

SCOOP | F1 | LA LIGA

May 2017 ₹ 60/-



Sports plus

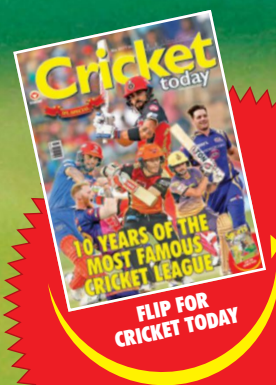
Registered DL(S) 01/3009/2015-17 R.N.I. No. 67924/98

**100
GOALS
FOR KING
RONALDO
IN UEFA
CHAMPIONS
LEAGUE**

**CAN VETTEL
CHALLENGE
HAMILTON IN
THIS F1 SEASON?**

**DORTMUND
BLASTS: IS
FOOTBALL
UNDER ATTACK?**

**THE GROWING
STATURE OF
NEYMAR**





AHMEDABAD | AMRITSAR | BANGALORE | BARODA | CHANDIGARH | CHENNAI | COCHIN | DEHRADUN | DELHI | GURGAON |
HYDERABAD | INDORE | JAIPUR | KANPUR | KOLKATA | LUCKNOW | LUDHIANA | MUMBAI | PUNE | SURAT





NAUTICA



Marching Ants

JACK & JONES®

ALSO AVAILABLE AT LEADING DEPARTMENT STORES, MULTI BRAND STORES AND ONLINE PARTNERS.

SHOP ONLINE AT: WWW.JACKJONES.IN JOIN US ON     JACKJONESINDIA



105 COVER STORY

A WORLD-RECORD 100
GOALS FOR KING RONALDO
IN UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

VIEW POINT



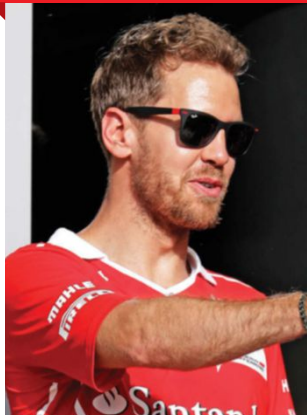
97 Problems once again letting Barcelona down

FRENCH OPEN PREVIEW



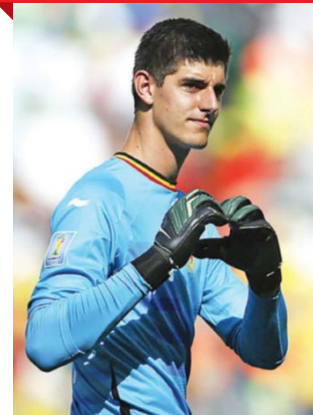
77 The Men & Women of Clay

VIEW




73 Can Vettel challenge Hamilton in this season?

SCOOP



69 Is Thibaut Courtois dating Delaney Royle?



**Ultra grip
takes you wherever
a SUV deserves!**



ContiCrossContact LX2 for SUV

- ◊ Outstanding dry and wet grip
- ◊ Enhanced stone ejection
- ◊ Reduced road noise





A WORLD-RECORD 100 GOALS FOR KING RONALDO IN UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

In a recent match between Real Madrid and Bayern Munich in the Champions League, Ronaldo struck a hat-trick of goals to become the first player in history to achieve 100 goals in the UEFA Champions League.

BY BHAVESH BHIMANI

There are champions. There are legends. And then there is Cristiano Ronaldo. The Portuguese footballer has created and broken countless records over the years and has firmly etched his name in the annals of the sport as one of the greatest players ever.

Of late, though, a lot of voices had raised concerns over Ronaldo's dwindling form.

Many arm-chair critics and studio experts have stated that the ace footballer is past his prime and is nearing the end of his glittering career.

Ronaldo did what any great sportsman should do. He answered his naysayers with his performance. And what a record-breaking performance it turned out to be! In a recent match between Real Madrid and Bayern Munich in the Champions League, Ronaldo struck a hat-trick of goals against Bayern to become the first player in history

to achieve 100 goals in the UEFA Champions League. He accomplished this milestone in his 137th Champions League appearance and in the all-important second leg of Real's quarterfinal tie. Ronaldo made this occasion special by attaining this historical record, leading his team to a 4-2 win and thereby straight to the semifinals of the Champions League.

For almost all his career, Ronaldo has been a champion player and has had a famed rivalry with Lionel Messi for the crown of the best football player in the world. With this achievement, Ronaldo has certainly inched ahead of Messi and has added another glorious feather in his illustrious hat.

Understandably, Ronaldo was quite pleased with his historic achievement. Although he did rue the fact that he could only score three goals in the game as he felt he could have easily struck a couple more. Regardless, this is a historical moment in the world of football and has yet again silenced Ronaldo's critics.

"I don't know who doubts me. People who love Cristiano never have any doubts. You have to tell me who doubts me because none of it has come to me," a beaming Ronaldo said to the press after his incredible accomplishment. "I'm happy; I wanted to reach this record. To do so is an honour and to do it against a team like Bayern is even better. When I started scoring goals in the Champions League I never thought I would



break this record. It's an honour for me because it's a very difficult number. I'm delighted."

Ronaldo now has 103 goals in European competitions; 100 of those have come in the Champions League, one in a UCL Qualifying match, and two in Madrid's 2-0 UEFA Super Cup victory over Sevilla in 2014. He scored his first Champions League goal way back in the 2006-07 season and has indeed come a long way since then. The footballer now leads the list of most goals by a player in UEFA club competitions. He is followed by Lionel Messi with 97 goals in 118 games and Raul Gonzalez with 76 goals in 158 appearances.

Ronaldo, the four-time world player of the year, has gone through some indifferent form of late. While it is highly unlikely he will be able to match up to his own high standards anytime soon, the fact that this fierce competitor is still fighting it out and still making and breaking records is indeed laudable.

RONALDO THE TRUE CHAMPION OF WORLD FOOTBALL

Perhaps no other footballer has invoked so much mixed sentiments as Cristiano Ronaldo has and even when he is not at his prime he continues to dominate world headlines with his remarkable feats. By becoming

the only player in the world to score 100 goals in the UEFA Champions League, Ronaldo is yet again on the centre stage.

While many might say that he has played nearly 140 games to achieve this landmark, one has to realize that Ronaldo scored his first Champions League goal in only his 30th match; against Roma for Manchester United in 2007. Ever since, he has worked his way relentlessly up the ladder and continues to thrive even today.

Yes, Ronaldo's powers are not what they once used to be, but they most certainly are not on the wane. At the time of writing, he has scored just 22 goals this season and you can see that at times he struggles with his kicks and passes. However, these numbers seem average only because Ronaldo has set such high standards of himself. Ronaldo has scored handsomely through consistent seasons; 40, 46, 34, 31, 48, 35 are his numbers in his last six seasons. By comparison, his current performance certainly does seem inferior, but they are still pretty decent. And

Ronaldo now has 103 goals in European competitions; 100 of those have come in the Champions League, one in a UCL Qualifying match, and two in Madrid's 2-0 UEFA Super Cup victory over Sevilla in 2014.



even a Ronaldo at only his half best is still better than several other players in the world at their finest.

And with age, Ronaldo has also matured as a player. He is using his intelligence and experience to score his goals and doesn't waste his energy unnecessarily these days. In his prime, Ronaldo used to burst through his opponents through his skills and raw power. But now, the Real Madrid player has progressed into a more efficient striker. He utilizes his positions judiciously and still has the ability to turn games his own way.

"Cristiano knows where his position is," says Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo's coach at Real Madrid. "He knows when to play centre-forward or on the left. The positions he takes, and where he scores his goals — that's all him."

It is because of this efficiency, his ability to adapt his game according to his age and a gumption to keep scoring that Ronaldo has been able to score so many goals.

Whether you love him or hate him, you have to agree that Cristiano Ronaldo does bring football fans into the stadium in great numbers. He is tall, swift and technically very sound; the perfect example of the modern day football player; and the world of football needs characters like him to prosper globally.

A BRIEF BREAKDOWN OF RONALDO'S 100 GOALS IN THE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Out of Ronaldo's 100 goals, 51 have come in

home games, 47 on the road and two at neutral venues. He has scored 68 goals from his right foot, 15 from his left foot and 17 through headers.

A whopping 85 of his hundred goals have come for his current side Real Madrid while 15 came for his previous team Manchester United where he played under Sir Alex Ferguson.

77 of Ronaldo's goals have come from open play, 12 have directly come from free-kicks and 11 from penalties. The 32-year-old has achieved more than half of his strikes in the opening 45 minutes of games. He has scored 3 goals in extra-time; the first one of which had helped Real Madrid secure the trophy against city rivals Atletico Madrid in 2014.

Stats also say that German clubs are Ronaldo's favourite goal-scoring oppositions. A fifth of his goals have come against Bundesliga sides, and Bayern Munich, Schalke and Ajax have been his most-favoured opposition as he has nine and seven goals each against them. He has also netted six goals against Malmo, and Galatasaray.

Overall, Ronaldo has scored 51 times in the group stage, 20 times in the quarter-final stage, 17 times in the round of 16 stage, 10 times in the semi-finals and twice in the finals. The champion footballer has now scored in 24 different European cities, spanning 15 countries.

These are indeed remarkable numbers and assert how influential a player Cristiano Ronaldo has been in the Champions League. "He has shown that in the key moments, he is there. He makes the difference," Zinedine Zidane was quoted as saying at a news conference. "When he has to be, he is. He is unique and we are happy for him and for the team. And for the people who have helped us in the Bernabeu."

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR RONALDO?

As already mentioned, Ronaldo is not at his prime anymore. But he is by no means nearing his end. In fact, the maturity he has shown as a player is certain to make him sail over smoothly in the seasons to come. He is now constantly modifying his game and functioning more as an out-and-out poacher.

Achieving 100 goals in the UEFA Champions League alone has been an extraordinary performance by Ronaldo. And he still has it in him to score quite a few more. The Portugal captain is contracted with Real Madrid until 2021. So unless he is forced down by injuries, Ronaldo should play another four seasons in the Champions League with a maximum of 13 games per season.

If Ronaldo goes at the pace he is going now or even his form drops a little, he should still comfortably end up scoring six goals a season for the next four years. That is assuming of course that a lot of factors go his way and Real Madrid, too, continues to reach the semi-final stage in all those four seasons at least. Regardless, it would be surprising if Ronaldo does not end up with more than 120 goals in European competitions and that would really be phenomenal number.

While Lionel Messi, who is three years younger to Ronaldo, will probably upstage Ronaldo's numbers, the fact that the Portuguese champion achieved this remarkable record first shall never be forgotten. His mind-boggling feats are sure to stand the test of time and will inspire several others to take up the sport and to get near his accomplishments. Undoubtedly, Cristiano Ronaldo, even as he is playing and creating these stupendous records, has already established himself as one of the greatest of the game. The world of football is unlikely to see another champion quite in the mold of him again.



BY PUNEET AHLAWAT

The Brazilian and Barcelona's star forward has grown in stature in the last few years and is now counted among one of the best players in the world. His presence on the field is enough to inspire his fellow players to go for the kill while his opponents are unable to decode his numerous skills. As part of Barça's attacking trio with Lionel Messi and Luis Suárez, he won the continental treble of La Liga, the Copa del Rey, and the UEFA Champions League in the 2014–15 season and followed the next year by the domestic double. He came third for the FIFA Ballon d'Or in 2015. With 51 goals in 76 matches for Brazil since debuting at age 18, Neymar is the fourth-highest goalscorer for his national team. Known for his dribbling, finishing, and ability with both feet, Neymar has earned comparisons to former Brazil and Santos forward Pelé. Off the pitch, he ranks among the world's most prominent sportsmen.



THE GROWING STATURE OF NEYMAR

Neymar ended the season with 39 goals in all competitions and 10 in the Champions League, making him joint highest scorer with Ronaldo and Messi.

CLUBS WANT HIM

From Manchester United to Real Madrid, Paris Saint Germain to Chelsea, the clubs are willing to shell out any amount to sign him in the future. However, his heart is at Barcelona and that's why he is not willing to move away from the Spanish club. He is a complete player, who can score mesmerizing goals against any team and is unstoppable when on song. There have been times when he has led his team to victory single handedly that too despite missing the services of Lionel Messi or Luis Suarez. There

was a time when Messi was considered as the top trump card of Barcelona but with the arrival of Neymar, it is no more the case.

AGE ON HIS SIDE

The 2014-15 season was the best one for Neymar as far as Barcelona is concerned. Neymar ended the season with 39 goals in all competitions and 10 in the Champions League, making him joint highest scorer with Cristiano Ronaldo and teammate Lionel Messi in the latter competition. Barcelona's attacking trio of Messi, Luis Suárez and Neymar, dubbed "MSN", ended with 122 goals, the most in a season for an attacking trio in Spanish football history. He has not raked that numbers again but it is largely because of his new role in the squad, where he has been given a task of providing as much assists as possible to his fellow players. He is 25 years of age and still has a long way to go. With age on his side, he is bound to create more records in the future.

INSPIRATIONAL FIGURE

Gone are those times when Messi and Ronaldo were considered as the most inspirational figures in the world of football. Neymar is the new hot favorite of the budding footballers, who looks upto him to learn new tricks in order to become a better footballer. Apart from his on-field antics, his off the field heroics are followed too. Neymar reportedly gives ten percent of his income to his church in Brazil and has named Kaka as his religious role model. Each year, Neymar organizes a charity match with fellow Brazilian footballer Nene in Nene's hometown of Jundiai, with the purpose of raising food for needy families. He doesn't believe in living a very lavish lifestyle, which is something automatically associated with footballers these days.

BIG MATCH PERFORMER

Barcelona's motto is "More than a club" and this club from Spain recently produced a historic moment routing France's Paris Saint-Germain 6-1 to qualify for the Champions League quarterfinals. Having lost the first leg 4-0 in Paris, few had given Barca a chance of reaching the last eight given no side had previously overturned such a deficit in the history of the competition. But Luis Enrique's side made a barnstorming start in the Camp Nou and led 3-0 early in the second half through Lionel Messi's penalty. The home side was coasting, but just past the hour Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani's volley seemingly put PSG back in control with a crucial away goal, meaning Barca needed to score three more times. However, with two

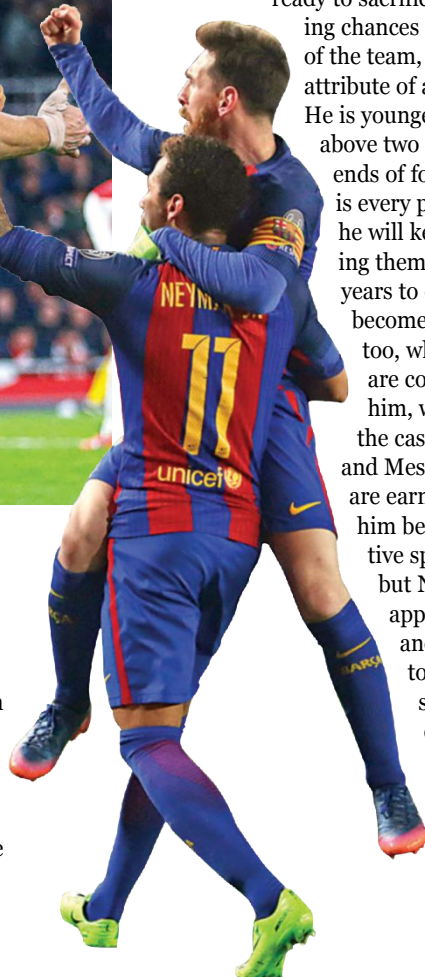


minutes of normal time remaining Neymar's exquisite free-kick gave Barca renewed hope, and two goals in stoppage time completed the most incredible of comebacks. In this greatest comeback, Neymar was the player, who stood above everyone and ensured his team's passage to next round of the prestigious event. In total, he scored two goals and assisted one in seven minutes to turn the tide fully in Barcelona's favor.

PRODUCING MORE THAN MESSI & RONALDO

There is a belief among football fanatics that Messi and Ronaldo are the best players in the world and there is no one, who can even come close to these two at the moment. However, Neymar has shattered this belief over again and again. He has shown that these two can be over taken if one

believes in his abilities. He has the second best assist record in the ongoing La Liga campaign and is far ahead than Messi and Ronaldo. This is enough to show that he is ready to sacrifice his goal scoring chances for the benefit of the team, which is the attribute of a great player. He is younger than the above two mentioned legends of football and there is every possibility that he will keep on outshining them for many more years to come. He has become a fan favorite too, where his teams are counting big on him, which is no more the case with Ronaldo and Messi. The two stars are earning more than him because of lucrative sponsorship deals but Neymar is fast approaching them and if he continues to perform on the same lines, he is expected to become the highest earner in the world of football.



SINK INTO ULTIMATE LUXURY WITHOUT REALLY SINKING IN.

PRESENTING **SLEEPWELL NEXA**, A MATTRESS WITH
A REVOLUTIONARY **RESPONSIVE MEMORY FOAM™**.



- Enhanced ventilation for quality sleep throughout the night
- Easy body movements even with a wrap-around comfort
- Excellent support for all body types

Sleepwell®
NEXA
RESPONSIVE MEMORY FOAM

• With HealthFresh™ Technology • 10 Years* Assured Warranty.*Conditions apply

**FROM FRESH
NEWSPAPERS TO
ALL NEW MUSIC RELEASES**

ONLY ON

AVXHOME.IN



**OUR SEARCH SITE HELPS
TO FIND ALL YOUR
FAVOURITE MAGAZINES**

SOEK.IN

JOIN US ON

FACEBOOK

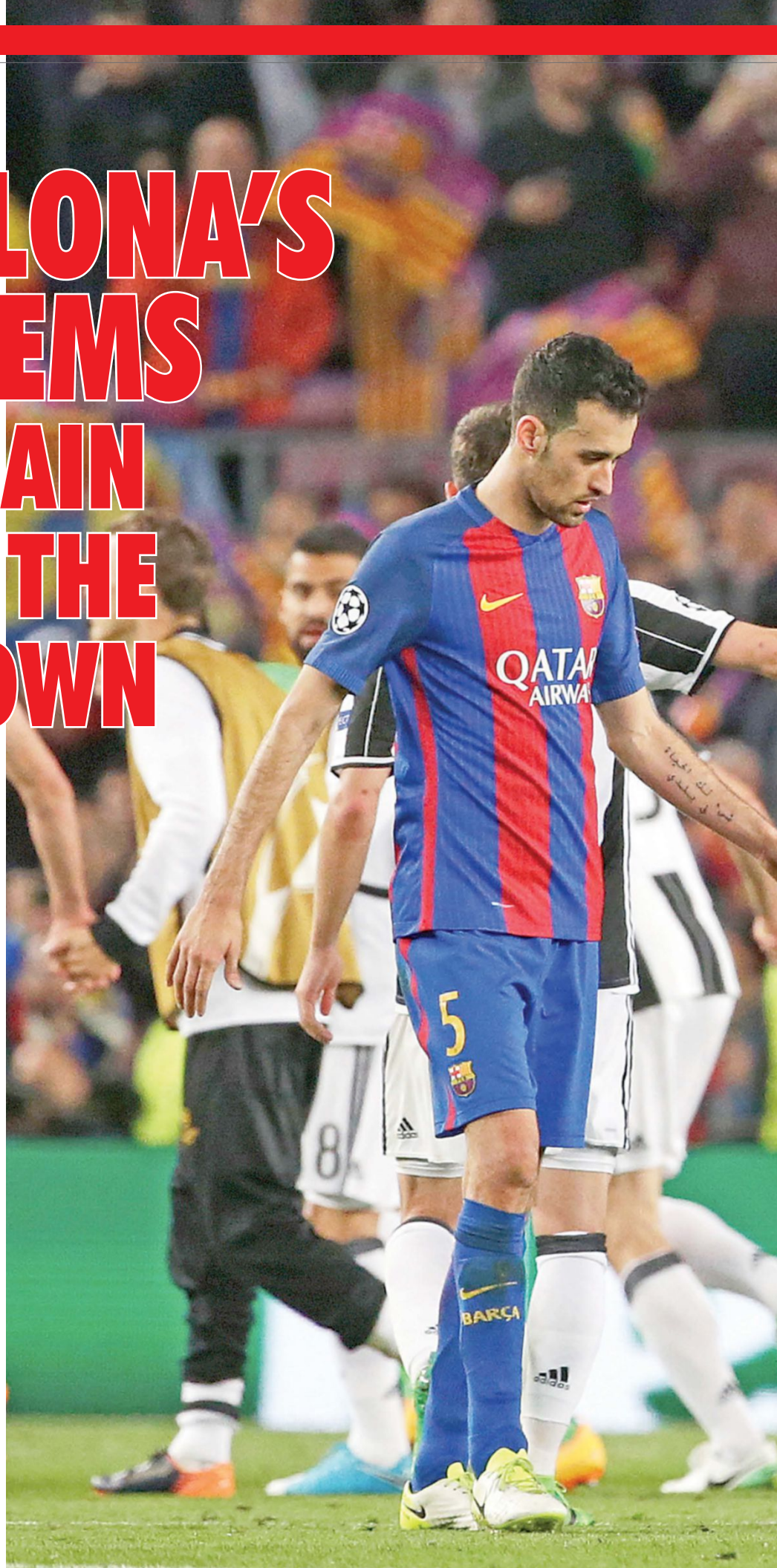
BARCELONA'S PROBLEMS ONCE AGAIN LETTING THE TEAM DOWN

It's been a case of missed opportunities as whenever Real Madrid have slipped Barcelona too have slipped which handed the initiative back to Real Madrid.

BY HIMANSHU DHINGRA

Barcelona were thrashed 4-0 against Paris Saint-Germain at Parc De Princes in the first leg of the round of 16 match in the Champions League, the club somehow miraculously turned around the deficit by beating the Parisians 6-1 at Camp Nou in the reverse leg. Similar situation arose in the quarter final where the Blaugrana were beaten 3-0 by Juventus, but this time a much needed comeback got failed to materialize against a much sounder team defensively.

In the league too it's a similar story, Barcelona are presently three points behind Real Madrid at the top of the Spanish La Liga and Los Blancos also have a game in hand. It's been a case of missed opportuni-





ties as whenever Real Madrid have slipped Barcelona too have slipped which handed the initiative back to Real Madrid. Just a couple of weeks ago Real could only draw against city rivals Atletico Madrid and instead of making the most of those dropped points, Barcelona went and lost their match to Malaga just a couple of hours later.

Just when it seems that Barcelona can make the most of their rivals' mistakes they go and dig a hole for themselves and that has been the theme all season. Valuable points have been dropped against teams that would normally be easy to beat. This season has seen Barcelona drop points against the likes of Alaves, Real Betis and Real Sociedad.

To be fair, many who observe the Catalan club closely think that it has been coming for quite a long time. One of the things that hasn't helped the club is the position that the manager Luis Enrique finds himself in. The 46 year old announced his decision to leave Barcelona before the end of the season earlier this year but the tension within the club ever since his appointment has been building.

If truth be told Enrique was never a popular choice at Barcelona when he was appointed back in 2014. And that is despite the fact that he is a former Barcelona B coach and a former Barcelona player and the fact that he left Real Madrid to join La Blaugrana. To have a further dig at Real Madrid, he described returning to Barcelona like a kid going to Disneyland.

The murmurings of discontent had begun in Luis Enrique's first season as many fans just did not want the Gijon born to be in charge at Camp Nou. In fact in 2015 Sporting Director Andoni Zubizarreta was shown the door and it further weakened the position of Luis Enrique. Winning the treble in 2015 and then the double 12 months later did bring in a temporary truce. The hounds



were out in full force earlier in the season to make a difficult job even tougher and it now looks that the only trophy Barcelona could win is Copa Del Rey.

The crowd is not happy with the 46 year old and in a recent poll 68% of the fans wanted the manager to be sacked because of what they considered to be a style not befitting of Barcelona. Many fans actually don't mind losing for some time so that the club can rediscover its identity and get back to playing beautiful football. This hostile mentality has also made players' life difficult and no wonder that they too have found their life tough on the football pitch. Two games against Juventus where they failed to score is a perfect example of how tough things are.

Pep Guardiola left Barcelona back in 2012 and although there have been managers between him and Enrique the comparisons have never ended and despite the fact that Enrique won the same number of trophies as Guardiola, he has never been accepted the same way as Guardiola was. On occasions Pep's teams also did things that were consid-

ered anti Barcelona but supporters seemed to be with him but the situation was completely opposite with Enrique.

You may think that Enrique hasn't been helped by factors in and around him but there have been times when he hasn't helped himself either. The former Roma boss is not close to either the media, nor is he close to the players. That disconnect with the players and especially the media has caused negativity in the camp and it is not the same as it was previously.

In this season there has been news of fall-out with the players as well. In the early part of the season it was Alex Vidal and in the recent times it seems that Jordi Alba is the latest player to have bore the brunt of manager's frustrations. Ivan Rakitic is another one who was left out of the playing XI in the early part of the season although he is now back in the team.

Managing Barcelona is a tough job even at the best of times with all the pressure and scrutiny of the world being on the players and manager.

However, Luis Enrique is not the sole reason why Barcelona are not performing to their magnificent best as there are other reasons as well that have hindered the team.

The playing staff is not the same as well with the midfield of Barcelona not looking the same as it used to be. Andre Iniesta is one of those champion players who come once in a generation and he is a modern day great. However he is now growing older and has suffered a few injuries over the last couple of years and that has affected his performance. Sergio Busquets is another one who has suffered this season thanks to injuries and hasn't been the same player who snuffs out the danger before it materializes. The game against Paris Saint-Germain was a perfect example where PSG players stopped him from executing his plans and that stopped the whole team functioning.

Andre Gomes is another player who arrived with much hype having done well at Valencia last season and being a winner with Portugal of the Euros. He too has struggled with the team this season and hasn't displayed anything and that has been a big disappointment.

Other options like Javier Mascherano, Denis Suarez and Rafinha have also been tried but no one has really stood out for one reason or the other.

The lack of goals from midfield has been conspicuous and that has put on extra pressure on the front three to score goals. The

Andre Iniesta is one of those champion players who come once in a generation. However he is now growing older and has suffered a few injuries over the last couple of years and that has affected his performance.



double whammy is that they have not been able to provide decent service which has made the task all the more harder for the trident of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar.

The Board of Barcelona should have seen that the team needed reinforcements and quality additions should have been brought in with a tough season in mind. The signings though have failed to hit the ground running which has meant more and more pressure on the incumbents. As already mentioned Andre Gomes has not been what the club had in mind. Paco Alcacer was bought as a backup and he wasn't going to get much playing time and going by his performances he hasn't deserved any either. Samuel Umtiti was brought in to help an ageing defence and you could argue that he is perhaps the only one who has done reasonably well in a season that has been marred by a lot of issues at

Andre Gomes has struggled with the team this season while Paco Alcacer was bought as a backup and he wasn't going to get much playing time and going by his performances he hasn't deserved any either.



the Catalan club. Yes, the manager has had his faults but the failure of the men behind the scenes to get in good players hasn't helped the team's cause.

In the past how La Blaugrana fared in the transfer market would not have had such a bearing on how they would do in a season but the failure of La Masia, the Barcelona's famed academy, to produce good players has put some added pressure on the ins and outs at Nou Camp. There was a time when the core of team would be from the academy with players like Xavi Hernandez, Andres Iniesta, Lionel Messi and Victor Valdes in the team. Those players

were brought up playing the Barcelona way and gave their all for the club and the fans on the pitch. No surprises then that the team enjoyed quite a successful spell in those years. There are a few academy graduates who have played a bit this season like Sergi Roberto and Rafinha. But neither the number nor the quality is close to what everyone associated with the club would like.

Barcelona are possibly the biggest football club in the world and the standards they have set themselves over the years have been remarkable. To maintain those standards however all things need to work properly. When things don't work properly we see seasons like these where nothing seems to go right. We saw what happened when Frank Rijkaard was in his last season in charge. Similar scenario has unfolded here with Luis Enrique. Other issues haven't helped and have played a crucial role in Barcelona not being at their best this season. Luis Enrique will not be at Camp Nou next season but for the club to be at their best once again it is imperative that other problems are ironed out.

When these two go out, the grip of their respective La Liga teams would get loosened and defeating them won't be tough for other teams.

THE FOOTBALL WORLD WITHOUT LIONEL MESSI AND CRISTIANO RONALDO



BY PUNEET AHLAWAT

Messi and Ronaldo are always in the news more often for their performances across the competitions at the European level or international level. It is tough to think when we saw them out of form for long as they manage to score every now and then.

Almost all the famous awards in the world football are dominated by these two and others just turn up for the sake of turning. Without any doubt, these two are the best footballers in

the history of the game. It is almost impossible to imagine football without them but as every good thing comes to an end, we would see them hanging up their boots in the future. How would the football world look without them? Are we going to see something extraordinary when they decide to leave the game? Here are the five possible outcomes, which could become true after their retirement from the game.

EDEN HAZARD AND NEYMAR RULING THE WORLD

After Messi and Ronaldo, if there are any

players, who can be called world beaters, the eyes would turn in the direction of Neymar and Hazard. They have been sensational for their respective teams and have been winning matches since long. Neymar is often overshadowed by Messi while Hazard has been a less popular figure because the press or media is more interested in highlighting the performance and personal life of Ronaldo. Neymar is an amazing footballer, who can fox defenders easily and is tough to contain. There are times when he has single handedly lit up the whole Barcelona team in a tough situation. On the other hand, Eden Hazard,



is the backbone of Chelsea. The London based club was in pathetic form last season because Hazard was off color but the tables have turned in the ongoing season because he has hit the right button.

BARCA AND MADRID'S GRIP TO BE LOOSENEED

When it comes to La Liga, Barcelona and Real Madrid are the champion clubs and debating or discussing about their performance in the leading football competition of Spain would be a foolish thing to do as you don't scan the performance of true leaders. However, their real strength can be judged in the Champions League, the best club competition in the world. In the last eight years, Barcelona and Real Madrid have shared five titles among them which is something extraordinary keeping in mind the amount of performance which is required in this long event. It won't be wrong to give much of the credit to Messi and Ronaldo as they have always scored goals against the big clubs and that too away from the home ground. The rivals have always given up and stopping these two is

like a dream, which has never seen the day light. However, when these two go out, the grip of their respective teams would get loosened and defeating them won't be tough for other teams. The hallmark of Barcelona and Real Madrid's success in the Champions League is because of these two masters and the success story would take a hit once Messi and Ronaldo bids adieu.

NATIONAL TEAMS WOULD TAKE A HIT

Messi and Ronaldo are the most important players for their respective national side. The Argentinean star has been an inspiration for his team since long. It was because of his performance that Argentina made it to the finale of the World Cup in 2014 but the poor performance of other resulted in a painful defeat at the hands of Germany. The similar story has folded in other competitions as well with no one ready to step up with Messi in the crunch situation. The forward star has single handedly carried the team's hope in the qualifying rounds for the upcoming edition of the World Cup but his four match suspension has disturbed the

The players are never bigger than the sports and the same is the case with Ronaldo and Messi. We have a lot of memories of these two super stars, which will be passed on to the future generation.

momentum and Argentina could miss out on a bus to Russia. On the other hand, Ronaldo has been a guiding force for Portugal, who won the last European championship. He was in exceptional form throughout the event but had to go off in the finale because of an injury. However, his team didn't lose the momentum and went on to win the title. Apart from it, he has scored goals in the World Cup qualifying matches and will ensure his team's safe passage to the main event. He is the best player to play for Portugal and there won't be anyone like him in the future. Once these two retires, the national teams would struggle to cope up.

STATISTICIANS WILL BREATHE AGAIN

With these two on the field, the records are tumbling every now and then. There is hardly any month where Ronaldo and Messi are not setting new benchmarks, which has made life hell for the statisticians as they are not getting any time to breathe. They have to work day and night to record the new achievements of these two players. Sometime the baton of scoring the highest goals in a calendar is with Messi while Ronaldo chips in on other occasions. The track record for the Champions League is another competition, where they have been mesmerizing since years. If this is not enough, their goals tally for the national team is improving day by day and it is giving another headache to the ones who have the job of maintaining the data. Once these two retires, the men in charge of penning down the data will take a sign of relief.

FOOTBALL WILL MOVE ON

Time and again we often think of our life without our football super heroes. How will we live after their retirements? However, with the passage of time, we have moved on and have found the solace in someone else's display. The players are never bigger than the sports and the same is the case with Ronaldo and Messi. We have a lot of memories of these two super stars, which will be passed on to the future generation but football as a sport will not stop as there will be new entries, who are going to take the game to another level. The world have seen the likes of Pele, Maradona, Beckham, Zidane and many other greats come and go but football has not stopped growing. We will definitely miss these two but will have to except that every good thing has to come to an end and we can't see Messi and Ronaldo playing forever as they are also human beings like us.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR A CLUB VERY MUCH ON THE UP

BY HIMANSHU DHINGRA

It may have been over 50 years since Tottenham Hotspur last won the domestic title in 1961, but you can be rest assured that it won't be that long from here since they are crowned the champions of England again. The club from North London has certainly come a long way in last few years and are now envy of a lot of clubs in the Premier League as well as the clubs in other leagues in Europe.

Spurs have certainly done a lot of things right to bring them here where they are now, sitting second in the league, four points behind Chelsea and piling the pressure on their London rivals. They are playing a brand of football that has virtually demolished the opponents in the last few games. So much has been the dominance that quite a lot of the games have more or less been over in the first half itself. It is not only in the league that Spurs have done well as the team has dominated in the club competitions as well, scoring a lot of goals and are now in the semifinals of the FA Cup where they will face Chelsea. There is a slightly different story in the Champions League and the Europa League where the Lilywhites have been knocked out earlier than what they would have liked, however there have been extenuating circumstances with the team having to play their home matches at Wembley and that is where most

They are playing a brand of football that has virtually demolished the opponents in the last few games. So much has been the dominance that quite a lot of the games have more or less been over in the first half itself.

of the damage has been done as far as the cup competitions are concerned. That is just a small blot on what has been a pretty impressive report card for Spurs over the last few seasons.

Tottenham were always a club that were doing sort of okay for their size and stature at

the start of the decade but were no way near close to the force they are today where they are mixing it with the very best.

Much of the credit for where Spurs find themselves these days is down to their manager Mauricio Pochettino. Since taking charge at White Hart Lane the Argentine has trans-





formed the team from one which was looking to get into Champions League at best to one which is fighting for the titles.

It is now the third season in which the former Espanyol manager is now the head at Spurs and in every season there has been palpable improvement in everything related to

football on the pitch. Much of the improvement in play is down to the mentality that has been brought in from the manager. The 45 year old has previously managed Espanyol and Southampton and with both his previous clubs we saw the same thing. In fact he helped avoid almost certain relegation with the

Catalan club beating a seemingly invincible Barcelona side in the derby on their way to doing it. At Southampton in his two full seasons he did good things at the south coast club giving debuts to youngsters without compromising on the style of play.

It was that ethic that prompted Spurs to



make their move for the Argentine and the move has worked a treat for both the club and the manager himself.

Spurs finished third last year and fifth the year before that and were in the running to be the champions until the very end where a few draws cost them the title and eventually the second place as well. However that should not take away from the fact that the team has overcome that disappointment and really taken to the Premier League by storm this season and could still pip Chelsea for the title.

The manager's style and the way he has set the team up has a lot to do with how the North London club has overtaken the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool, Manchester City and more importantly their bitter rivals Arsenal.

Mauricio Pochettino, demands excellence from all his players, he does not relent even when the team is in comfortable position in a match. The team could be winning 2-0, 3-0 or may be even 4-0 up front but he would not let players drop their standards. Sure, this type of mentality is hard to inculcate but once it is

embraced it is very tough to play against and it especially comes in handy in a long and grueling season. He is also ruthless like many other managers and that means the players not only respect him but also fear him.

It is not only on the match day that Spurs display their superior quality as Pochettino is equally relentless on the training pitch as well. During his pre seasons he has worked his players a lot to get them into shape and as previously mentioned we have seen the results on the pitch.

Having good players is one thing but to get the best out of them under different circumstances is also a different achievement and the 45 year old has done exactly that. The 2016-17 season has seen many different formations being tried and Tottenham have been one of those clubs who have also moved their players. The North London club have played with three at the back, four at the back and on occasions five at the back. Formations have also been changed in the midfield with sometimes it being a three and sometimes two. These flexibilities in formation have helped the club get the better of many opponents and

the manager has quite a bit to do with that.

Spurs traditionally have been a club that has sold their players when the so called bigger clubs have come calling but it looks that phase is now behind the club. A lot of players who have been linked with some of the biggest clubs in the world have now signed contract extensions with the club. The likes of Eric Dier, Dele Alli, Harry Kane and Christian Eriksen have all signed extensions. The prime reason why they have signed extensions is because of a manager like Mauricio Pochettino.

Pochettino has not only focused on the first team but has also focused attention on the academy as well. Spurs have one of the best academies and have some really good players coming through with likes of Harry Winks, Josh Onomah and Cameron Carter-Vickers.

Transfers is another area where the former Saints manager has excelled. He has signed players like Vincent Wanyama and Toby Alderweireld and others. Yes, there have been some flops as well but that is just part and parcel of the game. In addition there is still time for the likes of Moussa Sissoko and Vincent Janssen to come good.

So good has the Argentine been since his arrival in England that he has garnered praise from every conceivable angle. This is what Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola had to say about him,

"We played against Pochettino as players and then as coaches. I think he's one of the

The departing players are replaced by young technical players who are ready to prove their worth to the world. Prime examples of these players are Dele Alli and Christian Eriksen amongst others.



best managers in the world – I enjoy watching Tottenham,”

“He’s doing an amazing job in London at Spurs. The way they play I like a lot – they’re aggressive and have a lot of quality. The basis of the team is the national team with Alli, Walker, Kane – they have a lot of quality. Last season they were there until the last couple of games for the championship.”

It’s not just the manager that is making Tottenham a success story; there are other factors that have played a big role in making the club what it is.

The club has a great business model as well, not saying they are just a selling club but when there is a decent offer on the cards for one of their players the club does not stand in their way. Players like Michael Carrick, Dimitar Berbatov, Luka Modric and Gareth Bale have all previously been sold when the right



The likes of Eric Dier, Dele Alli, Harry Kane and Christian Eriksen have all signed extensions. The prime reason why they have signed extensions is because of a manager like Mauricio Pochettino.

offer has come along. These departing players are replaced by young technical players who are ready to prove their worth to the world. Prime examples of these players are Dele Alli and Christian Eriksen amongst others. When it comes to selling squad players Spurs are able to get decent price. This

kind of financial prudence has always kept Spurs in decent financial shape.

Credit for this financial health goes to the chairman Daniel Levy who has done a lot of good financial deals to bring Spurs on par with some of the biggest

clubs in the Premier League. There was a time when Spurs had two different sponsors, one for the League and one for the cup. Finances for any club are important and huge credit should be given to the team for doing a sterling job.

For any team to be remotely successful, they have to make their home ground a fortress and that is exactly what White Hart Lane has become, especially this season where they have been unbeaten in the league at home winning 15 and drawing only two. They however did suffer when they had to play their Champions League and Europa League matches at Wembley. Speaking of stadiums Spurs will be moving to a brand new stadium in 2018-19 season which will house 61,000 fans. Significantly the capacity will be more than that of Arsenal’s Emirates stadium. Once again it will bring extra revenue to the club via gate receipts and sponsorships making the club even sounder than it already is.

Tottenham used to be the whipping boys of the Premier league but thanks to some shrewd strategies on and off the pitch they are turning into a club that almost everyone envies.



BAYWATCH TO SET THE TEMPERATURE SOARING

It's a common trend to see WWE superstars in Hollywood movies but there is one actor, who has set a new benchmark and he was the world's highest-paid actor of 2016. The good looking Dwayne Johnson is ruling the screen world as he once did in the World Wrestling Federation. There was a time, when he was the undisputed leader of the wrestling world and his name "The Rock" was chanted by millions. Johnson gained mainstream fame in the World Wrestling Federation (WWF, now WWE) from 1996 to 2004 as a major figure in the company's Attitude Era, and was the most followed wrestler in the company's history. He returned to part-time wrestling for WWE from 2011 to 2013 and still continues to make sporadic non-wrestling appearances for the company. Johnson has won several titles in this sport but after making a move away from regular wrestling,

he is getting all the attention and accolades in acting. He is part of the screen world since long but the critics have started noticing him for his acting from 2012. The awards have poured in and the acclimation for his acting has grown. His movies are on the must watch list of fans and his latest movie Baywatch has already set the tone right with audiences, that too even before hitting the theatres.

Baywatch is an American action-comedy film directed by Seth Gordon, based on the television series of the same name. The movie will recast some of the iconic characters from the original '90s TV show, with Johnson taking on the role of head lifeguard Mitch Buchannon, made famous by David Hasselhoff. Zac Efron, meanwhile, steps into the shoes of French actor David Charvet as young stud Matt Brody. Bollywood megastar, Quantico actress and one of the world's most beautiful women, Priyanka Chopra will play

the film's villain, a new character called Victoria Leeds. True Detective's Alexandra Daddario replaces Nicole Eggert as Summer Quinn while Oldboy actress Ilfenesh Hadera is Stephanie Holden, the love interest of Mitch, and relatively unknown Kelly Rohrbach does her best to fill Pamela Anderson's stunning character. A lot has gone into the making of this movie as Hollywood has been actively trying to develop a Baywatch movie since 2004, three years after the television series of the same name went off the air - but the challenge in developing the feature was a big task and had to be withdrawn after not getting the right sort of team. However, as they say, the answer lies in the future, the Baywatch has finally seen the day light in form of a movie. Dwayne Johnson has already made fans anxious by stating that Baywatch is "far dirtier" than the TV series. "We are far dirtier than the show ever was — obviously the show was a family show on at family time of day — but in the movie we could have been dirtier," he said. "I think people are going to be shocked that Baywatch has got dirty — but there are a lot of laughs," he added. Praising his Baywatch co-star Priyanka Chopra, Hollywood actor Dwayne Johnson said that every movie needs a perfect antagonist to keep hero on his toes and Priyanka has done a wonderful job in the movie. Through a video message, Dwayne said, "This is a very special message to India for someone who is very important to me, very special to me. Someone, who is incredibly talented. She is attractive and the best part about this woman is that she is so good at being bad."

The film has been shot in Miami and Savannah, Georgia and with crispy dialogues, death defying stunts and hot faces, Baywatch has all the ingredients to march successfully on the carpet of box-office. The movie will release in India on 2nd June.

GO AHEAD AND STARE



DWAYNE
JOHNSON

ZAC
EFRON

PRIYANKA
CHOPRA

BAYWATCH

JUNE 2

UNCHARTED  VIACOM  MOTION PICTURES

TheBaywatchMovie.com 

TheBaywatchMovie.com [f/ParamountPicturesIndia](#) #Baywatch [t/ParamountPicsIN](#) [@ParamountPicsIN](#) [@ParamountPicsIN](#) [YouTube/ParamountIndia](#)

Magazine Partner
Cricket
today

ALSO IN HINDI, TAMIL & TELUGU
A VIACOM18 MOTION PICTURES RELEASE



DORTMUND BLASTS IS FOOTBALL UNDER ATTACK?

The team bus carrying the players emerged out of the hotel and just entered the road. Suddenly, three bomb blasts occurred in succession as soon as the team bus entered the road. The shrapnel hit the back glass of the vehicle.



Dortmund fans hold a poster 'Get well, Marc!' during the Champions League quarterfinal first leg soccer match between Borussia Dortmund and AS Monaco in Dortmund, Germany.



Dortmund's Sokratis Papastathopoulos, left, wears a t-shirt 'A lot of strength - we are with you' for his teammate Marc Bartra (above) who was injured in the explosion.

BY NUJING

It was quarter past seven in the evening on April 11 in Dortmund. The German club Borussia Dortmund was to play against French club Monaco in the first leg of UEFA Champions League football quarter finals in about two hours' time. For the rest of the football world, it was the low-profile match of the day. The marquee match of the day was between Barcelona and Juventus in Italy. Spectators were beginning to fill in the famous Westfalenstadion stadium of Dortmund. It is regarded as one of the iconic stadiums in the world with the most passionate football fans around.

BLAST IN DORTMUND

Borussia Dortmund players were staying in a hotel about 10 kilometers away from the stadium. The team bus carrying the players emerged out of the hotel and just entered the road. Suddenly, three bomb blasts occurred in quick succession as soon as the team bus entered the main road. The shrapnel from the blasts hit the back glass of the vehicle. Luckily, there were no casualties. But Dortmund's Spanish defender Marc Bartra was injured. A police man escorting the bus too was injured.

Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Bürki was sitting next to Bartra in the bus. He said: "I

was sitting in the back row next to Marc Bartra, who was hit by the shards of the burst back window. After the bang everyone in the bus got their heads down. We didn't know whether there would be more. The police arrived quickly, sealed everything off. We are all in shock."

The police arrived and sealed off the area. Bartra and the police man were taken to hospital. The police personnel combed the entire area for any further explosives. They found an unused bomb and a letter claiming responsibility. The police did not disclose the identity of the group or person behind the letter. That did not prevent various media to point fingers

at the Islamic terror outfit ISIS. The police also used drones and sniffer dogs to search the area. They escorted the physically unharmed players back to the safety of their hotel.

THE AFTERMATH

The match was postponed – albeit for one day. The football organizers claimed that the schedule was so busy that they cannot postpone the match for more than one day. The inconvenience must be excused. Borussia Dortmund's chief executive, Hans-Joachim Watzke said: "Bartra was injured, on his hand and his arm, but nothing that would be life-threatening. The team is in complete shock. Our task is to process this experience, because the match is taking place in less than 24 hours. That's our job. It is unfortunate. But a crammed schedule for both teams made it impossible to postpone the match for more than a day".

As the news of the attack and the subsequent one-day postponement of the match filtered out, players began to feel frustrated. Dortmund's Greek defender Sokratis Papastathopoulos was the only one to attack the decision frontally, and he minced no words: "I am happy first that I am alive. It was the most difficult day that I have lived in my life and I hope that nobody else has to live this day. They [UEFA] have to understand that we are not animals. We are people who have families, who have kids in the house. And we are not animals. I am happy that all the players are alive, and all the staff are alive."

The spectators were more humane than the football hooligans. They first had an inkling of something going wrong when they saw a tweet in the official page of Borussia Dortmund: "At our bus departure, an incident has occurred. One person was injured. More information to follow." Soon, the twitter page was updated with more details: "A bomb exploded at the team bus next to the hotel. The players are safe. There is no danger at the stadium."

The fans rose to the occasion. The visiting Monaco fans started chanting "Dortmund, Dortmund". Dortmund fans reciprocated the goodwill. They offered safe accommodation for the visiting



Fans show banners reading "you'll never walk alone" to players leaving the training ground of Borussia Dortmund prior the Champions League first leg quarterfinal soccer match.

Monaco fans. The offers were made in the stadium and on Twitter. They collectively chanted "You will Never Walk Alone" – the anthem of Liverpool football club, which incidentally is now coached by Dortmund's iconic former coach Jurgen Klopp.

SERIES OF ATTACKS

What troubled most was the fact that this is the last of a series of attacks on football clubs around the world. ISIS, the Islamic terror organization, is behind the majority of them. The outfit bans the game of football, because it says it is against the Islamic law. Nobody really knows whether football was actually in

vogue when the tenets of Islamic law were constituted. And football is quite popular in Islam-dominated countries in the Persian Gulf and in Africa. Still, ISIS attacked a popular club football match in Baghdad. An attack also occurred on the Real Madrid fans club office in Baghdad as well. There were a couple of car-bomb explosions in Besiktas near Istanbul, which killed 48 people. The bombings occurred when spectators were coming out of a stadium after a football match between Besiktas and Bursaspor in the Turkish Super Lig.

The most notorious terror attack on football occurred in Paris in November 2015. Three explosions occurred outside Stade de Paris when an international friendly game between France and Germany was going on. Then French president François Hollande was among the spectators of the match. The police acted swiftly and brought the situation under control. Hollande was escorted out. The coaches of both the teams were informed. But

The recent evidence of the Dortmund blasts point fingers at an individual who wanted the stock prices of Dortmund to be down so that he can make a fortune in the futures market of the stock market.



But terrorist attacks are an entirely different thing. It can dissuade people from coming to stadiums. Such attacks are an open challenge to the rule of law in a particular country. As terrorist outfits spread their wings globally, there is no stopping of such atrocities. Efficient policing and intelligence gathering are the only preventive measures.

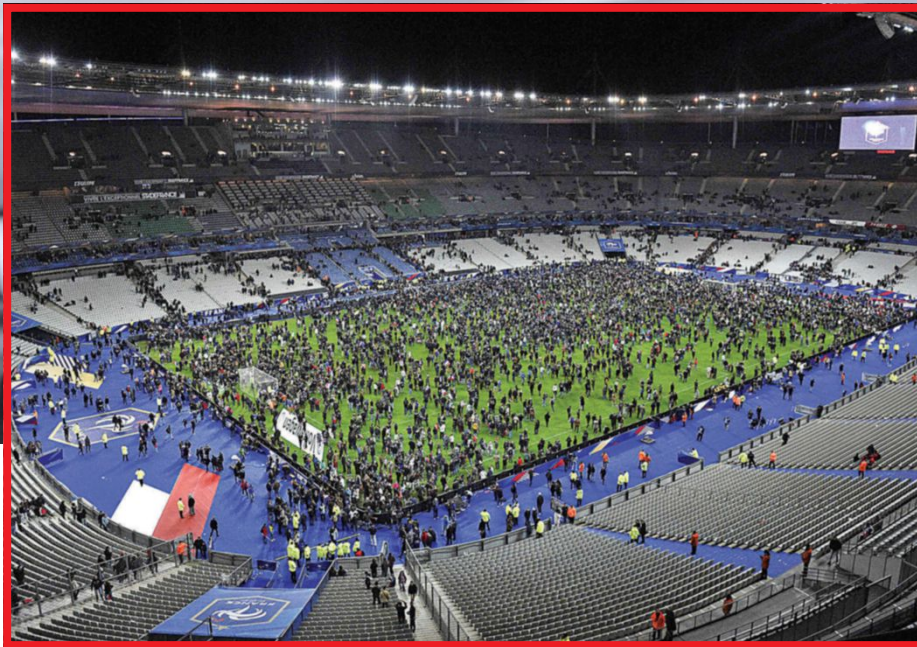
Football is indeed a beautiful game. There are plenty of stories about the goodwill generated by football. One of Pele's several biographies mentioned an incident in 1969. When he went to play in Nigeria for his club Santos, when Nigeria was plagued by civil war, the two warring factions – Nigeria and Biafra – decided to stop the war for a day so that people can watch the match. It is said that they even erected bridge between the two warring regions so that people can smoothly travel. While some researchers question the veracity of the incident, the goodwill generated by the story is irrefutable.

Then there is the incident involving two Mexican journalists in war-torn Yugoslavia in 1992 at the height of 1992. They went there to cover the war, but lost the way. A group of armed men surrounded them and questioned them at gun point in an incomprehensible language. The gun-wielding men were about to shoot them when the journalists showed their passport. The gunmen checked the passport and saw the word Mexico. "Mexico! Hugo Sanchez!?", they shouted and embraced the journalists. Sanchez, in case you do not know, was the Mexican forward who played for Real Madrid. He was especially known for his spectacular bicycle kick.

Even the so-called Jihadis are keen followers of football. Jehadi John, the British national famous for the head-chopping videos of the ISIS, is said to be an ardent Manchester United fan. They even talk about football during their interrogations. The power of the game is such that even terrorists love the game.

NEED FOR INVESTIGATION

There is a need for a fair investigation as well. Not all bombings on football grounds – and elsewhere – are conducted by terrorists. The recent evidence of the Dortmund blasts point fingers at an individual who wanted the stock prices of Dortmund to be down so that he can make a fortune in the stock market. He stayed in a hotel near the place where blasts occurred and triggered the bombs from his room. There seems to be no connection with any terrorist organizations. Such thorough investigation and trial are needed for each instance of football under attack.



Three explosions occurred outside Stade de Paris when an international friendly game between France and Germany was going on in 2015.

players and spectators were not. The match continued without any unscheduled breaks. The sound of explosions was heard inside the stadium, and even through the live TV coverage of the match. But people inside the stadium came to know about the incident only after the end of the match.

It was a night when Paris was under attack. There were coordinated attacks elsewhere in the city. Football also became a high profile target of the terror attacks. Perhaps, it gets them the news value they want.

IS THE BEAUTIFUL GAME AN UGLY TARGET?

Football has a passionate set of followers. There have been clashes in many countries

between rival fans. The English football hooligans are the worst offenders in this regard. And there have been tragedies happened caused by human negligence and stampede. Those are in a way unavoidable at times, because no one can rein in on the feelings of a passionate fan. Such incidents can happen in the case of any sports. To see the passion, just check the fans' comments on the official live-streaming website when the World Chess Championship finals were going on. You will be surprised by passion and anger on display there.

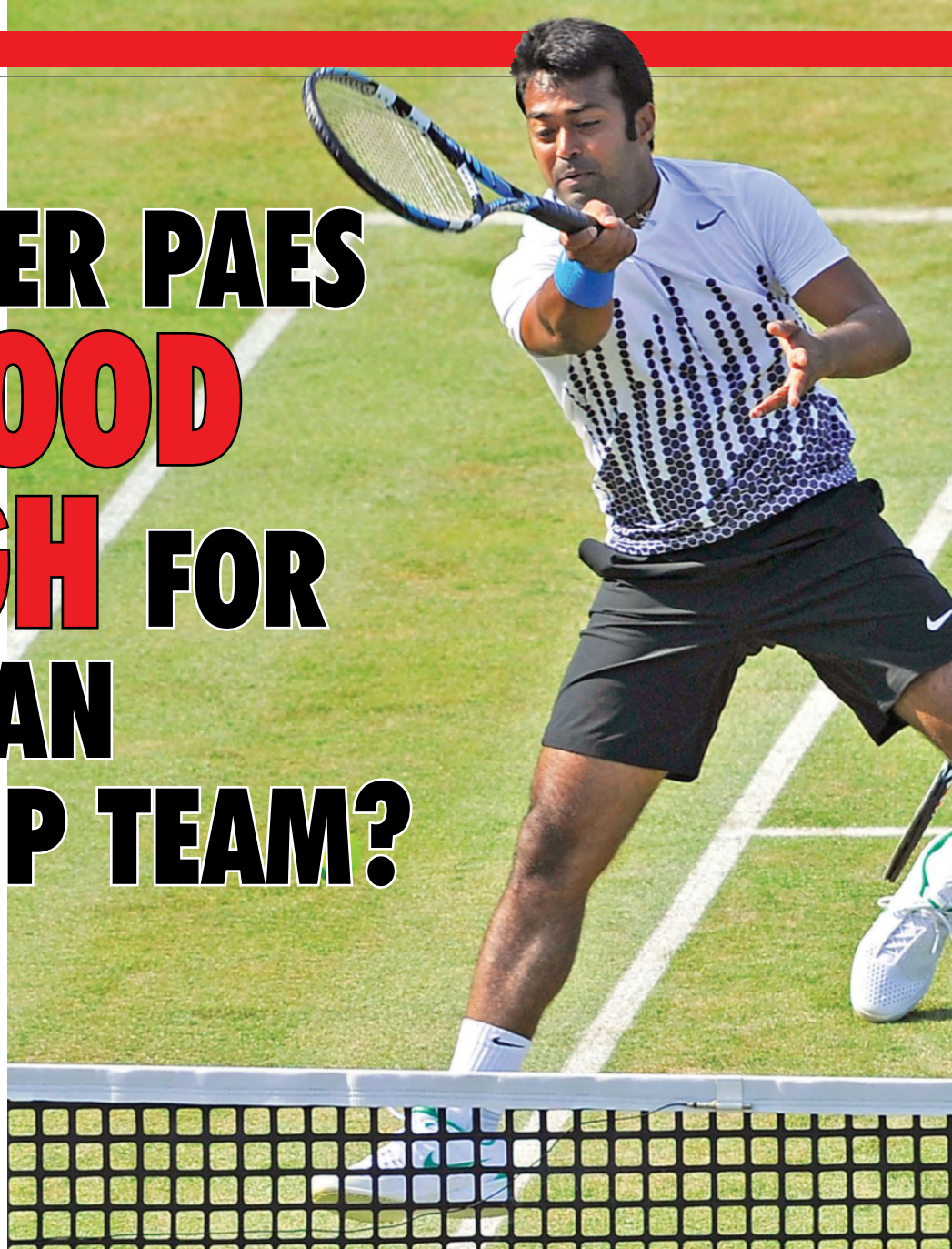
The disasters caused by the fans' passion and inefficient handling of crowd are bound to happen – in any popular sporting event.

IS LEANDER PAES NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE INDIAN DAVIS CUP TEAM?

When Paes was left out and Bopanna was preferred, it created a huge controversy. To put things in perspectives, Paes was having a lean season this year. He won his first title of the year just days before the Uzbekistan tie.

BY SUNIL GARODIA

If it is to be believed that nothing can be ad infinitum, then a line has to be drawn somewhere. The time, place and circumstance under which the line is drawn often create problems and controversies. In sports, this problem is even more acute. When a sportsperson retires, people often say he or she did so quite early and could have played for a few more seasons. There are others who will say that he or she got the timing right while still others will heave a sigh of relief and say it was about time.





The reason for narrating all this is just to show there is no perfect time for a sportsman to retire. As long as the fire is burning inside, the time spent in the arena is not stressing the body, the competitive spirit is alive and most importantly, as long as playing the game is enjoyable to the person concerned, there is no reason for him or her to retire. Age is not a factor, unless the body fails to keep pace with mind and soul. No sportsman would want to make a spectacle of self by just going through the motions. The same goes for player selection in team sports. Regardless of age, selectors generally select in-form players who are producing results, unless the focus is not on here and now but on building a team for the future. In that case, old warhorses are often overlooked in favour of promising rookies.

But that is just one angle. Another angle to

the issue arises from the fact that the sporting space in every discipline has become highly crowded and hence equally competitive. In team sports, spots are limited and there are others breathing down the neck for the same spot. In such cases, sportspersons can lose their place in the team for a variety of reasons which include temporary loss of form, injury, sporting rivalry, change in team management, change in team policy or if someone else is considered a better player at that point of time.

Paes was especially furious because he had been made to come all the way from Mexico, only to be told his services were not needed. He questioned the selection policy which he said was not consistent.

Having read the above, will the reader be able to spell out exactly why Leander Paes was not picked to play the doubles for the Indian Davis Cup team for the tie against Uzbekistan recently? One is afraid he or she will not be able to do so because of the simple reason that all of the above and some other things contributed in Paes' unceremonious removal. Initially too, the new non-playing captain, Mahesh Bhupathi (with whom Paes has a running feud since 2002 which intensified in 2012, after decades of



the player with the highest number of Davis Cup doubles wins (he already has 42 victories and needs one more to cross Nicola Pietrangeli of Italy, with whom he is now the joint top winner).

While some former players were critical of the way Paes was treated, Jaidip Mukherjea put things in correct perspective when he pointed out that since the team management had made it clear that players should report on Sunday, Paes was wrong in reporting on Wednesday. Mukherjea said that team discipline cannot be violated by anyone, however great. There were whispers in All India Tennis Association (AITA) too that Paes' late arrival had gone against him. Some sources even pointed out that he had made it a habit of reporting late. Others pointed out that the association had given him enough hints in recent months to retire from Davis Cup to make way for emerging youngsters. Was the appointment of Bhupathi then a hatchet job carried out by the AITA in order to get rid of Leander Paes, given the fact that they do not see eye to

friendship and fruitful doubles partnership), had asked the selectors to give the nod to only four specialist singles players – all youngsters who were performing well this season - in the team, keeping Paes and Rohan Bopanna as reserves. But when top singles player Yuki Bhambri pulled out due to injury days before the tie, it became almost certain that one of Paes and Bopanna would play the doubles.

In the end, when Paes was left out and Bopanna was preferred, it created a huge controversy. To put things in correct perspectives, Paes was having a lean season this year. He won his first title of the year just days before the Uzbekistan tie, after a string of losses. But then, things were not rosy with Bopanna too, who has a 9-7 win-loss record this year. Paes was especially furious because he had been made to come all the way from Mexico, only to be told his servic-

es were not needed. He questioned the selection policy which he said was not consistent. He said that sometimes it was based on rankings, sometimes on form, sometimes on the game preference of players (who plays deuce and ad courts) and other times on likes and preferences of the team management. Paes reiterated that currently the selection criterion was form, but it was not adhered to in his case. It must have hurt badly since it was the first time Paes was not in the Indian Davis Cup team in 27 years, and that too when he is on the cusp of being

Leander has always questioned Bhupathi's commitment to the game in general and playing for India in particular by hinting at his many business commitments. Theirs is a war that has seen many small battles.



that 1999 was their best year together on court and the worst year off it. That one remark gave a clue to the complete lack of trust between the two. When trust is not there, even small things assume gigantic proportions and Paes-Bhupathi were never the same formidable team thereafter.

They attempted many comebacks together but success eluded them. Later, India's young brigade, mainly Rohan Bopanna, Sania Mirza and Vishnu Vardhan, refused to partner with Leander Paes in doubles. While no one said it explicitly, whispers were always there that since most of these youngsters were trained at Mahesh Bhupathi Tennis Academy in Bangalore, Bhupathi might have played a hand in their refusal, just to put down Leander in their ongoing ego war. Leander has always questioned Bhupathi's commitment to the game in general and playing for India in particular by hinting at his many business commitments. Theirs is a war that has seen many small battles.

But it is difficult to believe that Leander's present ouster from the Indian Davis Cup team is solely because of their love-hate – now more hate than love – relationship. Paes has a 5-7 win-loss record this year to Bopanna's 9-7 although both have struggled. Bopanna is ranked higher at number 24 while Paes languishes at 53. Just winning a tournament a few days before the tie did not prove Paes is a better player on current form. But it could have been handled much more diplomatically. Paes could have been

informed in Mexico that his services were not needed, sparing the unnecessary drama and long travel on Paes' part. But maybe Paes was to be considered and he spoiled his chances by arriving late.

Whatever the reason, one feels that since Uzbekistan had suffered the blow of not having their top player, Leander could have been given a chance to go for his record. He is the greatest Davis Cupper India has produced and without bending rules, he should be treated with a lot more respect than was visible this time.

eye? It is difficult to believe that a seasoned pro like Bhupathi will allow people to fire at Paes using his shoulder. But it might not be entirely untrue, given the relationship the duo shared in the past and how it broke down, with much dirty linen being washed in public.

Paes and Bhupathi formed an awesome doubles partnership. Together, they won an amazing 25 Davis Cup rubbers and three Grand Slams. They were called the "Indian Express" for their amazing on-court chemistry and visible camaraderie. They were all over the place off-court and the social circuit buzzed with whispers about their escapades. Model Anupama Verma was at one time said to be cavorted by both, although she later said in an interview that she was with Bhupathi and Leander was a "thorough gentleman." Another bone of contention between the two was Bhupathi's coach Enrico Piperno (like Leander, an Anglo-Indian Kolkata boy). Leander never liked Piperno and asked Mahesh to drop him in 2000. Before that, in a televised interview, Paes had said







gains nothing with power of ground strokes and serves. In fact, it is counter-productive only. Powerful strokes sit up nicely with good bounce for the opponents for the return stroke. To succeed on clay, one needs to impart heavy spin on the shots, have truck loads of stamina to keep returning the ball, and possess a degree of never-say-a-die attitude. In other words, you have to be Rafael Nadal.

NADAL – THE MASTER OF CLAY

It is easier to understand the significance of clay courts and the French Open with a cricketing analogy. The cricket pitches in India are dusty and dry, while the pitches in England, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, are grassy and bouncy. Spinners thrive on Indian pitches, while fast bowlers excel in England, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Most of the overseas batsmen, with a few exceptions, struggle on Indian pitches. Similarly, batsmen from Indian sub continent find it hard on the overseas pitches.

The situation is similar in tennis as well.

to win on clay is Rafael Nadal. His game is made for clay courts. He imparts heavy spin on all his shots. He has endless stamina and tireless legs so that he can keep on returning shots. And mentally, he never accepts defeat. No wonder he has won nine French Open titles.

Nadal won his first French Open in 2005. Since then, he has missed out only on three times. He lost to Robin Soderling in the fourth round in 2009, and Federer won the title that year, beating Soderling in the final. He lost to Novak Djokovic in the quarter finals in 2015. Stan Wawrinka lifted the French Crown that year, beating Djokovic in the final. Last year, Nadal withdrew in third round following an injury. Djokovic won the tournament for the first time. With this extra-ordinary winning consistency at Roland Garros, he has established himself as the master of clay. The big question before the French Open 2017 is this: Can Nadal win an unprecedented 10th French Open title?

PREVIEW – MEN'S SECTION

Nadal will face tough competition from Djokovic, Wawrinka and Andy Murray. Then there is the second line of emerging title aspirants, the likes of Kei Nishikori, Dominic Thiem and Nick Kyrgios. Roger Federer has not confirmed his availability. Even if he participates, his chances are slim. He needs a faster surface to gain maximum value for his shots. In any case, at this age, he is no longer suitable for the rigors of Roland Garros. Most likely, he will not participate in the French Open. He wants to focus on the Wimbledon. Probably, he may retire after the Wimbledon as well.

Andy Murray is not going to be a force in the French Open either. His game is cut out for the grass and hard courts. He will find it hard on the slow and deceptive nature of clay. His performance will be more like the English batsmen on Indian pitches in test cricket. We can safely leave him out of the equation for finding the French Open winners.

That leaves three main title contenders: Djokovic, Wawrinka and our man Nadal. Among them, Djokovic has been going through a lean patch – a strange lean patch in that. It began after his victory in the French Open in 2016. After that he has not won anything substantial. And he lost his aura of a champion as a result of a series of unexpected losses. Still, Djokovic is one of the favorites of bookmakers. That is because of Nadal's age and Wawrinka's inconsistency.

Nadal will celebrate his 31st birthday dur-

THE MEN & WOMEN OF CLAY

BY NIJING

The French Open begins on May 28, Sunday, at the iconic Roland Garros tennis stadium. The final will be played two weeks later on May 11. It is kind of an off-road trip than the ATP tennis circuit. Tennis goes to clay courts. More than 90% ATP tennis tournaments are held in synthetic hard courts or in manicured grass courts. Both these types of courts have many things in common.

The prime among the common features is that both types of courts favor the power-hitters. The more power you have in your strokes and serves, the more chances you have of winning. But on clay courts, one

Rafael Nadal will face tough competition from Djokovic, Wawrinka and Andy Murray. Then there is the second line of emerging title aspirants, the likes of Kei Nishikori, Dominic Thiem and Nick Kyrgios.

The Spaniards are comfortable playing in grass courts. But players from most of the other countries normally find it hard to adjust their games to the demands of clay courts. One player who has the natural game



Alexander Zverev has shown stamina and skill in his short career so far. (Inset) Angelique Kerber is going to benefit most from Serena's pregnancy-forced absence.





more power-packed player who are likely to shine on grass or synthetic courts, but not at Roland Garros. Nishikieri and Thiem are solid players on clay. But they need to up the ante to challenge the big boys.

One man to watch out for is Alexander Zverev. The German youngster has shown stamina and skill in his short career so far. He has good memories of the French Open from his junior playing days. He can be a dark horse in the tournament.

Prediction: Nadal is the clear-cut favorite to win.

PREVIEW – WOMEN'S SECTION

The big news about Women's Section is Serena Williams' pregnancy. She is expected to deliver in September 2017. She is unlikely to play in the French Open and the Wimbledon. So, the other women players' title hopes have increased.

The reigning champion Garbiñe Muguruza will be confident of retaining the title. The Venezuela-born Spanish player has not had a great 2017 so far. However, most of the tournaments she played were on synthetic hard courts. On clay courts, she is a different beast. She is the top favorite to win the French Open Women's title.

Her toughest opponent will be Germany's Angelique Kerber. She is going to benefit most from Serena's pregnancy-forced absence. Her chances will be brighter at the Wimbledon and other hard courts. She is good on clay courts as well, but not the same force as on grass or hard courts. Another title hopeful is Maria Sharapova. She has not won a lot in recent times. But she has kept herself in good shape and form, despite the long title drought.

Simona Halep, the beaten finalist in 2014, will be looking to cross the final hurdle this time. The Romanian has been in good form. She has the all-round game to dominate the Serena-less scene of women's tennis. But she has not won a grand slam title yet. She has reached semi finals and finals. She tends to freeze in big occasions. If she can overcome that, a French Open crown is beckoning.

The French Open usually offers chance for less known women players to emerge victorious. That gives title hopes to a host of talented players, such as Karolina Piskova, Elina Svitolina and Johana Konta.

Prediction: Garbiñe Muguruza will be the favorite.

Now we can wait for May 28. Let us all off-road in tennis.

ing the French Open. Close to 15 years of rigorous tennis has taken a toll on his body. Nadal plays a waiting game, based on solid defense and tireless returning, which will provide more stress to the body. He has shown great determination and skill in reaching the Australian Open finals. He has almost defeated Federer in the finals. He won the Monte Carlo Masters, perhaps the most prestigious clay court tournament after the French Open, too. He is in good form. If his body holds up, Nadal will win the French Open. On current form, Djokovic will not be much of a threat to him, especially if he goes past the quarter finals. Nadal could be vulnerable during the early rounds – but not after quarter finals.

Nadal's fate depends on how well Wawrinka plays. He is the one guy who can stop Nadal in the climactic stages of the tournament. He has the stamina, skill and the confidence to take on Nadal. But the Swiss maverick is far too inconsistent. He is a terrific grand slam player. If Wawrinka brings out his A game, Nadal could find a solid road block in his journey to the 10th French Open crown.

So, what about the next in line – the Nishikieris and the Thiems? They have not won anything in the grand slam arenas to wear the favorite tag. They have shown talent, but still remains boys in a field where men like Federer, Nadal, and Djokovic roam. Nick Kyrgios and Milos Raonic are

The reigning champion Garbiñe Muguruza will be confident of retaining the title. The Venezuela-born Spanish player has not had a great 2017 so far. However, most of the tournaments she played were on synthetic hard courts.



Unlike Mercedes, Ferrari has a clear pecking order of drivers. If the recent history is any indication, they do not allow their own drivers to race against each other.

BY NIJING

The last few seasons of Formula One were won by engineers – not by drivers. The quickest car won by itself. Whoever driver was lucky enough to drive it won the F1 crown. It has been the case since 2011. First Red Bull dominated the scene with an ultra powerful car that nobody managed to catch. Sebastian Vettel, Red Bull's then lead driver, was the lucky driver to benefit from it. He has four Formula One titles to his credit. After some wholesale changes in engine specifications, Mercedes came up with the best car. There was no chance for others. The titles were shared by Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg, the two Mercedes drivers. The

others were competing just for the sake of it, not for winning the title.

Is the scenario going to change this season? If the first three races are any indication, it is indeed going to change. We are going to witness an exciting Formula One season in which Vettel and Hamilton could script a memorable title race.

STORY SO FAR OF 2017

The first race in 2017 itself sprang a surprise. This season saw the introduction of some more specifications, which were described on these pages in detail in an earlier issue. It had been expected that Mercedes could still retain the edge in speed. It looked in the qualifying rounds of Australian Grand Prix that Mercedes cars

were quicker than the rest. Ferrari looked the second quickest. However, on the race day in Melbourne, the Ferrari vehicle looked a different beast. It matched the Mercedes car in speed and control.

The Mercedes team was certainly not expecting such a strong challenge from Vettel. They made a tactical mistake by calling in Hamilton for an early pit stop, which allowed Vettel to take lead. He kept Hamilton behind for the entire race and won the Australian grand prix. The verdict after the race was something along the following lines: Ferrari did have a vehicle to make things difficult for Mercedes and Hamilton, but Mercedes vehicle is still superior, which would ultimately lead to Hamilton's victory. It seemed plausible too.

CAN VETTEL CHALLENGE HAMILTON IN THIS F1 SEASON?



You cannot expect a team like Mercedes to make tactical mistakes everyday. And Valtteri Bottas – the second driver of Mercedes – finished third, reminding everybody the superiority of their vehicle.

Then came the Chinese grand prix. It just confirmed the assumptions made after the Australian grand prix. Hamilton roared back to the lead by leading from start to finish. Once again, Mercedes gained the pole position and looked distinctly quicker than the rest in the practice and qualifying rounds. Their speed advantage was not as pro-

nounced in the actual race though. It was the turn of Ferrari to make a tactical error in China while choosing the pit stop. They called in Vettel for a pit stop in the second lap when virtual safety car was out. However, full safety car was announced when they did that. When Vettel came out of the pit stop he was in the sixth position. While the Ferrari backroom staff could not have foreseen the introduction of full safety car, it practically ended Vettel's chances of winning the race. He did extremely well to climb up to the second position.

So, it was even steven after two races. Vettel won the first race and Hamilton came second. In the second race, Hamilton won and Vettel came second. The third race was in Bahrain, just a week after the Chinese grand prix. Mercedes once again grabbed the pole position. But this time it was not Hamilton who bagged it. Bottas, the new comer, edged out both Hamilton and Vettel to win the pole position. In the race though, the old order prevailed.

Vettel overtook both Hamilton and Bottas in a sensational initial surge. Hamilton seemed confident of catching up with the German. However, he received a five-second penalty for driving too slowly on the pit lane, ostensibly to slow down Daniel Ricciardo of Red Bull. It looked as if Vettel will have a comfortable victory after the penalty slap on Hamilton. But Hamilton did a tremendous fight back. He came charged in, but failed to get past Vettel. For his part, Vettel drove smartly to deny any advantage to the Brit.

So, after three races, the situation is like this. Vettel leads the points table with 68 points. Hamilton is behind with 61 points. Bottas is third with 38 points and Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen is fourth with 34 points. Ferrari leads the constructors' championship by just three points. So, back to our original question: can Vettel challenge Hamilton in this season?

Three factors could determine the outcome of the season: speed, intra-team harmony and luck.

SPEED

The season is just three weeks old. We will come to know more about the vehicles after a couple of races in F1's European leg, which begins in Russia from

April 30. What become obvious now are the following points:

- Mercedes is quicker in practice and qualifying rounds.
- Ferrari manages to equal the speed of Mercedes in actual races.
- With soft tyres, Ferrari actually looked quicker during races.
- With hard tyres, there is not much difference between the two during races.

Even the drivers failed to give a clear picture about the speed of the vehicles. Hamilton did point out the inconsistency in



speed: "It is, as I said, very, very close. There were times when Sebastian [Vettel] put laps in and it was hard to even match the time. The last ten or 12 laps he was doing a 35.6 and I was doing a 35.8 and it was very hard to get to where he was. Then there were other times in the race when I was quicker."

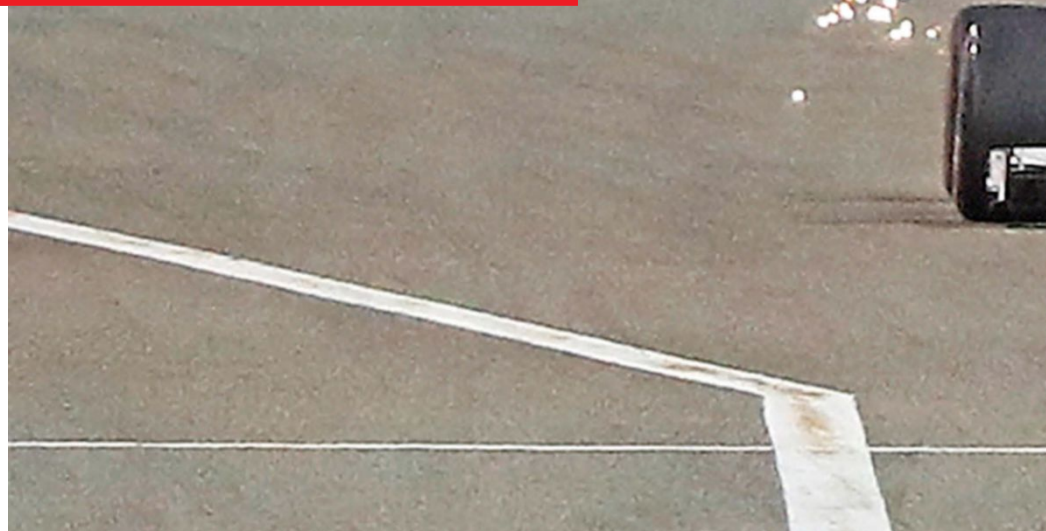
Vettel too agreed that there was inconsistency, but insisted that Ferrari can match Mercedes in speed: "In terms of pace we had a kind of match with Lewis, sometimes I was quicker, sometimes he was." Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff too indirectly admitted that they will not have the advantage of driving the fastest car any more. "It looks like we are very close on pace with Ferrari.

I expect it to ping-pong through the season. One race we will be ahead, another they will."

This is real good news for F1 fans, even though Mercedes fans may find this a bad news. For long we have been witnessing one-team dominance. Last seven seasons had an air of inevitability about it – first, the inevitability of Red Bull winning the title and then the inevitability of Mercedes winning the title. The same inevitability will not be there in this season. Ferrari, finally, seems to have produced a car that can be as fast as Mercedes, if not faster.

INTRA-TEAM HARMONY

That is something neither Hamilton possesses nor Mercedes cultivates. In fact, the fans must be thankful towards them for that, because the lack of harmony was the only thing that made the last season interesting. Unlike Mercedes, Ferrari has a clear pecking order of drivers. If the recent history is any indication, they do not allow their own drivers to race against each other.





Hamilton does have an inexperienced teammate, who is unlikely to hurt his ego. Still, Bottas is keen to script his own history. After winning the pole position in Bahrain, he threw his hat in to the title race ring. He said prior to the race in Bahrain: "It is early days to speak about the title fight, and it is going to be as it is a massively long season, but I feel like I am in the game."

If Bottas starts to win a couple of races, there could be trouble in the Mercedes camp. There will not be any problem as long as Hamilton finishes ahead of

Bottas. Ferrari, on the other hand, does not have the problem of the lack of intra-team harmony, as Vettel and Raikkonen share a cordial and mutually respectful relationship.

LUCK

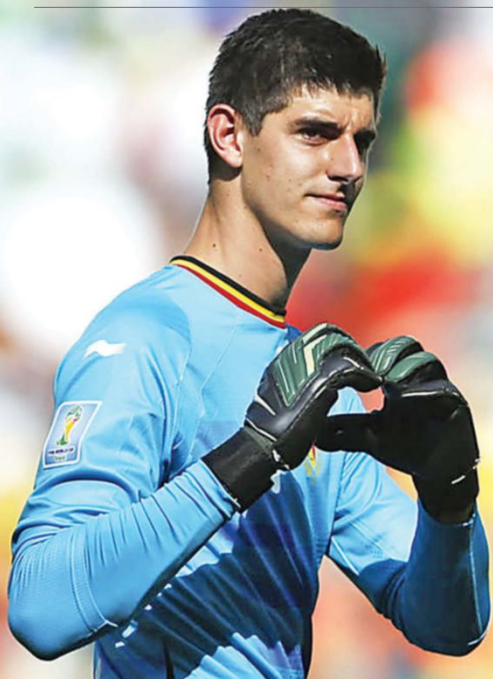
Luck cannot be quantified. But it does exist. With some luck, Hamilton would have been

the champion last year. Hamilton knows that more than anybody else does. In sporting world, luck tends to favour Germans. Their football team usually win most of the penalty shoot-outs, don't they?

When he won four titles in a row with Red Bull, Vettel looked like a darling of the Lady Luck. If his luck continues, he can be the formula one champion this year. But Hamilton is somewhat overdue to have some luck. In the meantime,

we can feel lucky in count: that finally, the Formula One race has become a competition of drivers again – not a contest between engineers alone.





that's the rules," he was quoted as saying by the outlet. He further revealed how the two got to know each other before adding that his daughter rarely sees the Belgian. "He asked my daughter where she got her dog from and shot straight up to the breeder in

Cambridge to get one for himself," he said. "We babysit Yoshi (footballer's dog) when he goes away. He was once playing away in the internationals. Delaney got the dog and brought it back because we have a Pomeranian and they're brother and sister. She rarely sees Courtois," he added.

Earlier this month, Courtois had announced his separation from long-

IS THIBAUT COURTOIS DATING DELANEY ROYLE?

BY SIDHARTH VERMA

Footballer stars are unpredictable when it comes to dating. They are known for their cheating habits and can even surprise everyone by going on a dating spree. Just days after Chelsea star Thibaut Courtois released a statement saying he had split from his pregnant girlfriend Marta Dominguez after a number of years together, reports have linked him with stunning 18-year-old dog-sitter Delaney Royle. When it comes to on-field performances, the goalkeeper has been a star. In July 2011 he joined Chelsea for a reported £8 million, and was immediately loaned to Atlético Madrid. In three seasons there, he won the Europa League in 2012, the Copa del Rey in 2013 and the La Liga title in 2014. He also won the Ricardo Zamora Trophy for best goalkeeper in La Liga, for his performances in his two latter seasons. Courtois returned to Chelsea in July 2014, and in his first season he helped them win the League Cup and the Premier League title. He has been Chelsea's star player since then. However, the same can't be said about his personal life. He was previously linked with Miss Belgium despite being in a relationship

Just days after Chelsea star Thibaut Courtois released a statement saying he had split from his pregnant girlfriend, reports have linked him with Delaney Royle.

and has been accused of cheating on many occasions. The current news of his sensational affair with 18-year old dog sitter has surprised everyone. English news outlet, The Sun, has claimed that the Belgian international has struck friendship with the stunning teenager after bonding over love for dogs. The Chelsea keeper reportedly messaged Delaney on Instagram to enquire about various dog breeds. Their friendship has grown strong now as Delaney regularly travels the 60 miles from her home in Chatham, Kent, to look after Courtois' pet Yoshi in Surrey. The newly-developed friendship between the two, meanwhile, have convinced the 24-year old custodian's friends that something is brewing between the two. However, Jonathan, Delaney's father, has quashed all the speculations by saying that his daughter visited the goalkeeper's mansion only to look after the dog and there is no truth to the ongoing rumors about the duo. "There's no relationship between her and a Chelsea player. Maybe one day a West Ham player. It's a West Ham player or nothing,

term girlfriend Marta Dominguez. The ex-couple have had one child together and they are now expecting another. Marta returned to her native Spain after separating from the footballer. The Blues star met Marta during his loan stint with Atletico Madrid in 2013. "My girlfriend Marta and I are no longer together. We both went our own way, even though she was expecting our second child," Courtois had said in a statement. "She moved to Madrid, I stayed in London. We still love each other but we don't have a romantic relationship. But we don't run away from our responsibilities. We are first and foremost parents of a beautiful princess, Adriana, and our about-to-be-born son Nicolas. We'll strive to give our children the love and attention they deserve," he had added. It seems that his flirtiest nature has led to the split as he was not satisfied with one and wanted more. The arrival of rumored girlfriend in his life has further added weightage to the above mentioned claims. However, we have to wait till both of them come out in the open about their relationship.



Sports Plus



28TH MAY – 11TH JUNE

The schedule given is subject to change. No responsibility is taken by Sports Plus for the accuracy of date and channel.

SCHEDULE

MAY

2017

Sports plus

TENNIS
FRENCH OPEN



FOOTBALL
CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



FORMULA 1
SPANISH GP



SUNDAY MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY

01

02
Champions League SF

03
Champions League SF

04
Europa League SF

05

06

Arsenal v United

07
Madrid Open

08
Madrid Open

09
Madrid Open

10
Madrid Open

11
Madrid Open

Rugby Union Spanish GP

12
Madrid Open

Rugby Union Spanish GP

13
Madrid Open

Spurs v Man United Spanish GP

14
R Madrid v Sevilla Madrid Open

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

Europa League Final

24

25

Monaco GP

26

Monaco GP

27
FA Cup, Final

Monaco GP

28
French Open

29
French Open

30
French Open

31
French Open

29th May - 5th June
Table Tennis World Championships

IMPORTANT EVENT

WEEKEND SPECIAL



V
07TH MAY



V
14TH MAY



MONACO GP
26TH MAY - 28TH MAY



THE NO.1 SPORTS MAGAZINE GOES ONLINE

www.crictoday.com

Cricket today

QUICK SCORE UPDATES : DESKTOP SCORECARD : EXCITING ONLINE GAMES : BLOGS & INTERVIEWS
LATEST NEWS & COVERAGE : COMPLETE SERIES SCHEDULE : PICTURE & VIDEO GALLERY : DOWNLOAD ZONE



“My elder brother lets me use his bike”

Cricket Today. An addiction for over 29 lakh men.

When it comes to winning hearts of young Indian men, Cricket Today emerges as the clear winner. And we don't claim that. The latest IRS report proves that. According to the survey, Cricket Today is much ahead of Stardust, Femina, Autocar, Digit, Cine Blitz, Sportstar and many more similar magazines. In other words, it means that Cricket Today is not just a sports magazine. It is, in fact the most stylish and sleek lifestyle magazine that caters to the upwardly mobile Indian male. The reason why men just can't help getting addicted to it.

Cricket
today

www.crictoday.com

