

The Peninsula SPORT

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Stars inspire future generations on National Sport Day

The Peninsula

Team Qatar's Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic athletes joined in National Sport Day celebrations across Qatar as the nation came together for a sixth consecutive year to participate in various activities and enjoy sport.

Qatar's sporting heroes turned out to share their experiences and advice as national federations organised activities across Qatar for all ages and abilities.

Commenting on another hugely successful National Sport Day, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani, said: "Our athletes are an inspiration to our nation and are excellent role models for our young people and we are delighted that so many of them were able to join in the celebrations today and pass on their experiences and guidance to aspiring young athletes."

"National Sport Day provides a unique opportunity to unite our nation through sport and share the Olympic spirit, and it is pleasing to see such large numbers of people turning out with their families and friends to participate in the many activities across Qatar. This is about more than just one day of sport – it is about kick-starting a future of health, happiness and success and we hope today's festivities have inspired people of all ages and abilities to participate in regular activity at any level."

H E Sheikh Joaan and QOC Secretary General, Dr Thani Abdulrahman Al Kuwari toured and joined in National Sport Day activities taking place around Qatar. Also participating were leaders of international sport, including CEO of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), Olivier Gers, and President of the International School Sport Federation (ISF), Laurent Petrynkia.

Commenting on his

Qatar celebrate National Sport Day

▶ Qatar's Rio 2016 Olympic and Paralympic athletes joined in National Sport Day celebrations across the country.

▶ H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani and Dr Thani Abdulrahman Al Kuwari joined in National Sport Day activities along with several leaders of international sport.

participation, Petrynkia said: "I have been very impressed with the involvement of so many schools across Qatar in National Sport Day, including children with a disability. All populations, stakeholders and the highest authority in the country, including Emir HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, have been participating in sport today, showing how the sporting spirit is continuing to grow in Qatar. Starting from the basics and promoting sport on a day like today is also

a very good way for schools and federations to detect talented pupils for the future. You can see a very high level of skilled pupils across Qatar."

Despite the wet weather, Katara was buzzing all day with multiple national federations organising an array of activities for everyone to enjoy. Team Qatar Olympians Fares Ibrahim and Kamal Mallash joined in the activities and spoke to the public about their Rio 2016 experiences. Ibrahim had a breakthrough year in 2016 with a bronze medal in the World Youth Championships, eighth place at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in a field of incredibly experienced athletes, and three gold medals at the Asian Junior Weightlifting Championships. Mallash was a member of Qatar's historic handball team that won silver at the 2015 World Championships and was on hand to show budding young handball players what it takes to become a champion athlete.

At the Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC), Qatar's first ever Paralympic medalists, Abdelrahman Abdelqader and Sara Masoud, together with Mohammed Al Kubaisi, joined the



President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani plays with kids during the National Sport Day celebrations in Doha yesterday.

activities and showed young people their Rio 2016 silver medals.

Meanwhile, Hamad Aquatic Centre welcomed Qatar's first-ever female double Olympian, Nada Arakji, to participate in a swimming open day and inspire youngsters through her experiences at the London 2012 and Rio

2016 Olympics. Swimming is one of the fastest growing sports in Qatar and with the Aquatics World Championships coming to Doha in 2023, now is the perfect time to take up the sport.

National Sport Day was established in 2012 with the aim of uniting the nation in a shared

celebration of sport and inspiring people to lead active and healthy lifestyles. Qatar is one of the only countries in the world to dedicate a public holiday to sport and the number of people that turned up to join in activities this year shows how it continues to be a huge success.



President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani and President of the International School Sport Federation (ISF), Laurent Petrynkia (left) take part in a tug-of-war contest with kids and officials during the National Sport Day celebrations in Doha yesterday. CENTRE: QOC Secretary General, Dr Thani Abdulrahman Al Kuwari looks on while two kids play chess. RIGHT: Qatar's Olympic weightlifter Fares Ibrahim tries boxing during a fun event at Katara.



Inclement weather spoils Qatar Total Open action

Armstrong Vas
The Peninsula

Inclement weather wreaked havoc on the second day of the Qatar Total Open at the Khalifa International Tennis Complex.

Two spells of afternoon downpour sent the schedule into a state of flux pushing back 11 first round matches yesterday.

The wet spell which affected the qualifying rounds on Sunday and also day one action of the main draw on Monday, forced the organisers for an early start to proceeding's yesterday.

But of the three matches which got off at 2.00pm, on different courts, none could be completed.

There were two stoppage

spells on account of rain, the first one happened after the players had seen nearly an hour's action.

Play resumed after a hour's break but the players again had to rush under the umbrellas and off to the dressing room as the downpour became much heavier, forcing a postponement of play for the second time.

Play didn't resume till the time we went to press.

"Yes! It is still raining, we will update you once we get information from the officials! Stay tuned," Qatar Tennis Federation @QatarTennis tweeted in response to a query.

Former world No.1 Jelena Jankovic, who made to the main draw via the qualifying route, got an unexpected rest, as her match against

Parvlyuchenkova was one of the 11 matches which were pushed back.

Jankovic, who has hired former world No8 Guillermo Canas of Argentina as her new coach, lost the first set 6-1 and was trailing 3-2 when play had to be postponed. Canas has previously coached Russia's Teymuraz Gabashvili and was part of Kei Nishikori's team. Among those women who were in action were Italy's Roberta Vinci against qualifier Lauren Davis of US.

The American ranked 55 won the first set 6-1 against the Italian ranked 30 places above her in the WTA rankings, and the second set was tied at one-all when rain struck.

The third match between Irina Begu of Romania and Darya



Workers mop up the playing surface as play was stopped due to rain during the Qatar Total Open at the International Khalifa Tennis Complex in Doha yesterday. Picture by Anvar Sadath

Kasatkina of Russia, Begu was leading 5-3 when rain came calling.

The other eight matches which were slated for yesterday but never took off were between Madison Brengle vs Caroline Garcia, Yulia Putintseva vs Timea Babos, Barбора Strycova vs

Fatma Al Nabhani, Shuai Zhang vs Timea Babos, Caroline Wozniacki vs Kiki Bertens, Christina McHale vs Elena Vesnina, Garbiñe Muguruza vs Çağla Büyükakçay and Laura Siegemund vs Mónica Puig.

On day one only one match of the main draw took place.

On Monday, rain halted play for two hours the match between Australia's Samantha Stosur and Latvian Anastasiya Sevastova.

The Australian won 7-5, 6-4 to advance to the second round where she will take on the winner of the match between Strycova and Al Nabhani.

Qatar Gymnastics Federation celebrates National Sport Day



Young gymnasts perform during a ceremony hosted by Qatar Gymnastics Federation (QGF) to celebrate the National Sport Day at the Khawla Gymnastics Hall yesterday. TOP RIGHT: Participants pose for a photograph with QGF officials during the event. QGF staff, administrative and technical officials, players, parents of players and a large audience were present at the occasion.

Morris stars as Wizards storm past Thunder while Spurs excel

Washington
AFP

Markieff Morris scored 23 points as the Washington Wizards took advantage of an off night by Russell Westbrook to crush the Oklahoma City Thunder 120-98 on Monday.

John Wall had 15 points and 14 assists and Bradley Beal scored 22 points as all five starters scored in double figures for the Wizards, who led by as many as 34 points.

Washington has won three straight, 10 of 11 overall and are an Eastern Conference-best 17-5 since New Year's Day.

"It definitely starts with him," Beal said of shutting down Westbrook. "Containing him as much as possible, keeping him out of the paint. Make him take a lot of tough jumpers."

"That's the game we want him to play. He wasn't comfortable with it. We made it difficult for him and their whole offense to get going."

Westbrook scored 17 points for the Thunder, but the NBA Most Valuable Player candidate was a long way from his triple-double form.

"I was doing what I wanted. I just missed," said Westbrook. The point guard played just 24 minutes.

It has been quite a week

for Westbrook. Less than 48 hours after an emotional matchup against former his teammate, Golden State Warriors star Kevin Durant, he finished with four rebounds and four assists while shooting five of 19 from the field.

The road matchup against the Wizards pitted all-star point guards Westbrook and Wall against each other.

It didn't garner the same amount of attention that came from Durant's first game in Oklahoma City since spurning the Thunder for the Western Conference champion Warriors.

But the same outcome means two losses in a row for the Thunder, who fell to 31-25, shooting just 35.4 percent overall on Monday.

Elsewhere, Kawhi Leonard tallied a game-high 32 points as the San Antonio Spurs clinched their 20th straight winning season with a 110-106 win over the Indiana Pacers on Monday.

LaMarcus Aldridge scored 19 points, and Danny Green,

NBA RESULTS

| | | | |
|--------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| Atlanta | 109 | Portland | 104 |
| Denver | 132 | Golden State | 110 |
| LA Clippers | 88 | Utah | 72 |
| New Orleans | 110 | Phoenix | 108 |
| Boston | 111 | Dallas | 98 |
| Washington | 120 | Oklahoma City | 98 |
| Milwaukee | 102 | Detroit | 89 |
| Memphis | 112 | Brooklyn | 103 |
| Orlando | 116 | Miami | 107 |
| San Antonio | 110 | Indiana | 106 |
| Philadelphia | 105 | Charlotte | 99 |



Manu Ginobili (left) of the San Antonio Spurs shoots the ball against the Indiana Pacers during their NBA game played at Bankers Life Fieldhouse on Monday in Indianapolis, Indiana. Spurs clinched their 20th straight winning season with a 110-106 win.

David Lee and Tony Parker each scored 12 for the Spurs, who were coming off a surprising 94-90 loss to the New York Knicks on Sunday.

The Spurs have lost two in a row only twice this NBA season and are 9-1 on the second night of consecutive games.

Aldridge's three-point play with 22 seconds left gave the Spurs a 105-100 lead, and Parker made two free throws with 23 seconds remaining that bumped the lead to 107-101 at Bankers Life Fieldhouse arena.

Two Aldridge free throws at the 3:55 mark and Leonard's baseline jumper with

3:34 to play gave San Antonio a 98-97 lead. Another Leonard basket stretched the lead to 100-97 with just under three minutes left.

Paul George scored a team-high 27 points for Indiana, who dropped to 29-26 on the season.

Myles Turner finished with 22. Jeff Teague scored 15 and Rodney Stuckey added 13 for the Pacers, who lost their fourth straight game.

San Antonio outscored Indiana 21-12 to close the second quarter as the teams went into the half tied 49-49.

In Denver, Juancho Hernangomez nailed six of

Denver's franchise-record 24 three-pointers as the Nuggets blasted the Golden State Warriors 132-110.

Nikola Jokic had 17 points, 21 rebounds and 12 assists for his second triple-double. He set career highs for assists and rebounds but was overshadowed by the team's outside shooting as four players hit at least four three-pointers.

Kevin Durant scored 25 points for Golden State. The Warriors were just eight of 32 from three point range, including Stephen Curry's one-of-11. Curry went four of 18 from the field and finished with just 11 points.

Wilder beats Povetkin in US trial over cancelled fight

New York
Reuters

Heavyweight boxing champion Deontay Wilder has won a fight with Russian boxer Alexander Povetkin - not in the ring, but in the courthouse - in a trial over a title bout that was called off after the Russian tested positive for a banned substance.

After less than an hour, a federal jury in Manhattan on Monday ruled in favour of Wilder in a civil trial, finding that Povetkin ingested meldonium after a World Anti-Doping Agency ban of the drug went into effect in January 2016.

That question had become key to duelling lawsuits the boxers had filed against each other over the championship boxing match scheduled for May 21 in Moscow, which was called off after Povetkin tested positive on April 27 for meldonium. Lawyers for Wilder and promoter DiBella Entertainment Inc had argued that Povetkin's positive urine test came after three negative ones earlier in April, which meant that the Russian took the drug after passing the earlier tests.

But lawyers for Povetkin and promoter Andrew Ryabinsky's company, World of Boxing LLC, said he had, like many other athletes, taken meldonium at a doctor's direction before the World Anti-Doping Agency had even announced plans to ban it.

Judd Burstein, a lawyer for Wilder, said he was "extremely happy" with the verdict. Povetkin's lawyer, Kent Yalowitz, on Monday called the verdict an "outrageous miscarriage of justice" and indicated he would seek to have it thrown out.

The lawsuits came after the World Boxing Council announced on May 13 that Povetkin had tested positive for meldonium and subsequently announced the postponement of his bout with champion Wilder.

In June, Wilder and DiBella sued Povetkin and Ryabinsky's World of Boxing LLC, saying they were owed at least \$5m for the defendants' breach of a contract requiring Povetkin to be produced for the match.

Povetkin and World of Boxing soon after counter-sued, seeking \$34.5m for what they said was Wilder's own breach of contract for walking away from the fight and defamatory for engaging in a "smear campaign."

Only one Russian athlete has returned medal to IOC: Official

Moscow
AFP

So far only one of the Russian athletes stripped of Olympic medals for doping has given it back to the International Olympic Committee, a senior Moscow sports official said on Monday.

Runner Anton Kokorin, who won bronze in Beijing in the

men's 4x400m relay team, is the only athlete to have returned his Olympic medal, Yelena Ikonnikova, the anti-doping coordinator of the athletics federation (RusAF) said.

The IOC has ruled that all the athletes who were stripped of their medals over doping violations must give them back.

Ikonnikova confirmed that Russia's athletics federation has

received a list of the athletes concerned and passed it on.

"We've distributed the list and the IOC demand for the return of Olympic medals to all the athletes and the regional (athletics) federations concerned," she said.

Ikonnikova added that RusAF has served as a mediator between the Russian Olympic Committee and the international

one and the athletes. Last week Russian Olympic Committee chief Alexander Zhukov said that it "was continuing with its work" to return the medals.

"Although only few athletes have agreed to return medals, we are continuing to work on this. We are contacting them via their sports federations," he told TASS agency.

Aleksandra Brilliantova, the ROC legal department chief,

complained however that the ROC had no leverage to force the country's athletes to return their Olympic medals.

"The ROC doesn't have any established procedure for returning medals, and this is a serious problem," TASS agency quoted Brilliantova as saying.

Media reports said that 13 Russian athletes who won medals at the 2008 Beijing

Games and eight who were medal winners at London in 2012 have tested positive for banned substances and have been ordered to return their gonks to the IOC.

Some of the doping violators have already retired and are seeking to defy the order and hold onto their Olympic medals, causing additional friction between the IOC and the ROC.



Nasir Jamshed

Jamshed suspended as probe widens

Islamabad Reuters

Former Test opener Nasir Jamshed has become the third player to be suspended by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) as part of its ongoing investigation into corruption.

Jamshed joins batsmen Sharjeel Khan and Khalid Latif, who were provisionally suspended at the weekend and sent home from the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 tournament being played in Dubai.

The 27-year-old Jamshed, who played two Tests in 2013, was not playing in the PSL but was suspended from all forms of cricket for violating the anti-corruption code, the PCB said.

Board chairman Shaharyar Khan also told reporters in Lahore that Sharjeel and Latif had been sent "show cause" notices for "spot fixing or matchfixing".

Sharjeel is a regular member of Pakistan's limited-overs team and made his test debut against Australia in Sydney last month, while Latif has played five one-day internationals and 13 T20 matches.

The PCB is investigating whether an international syndicate had attempted to influence matches in the PSL, it said in a statement.

Two other players who were questioned in the probe, Zulfiqar Babar and Shahzaib Hasan, would be allowed to continue to play in the tournament, Shaharyar said.

Fast bowler Muhammad Irfan had not been suspended but might be sent a show cause notice over the next couple of days, the PCB chairman added.

Jamshed played 48 one-day internationals for Pakistan but fell out of favour after a disappointing 2015 World Cup campaign and did not feature in the first two years of the PSL.

Sledging? Go for it, says Australia's captain Smith

Mumbai AFP

Australian captain Steve Smith raised the temperature yesterday ahead of the first Test against India, calling on his players to "go for it" with the verbal volleys and on-field aggression.

India-Australia series are notoriously feisty affairs — the 2008 contest Down Under was almost called off following the infamous "Monkeygate" incident as animosity between the old foes threatened to boil over.

There was then further bad blood during India's Test and one-day series in Australia prior to the 2015 World Cup when heated on-field exchanges led to several players being penalised.

But the day after his team landed, Smith urged his players to do whatever it takes for Australia to win their first Test match in India since 2004 when the sides clash on February 23 in Pune.

"I think each of our individuals play the way they play and if they want to get into a battle verbally then, if that gets the best out of them, go for it," he told reporters in Mumbai.

"It's all about us making sure



I think each of our individuals play the way they play and if they want to get into a battle verbally then, if that gets the best out of them, go for it: Steve Smith



Australia's Test cricket captain Steven Smith (left) and head coach Darren Lehmann listen to a question during a press conference in Mumbai yesterday.

that as individuals we're in the right mindset to go out and succeed and if guys want to get in those kind of battles then go for it.

"But in the end it's about us playing on skill and making sure that our skills are in the best place for us to succeed in these conditions," added the 27-year-old.

Relations between the old foes neared breaking point nine years ago when Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh was suspended for three matches for allegedly calling Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds a "monkey" during the New Year's Test in Sydney.

The ban was overturned when India threatened to quit the tour, claiming Singh had been wrongly accused.

The hostility between the sides extended into India's 2014-15 tour of Australia which saw India's Virat Kohli, Ishant Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan, and the hosts' Mitchell Starc, charged with breaching the International Cricket Council's Code of Conduct.

Australia opener David

Warner, who had heated on-field exchanges with India batsman Rohit Sharma with the Australian telling him to "speak English" was reported in both the Test and one-day series.

The Australians, who are coming in off a convincing Test series win against Pakistan, have not won a Test match on Indian soil in nearly 13 years but Smith urged his players to go out and achieve a career-defining victory.

"I think all of the guys are really excited about what's to come in the next six weeks. It's a great challenge to play here in India.

"We know that if we can pull something off and win a series here we'll look back in 10-20 years and it will be some of the best time of our lives," he said.

One of the key duels of the series will be between Smith and Indian skipper Kohli who is in the form of his life after scoring four double centuries since July.

Kohli is second only to Smith in the Test batting rankings and the Australian captain said he had the utmost respect for his

counterpart. "We're trying to form a game plan but I'm not going to tell you what it is," he said.

"He's obviously a world class player. He's been batting extremely well. He's scored four double centuries in his last four series so he's obviously a lot of player for India along with a lot of their other batters."

India, on a high after defeating Bangladesh this week to go 20 Test matches undefeated at home, yesterday named an unchanged squad for the first two Australia Tests from the one that beat their neighbours by 208 runs in Hyderabad.

Bangalore, Ranchi and Dharamsala will host the other matches in the four-Test series in March.

India Squad

Virat Kohli (captain), Murali Vijay, Lokesb Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Widdhiman Saha, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Ishant Sharma, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umesh Yadav, Karun Nair, Jayant Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Abhinav Mukund, Hardik Pandya



Adam Voges

Voges ends Test career with second best average

Sydney Reuters

Australia's Adam Voges has retired from international cricket, signing off with a Test batting average second only to the great Don Bradman.

Voges became the oldest player to score a century on his Test debut when he made an unbeaten 130 against West Indies two years ago, aged 35.

The right-handed batsman scored 1,485 runs at an average of 61.87, ranking him second on the all time list behind Bradman's incredible 99.94.

Voges lost his place in the Test team after the second of two defeats to South Africa in November and was treated for concussion after being hit by a bouncer when batting for Western Australia in a Sheffield Shield match the same month.

Voges, 37, will lead the Prime Minister's XI against the touring Sri Lankan team in Canberra today and has said it will be his last match against an international side. "This will be it for me," Voges told reporters.

"I'm certainly looking forward to getting out there and playing this game. I've had an amazing couple of years with Australia with the test team and I've loved every minute of it.

Australia have made wholesale changes to their team after a thrashing in Sri Lanka and home series defeat to South Africa.

The Steve Smith-led team have since revived their fortunes by defeating South Africa in a dead rubber at Adelaide and went on to beat Pakistan 3-0 at home.

The Aussies will now face India at their home soil in a four-match Test series starting in Pune on February 23.

Bangalore, Ranchi and Dharamsala will host the other matches in the series in March.

Pattinson out of PM XI against SL

Sydney AFP

Fast bowler James Pattinson was ruled out of the Prime Minister's XI in a Twenty20 game against Sri Lanka with a foot infection, Cricket Australia

announced yesterday in a statement.

The 26-year-old, who has endured a difficult few years with injuries, had been hoping to get more matches under his belt to be in contention for Australia's Test side as the Ashes

late this year. "Pattinson flew with the team to Canberra, however a left foot infection will prevent him from being fit to bowl," Cricket Australia said in a statement.

"He will be replaced in the squad by emerging New South

Wales bowler Harry Conway."

Conway, 24, was 12th man for the NSW Blues in their most recent Sheffield Shield match.

The PM XI will be coached by former Test captain Michael Clarke, with the match taking place at Manuka Oval today.

Bach wants only winners in Games host battle

Lausanne AFP

Olympic leader Thomas Bach does not like losers and that is why Paris and Los Angeles could this year both win the right to host the world's biggest and most complicated sporting event.

The French and US mega cities are currently locked in battle to stage the 2024 Olympics, along with outsider Budapest.

There is mounting speculation however that an International Olympic Committee meeting in September could give one of the frontrunners the 2024 Games and at the same time award 2028 to the other.

The double gold medal event could take some twiddling

of the Olympic machinery, but Bach said in December: "We have to take into consideration that the procedure as it is now produces too many losers."

The International Olympic Committee is worried that if Paris or Los Angeles miss out on 2024, they may give up on hosting at all. And in times of economic uncertainty, the IOC cannot afford to lose such quality candidates.

"You can be happy about a strong field in quantity for one day but you start to regret it the next day because then the procedure starts to produce losers and it is not the purpose of an Olympic candidature procedure to produce losers," Bach said to support his call for change.

The IOC is refusing to say whether reform will be ready



Thomas Bach

for the September 13 vote in Lima.

"We are staying with the 2024 process, we are very clear about that," Christophe Dubi, the IOC executive director for the Olympics, said in an interview.

Paris and Los Angeles have both said they are only interested in 2024. However Casey

Wasserman, chairman of the Los Angeles 2024 bid committee, said last month that the idea of awarding two Games at the same time was "an interesting concept".

Sources close to the IOC says a double vote has many advantages.

If Paris loses again after being beaten for 1992 (by

Barcelona), 2008 (Beijing) and 2012 (London) it would almost certainly withdraw humiliated and not take part again.

Los Angeles, with its heavyweight US media backers, would almost certainly take the same view.

"I know that the idea of a double vote is on the table," one source close to the IOC said.

"There is a clear procedure for 2024, that for 2028 is not yet set," added the source, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the confidentiality of discussions.

"The candidates will have to show that they agree this double campaign. If they say no it will be difficult to impose it on them."

If Paris, Los Angeles and Budapest agree to the vote

change then the IOC will need the back of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and to talk to countries that have expressed an interest in 2028. Madrid has already said it could be a candidate. An IOC executive meeting in July could formally propose the move. Then the Olympic charter will also need to be changed, another source close to the Olympic movement said.

"It's quite clever of Bach," said Patrick Nally, a sports marketing specialist who was one of the creators of the IOC's Olympic Partner (TOP) sponsorship programme.

"Bach is aware the IOC is facing difficulties," he added. "One of the biggest concerns is what happens if LA doesn't win," he said.

Qatari stars, Xavi assemble to support blind football on National Sport Day

The Peninsula

High-profile Qatari athletes and footballers from Al Sadd Football Club, including superstar Xavi Hernandez, assembled yesterday to show their support for blind football at a special event hosted by Save the Dream on the occasion of National Sport Day 2017.

The event supported by Sasol and the Qatar Social & Culture Center for the Blind was held at Qatar Foundation.

Hassan Al Haydous, Sabri Lamouchi and Qatar's first international female golfer, Yasmin Al Sharshani along with Xavi joined forces to take part in host of matches and penalty shootouts alongside children and members of the public. Organised as part

of Save the Dream's overall mission to use sport as a tool to educate and empower young people and with the support of Sasol - the international integrated chemicals and energy company - the activity was led by IBSA Blind Football World Referee Coordinator, Elias Mastoras.

It involved over 100 children from Al Yarmouk Preparatory School and Khalifa Secondary School who participated alongside blind, visually-impaired and able bodied athletes and members of the public.

Including a variety of National Sport Day-related activities, community matches and penalty shootouts, the day showcased how people of all abilities and areas of society can play blind football and learn about the

positive values sport can teach. Speaking about the event, Mohammed Hanzab, Founder of Save the Dream and ICSS Chairman, said: "National Sport Day is a special and important day for many people and communities across Qatar.

"To have so many high-profile athletes and sporting heroes come together in this incredible show of support and highlights the power that sport and blind football can have in bringing together people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds and encouraging inclusivity within society," he added.

"In addition, by pioneering a new football in Qatar for the first time, this joint activity run by Save the Dream and Sasol will hopefully make a real, lasting and positive difference to the lives of

blind and visually-impaired young people across the country." Phinda Vilakazi, President of GTL Ventures at Sasol said: "Sasol is proud to be the sponsor of the "A Ball for All" event. Ever since the initiation of Definitely Able in 2012, Sasol has been committed to empowering people with disabilities to find their place in society through sports.

"We have seen the positive impact that sports can have on the disabled community.

"In the past, we have hosted the South African Paralympic Wheelchair Basketball team in a friendly match against the Qatar national team and organized a race between a blade runner champion and an Arabian horse," he added.



Football superstar Xavi Hernandez (left) in action during a special event hosted by Save the Dream on the occasion of National Sport Day at Qatar Foundation yesterday.

Bale left out as Madrid aim to halt Maradona-backed Napoli

Madrid AFP

Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane has resisted the temptation to rush back a fit-again Gareth Bale for their Champions League clash today against an on-form Napoli backed by Diego Maradona.

Bale returned to training for the first time since suffering ankle ligament damage in November on Sunday and has been left out of Zidane's 19-man squad.

Cristiano Ronaldo has been passed fit, though, as the Portuguese has shrugged off a knock picked up in Saturday's 3-1 win at Osasuna to keep Los Blancos top of La Liga.

"He has had nearly three months out and we have to go slowly with Gareth," said Zidane on Tuesday.

"Everyone wants to win the Champions League, but it is a hard and long road and we are on that path.

"The good thing is that we are in good shape. We have everyone fit, that means it will be harder to pick the squad, but I'm happy to see everyone ready and committed for the return of the Champions League."

Napoli's sensational free-scoring form that has seen them reeled off an 18-game unbeaten run has seen the Italians' hopes of shocking the holders soar.

Among the expected 10,000 strong travelling support will be Napoli's greatest ever player as

CL last 16 stage
10,000
Among the expected 10,000 strong travelling support will be Napoli's greatest ever player as football legend Maradona arrives in Madrid

18
Napoli's sensational free-scoring form has seen them reeled off an 18-game unbeaten run as Italians' hopes of shocking the holders soar

Maradona arrived in Madrid on Monday.

"Thankfully he is not playing! We are happy about that," said Madrid midfielder Luka Modric on the presence of Maradona.

"He is one of the most important players in the history of football. It is nice he is here to see the game live."

Zidane, though, insisted he is more concerned by the likes of the on-fire Dries Mertens, who has scored 14 goals in his last 11 outings, including three hat-tricks.

"He (Maradona) was one of the best players in the history of football, but I am more worried about those that are on the field."

No side has managed to retain the competition in the Champions League era with AC Milan 27 years ago the last team to win back-to-back European Cups.

However, Modric believes the 11-time winners are better placed than anyone else to bring that streak to an end in June's final in Bale's home city of Cardiff.

"We are Real Madrid and it has never happened, but we think we can be the first team to defend the title," added the Croatian.

"Tomorrow is the first step against Napoli, that is the most important thing not looking further ahead. We want to be in Cardiff but we need to go game-by-game."

Napoli have a returning star of their own as Arkadiusz Milik has made the bench for victories over Bologna and Genoa after suffering cruciate ligament damage in October.

However, the Polish international will start on the sidelines again with Mertens partnered by Lorenzo Insigne and former Madrid winger Jose Maria Callejon. "We are going to play an away match against the champions of the world and a really strong side," Napoli boss Maurizio Sarri told the club's website.

"They are so strong that we don't even know if we will be able to stop them.

"I don't know what to expect and what it will happen. I just want to say that I want commitment, dedication and nerve in



Real Madrid's players take part in a training session at Valdebebas training ground in Madrid yesterday, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League match against Napoli.

order to understand exactly who we are and where we can get to."

Napoli will be forced to abandon one lucky charm, though, as Madrid will be the ones in their famous white jerseys on today.

The turnaround in Napoli's fortunes in recent months coincided with superstitious president Aurelio De Laurentis's decision to replace the club's traditional sky blue colours for white back in November.

Arter grateful for Guardiola gesture

London AFP

Bournemouth's Harry Arter has praised Pep Guardiola for the "unbelievable touch" of wishing him well with the birth of his child, which is due later this week.

In December 2015, before the Manchester City manager had arrived in England, Arter and his partner Rachel's daughter Renee was stillborn, prompting an outpouring of sympathy for the midfielder and his family.

Guardiola was seen talking to Arter after City's 2-0 win away to Bournemouth in the Premier League on Monday.

Explaining what the Spaniard had said to him, Arter told the *Daily Echo*: "He offered his best wishes for me and my partner this week, which was an unbelievable touch."

"He is someone I have a massive amount of respect for. I watched his Barcelona teams, and look at his Manchester City side.

"For me, he is the best manager in the world. I don't think there's anybody close to him and what he has achieved."

Guardiola had previously relayed the details of his side of the conversation at his post-match press conference.

"He (Arter) will be a father soon so I said big congratulations to him and his partner because I know what happened in the past, and, hopefully, the baby will be well," said Guardiola.

Bayern and Arsenal desperate for European glory



Bayern Munich's Douglas Costa (left) and his team-mate Arjen Robben arrive for the final team training at the team training area in Munich, yesterday.

Munich Reuters

Bayern Munich and Arsenal meet in their big-name Champions League round of 16 first leg today, both hoping European success will help lift mid-season gloom on their domestic fronts.

Bayern are on track for a record-extending fifth consecutive title with a seven-point lead thanks to their 2-0 win over Ingolstadt on Saturday.

But that result does not tell the whole story, with the German champions looking lacklustre for most of the match before snatching two goals in the

final minutes. The Bavarians have been more a model of efficiency under coach Carlo Ancelotti than the high-scoring, high-speed train of past seasons under Pep Guardiola.

With fans grumbling about the lack of spark, Ancelotti said Saturday's win gave them the boost needed to take on Arsenal.

"This result gives us a lot of confidence for Wednesday," Ancelotti said.

Ancelotti could be without winger Franck Ribery, with the Frenchman working towards a comeback from a thigh muscle injury sustained two weeks ago.

"It will be difficult but we will have to see. We will, however,

take no risk with this," said the coach. Bayern have posted a record 15 straight home wins in the competition, including three this season. Arsenal Wenger's Arsenal have lost in the last 16 for six years in a row, including to Bayern in 2013 and 2014.

The London side ended a two-game losing run with a 2-0 league win over Hull on Saturday but that did little to lift the mood of their fans with Wenger non-committal about his future.

Asked about his future, the coach said: "I focus on what is important, winning football games and getting the team to perform. The rest, I cannot influence."

Chilean Alexis Sanchez scored both goals against Hull but his own future is equally unclear and Wenger knows that a good result in Munich will go a long way in pushing these issues into the background.

"We have had bad experiences against them (Bayern)," said Wenger of their past eliminations, including one back in 2005. "But I feel that this is a good opportunity."

"We have won there before and we play the first game away from home, so it is important we protect the second game because I feel that to have a chance to qualify in the second leg, that will be very important."