



TEHRAN: Iranian children take part in a training session at the Doustimehr Soccer Academy.

Football: Sterling not on same level as Messi, Ronaldo, insists Guardiola

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola would love Raheem Sterling to reach the same level as Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, but the Manchester City manager is not sure if any player will be able to equal the feats of that legendary pair.

Others have recently been comparing Sterling to the two dominant players of the last decade. England manager Gareth Southgate suggested Sterling could eventually be mentioned in the same breath as Messi and Ronaldo when asked how far the City winger could go if he maintains his superb form.

Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher has also said that he sees Sterling as a potential future winner of the Ballon d'Or -- an award Barcelona star Messi and Juventus forward Ronaldo have each won five times. City manager Guardiola is thrilled at Sterling's progress during their three years working together, but having also coached Messi at Barca, he knows the exceptional standards required at that exalted level. "Right now, Raheem is not in that level, but maybe in the future I wish. It would be a dream for him and for all of us," Guardiola told reporters. "The consistency of



these two guys, they are legends, something unique in world football. "If Raheem can target that level -- wow. We will be there to help him and of course he can do it. "But right now, nobody, not in the club, or in all the clubs in the world can compare with these two guys and what they have done every single week for ten years. Nobody." Sterling in electric form Sterling enjoyed his best goal-scoring season last year as he

netted 25 times to help City win the domestic treble of Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup. He has started the new season in electric form with eight goals in seven games for club and country. He scored in both Euro 2020 qualifiers for England during the international break.

To understand what Sterling is up against, Ronaldo's mark of 29 club goals last season for Juventus is the lowest figure either he or Messi have recorded in the last decade. As City prepare to resume their Premier League campaign, away to Norwich on Saturday, Guardiola has noticed how the 24-year-old is becoming much more clinical in front of goal -- as Sterling aims to improve on his best league tally of 18 from 2017-18. "Before Raheem made good actions and dribbles, but he didn't finish too much. Now he is a player who can win games for himself," Guardiola said. "It is a case of practice, practice, practice - and mentality. The guy who scores goals is because he arrives in front of goal. If you are not there, it's impossible. "In the beginning, he didn't get there. Now he is always there. I have the sense that he has the desire and commitment to score goals and that's why he scores

Messi still out but Barcelona could welcome back Suarez

BARCELONA: Forward Luis Suarez could return to the Barcelona team for their La Liga game against Valencia, coach Ernesto Valverde said adding that he was pessimistic about Lionel Messi's recovery.

"Suarez participated in a full training yesterday and again today," Valverde said. "We hope he can play." The 32-year-old Uruguayan limped off with a calf problem in a 1-0 opening-weekend loss to Athletic Bilbao on 16 August. At the time the club forecast he would be out for a month. A return Saturday would be in line with that prediction. Messi, who also has a calf problem, encouraged hopes that he would be back for Barcelona's opening Champions League game at Borussia Dortmund next Tuesday.



His coach was more cautious. "We think he's about to come back," Valverde said. "I don't want to say anything to avoid creating expectations, but I think it will be difficult for Tuesday." Barcelona have one win in three games, their worst league start since 2008. They received further

bad news when centre-back Samuel Umtiti was ruled out for "five to six weeks" with the foot injury he suffered while training with the French national team last week. They welcome a Valencia team that has the same record but has been plunged into crisis following the surprising dismissal of coach Marcelino. —AFP

Doi, Hibino set up rare all Japanese final in Hiroshima

TOKYO: Japan's Misaki Doi upset Russian second seed Veronika Kudermetova 6-4 6-3 on Saturday to set up a final with compatriot and doubles partner Nao Hibino at the Hana-cupid Japan Women's Open in Hiroshima.

It will be the first all-Japanese WTA Tour final in 22 years after Naoko Sawamatsu beat Yuka Yoshida in Jakarta in 1997. Doi and Hibino are also in Sunday's doubles final where they face Russian Valeria Savinykh and American Christina McHale. Although Kudermetova fired down nine aces, Doi kept up with the powerful Russian, who is ranked 59 places higher at world number 48, and broke three times in the 82-minute

contest. Doi broke early in the second set to take a 3-0 lead and although Kudermetova broke back to make it 3-2, the Japanese re-



claimed a break advantage before serving out for the match. In the day's earlier semi-final, Hibino recovered from a set down to beat Romanian Mihaela Buzarnescu 4-6 6-0 6-3. Hi-

bin, ranked 146 in the world, was broken twice in the opening set to hand Buzarnescu the advantage but stormed back in the sec-

ond with nine winners. Buzarnescu struggled to serve and faced 14 break points, with the 24-year-old Hibino converting six to move into the final after two hours and 10

Quick Read

Pakistan-India Davis Cup tie to be held in Islamabad: ITF

ISLAMABAD: The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has said the upcoming Davis Cup tie between Pakistan and India has been rescheduled for the week commencing November 15 in Islamabad. The ITF in its statement regarding the Asia/Oceania Group I tie between Pakistan and India said, "The Davis Cup Committee has determined that the Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Group I tie between Pakistan and India will be rescheduled for the week commencing 25 November in Islamabad. The Pakistan Tennis Federation has until 19 September to confirm the precise dates of the two-day tie. "The ITF will continue to monitor the security situation in Pakistan with the host nation and our independent security advisors," it added. The ITF had postponed this month's Davis Cup tie between Pakistan and India under "exceptional circumstances" following a rise in political tensions between the two countries. The ITF had said the decision was taken following an in-depth security review by independent security advisors. The tennis body had earlier expressed confidence on security arrangements in Pakistan. However, the Indian Tennis authorities were insisting on not travelling to Pakistan due to present circumstances. —APP



Martić sets up final with Pliskova at Zhengzhou Open

BEIJING: Croatia's Petra Martić and top seed Karolina Pliskova marched into the final of the inaugural Zhengzhou Open with commanding straight sets victories on Saturday. Seventh seed Martić dispatched Frenchwoman Kristina Mladenovic 6-0 6-3 in 67 minutes to reach her first Premier showpiece, sealing victory with her third ace of the match. Mladenovic had a mounting error count and six double faults while Martić, who faced only one break point, broke her unseeded opponent four times, helping her win seven games in a row. Czech Pliskova dominated her semi-final as she beat Ajla Tomljanovic 6-3 6-2 in 68 minutes. It was her third victory of the year over the Australian after wins in Brisbane and Rome. World number two Pliskova won 93 per cent of her first serve points, and broke four times en route to her fifth final of the season. Despite three consecutive double faults in the second set, her superior counter-punching was also on display as she hit 28 winners, while Tomljanovic made 13 unforced errors. Pliskova will seek her first title in China on Sunday after finishing as runner-up in Zhuhai in 2015 and Tianjin last year. —Reuters



Europe retain one-shot Solheim Cup lead after foursomes

NEW YORK: Team Europe continued to hold a slender one-point advantage over the US with a 6-1/2 to 5-1/2 lead after the second day's foursomes in the Solheim Cup saw the teams share two wins each in gusty conditions at Gleneagles. The American Korda sisters, Jessica and Nelly, picked up where they left off on Friday at the PGA Centenary Course with a dominant 6 & 5 victory over Carlota Ciganda and Bronte Law. Struggling Bronte and Law failed to sink a single birdie as the Americans claimed a point to level the overall score. Europe, who were leading 4-1/2 to 3-1/2 after Friday's fourballs, then had Charley Hull and Azahara Munoz to thank for their 4 & 3 victory over Danielle Kang and Megan Khang. They were also boosted by Georgia Hall and Celine Boutier whose 3 & 2 victory over Lizette Salas and Ally McDonald at the 16th hole gave them two points. But Americans Morgan Pressel and Marina Alex, who trailed Anna Nordqvist and Anne Van Dam by four after six holes, stunned the Europeans by taking seven of the next nine for a 2 & 1 victory. The US need 14 points to retain the Solheim Cup while Europe must score 14-1/2 to win the title for the first time since 2013. —Reuters



England extend lead in Ashes

LONDON: Joe Denly led England to 88 for two as the hosts extended their lead over Australia to 157 runs at lunch on the third day to retain the upper hand in the final Ashes test on Saturday. England, seeking to level the series at 2-2, lost Rory Burns for 20 and Joe Root for 21 in bright sunshine at The Oval, but Denly hit a six and five fours in a fluent unbeaten 37



LONDON: Nathan Lyon celebrates Joe Root's wicket during Test match against England.

Footballer turned powerlifter Zulfia wins gold medal in Dubai

The Business Report

KARACHI: Midfielder of Pakistan women football team, Zulfia Nazir, has now set her eyes on winning laurels in the sport of powerlifting after winning gold medal in Dubai.

Zulfia, who represented the Pakistan women football team in the SAFF Women Championship in 2014, is currently in Dubai where she has been playing football for a local club and works as a fitness trainer. She proved her mettle by winning a gold medal in the Desert Barbell Power Meet in Dubai.

Contesting in the under 52 kg weight category, Zulfia lifted 110 each in squats and deadlift. In the chest press category, she lifted 57.5 to win the gold medal. She has now set her eyes on bringing laurels for the country in powerlifting and wants to compete in the Asian Championship. "I want to play in Asian Championship. I know I can win titles for Pakistan.

I have contacted people at the helm of affairs in Pakistan and hope that I will get a chance to represent my country," she told private.tv from Dubai. Zulfia was once a regular face in the Pakistan women football team, but uncertainty at the Pakistan Football Federation has kept footballers like her away from the scene. However, she is still hopeful of wearing green once again. "I haven't quit football. I am playing for a local club here and I am very much in practice. It will be exciting to represent Pakistan in multiple sports," Zulfia said while aiming to represent Pakistan in both football and powerlifting.

