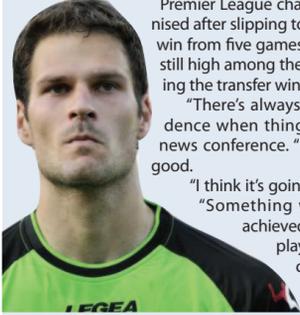


BEGOVIC: CHELSEA WILL IMPROVE

LONDON: Chelsea remain high on confidence despite their poor start to the season, and if anything the current struggles has made the players stronger, goalkeeper Asmir Begovic said ahead of today's Champions League game at home to Maccabi Tel Aviv. The Bosnia international is in line to make his debut in the competition against the Israeli side because first-choice Thibaut Courtois is recovering from knee surgery.



Premier League champions Chelsea will be closely scrutinised after slipping to 17th place in the table with only one win from five games. But Begovic said that self-belief was still high among the squad he joined from Stoke City during the transfer window as replacement for Petr Cech. "There's always going to be a bit of a hit on confidence when things aren't going your way," he told a news conference. "But confidence levels are still pretty good."

"I think it's going to make us stronger going forward. "Something we can't forget is what this group achieved last year. We have some of the best players in the world and we're more than confident we'll get to the levels we want to."—Reuters

SINGAPORE GRAND PRIX OFFICIALS UNFAZED BY HAZE

SINGAPORE: Organisers of this weekend's Singapore Grand Prix have played down concerns about the cloud of haze hanging over the city, saying it was not expected to impact on Sunday's Formula One race. The city-state has been blanketed by thick smog for the past week, a result of farmers in neighbouring Sumatra burning forests to clear their land for agriculture.

The Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) in Singapore has fluctuated well above 100, levels considered "unhealthy", for the past few days, and reached as high as 249 on Monday night, putting it in "very unhealthy" territory. Race officials said they were monitoring the situation and planned to place first-aid stations on standby to treat any possible haze-related conditions over the weekend, as well as selling face masks at cost price. But the officials said there were no plans to change any of the scheduled events over the race weekend, including the pop concerts held each night at the Marina Bay street circuit. "Based on the current PSI levels, there are no plans to amend the published racing and entertainment programme," Singapore GP said in a statement yesterday. "The haze situation is highly changeable not only from day to day, but from hour to hour. Therefore, it is currently not possible to reliably predict what the PSI level might be over the race weekend. "We will continue to work closely with all the relevant government authorities to receive the best possible forecasts when they are available."—Reuters

BOXER DIES AFTER KO

MELBOURNE: Australia's peak medical authority has called for a ban on boxing after a local fighter died in hospital yesterday, four days after being knocked out in a regional title bout. David Browne Jr was felled by a punch from Filipino Carlo Magali in a super featherweight bout in Sydney on Friday. The 28-year-old father of two initially regained consciousness but later collapsed and was rushed to hospital in critical condition.

Browne remained in a coma until his family made the decision to turn off his life support on Tuesday, state media reported. Browne is the second Australian boxer to die in six months. Braydon Smith, a 23-year-old law student, died in March from injuries sustained in a continental featherweight title bout defeat to Filipino John Moralde in Queensland.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Vice President Stephen Parnis said people needed to "think twice" about participating in the sport. "I know they don't intend for this to happen but... the way that boxing is designed, there will be these times inevitably where someone will get bleeding or irreversible damage to the brain and they will either lose their life or end up with brain damage," Parnis told state broadcaster ABC. —Reuters



RANGERS TRIUMPH, METS EDGE MARLINS

ARLINGTON: The Rangers moved within a half-game of AL West leading Houston, when Prince Fielder hit a tiebreaking, two-run homer in the eighth inning to lead Texas to a 5-3 win over the Astros on Monday in the opener of a pivotal four-game series.

Mitch Moreland hit his team-leading 20th home run for Texas, which has won four straight against the Astros and leads the season series 9-4. Fielder's homer came on 3-2 pitch from Will Harris (5-4). He had two hits and scored three times. Keone Kela (7-5) got the win, retiring one of two batters, and Shawn Tolleson earned his 32nd save in 34 attempts. The Astros' Jose Altuve hit Cole Hamels' sixth pitch of the game for his 12th homer of the year.

METS 4, MARLINS 3

David Wright had a go-ahead double in the seventh inning, Yoenis Cespedes homered again and the Mets won their eighth straight, beating the Marlins.

With two outs and runners on first and second, David Wright hit a fastball from reliever Kyle Barraclough (2-1) to the deepest part of the park, well over the head of scrambling center fielder Christian Yelich, for a ground-rule double - scoring pinch-runner Eric Young Jr. and giving the Mets a 4-3 lead. Travis d'Arnaud also homered for New York. Cespedes connected for the ninth time in 13 games. Hansel Robles (4-2) pitched a scoreless seventh for the win. Jeury's Familia was perfect in the ninth for his 41st save in 46 opportunities.

Logan Verrett, making a spot in start in place of Matt Harvey, who was skipped in the rotation to limit his innings, pitched one-run ball for five.

YANKEES 4, RAYS 1

Alex Rodriguez had a tying, two-out RBI double in the ninth and Slade Heathcott followed with a three-run homer, leading the Yankees to a victory over the Rays.

The victory moved the Yankees within three-games of AL East-leading Toronto. Erasmo Ramirez held the Yankees hitless until Carlos Beltran led off the eighth with a hot shot that took a short-hop off first baseman Richie Shaffer and went into right field.

Tampa Bay stopped a 21-inning scoring drought and took a 1-0 lead on Logan Forsythe's eighth-inning RBI double. The Yankees rallied in the ninth. Down to their last out, Brett Gardner was walked by Brad Boxberger (4-10) on four pitches and stole second. Then Rodriguez tied Craig Biggio for 21st place all-time with his 3,060th hit. Heathcott homered after Brian McCann was intentionally walked, setting off a raucous celebration in the New York dugout.

INDIANS 8, ROYALS 3

Carlos Carrasco overcame a home run on his first pitch of the game to throw six strong innings, and Lonnie Chisenhall drove in three runs as the Indians beat the Royals.

Carrasco (13-10) let Alex Gordon hit his first pitch deep into the seats in right field, but that was the only run he allowed. The right-hander, who struck out nine, was making his second start since coming off the disabled list with a sore right shoulder.

Lonnie Chisenhall drove in three runs for the Indians, who entered play trailing Texas by 4-1/2 games for the AL's second wild-card spot. Cleveland, which has won 13 of 18, also got back to the .500 mark (71-71). Edinson Volquez (13-8) allowed four runs in five innings for Kansas City, which has lost eight of 10, while Gordon was 4 for 5.

DODGERS 4, ROCKIES 1

Clayton Kershaw won his ninth straight decision, Justin Turner hit a tiebreaking double and rookie Scott Schebler homered to lead the Dodgers to a victory over the Rockies.

The Dodgers, kicking off a 10-game homestand following a 7-3 road trip, won for the 16th time in 20 games. They and reduced their magic number to 12 for clinching their second straight NL West title.

Kershaw (14-6) yielded a run and three hits over seven innings and struck out five, raising his major league-lead-

ing strikeout total to a career-high 264 and lowering his ERA to 2.12. The reigning NL MVP and three-time Cy Young Award winner hasn't lost since June 27 at Miami.

Kershaw is 9-0 with a 2.48 ERA in his last 10 starts against the Rockies, including a no-hitter. His last loss to them was on July 12, 2013.

PADRES 10, DIAMONDBACKS 3

Wil Myers hit a leadoff homer and had four RBIs, and James Shields pitched seven strong innings as the Padres jumped on the Diamondbacks early.

Myers hit his second career leadoff homer in San Diego's five-run first inning off Jeremy Hellickson (9-9) and had a two-run double in the fifth, another five-run inning.

Cody Spangenberg had three RBIs and the Padres had 11 hits after scoring four combined runs in a three-game sweep by San Francisco.



NEW YORK: Miami Marlins Ichiro Suzuki (51) ducks to avoid a pitch as New York Mets catcher Travis d'Arnaud (left) catches the ball in the sixth inning. — AP

Shields (12-6) allowed a run on four hits and pitched through an indoor downpour in the stands behind home plate after the Chase Field roof leaked in the first inning.

Arizona's Paul Goldschmidt had a run-scoring double in the first inning, joining Luis Gonzalez (2011-12) as the only players in team history with multiple 100-RBI seasons. Goldschmidt had 125 in 2013.

WHITE SOX 8, ATHLETICS 7

Melky Cabrera drove in Geovany Soto with two outs in the 14th inning to give the Chicago White Sox a win over the Athletics. Cabrera singled off Arnold Leon (0-2) to end the season's longest game for both teams. Dan Jennings (2-3) pitched two scoreless innings in relief for Chicago, which squandered a 7-3 lead in the ninth. Jose Abreu and Trayce Thompson hit two-run homers off Sonny Gray in the third.

John Danks went seven innings and allowed three runs and three hits. In his first start since throwing a complete game Sept. 4 at Kansas City, Danks only surrendered solo homers to Jake Smolinski in the third, Brett Lawrie in the fourth and Josh Reddick in the seventh.



ARLINGTON: Texas Rangers' Mike Napoli (25) is tagged out by Houston Astros catcher Hank Conger (right) as Napoli was trying to score on a run-scoring double by Rougned Odor in the second inning of a baseball game. — AP



Jean de Villiers

DE VILLIERS, BURGER DEFY MASSIVE ODDS

JOHANNESBURG: Skipper Jean de Villiers and Schalk Burger defied massive odds to be part of the Springboks squad for the Rugby World Cup, which kicks off Friday in England.

Inside centre De Villiers suffered career-threatening knee ligament damage during a Test defeat by Wales last November. Flanker Burger was recovering from injury three seasons back when he developed bacterial meningitis and doctors told his parents they feared the worst.

But when the South African national team bade farewell to supporters at a Johannesburg hotel this weekend before flying to London, De Villiers and Burger made passionate vows.

"We will never give up," promised a deeply emotional De Villiers, 34, as he spoke from a temporary outdoor stage. "The time to play rugby has come and we are ready," stressed Burger, 32, whose father was also a Springbok forward.

But behind the selfies, smiles, hugs, waves and seemingly endless signing of autographs, lay tales of remarkable determination by De Villiers and Burger to be part of the greatest rugby show.

Burger was hospitalised because he had a cyst next to his spinal cord and moved to intensive care after contracting meningitis.

The life of the huge forward-who can operate anywhere in the back row-was on the line and his father and mother were summoned to say "goodbye".

But drawing on the never-say-die spirit he demonstrates on the rugby field, Burger recovered to regain his place with the Western Stormers Super Rugby outfit in Cape Town and the Springboks.

"What Schalk has gone through in recent years and what he has achieved makes it one of the most inspirational sporting stories of our times," says national rugby union president Oregan Hoskins. "He has been an icon of inspiration and the fact that he always seems to have a smile on his face makes it even more joyous to watch him in action."

Allister Coetzee, who left the Stormers after a Super Rugby quarter-finals exit this season to further his coaching career in Japan, hailed Burger.

"I do not think people realise exactly what Schalk went through during 2012 and 2013, first with his knee injury and then his illness. He is the ultimate warrior."

"Just to get back into the game after those setbacks-never mind what he has achieved since-speaks volumes about his character."

Burger was part of the South African 2007 World Cup-winning squad and this will be his fourth appearance at the quadrennial tournament.

De Villiers recalled his darkest moment as he was about to be carried off the Millennium Stadium pitch in Cardiff with the cold, grey, overcast weather matching his mood.

"My immediate thought was this is the end of my career," said the Stormer who attended the same Western Cape school as Burger.

"But within a short period of time my frame of mind changed and I started setting new goals-I wanted to be back playing by July 2015."

After surgery and hours of daily rehabilitation for eight months, De Villiers came off the bench in a Springbok warm-up game against a World XV two months ago and suffered no ill effects.

But his return as a Test starter, against Argentina in Durban, was disastrous as he suffered a broken jaw and was labelled a "carthorse" by a senior columnist as South Africa suffered a stunning defeat. But Springboks coach Heyneke Meyer kept faith in his skipper, and who would bet against De Villiers as he urgently seeks match fitness and form. — AFP

ORIOLES 2, RED SOX 0

Kevin Gausman pitched six innings of two-hit ball to earn his first victory in six weeks and Adam Jones had two RBIs as the Orioles beat the Red Sox for their fifth win in six games.

Caleb Joseph had three hits for the Orioles, who moved two games ahead of the last-place Red Sox in the AL East. Baltimore trails four teams in the hunt for the second AL wild-card spot.

Gausman (3-6) struck out seven, walked four and allowed only one runner past second base. The right-hander was 0-4 in his previous seven starts.

Brad Brach worked the seventh inning, Darren O'Day and Brian Matusz shared the eighth and Zach Britton got three straight outs to complete the three-hitter and earn his 33rd save. Eduardo Rodriguez (9-6) gave up one run and five hits in 5 1-3 innings for Boston.

TWINS 7, TIGERS 1

Eduardo Escobar homered and drove in two runs and Tyler Duffey struck out seven while pitching into the seventh inning to lead the Twins to a victory over the Tigers.

Duffey (3-1) gave up one run on seven hits and walked two in 6 1-3 innings, and Joe Mauer went 3 for 5, extending his streak of games reaching base to 34 for the Twins, who entered the night trailing the Texas Rangers by one game for the American League's second wild card.

Kyle Lobstein (3-8) gave up six runs on seven hits in just 1 2-3 innings for the Tigers. J.D. Martinez had two hits for Detroit, but Steven Moya had four of the team's 11 strikeouts.

NATIONALS 8, PHILLIES 7

Jayson Werth hit two homers and drove in five runs, and Yunel Escobar had the game-winning RBI in the 11th inning to lift the Nationals to a victory over the Phillies.

Pinch-hitter Danny Espinosa led off the 11th with a walk, moved to second on Cameron Rupp's passed ball and went to third on Anthony Rendon's single. Espinosa then scored on Escobar's high chopper to second base off Luis Garcia (3-5).

The groundout made a winner of Jonathan Papelbon (4-2), who blew his first save of the season by allowing Freddy Galvis' solo homer in the 10th. Rendon homered and had four hits and Bryce Harper also homered for the Nationals, who remained 9-1/2 games behind the first-place Mets in the NL East. It was Washington's second straight win after snapping a five-game losing streak on Sunday. Ryan Howard and Cody Asche also homered for Philadelphia.

MARINERS 10, ANGELS 1

Seth Smith homered and Taijuan Walker pitched seven dominant innings to pace the Mariners to a victory over the Angels, dropping Los Angeles four games back in the AL wild card race.

Los Angeles is four games behind New York and Texas, and three games behind Minnesota. The Yankees, Rangers and Twins all won Monday night. Cleveland also won to move within a half-game of the Angels. Smith's two-run homer keyed a three-run second as the Mariners erased a 1-0 deficit. Seattle broke it open with six runs in the seventh to make it 10-1.

Walker (11-8) allowed one run on four hits, striking out seven with no walks. Garrett Richards (13-11) gave up four runs on five hits in six innings.

GIANTS 5, REDS 3

Matt Duffy doubled twice and drove in two runs as the Giants beat the Reds. Brandon Belt tripled and drove in two runs and Marlon Byrd added an RBI double to help San Francisco win its fourth straight at AT&T Park. The defending World Series champs remained 7-1/2 games behind the Los Angeles Dodgers in the NL West with 18 games remaining - including four against the Dodgers. George Kontos (3-2) retired four batters for the win after Tim Hudson failed in his bid for the 222nd victory of his career. — AP