

Sports

Emery's baptism of fire as Arsenal open against City

Liverpool open against West Ham

LONDON: Arsenal's new manager Unai Emery faces a baptism of fire after the Gunners were handed an opening day fixture at home to Premier League champions Manchester City. Emery, Arsenal's first new manager since Arsène Wenger took charge in 1996, will then travel to London rivals Chelsea on the second weekend of the season. Liverpool, who will look to build on their Champions League final appearance, open their campaign at home to West Ham United in what will be manager Manuel Pellegrini's first competitive game in charge of the London side.

Jose Mourinho's Manchester United, a distant runners-up to City last season, start at home to Leicester City while FA Cup winners Chelsea are

away to Huddersfield Town. Tottenham Hotspur, who finished third, have confirmed that their first home fixture on the second week of the season against newly-promoted Fulham will be held at Wembley. The north London club say their first game in their new stadium will be against Liverpool on the weekend of Sept 15-16.

Tottenham played all their home games at Wembley last season while their new 62,000-seater stadium was being constructed but work is still ongoing and the club has sought permission to return to the national stadium for one game. "As you will note there is a home fixture scheduled for the weekend of 18/19 August 2018 and this match will be played as a home fixture

at Wembley Stadium," the club's website said. "It was always our intention to seek permission to play the first few games away. In discussions with our coaching staff the preference was to break what would otherwise have been a continuous run of away games with one game at what was effectively our 'home' stadium last season."

Tottenham are away to Newcastle United on the opening weekend on Aug 11-12. Championship winners Wolverhampton Wanderers will mark their return to the top division for the first time since 2012 against Marco Silva's Everton at Molineux. Cardiff City, automatically promoted with Wolves, start away to Bournemouth while Fulham, who beat Aston Villa in the Champi-

onship playoff, host former manager Roy Hodgson's Crystal Palace in a London derby.

Southampton host Burnley on the opening day. The season's first Manchester derby will be at The Etihad on the weekend of Nov 10-11 while Arsenal host Tottenham and Liverpool greet Everton on the weekend of Dec 1-2. All eyes will be on former Paris St Germain manager Emery as he attempts to revive Arsenal's fortunes after they missed out on the Champions League for a second successive season. The Spaniard will come face to face with fellow Spaniard Pep Guardiola on the opening day and after a trip to Chelsea he has another London derby with West Ham United the visitors.— Reuters

Sky, Perform win Serie A broadcast rights in Italy

MILAN: Broadcaster Sky and sports media group Perform won the rights to screen top-flight Serie A football matches in Italy until 2021 for more than 973 million euros (\$1.2 billion) per season, Italy's soccer league chairman said. Sky and Perform outbid Mediaset, Italy's biggest commercial broadcaster, which had strained its finances to buy rights in the previous three-year tender. "The sale of TV rights has finally reached a conclusion," league Chairman Gaetano Micciche said. The league had been trying for a year to auction the rights for 2018-2021.

European pay-TV firm Sky said it had secured exclusive rights to broadcast live 266 matches in Italy every season, or seven out of 10 Serie A games being played on a given day. After buying the rights to show the remaining three matches from each round of fixtures, Perform Group will launch its DAZN streaming and on-demand service in Italy, offering subscriptions for 9.99 euros per month.

DAZN said it would also show highlights of the seven games being broadcast by Sky. UK-based Perform is owned by Access Industries, founded by billionaire Len Blavatnik. Under the terms of the sale, the league is entitled to a further 100 million euros each season based on results achieved by Sky and Perform in terms of subscriptions and revenue, Micciche said. The league kicked off a new bidding round for 2018-2021 rights this month after it cancelled a contract awarding them to Spanish multimedia group Mediapro. The decision was taken after Chinese-owned Mediapro failed to present the necessary bank guarantees.

Mediapro had been expected to auction the rights to other operators but its tender was also cancelled by a Milan judge in May on grounds that it breached antitrust rules. This followed a legal challenge from Sky's Italian subsidiary. Mediapro did not take part in Wednesday's auction for the rights of 400 matches, a source close to the league said on Wednesday. The 2017-18 season of Italy's Serie A, which ended in May, was aired by both Sky's Italian subsidiary and Mediaset's pay-TV arm Premium. Mediaset said in a statement it had offered a total of 600 million euros over three years and would now contact the winners of the tender to secure a deal in order to give its pay-TV customers access to matches.— Reuters



NEW YORK: Tiger Woods of the United States plays from a bunker on the practice chipping area during a practice round prior to the 2018 US Open at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club in Southampton. — AFP

All eyes tracking Tiger as 118th US Open tees off

SOUTHAMPTON: Tiger Woods's latest bid to end his 10-year major championship drought began yesterday at a US Open stacked with talent and packed with compelling story lines. By the time Woods was to tee off at Shinnecock Hills - alongside world number one Dustin Johnson and second ranked Justin Thomas - the powerhouse group of Phil Mickelson, Jordan Spieth and Rory McIlroy were set to be winding things up on the par-70 course on New York's Long Island.

Mickelson, who turns 48 tomorrow, is vying to become just the sixth man to claim the career Grand Slam, the US Open the only major missing from his resume. Mickelson, a six-time runner-up in the event, is paired with two other multiple major winners lacking just one leg of the Grand Slam—McIlroy, who has yet to win the Masters, and Spieth, who has yet to claim a PGA Championship. Northern Ireland's McIlroy isn't a fan of the so-called super-groups the US Golf Association likes to put together.

"At a major championship, you don't need (it)," McIlroy said. "I don't think the anticipation level can get any higher anyway." While all eyes will be on Woods, the 42-year-old star making the 10th start of his comeback after spinal fusion surgery

can't be considered the most likely man in his group to contend for the title. That has to be Johnson, who wrested the number one ranking back from Thomas on Sunday with a US PGA Tour victory in Memphis. Thomas, the reigning PGA Champion, is also a good bet, but Woods has shown enough good golf in an inevitably erratic comeback to have many wondering if he could make his first victory since 2013 a major. "I think everyone realizes it's different when he turns up," Australia's Jason Day said. "He definitely moves the needle. If he's on contention this Sunday, then it's going to be huge." With a chance of gusting winds in the forecast, USGA officials said they had reconsidered several planned hole locations for the first round. "We've changed some of the hole locations, just to make sure they're in areas that can handle this kind of wind," USGA chief executive Mike Davis said.

Closer to the edge

The USGA don't want any repeat of the scenes at the 2004 US Open at Shinnecock, when powerful winds dried out the greens, making some of them virtually unplayable in the final round. The recollection of that fiasco had Davis welcoming the gentle rain that fell on Wednesday, settling the dust and giving the greens moisture that will help see them through Sunday. England's world number three Justin Rose, who was due to tee off at 7:30 am in search of a second US Open title, was delighted with the rain, which wasn't expected to stick around through the tournament days. "I don't think the total amount of rainfall is going to be changing the nature of this golf course, but I think with my tee time I'm thinking this could be a good thing," he said.— AFP