



Employees place layers of lawn outside the Fisht Stadium in Sochi, the host city for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Russia—Reuters

Russia, biathlon saga head agenda at WADA meeting

MONTREAL, MAY 16 /- The fallout from the Russia doping scandal and a corruption crisis in biathlon will dominate the agenda as World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) chiefs gather in Montreal this week. The global anti-doping watchdog's executive committee met on Wednesday to discuss the status of Russia's national anti-doping agency RUSADA before presenting an update to WADA's 38-member Foundation Board on Thursday. RUSADA has been at the centre of a standoff between WADA and Russia ever since the body's suspension in November 2015 following revelations of a vast doping scandal involving Moscow's main drug-testing laboratory WADA is adamant that RUSADA will continue to be ruled non-compliant until Russia accepts the findings of its bombshell McLaren report and also allows WADA inspectors into the Moscow testing laboratory. WADA has set out a roadmap detailing the path RUSADA must take to regain "compliant" status and rejoin the ranks of recognised testing authorities. The agency has already been allowed to resume doping controls under the supervision of WADA-appointed monitors and the UK Anti-Doping Agency. RUSADA's new director, Yuri Yungus, meanwhile, has repeatedly vowed to restore trust in the tarnished testing agency. However, in the eyes of WADA, RUSADA has still failed to meet two key conditions necessary for it to regain its full compliant status, namely granting access to the Moscow laboratory and samples that may have been stored there, as well as fully accepting

the findings of the McLaren report. WADA President Craig Reedie told a symposium in Lausanne in March that Russia failed to respond to four letters requesting a joint inspection of their Moscow laboratory. Russia's authorities have consistently denied allegations of a state-sponsored doping scheme, a key finding of the McLaren report. The WADA impasse takes on added significance with the football World Cup due to kick off in Russia in just under a month's time. Russia's non-compliance has already led to deadlock in athletics. The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) says it will not lift its ban on Russian track and field athletes until WADA declassifies Russia in compliance with all its regulations. That hardline stance saw Russian track and field athletes barred from the 2016 Olympics and 2017 World Championships in London, with the exception of a handful of exempted Russian athletes competing under a neutral banner. Meanwhile, Russia has been forced onto the defensive in the Moscow doping scandal involving the handful of exempted Russian athletes competing under a neutral banner. Meanwhile, Russia has been forced onto the defensive in the Moscow doping scandal involving the handful of exempted Russian athletes competing under a neutral banner. Meanwhile, Russia has been forced onto the defensive in the Moscow doping scandal involving the handful of exempted Russian athletes competing under a neutral banner.

Porterfield confident of Ireland's place at Test table

DUBLIN, MAY 16 /- Ireland captain William Porterfield was in no doubt his side deserved their elevation to Test cricket after a thrilling debut ended in a five-wicket loss to Pakistan. Hopes of a miracle at Malahide weren't just the stuff of fantasy when Pakistan, set a modest 160 to win yesterday's final day, collapsed to 14 for three before lunch at the Dublin ground. Imam-ul-Haq (74 not out) and Babar Azam (59) then combined to dash dreams that Ireland, the 11th nation to play men's Test cricket, would record a remarkable win.

But it was a testament to Ireland's skill and resolve that after they had been made to follow-on by visiting captain Sarfraz Ahmed, the game remained in the balance on the final day. For a while, it seemed Ireland might rewrite the record books on two fronts in becoming only the fourth side to win a Test after following on and just the second in the 141-year history of the format, following Australia's defeat of England in the inaugural 1877 Test at Mel-

bourne, to win their debut match. That they were in a position to do that owed much to Kevin O'Brien's impressive 118 — just the fourth instance of a man scoring a century in his country's first Test match — that was the cornerstone of Ireland's second innings 339. Ireland made their reputation on the global stage with World Cup triumphs in England, India and West Indies. Porterfield was proud of his side's entry into the Test arena. "The biggest thing was how we fought back in the second innings with the bat — that showed the character of the team," he said. "It's something that's been talked about during big occasions, World Cups. That's always been known to be there but Test cricket is Test cricket for a reason, it's there in the name, you did get tested and we were after the first innings. "To get up to close to 350 showed what we've got in the changing room and the passion that we have for playing our cricket." The crowd briefly included 74-year-old Rolland Coats, an Irish cricket fan, Mick Jagger, but

Porterfield hoped that the next generation of potential Irish cricketers would be more inspired by O'Brien's hundred. "Hopefully in the next week or two there's going to be hundreds of little kids aspiring to be Kevin O'Brien in cricket," the Irish captain said. "This Test match will have gone a long way to providing the next generation of cricketers, I'm sure." "World Cup noise." This was O'Brien's first international century since he scored the fastest-ever World Cup hundred, off just 50 balls, in Ireland's stunning win over England at Bangalore seven years ago. Yet the controversial decision to shrink the 2019 World Cup in England to a 10-team tournament and Ireland's failure to come through an increasingly competitive qualifying tournament where only two spots were available means Porterfield's men will be on the outside looking in next year. "We wouldn't have got to where we were if we didn't get those opportunities to put down a marker on the world stage," Porterfield insisted.

India beat China 3-1, remain unbeaten in women's Asian Champions Trophy

DONGHAI CITY (South Korea), May 16 /- Continuing its fine show at the Asian Champions Trophy Indian women's hockey team stunned higher-ranked China 3-1 to register their second consecutive win in the tournament on Wednesday. Vandana Katariya (4th, 11th minutes) scored a brace while Gurjit Kaur struck the other goal from a penalty corner to ensure India's comfortable win over eighth-ranked China.

China's main goal came from the stick of Wen Dan in the 15th minute. By virtue of this win, India team is sitting pretty atop the standings with two victories from as many games. India, ranked 10th in the world, will next play Malaysia on Thursday. The Malaysians beat Japan 3-2 in another encounter. India had earlier defeated Japan 4-1 in their tournament opener. The tournament also marks the comeback of Sjoerd Marijne as the chief coach of the women's side after being at the helm of the men's team for little over seven months.

Maradona joins Belarus's Brest as chairman-club

MINSK, MAY 16 /- Diego Maradona has signed a three-year contract to join top-flight Belarusian club Brest. Brest as chairman, the club said. Argentine legend Maradona, a former World Cup winner, recognised as one of the all-time greats, last month stepped down as coach of United Arab Emirates' second division club Al-Fujairah. "Yes, Diego's with us, the club wrote his official Twitter account late Tuesday, following media rumours over the weekend. Maradona, one of football's most divisive figures off the field, will oversee the "strategic development" of the club when he takes over following the June 14-July 15 World Cup in Russia, according to a tweet. Dinamo, based in the south-west of Belarus, are currently in eighth position in the country's Premier league. (AFP)

Warne's presence motivated Kuldeep to register career-best IPL figures

KOLKATA, MAY 16 /- Young chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav said the presence of his idol, legendary Shane Warne, in the Rajasthan Royals dug-out before accounting for his best performance in the Indian Premier League. Till Tuesday night, Kuldeep was having a somewhat quiet time in the ongoing IPL with just nine wickets from 12 outings at an economy rate of around 8.5. But, by his own admission, Kuldeep said he was determined to turn things around in front of the Australian spin legend, who is the mentor of Rajasthan Royals team. "I'm always a big fan of him (Warne). He has been my idol. I always get a different kind of motivation when I play in front of him. I wanted to put up a good show in front of him," Kuldeep said in the post-match news conference.

Kuldeep grabbed 4-20 and earned Kolkata Knight Riders an important six-wicket victory over Rajasthan Kuldeep cleaned up the top order from the other end to bowl out Rajasthan for 142 in 19 overs. It was redemption time for Kuldeep on Tuesday night as he first got Rajasthan skipper Ajinkya

Rahane out bowled with a loopy googly, and then sent him dismissed danger man Jos Buttler. In his next two overs, Kuldeep got Stuart Binny stumped by another googly before accounting for the wicket of Ben Stokes. India's frontline spinner in limited overs formats,



Kuldeep said Warne also gave him tips for the upcoming series in England. "I discussed with him after the match. We have already started my planning for the upcoming England series. But it was a brief conversation. Maybe after the IPL, I will again get a chance to talk to him," Kuldeep said. Kuldeep made a wonderful Test debut, against Australia in Dharamsala in March 2017, when he returned with figures of 4-68

in the Australian first innings, but since then he has played just one more Test. He has been named in the next month's one-day international against Afghanistan in Bengaluru. Insisting that he is a wicket-taking bowler, Kuldeep said his defensive mind set against Mumbai Indians in their previous game in Kolkata may have cost him dear. "Maybe my mind set became a bit defensive and thought of restricting the flow of runs. But I'm not the kind of a bowler who stops the flow of runs. If I attack at the batsmen, most of the times I get wickets. My strength is to keep looking for wickets," he said. Buttler's wicket was special for him as it proved to be turning point of the game. "If he had played for 10 more overs, the score would have been 170-180. Everything went according to my plan. For me it was the best wicket," he said. KKR will head to Hyderabad on Thursday to take on leaders Sunrisers Hyderabad in the last round-robin league match on Saturday. "We have to win the next match straightaway. That's important for us, then only we stand a chance to qualify," he signed off. (PTI)

Sarfraz proud of Imam and Babar as Pakistan survive Ireland scare

DUBLIN, MAY 16 /- Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed praised the character of young batsmen Imam-ul-Haq and Babar Azam after they showed their guts to give the follow-on in Ireland's inaugural Test did not backfire. Only three times in the 141-year history of Test cricket have a side won after following on but when Pakistan were 140 for three, chasing a modest 160 to win on yesterday's final day of this stand-alone match, it seemed Ireland might

have been a shoo-in. Sarfraz, in the format with a stunning success. But 22-year-old left-handed opener Imam, who was a first debut, responded to the pressure of the situation with a composed 74 not out — his first century in the four following half-centuries in warm-up matches against Kent and Northamptonshire. With the 23-year-old Babar, who made 59 after being dropped on nine overs, Pakistan's top batsmen shared a stand of 126 that took Pakistan to the brink of an eventual five-wicket win over a competitive Ireland side. The way Imam in particular coped under grey skies against some lively pace bowling was an especially heartening sign for Pakistan ahead of their upcoming two-Test series in England, where conditions are likely to be similar to those they encountered at Dublin's Malahide. It also meant Pakistan had not failed in a run chase again. Their previous Test, against Sri Lanka in the UAE in October, saw them beaten after a target of 136 proved beyond them as left-arm spinner Lasanga Mherath took six wickets for 43 runs. "Definitely we were worried when we were down 14 for three," Sarfraz told reporters. "But it's really good that these two

young players in our team, Imam-ul-Haq and Babar Azam, the way they played, they showed their character; they showed their confidence. I think the way they played gives great confidence to the team and will help them in the next matches as well," the wicket-keeper added. Pakistan were reeling after losing three wickets inside five overs and their skipper feared another morale-sapping loss was at hand. "You know previously it's not happened like this," admitted Sarfraz. "In the last Test match when we were chasing 136 and we were all out for about 120. "Yeah we were thinking when we were called for the follow-on in we were batting in the fourth innings it would be very difficult to be asked to bat in the Pakistan, understandably enough, have been struggling to replace the likes of retired veteran batsmen Misbah-ul-Haq and Yousuf Khan. But Imam, whose selection for the tour is also linked to nepotism given he is the nephew of Pakistan selection chief and former Test batsman Inzamam-ul-Haq, didn't just hold his nerve but counter-attacked with a maturity beyond his years, a maturity belying his lack of experience. "And with Faheem Ashraf, Pakistan's other debutant, making 88 in the first innings to take the tourists to beyond 300, Sarfraz was in buoyant mood. "We are very confident. We are a very young side, we had two debutant players, but we were very confident whatever the target will come, we will chase it down. "At 14 for three there was a little bit of concern but the way Imam and Babar Azam were as a collective, it was very important the way these two young players are batting. "I think it's very good for Pakistan as a team to chase this on the fifth day. (AFP)



Optimistic Rahane says Rajasthan can still qualify for play-offs

KOLKATA, MAY 16 /- Their fate hanging by a thread, Rajasthan Royals captain Ajinkya Rahane believes his side still can qualify for the play-offs even after a bitter defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League. After a great start by Jos Buttler and Rahul Tripathi, Rajasthan were bundled out for 142, which was chased down by KKR for 118 overs on Tuesday night in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata. Rajasthan are lying fourth in the standings with 12 points from 13 games and will now face a virtual shoot-out on May 19 against a resurgent Royal Challengers Bangalore, who are also in contention in a do-or-die situation to secure an available play-off berth. "We still have to believe in ourselves. Anything can happen in cricket, it's a funny game. We have to learn from our mistakes. We were too positive with our batting tonight. But, we have to learn as a team," Rahane said at the post-match news conference on Tuesday night. Rahane admitted that they have not batted well this season as they should have posted some around 175-180 yesterday, especially after the magnificent start provided by Buttler and Tripathi. "After the magnificent start given by Rahul and Jos Buttler, we did not string any partnerships. It's not about any individual. We lost because we did not play ourselves in the middle and we needed to get a partnership going. When you get a start like that you have to back yourself," he said.

Rajat Sharma to contest for DDCA President's post

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 /- Renowned journalist Rajat Sharma on Wednesday said he has entered the race for the post of Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA) President. The elections for DDCA will be held on June 30. Padma Bhushan awardee Sharma is the chairman and managing director of news channel. Sharma's team will consist of Rakesh Bansal who will fight the elections for vice president, Vinod Thirka (secretary) and Om Prakash Sharma. A statement from the Sharma faction said that the names of rest of the panel will be released later. Sharma has been backed by former DDCA President Sneha Bansal, Treasurer and International relations officer (IR) President Nandor Batra among others. The dates for the DDCA elections has been called off by administrators Justice Vikramjit Singh, who also issued the directive that the panel will be held without the much-criticised proxy voting system. The proxy system of voting in DDCA has been done away with by Justice Singh. The panel will be released on May 11 point model of code of conduct for election of members of the executive committee.

Ireland open to Pakistan tour if 'stars align'

DUBLIN, MAY 16 /- Ireland are open to touring Pakistan in an "if the stars align," the chief executive of men's Test cricket's newest nation has said. The Irish made their Test debut with a highly creditable five-wicket loss to Pakistan at Malahide Cricket Club. Dublin concluded Tuesday. After being made to follow-on, Ireland reduced Pakistan to 14 for three to give themselves hope of a remarkable win before their visitors managed to chase down a modest victory target of 160. The match further strengthened the cricket bonds between Ireland and Pakistan, which date back to when the non-Test nation knocked the subcontinental giants out of the 2007 World Cup with a stunning win in Jamaica. Pakistan became a no-go area for leading cricketers in Ireland in an attack by armed militants on Sri Lanka's team bus in Lahore in 2009, with the United Kingdom returning to Pakistan in 2015, while April saw World Twenty20 champions West Indies visit for a three-match T20 series. (PTI)

Indian paddlers' CWG showing has even forced China to take notice: Costantini

NEW DELHI, MAY 16 /- The Indian women's team's historic performance at the Commonwealth Games has even attracted the attention of table tennis power house China, says chief national coach Massimo Costantini. The Indian women's team historic performance at the Commonwealth Games has even attracted the attention of table tennis power house China, says chief national coach Massimo Costantini. "We are getting a lot of respect from everyone. When we were playing China in the World Championships (earlier this May), they were very concerned about

playing us. Some of the coaches like China's coach even asked for the video of the match in which India beat Singapore to win the CWG gold," India's Italian coach told PTI. "India witnessed its best performance in table tennis at the CWG, bagging a record haul of eight medals including historic gold in the women's team and silver in the mixed team. It was largely made possible by Manika Batra, who ended up winning four medals, the most by an Indian in Gold Coast. Costantini, who also served as the chief coach of the national

team from early 2009 till the end of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, played a vital role in the success of CWG success. A month later, he guided the men's team to finish 13th in the Championship Division of the World Team Championships at Halmstad in Sweden. However, the Manika-led women's team was not able to take the winning momentum of the CWG forward and finished a dismal 17th, beating just one of its opponents. Asked about the reason behind the drastic drop in performance of the women, the former USA coach said he saw it coming. "I didn't expect

much from the women because I knew they won't be able to recover after such a great performance (at the CWG). There was a physiological drop. I could see Manika (Batra) was not sharp, she wasn't responding well, she was a bit out of sync, quick to come to the team's defence, the 60-year-old said it's not the team's fault as consistency comes with experience. "It's not their fault because when you have such a good performance you can't recover in one week ready." However, the men are used to playing international games a week after week. "Our women

are not ready. I am working on making them understand their responsibilities, making them learn how to get rid of the pressure of the previous match, handle exposure and reset themselves in short time. "On the contrary, the coach expected more from the men. "The men were participating for the first time in the championship division. They were playing to make history. I thought with this team and the opponents they should have reached the top 12 but they just missed the mark by a little bit." The Asian Games in August-September will be a much tougher challenge than

