

## Sports

Photo of the day



Pierre Gasly of Scuderia AlphaTauri and Alexander Albon of Red Bull Racing play backgammon in Istanbul. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

# Rugby ex-internationals to take legal action over brain injuries

## Thompson 'has no recollection of winning the 2003 World Cup'

LONDON: England World Cup winner Steve Thompson is among a group of former internationals planning legal action against rugby authorities over brain injuries, the law firm leading the case said yesterday. Thompson, who said he has no recollection of winning the 2003 World Cup, is part of the group, along with another ex-England player Michael Lipman and former Wales international Alix Popham, according to law firm Rylands.

The planned action is against World Rugby, the Rugby Football Union and the Welsh Rugby Union, for "failure to protect (the claimants) from the risks caused by concussions". The players have also created 15 "commandments" which they feel World Rugby should adopt to make the game safer. Thompson, Lipman and Popham are part of a test group of eight players, but Richard Boardman of Rylands said he was

representing more than 100 players, whose ages range from their 20s to their 50s.

Many of whom are showing symptoms of neurological problems and Boardman said he wanted World Rugby to make immediate changes to address the issue, which is also a growing concern in football. "The obvious first step is for World Rugby, RFU and WRU to stop being in denial and acknowledge that there is a problem," Boardman added. Thompson, 42, was diagnosed with early onset dementia and probable CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy) in November.

"I have no recollection of winning the World Cup in 2003, or of being in Australia for the tournament," he said. "Knowing what I know now, I wish that I had never turned professional. I went from working on a building site and training twice a week to training every day, sometimes twice a day. "Many of those

training sessions were contact sessions using a scrummage machine and I would be in the thick of things, with all the pressure pushed on me.

"It was not uncommon for me to be left dazed, seeing white spots and not knowing where I was for a few seconds. Sometimes I would pass out completely. It was just an accepted part and parcel of training." Popham, 41, was diagnosed with traumatic brain injury, early onset dementia and probable CTE in April. He said the diagnosis had turned his world upside down. "We had an answer as to why I was struggling so much, but my future looked so bleak. Mel and I only married last year, we were hoping to have another child too, but that's just not going to be possible now," he added.

Lipman, 40, was diagnosed with early onset dementia and probable CTE three weeks ago. "This is something I will be

battling forever and ultimately I won't win," he said. "I am a walking time bomb. I feel like I am treading on eggshells with myself." Boardman said senior figures in the game had been discussing the issue of head injuries since at least 1975. But he added: "Inexplicably, the game's approach to concussion seems to have become less progressive in the professional era, as evidenced by the three-week mandatory break following a concussion being reduced to just six days in 2011.

"Whilst health and safety has moved in the wrong direction, the professional game has become a game with increasing collisions as players get heavier, stronger and faster." The 15 commandments to make the game safer include the abolition of zero-hours contracts that compel players to play when injured in order to get paid and a limit to the number of contact sessions permitted in training. —AFP

## Mohammed Jaffar to participate in Dakar Rally

KUWAIT: Motocross and Red Bull Athlete Mohammed Jaffar announced his in the upcoming Dakar Rally which will take place for the second consecutive year in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Mohammed Jaffar has seen considerable success in motocross rallies across the region and is a fan-favorite in his home country of Kuwait. Jaffar joins in the footsteps of Red Bull teammates who've competed in the Dakar Rally, like fellow GCC driver Nasser Al-Attiyah (QAT), and Toby Price (AUS), who are 3-time and 2-time winners of the Dakar Rally, respectively.

The 43rd edition of the historic event begins January 3, in the coastal city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This marks the third consecutive year in which the entire race takes place within the borders of a single country. This is the second year in Saudi Arabia since its move from South America, where it had been held for a decade. 2021 sees Kuwaiti motocross racer Jaffar make his Dakar Rally debut in the motorbike category. "This will be the first time I will get to participate in the Dakar Rally," Mohammed Jaffar said. "It's a huge challenge, indeed."

The race is famous for its difficult terrain, long drive times, and having to read the map as you go. Unlike closed-circuit races, there's no footage and no possibility of team practice on the track beforehand. The rally is seen as a supreme test of driver, car, and crew. Even teams with excellent Dakar experience will find their battles to overcome. "This race is tough on anyone, no matter your racing background," Jaffar said. This year brings with it several new challenges, as well what the race organizers expect to be a boon for the participants.

Of interest to Mohammed Jaffar and his team are the rule changes pertaining to the motorbike category. The first is a time penalty for piston changes, and a complete ban on any mechanical work on motorbikes at the refueling stations. The race organizers hope that this will mean a more careful rally run, as keeping the engine healthy will become a top priority. This will surely change the strategies teams will implement. This year will see the addition



of the digital road book, which, according to organizers, will be more accurate and helpful in certain areas than the standard print version. The print edition will still be made available to those who prefer it.

The road book will be distributed to teams 10 minutes before the start of the race. The route will take them from the starting point of Jeddah through several major areas of the country, with a rest day planned in Ha'il. This will give the teams time to regroup before the final stretch. The 2021 Dakar rally will end on January 15, where it started, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Mohammed Jaffar will represent Kuwait with the Red Bull KTM Team starting January 3, at the Dakar Rally. To find out more about Mohammed Jaffar's participation in the Dakar Rally, visit @mo\_jaffar on Instagram or visit redbull.com

## Kohli absence creates 'void and opportunity' says India's Tendulkar

NEW DELHI: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar said captain Virat Kohli's departure will leave a "void" for India in their Test tour of Australia,

but added that it will hand a golden opportunity to a younger player. In an interview with AFP, the record-setting batsmen said India's bench strength would help as they bid to win a second straight Test series in Australia. Kohli will only lead the side in the first of the four Tests starting in Adelaide on December 17 - before returning home for the birth of his first child.

There have also been calls from some veterans for India's skipper in all three formats to



hand over some of his captaincy duties permanently. Tendulkar would not, however, join that debate, saying instead: "Let's understand, this is not about individuals. It is about our team and the best part about Indian cricket right now is there is bench strength." Still, he admitted Kohli would be missed. "When you lose an experienced player like this there is without any doubt a void," the former India captain said. —AFP

## News in brief

## Indian wicketkeeper Patel retires

NEW DELHI: India's Parthiv Patel, who was the youngest Test wicketkeeper when he made his debut against England in 2002 retired from all cricket yesterday. Overshadowed for much of his career by Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Patel, who was 17 years and 153 days on his international debut, played his 25th and last Test for India in 2018. "Today, I announce retirement from all forms of cricket and as I bring down curtains on this 18-year-old cricketing journey, I feel heavier with gratitude for many," the 35-year-old said in a statement. He added that India's management had "showed generous amount of confidence and faith in a 17-year-old boy to play for India". Patel made his debut under Sourav Ganguly, current president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. He had a batting average of over 31, including six half-centuries, in his stop-start career. —AFP

## Moukoko becomes youngest player

SAINT PETERSBURG: Borussia Dortmund striker Youssoufa Moukoko, aged 16 years and 18 days, became the youngest player in Champions League history on Tuesday when he came off the bench in a 2-1 victory away to Zenit Saint Petersburg. Cameroon-born Moukoko, who made his European debut as a 58th-minute substitute in Russia, broke the previous record of Celestine Babayaro, who was 16 years and 87 days when he played for Anderlecht in November 1994. Dortmund, who had already qualified for the last 16, equalized within minutes of Moukoko's introduction, with Lukasz Piszczek cancelling out Sebastian Driussi's first-half goal. Axel Witsel's low shot from the edge of the area on 78 minutes won the game for Dortmund as they secured top spot ahead of Lazio in Group F. —AFP

## WCup hero Goromaru to retire

TOKYO: Japan rugby star Ayumu Goromaru, who enjoyed cult status after leading his country to a historic World Cup win over South Africa, will retire at the end of the 2021 domestic season, his club announced yesterday. The 34-year-old was estimated as the world's richest player following his performances at the 2015 Rugby World Cup in England, where he scored 24 points in "Miracle of Brighton" 34-32 victory over the Springboks. Goromaru's rugged good looks and distinctive goal-kicking stance earned him a huge following in Japan, with a bronze statue and a "Master of Ninjas" title among the honors bestowed on the fullback, who also had a giraffe named after him at a Japanese zoo. Goromaru-mania even prompted fans to flock to see a Buddha statue said to be in a similar pose to that the pin-up struck in his pre-kick routine. —AFP

## Zhang Jienalin to make history

SHANGHAI: Zhang Jienalin will make history this week when she becomes the first female golfer to compete in the 26-year history of the Volvo China Open. The tournament in Shenzhen usually has European Tour status and is for men only but the coronavirus and consequent travel restrictions sees it tweaked this year into a domestic event. The 24-year-old Zhang, who is ranked 484th in the world, won her first title in the recent mixed-field Hangzhou International Championships. On that occasion women were competing from forward tees, but in southern China she will tee it up on the same length course as her male rivals. "For me this week it's all about driving distance. I failed to hit the green in two shots on many of the par fours in practice today," Zhang said in a press release. "The greens here are also very difficult and are playing quite fast." —AFP

## COVID-hit Hamilton feeling better

YAS MARINA: Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton said he has suffered "one of the hardest weeks for some time" after testing positive for coronavirus but is hopeful of driving in the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. The 35-year-old Briton missed last Sunday's penultimate round in Bahrain after contracting coronavirus while on holiday in Dubai. Speaking in an Instagram video from his quarantine period spent in Bahrain, he said: "I know I've not been in touch this past week but it's definitely been one of the hardest weeks that I've had for some time. "I've just been focusing on recovering and trying to get back in shape so I can get back in the car and race in Abu Dhabi. "I woke up today feeling great and got my first workout in so I just wanted to send you guys a message of positivity, let you know I'm OK. "I hope that I can get back in the car soon." —AFP

## Warner ruled out of India Test

SYDNEY: Australia's star opening batsman David Warner has been ruled out of the first Test against India, but will try to return for the blockbuster second installment on Boxing Day. Cricket Australia said yesterday. Warner is recovering from a strained adductor muscle that forced him to limp out of Australia's second one-day international against India last month, after a knock of 83. "I feel I have made great progress in a short amount of time and it's best for me to stay here in Sydney to continue working on getting back to full fitness," the 34-year-old said in a statement. "The injury feels a lot better, but I need to be able to satisfy in my own mind and to my team-mates that it is 100 percent ready for Test match conditions. "That includes running between the wickets and being agile in the field. Right now I feel I am short of being able to play at peak fitness and another 10 days will make a difference." —AFP