

PAKISTAN APPOINTS SARFRAZ AHMED NEW T20 CAPTAIN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Cricket Board yesterday announced Sarfraz Ahmed as new captain of the T20 team after Shahid Afridi stepped down following his side's humiliating early exit from the World Twenty20.

A statement on the PCB website described Ahmed—who led the Quetta Gladiators to the final in Pakistan's first-

ever franchise-based T20 league in February—as a “natural choice” for the position. “I spoke to Sarfraz this morning and conveyed to him that he was our natural choice for this position. His appointment is open-ended. I wish him good luck in his new role,” it quoted PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan as saying. Afridi resigned as captain Sunday

after his team's exit from the tournament's group stage.

Ahmed, a right-handed wicketkeeper-batsman who has played 21 T20 internationals and the same number of Test matches, as well as 58 one-day internationals, said he will invoke the team's fighting spirit. “We will play good cricket,” the 28-year-old told

reporters after his appointment was announced.

He showered praise on the outgoing captain Afridi, subject of some of the most scathing criticism in the wake of the team's performance in India. “I haven't seen a megastar like Afridi in my cricketing career. He has served Pakistan cricket for 20 years,” Ahmed

said. Head coach Waqar Younis resigned Monday following Pakistan's disastrous performance in the World Twenty20. The 2009 champions were widely criticised for a lacklustre performance in India, with just one victory against unfancied Bangladesh and big losses to India, New Zealand and Australia.— AFP

MUTO LEAVES EVERGRANDE ON BRINK OF SHOCK EXIT

SAITAMA: Yuki Muto's second-half winner left title-holders Guangzhou Evergrande teetering on the brink of a shock AFC Champions League exit as they went down 1-0 to Urawa Red Diamonds yesterday. Muto's header seven minutes after half-time consigned Luiz Felipe Scolari's super-rich Chinese champions to their second defeat in four games and left them rooted to the bottom of Group H.

With two games to go, winless Evergrande have just two points so far, five points off second place and a spot in the last 16, with their title defence seemingly at an end.

Evergrande, part-owned by Internet giant Alibaba, are the poster-child for President Xi Jinping's push to turn China into a football power, which has translated into heavy investment in players by Chinese clubs. But the five-time defending Chinese Super League champions looked anything but winners in a cauldron atmosphere as they faced Japan's Urawa and their massed ranks of fans in Saitama.

If not for some agile keeping by Zeng Cheng, the scoreline could have been worse for a team featuring ex-Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Paulinho and former Atletico Madrid striker Jackson Martinez, their record signing. Muto put Evergrande on the ropes on 52 minutes when he

instinctively got his head to the box, following a cross from Takahiro Sekine.

Zeng saved brilliantly from Sekine at close range but Tadanari Lee was left thumping the turf in exasperation when he passed up an open goal and instead tamely poked his shot at the goalkeeper.

Zeng also saved from Shinzo Koroki one-on-one to keep Evergrande in it but the visitors' costly strikeforce was finding little joy at the other end of the pitch.

Urawa's victory lifted them to second in Group H behind Sydney FC, who moved to the verge of the knock-out stages with a 1-0 home win over South Korea's Pohang Steelers.

Milos Ninkovic grabbed the winner for Sydney, who now have nine points from four games, in the 51st minute and at the second attempt after two Pohang players failed to clear the ball.

Elsewhere, in Group F, free-scoring FC Seoul lost their perfect record when they were held to a 0-0 draw by China's Shandong Luneng, with Brazilian sharpshooter Adriano unable to add to his nine goals so far.

And Japan's Sanfrecce Hiroshima kept up their bid for the knock-out stages when they beat Thailand's Buriram United 2-0 away.— AFP



NEW YORK: Alex Killorn #17 of the Tampa Bay Lightning scores against Thomas Greiss #1 of the New York Islanders during the second period at the Barclays Center on Monday in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. The Islanders defeated the Lightning 5-2.— AFP

TAVARES CAPS ISLANDERS' 3-GOAL SECOND IN WIN OVER LIGHTNING

NEW YORK: The New York Islanders responded to a rare public scolding from head coach Jack Capuano and moved closer to clinching a playoff spot Monday night, as Matt Martin, Brock Nelson and John Tavares scored in a span of less than six minutes in the second period of a 5-2 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning at Barclays Center. The rebuke by the usually protective Capuano came two days after a 5-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, a defeat that dropped the Islanders to 5-6-2 since March 9 and left a playoff spot in peril.

Tarasenko scored one third-period goal and assisted on another to give the St. Louis Blues a 5-2 win over the Arizona Coyotes Monday night that pulled the Blues into a first-place tie with the Dallas Stars in the Central Division. Both teams have 105 points with two games remaining in the regular season. If the two teams end the season tied, Dallas would win the tiebreaker. The win also moved the Blues six points ahead of the third-place Blackhawks.

CANUCKS 3, KINGS 2

Jared McCann scored the winning goal and Ryan Miller recorded 40 saves—including 20 in the third period—as the Vancouver Canucks beat the Los Angeles Kings 3-2 Monday night. McCann's goal on a breakaway at 19:27 of the second period stood up as the winner as the Canucks (30-36-13) posted their third consecutive win. Before Monday, Vancouver failed in eight attempts to record a three-game win streak.— Reuters



SAITAMA: China's Guangzhou Evergrande midfielder Paulinho (L) keeps the ball against Japan's Urawa Reds during their football match of the AFC champions league first round group H in Saitama yesterday.— AFP

RONALDO HUNTS MORE GOALS IN GERMANY

WOLFSBURG: Cristiano Ronaldo, the Champions League's top scorer this season with 13 goals, can add to his tally and extend his record against German clubs in the knockout stages at Wolfsburg. The 31-year-old is currently four short of matching his record in a Champions League season ahead of Wednesday's quarter-final, first leg, at the German league club with the return next Tuesday at the Bernabeu. The Portuguese star is on a rich run against Bundesliga sides and has found the net in all of the last six knockout ties played against German clubs in the Champions League.

It started back in the 2011/12 semi-finals when he bagged a brace against Bayern Munich as the Bavarian giants went on to suffer heartbreak in the final at home to Chelsea.

In the 2012/13 campaign, he netted against Borussia Dortmund as the German side reached the final at Wembley when they lost to Bayern. But in the 2013/14

campaign, when Real achieved 'La Decima', he netted a total of seven goals across the home and away meetings with Schalke, Borussia and Bayern.

Then last season, he claimed three goals in the last-16 tie against Schalke in a 5-4 aggregate win, netting twice in the shock 4-3 defeat in Madrid having also scored when Real won 2-0 in Gelsenkirchen. A home Champions League quarter-final against Ronaldo and Real is a dream tie for the Wolfsburg squad, who are without a win in their last three games. “You can only be impressed with Cristiano Ronaldo,” said Wolfsburg's Germany international Julian Draxler.

“Just look at the way he has performed over the years and the goals he has scored. Of course, you always follow the progress of a player like him. We hope we can keep him at bay as much as possible over the two games. But at the end of the day, this is about Wolfsburg versus Real Madrid, not Wolfsburg versus Ronaldo.” — AFP



Cristiano Ronaldo

RANGERS 4, BLUE JACKETS 2

After whiffing in two previous tries to secure a spot in the NHL playoffs, the New York Rangers punched their ticket to the postseason Monday night with a 4-2 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets in Nationwide Arena. The Rangers (44-26-9) were 0-2-1 and had lost to non-playoff qualifiers Carolina and Buffalo in the past week before taking care of the business on the road against the Blue Jackets. Columbus (31-40-8) is another opponent that will not be advancing past the regular season.

PANTHERS 4, MAPLE LEAFS 3

Rocco Grimaldi scored two goals and the Florida Panthers held on to defeat the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 Monday for their third straight victory. Grimaldi potted both of his goals in the second period. The center entered the game with one goal for the season, which he scored on Nov. 4.

BLUES 5, COYOTES 2

Kyle Brodziak scored twice and Vladimir

NHL Results/Standings

Toronto 3, Florida 4; Vancouver 3, Los Angeles 2; St. Louis 5, Arizona 2; NY Islanders 5, Tampa Bay 2; Columbus 2, NY Rangers 4.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference					
Atlantic Division					Pacific Division					
	W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS				
Florida	45	25	9	229	197	99	Dallas	48	23	9 260 226 105
Tampa Bay	45	29	5	219	191	95	St. Louis	48	23	9 221 195 105
Detroit	40	28	11	204	216	91	Chicago	46	26	7 224 200 99
Boston	41	30	8	233	220	90	Nashville	39	26	14 219 207 92
Ottawa	36	34	9	224	240	81	Minnesota	38	31	11 215 201 87
Montreal	36	37	6	211	228	78	Colorado	39	36	4 208 227 82
Buffalo	33	35	11	193	214	77	Winnipeg	32	39	8 204 231 72
Toronto	28	40	11	192	233	67				
Metropolitan Division					Central Division					
Washington	55	17	6	241	182	116	Anaheim	44	24	10 209 185 98
Pittsburgh	46	25	8	235	194	100	Los Angeles	46	28	5 215 186 97
NY Rangers	44	26	9	229	209	97	San Jose	44	29	6 233 205 94
NY Islanders	43	26	9	219	203	95	Arizona	35	37	7 205 235 77
Philadelphia	39	26	13	203	208	91	Vancouver	30	36	13 182 227 73
Carolina	34	29	16	192	216	84	Calgary	33	40	6 218 251 72
New Jersey	37	34	8	176	200	82	Edmonton	30	43	7 194 239 67
Columbus	31	40	8	205	246	70				

Note: Overtime losses (OT) worth 1 pt and not included in loss column (L).

POCHETTINO HOPES EUROPEAN EXIT HELPS SPURS HUNT DOWN FOXES

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's clash with Manchester United on Sunday will show whether manager Mauricio Pochettino made the right call when he sacrificed progress in Europe to focus on clinching Spurs' first Premier League title in 55 years.

Second in the table and seven points adrift of leaders Leicester City with six games left, Spurs were knocked out of the Europa League by Borussia Dortmund 5-1 on aggregate after Pochettino rested key players in the last-16 stage.

The Argentine made seven changes to his team for the first leg in Germany, resting Eric Dier and leaving leading scorer Harry Kane on the bench, along with Mousa Dembele and Erik Lamela. Spurs lost the game 3-0, effectively killing off their hopes of progression to the quarter-finals.

They got over that disappointment by put-

ting three goals past Bournemouth in the league three days after the second leg, but Pochettino's hope that the absence of European action would help his players hunt down the Foxes were derailed by the international break.

Spurs had only a day to prepare for their match against Liverpool last weekend and duly allowed Leicester to stretch their lead by dropping two points at Anfield, but have eight days to prepare for the visit of United.

“We haven't had many clear weeks this season,” Pochettino told the club's website (www.tottenhamhotspur.com). “We've had a lot of midweek games but... now we have a few days to recover and try to prepare for United.”

“It's important because we only really had one day to prepare for Liverpool. International weeks can be difficult... but now we have six games left in six weeks and time to prepare the players. We will fight until the end of the season.”

Meanwhile, United midfielder Ander Herrera backed his team to raise their game against Spurs, citing their record against the top teams this season.

United beat Spurs in their opening league game of the campaign, and have also recorded wins over Arsenal, Manchester City and Liverpool, as well as an away draw at leaders Leicester City.

“When we play against a top team, I am not so worried about our performance because we usually do quite well,” the Spaniard told British media.

“We have to prepare very good... because we watched Tottenham's game against Liverpool. I think they deserved to win, they controlled the second-half almost fully, so it is not going to be easy.”

“But when we play against top teams I think we perform better.” — Reuters