

MCNAMARA LEAVES ROLE AS ENGLAND COACH

LONDON: Steve McNamara has left his role as head coach of England, the Rugby Football League (RFL) announced yesterday. "The RFL has concluded that with the 2016 Four Nations and 2017 World Cup on the horizon, now is the time to make any change to the England set-up," RFL chief executive Nigel Wood said in a statement. McNamara, 44, had been in the role since 2010. His contract expired following November's Test series against New Zealand, which England won 2-1, and he has been told he will not be offered a new deal. Veteran Australian Wayne Bennett, current head coach of the Brisbane Broncos, is expected to be appointed as McNamara's successor. "Steve McNamara has been the longest serving national coach in our history and it is undoubtedly the case that the national team and set-up have moved on considerably under Steve's leadership," Wood added. "We would like to place on record our thanks to Steve McNamara for his considerable efforts over the years to both the England senior team and the underlying programme. "He leaves with our very best wishes and on a high, after a series win over New Zealand." —AFP



NIGERIA VOWS CLAMPDOWN AFTER 8 TEST POSITIVE

ABUJA: Nigerian Sports Minister Solomon Dalung yesterday vowed to tighten anti-doping measures after eight athletes tested positive during last year's All Africa Games in Congo. "This has brought to the fore the need to conduct more dope tests and strengthen all components of the nation's anti-doping programme in order to detect, deter and prevent our athletes from this unethical behaviour," Dalung told a press conference. Competing in five sports-athletics, para-athletics, weightlifting, para-weightlifting and wrestling — the athletes tested positive for banned substances ranging from anabolic steroids to diuretics. Seven were banned for four years with weightlifter Elizabeth Onuah, a second time offender, getting an eight-year suspension. A patron of the Nigeria Olympic Committee, Ibrahim Galadima, said this scandal could adversely affect the country at the Rio Olympics in August. "It is indeed embarrassing. It is a major setback at the wrong time. Our preparations for the 2016 Rio Olympics are shaky and so this is indeed very unfortunate," he lamented. —AFP

GARDE DOWN BUT NOT OUT AFTER DEADLINE DEBACLE

LONDON: Aston Villa manager Remi Garde says the danger of his club toppling out of the Premier League and a reluctance to spend big meant that he failed to make any signings during the transfer window that could have helped the team stay up. But, he said via the club's website (www.avfc.co.uk), the team will cope. The Frenchman missed out on all his targets, with Roma's Seydou Doumbia opting for Newcastle United, Girondins Bordeaux midfielder Wahbi Khazri heading to Sunderland and Hajduk Split goalkeeper Lovre Kalinic being denied a work permit. Villa is eight points adrift of safety. "I am disappointed. I know the team needs strengthening and improving with new players," the manager said. "Probably the main reasons we haven't been able to are that we are bottom of the league and not very attractive for players—and also because financially speaking the club is not in the situation, probably, where they wanted to spend too much money." —Reuters



OVER 70 PLAYERS PARTICIPATE IN HANDICAP SPORTS TOURNAMENT

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The local handicap sports tournament started on Sunday evening at the Kuwait Handicap Sports Club with the participation of more than 70 players competing in swimming, table tennis, and basketball. The opening ceremony was attended by the honorary president of the club Sheikh Al-Sabah and a delegation from the Public Authority for Sports. Deputy Chairman of the Club Nasser Al-Ajmi said the championship included all age groups and was of good standard on its first day in three games. He said the club seeks to develop and enhance the level of players and prepare them at the best way possible for international competition.

Meanwhile, table tennis player Hamid Wabdan said the tournament is very important to keep players well prepared physically, and not rely on exercises only. He said the first day competition showed good skills in juniors. Meanwhile, Chairman of Kuwait Handicapped Sports Club Shafi Al-Hajiri said the local championship has been a success, especially in discovering skilled players, he said the championship was organized to coincide with Kuwait's celebrations of the National Days and 10 year on HH the Amir ascension to power. Al-Hajiri said that PAS Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Sabah follows the club activities, and removes all obstacles both local and foreign in order to enhance the handicapped sports.

He said that preparations are ongoing to participate in an athletic event in Sharqa, UAE, and will be preceded by a training camp. Al-Hajiri said that the aim is to have three players participate in Brazil Olympic 2016. He said the championship that included all age groups sowed a good technical level specially the young players. He said the club seeks to improve the level of players at all levels. On his part, President of the Handicapped Basketball Asian Federations lauded the support of PAS for this and other championships organized by the club. He said Kuwait is the Gulf champion in basketball in addition to west Asia region.



KSSC TO ORGANISE SHEIKH ABDALLAH AL-MUBARAK AL-SABAH CUP TOURNEY

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Shooting Sports Club will organize the late Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Cup tournament in the air pistol and rifle, as well as Olympic archery from Feb 4 until Feb 7, at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. Kuwait Shooting Sport Club Obeid Al-Osaimi said KSSC is proud to organize the cup of late Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah each year, and it coincides this year with Kuwait's celebration of its glorious national days. He said this cup has great memories for one of Kuwait's sincere men, who has many achievements, and limitless giving, which contributed to Kuwait's development. Al-Osaimi congratulated the Kuwaiti people on the occasion of the National and Liberation days. Al-Osaimi lauded the late Sheikh as a successful leader, who cared for Kuwait and its people, and was characterized by being keen on Kuwait security and safety of its people. He said the club remembers this generous personality, so youth can take example from it during their life. Al-Osaimi concluded by hoping that Kuwait shooters exert their efforts during the tournament and get distinguished results, as it is one of the beneficial experiences before starting their competitions abroad.



Obeid Al-Osaimi

QATAR'S AL ATTIAH GUNNING FOR SIXTH OLYMPIC APPEARANCE

NEW DELHI: Qatari sportsman Nasser Al Attiyah swapped the steering wheel for the shotgun as the twice Dakar Rally winner targets a sixth Olympic appearance at the Rio de Janeiro Games in August. The 45-year-old, who won bronze in the men's skeet at the London Olympics, is competing at the ongoing Asian shooting Championship on the outskirts of New Delhi, hoping to maintain his record of competing at each Games since 1996. "I have been five times in Olympic Games - Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, Beijing and London," the Qatari told Reuters TV. "(I won) bronze medal in London. And now really it will be dream for me to (also) compete in Rio, like six times in Olympic Games." Rallying and marksmanship are not easy to combine but Al Attiyah said he enjoyed both. "I love both sport - rally and shooting. And this was my dream for a long time, to be champion in rally and champion in shooting and this was really a good thing what I make for myself." He took to shooting hoping it would help him focus better behind the wheel when competing in the gruelling rallies, before Al Attiyah fell to the charm of shooting clay targets flung into the air. His busy rallying schedule does impact his shooting but Al Attiyah claimed bronze - only the fourth medal Qatar have ever won at the Olympics - in London after only 10 days of practice. "It is not easy. When I started rally, I was looking for another sport to help me from (the) concentration side and I find myself one day practicing shooting and I said, 'okay this is a right sport to help me for driving, for rally.' "But I find also myself good in shooting and I said 'why not to be one of the Olympic medal (winner) in shooting.'" —Reuters

CAVENDISH DEFENDS DUBAI CROWN WITH NEW TEAM

DUBAI: Defending Dubai Tour champion Mark Cavendish goes into the 2016 edition, which starts today, looking for his first win since joining South African team Dimension Data. The Briton won the overall title last year while still with Etixx Quick-Step thanks to victories on the first and fourth stages. Cavendish left Quick-Step at the end of last season to join the first African cycling team to take part in the Tour de France, MTN-Qhubeka, who have since been renamed Dimension Data. The 30-year-old, who has won 44 stages on Grand Tours, also took Etixx team-mates Mark Renshaw and Bernhard Eisel with him to his new outfit. Ahead of the race Eisel said the onus was on his new team to deliver a stage win for Cavendish. "The pressure is on us," the Austrian said. This is the third time the Dubai Tour has been held, and it will have by far its most impressive start-list so far. Cavendish will have to battle with the likes of German Marcel Kittel and Italians Elia Viviani, Andrea Guardini and Sacha Modolo if he is to get off the mark for the season. "This is a great opportunity for us to work on getting our lead-out train in good order," said Kittel, who won three stages in Dubai during

the maiden staging in 2014 and has taken Cavendish's place as Quick-Step's main sprinter. It is not only the sprinters who are under the microscope this week though. Swiss veteran Fabian Cancellara, German time-trial specialist Tony Martin, former world road race champion Philippe Gilbert of Belgium and 2012 Tour de France champion Bradley Wiggins will all be taking part. It is a rare road outing for 35-year-old Brit Wiggins as the four-time Olympic gold medalist will focus on the track this year ahead of the Rio de Janeiro Games. But with bonus seconds on offer for stage victories, Manxman Cavendish will still fancy his chances of holding onto the blue jersey that goes to the winner of the General Classification. **The route:** Wednesday (stage 1): Dubai Marine Club to Fujairah, 179 kilometres Thursday (stage 2): Dubai to Palm Jumeirah, 183 km Friday (stage 3): Dubai to Hatta Dam, 172 km Saturday (stage 4): Dubai to Business Bay, 137 km Previous champions: 2014: Taylor Phinney (USA) 2015: Mark Cavendish (GBR). — AFP