

### 'JAPANESE MESSI' BREAKS J-LEAGUE GOAL RECORD AT 15

**TOKYO:** Japanese media hailed wonderkid Takefusa Kubo yesterday after he became the youngest scorer in the J-League at 15 with a super strike for FC Tokyo's under-23 side. At 15 years, 10 months and 11 days, Kubo fired the winner in Saturday's 1-0 win at Cerezo Osaka's under-23s in a J-League third division game to beat the previous mark. That was held by Takayuki Morimoto, who scored for Tokyo Verdy two days shy of his 16th birthday in 2004 before going on to play in Italy. Kubo, a former YouTube sensation dubbed the 'Japanese Messi' during his time as a pint-sized member of Barcelona's youth set-up, broke the record in style, dribbling past two defenders before smashing the ball home from a tight angle. "I'm just really happy-hopefully I can continue helping the team win like this," Kubo told local media, with the popular Nikkan Sports daily likening the forward to Argentine and Barca wizard Lionel Messi in its match report. —AFP

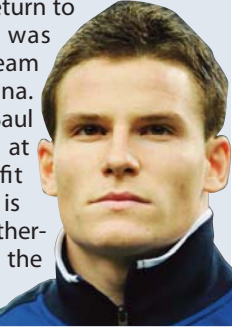


### YAN'S MILESTONE MARRED BY CRUCIBLE STRUGGLES

**SHEFFIELD:** Yan Bingtao became the first player born this century to play in the World Championship, but the Chinese teenager's Crucible debut didn't go as he would have hoped yesterday. Yan, born in February 2000, arrived in Sheffield hailed as one of the brightest young stars in a growing band of Chinese players making an impact on the sport. The 17-year-old showed glimpses of the talent that many expect will bring him a host of trophies over the course of his career, making a fine 109 break in the second frame of his first-round tie against Shaun Murphy. But Yan still ended up trailing 6-3 at the end of the first session as Murphy's extra experience on the big stage proved crucial. Murphy, the 2005 world champion, has twice lost to Yan in three previous meetings but their first Crucible encounter presented a different challenge to the teenager. Although based in Sheffield, Yan had never played at the venue previously while Murphy has abundant experience of the famous theatre. Murphy rattled in 112 and 118 to surge 4-1 ahead, before shaking off the setback of losing the next two frames by taking control come the session's end. They play to a finish in the best-of-19-frame match today. —AFP

### ATLETICO'S GAMEIRO FIT FOR LEICESTER RETURN

**MADRID:** French international Kevin Gameiro boosted Atletico Madrid's chances of reaching a third Champions League semi-final in four years as he was included in Diego Simeone's squad for tomorrow's quarter-final, second leg at Leicester City. Gameiro hasn't featured in Atletico's last five games, including their 1-0 first-leg win over the English champions, due to a groin injury. However, he and reserve goalkeeper Miguel Angel Moya have both been given the all clear to return to action, Atletico confirmed yesterday. Simeone was afforded the luxury of resting a host of his first-team regulars for Saturday's routine 3-0 win over Osasuna. Top scorer Antoine Griezmann, captain Gabi, Koke, Saul Niguez and Stefan Savic are all expected to return at the King Power Stadium. Whether Gameiro is fit enough to start in place of Fernando Torres up front is the only doubt in the Atletico side with Simeone otherwise expected to name the same team that started the first leg. —AFP



## KUWAIT TENNIS U-18 JUNIOR TOURNAMENT

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Tennis U18 Junior Tournament concluded in the presence of Kuwait Tennis Federation Deputy Chairman of the Board Abdelsamad Al-Aryan,

Treasurer Faleh Al-Otaibi, Assistant Treasurer Ahmad Al-Qallaf, and Technicla Director Abbas Al-Busairi. The final results were Ahmad Khamees

from Yarmouk Sports Club was in first place, Essa Qabazard in second while Tameem Al-Hallaq from Kuwait Club was third. In the doubles Kuwait's Club Tameem Al-

Hallaq and Hussein Dashti took first place, while Yarmouk's Ahmad Khamees and Essa Qabazard second, and Kuwait's Ali Sadeq and Hussein Ali were in third.

The final results for clubs: Kuwait in first place with 276, followed by Yarmouk with 252, Salmiya in third with 149 and Kheitan in fourth with 16 points.

### NSH HOLDS CRICKET TOURNAMENT FOR NSH EMPOWER TROPHY

**KUWAIT:** Knowing the passion for cricket, NSH top management headed by Sabu decided to host the cricket tournament in Kuwait for the NSH Empower Trophy - 2017. Several teams, irrespective of age and grade registered from different locations, Fahaheel, Mahboulla, Mangaf, Abu Halifa, Wafra, etc.

The surprising performance of captain Vivek led the Fahaheel team to

the driver's seat. Though the Mahbulla Lions gave a tough fight, could not reach the target. Vidaya Sagar's Roaring Lions found chasing away the Jackals that witnessed the growing enthusiasm. The joy had no limits when Surendra, a worker declared the senior managers 'out'. It is our social responsibility that leads NSH in bringing out numerous talents in sports and arts, said veteran Sabu.



Andy Murray

#### TENNIS

## PLENTY ON THE LINE IN MONTE CARLO FOR MURRAY, DJOKOVIC

**MONTE CARLO:** The top two players in the world, Andy Murray and Novak Djokovic, both have something to prove as the pair return to the tour from injury to play this week's Monte Carlo Masters.

Both have been struggling with elbow injuries, but world number one Murray proved his fitness during a recent exhibition with Roger Federer in the Swiss city of Zurich.

Meanwhile, Djokovic showed good form in Davis Cup action last weekend, leading Serbia into the semi-finals.

"I feel great," the 29-year-old Serb said on Sunday's opening day. "It's nice to be in a place where I spend a lot of time training. It's home here. I spend a lot of time on these courts."

"It's normal for an athlete to go through (injury) ups and downs. I trust myself and the effort I put into my game. I have to believe I'll get the results I'm hoping for," added Djokovic, a two-time former winner of the event.

"All of my thoughts next week will be on this event, I won it in 2013 and 2015. I'm hoping this

is the place to have a new start to the season."

Federer is the in-form man on tour at the moment, but the winner of three titles already this season is skipping the clay-court season curtain-raiser. The prestige event in the Mediterranean principality could be another showpiece for Rafael Nadal, who will kick into gear on his favourite surface as he bids for an unprecedented 10th title at the Country Club overlooking the sea.

The fifth-ranked Spaniard has been pipped at the post so far in 2017 at the important moments, losing finals to revitalised rival Federer at the Australian Open and Miami while missing out on a title in Acapulco at the hands of American journeyman Sam Querrey.

#### HISTORIC EVENT

"Monte Carlo is unique for me, I'm here to adjust my game and be ready to play," Nadal said. "The season has started well for me. I'm happy with how I'm playing."

"This is an historic event for me, I'm working

to be ready. I'm excited to be here."

Nadal, 30, won his ninth title a year ago after a three-year gap, beating Gael Monfils in the final after dispatching Murray in the semis.

Monfils will be missing as he continues treatment on a knee injury which has bothered him for months. Also missing is the injured Canadian Milos Raonic, Japan's Kei Nishikori and charismatic Australian bad boy Nick Kyrgios, who is delaying the start of his clay campaign after a strenuous Davis Cup effort in Brisbane.

France's Richard Gasquet is still recovering after appendix surgery. Federer has said he will not play on clay until the French Open at Roland Garros in well over a month, taking advantage of his ATP privilege at age 35 to pick and choose his schedule with extra flexibility.

Murray and Djokovic take the top two seedings, with the tournament's top eight receiving byes into the second round.

The third seed is treble grand slam champion Stan Wawrinka of Switzerland, the 2014 winner, with Nadal seeded four. —AFP