

CHARGERS SAY BITTERSWEET FAREWELLS IN LAST WEEK IN SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO: Antonio Gates first arrived at Chargers Park in 2003, and Philip Rivers joined him one year later on the peaceful practice fields and low-slung buildings tucked below a golden hillside in northern San Diego.

The tight end and his quarterback have spent their entire NFL lives inhabiting this training complex. They've honed their skills with uncountable thousands of throws and catches on these fields, and they've built warm friendships with hundreds of their fellow Chargers in its locker room.

But Chargers Park and San Diego are down to their final week as this team's home. After a three-day mandatory minicamp concludes Thursday, the play-

ers will disperse for summer vacation before the moving vans portentously parked outside the complex are filled for the 85-mile drive north to Costa Mesa, the Orange County city where the Los Angeles Chargers will hold training camp in July.

"It's a bittersweet moment, because obviously the memories are still here," Gates said Tuesday. "They will forever be here for myself, for the guys that have been around." Chargers Park will be empty this summer for the first time in two decades, and San Diego will spend its autumn Sundays without the team that arrived from Los Angeles in 1961. The move has loomed for five months, but its imminent finality has some veter-

ans feeling nostalgia during their last few workouts in San Diego's postcard-perfect sunny weather.

"There's a lot of time spent out there, a lot of balls thrown," Rivers said while standing in the cool shade just off the practice fields. "A lot of time spent in this locker room, weight room, meeting room. Qualcomm (Stadium) and the memories there from game days are public memories that a lot of people shared in."

While coach Anthony Lynn and many current Chargers haven't been around long enough to truly feel their fans' pain, the senior players and team employees are still processing the end of this era.

"You've got to look at it as a positive,

as we're going somewhere to a new beginning," said pass rusher Melvin Ingram, who has spent his entire five-year career with the Chargers. "But you've also got to have a bitter feeling, (because) this is where it all started, and you're leaving the place where it all started." While the Rams packed up swiftly in St. Louis after securing relocation last year, the Chargers elected to make a slower transition north, holding their offseason workouts and running out their lease at the training complex still owned and maintained by the city of San Diego.

Rivers was grateful for the gradual breakup, which allowed him extra time to decide whether to commute to LA or

to move his wife and eight children out of their longtime family home.

Rivers still hasn't decided, by the way. "I will figure it out at some point," he said with a laugh. Gates has long spent parts of his offseason in Los Angeles, so he has given his teammates plenty of tips on the sprawling metropolis. He also needs just one touchdown catch to become the NFL's career leader in TDs by a tight end, and Gates is at peace with the fact that he'll set the record and finish his career away from San Diego.

"I'm excited to move to LA. I'm excited about the new change, and hopefully they'll welcome us with open arms, embrace us, and we can win some games and win a championship." — AP

'CULTURE OF FEAR' EXISTED IN BRITISH TEAM: REPORT

LONDON: A long-awaited independent report published yesterday into British Cycling says the sport's domestic governing body lacked "good governance" and there was a "culture of fear" within the track cycling team.

However, the report—compiled by a five-member panel headed by British Rowing chair Annamarie Phelps—is not as damning about British Cycling as the draft that was leaked to the Daily Mail in March, although the "culture of fear" conclusion remains.

The panel—who began work in April 2016 after allegations of sexism and bullying were made about the then British Cycling technical director Shane Sutton by female track rider Jess Varnish and then by several other cyclists—took evidence from more than 100 former riders and staff.

The report—seven pages shorter than the leaked version—said Sutton, who subsequently resigned prior to the 2016 Olympics in Rio, was allowed to operate within a "power pocket" without having to really answer to anybody.

Phelps explained at a press conference after the publication of the report why it varied somewhat from the draft version. "The panel carefully reviewed the draft in the light of new information provided to it," said Phelps.

"It's important to reiterate that the panel's findings and recommendations were unanimous and wholly independent.

"At times the culture and climate came secondary to this. The situation is not simple," added the 51-year-old, who is a former rowing world champion in the women's lightweight coxless four.

'NOT ADEQUATELY DEALT WITH'

Phelps said the situation could have been contained if British Cycling had reacted to a report in 2012 pinpointing worries over the culture within its elite programmes.

"Many of the early warning signs highlighted by that report were not adequately

dealt with by the board at that time," said Phelps. UK Sport, who operate a tough funding to medals potential policy, are taken to task over their failure to monitor properly the poisonous atmosphere at British Cycling's headquarters in Manchester.

Sutton resigned after the allegations by Varnish, who said he told her to "get on with having a baby" after she was cut from the team last year. However, Phelps and her fellow panel members, while decrying the strong language used by coaching staff, did not think it was based on gender.

"The language used could at times be perceived as discriminatory, certainly derogatory and have no place in modern work place or high level sport," she said, though they did find Varnish's case had not been "handled well".

Varnish and her team-mate Katy Marchant had both lashed out at the British set-up after they failed to qualify for last year's Olympics, where the British team went on to enjoy huge success on the track. British Cycling has already begun to implement reforms and made changes to board personnel which left Phelps optimistic that the atmosphere would be altered for the good.

"There is much talent that could be better harnessed to make British Cycling even more successful," said Phelps. "I'm confident the new leadership will grasp the issues head on." British Cycling chair Jonathan Browning said all the recommendations had been accepted unconditionally by him and the board. "We accept in full the recommendations and apologise for where we've fallen short for the standards we should have achieved," he said.

"Since the findings were shared with us we've rapidly made major changes to the World Class Programme and to our leadership operations and governance, so we can ensure British Cycling learns the lessons and becomes a world class governing body." — AFP

CYCLING

FORMER UCI PRESIDENT HEIN VERBRUGGEN DEAD

LAUSANNE: Hein Verbruggen, former president of the International Cycling Union (UCI) and one of the most prominent sports administrators of his time, has died. He was 75. The Dutchman, head of the UCI between 1991 and 2005, was heavily implicated in the doping scandals that rocked elite cycling when he ran the sport.

Most notable in that era was the case of American Lance Armstrong, who defeated cancer to go on and win seven straight Tour de France races from 1999 to 2005. He was stripped of his titles in 2012 and banned from the sport for life.

The fallen US cycling hero later admitted taking banned substances. Verbruggen, also a member of the International Olympic Committee between 1996-2005 and again from 2006-8, was accused by an independent commission in 2015 of attempting to shield Armstrong from investigation.

The Cycling Independent Reform Commission (CIRC), set up following allegations of corruption at the heart of the UCI, said the body "exempted Armstrong from rules, failed to target test him despite the suspicions, and publicly supported him against allegations of doping, even as late as 2012".

The commission said "requesting and accepting donations from Lance Armstrong, given the suspicions, left UCI open to criticism". Travis Tygart, the head of the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), even called for the prosecution of Verbruggen and Pat McQuaid, UCI president from 2005-13, over the alleged cover-up.

The independent commission later cleared Verbruggen of corruption, the Dutchman insisting that claims that he failed to do enough to combat doping were unfair.

The IOC, in a statement Wednesday, dubbed Verbruggen, who also headed the SportAccord Convention of international sports federations from 2003 to 2013, "a cycling fanatic and a true sports fan".

"Hein Verbruggen was a fearless fighter for his sport. "Thanks to his great engagement and his management skills, he greatly contributed to the success of the Olympic Games Beijing 2008 as chair of the coordination commission. For this he will be always remembered," said IOC president Thomas Bach.

The IOC said that as a mark of respect the Olympic flag will be flown at half-mast at its headquarters in Lausanne. — AFP



BEIJING: In this April 3, 2008 file photo, Hein Verbruggen, the then coordination commission chairman of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Organizing Committee, listens during a news conference in Beijing. Former International Cycling Union president Hein Verbruggen has died. The Dutchman oversaw the worldwide spread of a sport often tainted by doping. He was 75. — AP



OAKLAND: Kevin Durant #35 of the Golden State Warriors speaks at the press conference after his team's 129-120 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers in Game 5 to win the 2017 NBA Finals at ORACLE Arena. — AFP

WARRIORS, CAVALIERS WORKING ON FOURTH FINALS IN A ROW

BASKETBALL

OAKLAND: Stephen Curry was still smiling and laughing about Golden State's second NBA title in three seasons when he made it clear the Warriors think they are just getting started hoisting trophies.

"We're obviously just getting started," the two-time NBA Most Valuable Player said. "This is something that we want to continue to do." The Golden State juggernaut rolled over Cleveland four games to one in the best-of-seven championship series, which ended with a 129-120 Warriors home triumph Monday that brought NBA Finals MVP Kevin Durant his first championship. "They have an incredible team. They beat us, but I'm pretty sure we'll be back and we'll be ready to battle again," Cavaliers guard Kyrie Irving said. "You just pick yourself back up and you keep pushing and you keep going."

It was an unprecedented third consecutive meeting between the clubs in the finals and both appear ready to continue their domination of conference rivals on the way to an annual showdown for the crown.

"As far as that team, they're going to be here for a while," Cleveland superstar LeBron James said of the Warriors. "Pretty much all their big-name guys are in their 20s and they don't show any signs of slowing down. From my eyes, they're built to last a few years."

Curry, Durant, 3-point sharpshooter Klay Thompson and forward Draymond Green are all under 30 and formidable starters.

"It's encouraging. Quite encouraging," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "It's fun to be part of this. It has been great three-year run, but we feel like we can carry this forward. We'll see how long."

The Cavaliers will be searching for answers in the off-season after being dethroned, the Warriors avenging last year's loss when they squandered a 3-1 finals lead.

Does Cavaliers general manager David Griffin look to star free agents or trade deals? Will he bring in more role players as he did with 3-point ace Kyle Korver in order to build a better challenge for the Warriors in the finals? How does he not compromise the squad needed to fight past rivals to reach the finals?

"I know our front office is going to continue to try to put our ball club, put our franchise, in a position where we can compete for a championship year in and year out," James said.

"Teams and franchises are going to be trying to figure out ways that they can put personnel together, the right group of guys together to be able to hopefully compete against this team. So we will see, but I will get away from the game a little bit."

"As far as being back on the basketball court, I'm going to take a while," he added. "I need to get off of my feet and let my joints and let my body kind of recover from being out on the floor for 14 straight years."

'BEAT HIM TO THE GYM'

James could opt out of his contract after next season, so he will want to see some progress. That could involve moving forward Kevin Love, who was only 2-for-8 for six points in the final game. The Warriors figure to sign Curry to a five-year deal for about \$205 million since he has taken less money in recent years to help finance a strong supporting cast.

Durant might be asked to do the same—take less than he might command elsewhere to allow

Golden State to keep Andre Iguodala and Shaun Livingston without salary cap issues. It's such unselfish nature that has helped the Warriors flourish. "We don't even have to speak about it," Iguodala said. "That's the culture that we built and it's an amazing thing to see."

And Durant knows James will soon be work-

ing on new ways to dethrone the Warriors.

"He'll probably be back in the gym the start of July getting ready for next season, so I've probably got to beat him to the gym," Durant said. "I've got nothing but love and respect for him and I can't wait to compete against him again next season." — AFP

YACHTING

COUTTS BRUSHES ASIDE AMERICA'S CUP CRITICS

HAMILTON: New Zealand sailing great Russell Coutts dismissed criticism of this year's America's Cup from his home country, ahead of the final match between Team Oracle USA and the Kiwis which starts on Saturday in Bermuda. It is a chance of revenge for the New Zealanders, after they blew an 8-1 lead to lose 9-8 to Oracle in one of sport's greatest comebacks in 2013.

The 1984 Finn-class Olympic champion and five-time America's Cup winner Coutts is the head organizer of the 35th edition of the world's oldest sailing competition, which has featured a shortened format and ultra-fast boats in an attempt to bring in new fans.

But New Zealand, who set up the rematch with the Americans by beating Sweden's Artemis Racing 5-2 in the challenger final on Monday, have refused to join the other teams to discuss the future of the Cup.

Coutts expressed his delight with the new format, but acknowledged that should New Zealand win the title and hold the next staging of the event, then it could prove to be a one-off. "We just have to wait and see what their plan is, they have not announced their plan," he told AFP.

"I think the strength in the framework agreement with the five teams that have joined is really that they have agreed to pre-agree the rules before any one team wins.

"Typically in the past, the team has won,

and then created the rules with a friendly challenger of record, in isolation to everyone else. "So everyone else has to wait and see what those rules are. And clearly, that's not ideal." "It's much better I think to involve everyone, and the New Zealanders were invited to participate in that process, they declined."

FOILING CRITICISM

The criticism has come despite an exciting America's Cup challenger series, that has seen the hydrofoil boats enable teams to travel up to double the wind speed.

New Zealand have accused that of killing innovation in the event, but Coutts strongly disagrees. "No, I don't think that that's true," he said. "I think clearly you see more innovation in these last two America's Cups than we've perhaps ever seen in these last, you know, 30-50 years, frankly. "You know, no matter what the critics say about foiling, what I can tell you is that it's already having a dramatic impact in our industry."

"Of course it's a more efficient way of sailing, and therefore that's going to translate in a fairly major way than it already is into a pleasure boat, leisure industry."

Other significant changes to this year's competition include the shift from offshore to inshore racing, which opened up the sport to a new fanbase, and the shortening of the races themselves.—AFP



TOKYO: This file photo taken on June 2, 2016 shows Russell Coutts, CEO of the America's Cup Event Authority delivering a speech next to the America's Cup trophy during a press conference in Tokyo. New Zealand sailing great Russell Coutts dismissed criticism of this year's America's Cup from his home country, ahead of the final match between Team Oracle USA and the Kiwis which starts on June 17, 2017 in Bermuda. — AFP