

UEFA Chief: VAR Could Be Used in Champions League by 2019

MILAN (AFP) - UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said Wednesday that the video assistant referee (VAR) system could be introduced to the Champions League by the 2019-2020 season.

Slovenian Ceferin has taken a cautious approach to the use of VAR despite it being used in the Italian and German leagues this season. FIFA have also approved its use at the upcoming World Cup in Russia.

"Realistically speaking, in the 2019-2020 season we could have it in the Champions League and at the European Championship," Ceferin said in an interview with Italian daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

"The Champions League is like a Ferrari or a Porsche. You can't drive it right away, you need training and testing offline. Everyone has to understand how it works.

"At the moment not everything is clear for the fans and referees, we cannot allow that, and I've seen some comical situations in Germany, the FA Cup and Italy.

"For the top of the top of our sport we need the top of the top rules. We must solve the problems, not try to please someone."

And European football's chief added that he had "some concerns about the World Cup, where we'll have referees who have never officiated with VAR.



UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin does not want to rush to introduce VAR into European competitions

Matthysse Vows Fight 'to the Death' Against Pacquiao



Manny Pacquiao (centre L) will fight Lucas Matthysse (centre R) for the WBA welterweight title in July

MANILA (AFP) - World champion Lucas Matthysse on Wednesday vowed a fight "to the death" in his July title defense against Manny Pacquiao, describing the Philippine boxing legend a diminished star.

But the 35-year-old Argentine -- who took the vacant World

Boxing Association welterweight title in January -- said it was still a "dream-come-true" and "an honor" to face Pacquiao, winner of eight unprecedented world titles in different weight classes.

"Obviously he is still a very great fighter but since the knockout of Marquez, I think he

is not the same fighter anymore," Matthysse said at a joint news conference in Manila, referring to the Filipino's sensational 2012 knockout loss to Juan Manuel Marquez.

Pacquiao, 39, will fight Matthysse for the WBA welterweight belt on July 15 in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur.

The Filipino has 59 wins with 38 knockouts in his career, and is currently a senator in the Philippine parliament.

But Matthysse -- who has 39 wins with 36 knockouts in 43 matches -- said he was not fazed by the status of his opponent.

Pacquiao has not fought since he lost his World Boxing Organization welterweight crown in a shock points defeat to Australia's Jeff Horn last year, and has not knocked out an opponent in nearly nine years.

Ricciardo Wants Two-Year Deal Because of F1 Uncertainty

LONDON (Reuters) - Daniel Ricciardo says he does not want his next Formula One contract to tie him down for the next four years due to the uncertainty over the sport's future and instead wants to sign a two-year deal.

The 28-year-old Australian, winner in China at the weekend and one of the hottest properties on the market, is out of contract with Red Bull at the end of the year.

"I don't want to sign anything too long because I don't know where the sport's going," The Times newspaper quoted him as saying on Wednesday.

Formula One's current engine regulations last only to the end of 2020, when team agreements also expire, and the sport is deciding how the future should look and what kind of engines will be used.

Ferrari have already warned that they could walk away if they do not like what is on offer.

Red Bull could have a new engine partner as early as next season, with the team weighing up whether to stay with Renault or switch to the improving Honda units used by their Toro Rosso team.

Mercedes have yet to announce a new deal for four times world champion Lewis Hamilton, who is also out of contract at the end of this season and has said he wants to see what the future holds before committing.

While Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull's Max Verstappen have long-term deals, there is uncertainty about the futures of Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari and Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes.

Ricciardo would be a strong replacement for either but the Australian told the newspaper that neither team had been in touch so far.

76ers, Mavericks to Play Two Preseason Games in China



Ben Simmons of the Philadelphia 76ers drives to the basket.

NEW YORK (AP) — Dirk Nowitzki's 21st NBA season will include a trip in China.

His Dallas Mavericks will play a pair of preseason games against the Philadelphia 76ers there, 10 years after Nowitzki played for Germany in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. He will become the first player in NBA history to play 21 seasons with the same franchise.

The league announced Tuesday that the Mavericks and 76ers will meet

Oct. 5 in Shanghai and then Oct. 8 in Shenzhen.

The 76ers, who are back in the playoffs this season, have a large international fan base. They are led by Joel Embiid, a native of Cameroon, and Australian rookie Ben Simmons.

Dallas and Philadelphia both will be playing in China for the first time. The games will be the NBA's 25th and 26th in China, which is passionate about basketball and will host the 2019 Basketball World Cup.

Nishikori Beats Medvedev to Reach Monte Carlo Last 16



Japan's Kei Nishikori saw off Daniil Medvedev to reach round three

MONTE CARLO (AFP) - Japan's Kei Nishikori continued his comeback from injury with an impressive 7-5, 6-2 win over Russian Daniil Medvedev on Wednesday to reach the Monte Carlo Masters third round.

The former world number four, who has struggled over the last year with a right wrist injury, followed up his first-round victory against Tomas Berdych with a solid display on centre court.

Nishikori will face either Guillermo Garcia-Lopez or Andreas Seppi for a place in the quarter-finals.

"The first set was a real battle, he was playing a little better than me I think at the beginning," said Nishikori, who is playing the tournament for the first time

in six years. "I just tried to stay calm and not do anything too crazy and stay calm at the baseline."

World number 49 Medvedev started strongly and broke for a 3-1 lead in the first set, but that was the cue for Nishikori to up his game and he broke straight back.

Another break in game 11 gave the 28-year-old the opening set, and despite some late jitters on serve, he wrapped up victory after a one-sided second set on his third match point.

Nishikori, now ranked 36, missed the end of last season through injury and only returned to action in a second-tier Challenger event in January.

Cavendish to Make Racing Return in Yorkshire



Mark Cavendish

LONDON (AFP) - British rider Mark Cavendish will make his return from injury at next month's Tour de Yorkshire.

Cavendish has not raced since crashing in the final stages of Milan-San Remo last month when he broke a rib and sustained an ankle injury, forcing him to miss the Commonwealth Games in Australia.

The 32-year-old will use the Tour de Yorkshire, from May 3-6, as part of his preparations for the Tour de France, which he will start four stages wins from matching Eddy Merck's record of 34.

Another Dimension Data rider, Serge Pauwels, will return to Yorkshire to defend the title he won in 2017.

If Anyone Can Beat Real, Then It's Bayern: Rummenigge

BERLIN (AFP) - Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has thrown down the gauntlet to Real Madrid ahead of next Wednesday's home Champions League semi-final, first leg.

"We have to keep our concentration until next Wednesday, but if anyone can beat Real Madrid at the moment, it's FC Bayern," boasted Rummenigge.

Bayern host the first leg at Munich's Allianz Arena with the return at Madrid's Bernabeu on May 1.

The German giants warmed up by romping to a 6-2 win at Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday in the German Cup semi-final.

"It was a demonstration of the footballing quality of our team," added Rummenigge.

"To be a FC Bayern fan must be paradise at the moment.

"The team clearly has a tremendous quality for achieving everything it wants to."

Bayern could repeat their 2013 treble. They are in the German Cup final on May 19 and have already secured a sixth straight Bundesliga title.

The Bavarian giants ran riot in Leverkusen as Germany forward Thomas Mueller scored twice and helped set up the opening goal in a man-of-the-match performance.