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FOOTBALL

New Dutch manager Xavi vows to restore pride

Former Barcelona midfield great has signed a four-year deal with Dutch through the next World Cup

AFP
Zeist, Netherlands

New Netherlands coach Xavi Hernandez vowed to bring back the attacking footballing philosophy that the Oranje are famous for, believing that this will bring the team out of the doldrums in terms of results.

“If we play good football... taking the initiative, dominating the game, playing in an offensive way... we will be closer to winning and to getting results,” the 46-year-old former midfielder told reporters at his first news conference since being appointed.

The Netherlands were disappointing at the most recent World Cup, topping their group without really convincing and then crashing out to Morocco on penalties in the last-32. “I remember when I was a kid watching the Netherlands, you could watch good football. And this is my target – to play good football in order to be proud,” said Xavi.

Asked which was more important, attractive football or results, Xavi replied: “Both. We are here to compete, we are here to enjoy and we are here to win. I insist, we are here to win.”

In replacing Ronald Koeman on a four-

year deal, Xavi becomes the first foreign boss of the Oranje in 48 years.

The Barcelona great, who won the 2010 World Cup with Spain as a player, beating the Netherlands in the final, had not held a head coaching job since leaving the Camp Nou in 2024.

Xavi, whose first coaching role was with Qatari club Al-Sadd, won the 2023 La Liga title with Barca but was sacked at the end of the following season and replaced by Hansi Flick.

Dutch Director of Football Nigel de Jong, who was on the losing side during the 2010 World Cup final, revealed that they had approached former Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola and ex-Liverpool manager Arne Slot before settling on Xavi. “Well, it’s not a bad position after Guardiola and after Slot, no?” joked Xavi. “I don’t care if I’m the third or I’m the 10th one.”

Xavi’s first match at the helm will be a home Nations League clash with Germany on September 24. Facing him on the sidelines will be another national management rookie, Liverpool legend Jurgen Klopp. “I feel excited, I feel motivated because we are playing against Germany, one of the best teams in Europe, and one of the best coaches in recent years, Jurgen Klopp,” he said.

The Netherlands are still attempting to shed their nearly men tag in international

football. They have lost three World Cup finals, the most of any nation in history to have never lifted the trophy.

A Euro 1988 triumph remains the Netherlands’ only major title, and they have since lost four Euros semi-finals, including two years ago to England. Xavi won four Champions Leagues with the Catalan giants during an illustrious playing career, and sits second on their all-time list of most appearances for Barca, behind only Lionel Messi.

“When he is not playing football, he is watching football, he will become a coach I’m sure,” Guardiola said in 2011, after Xavi had more than met the challenge of filling his boots at the heart of Barca’s midfield.

Nicknamed the “Maquina”, the Machine, in Spain, Xavi was the midfield metronome who came to define a style of football which dominated the game for the best part of a decade. If it were not for Messi, Xavi surely would have won the Ballon d’Or, an award he finished third in three times in a row, behind only Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Andres Iniesta.

Xavi said that his main goal as Dutch coach was to make the country proud of the Oranje again. “We will work with passion, with ambition and with desire, in order that people in Holland, the 18nm people, are proud of our team.”



Xavi Hernandez poses during his unveiling as Netherlands’ new head coach at the Royal Dutch Football Association headquarters in Zeist. (AFP)

PREMIER LEAGUE

‘Special’ forwards inspire Alonso after Chelsea make winning start



Chelsea’s Cole Palmer scores against Fulham at Craven Cottage in London on Monday. (Reuters)

AFP
London

Xabi Alonso hailed Chelsea’s “special” forwards after Morgan Rogers, Cole Palmer and Joao Pedro combined to inspire a 3-2 win at Fulham on Monday in his first game as Blues boss.

Alonso enjoyed the perfect start to his reign thanks to his decision to give Rogers, Palmer and Pedro the freedom to tear into Fulham’s defence. Pedro took just 31 seconds to open the scoring with a composed finish from Palmer’s pass. Rogers showed he can justify the eye-watering £117mn (\$159mn) fee that Chelsea paid to Aston Villa to make him the most expensive British player in history.

The England star bagged Chelsea’s second goal, firing home with aplomb after half-time, scoring from an acute angle to put Chelsea 3-1 up. Chelsea’s entertaining display was a stark contrast to their moribund efforts under Enzo

Maresca and then Liam Rosenior last season. “We were a threat. The three strikers were combining well and creating chances,” Alonso said.

“Overall, the squad is balanced. The special players need to have the freedom but as well they need to have the responsibility to help the team. We know they have the talent to create many chances. It is a good start. But it is not to rely only on them. We need to have control, quality and toughness.”

Alonso was sacked by Real Madrid in January after less than eight months in charge. The former Liverpool midfielder has a point to prove as he tries to rediscover the midas touch that led Bayer Leverkusen to an unexpected German title in 2024. Chelsea had to survive Sanchez’s second mistake, which handed a goal to Gonzalo Garcia, before Alonso could celebrate his debut victory in a pulsating west London derby.

“It was a really intense game. We suffered, we competed, we did whatever it takes in certain moments,” Alonso said. “The early goals helped to get confidence. We had a few chances before their equaliser. At the end, you know

you have to roll your sleeves up and fight to defend your goal.”

Palmer also has a chance to prove the doubters wrong after his struggles last season led to England boss Thomas Tuchel leaving him out of the World Cup squad. He appeared revitalised after the arrival of his good friend Rogers.

The former Manchester City youth team graduates both celebrated their goals with the ‘ice-cold’ gesture that Palmer has made popular after borrowing it from Rogers. “When you grow up, you want to play or do anything with your best friends, so playing football at the best level feels surreal,” Palmer said. Admitting he is keen to get back to his best this season, Palmer added: “Did you not watch the game? I’m only joking! I’m ready you know. It was a difficult season with injuries and whatnot, but through the summer and since I’ve been back, I’ve worked extra hard. I know the talent I’ve got so I can put in performances like that.”

Asked if he wanted to silence the critics, Palmer added: “Normally I’m not an emotional person. “I’m not usually bothered about things in life, but over the summer I rested, I recharged and yeah I’m ready and I’m hungry”

VOLLEYBALL U-17 WORLDS

Defending champions Italy knocked out by Argentina in last 16

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Argentina stunned defending champions Italy while Iran, Venezuela and Brazil advanced to the quarter-finals of the 2026 FIVB Volleyball Boys’ U-17 World Championship in Doha.

Argentina defeated Italy 3-1 in the round of 16, winning 25-20, 25-23, 20-25, 25-16 at Aspire Zone’s Ladies Sports Hall. Italy had topped Group B with a perfect nine points, while Argentina finished third in Group C with three points.

Iran continued their impressive run with a straight-sets victory

over Chinese Taipei, the bronze medallists from the previous edition. The Iranians won 25-18, 25-19, 25-21 to maintain their perfect record after topping Group E with nine points.

Venezuela booked their place in the last eight after edging Bulgaria 3-2 in a closely fought encounter. Venezuela lost the opening two sets 28-30, 17-25 before fighting back to win the next three 25-19, 25-18, 15-12.

Brazil also advanced comfortably, defeating India 3-0 with scores of 25-17, 25-13, 25-14.

France joined the quarter-finalists after overcoming Spain 3-2 in another five-set contest, winning 23-25, 25-19, 25-16, 23-25, 15-10.



Argentina defeated Italy 3-1 in the round of 16 of the 2026 FIVB Volleyball Boys’ U-17 World Championship at the Aspire Zone’s Ladies Sports Hall in Doha yesterday.

COLOMBO TEST

Sri Lanka trail India by 238 runs in second Test

Dinusha fought a lone battle and ended the day on 85 not out

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka were fighting hard to avoid the follow-on when rain brought an early end to play on day three of the second Test against India yesterday, with the hosts on 265-8.

Sri Lanka need a further 39 runs to avoid being asked to bat again, still 238 runs behind India's first-innings total of 503-9 declared.

Only 80.4 of the 98 overs scheduled for the day were possible due to rain. India's fast-bowling coach Morne Morkel said the team intended to wrap up Sri Lanka's innings quickly on day four and enforce the follow-on. "With the amount of rain that is around, it takes (a) lot of time to put the covers on and take covers off," he told reporters. "So given the lead we have, we want to ask them to follow on and put them under pressure."

Wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella was dismissed for a third-ball duck, reducing Sri Lanka to 173-7. However, Sonal Dinusha added 57 runs for the eighth wicket with Keshara Nuwantha (18) to frustrate India.

Nuwantha was dismissed soon after tea but Dinusha found another able ally in fast bowler Lahiru Kumara, who batted for more than an hour as the pair added another 35 runs for the ninth wicket.

Dinusha, the batting all-rounder, who scored 100 and 84 last week in Galle, ended the day on 85 not out. Sri Lanka resumed on their overnight score of 8-2 but lost two wickets in the morning session. India made further inroads after lunch, picking up another three wickets.

Pasindu Sooriyabandara, who replaced Dinesh Chandimal as a concussion substitute in the second innings of the Galle Test, is in the starting side for the first time.

Sooriyabandara was the next-best Sri Lankan batsman with 80, but said he regretted not going on to score "a big one". Krishna was the pick of India's bowlers, claiming three wickets, often troubling the batters with extra bounce. India lead the two-match series 1-0, having won the opening Test in Galle by 165 runs.

BRIEF SCORES: Sri Lanka 265 for 8 (Dinusha 85*, Sooriyabandara 80, Prasidh 3-47) trail India 503 for 9 dec by 238 runs.



India's Prasidh Krishna (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis during the third day of the second Test at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground in Colombo. (AFP)



Sri Lanka's Sonal Dinusha plays a shot as India's wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel looks on during the third day of the second Test at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Captain Root angered by England's off-field 'stupid mistakes'

AFP
London

Joe Root expressed his frustration that a winning return as England Test captain has been overshadowed by another off-field incident that saw Brydon Carse dropped for the second Test against Pakistan.

Carse has been referred to the Cricket Regulator after videos on social media appeared to show the fast bowler being led away by police in handcuffs following an incident at a nightclub in Derby on Saturday.

It is the latest in a series of alcohol-fuelled controversies that have dogged England since a disastrous tour of New Zealand and Australia at the end of last year.

White-ball captain Harry Brook was involved in an altercation with a nightclub bouncer in Wellington and videos circulated of opener Ben Duckett appearing drunk on a night out during the 4-1 Ashes series thrashing by Australia.

In June, former captain Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson were given a written warning and stood down from the second Test against New Zealand after an incident at a London nightclub which came after they broke a curfew.

Stokes announced his shock retirement from international cricket during the third Test a few days later, paving the way for Root to return for a second spell as red-ball captain.

England thrashed Pakistan by an innings and 103 runs inside three days of his first match back in charge last week.

"If I'm being brutally honest, I'm really hacked off. I'm really disappointed that, after last week's performance, we're sat here and we're talking about something that is not related to it at all," Root told a press conference yesterday.

"It's not the isolated incident itself, it's the fact we continuously keep making stupid mis-

takes away from the game and it's detracting from what we are doing on the field."

A curfew on players going out was introduced in January following the troubled tour to Down Under.

Bigger than curfews

However, Root has said he will not impose a curfew as he does not believe it is a productive way to change the culture around the England squad.

"I still don't believe that's the way to go. It's important we create something bigger than that, it's about having something long lasting that we can be proud of," added the 35-year-old.

"Clearly we are not portraying ourselves how we want to and I think we have an opportunity to build a culture that is very strong, that we can be proud of, that is player driven and of course that isn't going to happen overnight.

"We have already had conversations as a team on what is expected from this group of players, what it means to play for England, what it takes to play for England.

"We want to create something that we can be proud of, that people who follow us can be proud of."

Carse was not selected for the first Test and has been withdrawn from the squad for the second Test, which begins at Lord's tomorrow.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan believes an example has to be made to draw a line in the sand and improve off-field behaviour going forward.

"Someone is going to have to get a punishment that sends a shiver down the whole England cricket team and right down through the programme, so that everyone knows that if you misbehave or bring any kind of bad reputation on to this team, you know what's going to come," Vaughan told the BBC.

"It's the only punishment that will really hurt players."



England's Joe Root with Brydon Carse during the first Test against India at Headingley Cricket Ground in Leeds on June 22, 2025. (Reuters)

FORMULA 1

Hamilton apologises for Ferrari radio fury

Reuters
London

Lewis Hamilton has rowed back on sarcastic radio messages he made during Sunday's Dutch Grand Prix, saying he had not presented the "best version" of himself.

The seven-times Formula One world champion was frustrated at being held up behind Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc in the race at Zandvoort and felt he missed out on a podium because of the team's delay in acting.

"Big waste of time guys, good job," he said sarcastically after Leclerc eventually pitted.

Looking back on the weekend, Hamilton praised the team in an Instagram post for their work at the factory in bringing updates and

improving the car. "I've listened back to some of my radio and TV comments," said the Briton.

"In the heat of the moment frustration can come out, especially when you care as deeply as I do. But that wasn't the best version of me. I take responsibility for that, and I'll be better."

Hamilton, who finished fourth in the race and less than a second behind Mercedes' George Russell, said he believed in the team and what Ferrari was building for the future.

"The direction is clear. The belief is there. And the fight is absolutely still on," he said.

Hamilton and Russell are tied on points, with the Mercedes driver ahead on race wins in second place overall and 59 behind his teammate Kimi Antonelli.

The next race is in Italy at Monza, a home round for both Ferrari and Antonelli.



MERCEDES 'HAVEN'T GOT THE MONEY' FOR UPGRADE PACKAGES, SAYS WOLFF

Although Mercedes sits atop the F1 team standings, and has the top two drivers in the individual standings, team principal Toto Wolff is speaking out about funding disparities relative to the team's top competitors.

After a second-place finish in the 2025 team standings, Mercedes' driver pairing of Kimi Antonelli and George Russell combined to win the first six races in 2026 and eight of 10 to start the season.

McLaren, which won the 2025 constructors' championship, was winless in the first 10 races this season before 2025 F1 champion Lando Norris won each of the last two races for the team in Hungary

and Netherlands, bridging F1's midseason break.

The adjusted Ferrari team, anchored by seven-time F1 champion Lewis Hamilton, won the other two races where Mercedes failed to finish on top, in Spain and Great Britain. Ferrari sits in second place in the constructors' standings, 87 points behind Mercedes.

The McLaren and Ferrari surges came on the back of major upgrade packages that have revived each team's season. Wolff said Mercedes has been unable to match those upgrades. "We haven't got the money to put developments on the car," Wolff said. "I said it before, we are trying

to evenly split that through the season, based on our calculations of when we can bring the biggest updates and optimizing the championship points. We just can't do what we can't do.

"That's why it is a development race. If you bring an upgrade, each of the top teams will have a couple of tenths in it, at least, and that's what you lose. So, yeah, the ride has been a bit tougher than at the beginning of the year."

Mercedes driver Kimi Antonelli, who has won six races this season and is atop the F1 standings, didn't hide his feelings when talking after his second-place finish in Sunday's Dutch Grand Prix.

"We're clearly not the fastest car anymore on the grid," said Antonelli, who turns 20 yesterday. "We're probably second or third, at least in (Sunday's) race, and McLaren has taken a huge step, especially since Hungary, since the big upgrade package they brought."

With teams capped in terms of how much money they can spend in a season (\$215mn), Wolff hinted at the possibility that Mercedes is setting much of what is left in that money for a final push later in the season.

"You will see if toward the end of the season (if the other teams) are going to be able to deploy as much stuff onto the

car as they do now," Wolff said. "Someone might have a different strategy in spending more at the beginning and in the middle of the year than toward the end."

"I'm confident with the team. The team has been working super hard on this next package that is coming up and they just want to make sure that it's going to work out well once we put it on," Antonelli added. "So for sure, in this race, it's going to be more difficult, it's going to be challenging, but we're ready to do our best and to maximize every opportunity."

"And then hopefully it's going to be our turn to bring the package that's going to give us a little bit of the upper hand again."

TENNIS

Djokovic and Sabalenka stunned in US Open mixed doubles

Reuters
New York

Top seeds Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka suffered an early exit from the US Open mixed doubles yesterday, falling 1-4 4-2 10-2 to Henry Patten and Katerina Siniakova in their opening match.

Djokovic, a 24-times Grand Slam singles champion, and four-times major winner Sabalenka made a strong start by taking the opening set. But Patten and doubles specialist Siniakova hit back to claim the second before dominating the tiebreak to secure a place in the quarter-finals.

Siniakova sealed the upset in style with an ace out wide on match point, ending the tournament hopes of the star-studded pairing.

"It wasn't looking very good for a while, in this format we play one bad game and all of a sudden the first set's gone," Patten said.

"We knew the same could happen in the second, and we played an amazing tiebreak. Kat acing Novak on match point was great."

The mixed doubles championship is once again being staged in the week before the singles main draw, after organisers revamped the format last year to attract more leading singles players by reducing the field and giving the event a standalone slot on the calendar.

The revamped format proved a commercial success in its debut year, drawing sellout crowds and attracting many of the sport's biggest singles names despite criticism from some doubles specialists, who argued it marginalised established pairings.

Italian duo Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori went on to retain the title by defeating Iga Swiatek and Casper Ruud in last year's final.

Wawrinka bids farewell after missing out on wildcard

Former US Open champion Stan Wawrinka bid an emotional farewell to Flushing Meadows after being denied a wildcard into the main draw, ending hopes of a final

appearance at the year's last Grand Slam in what he has said will be his final season.

The Swiss veteran competed at the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon this year on wildcards but will miss the US Open, where he won the title in 2016, depriving him of a farewell appearance at the year's final major.

The 41-year-old three-times Grand Slam champion was not among the final wildcards announced over the weekend and will also not compete in this week's qualifying tournament.

"This city challenged me. It pushed me. It brought something out of me that few places ever could," Wawrinka wrote on Instagram.



Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka interact during their US Open mixed doubles match in New York yesterday. (AFP)

CYCLING

Pogacar storms to Vuelta a Espana stage four solo win

'It's super good because now I can be calm and confident for next days'

AFP
Andorra la Vella, Andorra

Cycling superstar Tadej Pogacar crushed his Vuelta a Espana rivals to clinch a sensational solo stage four victory yesterday and open up a commanding general classification lead.

The Slovenian, aiming to complete a Grand Tour grand slam, attacked with just over 50 kilometres remaining in Andorra's mountains, and crossed the finish line with the chasing pack languishing.

Jarno Widar and Felix Gall completed the day's podium in second and third respectively, both coming in 2min 39sec behind Pogacar as they beat out four other riders in a sprint to the line.

"It's super good because now I can be calm and confident for the next days," said Pogacar.

"We just keep going day by day and focus on each day after this, because it will be a little bit less stressful for sure."

Already wearing the red jersey after winning the individual time trial on the first stage, UAE Team Emirates-XRG rider Pogacar's bid to carve out a significant lead was foiled on Monday by inclement weather.

Riders had to take shelter from a dangerous hailstorm in a roadside hotel in the Pyrenees and the third stage was abandoned.

So it was a day later than planned that five-time Tour de France winner Pogacar, hoping to become only the fourth rider to claim a Tour-Vuelta double in the same season, took full control.

Racing resumed on Tuesday with a short but tricky 104.8km course in the mountains with four



Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the fourth stage of the Vuelta a Espana 2026, a 104.8km race in Andorra-la-Vella yesterday. (AFP)

categorised climbs. Decathlon led onto the day's second climb, Collada de Beixalis, but Pogacar decided that was his moment to shine.

The 27-year-old, competing in the Vuelta for the first time since 2019, powered ahead, with Gall attempting to follow him.

Pogacar dropped the Austrian, who fell back to the chase group, and flew on ahead, creating a two minute gap.

"(I didn't) want to be also isolated against all the GC riders because they would all play against me - I tried with an attack on the

climb and I just hoped that I could survive until the finish line," explained Pogacar.

"I saw that I could open the gap and I did it and it was pretty tough but a beautiful day out there."

The chase group expanded to nine riders, including Oscar Onley and Primož Roglič, but Pogacar was three minutes ahead up the road at that point. The unstoppable Slovenian pumped his fists then raised his arms aloft as he crossed the finish line.

Pogacar won his first stage at a Grand Tour in Andorra in 2019 at La Vuelta.

"I have such beautiful memories from the first time in Andorra," added Pogacar. "It was really beautiful and it's one of my favorite moments of the career so I will never forget that day."

Widar and Gall edged out four-time Vuelta winner Roglič, Onley, Enric Mas and Sepp Kuss in a sprint to the line, after they had dropped Richard Carapaz and Mattias Skjelmose in the final stages. Today's stage five takes place in Spain, running 173.3km from Falset - south-west of Barcelona - to Roquetes, and offers the chance for a sprint finish.

GOLF

Woods 'excited' about match play coming to Tour Championship

Reuters
New York

Tiger Woods is all in favor of the PGA Tour changing the format of its Tour Championship to include a 32-man match play competition.

PGA Tour CEO Brian Rolapp announced the news on the new format yesterday ahead of the Tour Championship at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta.

The new match play competition will begin in 2028, featuring the top 90 golfers in a stroke-play event to determine the 32 players who will advance to the first of two match play rounds.

"The conclusion of the season should be worthy of the journey it takes to get there," Woods wrote on X.

"Today's announcement is a result of the hard work and passion of our players. Excited to usher in a new era of match play on the PGA Tour."

The FedExCup Playoffs currently are contested over three weeks, with fields of 70, 50 and 30 players competing in stroke play events.

As for the new format, the first week will feature a group

stage, dividing 32 golfers into eight groups of four for head-to-head match play.

The top two players in each group move on to a new course in a Week 2 finale.

In the finale, the remaining 16 players compete in four rounds of match play. The final two undefeated players will battle to be crowned the Tour champion.

In the end, one player will be left standing.

"From the beginning, the goal of the Future Competition Committee was to create an easier-to-follow competitive model for our fans with greater consequence and a stronger season-long narrative," Rolapp said.

"Throughout this process, we listened carefully to our fans, players and partners. One message came through clearly: the culmination of our season should be worthy of the journey it takes to get there."

"The result is a season-ending structure that rewards excellence over the course of the year while building toward a reimagined Tour Championship. We are creating something different, something distinct within professional golf that can resonate far beyond it."

Poulter unsure about his future with LIV Golf

England's Ian Poulter said yesterday he hoped LIV Golf remained afloat next year but was unsure about his own future with the breakaway circuit he has been with since its launch in 2022. Poulter, a five-times Ryder Cup champion, made the admission in a lengthy social media post that came one day after LIV's 2026 season concluded earlier than originally planned, calling his time there "one hell of a ride."

"It would be a real shame if LIV 2.0 doesn't happen," Poulter, 50, said on Instagram. "There are players who would love a strong global platform to play on and countries and fans who want us back. Some players will

stay, some may go. As for me, I may stay or take some time off. I genuinely haven't decided yet." LIV Golf wrapped up its season a week earlier than planned and this month said it had secured a lead investor that will provide a funding boost as it prepares for a future without backing from Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. While LIV Golf has signed a term sheet with a lead investor that would fund the league in 2027, it is a non-binding agreement and has not been finalised. Poulter has never won an individual or team title with LIV but does have 17 career professional wins, including three on the PGA Tour.

ATHLETICS

Kerr and Ingebrigtsen to renew 1,500 rivalry next month

Reuters
London

Tokyo Olympics champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen will renew his fierce 1,500m rivalry with Briton Josh Kerr at World Athletics' inaugural Ultimate Championship next month after both athletes received exceptional invitations for the meet.

The pair have met multiple times over 1,500m, with Norway's Ingebrigtsen holding a significant head-to-head advantage over Kerr, though they have not faced each other over the distance since the Zurich Diamond League meeting in 2024.

Kerr took bronze behind his rival in Tokyo but beat the Norwegian to win gold at the 2023 world championships.

The Scot also took silver behind Cole Hocker at the Paris Olympics two years ago, while Ingebrigtsen finished fourth.

The pair have traded barbs over the years, with Ingebrigtsen once



referring to Kerr as "just the next guy" and boasting he could beat him blindfolded, while Kerr has said the Norwegian has major weaknesses.

Ingebrigtsen stoked the rivalry earlier this month when he said he was disappointed not to see Kerr at the European Championships and that the sport was being

ruined by athletes skipping major competitions. Kerr broke the mile world record in July at the London Diamond League and followed that up with a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in front of home fans in Glasgow, before skipping the European Championships to manage his workload.

"I've made some choices this

season that have created plenty of noise, but I've always wanted to prove myself in the biggest races, against the best in the world," Kerr said in a statement on Monday.

The stacked 1,500m field at the September 11 to 13 meet in Budapest also includes American Hocker and Portugal's world champion Isaac Nader.

OLYMPIC CHAMPION BRIGNONE TO UNDERGO NEW KNEE OPERATION

Double Olympic champion Federica Brignone is to undergo surgery again on her left knee before deciding whether to continue for another season, she announced yesterday.

The 36-year-old injured knee ligaments during the Italian championships in April 2025. She managed to regain fitness in time to win two gold medals on home snow at the Milan-Cortina Games, in super-G and giant slalom, earlier this year.

But Brignone cut her season short after the Olympics to continue her recovery, but has now decided on surgery.

"My leg continues to improve, but unfortunately, during certain activities and while skiing, I am still experiencing pain," Brignone said. "For this reason, together with the medical team, we have decided to proceed with surgery..."

"The main objective will be to remove the plate and clean up the area, with the possibility of also addressing the meniscus."

Brignone said earlier this year that the 2026/27 season would likely be her last.

"If I do a last dance or not depends on my health and my desire and motivation," she told Olympics.com in April.

The new World Cup campaign begins on the weekend of 24-25 October in Soelden, Austria, with a giant slalom race.

The 2027 world championships will take place in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, in early February.

Brignone is also a two-time world champion and won the overall World Cup title in both 2020 and 2025.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Tottenham need winning mentality, says coach De Zerbi

Spurs started their league campaign with a 3-0 loss at Brentford

Reuters
London

Tottenham Hotspur need to develop a winning mentality, manager Roberto De Zerbi said as his big-spending side seek to bounce back in a League Cup second-round clash with Charlton Athletic after a heavy defeat in their Premier League opener.

Spurs started their league campaign with a 3-0 loss at Brentford on Saturday despite a recruitment drive that has brought in midfielders Sandro Tonali and Mateus Fernandes plus defenders Andy Robertson, Marcos Senesi and Jan Paul van Hecke.

The North London club strengthened further yesterday with the signing of Brazilian winger Savio from Manchester City.

The deal took Tottenham's spending to £322mn (\$439.08mn), including add-ons, as they overhaul the squad after narrowly avoiding relegation by finishing 17th last season.

Asked about the importance of the League Cup, De Zerbi told reporters: "For me it's like the Premier League. We are not in the position to make differences. We need to get used to winning the matches."

De Zerbi, who was appointed on a long-term contract in March, successfully guided Spurs to safety after taking charge for the final seven games of last season. "We have to change the mood. We can because we already did last season ...," the Italian said.

"I think the environment has to change, the players inside and the people inside have to change this mentality. It's a challenge. When I said we have to become a team it's about this. The quality of the players we had enough of against Brentford to do much better."

De Zerbi also spoke about Savio, whose full name is Savio Moreira de Oliveira. The 22-year-old, previously known as Savinho, has decided to wear "Savio" on his number 17 shirt.

"In terms of one-to-one, he's one of the best



Roberto De Zerbi, who was appointed on a long-term contract in March, successfully guided Spurs to safety after taking charge for the final seven games of last season.

players, can play on either side," De Zerbi said. "If you analyse the best wingers in the world they score 10-15 goals a season and he has the qualities."

Spurs received a fitness boost ahead of the Charlton tie, with new captain Micky van de Ven set to return to the bench after recovering from an injury on the club's pre-season tour.

Right back Pedro Porro will also be among the substitutes following his delayed return to pre-season training after helping Spain win the World Cup. "I don't know if Savio is ready to play, if everything is ok to play or on the bench. Great news to have Van de Ven and Porro. (James) Maddison suffered a small injury to the shoulder," De Zerbi said.

LA LIGA

Mourinho happy with squad despite losing out on Rodri

AFP
Madrid

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho said he is "very happy" with his squad, which he considers complete despite missing out on midfielder Rodri, later signed by rivals Barcelona.

Los Blancos revamped their squad this summer, signing six players including record arrival Yan Diomande, Bernardo Silva and Marc Cucurella.

However Madrid's approach for Rodri broke down, meaning beyond former Man City playmaker Silva, they have not strengthened in midfield.

"For me the squad is closed, but the market is still open -- you never know if a player will come and say 'I've been benched twice and I want to leave,'" Mourinho told reporters.

"In theory no (more deals)... but something could always happen... In my head the squad is closed closed, and I have not asked for anyone. I am very happy with the players I have."

With midfield maestros Luka Modric and Toni Kroos departing in 2024 and 2025, Madrid have struggled to control matches. Mourinho's side snatched a late 2-1 win at Espanyol on Saturday

in their La Liga opener, starting with Silva and Federico Valverde together in midfield.

Mourinho said French defensive midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni was not ready to play against Real Sociedad today. "He's got a problem, the holiday time wasn't enough (for him to recover), seeing the games approaching the player wanted to try... but we've decided that you can't start a season in suffering," explained the coach.

"You can finish a season suffering, the last couple of months, but you can't start in August not at 100 percent. So we decided with him, the staff, the medical department, to get him to return at 100 percent."

Mourinho said he had faith in Uruguay international Valverde as a midfielder, despite previous coaches using him in a variety of different roles, including right-back and right winger. "For me he is a player for the centre of the pitch," added Mourinho. "Depending on the opponent and our objectives, he might be more set in his position or more mobile."

Mourinho said in modern football, players' positions were less relevant. "I don't want to identify Tchouameni as the No. 6, Camavinga No. 6, Fede No. 8, Bernardo No. 10... things dilute during games."



Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho (centre) celebrates with his players after the win against Espanyol on Saturday. (Reuters)

Spurs splash out £75mn for Man City winger Savinho



London: Tottenham signed Brazilian winger **Savinho** from Manchester City for a reported initial fee of £75mn (\$102mn) to take their overall outlay in the transfer market beyond £300mn this window.

The 22-year-old failed to establish himself as a first-team regular during two seasons at City. But Spurs are hoping he can add pace and creativity to their attack after narrowly escaping relegation from the Premier League last season.

"It's taken a while but I'm very happy to be here," Savinho said in a Tottenham statement. "It's a wonderful opportunity at a brilliant club with one of the best managers in the world. As soon as I spoke to the head coach I knew I had to come. He told me he wants to help me reach the highest level and I believe we can do that together, as a team."

Roberto De Zerbi's impact at the end of last season helped Spurs avoid dropping into the second tier of English football for the first time in 49 years. But the Italian's big spending revolution of the Tottenham squad got off to a miserable start in a 3-0 defeat to Brentford on the opening weekend of the Premier League season.

Savinho adds to the expensive arrivals of Mateus Fernandes, Sandro Tonali and Jan Paul van

Hecke, while Marcos Senesi, Andy Robertson and Martin Dubravka have also joined on free transfers.

"Savio is a player who brings energy, imagination and quality in wide positions. He has the courage to attack defenders and the ability to change a game with his creativity," said De Zerbi. "We're very pleased to have him with us, and I'm looking forward to working with him, helping him continue to grow and seeing him bring his personality to the team."

City could reportedly receive up to an extra £10mn in add-ons. There is also likely to be further business between the two clubs with Egyptian forward Omar Marmoush also set to depart Manchester for north London before the end of the window next week.

Savinho joined from Troyes, one of a group of clubs controlled by City's owners, for £30mn in 2024. He rose to prominence during a blistering loan spell at another City Football Group club Girona, but has failed to recreate that form so far in England.

In 84 appearances, Savinho scored just seven times as City missed out on Premier League or Champions League glory in Pep Guardiola's final two seasons in charge.

France striker Nkunku returns to RB Leipzig on loan

Berlin: France forward Christopher Nkunku has agreed a return to RB Leipzig, signing on-loan from AC Milan for the season, the German Bundesliga club announced. Nkunku left Leipzig in 2023 for Chelsea before joining Milan last summer, where he scored just eight times in 35 appearances for the Italians.

He scored 70 goals in a previous four-year spell with Leipzig, which included two German Cup successes and being named Germany's player of the year in 2022.

The 28-year-old made the last of his 18 Les Bleus appearances in November. "When I heard of the opportunity to join RB Leipzig, I immediately wanted to say yes," Nkunku said in a club statement.

"I'm very happy to be back here. My connection to RB Leipzig is very special. Even after leaving the club, I continued to keep a close eye on what was happening here. I'm now ready to add a new chapter to my time here at RBL."

ETHIOPIA BIDS TO HOST AFCON IN 2028

Ethiopia has formally submitted its bid to host the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) in 2028, which would be its first in more than half a century.

The Ethiopian Football Federation confirmed its bid in a post on X late Monday. It last hosted the continental tournament in 1976.

Ethiopia has the second biggest population in Africa, with around 130 million people, and its capital serves as the headquarters of the African Union (AU). It has the highest altitude of any African capital at 2,300 metres.

The bid faces numerous obstacles, including ongoing insurgencies in the country's two most populous states, Amhara and Oromia, as well as threats of renewed civil war between the federal government and the northern Tigray region.

The Ethiopian team ranks 143rd out of 211 by FIFA, and it

last played in the biennial AFCON tournament in 2022, when it was eliminated in the group stage.

"Ethiopia has formally submitted its bid to CAF to host AFCON 2028," its federation said on X, "reaffirming the nation's full readiness to host Africa's biggest footballing event."

The biennial AFCON was last hosted by Morocco, while next year's tournament will be co-hosted by Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The tournament will shift to a new schedule -- to be held every four years from 2028, to align with other FIFA competitions. Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which are facing deadly violence from jihadist groups, have expressed their desire to co-host AFCON 2032, according to their football federations.

MAN CITY SET TO SIGN BOUADDI FROM LILLE

Manchester City are set to sign midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi from

French side Lille, with British media reporting the Premier League club could pay up to 100mn euros (\$116.80mn) for the 18-year-old.

The Athletic reported City will pay an initial fee of 95mn plus up to five million in add-ons for the Morocco international.

Bouaddi would become one of City's most expensive signings, following the arrival of Elliot Anderson from Nottingham Forest in a reported 116mn pounds (\$158.18mn) deal earlier this summer.

Primarily a defensive midfielder, Bouaddi made 30 Ligue 1 appearances as Lille finished third and secured qualification for the Champions League.

Bouaddi also made his senior debut for Morocco in May and was later included in the country's 26-man World Cup squad. He made his tournament debut against Brazil and started five of Morocco's six matches as they reached the quarter-finals.

FOCUS

Baleba joins as United boost midfield options

AFP
Manchester

Cameroon's Carlos Baleba has joined Manchester United from Brighton and Hove Albion, the Premier League giants announced.

The 22-year-old is the third midfielder signed by the Red Devils during the summer transfer window. "Manchester United is pleased to confirm that Carlos Baleba has joined the club, subject to registration," the 20-time Premier League champions said in a statement.

His reported £70mn (\$95mn) fee takes United's spending on midfield reinforcements to more than £150mn in this window. He joins Belgium's Youri Tielemans and Andrey Santos of Brazil in a new-look United midfield after veteran Casemiro left at the end of last season.

"Baleba has already established himself as one of the most talented midfielders in the Premier League," said United. "During the 2024/25 season, his combined number of tackles and interceptions was the sixth-highest among midfielders in the league, while he also ranked fourth-highest for progressive ball carries per 90 minutes."

United had been interested in signing Baleba a year ago following two impressive seasons



Manchester United signed Cameroon midfielder Carlos Baleba from Brighton in a £70mn deal yesterday.

for Brighton, but baulked at the south coast club's asking price. His last season was far less impressive, but that did not put off the Old Trafford club.

"It is an incredible feeling to join the club of my dreams," said Baleba. "Playing at Old Traf-

ford is always special but the opportunity to do so as a Manchester United player will be a real honour. I cannot wait to work with Michael Carrick; his experience and knowledge of the game make him the perfect coach to help me to reach the highest level."

Baleba had joined Brighton from French team Lille in 2023 and made 112 appearances for the Seagulls, including 35 last season. He was not property a year ago before his star waned a touch during the following campaign.

But it is his athleticism and combativity which have convinced United to sign him. He ranked "in the top eight per cent of players for combined tackles and interceptions as well as the top one per cent for second balls won" last season, United said.

"Carlos is an elite midfielder with immense potential to develop further," said United's director of football, Jason Wilcox, who also pointed to Baleba's determination to join the club. "He brings a unique combination of qualities that will really complement our squad."

Baleba is still recovering from an ankle injury he suffered during pre-season. He has signed a five-year contract with the option of a further year, according to reports.

The fee is £65n plus a potential £5mn in add-ons. He will compete with Tielemans, Santos, Kobbie Mainoo and Mason Mount for a midfield starting berth at Old Trafford.