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BASKETBALL

Al Janoub stages World Cup qualifier as China beat Qatar

The venue will be one of four arenas hosting games at the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Local Organising Committee of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 officially opened Al Janoub Arena in its new configuration yesterday in front of a capacity crowd of 8,200 fans, following its transformation from a football stadium into a basketball arena. The venue will be one of four arenas hosting games at the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

The opening coincided with celebrations marking exactly one year to go until the start of the tournament, with Al Janoub Arena hosting the game between Qatar and China in the World Cup Asian Qualifiers.

The game was attended by HE Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs; Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee; HE Sheikh Saud Ali al-Thani, President of FIBA; Andreas Zagklis, Secretary General of FIBA and Dr. Ahmad Abdulla Al Buenain, Director General of the Local Organising Committee for the FIBA World Cup 2027

Qatar suffered a 57-83 defeat to China in a game that marked the start of their second round campaign. Qatar are competing in the qualifiers as part of their preparations for the World Cup, despite having already secured their place in the tournament as the host nation.

After briefly trailing in the opening quarter, China seized control with a decisive early run and never looked back and outscoring the hosts in every period to seal a dominant road win.

The momentum shifted late in the first quarter, when Mike Lewis II knocked down the first of two free throws to put Qatar ahead 12-11 after the score had been tied at 11-11. But China responded immediately and emphatically.

Over the remainder of the opening quarter they unleashed a 12-1 run, holding Qatar to 0-of-5 from the field while connecting on 4-of-6 from the floor and committing no turnovers. That surge opened up a 12-23 lead and set the tone for the rest of the game.

Centre Hansen Yang stole the spotlight for China, finishing with 15 points, 9 rebounds and 2 blocks. He shot an efficient 7-of-11 from the field, including 6-of-9 from two-point range.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs HE Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani attended the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 Asian Qualifiers between Qatar and China at Al Janoub Arena yesterday. Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, FIBA President HE Sheikh Saud Ali al-Thani and Secretary General of FIBA Andreas Zagklis were also present.

China's balanced attack featured strong support from forward Jinqui Hu, who contributed 10 points and 8 rebounds, and guard Sanning Liao, who added 11 points, 4 assists. Playmaker Mingxuan Hu chipped in 12 points and 4 assists without a turnover, providing steady leadership in the backcourt.

On the other side, Mike Lewis II was Qatar's standout performer, tallying 14 points, 2 rebounds, 1 assist, and 2 steals. He shot 5-of-9 from the field, including 3-of-4 from deep, but received little help as China's defense clamped down.

China's biggest run came late in the third quarter and spilled into the fourth, as they outscored Qatar 0-10 over. That burst turned a 48-61 lead into a commanding 48-71 advantage, effectively putting the game to bed. Mingxuan led the charge, scoring 8 points on perfect shooting from the field and the line during the stretch.

Qatar's largest lead was 3 points, achieved early left in the first quarter at 5-2. But that was as good as it got for the hosts. China's biggest lead reached 26 points with 39 seconds remaining at 57-83, which also stood as the final margin. After falling behind early, China took control and never allowed Qatar to threaten again.

The World Cup will take place from August 27 to September 12, 2027, bringing together 32 national teams for 92 games across four venues: Lusail Arena, Al Janoub Arena, Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah

Arena and Al Duhail Arena. The evening also featured a range of entertainment and interactive activities for fans, adding to the atmosphere surrounding the opening of Al Janoub Arena and the Qatar-China game and encouraging greater engagement throughout the venue. The activities complemented the on-court action and provided fans with a broader event experience, offering an early glimpse of the atmosphere the Local Organizing Committee aims to deliver during the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

FIRST TICKET PASSES LAUNCHED
The one-year-to-go celebrations also coincided with the launch of the first ticket passes for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, now available to fans through the tournament's official website, marking another important step on the road to next year's global event.

The options include the Lusail Series Pass, covering all 32 games to be played at Lusail Arena; the Final Phase Pass, covering all 12 games from the quarter-Finals through to the final; and the Follow My Team Qatar Pass, which includes Qatar's five Group Phase games – three in the first round and two in the second round.

The Follow My Team Qatar Pass gives fans the opportunity to secure their seats early and support the national team throughout their World Cup campaign on home soil.



Qatar and China players battle for the ball at Al Janoub Arena yesterday.



A range of entertainment and interactive activities were held for fans during the opening of Al Janoub Arena yesterday.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Late strike helps Rayyan beat Wakrah, Shamal rally to sink Gharafa



Roger Guedes opened the scoring for Al Rayyan against Al Wakrah at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Rayyan and Al Shamal secured victories in the Doha Bank Stars League yesterday, with Al Rayyan edging Al Wakrah 2-1 at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium and Al Shamal coming from behind to beat Al Gharafa 3-1 at Khalifa International Stadium.

Roger Guedes opened the scoring for Al Rayyan just before half-time, nodding home a precise cross from Gabriel Pereira. Early in the second half, Omar Al Osad nearly restored parity for Al Wakrah in the 48th minute, but his right-footed attempt from outside the box sailed just over the bar.

The Blue Wave finally equalised in the 73rd minute when Amine Zouhrouh capitalised on a poor clearance by goalkeeper Mahmud Abunada, deftly lobbing the ball into the net.

Deep into stoppage time, Ahmed Alaeldin struck the decisive winner for Al Rayyan on the stroke of full time. The late goal ensured coach Vicente Moreno's side maintained their perfect start to the season and secured all three points in a hard-fought contest.

Al Shamal, meanwhile, came from a goal down to beat Al Gharafa and register their first win of the season. The result lifted Shamal after their opening-round draw, while Gharafa suffered their first defeat following their win-



Al Shamal came from a goal down to beat Al Gharafa 3-1 at Khalifa International Stadium.

ning start. Substitutes made the difference for Shamal after a goalless first half. Fabricio Diaz opened the scoring for The Cheetahs in the 52nd minute, but Al Shamal hit back through Omar Mohammed (56th), Ali Asadalla (90+1) and Baghdad Bounedjah (90+8).

After a subdued first half, Al Gharafa's Uru-

guayan midfielder Diaz lit up the proceedings with a fabulous strike from outside the box after being set up by Amro Surag. The move came after Yacine Brahimi's shot was blocked by Al Shamal goalkeeper Babacar Seck.

Al Shamal equalised minutes later when Omar seized on a rebound and deposited the ball into the top-right corner.

Both sides then missed several chances before Al Shamal took the lead at the end of regulation time. Asadalla flicked in a fine cross from Omar, delivered from the left of the six-yard box.

There was more delight for Al Shamal in the dying seconds of stoppage time when Bounedjah, on a counter-attack, lifted his shot over Al Gharafa goalkeeper Khalifa Ndiaye, who had advanced more than 10 yards outside the box.

Defending champions Al Sadd will also be in action today when they visit Qatar SC at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. Al Sadd opened their title defence with a 3-1 victory over Al Ahli and currently lead the standings on goal difference. Qatar SC, meanwhile, are looking for their first victory after drawing 2-2 with Al Wakrah.

REMAINING FIXTURES
TODAY: Al Ahli vs Lusail at Al Thumama Stadium, 5:15pm; Qatar SC vs Al Sadd at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, 7:30pm.
Tomorrow: Al Duhail vs Al Arabi at Al Bayt Stadium, 5:15pm; Al Shahania vs Al Salliya at Lusail Stadium, 7:30pm

FOCUS

Smith and Cox revive England after Abbas strikes

AFP
London

Jamie Smith and Jordan Cox both scored fifties as England recovered from a top-order collapse against Pakistan to 248-9 when bad light ended yesterday's opening day of the second Test at Lord's.

Veteran paceman Mohammad Abbas took three wickets for four runs in 16 balls, including the prize scalp of England captain Joe Root for just four, as the hosts slumped to 36-3 after Pakistan won the toss in helpful conditions for seam bowling.

But Smith's 61 and 55 from Cox - his second fifty in successive Test innings -- got England back into the game and turned attention away from the late-night drinking incident that saw fast bowler Brydon Carse dropped from their squad.

Abbas had fine figures of 4-56 in 15 overs and fellow seamer Mohammad Ali 3-67 in 17 when the umpires ruled it was unsafe to continue despite the floodlights illuminating the ground.

Pakistan were woeful in all departments during an innings and 103-run defeat in the first of a three-Test series at Headingley last week.

They did, however, have the worst of the conditions after losing the toss before being dismissed for meagre totals of 171 and 135.

It was a different story in London, with Pakistan captain Babar Azam, the only change to either side as he returned from a finger injury in place of stand-in skipper Salman Ali Agha, opting to field on a green-tinged pitch under grey skies following a rain delay.

Abbas, who has had stints with several English counties, was soon into his stride on a ground where he was named player of the match after taking eight wickets in Pakistan's victory in their last Test at Lord's in 2018.

The 36-year-old was fortunate, however, when Emilio Gay glanced a legside ball only for diving wicket-keeper Mohammad Rizwan to hold an excellent one-handed catch.

Ben Duckett fell for 17 when lbw to an Abbas nip-backer.

Medium-pace bowling with the 'keeper standing up to the stumps has plagued England in recent times and Rizwan was up to the wicket when Abbas pinned Root on the back leg.

Harry Brook was then bowled for 15 by a superb Ali delivery that jagged back, with England 80-4 at lunch.

Dan Lawrence had made 10 when he flicked to midwicket only for Shan Masood to drop a

seemingly routine catch. Pakistan's fielding was also poor as they tumbled to the bottom of the World Test Championship table with defeat in Leeds.

But when Lawrence turned spinner Ali Usman legside and set off for a non-existent single, only to be sent back by Cox, he was run out by Masood's accurate throw from mid-wicket to Rizwan.

Cox, however, struck consecutive legside boundaries off Usman to complete an 88-ball fifty including seven fours.

His partnership of 67 with Smith ended when substitute fielder Agha, belying Pakistan's deserved reputation as a poor fielding side, held a superb slip catch off Khurram Shahzad.

Smith, whose fifty came from a mere 63 balls, was clean bowled by Ali and two balls later the paceman dismissed tailender Ollie Robinson with another nip-backer.

Jofra Archer launched Abbas for a straight six before the bowler had his revenge, with Gus Atkinson - who has a Test century at Lord's to his credit - a useful 34 not out at stumps.

BRIEF SCORES: England 248 for 8 (Smith 61, Cox 55, Abbas 4-56, Mohammad Ali 3-67) **vs Pakistan**



Pakistan's Muhammad Abbas celebrates taking the wicket of England's Joe Root on day one of the second Test at Lord's cricket ground in London yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Dinusha ton helps Sri Lanka draw second India Test

INDIA TOILED ON DAY 5, MANAGING JUST THREE WICKETS

AFP
Colombo

Sonal Dinusha hit an unbeaten 133 as Sri Lanka staged a stunning comeback to draw the second Test against India in Colombo yesterday.

Sri Lanka declared their second innings on 429-9 in the final session on day five after being made to follow on and the teams then shook hands before the 15 mandatory overs began.

India won the opening Test and claimed the two-match series 1-0.

"I don't think we could have done anything differently," said India skipper Shubman Gill. "A lot of positives for us, learning from the opposition. The way they came back, it was tremendous to see."

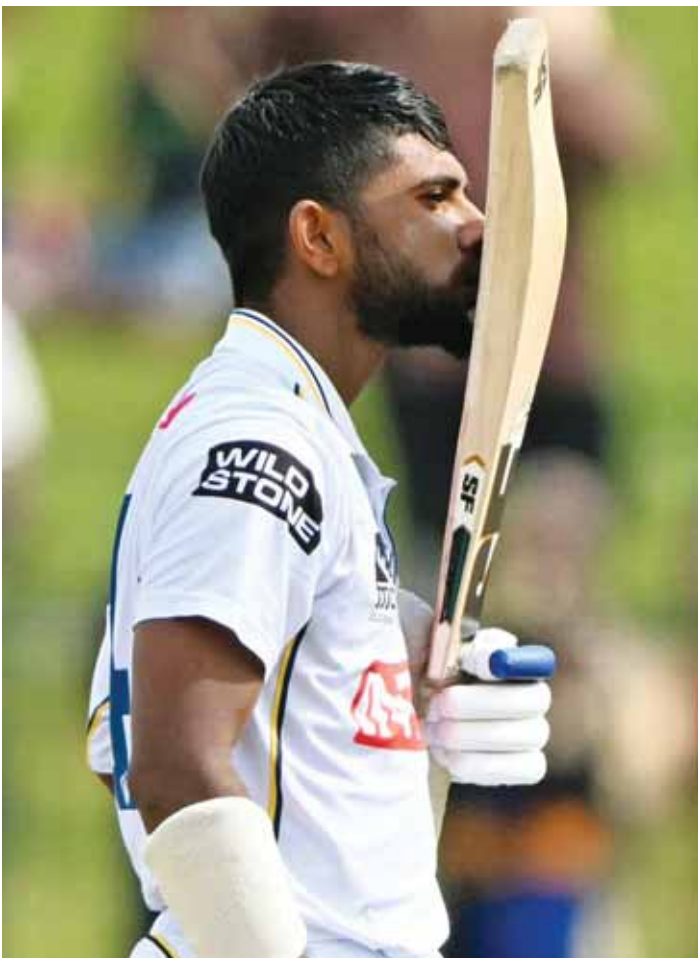
Gill acknowledged a "brilliant game", saying "Test cricket won today".

Sri Lanka, who resumed on 229-6, extended their lead to 216 runs, the left-handed Dinusha standing out with twin centuries in the match after his 103 in the first innings.

Dinusha, 25, batted superbly under pressure in just his fifth Test to be named player of the match after he made sure Sri Lanka picked up valuable points in the World Test Championship.

"He is a smart cricketer, this innings today would go down in history in Sri Lankan cricket as one of the greatest match-saving knocks," Sri Lanka coach Gary Kirsten told reporters. "It was great to watch."

Dinusha became only the eighth Sri Lankan to score hundreds in



Sri Lanka's Sonal Dinusha celebrates after scoring a century during the fifth day of the second Test against India at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

both innings of a Test, joining an exclusive list including Duleep Mendis, Asanka Gurusinha, Aravinda de Silva, T.M. Dilshan, Kumar Sangakkara, Kamindu Mendis

and Dhananjaya de Silva. The match-saving hundred was Dinusha's third in Test cricket and also his career-best score.

Dinusha, who made 100 and

84 in the opening Test in Galle, amassed an impressive 420 runs in the series.

Indian batter Devdutt Padikkal was named player of the series for his 328 runs, including centuries in both matches.

India had looked favourites to wrap up the Test until day four, but overnight batters Dinusha and Keshara Nuwantha (46) put on 112 runs for the seventh wicket to turn the match on its head.

"It's all about finding the talent," said de Silva, the Sri Lanka skipper. "I think the selectors and coach gave me that opportunity to get the youngsters in and let them really go there and do the job for the country."

Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar broke the stand in the first over after lunch to have Nuwantha caught at second slip following a wicketless first session.

Veteran spinner Ravindra Jadeja then had Prabath Jayasuriya out for two but Dinusha kept up the fight with the lower-order.

India, who posted 503-9 declared in their first innings, enforced the follow-on after they bowled out Sri Lanka out for 290.

The hosts were in trouble at 218-6 in their second innings before Dinusha and Nuwantha ground their way towards a draw.

India stay fifth in the WTC standings, with Sri Lanka sixth.

BRIEF SCORES: India 503 for 9 dec (Padikkal 117, Jurel 115*, Asitha 4-106) **drew with Sri Lanka 290** (Dinusha 103, Sooriyabandara 80, Prasidh 3-52, Suthar 3-85) **and 429 for 9 dec** (Dinusha 133*, Sooriyabandara 92, Jadeja 3-94, Suthar 3-121).

MOTORSPORT

Pramac Yamaha replace Miller with Guevara for MotoGP 2027 season

AFP
Paris

Australian rider Jack Miller will exit the MotoGP stage at the end of the season after his team Pramac Yamaha announced yesterday that they would not be extending his contract.

The Tuscany-based team later confirmed that his seat will be taken by Pramac's Moto2 rider Izan Guevara.

The 31-year-old Miller is 19th in the standings this season having picked up 23 points with a best finish of eighth in Hungary.

In his MotoGP career he has won four races, claimed 23 podiums and two pole positions.

"I still believe I have more to offer and more to achieve, and I'll take that motivation with me into whatever comes next," said Miller who appears set to join the Yamaha Superbike team.

"I'm looking forward to the next chapter of my career and seeing where that journey will lead.

"But before then, there are still races left this season, and my full focus remains on finish-

ing the year strongly with the team."

The first of those races comes this weekend in Aragon where he will again look to put Pramac, who he joined in 2025 from Ducati, at the front of the grid.

"Beyond his contribution on track, Jack brought tremendous energy to our team," said Yamaha MD Paolo Pavesio.

"His positive attitude, spirit and ability to build strong relationships in the garage made him a pleasure to work with."

Pramac are now looking to the 22-year-old Spaniard Guevara, who won the Moto3 world title in 2022, to step up from Moto2 and partner Toprak Razgatlioglu.

"We have known Izan's talent for many years," said Pavesio.

"The speed he demonstrated on his way to becoming Moto3 world champion left no doubt about his potential.

"His work ethic, determination, consistency, and ability to continuously improve have confirmed that he is ready to take the next step.

"It is exciting for Yamaha to welcome such a talented young rider into our MotoGP project."

Ogura to miss Aragon MotoGP after hand surgery

Japanese rider Ai Ogura, who is third in the MotoGP world championship standings, has undergone successful surgery on a hand injury, his team Aprilia-Trackhouse said yesterday.

The 25-year-old, racing in just his second MotoGP season, suffered the injury while motocross riding in Japan.

"Ai's left thumb fracture has been plated and an assessment on his condition will be made over the coming weekend before a rehabilitation plan is established," the team said in a statement.

"While we hope that Ai will be fit to attend the San Marino Grand Prix, starting in 15 days, at this stage it is too early to confirm. Wishing him a speedy recovery."

Ogura is only 37 points behind championship leader Jorge Martin with 10 races of the season remaining.

But he will miss out on valuable points this weekend at the Aragon Grand Prix in Alcaniz, after crashing out at Silverstone last time out.

Ogura claimed his maiden top-class win at the Dutch MotoGP in June and has posted three other podium finishes this year.

Marco Bezzecchi is second in the standings, six points ahead of Ogura, with Marc Marquez three points behind the Trackhouse man in fourth.

CYCLING

Pogacar holds off Mas to claim Vuelta stage six victory

AFP
Castellón de la Plana, Spain

Tadej Pogacar outsprinted Enric Mas to claim Vuelta a Espana stage six victory yesterday, his third stage win of the race.

The Slovenian superstar and Mas outshone their rivals on the gravel in the stage's final climb, and Pogacar held off the Spaniard when arriving in Castellon de la Plana to extend his general classification lead.

Five-time Tour de France winner Pogacar, the overwhelming favourite for the Vuelta, is aiming to complete a Grand Tour grand slam having also won the Giro d'Italia in 2024.

Ramses Debruyne grabbed the third spot on the podium, finishing in a group including Primoz Roglic, Richard Carapaz and Felix

Gall, 46 seconds behind the leaders.

UAE Team Emirates XRG's Pogacar, who had a brief scare as he came off the road on the final descent, now leads Movistar's Mas by 3min 34sec and compatriot Roglic by 4min 21sec overall.

Mas overtook Pogacar on the summit of the last climb, which came out of the blue for the Slovenian. "I was really surprised on the top, he flew past by me like a rocket," said Pogacar. "I was just happy to be with him in the last 10 kilometres into the headwind because I had no water, it was nice to have a compatriot next to me."

"Then in the end, I knew that I can beat him in the sprint, but I still appreciated that he committed full and I also committed full to the finish line. So chapeau to him, it was a great race."

There was a big battle to get into the break on the 177.5 kilometre

ride from Alcossebre but it took a long time for an escape to form.

Finally, 15 riders moved clear and established a two-and-a-half minute gap on the peloton with 40km remaining.

The break split up on the final climb of Puerto El Bartolo, which peeled onto a gravel road, where Pogacar attacked and picked off the riders ahead of him. Mas was hot on his tail and the Spaniard dug deep to charge past Pogacar and head over the top of the climb ahead.

Pogacar came off the road and into a grassy section after misjudging a corner, but he swiftly recovered to get back on Mas's trail.

"He simply went off the track, and when I turned around, he was already on my wheel," said Mas.

Four-time Vuelta winner Roglic, Gall and Debruyne were chasing the front two, but Pogacar and Mas worked well together to

keep their advantage. Pogacar lead out towards the finish line but Mas simply did not have the kick to come around him.

"Pogi is Pogi, and we have to take it one day at a time - I'm second overall, I'm feeling good," said Mas. It was a bad day for Oscar Onley, who lost over a minute-and-a-half on his general classification rivals. Earlier in the day, Netcompany Ineos rider Josh Tarling abandoned the race with around 120km of the stage left, with his team not giving a reason.

The Briton's brother Finlay Tarling died in the Tour of Portugal after a crash with a vehicle, but Josh decided to race in Spain in honour of his sibling.

"Josh Tarling's brave La Vuelta has come to an end and he's decided to stop. We couldn't be prouder," said Netcompany Ineos on social media.



Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates as he crosses the finish line of the sixth stage of the Vuelta a Espana 2026, a 177.4 km race between Alcossebre and Castellon de la Plana yesterday. (AFP)

ATHLETICS

Dos Santos sets new 400m hurdles world record

RUSSELL BREAKS WOMEN'S 100M HURDLES WORLD RECORD

AFP
Zurich

Brazil's Alison Dos Santos smashed the world record in the men's 400m hurdles at the Diamond League meet in Zurich yesterday.

Dos Santos clocked a sensational 45.80 seconds to beat the previous mark of 45.94sec set by Norway's Karsten Warholm when winning gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

Asked whether he thought he might break the world record, Dos Santos was in no doubt: "I did, I did!"

"As soon as I knew I was coming here, I was excited. The weather's good, the track's amazing"

Dos Santos, the 2022 world champion who won world silver last year as well as two Olympic bronzes, will leave Zurich with a cheque for \$80,000 for having broken the record.

Dos Santos, drawn in lane six inside Warholm, kept early track on the traditionally fast-starting Norwegian. The pair were neck-and-neck coming into the final 150 metres, before Dos Santos put on the afterburners down the home straight, immediately dropping Warholm.

From there, it was just a race between the 26-year-old Brazilian and the line. He did not hold back, crashing through to finish in amazing style.



Brazil's Alison dos Santos celebrates after breaking the world record in the men's 400m hurdles during the Zurich Diamond League meeting at the Letzigrund Stadium in Zurich yesterday. (AFP)

"I hope that Brazil stopped to watch this as much as the people here in the stadium," said Dos Santos. "This has been an incredible night, I have no words to explain what happened other than I just broke the world record."

"I have been showing great form throughout the season - that I am fast, I am strong"

Dos Santos said there had been fundamental changes made to his training and racing in preparation for a tilt at the world record.

"I'm starting faster, I'm finishing stronger, and that is what I have to do to be able to break a world record," he said.

"I was looking for my coach after I crossed the finish line. I was

the one running, but he is the one who made this possible - someone who believed in me when I was younger.

"He helped me to develop both as an athlete and as a person, too. He's like an older brother, like a dad to me."

Warholm swept in on the coat-tails of Dos Santos in 46.69sec,



US' Masai Russell celebrates after breaking the world record in the women's 100m hurdles in Zurich yesterday. (AFP)

which also beat his meet record set last year, while Nigeria's Ezekiel Nathaniel was third (47.50).

"From Silesia it did not look like it was going to come today, I would say," Warholm said of Dos Santos's new WR.

"But after the hurdle 4-5 he looked extremely good. He was brilliant."

Warholm was left satisfied with his own performance, saying it was "really good".

"But on the other hand, it is like nothing to do. I just cannot go out there and run one second faster because he does it. That is not how it works," he added.

"So I have got to get back to the drawing board and do something else. I still feel I can do something about it."

"I have been running 45.94 be-

fore. It is unbelievable. There is nothing more to say. It is a crazy event."

Olympic champion Masai Russell also set a new world record in the women's 100m hurdles yesterday. The 26-year-old American clocked 12.09 seconds to beat the previous best of 12.12sec set by Nigeria's Tobi Amusan at the Eugene world championships in 2022.

Russell, whose previous best was 12.14sec, dominated the race, with a fast start setting her out into the front from the first two hurdles.

"Competing in a world record race is amazing," said Amusan, who came second in a season's best of 12.23sec.

"I came out here and I did my best and I am happy with this SB"

FOCUS

Czech duo Muchova and Mensik win US Open mixed doubles title

AFP
New York

The Czech team of Karolina Muchova and Jakub Mensik won the US Open mixed doubles Wednesday, saving two match points in a nervy semi-final and then pulling through in a tight final.

The pair survived a second-set pummeling in the championship decider in New York to edge Belinda Bencic of Switzerland and Flavio Cobolli of Italy, 6-3, 1-6, 10-6.

Mensik, a singles semi-finalist at this year's French Open, sealed the triumph with a searing ace to the backhand corner.

Another Mensik ace saved one of two match points earlier in the evening when the Czech pair edged the Russians Mirra Andree-

va and Andrey Rublev, 5-4, 3-5, 11-9. The back-to-back wins secured the first Grand Slam title for both Mensik and Muchova, who lost a heartbreaking Wimbledon singles final in July in three sets to fellow Czech, Linda Noskova.

"At the end the matching outfits made the difference for us," Muchova quipped during the trophy presentation, referencing the white and maroon kit worn by the team.

The mixed doubles event is in its second year with a convention-busting format which features shortened sets and multiple matches played the same day.

The competition is scheduled before the main US Open to attract singles stars who usually avoid Grand Slam doubles events to conserve energy for the conclud-

ing matches of the biggest events. The tournament's star teams - the cross-generational partnership of Serena Williams and Carlos Alcaraz and Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka - did not make it through the event's preliminary rounds. That left open a Grand Slam opportunity for some of the game's most accomplished non-household names to nab a precious major title, resulting two semifinals and a final that all went the distance.

Earlier, Cobolli and Bencic beat the married team of Elina Svitolina of Ukraine and Gael Monfils of France in a hard-fought marathon, 4-5, 4-1, 10-5. The result ended the prospects for a fairytale finale to the career of the acrobatic Monfils, who has said 2026 will be his last season.



Karolina Muchova and Jakub Mensik celebrate after winning the mixed doubles title of the US Open in New York City. (AFP)

TENNIS

US Open draw hands Alcaraz, and Sabalenka tough tests

Reuters
New York

Defending U.S. Open champion Carlos Alcaraz faces a challenging road to the New York final while Aryna Sabalenka will also have her hands full in her bid for a three-peat, following yesterday's draw.

Alcaraz, who is returning to singles action after sitting out five months with a wrist injury, landed in the stronger bottom half of the men's draw along with former U.S. Open champions Novak Djokovic, Daniil Medvedev, Stan Wawrinka and Marin Cilic.

The Spanish second seed will start the year's final major against Roman Safullin and could face either Arthur Fils or Ben Shelton in the quarters before a potential semi-final showdown against Djokovic, Medvedev, Frances Tiafoe or Brandon Nakashima. Djokovic, a four-times U.S. Open winner who is chasing a record-setting 25th Grand Slam title, will begin the fortnight against Argentine Mariano Navone and, should he advance, would then face either Wawrinka or Matteo Berrettini in the second round. Top seed Alexander Zverev, who won his first Grand Slam title at this year's French



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus looks on during a practice session at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York. (AFP)

Open, will start against Lorenzo Sonego and could face Lorenzo Musetti in the fourth round, Alex de Minaur in the quarters before possible matchups against Felix Auger-Aliassime in the semis and Alcaraz in the final.

On the women's side, top seed Sabalenka will play Colombian Camila Osorio in her opening match and faces a potential quarter-final clash with reigning Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova and a semi-final showdown with in-form Jessica Pegula, who finished runner-up in a

pair of US Open tune-up events. Sabalenka's fortnight may also include a second-round date with Renata Zarazua before potential matches against Barbora Krejickova and Diana Shnaider over the next two rounds and, if the draw goes according to seed, a title match against Elena Rybakina.

Former U.S. Open winner Coco Gauff, who is seeded fourth and arrives in New York fresh off winning the title in Cincinnati, was placed in the bottom half of the draw and could meet Amanda Anisimova in the quarter-finals.

SPOTLIGHT

ISL to resume with London meet

Reuters
London

The International Swimming League (ISL) will return from a five-year hiatus with a one-night All-Star Match at the London Aquatics Centre on December 19, the league said, taking a first step toward its planned full relaunch.

The team-based event will feature some of the world's leading swimmers competing for a record purse, with details to come later, the league said. Past ISL events have featured American Caeleb Dressel, Britain's Adam Peaty and Hungary's Katinka Hosszu.

The announcement gives concrete shape to plans outlined by ISL Commissioner Ben Allen last year, when he told Reuters the league hoped to restart in the

autumn of 2026 under a revised commercial model less dependent on a single investor and more reliant on sponsorship and media partnerships.

The ISL, launched in 2019 to provide a season-long professional competition outside the Olympic cycle, last staged a season in 2021. Its operations were halted after the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of Russia's war in Ukraine on its principal backer, Ukrainian businessman Konstantin Grigorishin.

Allen said in December that the league had initially envisaged a seven-match comeback season across North America and Europe, including at least one event in Asia and possibly another in the Middle East. The ISL had also been considering a one-day format after previously holding competition across two days.

In July, the league announced it would pay about 300 athletes overdue prize money owed from its 2021 season. The announcement suggests that the London event will serve as a trial of that condensed approach before a wider return.

"The All-Star Match is the moment swimming has been waiting for: the world's best athletes, back on the ISL stage," Allen said in a statement. "London is the perfect host city, with a venue built for nights like this and in front of one of the world's great sporting audiences."

The Aquatics Centre, built for the 2012 London Olympics, has since hosted major international swimming events. The ISL said it would later announce the swimmers taking part, the match format, ticketing details and broadcast arrangements.

Alpine F1 confirm Colapinto for 2027 in unchanged lineup

Argentine driver Franco Colapinto will continue to race for Renault-owned Alpine next season in an unchanged lineup with Frenchman Pierre Gasly, the Formula One team said yesterday. Colapinto, 23, joined Alpine as a reserve last season, replacing dropped Australian Jack Doohan after six rounds. This year he has scored in six of 12 rounds so far, contributing 19 of the sixth-placed team's 63 points.

Gasly has a contract until the end of the 2028 season. "We have seen Franco truly grow and mature into a great driver this year," said team boss Flavio Briatore in a statement. "His results in Miami and Montreal especially confirmed what I already knew: Franco belongs in Formula One and he belongs at this team." Colapinto, whose best result this season is a sixth place in Canada,

said he felt settled at Alpine and the team had made significant progress. "Our long-term goals are obvious - to compete and win - and I am grateful to the team, Flavio and (managing director) Steve (Nielsen), for the trust placed in me to be one of its drivers going into the future," he said. The next race is the Italian Grand Prix at Monza on September 6.

(Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

PSG to face Barcelona, Man City and Villa in Champions League

Enrique’s team aiming for a third straight European title, a feat achieved only by Real Madrid

AFP
Monaco

Two-time defending champions Paris Saint-Germain were handed meetings with Barcelona, Manchester City and Aston Villa among their eight matches in the league phase of this season’s Champions League, as the draw took place yesterday.

PSG, who beat Arsenal on penalties in Budapest in May to retain the trophy, will play Barcelona, Roma, Turkish champions Galatasaray and Slovan Bratislava of Slovakia at home.

Luis Enrique’s team will travel to England twice to face City and Villa. They beat both teams on the way to winning their first Champions League title in 2025 and also defeated the latter in the UEFA Super Cup in Austria earlier this month.

The French champions will also go to Spain to play Villarreal and Italy to take on a Como side coached by Cesc Fabregas.

“I can’t say anything bad about the Champions League, but I won’t be watching the draw. I will be relaxing and going out on my bike, then we’ll take a look at the menu. But I would sign up for the same result as in the last two years,” Luis Enrique told reporters earlier.

PSG are aiming to become European champions for a third straight year, something only the Real Madrid of 2016 to 2018 have achieved in the last 50 years.

The first matches in this season’s league phase will be played between Tuesday, September 8 and Thursday, September 10, with the final games in late January. UEFA is expected to announce the full fixture schedule on Saturday.

Last season’s runners-up Arsenal, the Premier League champions, will notably host Real Madrid, Borussia Dortmund



Former France and Arsenal forward Thierry Henry (left) after receiving The UEFA President’s Award from UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin during the draw ceremony for Champions League league phase in Monaco (AFP)

and Lille as well as Sabah, the club from Azerbaijan who came through four two-legged qualifying ties to reach the league phase for the first time.

The Gunners have a tough list of away ties against Bayern Munich, Real Betis, Napoli and Slavia Prague.

Andoni Iraola’s Liverpool will be at

home to Atletico Madrid, Porto, Villarreal and Lens, while playing Inter Milan, Club Brugge, Fenerbahce and Austrian league phase debutants LASK away.

Manchester United, who were not in the first pot of seeds, have home games against Bayern, Roma, RB Leipzig and Sabah and also a series of difficult away fixtures

KEY FIXTURES

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN (FRA): Barcelona (h), Manchester City (a), Roma (h), Aston Villa (a), Galatasaray (h), Villarreal (a), Slovan Bratislava (h), Como (a)
BAYERN MUNICH (GER): Arsenal (h), Atletico Madrid (a), Real Betis (h), Manchester United (a), Bodo/Glimt (h), Lille (a), Slavia Prague (h), Viking (a)
REAL MADRID (ESP): Inter Milan (h), Arsenal (a), PSV Eindhoven (h), Roma (a), RB Leipzig (h), Shakhtar Donetsk (a), LASK (h), AEK Athens (a)
LIVERPOOL (ENG): Atletico Madrid (h), Inter Milan (a), Porto (h), Club Brugge (a), Villarreal (h), Fenerbahce (a), Lens (h), LASK (a)
INTER MILAN (ITA): Liverpool (h), Real Madrid (a), Club Brugge (h), Borussia Dortmund (a), Shakhtar Donetsk (h), Feyenoord (a), VfB Stuttgart (h), Slovan Bratislava (a)
MANCHESTER CITY (ENG): Paris Saint-Germain (h), Barcelona (a), Sporting (h), Porto (a), Napoli (h), RB Leipzig (a), AEK Athens (h), Lens (a)

ARSENAL (ENG): Real Madrid (h), Bayern Munich (a), Borussia Dortmund (h), Real Betis (a), Lille (h), Napoli (a), Sabah (h), Slavia Prague (a)
BARCELONA (ESP): Manchester City (h), Paris Saint-Germain (a), Aston Villa (h), Sporting (a), Feyenoord (h), Galatasaray (a), Como (h), Sabah (a)
ATLETICO MADRID (ESP): Bayern Munich (h), Liverpool (a), Manchester United (h), PSV Eindhoven (a), Fenerbahce (h), Bodo/Glimt (a), Viking (h), VfB Stuttgart (a)
BORUSSIA DORTMUND (GER): Inter Milan (h), Arsenal (a), Real Betis (h), Aston Villa (a), Villarreal (h), Bodo/Glimt (a), AEK Athens (h), Sabah (a)
ASTON VILLA (ENG): Paris Saint-Germain (h), Barcelona (a), Borussia Dortmund (h), Club Brugge (a), Fenerbahce (h), Galatasaray (a), Viking (h), Slavia Prague (a)
MANCHESTER UNITED (ENG): Bayern Munich (h), Atletico Madrid (a), Roma (h), Sporting (a), RB Leipzig (h), Villarreal (a), Sabah (h), Como (a)

against Atletico, Sporting of Portugal, Villarreal and Como.

Other notable games include Manchester City visiting Barcelona and Real Madrid entertaining Inter, while last season’s Europa League winners Villa must go to Barcelona and play Dortmund at home. Unai Emery’s team will also tackle Istanbul giants Galatasaray and Fenerbahce.

The latter are appearing in the Champions League proper for the first time since 2008/09 after beating Lyon in the play-offs this week. New names in this season’s competition are Como, who have upset the traditional order in Serie A, and Sabah, while LASK made it to this stage for the

first time after a stunning comeback win over Celtic in the play-offs.

Last year’s Norwegian champions Viking, from the city of Stavanger, have reached the Champions League proper for the first time too, and they have a glamorous fixture schedule that includes Bayern, Atletico, Villa and Napoli.

This is the third season since the introduction of the new format for the Champions League, with 36 teams now all pooled together in one giant league and each playing games against eight different opponents. This season’s final will be played at the Metropolitano Stadium in Madrid on June 5, 2027.

UEFA target Infantino for ‘criminal mismanagement’, suspend boycott threat

Lausanne: Embattled FIFA president Gianni Infantino was potentially facing a legal suit brought by UEFA accusing him of “criminal mismanagement” over his now-shelved plan to bring private financing into the World Cup.

But, the 56-year-old Swiss chief of world football’s governing body gained some respite when UEFA also announced later that they were withdrawing, “on a provisional basis”, their threat to boycott FIFA tournaments.

That will be music to the ears of Poland, who are hosting next month’s women’s Under-20 World Cup. However, the nuclear option of a boycott – widely seen as pivotal in forcing Infantino into his humiliating climbdown just days after launching the proposal last month – remains.

UEFA, European football’s governing body, said after a meeting of the continent’s member associations in Monaco that it had “agreed to suspend, on a provisional basis, the withdrawal by European teams from FIFA competitions in the coming season”.

“This position will remain under constant review and may be reconsidered immediately if circumstances so require.”

The provisional suspension may be a relief for Infantino – whom UEFA have urged to resign – but the threat of a legal suit will leave a far sourer taste. “UEFA is actively considering legal action arising out of and in connection with the... plan proposed by FIFA,” read the legal document, to be filed in a court in Florida in the United States.

The document is a request for permission to gather evidence for a potential criminal complaint in Switzerland, where both UEFA and world football’s governing body FIFA are based.

“More specifically, UEFA and other interested parties are preparing to bring criminal claims in Switzerland against Infantino and possibly other FIFA officials and advisors for criminal mismanagement under Article 158 of the Swiss Criminal Code,” it continues.

UEFA laid out a long list of documents they wanted access to, pertaining to the background of the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) plan.

These include a meeting that was held at a hotel in New York City on the eve of the World Cup final last month and which several senior FIFA directors attended

where they were, according to the *New York Times*, apprised of the plan.

According to the newspaper, of the five directors present, two refused to sign off on it – one of them was chief operating officer Kevin Lamour, who has since left FIFA.

If successful in gaining access to the documents, UEFA intend to lodge the complaint in Switzerland and said they had been assured it met the requirements to be heard in a Swiss court. “On information and belief, Infantino’s actions described herein rise to the level of criminal mismanagement,” UEFA said.

Infantino had been hoping for a smooth ride to being re-elected unopposed for a fourth and final term next March in Rabat after a highly successful World Cup.

However, within days Infantino had used up all his credit with his folie de grandeur. UEFA may have been the harshest critics – they described his proposal as a “shady, opaque backroom deal” – but they found solid support from CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

CONCACAF’s president Victor Montagliani is widely seen as the likeliest challenger to Infantino while UEFA’s Aleksander Ceferin has ruled himself out.

The three confederations have kept up the pressure and collaborated on a no-holds-barred joint letter issued earlier this month.

“Leadership in football is not a possession. It is not about holding – or demanding – power to be held,” they wrote.

“When trust is broken through deception, when an individual places himself above the collective that entrusted him with authority, that duty has been abandoned,” the confederations added.

Infantino is not without friends – 2034 World Cup hosts Saudi Arabia came out in support on Thursday, with African football’s governing body CAF and South America’s CONMEBOL supportive.

However, UEFA remain unabashed in their determination for his 10-year reign to come to an end, signing off with a flourish in Thursday’s statement over the suspension of the boycott.

“FIFA must once again be governed as an institution serving football – not operate as an instrument of individual power.”

LA LIGA

What coach Mourinho wants from Mbappe

AFP
Madrid

The 2026/27 season has barely begun and Real Madrid superstar Kylian Mbappe is already on top of La Liga’s goalscoring charts ahead of the visit of promoted side Malaga on Sunday.

The French forward hit a hat-trick as Jose Mourinho’s team steamrolled Real Sociedad on Wednesday, securing a second league win from two matches this season.

Mbappe, who won the league’s top scorer trophy in both of his two prior seasons at the club, will be licking his lips ready for more with Malaga visiting the Santiago Bernabeu. However, despite his superbly taken treble, Mourinho said goals are not enough for the forward, who he described as “incredible”.

“I prefer 40 (goals) with titles than 60 without titles,” Mourinho told reporters. “I prefer 40 with a lot of work for the team than 60 just playing for himself, as often happens with forwards.”

That was not a criticism of Mbappe this season but instead an encouragement for the Frenchman to maintain the level he has shown so far in terms of work-rate. “I’m very happy with him,” continued Mourinho. “From a technical standpoint, there’s obviously nothing to say, but in terms of helping the group grow, taking responsibility, working... He arrived two days early, and two days early in that pre-season period can mean something positive.”

Getting more out of Mbappe, beyond the slew of goals he is guaranteed to provide, may be the key to unlocking a team which boasts great quality and potential but has failed to win a major trophy in the last two seasons.

“I’m really happy that he made history in the World Cup because there are 25 world champion players, but only one is eternal in



Kylian Mbappe hit a hat-trick as Real Madrid steamrolled Real Sociedad on Wednesday, (AFP)

football – the player who has the most goals in the World Cup,” said Mourinho, referring to Mbappe’s exploits with France this summer.

The 27-year-old won the Golden Boot at the World Cup by notching 10 goals, meaning he has netted 22 at the tournament in his career, keeping him one above Lionel Messi, with both players surpassing Miroslav Klose’s previous record of 16. “I see him really hungry to make history with Real Madrid,” continued Mourinho.

Since Mbappe joined Real Madrid from Paris Saint-Germain in 2024, he has watched his former side go on to win the Champions League twice, while Los Blancos’ rivals Barcelona have claimed both La Liga titles in that time.

Madrid failed to win a single trophy last season and Mbappe’s only silverware with the club is the 2024 UEFA Super Cup and FIFA Intercontinental Cup, despite scoring 86 goals in just 103 appearances for the club in his first two campaigns. “This year, we have to win,

that’s what we all want, and that’s what we’re going to do,” said a determined Mbappe at the start of the season.

The way to do that, Mourinho believes, is through teamwork. “I always say that with these players, you have to teach them to play as a team and teach them very little from an individual perspective,” added the veteran Portuguese coach.

Mourinho, 63, may have the aura and steel needed to bring the club’s biggest stars together and get them pulling in the same direction, despite his own struggles in recent years away from Europe’s biggest clubs. During a chaotic 2025/26 campaign it did not always feel like that was the case at Madrid, as Xabi Alonso and then Alvaro Arbeloa came and went, Mbappe’s goals alone unable to keep them afloat. Malaga will provide another opportunity for Mbappe to add to his ever-growing numbers on Sunday, but Mourinho will be looking for more than another hat-trick.

FOCUS

Atletico rule out talks with Barca over Alvarez

AFP
Madrid

Atletico Madrid hardened their stance over a possible sale of striker Julian Alvarez to Barcelona, ruling out any negotiations with the Spanish champions.

The Atletico board “unanimously expressed their full support” for the club’s decision not to negotiate Alvarez’s transfer to Barcelona, although they indicated they are not closed off to other approaches, with Arsenal linked with the Argentina international in recent days.

“There has not been and there will not be any negotiation with them (Barcelona) regarding Alvarez’s transfer,” said Atletico.

The club said it was “open to negotiations inherent to the transfer market”, but only “in an ethical and professional manner and with respect between clubs”.



Atletico said Barcelona had not met those requirements, without providing further details. The Rojiblancos previously reported Barcelona to FIFA and the Spanish football federation for their pursuit of Alvarez.

Atletico said they are “convinced” Alvarez “will understand the decision, focusing on working in the best possible way to help

the club achieve its objectives”. The forward missed training for the second day running on Wednesday because of a reported illness, after being jeered by the club’s fans during Atletico’s 2-2 La Liga draw against Villarreal on Sunday.

TOTTENHAM LAND MARMOUSH FROM MANCHESTER CITY

Tottenham Hotspur continued their summer binge when they signed Egyptian striker Omar Marmoush on loan from Manchester City.

The 27-year-old joined on a season-long loan but Tottenham said that “the deal includes an obligation to make the move permanent next summer”.

That will cost £60mn pounds (\$82mn), British media reported. Marmoush became Tottenham’s second signing from City in a matter of days, after Brazil winger Savio joined Tuesday for a reported initial fee of £75mn – and scored on his debut on Wednesday.