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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Arabi beat Sailiya for first win, Ahli edge 10-man Qatar SC

Snana put Arabi ahead just before half-time before Laye added a second in the 77th minute



Al Arabi's Issa Laye (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Al Sailiya in the Qatar Stars League match yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi inflicted more pain on winless Al Sailiya in the Qatar Stars League with a 2-0 victory at Khalifa International Stadium, while Al Ahli edged 10-man Qatar SC 1-0 at Al Thumama Stadium.

Youssef Snana put Al Arabi ahead just before half-time before Issa Laye added a second in the 77th minute to secure the club's first win of the season. The result lifted Al Arabi to five points, while Al Sailiya remain without a point after three consecutive defeats.

After a subdued opening half, Al Arabi broke the deadlock in the 45th minute when Snana headed home a well-delivered corner from Rodrigo on the right.

Al Sailiya struggled to find a response and Al Arabi doubled their advantage in the 77th minute. Laye was left unmarked and made no mistake with his header from Oussama Tannane's cross from the left.

Al Arabi came close to a third in the 89th minute, but Al Sailiya goalkeeper Bautista Burke produced a fine save to keep out Perez Alexis' header.

At Al Thumama Stadium, Al Ahli made the most of their numerical advantage to beat Qatar SC 1-0, but were made to work hard for the three points.

Qatar SC were reduced to 10 men in the 12th minute when Eisa Palangi was sent off for a reckless tackle on Ahmed Reyed Mawla. Despite having an extra man for most of the match, Al Ahli struggled to break down a determined Qatar SC defence, with the first half ending goalless.

The Brigadiers came close in the 58th minute when Ismaeel Mohammad struck the crossbar with a right-footed effort from inside the box following Benjamin



Al Ahli made the most of their numerical advantage to beat Qatar SC 1-0.

Bourigeaud's assist. Al Ahli finally found the breakthrough in the 82nd minute. Julian Draxler's initial effort was saved, but Younes Hussein reacted quickest to the rebound and headed into an almost empty net. The victory took Al Ahli to four points, while Qatar SC remain on one.

Meanwhile, Al Shamal and Al Shahania will meet at Al Bayt Stadium today, while Lusail face Al Wakrah at Lusail Stadium.

Lusail coach Emmanuel Mesquita said his side would look to build on their impressive 3-3 draw against Al Ahli in their previous match. "Our performance in the last match against Al Ahli gives us the confidence to continue working hard and fighting in every match," Mesquita said. "We hope to be ready against Al Wakrah and come out with a positive result."

Mesquita acknowledged the threat posed by Al Wakrah, who are coming off a defeat to Al Rayyan. "Al Wakrah is a strong team and has a lot of experience. Their loss to Al Rayyan will give them additional motivation against Lusail, but we are ready for all scenarios," he said. He also called on

Lusail supporters to back the team. "The fans are the heart of football. We play for them and their support means a lot to us," Mesquita said.

Al Wakrah coach Jose Luis Sierra, meanwhile, is confident his team can launch their winning campaign against Lusail. Despite a draw and a defeat, Sierra believes his side are in good shape. He said Al Wakrah would have a strong chance of victory if they can reproduce the level of performance they showed against Al Rayyan.

Defending champions Al Sadd, who have won both their league matches and also booked their place in the Qatar Cup final, face Al Gharafa tomorrow.

Al Rayyan take on Al Duhail earlier in the evening.

REMAINING FIXTURES
Today: 5pm: Al Shamal vs Al Shahania at Al Bayt Stadium; **7.15pm:** Lusail vs Al Wakrah at Lusail Stadium
Tomorrow: 5pm: Al Rayyan vs Al Duhail at Ahmaad Bin Ali Stadium; **7.15pm:** Al Sadd vs Al Gharafa at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium

U-20 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Qatar bounce back as Saudi stay perfect

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar revived their AFC U-20 Asian Cup China 2027 qualifying campaign with a convincing 3-0 win over Hong Kong, while Saudi Arabia maintained their perfect start with a 3-2 victory over Oman.

Qatar, who had suffered a 2-1 defeat to Oman in their opening match, dominated from the start at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium and took the lead in the 10th minute through captain Ahmad al-Sayed. Omar Ali doubled Qatar's advantage seven minutes later before forward Yazan Mohamed added a third in first-half stoppage time to seal Qatar's first win.

The result moved Qatar level on three points with Oman, while Saudi Arabia sit top of Group E with six points after winning both their matches.

At Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium, Saudi Arabia took the lead in the 18th minute when Awaji Mohammed's header from Yasir al-Dhafeeri's corner deflected off Fahad Abdullah and into his own net. Oman responded five minutes later, with Aly Al Alawi setting up Hassan Al Qassmi to score from close range following a well-worked free-kick.

Saudi Arabia regained the lead two minutes after the restart when Faris Yousef's cross was headed by Elyas Abu Bakr, with the ball looping over goalkeeper Hassen Al Hinai before crossing the line off the underside of the bar. Yousef then made it 3-1 in the 66th minute, acrobatically steering Fawaz al-Mashhur's cross into the net.

Ghanim al-Samin reduced the deficit three minutes later, sidefooting home from the edge of the box after combining with al-Alawi, but Oman could not find an equaliser as Saudi Arabia held on for the win.



Qatar secured a convincing 3-0 win over Hong Kong at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

Younousse and Tijan enter last 16 of Asian Beach Volleyball Championship



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan advanced to the round of 16 at the Asian Beach Volleyball Championship in Shangluo, China, after topping Group B. The duo sealed their third straight victory by defeating Thailand's Netitorn and T Poravid 21-18, 21-11 in straight sets.

Younousse and Tijan had opened their campaign with a straight-sets win over Malaysia's Teh and Yong Jian before overcoming New Zealand's Sam and Ben Odia in a three-set

encounter. The Group B winners now advance to last the 16 as they continue their bid for the title and qualification for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Moussa Alakhair and Mohamed Ehab Zaki ended their group-stage campaign with their first victory, beating Hong Kong's pair 21-12, 21-12 in straight sets. Al-Khair and Zaki had opened the tournament with a 0-2 defeat to China's Wang and Du Hongjun before losing 2-0 to Thailand's Pitak and Watchrawit, 21-19, 21-18.

Lusail SC launch Fan Zone to enhance matchday experience

Doha: Lusail Sports Club will launch a new 'Fan Zone' experience at Lusail Stadium, starting at 5:30pm on matchdays, as part of its efforts to enhance fan engagement and strengthen the connection between supporters and the club.

The initiative aims to turn matchday into a complete sporting and community experience, with a range of entertainment and interactive activities for children, young people and families before kickoff.

The Fan Zone is designed to create a lively atmosphere around matches, encourage fans to arrive early and increase participation, while offering an experience that extends beyond the 90 minutes of football.

The club said fans are a key part of the success of the sporting system and in creating the atmosphere inside the stadium. It added that it would continue developing initiatives and events aimed at different sections of society to boost attendance and fan participation.

Lusail Sports Club has invited fans and football enthusiasts to arrive early, enjoy the Fan Zone and then head to the stands to support the team and help create a vibrant match atmosphere.

Lusail SC, looking for their first win in the Qatar Stars League, face Al Wakrah at Lusail Stadium today.

Qatar hoopsters prepare for Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games

Doha: Qatar's men's basketball team is stepping up preparations for the upcoming Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, with the team aiming for a strong showing in one of the continent's biggest sporting events.

The Games will be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4, but the men's 5x5 basketball competition will begin earlier at the Aichi International Arena in Nagoya.

Qatar will open its Group B campaign against Iran on Thursday, September 10, at 4am Doha time.

Qatar will then face Jordan on September 12 at 7am before taking on Chinese Taipei at the same

time on September 13. Group A features Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, while Group C comprises China, the Philippines, Bahrain and Kazakhstan.

The quarter-finals are scheduled for September 16, followed by the semifinals on September 18. The competition will conclude on September 20 with the third-place playoff and final.

Qatar have a notable history in Asian basketball, having qualified for the FIBA Basketball World Cup for the first time in 2006 when Japan hosted the tournament. The team also won bronze medals at the FIBA Asia Cup in 2003 and 2005 and claimed the Asian Challenge Cup title in 2004.

FORMULA 1

Antonelli ready to enjoy home race after grid drop

Mercedes driver set to start from back due to engine penalties as he leads Russell and Hamilton by 59 points

Reuters
Monza

Formula One championship leader Kimi Antonelli looked forward to his home Italian Grand Prix yesterday and said grid penalties had taken the pressure off while he also had less to prove than last year.

The 20-year-old Mercedes driver is set to start from the back of the grid as he becomes the first Italian in 73 years to lead the standings at Monza.

"I think in some ways it helps to release pressure, although I'd very much rather fight for pole and start at the front," Antonelli said of the penalties he will incur for Sunday's race after exceeding his power unit allocation.

"But in some ways, I feel like it makes me a bit more relaxed going into the weekend.

"And I think also that's why I'm going to be able to enjoy more the driving and the weekend itself. And, of course, as well, it's a different opportunity. It's an opportunity to try something different during the weekend, different work method as well, in free practice especially."

SIX WINS THIS SEASON

Antonelli has had six wins in his second season and leads teammate George Russell and Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton by 59 points. The race, a highlight for any Italian Formula One fan and a home track for Ferrari, will be a damage limitation exercise.

Just how many people the



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli (left) shares a laugh with Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen ahead of the Italian Grand Prix at the Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit in Monza, Italy yesterday. (AFP)

younger can overtake, and how many points he can score, is a big question. Hamilton reckoned Antonelli could cut through the tail-end and midfield "pretty easily" and felt sixth place was achievable for the youngster who took his seat at Mercedes.

Mercedes insiders suggested top five was possible.

"It's a circuit that could suit us very well. But we've seen how strong McLaren is and how strong they have been in the past two races," said Antonelli.

"Ferrari is going to be certainly on top, especially with the new engine. I think it's still a very strong car. I think this track can be good for us, but we still need to take into account that Ferrari, McLaren, even Red Bull might be quick this weekend.

"I feel very free mentally going into this weekend. I'm actually very excited, very much looking forward to it, but with no real pressure."

Last year, as a rookie, Antonelli qualified seventh and finished

ninth but he is in a very different place now.

"Obviously, I was coming from a difficult period as well. And I felt like I had to prove myself, to prove that I could belong in F1. So, I feel like also that increased a lot of the pressure on myself, and that made me drive very, how can I say, very tense," he recalled.

"Then also when you get the good results in, it's always one less thing to prove. And I've proven that I can win. I've proven that I can perform."

Heading for home race, Leclerc still dreams of world title

In his eight years at Ferrari, Charles Leclerc has established himself as a popular and talented Monegasque prince of the Formula One grid, yet being crowned his sport's king remains just a dream.

The 28-year-old said in an interview in August that it "is still possible" for him to become world champion in 2027, although it will be "surely a difficult goal to achieve".

He has flashed his talent again this season, winning at Silverstone and stepping onto the podium after three other races.

Yet, ahead of the Italian Grand Prix at Monza, a race he has won twice, he sits fifth in the drivers' standings, 87 points behind leader Kimi Antonelli and also trailing team-mate Lewis Hamilton.

Ferrari signed Leclerc, fresh from an impressive rookie F1 campaign with Sauber, ahead of the 2019 season.

He has since racked up nine victories, including one on home soil in Monaco and two at Monza and finished a distant second behind Max Verstappen in the 2022 world championship and third in 2024.

In June, Leclerc signed a contract extension with Ferrari until the end of 2028.

At the Dutch Grand Prix in Zandvoort in August, he talked of his love for the team.

Leclerc - a wealthy driver and a star of the press and social media who has released pop records - presents himself as a mature and clear-headed leader of the Scuderia, despite the pressure this year from Hamilton, who, at 41, is



Ferrari's Charles Leclerc speaks with media in Monza yesterday. (Reuters)

aiming for an eighth world title. "I've changed a lot, because through experiences - good and bad - you mature enormously as a driver and as a person," said the recently-married Leclerc, who is smiling but often reserved in front of the press, in contrast to his aggressive approach on the track.

"I grew up in Italy with karting and absorbed a lot of Italian passion and emotion. But over the years, I've managed to handle those emotions

better when things are going very well or very badly," says Leclerc, who recently admitted to being affected by what he calls "negative stories" surrounding his inconsistent performances.

Leclerc's inability to turn pace and potential into domination mirrors the frustrating recent history of the Scuderia.

Ferrari, historically the sport's most successful team, won their last constructors' title in 2008. The last driver crowned world champion in a red single-seater was Finn Kimi Raikkonen the year before.

"The passion within Ferrari is an incredible force, and when things aren't going as they should, we work tirelessly to turn the tide," said Leclerc.

"But it can hurt too. When things aren't going well, people feel it very deeply."

He says the arrival of Frenchman Fred Vasseur as team principal ahead of the 2023 season improved Ferrari's team culture.

"Fred has really brought that calm, that cool-headedness needed to make the environment less prone to emotional outbursts," said Leclerc.

This weekend, Leclerc said he expects to be swept up by the "immense enthusiasm" that grips the tifosi, the Monza circuit and nearby Milan the week before the Grand Prix.

"My love for Ferrari and for this sport is the same as it was on the very first day," said Leclerc.

(AFP)

Hamilton hopes to boost title bid with record Italian win

Lewis Hamilton will seek to boost his hopes of an unprecedented eighth drivers' world championship with a record sixth Italian Grand Prix win on Sunday when he races on Ferrari's home tarmac.

As he bids to reduce local hero Kimi Antonelli's 59-point advantage - the Italian having claimed six wins for Mercedes - the 41-year-old seven-time champion has been given encouraging news.

Ferrari plan to introduce an up-dated power unit while Antonelli, 20, faces a grid penalty for taking a new engine.

Hamilton shares the Monza record of five Italy wins with fellow seven-time title-winner Michael Schumacher, whose first home win 30 years ago, in his opening season with Ferrari, is being commemorated with a special livery and team kit.

The nostalgic twist will only add to an emotional atmosphere as Italy's favourite sports team battle the tifosi's new curly-haired hero, Antonelli, who just happens to come from Ferrari's homeland of Emilia-Romagna, at the historic 'temple of speed'.

As they head into the 13th round of this year's world championship and one of F1's most treasured events, Antonelli leads on 242 points with his Mercedes team-mate George Russell and Hamilton both in pursuit on 183.

Russell is second by virtue of having won twice this year to Hamilton's once.

For Hamilton, Monza has always been a happy hunting ground.

He won five times at the old royal park circuit between 2012 and 2018 and will hope Ferrari have reacted to his criticism of poor team work and strategy at last month's Dutch Grand Prix won by McLaren's world champion Lando Norris.

His team-mate Charles Leclerc will have his own reasons to shine, which include seeking a third Italy win to add to exultant triumphs in 2019 and 2024.

Team boss Fred Vasseur con-

firmed that Ferrari, along with Audi and Honda, will have an upgraded power unit.

"It is a step in the right direction and, as we know, this year is all about marginal gains," he said. "Monza is a demanding circuit and the field is very close - so our priority will be to execute every aspect of the weekend as well as possible."

His Mercedes counterpart Toto Wolff conceded that taking a penalty - meaning that the championship leader will start from the back of the grid - would not be popular with the home crowd. It will mean that Antonelli has to focus on tyre management, strategy and overtaking instead of pole position and victory. Monza, however, is one of the few high-speed tracks where exceptional recovery drives are possible.

Referring to the team decision to change his engine, Wolff said: "Obviously, algorithms don't take nationality into consideration."

"We are here to go for a championship, not get the most PR."

After his and McLaren's strong showing in Zandvoort, Norris - boosted by a lucrative new long-term contract - and his team-mate Oscar Piastri may be contenders too, but a more powerful challenge could come from last year's winner Max Verstappen.

The four-time champion will have an updated Honda power-unit in his Red Bull car as he bids for a fourth win in five years, with Liam Lawson continuing as his team-mate in the absence of Isack Hadjar, who is recovering from a broken wrist.

Yuki Tsunoda will continue to replace Lawson at Racing Bulls. "Not finishing the race in Zandvoort was disappointing," said Verstappen, who crashed out on the opening lap of his home event.

"But it was special for me to see the fans at the circuit for one last time.

"Monza is one of my favourite tracks and I like that it is an old school, fast circuit. I always enjoy it here."



Lewis Hamilton attends a press conference in Monza yesterday. (AFP)

Kaia's career-best 72 steers Zimbabwe to T20 victory

Innocent Kaia struck a career-best 72 for Zimbabwe in a five-wicket victory over hosts Namibia in a Twenty20 tri-series match yesterday. Put in to bat in Windhoek, Namibia made 156-6, thanks mainly to an unbeaten 88 from captain Gerhard Erasmus.

Zimbabwe reached 159-5 with 11 balls remaining. Kaia, batting at No.3, had fruitful partnerships of 61 with Brian Bennett and 54 with captain Sikandar Raza as Zimbabwe completed a double over Namibia after a five-run win on Monday.

Kaia struck three sixes and eight fours from 42 balls before his mistimed pull off a Jack Brassell delivery was caught by Erasmus at mid on.

"It is great contributing significantly to a victory. I planned to be aggressive and take on the Namibian bowlers. It paid off," player-of-the-match award winner Kaia told reporters.

Like Kaia, Erasmus struck three sixes and eight fours in his knock. His 83-run fourth-wicket stand with Alexander Busing-Volschenk (29) was the highlight of the innings.

"We bowled really well in the powerplay and controlled the game in the middle. There were a lot more boxes ticked today. It's such a windy ground that sometimes hitting into the wind is so difficult and hitting with the wind so easy. The wind makes it quite tough to take catches here. We all will be watching the match tomorrow closely but it is what it is. We will be wishing for South Africa to win but I know both teams will play their best game," Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza said.

BRIEF SCORES:

Namibia 156-6 in 20 overs (G. Erasmus 88 not out, A. Busing-Volschenk 29 not out; B. Evnns 2-29, K. Matigimu 2-31) **v Zimbabwe 159-5 in 18.1 overs** (I. Kaia 72, S. Raza 29; R. Trumpelmann 2-41)

Result: Zimbabwe won by five wickets

Toss: Zimbabwe

Today: Namibia v South Africa (1200 GMT)

CRICKET

'Role model' Stokes set to open for Adelaide Strikers

AFP
Sydney

Role model **Ben Stokes** is set to open the batting for the Adelaide Strikers in the Big Bash League, with club coach Tim Paine saying the former England skipper was made for the job.

All-rounder Stokes, who signed for the T20 franchise on Tuesday, is usually a middle-order batsman but ex-Australia captain Paine has other ideas.

"I think he's made to open the batting in the Big Bash. The pacey, bouncy wickets in Australia really suit him," said the Strikers head coach.

"I've been on the end of a couple of his devastating innings in Test cricket where you feel like you can't defend the field. He can play 360, he's got power."

Should the 35-year-old do so he would partner Strikers captain Matt Short, another destructive big-hitter.

"I love the combination. They're both really different. Both



absolutely world class," said Paine. Stokes retired from the international game midway through

England's recent Test series defeat against New Zealand but has continued playing county cricket for

Durham. He had been dropped for the second Test against New Zealand after breaking a team curfew in a nightclub incident also involving England team-mate Gus Atkinson.

Despite the controversy and Australian fans' love-hate relationship with Stokes, Paine is confident he will be warmly welcomed.

"I know Australian cricket fans have loved beating England and love beating Ben Stokes," he said. "But they've absolutely always respected the way he plays the game, how competitive he is and how much he wants to win."

"I think Australian fans will really warm to his character and his personality."

"We expect he'll be a fantastic role model for our club and for our fans."

Stokes's decision to play for Adelaide takes him back into the T20 franchise world after a brief stint at Big Bash side Melbourne Renegades in 2015.

He is available for the entire tournament, which runs from mid-December to January 26.

TENNIS

Alcaraz believes ‘impossible’ schedule raising injury threat

AFP
New York

Carlos Alcaraz said Wednesday he plans to play fewer tournaments in future, blaming an “impossible” tennis calendar for a rising number of injuries in the sport.

Alcaraz, who has only just returned from a four-month lay-off caused by a wrist injury, was speaking after he moved into the third round of the US Open with a four-set defeat of Portugal’s Jaime Faria. The reigning US Open champion overcame a sluggish start before defeating his 72nd-ranked opponent 4-6, 6-0, 6-3, 6-2 in 2hr 40 min at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Afterwards the seven-time

Grand Slam champion said while he had not wanted to spend four months on the sidelines this season, he planned to make regular breaks a part of his schedule in future.

“Obviously I don’t want to have this break because an injury,” the Spaniard said. “But in the future I’m going to take some breaks, some long breaks. Maybe not four months, but one month, two months, missing some tournaments, because it’s impossible to play them all.”

“I think they adding more important tournaments... you know, in a way they are making us play. You can say no.

“So it’s impossible, and we are seeing a lot of players getting injured, a lot of players getting tired. If they don’t do anything about it, we are going to see even more

in the future. “For me, taking this break because an injury, it wasn’t that good, but you know, what I’m going to say is I’m going to take some breaks and missing some tournaments in the future, for sure.”

Alcaraz showed some signs of rust against Faria, blaming his first set problems on a failure to convert a golden break point opportunity that would have given him a 4-2 lead. Instead, Faria leveled at 3-3 and then broke Alcaraz in the next game to go 4-3 up.

“Tough match for me. Obviously the first set I was feeling great, I had break point, I missed it,” Alcaraz said. “After that I was in a rush. I didn’t take time, I wasn’t patient and that obviously cost me the break.”

Faria was left ruing his inability to build on an impressive opening

set. The 23-year-old’s serve fell apart in the second while Alcaraz upped the tempo and began to find a telling extra zip in his ground-strokes.

Although Alcaraz had to save two break points in the opening game before holding, it was all one-way traffic thereafter.

Faria was broken three times as Alcaraz went through the gears to take control of the contest.

The Spaniard’s momentum extended into the third set, with Faria broken again to go 2-0 down.

Faria hit back with a break of Alcaraz’s serve to make it 2-1, but was soon back in trouble after being broken in the next game to trail 3-1. The set went with serve thereafter as Alcaraz took a 2-1 lead.

Alcaraz went a double break up in the fourth to move into a 5-1 lead and served out to seal victory.



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain celebrates defeating Jaime Faria of Portugal in the US Open second round match at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York. (AFP)

US OPEN

Former champions Swiatek and Osaka enter third round

Canada’s Auger-Aliassime upset by Russia’s Khachanov in four sets



Poland’s Iga Swiatek serves to Argentina’s Nadia Podoroska during their US Open second round match in New York yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
New York

Former champion Iga Swiatek marched into the third round of the US Open on Thursday as men’s top seed Alexander Zverev eyed the next step in his bid for a first title at Flushing Meadows.

Swiatek, whose six Grand Slam titles include the 2022 US Open, defeated Nadia Podoroska 6-3, 6-2 in the first meeting between the two since Swiatek beat the Argentine on the way to her first Grand Slam title at Roland Garros in 2020. Apart from a brief scare at 5-3 in the first set, when Swiatek saved four break points, the Polish star was largely untroubled by the former top-40 player now sunk to 449th in the world.

Swiatek broke twice on the way to a 5-1 lead in the second set and closed it out on her own serve, giving herself a match point with a forehand winner and polishing it off after an hour and 11 minutes with a stinging backhand.

It was another encouraging

performance for the former world number one, who hadn’t reached a final in 2026 until her run to the title at Toronto in August.

She then came up short in her title defense at Cincinnati, but said her game is trending in the right direction.

“I’m here with better feeling than any other Grand Slam this year,” Swiatek said. “Just trying to enjoy every day and improve the game every day.”

Two-time champion Naomi Osaka survived a second-set swoon to beat Katerina Siniakova 6-2, 5-7, 6-1 yesterday and reach the third round of the US Open. The Japanese 13th seed looked in total control against her Czech opponent, racing through the first set and to a 4-2 lead in the second without facing a break point. But as Osaka’s unforced errors began to pile up - 20 in the second set compared to four in the first - doubles world number one Siniakova pounced.

Serving for the match at 5-3, Osaka was broken - the fourth straight break of serve in the set still leaving her 5-4 up. But Siniakova kept pressing and broke a

clearly frustrated Osaka for a 6-5 lead on the way to forcing a third set. Osaka regrouped in the decider, riding a quick break to a 3-0 lead and fending off a pair of break points in the fifth game to make it 4-1 before breaking Siniakova one more time. “The match was definitely really tough,” Osaka said.

“I just felt like I had to fight. I definitely had a couple of opportunities in the second set, and I think I was a little too hard on myself,” said Osaka, who next faces Belgium’s Elise Mertens, a 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) winner over Maria Timofeeva of Uzbekistan.

“I took the bathroom break, tried to regroup,” Osaka added. “I just told myself that it’s an honor to play on this court.”

Later in the day, Russian veteran Karen Khachanov defeated third-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime in the second round in four sets.

Khachanov, unseeded this year but a familiar face in the latter stages of big tournaments, beat Auger-Aliassime 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-2, 6-2. The 26-year-old Canadian, a two-time semi-finalist at Flushing Meadows, eked out

a first-set tiebreaker against the hard-hitting Russian, who himself made the US Open semifinals in 2022. But Auger-Aliassime, who appeared to give up quickly on some balls, was undone by a rash of unforced errors in the subsequent sets. He made 47 in all, compared with 30 for Khachanov.

Khachanov also won several key points with blistering backhand down-the-line winners.

“Maybe he had some physical issues,” Khachanov told an on-court interview. “It’s part of our sport. It’s part of tennis.”

“I tried to give my best performance. Fight,” Khachanov said. “I’m super happy to get this win.”

After reaching the quarterfinals of the French Open and Wimbledon, Auger-Aliassime withdrew from the Rogers Cup in Montreal in early August due to a back injury. He won two matches at the Cincinnati Open in mid-August, but lost in the round of 16 to Frances Tiafoe. Auger-Aliassime entered this year’s US Open without a coach after parting ways with long-time coach Frederic Fontang in July.

ATHLETICS

Just the beginning of the journey, Broeders-Bol says of 800m adventure

AFP
Brussels, Belgium

Femke Broeders-Bol has achieved what many athletes can but dream: swapping with success from a discipline in which she was a two-time world champion to the 800m, one of the most ruthless running distances.

The 26-year-old won 400m hurdles golds at last year’s Tokyo world champs and the 2023 edition in Budapest.

She is a two-time Olympic bronze medallist in the hurdles and left the 2024 Paris Games with an additional gold and silver in the 4x400m relays.

US rival Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone came away with back-to-back Olympic hurdles golds and also the world record to overshadow the Dutchwoman on the ultimate stage. While the American has clocked the three fastest times ever in the 400m hurdles, Broeders-Bol has four in the top nine.

The Dutch athlete opted to compete in the 800m just as a pregnant McLaughlin-Levrone stepped away from the sport - her daughter Savannah was born in July. But it is not something that Broeders-Bol has regretted for one minute.

The women’s 800m has been one of the stand-out events of the season, Switzerland’s Audrey Werro inching ever closer to the oldest world record in track and field: the 1min 53.28sec over two laps set by Jarmila Kratochvilova of the then-Czechoslovakia in Munich back in 1983.

Werro has gone third fastest in the all-time list with a winning 1:53.70 at last week’s Zurich Diamond League. Broeders-Bol, second, improved the Dutch national record to 1:54.71 - the 15th fastest time ever run over the distance and an astonishing achievement for someone new to the event.

“I never expected to go this fast in the first season,” she said ahead of the Diamond League finals in Brussels. “It’s a couple of years’ plan and I was hoping to get to that level eventually, but to be there already this quickly is a very nice surprise.”

The transition from hurdles to the “very unpredictable” 800m had been a “very big experience”, she added.

“In the hurdles you also race others but you always have your own hurdles. Here you’re together in a lane after 100 metres.”

Asked where she could progress, the ever-humble Broeders-Bol replied: “I think



Femke Broeders-Bol during a press conference in Brussels.

pretty much in everything except speed! “My speed is very good for an 800m runner. My endurance is very bad and I think the tactical part is still something I need to learn. For me it really feels like I’m still at the beginning of this journey and there’s so much to learn.”

Broeders-Bol added that she had learned not to underestimate herself. “I was quite scared of the 800. At one point my coach told me I had too much respect for the 800 and also in a way for my competitors, putting everyone and everything on a pedestal, because I didn’t know where I was at. There’s a lot of more things out of your control and it’s really a race against each other until the line and I think it’s a lot of fun.”

With the 800m in a golden age of runners also including Britain’s Olympic champion Keely Hodgkinson, Broeders-Bol expressed hope that she and her rivals “can push the event further together”.

“We are in an era where there are so many amazing girls to run against,” with Werro, Hodgkinson and the Dutch runner completing the European podium in Birmingham last month.

Sweden’s world and Olympic pole vault champion Armand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis, who registered 7.15m in the long jump as a 17-year-old and 10.37sec in a one-off 100m race in 2024, dubbed Broeders-Bol “amazing”.

“If there’s anybody that’s going to do that transition as well as somebody could do it, it would be her, just based on her professionalism, really,” Duplantis said. “She’s such a student of the sport and the event, and she never leaves anything to chance. She’s so on top of everything that it’s really an inspiration.”

Triple world sprint gold medallist Melissa Jefferson-Wooden added that “what Femke has done is something that should be talked about a little more”.

Rookie Omrzel triumphs as Mas extends Vuelta lead

Slovenian 20-year-old Jakob Omrzel climbed to victory on stage 12 of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday as Spain’s Enric Mas extended his overall lead on a tough mountain stage.

In a landmark performance, Omrzel of the Bahrain Victorious team also leapt up the overall standings, evoking memories of his countryman Tadej Pogacar’s showing in his first Grand Tour in 2019.

Omrzel jumped to sixth overall, just 30sec behind Briton Oscar Onley in the best young rider white jersey category.

“I can’t believe what I did, but I felt super good, I’m still feeling okay,

I’m not tired. So I’m just enjoying it at the moment,” Omrzel said.

Three major mountain stages remain on what is becoming an enthralling 21-day race.

Pogacar was six months older than Omrzel when he came third and won three stages in the 2019 edition of the Vuelta.

Movistar rider Mas finished 2min 56sec adrift of the winner but extended his overnight lead of 1:18 on Primoz Roglic by a further 27sec.

Four-time champion Roglic, another Slovenian, crossed the line with Felix Gall, who is third overall.

Following the two previous stages where the GC rivals played second

fiddle to either the escape artists or the sprinters, the Vuelta returned to the mountains on stage 12 with a run of 166km that was contested in searing heat over five climbs to Calar Alto. Mas has won the Vuelta white jersey twice, in 2018 and 2020, and is set for his first Grand Tour win if he can hold on.

Pogacar had been leading the Vuelta by almost four minutes but crashed out on stage eight, breaking his collarbone in what may be a season-ending injury.

The race ends in Andalusia next weekend with stages in the mountains and hills around Malaga and Granada’s Sierra Nevada.



Slovenian rider Jakob Omrzel celebrates winning the 12th stage of the Vuelta a Espana 2026, a 166,6km race between Vera and Calar Alto, yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

‘Everyone a winner’ with Barcola transfer: Enrique

‘He wanted to leave because he wanted to have more importance in the team’

AFP

Poissy, France

Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique insisted that the sale of France winger Bradley Barcola to Liverpool was a good deal for all parties, as the reigning European champions get ready to defend their Champions League title without one of their key players from the last two campaigns.

“Everyone is a winner,” the Spaniard told reporters on the eve of his team’s Ligue 1 clash at home to Monaco today.

“He wanted to leave because he wanted to have more importance in the team. And that is something that you have to earn in training. I can’t guarantee that to any player. He has been a very important player for us, and he is an incredible person. He was liked by his teammates. He still had two years left on his contract but he decided to leave and I wish him all the best. We have to accept it.”

Barcola, who appeared in all of France’s matches at the World Cup, had not featured at all for PSG at the start of this season before joining Liverpool in a blockbuster deal for a fee of 125mn euros (£107mn, \$145mn) plus 20mn euros in bonuses.

The 24-year-old scored 13 goals in 49 appearances in all competitions last season for PSG as they retained the Champions League and Ligue 1 titles.

However, he was not automatically as-

sured of his place in Luis Enrique’s starting line-up, especially with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia competing to play in the same position on the wing.

PSG have brought in three new attacking players for a combined fee of around 150mn euros, with Spain World Cup final hero Ferran Torres arriving from Barcelona while Maghnes Aklouché was signed from Monaco and Mika Godts from Ajax.

“I am happy with the three players we have brought in up front. We must not make comparisons. We will see what happens but I am happy with the transfer window,” said Enrique, who also saw PSG sell Portugal striker Goncalo Ramos to AC Milan and Senegal winger Ibrahim Mbaye to Aston Villa.

The former Barcelona and Spain coach insisted his new players would need “time to adapt” as PSG come into the match against Monaco having drawn their first two Ligue 1 games of the campaign with Rennes and Lille.

They also lost to Lens in the French Champions Trophy having previously beaten Aston Villa to win the UEFA Super Cup. The Parisians start their bid to win a third straight Champions League title at home to Slovan Bratislava next Wednesday.

“Our objectives are clear. I have said it many times. I want to win the most important trophies and there is none bigger than the Champions League,” added the coach, who is beginning his fourth season at the helm.



Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique speaks to his players at a training session yesterday, on the eve of his team’s Ligue 1 clash against Monaco.

IRAOLA HAILS BARCOLA MENTALITY AFTER BLOCKBUSTER LIVERPOOL MOVE

Liverpool: Liverpool boss Andoni Iraola said that Bradley Barcola arrived at the club with the “right mentality” after making clear his desire to join the Premier League club from Paris Saint-Germain.

The 24-year-old France forward became the second-most expensive signing in Liverpool’s history on Monday when he joined for a fee of up to £124mn (\$167mn).

The price tag for the left-winger is second only to the £125mn Liverpool paid Newcastle for Sweden star Alexander Isak last year. Iraola, who has started his Anfield tenure with two Premier League draws, welcomed the signing from the two-time defending Champions League winners, saying he would be available for today’s match at Ipswich.

“It was our priority, let’s say, to sign a very, very good player in that position,” the Spaniard told reporters. “And I think he has come also with the right mentality. I’ve learnt from him that he wanted Liverpool a lot. He just wanted to come here and I think that’s a good first sign. And being the player that he is and the things that he has won recently, I think he has come also with the willingness to help us.”

“And I’m very happy with him and he trained well with us. If everything goes well in today’s training, also he will defi-



Winger Bradley Barcola joined Liverpool from Paris Saint-Germain for a fee of 125mn euros plus 20mn euros in bonuses. (Reuters)

nately be available for tomorrow.”

Iraola said a decision would be made on whether Barcola would be ready to

start against newly promoted Ipswich at Portman Road. “He is in a good place, but we also have to consider that he hasn’t had

the minutes in the pre-season games,” said the former Bournemouth boss.

Barcola will be part of an expensively assembled Liverpool attack that also includes Isak, Hugo Ekitike and playmaker Florian Wirtz. The arrival of the Frenchman has raised questions about the future of left-winger Cody Gakpo, who was linked with a move away from Anfield during the summer transfer window.

But Iraola said he was happy to keep the Dutchman, whom he described as a “very valuable player”.

Iraola, who replaced the sacked Arne Slot, said he was happy with the club’s transfer business, including the signings of Barcola, Jeremy Jacquet and Victor Munoz, and was thankful the summer window was now closed.

“The club has decided that those signings that we’ve done are the ones that improved our team, improved our position,” he said. “There were other options that we decided not to take for different reasons. Sometimes it’s sporting reasons because they don’t improve what you have.”

“Sometimes it’s because of economic reasons – it didn’t make sense in terms of the market to do those movements. But I’m happy now that I know what we have. I have a lot of quality in the team.”

FIFA blasts UEFA ‘smear campaign,’ fights World Cup plan disclosures

New York: FIFA has accused UEFA of a “smear campaign” and a “fishing expedition” after European football’s governing body asked US judges to force it to hand over documents related to its failed World Cup investor plan.

Global football body FIFA’s divisive plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to investors, unveiled in July, triggered a huge backlash across the sport, with UEFA threatening to boycott the World Cup unless the plan was scrapped.

While FIFA quickly aborted the plans in response to the backlash, UEFA is now preparing possible legal action against FIFA president Gianni Infantino for alleged “criminal mismanagement.”

Last week, it filed requests in three US states requesting the disclosure of documents related to the plan from FIFA and partners, including prospective lead investor Joshua Kushner’s Thrive Capital firm.

If successful in gaining access to the documents, UEFA had said it intends to lodge a legal complaint in Switzerland, saying it has been assured the case would meet the requirements to be heard in a Swiss court.

But FIFA has hit back, asking US judges for permission to contest the UEFA requests. “While these applications are styled as legal pleadings with captions and docket numbers, they are little more than press releases in further support of UEFA’s smear campaign against FIFA and its leadership,” say the FIFA filings.

The filings, reviewed by AFP, say UEFA does not have the right to demand FIFA internal documents because no criminal proceedings yet exist in Switzerland or elsewhere.

Even if such proceedings did exist, the filings say, UEFA would not have legal standing because it has suffered no financial loss. The FIFA filings also accuse UEFA of illegally bypassing Swiss courts but applying directly to US courts.

Disclosure of the documents, including correspondence involving Infantino and other named FIFA personnel and advisors, “would directly threaten FIFA’s interests and reveal sensitive and proprietary information,” say the filings.

UEFA has made no secret of its desire to remove Infantino, who had hoped to be re-elected unopposed for a fourth and final term next March after a highly successful World Cup.

UEFA may have been the harshest critic – it described his proposal as a “shady, opaque backroom deal” – but it has found solid support from North and Central America’s CONCACAF, and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

TRANSFER

Martinelli joins Saudi’s Al Hilal from Arsenal

AFP

London

Arsenal forward **Gabriel Martinelli** has joined Saudi side Al Hilal, the Premier League champions announced. No fee was disclosed but British media reports said the deal was worth a guaranteed £60mn (\$81mn).

That would make 25-year-old Brazil international Martinelli the most expensive player to leave the London club, following Alex Oxlade Chamberlain’s £35mn exit to Liverpool in 2017. Martinelli has signed a four-year deal with Al-Hilal, who are currently joint-top of the Saudi Pro League with Cristiano Ronaldo’s Al Nassr.

“Gabriel Martinelli has joined Saudi Pro League side Al Hilal on a permanent transfer,” said a statement on Arsenal’s website. “Proud to be blue, proud to be Al Hilal,” said Martinelli during an unveiling video on his new club’s social media channels.

He will join Ollie Watkins at Al Hilal after the England striker left Aston Villa in a deal worth an estimated £51mn. Martinelli’s departure comes after Arsenal sold fellow left-sided forward Leandro Trossard to Besiktas.

Christos Tzolis has joined from Club Brugge but there are concerns the exits of Martinelli and Trossard could leave Arsenal short of personnel in that part of the pitch. Martinelli made 53 appearances in all competitions last sea-



son, scoring 11 goals, as the Gunners won the top-flight title for the first time since 2004. His nearly 300 games for Arsenal, including 62 goals, also saw him involved in their 2020 FA Cup and 2023 Community Shield successes.

But he was left out of Arsenal’s first two matchday squads of the season, with manager Mikel Arteta making it clear Martinelli would struggle for game time were he to remain at the Emirates Stadium.

Former Arsenal striker Ian Wright criticised the club’s decision to omit Martinelli from the squad for the opening game against Coventry. “The way Martinelli is being treated at the moment, it really makes me feel uncomfortable,” Wright said.

“I know they might want him out, and a lot of people might say, ‘yeah, it’s time for him to move him on’. But there’s ways of doing that and it should suit him as well, how he wants to leave.”

ROUND-UP

Spanish Court clears Asencio over video, but Real Madrid investigate drink-driving

Real Madrid’s **Raul Asencio** was cleared by a Spanish court of distributing an explicit video involving a minor, shortly after coach Jose Mourinho said the defender faced club disciplinary action over a drink-driving conviction. In a statement, a court in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, declared that “no offence” had been committed by the 23-year-old following the withdrawal of charges by the two complainants, to whom he had previously apologised.

Asencio was charged in 2025, alongside three former teammates from Real Madrid’s youth academy, for his alleged involvement in the recording and unauthorised distribution of sexually explicit videos involving two young women aged 16 and 18. The three other players, Ferran Ruiz, Juan Rodriguez and Andres Garcia, were found not guilty of distributing intimate footage without consent but were given a one-year suspended prison sentence for “child pornography” and must attend a sexual “re-education” course.

Asencio, who was not present at the time of the incidents, was charged with sharing the videos with a third party. The drink-driving incident also occurred in Gran Canaria.

The centre-back was more than three times over the legal limit on August 16. Asencio was convicted by a court in San Bartolome de Tirajana, a village in Gran Canaria, and fined 14,400 euros (\$16,700), while his driving licence was suspended for eight months. Mourinho praised the player while saying Asencio had let Real Madrid down.

Asencio suffered a hamstring injury in July and has yet play this season.

ACTOR JACKMAN IN TALKS TO BUY STAKE IN NORWICH

Hollywood star Hugh Jackman says he is in talks to buy a stake in Norwich – and could



soon be squaring up against fellow A-lister Ryan Reynolds in the second tier of English football. The Australian actor, whose mother is originally from the city, is close friends with Wrexham co-owner Reynolds, and told Talksport they could soon be rivals in the Championship.

“I’m very, very interested – and talking about it right now,” Jackman said when asked if he could get involved in English football. “Good on Ryan, you do your thing, I’m all about the Canaries.”

In 2023, Jackman took up an invitation to watch Wrexham alongside his Deadpool and Wolverine co-star Reynolds, who co-owns the Welsh club with fellow actor Rob McElhenney. Under their ownership Wrexham rose from the National League to the Championship with three straight promotions from the

2022/23 season. Jackman believes Norwich and Wrexham will be promoted to the Premier League this season, even though both teams have won just one of their four matches so far.

“I went to Carrow Road a couple of times, and I love the Canaries, and this is the year we’re going to get promoted. That’s my prediction,” said Jackman.

“My prediction is Norwich and Wrexham are getting promoted this year.”

Sydney-born Jackman, 57, previously revealed he was offered the chance to invest in Norwich in 2010 but turned down the opportunity. American billionaire Mark Attanasio is the majority shareholder in the club, located in the east of England.

QUEIROZ REVERSES RESIGNATION TO STAY AS GHANA COACH

Carlos Queiroz will continue as head coach of the Ghana national team despite initially stepping down following their World Cup exit, the country’s football association said.

The 73-year-old Portuguese led the Black Stars to the last 32 of this year’s World Cup before they were knocked out by Colombia. Queiroz, who also coached Iran at the 2022 World Cup, then said he would not be extending his contract. But the Ghana Football Association (GFA) has now agreed a deal for Queiroz to return for the “next phase of the team’s programme”.

Ghana kick off their 2027 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying campaign later this month with games against Ivory Coast and The Gambia.

Somalia are the other team in Group C of qualifying for next year’s AFCON in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

Queiroz, a former Manchester United and Real Madrid assistant coach, has also led Portugal, Colombia, Egypt and Qatar in international football.