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FOOTBALL

Lusail rout Wakrah to make history with first QSL win

Al Shamal produce a late comeback to beat 10-man Al Shahania in an eventful encounter

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail secured their first Qatar Stars League victory in emphatic fashion, thrashing Al Wakrah 4-0 at Lusail Stadium, while Al Shamal produced a late comeback to beat 10-man Al Shahania 4-2 in an eventful third-round clash at Al Bayt Stadium.

The victory marked Lusail's first in the top flight since their establishment and promotion to the First Division after winning the Second Division League title last season. Lusail began their campaign with a 1-0 defeat to Al Rayyan before drawing 3-3 with Al Ahli.

Yesterday's emphatic victory lifted the newly promoted side to four points, while Al Wakrah remain on one point and are still searching for their first win of the campaign.

Hamidreza Firouzi opened the scoring in the 12th minute for Lusail, firing a right-footed effort into the top-left corner after meeting a cross from Amin Pilali.

Lusail doubled their advantage seven minutes later when Rodrigo Moreno converted from the penalty spot after Al Wakrah defender Ali Al Mahdi brought down the goal-bound Firouzi.

The hosts extended their lead just before half-time, with Firouzi turning provider as Farhad Zavoshi rifled home from a difficult angle on the left. Lusail continued to dominate after the break, with Zavoshi completing his brace in the 57th minute to seal a convincing victory and compound Al Wakrah's misery.

At Al Bayt Stadium, Al Shamal scored three late goals to overturn a 2-1 deficit and beat Al Shahania 4-2. Al Shamal took the lead in the 25th minute when Abdelkarim Hassan struck from outside the box, but Al Shahania equalised from the penalty spot in first-half stoppage time through Francesco Antonucci.

Abdoulaye Traore then put Al Shahania ahead in the 54th minute after earlier having a goal ruled out for offside. The turning point came in the 72nd minute when Al Shahania were reduced to 10 men after Andreas Van Beek was sent off for a dangerous challenge on Baghdad Bounedjah.

Al Shamal capitalised late, with Mowafak Awad scoring twice in the 80th and 90th minutes. He first connected with a



The convincing 4-0 victory over Al Wakrah marked Lusail's first in the top flight since their establishment and promotion to the First Division after winning the Second Division League title last season.

Mohamed Ben Romdhane assist before converting Abdullah Al Ahrak's cross from close range.

Bounedjah completed the comeback in the 10th minute of added time, racing onto a through ball before beating the goalkeeper to make it 4-2.

The victory was Al Shamal's second of the season and moved them to seven points, while Al Shahania remain on three.

SADD FACE GHARAF, RAYYAN MEET AL DUHAIL

Defending champions Al Sadd, who have won both of their league matches and reached the Qatar Cup final, face Al Gharafa today, while Al Rayyan take on Al Duhail. Al Sadd coach Razvan Lucescu expects a demanding encounter against Al Gharafa, just three days after their Qatar Cup semi-final.

"We are playing another match three days after the Qatar Cup semi-final, but

the team and players are ready to take on the challenge in order to achieve victory," Lucescu said.

The Romanian added that Al Sadd's objective is clear - to win and continue their positive start - while stressing that the league encounter would be different from their recent Qatar Cup meeting.

Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said his side had focused on tactical and strategic preparations during training. "We made some mistakes in the match against Al Sadd in the Qatar Cup, but it was an open and balanced match as we expected," Martins said.

"We must address the mistakes we made and avoid repeating them. I expect the match to be intense and open, with both teams adopting an attacking approach and relentlessly pursuing victory."

Martins also stressed the importance of taking chances against the champions.



Al Shamal scored three late goals to overturn a 2-1 deficit and beat Al Shahania 4-2.

"In matches like these, we must increase our attacking efficiency in front of goal and strive to capitalise on opportunities, because small details make all the difference. Playing against a team like Al Sadd also requires a high level of concentration throughout the entire match," he said.

In the other fixture, Al Duhail coach Djamel Belmadi said his side are prepared for a difficult test against Al Rayyan at Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium. "The Al Rayyan match is considered one of the difficult matches in the league. We are preparing well for this type of match and we seek to appear in the appropriate manner," Belmadi said.

He acknowledged Al Rayyan's quality and history, adding that there was little to separate the two sides. "Certainly, there are slight differences between the two teams, and I don't see a big difference, but overall, the match will be difficult against

a complete team that is one of the most prominent and distinguished teams in the league," he said.

Al Rayyan coach Vicente Moreno, meanwhile, is confident his side can maintain their winning start. "We are facing a very important match because we will be playing against a very good team, and we need to give our best if we want to win tomorrow, and I have confidence in my team," Moreno said.

He added: "I told the players at the beginning of the season that it was very important to win the first league games and now we have a very good chance to win our third game, and I am sure that we will play a good game."

Moreno also pointed to his side's greater recovery time, noting that Al Rayyan had more rest than Al Duhail following the latter's Qatar Cup semi-final, but remained confident his players would deliver.

Younousse and Tijan reach Asian Beach Volleyball Championship quarters



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan advanced to the quarter-finals of the Asian Beach Volleyball Championships in Shangluo, China, with a straight-sets victory over Kazakhstan's Bogato and Gorin in the round of 16. The Qatari pair won 21-12, 21-13 to continue their impressive run in the tournament after topping Group B with a perfect record. Younousse and Tijan will face China's Wang and Du in the quarter-finals today. The Qatari duo are targeting the title as they continue their bid to strengthen their chances of qualifying for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics. They have a distinguished record, including a bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and fourth place at Paris 2024, along with three Asian titles and two Asian Games gold medals. They also won gold at the Sanya 2026 Asian Beach Games in April.

ATHLETICS

Seville, Alfred win at Diamond League finals

AFP
Brussels, Belgium

Sprint stars Oblique Seville and Julien Alfred won their respective races on the opening day of the two-day Diamond League finals in Brussels. But the evening's entertainment was mired by the withdrawal of Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis with a tightness in his leg that had resurfaced at last week's meet in Zurich.

"I pushed through it, probably a little bit too much. I said that if I felt this irritation during my warm-up, I wasn't going to jump," the US-born Swede said.

Duplantis admitted he was not certain to make the inaugural season-ending World Athletics Ultimate Championship in Budapest next week, where there will be a prize money pot of \$10mn.

To make Duplantis's night even worse, Greek rival Emmanouil Karalis won the pole vault with a meet record of 6.12m, beating by 1cm the previous best set by the Swede in 2024. Back on the track, world 100m champion Seville overcame a poor start to win the blue riband race in 9.90sec ahead of Cameroon's Emmanuel Eseme.

The Jamaican left it late to reel in the field, but looked comfortable as he crossed the line.

St Lucia's Olympic champion Alfred made short work of the women's 200m, winning in 21.79sec ahead of American Kayla White.

In a night of six meeting records, the most



Oblique Seville sprints to 100m victory at the Diamond League Finals in Brussels. (AFP)

impressive was arguably set by Botswana's world champion Busang Collen Kebinatshipi, who scorched to an impressive 43.40sec in the 400m.

It was the joint fifth fastest time ever run over the one-lap race, smashing by 0.23sec the previous best set in 2021 by American Michael Cherry, as the top four all posted sub-44sec times.

Trinidad and Tobago's Jereem Richards set a national record in second ahead of the US pair of Jacory Patterson and Chris Bailey, both in personal bests.

Not to be outdone, Kenya's world and Olympic 800m champion Emmanuel Wanyonyi won his fourth consecutive Diamond League title with victory in 1:41.80, smashing by 0.40sec the meet record set by Denmark's Wilson Kipketer in 1997.

There was a second Kenyan meeting record, this time by Faith Cherotich, who won her third Diamond League title in a row in 8:51.61.

Australian Cameron Myers came out top of a loaded 1,500m, winning in 3:30.14 as Norwegian wildcard Jakob Ingebrigtsen cracked down the home straight to end up fifth.

American Chase Jackson also set a new area, meet and Diamond League record in winning the women's shot with 21.14m - an improvement of 12cm on her personal best. Jackson's teammate and world record holder Ja'Kobe Tharp, still just 20, stormed to victory in the 110m hurdles in 13.03sec.

Jamaica's Tajay Gayle went out to a season's best of 8.46m to edge Greek's Olympic champion Miltiadis Tentoglu by 6cm in the long jump, while Slovenia's Kristjan Ceh managed a meet record of 71.29m to outgun Mykolas Alekna in the men's discus.

American Valarie Sion's five-year title-winning discus streak came to an end, however, as Feng Bin managed a best of 67.46m to become the first Chinese athlete to be crowned Diamond League champion since 2019.

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan players used to ‘chaos’: Hesson

AFP
London

Interim Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson hopes his drastically revamped squad can come through some all too familiar “chaos” with a much-improved showing against England in next week’s third and final Test in Birmingham.

Pakistan suffered an innings and 103-run loss in the series opener at Headingley before going down by 194 runs at Lord’s on Sunday as England took an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match campaign.

The Pakistan Cricket Board responded to those defeats in dramatic fashion, taking the extraordinary step of sending seven players home, calling up another seven and replacing sacked Test coach Sarfaraz Ahmed with Hesson, already Pakistan’s white-ball boss.

Senior players Imam-ul-Haq and Salman Ali Agha - Pakistan’s captain at Headingley when Babar Azam was injured - were among those told to leave. Left-arm spin bowler Ali Usman, who claimed a five-wicket haul at Headingley, and seamer Khurram Shahzad were also sent home.

Of the seven replacements, only batsmen Saim Ayub and Abdullah Fazal have Test experience.

Hesson, however, feels the whole squad can now unite and give a better account of themselves when the third Test at Edgbaston starts on September 9.

The New Zealander had recently been in Japan preparing for the Asian Games and was only due to travel to the UK for the squad’s audience with King Charles, which took place Wednesday.

“I was heading over to see the King and be part of a nice occasion. That got expedited,” Hesson told reporters at Edgbaston yesterday, as quoted by the BBC. “The last couple of days have been challenging for being in a hotel with some players coming, some players going and then the arrival of everyone.”

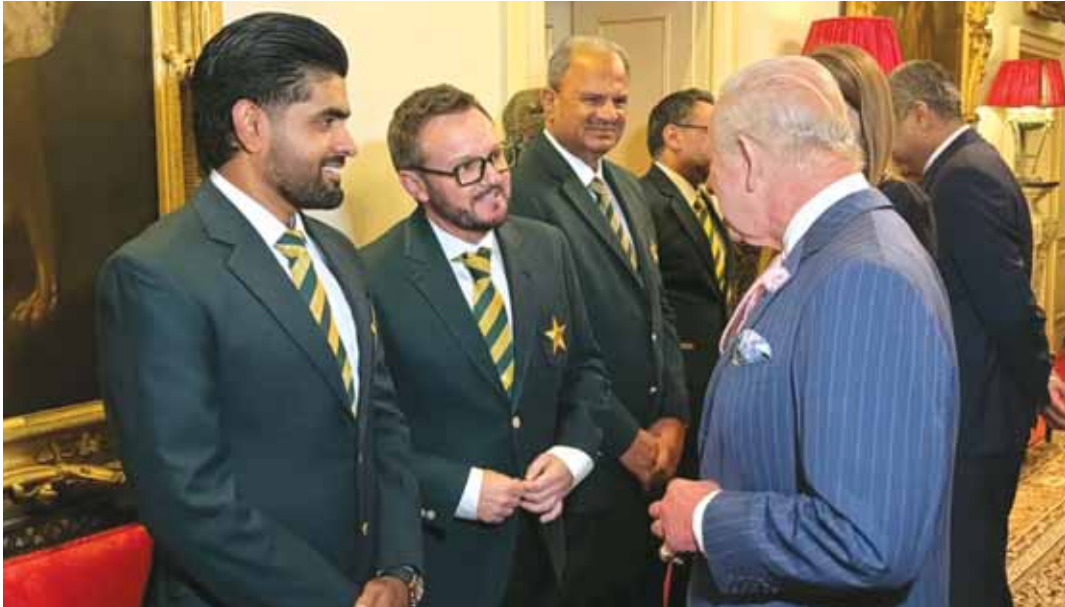
“The guys are probably more used to a little bit of chaos than I am. There is no doubt they have been disappointed, incredibly disappointed.

“We have had to park that and go ‘righto, where to from here?’ They have been really good over the past couple of days.”

Hesson added: “I don’t think anyone wants this to happen in the middle of a series.

“From my perspective, it is about putting a balanced squad together, not only for this Test, so we actually have some variety in our attack.

“Pakistan is known for the pace, unusual actions, mystery spin - we haven’t really been able to present any of that.” jdg/mw



Pakistan Test captain Babar Azam and interim team coach Mike Hesson chat with King Charles during a meeting at Buckingham Palace on Wednesday.

MATCH REPORT

South Africa win thrilling T20 to end Namibia jinx

BATSMAN LHUAN-DRE PRETORIUS HITS QUALITY CENTURY

Reuters
Windhoek, Namibia

South Africa’s Lhuan-dre Pretorius struck his maiden Twenty20 International ton with 101 from 53 balls as the tourists broke their Namibia jinx to win by 11 runs in their Tri-Series clash in Windhoek yesterday and book a final place against Zimbabwe.

Namibia had won their previous two T20 clashes with their neighbours, both against depleted South Africa teams, but this time came unstuck as the visitors posted 228 for four.

Namibia were in the contest for much of their innings but ran out of steam towards the back end as they reached 217 for three in their allotted 20 overs.

South Africa were sent in to bat and a 156-run opening stand from 69 deliveries between Pretorius and Connor Esterhuizen (88 from 40 balls) set them up for a massive total.

Both batters hit eight sixes on the flat wicket as they tore into the home bowling attack, with spinner Jan Balt (2-31 in four overs) the only one to come through relatively unscathed.

Namibia also had a fantastic start as Jan Frylinck (72 from 36 balls) and Louren Steenkamp (61 from 44 balls) put on 119 in 65 balls for the first wicket, but fell just short.

They were not helped by



South Africa’s Lhuan-dre Pretorius celebrates his hundred against Namibia during their T20 international in Windhoek yesterday. South Africa won by 11 runs.

Steenkamp retiring hurt at the end of the 16th over after he took a blow to the head and then the arm in separate incidents.

Lhuan-dre Pretorius, the Player of the Match, said yesterday: “Feels pretty good - we needed victory and got it. We will think about Sunday when it comes. Connor made it easier for me in the start and once he got out, I took over.”

He added: “No, I didn’t speak

to Heinrich today but I just saw he has sent me a message.”

Namibia skipper Gerhard Erasmus said yesterday: “I think it was an awesome game of cricket for public. It was a game of boundaries. We leaked a few and then couldn’t score at the back of the innings. It was amazing from openers to give us a shot but we couldn’t finish it off. It has been incredible to play some good cricket and I thank everyone who

came out. We want to create a brand of cricket people can come and watch and be proud of.

South Africa will play Zimbabwe in the series final at the same venue tomorrow.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 228 for 4 (Pretorius 101, Esterhuizen 88, Balt 2-31)
beat Namibia 217 for 3 (Frylinck 72, Steenkamp 61, Mokoena 2-43) **by 11 runs**

COMMENT

Irked Gillespie says he feels for Pakistan players

Agencies
Sydney

Former Pakistan coach Jason Gillespie said the team’s latest upheaval reflected a lack of stability off the field, after the Pakistan Cricket Board overhauled the squad and coaching staff midway through the test series against England.

Pakistan sent home seven players, including former captain Salman Ali Agha, and parted ways with head coach Sarfaraz Ahmed and bowling coach Umar Gul after heavy defeats in the opening two Tests.

Pakistan lost the first Test by an innings and 103 runs and the second by 194 runs to go 2-0 down in the three-match series, failing to score more than 200 in all four innings.

Gillespie, who coached Pakistan from April to December 2024, said constant changes had made it difficult for the team to build consistency.

“I feel for the players - this is these guys’ livelihoods,” Gillespie told *The Australian* newspaper. “From the outside it looks like they are playing with fear. Salman Ali Agha goes from captaining the team in the first Test against England, to being out of the team for the second Test and on the plane home before the third Test. How does that work? If you



want consistency on the field there needs to be consistency off the field. That goes to board level, selection and coaching level.”

Pakistan have had six Test coaches in the past three years, with former Australia fast bowler Gillespie among them.

Pakistan have won one of their last eight Test series since August 2024, a run that includes a 2-1 victory over England under Gillespie. “Aaqib Javed (Director High-Performance, Pakistan Cricket Board) came out recently and blamed (former Pakistan white-ball coach) Gary Kirsten and myself for everything that is going on. Aaqib has been chairman of selectors for the past two years. We haven’t even been there,” Gillespie said. “Somehow he claims it is our fault. Make sense out of that. I think

Javed needs to look at himself in the mirror.”

Reuters has contacted the Pakistan Cricket Board for comment. Gillespie was also critical of how some players learned of their omissions. “The players who were sacked heard it through family and friends and the media,” he said. “How disrespectful is that?”

Despite his criticism, Gillespie said he remained a strong admirer of Pakistan’s players. “The talent there is as good as anywhere in the world,” he added. “These players just need support off the field.”

SRI LANKA SKIPPER MENDIS OUT OF T20 SERIES AGAINST ENGLAND

Sri Lanka’s white-ball captain Kusal Mendis will not play in the away T20 series against England because of injury, the cricket board said yesterday. The 31-year-old will be replaced as skipper by deputy Charith Asalanka for the three-match series, which will be followed by three ODIs.

Revised T20 squad: Charith Asalanka (capt), Pathum Nissanka, Kamil Mishara, Lahiru Udara, Kamindu Mendis, Janith Liyanage, Dasun Shanaka, Dunith Wellalage, Wanindu Hasaranga, Maheesh Theekshana, Tharindu Rathnayake, Dushmantha Chameera, Eshan Malinga, Nuwan Thushara, Pavan Rathnayake and Dilshan Madushanka.

ANNOUNCEMENT

England call up hat-trick hero Crocombe for Sri Lanka one-dayers

AFP
London

Uncapped seamer **Henry Crocombe** has been called into England’s squad for this month’s one-day international series at home to Sri Lanka after taking hat-tricks in successive County Championship matches.

The 24-year-old Sussex bowler ran through Somerset’s tail at Hove last week as he took three wickets in as many balls.

He then repeated the feat against Essex at Chelmsford on Thursday during a return of 5-39, collecting a second hat-trick in eight days.

It has been a breakthrough season for Crocombe, who was briefly added to England’s squad for June’s second Test against New Zealand, when now retired former captain Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson were dropped for disciplinary reasons.

Uncapped Derbyshire batsman Aneurin Donald has been included in England’s squad for a preceding T20 series against Sri Lanka.

Donald, 29, scored 489 runs in 12 matches for Derbyshire in the T20 Blast this season.

All-rounder Jacob Bethell continues his recovery from a right knee injury suffered during the white-ball series against India which saw him miss The Hundred, with an England spokesman saying Friday he “remains on course in his rehabilitation”.

England management hope to see Bethell return during the white-ball series in Australia in November.

Ben Duckett is back in the T20 squad after being left out earlier this year but fellow opener Phil Salt is unavailable due to a right quad



problem. “Aneurin Donald and Henry Crocombe are two promising players who have earned their places on the back of impressive performances in domestic cricket,” said England men’s national selector Marcus North.

“Aneurin has had an exceptional season for Derbyshire in the Vitality Blast and also with Trent Rockets in The Hundred while Henry is a player we have had an eye on all summer.”

A three-match T20 series starts at Southampton on September 15, with the first of three ODIs at Chester-le-Street on September 22.

England T20 squad
Harry Brook (captain), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Sonny Baker, Tom Banton, Jos Buttler (wkt), James Coles, Jordan Cox, Liam Dawson, Aneurin Donald, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Saqib Mahmood, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue

England ODI squad
Brook (captain), Rehan Ahmed, Archer, Atkinson, Banton, Baker, Buttler (wkt), Cox, Henry Crocombe, Dawson, Duckett, Jacks, Overton, Rashid, Joe Root, Tongue

World T20 champions India to face Japan in first international meeting

TOKYO: The reigning T20 world champions India will play Japan for the first time in an international match when the teams meet at the Sano International Cricket Ground in Tochigi on September 22, the two cricket boards said yesterday.

The T20 fixture will mark the first time Japan will face a full member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in men’s cricket.

“To be able to invite the reigning World Champions to the home of cricket in Japan is a landmark moment for our association,” JCA Chief Executive Naoki Miyaji said in a statement. Japan became an Affiliate Member of the ICC in 1989 before gaining Associate status in 2005. “The BCCI is delighted to be part of this historic occasion as the Indian and Japanese men’s teams come together for a special T20 International in Japan,” BCCI Honorary Secretary, Mr Devajit Saikia, said.

India’s Mandhana is top run-scorer in women’s cricket

India’s batting superstar Smriti Mandhana has become the leading run-scorer in women’s international cricket after smashing a record-breaking 124 off 64 balls in the Women’s Asia Cup in Dubai. Mandhana

overtook former India skipper Mithali Raj, who had been the top international scorer with 10,868 international runs, during her match-winning innings against Hong Kong on Thursday. It also sealed India’s place in the semi-finals of the T20 tournament.

The 30-year-old also became the leading century-maker in women’s international cricket, with 18 hundreds across formats, overtaking Australia’s Meg Lanning and South Africa’s Laura Wolvaardt, who have 17 each. “It’s just the start,” the India vice-captain said after the game. Mandhana has two centuries each in Tests and T20Is, and 14 in one-day internationals. “Until I was batting, I didn’t know what record, because I didn’t know what’s the exact runs,” Mandhana said, according to Indian sports outlet *Sportstar*. “A very good day for Indian cricket, I would say,” she added. She also heaped praise on Mithali Raj as a “legend and a role model”.

Mandhana’s knock featured 14 fours and seven sixes as India piled up 193-5 before bowling out Hong Kong for 56 to secure a 137-run victory.

TENNIS

Sabalenka leads charge into US Open fourth round

Jessica Pegula keeps her bid for maiden Grand Slam title alive after win over Leylah Fernandez

AFP
New York

Two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka out-gunned Kamilla Rakhimova to reach the US Open last 16 yesterday.

Sabalenka didn't face a break point in a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Rakhimova, firing 29 winners, with 10 aces.

The numbers didn't tell the whole tale of a match that saw 92nd-ranked Rakhimova push Sabalenka hard in a second-set slugfest.

"She played incredible tennis, she really pushed me so hard in the second set," Sabalenka said. "I'm super happy that I was able to close this match in straight sets because she's a fighter."

Sabalenka, whose world number one ranking is under threat in New York, got off to a strong start, breaking Rakhimova in her first service game and holding her own serve with ease.

Sabalenka didn't miss a first serve until the seventh game of the contest, pocketing the first set in 35 minutes.

But Uzbekistan's Rakhimova dialed up the power in the second set, which featured mammoth service holds from each player before Sabalenka gained the crucial break for a 5-4 lead.

Sabalenka, who must repeat as champion to have a chance of remaining number one, next faces either 15th-seeded Russian Diana Shnaider or 96th-ranked American Taylor Townsend.

Shnaider knocked Sabalenka out of the French Open quarter-finals at Roland Garros in June.

Pegula overcomes Fernandez for return to fourth round

Jessica Pegula kept alive her bid for a maiden Grand Slam title when the third-seeded American rallied from behind to beat fellow former US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez 1-6 6-4 6-3 and make the fourth round.

Pegula faces Sorana Cirstea in the last 16 and will need to iron out some of the flaws in her game after a sluggish start against Fernandez,



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus celebrates after defeating Kamilla Rakhimova of Uzbekistan in their US Open match at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York City. (AFP)



Jessica Pegula of the United States reacts against Leylah Fernandez of Canada yesterday. (AFP)

but the American showed the resilience and composure that have made her one of the title contenders.

In other early matches, Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk beat Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-3, 6-2 and Romanian veteran Sorana Cirstea beat Italy's Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-3.

The night session features the return to Ashe of a US tennis great as 23-time Grand Slam singles champion Serena Williams teams up with sister Venus in doubles, taking on the 14th-seeded duo of Chan Hao-ching and Maya Joint.

Venus and Serena won two of their 14 Grand Slam doubles titles together at the US Open, where they first competed in 1997.

Their first doubles appearance together in a major since the 2022 US Open comes after 23-time Grand Slam singles champion Serena returned from almost four years away from professional tennis to play at Wimbledon. A knee injury in her first-round defeat - to Australia's Joint - scuppered plans for the sisters to play doubles at Wimbledon.

Zverev grinds past Halys, Gauff keeps rolling at US Open

Alexander Zverev was dragged the distance for a second straight match at the US Open but the top seed outlasted Quentin Halys on Thursday to reach the third round, while Madison Keys, Naomi Osaka and Coco Gauff also battled through.

Canadian third seed Felix Auger-Aliassime became another major casualty of the chaotic opening week at Flushing Meadows before French showman Gael Monfils made his final bow at the year's last Grand Slam event.

French Open champion Zverev narrowly avoided the trapdoor again, grinding out a 6-4 4-6 7-6(3) 6-7(3) 6-3 win over Halys to keep his bid for a second major title alive. Although the German's fitness held up, his form will be under the scanner.

"Physically, I feel fine," said Zverev, who has spent more than nine hours on court after the clash with Halys and another marathon against Lorenzo Sonego in the opening round.

"I'm proud, I think, to be physi-



Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates after winning his second round match against France's Quentin Halys. (Reuters)

cally quite strong. So, yeah, I hope at some point I'll start playing better tennis. It's also a skill to win ugly and when you're not playing great tennis ...

"I said it last year, New York has always been difficult for me. Just the conditions."

Auger-Aliassime, a semi-finalist last year, took the opening set

but was then swept away 6-7(5) 6-3 6-2 6-2 by Karen Khachanov after experiencing dizziness midway through the clash.

Osaka endured up-and-down form against Czech Katerina Siniakova but the perennial New York favourite prevailed 6-2 5-7 6-1 after harnessing the resolve she has had time to hone, on the court

where she won her first major eight years ago. "I just told myself that it's an honour to play on this court," Osaka told the crowd at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The 28-year-old Japanese player's match was not the only nail-biter across the sprawling Flushing plaza, as American Keys mounted an epic comeback against Hungarian Anna Bondar to seal a 5-7 6-4 7-6(5) win and delight home fans.

The 2017 finalist fired a remarkable 34 forehand winners to get the job done.

Her compatriot Taylor Fritz had an easier time, swatting aside Italian Mattia Bellucci 6-0 6-1 6-1, while last year's runner-up Amanda Anisimova's 6-3 3-6 6-1 defeat of Austrian Lilli Tagger added to the American joy.

Gauff overcame Spaniard Paula Badosa 6-4 7-6(5) on a sweltering evening that contrasted with the rain-hit opening few days to extend her bid for a second title.

Iga Swiatek enjoyed a relatively drama-free 6-3 6-2 win over Argentina's Nadia Podoroska, a rare appearance on the Grandstand for the 2022 champion.

FORMULA 1

Russell tops second practice to beat Ferrari and Antonelli in Italy



Mercedes' British driver George Russell drives during the first practice session of the Italian Grand Prix at the Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, northern Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Monza, Italy

George Russell bounced back to beat his championship-leading Mercedes team-mate Kimi Antonelli and both Ferraris on their home turf yesterday when he topped the times in second practice for this weekend's Italian Grand Prix.

Russell, who was three-tenths of a second adrift in third place in the opening session, led the way with a best lap of one minute and 22.559 seconds to finish 0.120sec clear of Charles Leclerc with Antonelli third, 0.141sec adrift.

World champion Lando Norris was fourth for McLaren ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, who had been second behind Leclerc, sporting a special livery to celebrate Michael Schumacher's first Monza win 30 years

ago, in a Ferrari 1-2 earlier in the day. Oscar Piastri was sixth in the second McLaren.

The top six were separated by 0.469 seconds with Racing Bulls rookie Arvid Lindblad taking seventh ahead of Oliver Bearman of Haas, four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull and Yuki Tsunoda in the second Racing Bulls car.

It was a very satisfactory session for Russell who, together with Hamilton, is 59 points behind Antonelli in the drivers' title race and knows he must take full advantage of the young Italian's engine penalties that require him to start from the back of the grid tomorrow.

The backdrop to the day, however, was a spicy spat between the Alpine and McLaren teams after the International Court of Appeal upheld an appeal by Red Bull and McLaren concerning the result of the Monaco Grand Prix.

That led to Alpine's Pierre Gasly

dropping from third to seventh, replaced by Red Bull's Isack Hadjar as Oscar Piastri rose to fourth in a reshuffled outcome.

Alpine's team boss Flavio Briatore told a press conference he questioned the impartiality of the court, pointing out that one of the four judges had close connections with McLaren, a claim that was robustly repudiated with team chief Andrea Stella describing the Italian's remarks as "insulting".

Frenchman Hadjar will miss tomorrow's race with a wrist injury and remains a doubt for next week in Spain.

He also sat out last month's Dutch Grand Prix.

"Madrid is in a matter of days so it will be difficult," Red Bull boss Laurent Mekies told Canal+.

"We'll assess him again but it's difficult to think about Madrid. The priority, what will guide our decision, is that we're sure he's back at 100%."

Van Aert wins Vuelta stage 13, Mas retains red jersey

MADRID: Belgian Wout van Aert won his first Vuelta a Espana stage of the year when the Visma-Lease a Bike rider beat Valentin Paret-Peintre in a two-man race to the finish line in stage 13 yesterday. Points classification leader Van Aert launched a decisive attack with about four kilometres to go, with Paret-Peintre on his wheel. Soudal Quick-Step's Paret-Peintre tried to move ahead in the last 200 metres but Van Aert pushed past the Frenchman to claim victory.

Red jersey holder Enric Mas did not challenge for the stage and spent most of the 192.8-km ride from Almunecar to Loja in the peloton. He finished three minutes later with the bunch, retaining a lead of one minute and 45 seconds over Primož Roglič, who remained second overall. "It was, I think, a very difficult stage to control... we kept attack-



ing and the final attack worked," said the 31-year-old Van Aert, a three-time cyclo-cross world champion, who won the Tour de France points classification in 2022. The medium-mountainous stage, one of the longest in the race, saw attacks from the start. As riders jostled for position, Gregor Muehlberger, who was ninth overall, crashed during a climb. The Austrian Decathlon CMA CGM rider, who has been setting the pace for teammate Felix Gall's pursuit of the red jer-

sey, got back up and continued but was later forced to abandon the race. About an hour into the stage, a large group broke away from the peloton, and Van Aert was part of it from the start. The Belgian looked to pull ahead with just over 20 km remaining but Vincenzo Albanese helped to keep the green jersey holder in check.

Van Aert waited for his opportunity and clinched victory with another attack near the end. "It was close enough to the finish to be worth it and with Valentin I had a nice companion... it was nice to battle to the line together," Van Aert added. Van Aert's teammate and three-time stage winner Matthew Brennan reached the finish line 24 seconds later to claim third place. A mountainous 152.7-km ride from Jaen to Sierra de la Pandera will test the riders today.

2026 ASIAN GAMES

Yu Zidi, just 13, is China's medal hope

AFP
Beijing

Yu Zidi, the 13-year-old swimming sensation, will be among a bumper 815 Chinese athletes heading to the Asian Games in Japan this month, state media said yesterday.

China finished their home Asian Games top of the medals table with a record 201 golds three years ago and will expect a similar performance in Aichi-Nagoya starting on September 19.

China's squad boasts 36 Olympic champions and the prodigy Yu, who became the youngest medallist in swimming world championships history last year

aged just 12. China's team comprises 404 women and 411 men who will compete in 38 sports, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Reigning Olympic champions include divers Wang Zongyuan and Chen Yuxi, as well as table tennis gold medallists Sun Yingsha and Wang Manyu.

However Zheng Qinwen, the 2024 Paris Games women's singles tennis champion, will not be involved.

Diver Wang told Xinhua the Games "represents the highest-level comprehensive sporting event in Asia and serves as a genuine test of our preparation".

"We will showcase China's standard and strength on the regional and global stage," Wang added.



SPOTLIGHT

PSG record most lucrative transfer window in club history

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Paris Saint-Germain have completed the most lucrative transfer window in the club's history, generating more than €400mn from player departures. The figure is also among the highest ever recorded by a European club in a single transfer window, underlining the scale of PSG's transformation both on and off the pitch.

Six players left the French champions this summer, yet none had started either of the club's last two Champions League finals. While several of Europe's biggest sellers were forced to part with key first-team players to balance their books, PSG managed to generate a record return largely by selling squad players.

The departures have highlighted the growing value of PSG's squad depth and the club's increasingly sophisticated approach to the transfer market.

The six departures were Bradley Barcola to Liverpool for €145mn, GonCalo Ramos to AC Milan for €75mn plus €15mn in bonuses, Ibrahim Mbaye to Aston Villa for €60mn, Randal Kolo Muani to Juventus for €6mn after an €8mn loan spell at Tottenham, Lee Kang-in to Atletico Madrid for €40mn and Noham Kamara to Lyon for €4.1mn.

Fees include reported bonuses and associated payments. The six players had cost PSG just under €210mn to acquire, mean-



European champions PSG continues to build a team capable of competing for every major trophy while increasing the value of its players.

ing the club has generated close to €200mn in capital gains within a few years. The figures underline how PSG have turned squad depth into a significant financial asset, creating substantial transfer value without having to dismantle the core of a team that has won back-to-back Champions League titles and UEFA Super Cups.

This summer is not an outlier. PSG ranks third in Europe for combined rev-

enues from player departures over the last five summer transfer windows, with €788.55mn, behind Chelsea (€1.15bn) and Manchester City (€845mn). Over the last five seasons combined, the club again ranks third, with €855.6mn, behind Chelsea (€1.20bn) and Manchester City (€886mn).

During the last ten summer windows, PSG ranks third with €1.15bn, be-

hind Chelsea (€1.75bn) and Manchester City (€1.16bn). Across the course of the last ten seasons, the club ranks fourth with €1.25bn, behind Chelsea (€1.97bn), Benfica (€1.50bn) and Manchester City (€1.30bn). These figures illustrate the evolution of the club's model. One that is now capable not only of attracting talent, but of developing players and creating significant value around their careers in Paris.

The club's recent strategy reflects greater financial discipline and patience in the transfer market. PSG allowed Gianluigi Donnarumma to leave despite widespread scepticism, then went on to win the Champions League again.

The club waited six months to sign Khvicha Kvaratskhelia at half the original asking price, walked away from deals for Zion Suzuki and Yan Diomande when the terms no longer made sense, and brought Xavi Simons back to the club before selling him for a significant profit.

None of this has come at the expense of sporting ambition. PSG continues to build a team capable of competing for every major trophy while increasing the value of its players, showing that sporting success and transfer revenue can go hand in hand rather than work against each other.

HOMEGROWN VALUE, SHARED SUCCESS

The summer has also highlighted the growing importance of the club's Academy. Ibrahim Mbaye and Noham Kamara both came through the youth system, hav-

ing been identified, developed and integrated into an ambitious first-team project before generating significant value for the club. The Academy pipeline is now an integral part of PSG's model.

The transformation extends beyond the squad and balance sheet to the club's culture. Last week, PSG announced a collective bonus for all employees in recognition of the 2025-26 season, underlining the club's belief that its achievements belong to everyone who contributes to its success.

Continuity has been equally important. The stability of the coach, president and sporting director - something rare at PSG in the past and increasingly uncommon in modern football - has been fundamental to the club's progress.

Nasser al-Khelaifi, president of PSG and chairman of Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), was personally involved in all five of the club's major operations this summer, negotiating directly at ownership level with Liverpool, Juventus, AC Milan, Atletico Madrid and Aston Villa.

His network of relationships, ability to build trust at the highest levels of the game and business acumen played a key role in PSG's transfer-window strategy.

Eight years ago, PSG was the buyer behind another club's record-breaking summer. This summer, it recorded the most lucrative transfer window in its own history.

The contrast tells the story of a club that once bought its ambition but now develops it, protects it and, when the time is right, sells from a position of strength.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal's boss Arteta relishing first duel with Chelsea's Alonso

Both sides have made perfect starts to the season, winning both their matches

Reuters
London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta is relishing the prospect of facing long-time friend Xabi Alonso in the Premier League for the first time when the defending champions host Chelsea tomorrow.

Both sides have made perfect starts to the season, with Arsenal and Chelsea both taking six points from their opening two matches. Arteta and Alonso, both 44, grew up together in Spain's Basque Country and have remained close throughout their playing and coaching careers.

The pair first faced each other as managers in a friendly in 2024 when Alonso was in charge of Bayer Leverkusen, but tomorrow's encounter will be their first meeting in England's top flight.

"I am really happy for him. It's incredible because obviously we have the history we have together," Arteta told reporters. "To be facing each other at such a level and with the responsibility we have managing some of the top clubs in the country is a really beautiful thing to experience."

Chelsea's attack has been impressive early in the campaign, with Morgan Rogers, Joao Pedro and Cole Palmer all finding form in front of goal, but Arteta said controlling the flow of the game would be crucial.

"That will depend on a lot of factors and game state is a massive one, especially because the two games that they played, they scored very, very early and that changes the momentum and the shift of the game," Arteta said. "But they are capable and he's capable of playing in various ways. He's been a really successful manager so far."

Arsenal were linked with a number of high-profile attacking targets during the



Arsenal players train ahead of their Premier League game against Chelsea.

transfer window, including Rogers, Julian Alvarez and Vinicius Junior, but their only forward addition was Greece winger Christos Tzolis from Club Brugge.

Arteta, however, brushed off suggestions that Arsenal had fallen short in the market. "I don't know, these are just opinions," the Spaniard said.

"The window is closed and I prefer to look at all the incredible things that we have in this squad and not to spend any more time on the things that are not part of us

right now. That's it and that's my main responsibility."

Arsenal will lean heavily on the likes of Kai Havertz, Viktor Gyokeres and Bukayo Saka but Arteta insisted the attack is not weaker compared to last season despite the departures of Leandro Trossard, Gabriel Jesus and Gabriel Martinelli.

"We have to understand the amount of minutes that those players played and the ones that were injured last year, especially in the first six months, and the data shows

something completely different," Arteta said. "But it is what it is. It is what we have and, as I said before, we already have some very, very good players."

Martinelli's departure for Saudi side Al Hilal in a reported £60mn (\$81mn) deal ended the Brazilian's seven-year spell at Arsenal that saw him make nearly 300 appearances for the club. "He goes with our gratitude," said Arteta. "It's been a pleasure to work with him, to be part of this journey with him."

Enrique extends contract as PSG coach until 2030

Paris: Head coach Luis Enrique has agreed a three-year contract extension with two-time defending European champions Paris Saint-Germain, the Ligue 1 giants announced.

The Spaniard's previous deal had been due to expire at the end of this season, but he has signed a new deal lasting until 2030. The news was announced ahead of PSG's Ligue 1 match against Monaco at the Parc des Princes, with players Joao Neves, Fabian Ruiz, William Pachio, Lucas Beraldo and Senny Mayulu all also penning contract extensions.

Enrique, joined by those five Champions League winners, was given a raucous reception from the home fans when the announcement was made. The former Barcelona and Spain boss was appointed PSG coach ahead of the 2023/24 season, tasked with leading them to a long-awaited maiden European Cup.

He achieved that with a stunning 5-0 final victory over Inter Milan in the 2025 Champions League final, before Paris successfully defended their title by beating Arsenal on penalties in May. PSG have also won three Ligue 1 titles and two French Cups since Luis Enrique replaced Christophe Galtier at the helm.

RICHARLISON DECIDED SPURS EXILE HIMSELF, CLAIMS DE ZERBI

Tottenham boss Roberto De Zerbi said he only wants to work with "hungry" players after leaving Richarlison out of his Premier League squad.

The Brazilian's future is uncertain after a proposed return to Everton before Tuesday's transfer deadline for English clubs reportedly collapsed over his wage demands.

Richarlison has also been linked with moves to Turkey or Saudi Arabia, where the window remains open, but he cannot feature for Tottenham in the Premier League until at least January after being left out of De Zerbi's 25-man squad. In an explosive social media post on Monday, Richarlison claimed "never again will anyone decide my future for me".

But De Zerbi said it was the 29-year-old who initiated a move. "I think Richarlison, he decided everything alone. He spoke with me at the beginning of the pre-season and told me his idea and desire was to leave," the Italian said. "I can't say nothing because I didn't decide anything. The message of Richarlison from the beginning of the season has been very clear. I accepted that and for me (there is) nothing (to say). If you don't want to stay here, I don't want to keep (talking) in the press conference. Go out, you have the freedom to go out. If you don't want to stay, why (do) we have to keep you on the list? Why (do) you have to stay?"

De Zerbi guided Spurs to Premier League survival towards the end of last season, but a splurge of over £300mn (\$405mn) on new players in the transfer market is yet to reap any reward. Spurs have lost their opening two games of the season.

FOCUS

Alonso urges Chelsea to 'move forward' after Fernandez's exit



AFF
London

Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso hopes everyone at Stamford Bridge can now "move forward" following the protracted sale of Enzo Fernandez to Manchester City.

The Argentina midfielder left Stamford Bridge to join City in a British record-equalling £125mn (\$169mn) deal ahead of the window closing on Tuesday. Chelsea had hoped to offset Fernandez's exit by bringing in midfielder Lamine Camara from Monaco, but that move collapsed when the Ligue 1 side backed out having not signed a deal sheet before the window closed.

Alonso, though, insists his focus is on the future, starting with tomorrow's trip across London to Premier League champions Arsenal, when Chelsea will be bidding

to maintain their 100 percent start to the new campaign. "We take all the decisions together," Alonso told a pre-match press conference. "We are responsible for them with our work together, the big ones, small ones. We knew ultimately the last goal is to have the best for the team, for the squad, for daily work here. We want to build a good spirit and a good team, and we have always taken the decisions thinking that we wanted to reach that."

Alonso added: "In football many things happen, and you need to be prepared for everything. With Enzo, we have had conversations, but always with respect as well. What he has done for the club, it has been great, and we are thankful, but now it is time to move forward. We have a lot of big personalities, players with a lot of quality in all the different positions and now we are ready to go."

Alonso also refused to go into fresh detail

about the collapse of the deal for Camara.

"I think that we are prepared and happy with the squad, the depth, with the healthy competition we have in different positions," he said. "It is a good balance between players of different stages (of their career)."

"We need to build that energy during the week to perform well at the weekends. So far, it is just two games, but it has been a good start and now we know who is in the building and that is good to have that certainty."

Chelsea's squad has undergone major change over the summer.

"We can be very happy with the whole transfer window," said Alonso, who will make a late check over midfielder Moises Caicedo, who went off during the closing stages against Brighton.

"What we started talking about in late May-early June, many things we have accomplished."