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ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

Rayyan survive late scare to beat Faisaly in opener

Jordanian club fight back but Rayyan hold on for all three points

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Al Rayyan survived a spirited second-half fightback from Al Faisaly to secure a thrilling 4-3 win in their Asian Champions League Two Group C opener at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan.

The Qatari side looked in control after taking a 3-1 lead at the interval before Mohammad Haddad and Ahmad Ersan struck late to set up a tense finish. The match got off to a cagey start, with neither side able to establish an early rhythm before Al Faisaly's Ahmad Ersan saw his effort from inside the box sail over the bar from a corner in the fourth minute.

Al Rayyan's free-flowing play almost produced the opener in the sixth minute, with Roger Guedes seeing his effort from outside the box blocked after being teed up by Otavio.

The Qatari side, however, did not have to wait long, striking from the resulting corner when David Garcia towered above the Al Faisaly defenders to steer Otavio's delivery into the bottom left corner.

Al Rayyan doubled their advantage in the 22nd minute when Drissa Diakite's clever flick released Roger Guedes through the middle, with the Brazilian racing into the box before reacting quickest to tuck away the rebound after his initial effort had struck the left post.

Guedes continued to torment the Al Faisaly defence, testing Al Abdallah Al Fakhori with a long-range effort in the 27th minute, but the Al Faisaly goalkeeper could not prevent Al Rayyan from scoring in the 41st minute.

Otavio delivered a perfect cross for Ahmed Alaa, who powered a diving header into the bottom corner beyond a rooted Al Fakhori to leave the Jordanian side with a mountain to climb. Al Faisaly, however, reduced the deficit in first half stoppage time when Saidou Simporé converted from close range after being



Al Rayyan's David Garcia (centre) celebrates after scoring against Al Faisaly in the Asian Champions League Two match at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

picked out by Ahmad Ersan.

Al Rayyan continued to dictate proceedings after the restart and restored their three-goal cushion in the 73rd minute with Hazem Shehata finishing from the centre of the box following Ahmed Al Ganahi's cutback.

The Jordanian side, however, refused to throw in the towel, with Haddad reacting

quickest to fire the rebound into the top corner from a tight angle after Ersan's initial effort crashed against the left post.

Al Faisaly then set up a nail-biting finish in the 84th minute, with Ersan curling a superb right-footed free-kick into the top corner to reduce the deficit by one but Al Rayyan held firm to secure all three points.

SQUASH

Crouin ends Coll's Qatar Classic defence

By Sports Reporter

Doha

New Zealander Paul Coll, the world No. 2 and defending champion, was knocked out of the Qatar Classic squash tournament in the quarter-finals after losing 4-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-9 to France's Victor Crouin. Coll, a 34-time PSA title winner, had been hoping to continue his bid for a second successive Qatar Classic crown after defeating Egypt's Mostafa Asal in last year's final.

But fifth-seeded Crouin fought back strongly after losing the opening game to book his place in the semi-finals. The Frenchman, who has won 19 professional titles, will face Egypt's fourth-seeded Karim Gawad in the semi-final. Gawad, the 2016 Qatar Classic champion, advanced after beating compatriot Youssef Soliman 11-4, 12-10, 15-13. World No. 1 Asal will meet England's seventh-ranked Marwan El Shorbagy in the other men's semi-final.

In the women's draw, Egypt's Amina Orfi, the world No. 2, continued her impressive run with a 13-11, 11-8, 12-10 victory over compatriot Fayrouz Aboelkheir, the sixth seed. Orfi, 18, will face England's Jasmine Hutton in the semi-finals after Hutton defeated

Malaysia's Rachel Arnold 11-9, 11-6, 7-11, 11-4.

World No. 1 and defending champion Hania El Hammamy will take on Malaysia's fourth-ranked Siva Sangare Subra Maniam in the other women's semi-final.

Orfi, who is seeking her first Qatar Classic title, said she was delighted to reach another semi-final in Qatar. "I am very happy to have qualified for another semi-final here in Qatar. I think we played a good match overall, although the game had frequent periods of stoppage and resumption, which made the match more difficult," she said.

"Even when I was behind in the score, I didn't panic, and I continued to believe in my ability to come back and win. I kept telling myself that I could win, and this belief helped me a lot to overcome the difficult moments and win the match."

Orfi said her experience at last year's World Championship had given her greater confidence when dealing with difficult situations.

"I think my participation in the World Championship last year gave me a great deal of confidence and experience, and I became more able to deal with difficult situations. Even when I don't perform at the level I aspire to, those experiences help me to stay calm," she said.



Fifth-seeded Victor Crouin (left) fought back strongly against Paul Coll after losing the opening game to book his place in the semi-finals.

SPOTLIGHT

Monaco to become one of a record 10 F1 sprint weekends in 2027

Reuters

London

Monaco's tight and twisty streets will host a Formula One sprint for the first time next season with a record 10 race weekends, including the scheduled opener in Bahrain, featuring the format on a 24-round calendar published on Wednesday. The championship will start at the Sakhr circuit on March 14, after February 24-27 testing in the Gulf kingdom, with Saudi Arabia the second round on March 21, Formula One and the governing FIA said.

Portugal (June 20) and Turkey (October 3) are additions with the Dutch Grand Prix at Zandvoort and Barcelona having dropped off. There were no asterisks against the four races in the Gulf but they will remain uncertain for as long as the current conflict in the region continues.

Saudi Arabia's race in Jeddah was cancelled this year while Bahrain's has been rescheduled to Malaysia's Sepang circuit next month.

The inclusion of a Monaco sprint race will surprise some, given that overtaking is almost impossible around the principality's harbour-side layout.

Qualifying is usually the most exciting point of the Monaco weekend, with the race often a procession and won from pole position, and Formula One highlighted the fact that spectators would now get two qualifying sessions as well as the showcase grand prix on Sunday. Replacing Friday's second practice session with sprint qualifying should increase the excitement on the first day of track action but it will also give drivers significantly less time to work



A view of the first corner of the Lusail International Circuit during last year's Qatar Grand Prix.

their way into the weekend at a particularly unforgiving track.

A Saturday sprint victory is worth eight points to the winner, meaning a driver can come away from the weekend with a maximum of 33 rather than the usual 25 if he wins both.

The 2026 season featured six sprints, the most to date, but Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali said in August that the number would be increased because so many circuits wanted one since the format was introduced in 2021.

Formula One said its data showed total viewership of sprint weekends was 12% higher than non-sprint weekends, with qualifying three times more popular with

fans than free practice. Bahrain's Sakhr circuit, Australia (Melbourne), Japan (Suzuka), Monaco and Abu Dhabi (Yas Marina) will all host sprints for the first time. Returning sprints will be Canada (Montreal), Britain (Silverstone), Italy (Monza), Brazil (Interlagos) and Qatar (Lusail).

That means three of the first four rounds will be sprints, as well as three of the last four.

"We are thrilled to welcome Portugal and Turkey to the championship and to expand sprint racing to 10 events, giving our fans even more intensity, drama and the wheel-to-wheel action that makes our sport so special," said Domenicali.

Australia (April 4), Japan (April 11) and

China (April 18) will form a triple-header on successive weekends before Miami stands alone on May 2 with Canada and Monaco following on May 23 and June 6.

Azerbaijan (September 26), Turkey (October 3) and Singapore (October 10) form another triple-header with Austin (October 24), Mexico (October 31) and Brazil (November 7) lining up as the third.

Next season is due to end later than this year with successive sprint weekends in Qatar (December 5) and Abu Dhabi (December 12).

This year's final race is scheduled for Abu Dhabi on December 6, although it could be rescheduled to Italy's Imola circuit for the same date.

Lusail Circuit to host 2027 F1 Qatar GP from December 3 to 5

Doha: The 2027 Formula 1 calendar has been officially confirmed, marking the return of the Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix to Lusail International Circuit (LIC) on December 3 to 5.

Being the 23rd round, the Qatar Grand Prix will once again be the penultimate race of the season, as Formula 1 rounds off a 24-race calendar that also welcomes the return of the Turkish and Portuguese Grand Prix after several years away.

Lusail International Circuit has hosted F1 since Qatar made its debut on the calendar in 2021 and is now among a select group of venues to host all three major motorsport events - F1, MotoGP and the FIA World Endurance Championship.

Having successfully hosted Sprint weekends in past seasons, LIC will feature the format again in 2027 as one of only 10 Sprint rounds on the calendar this year. The 5.38km circuit, with its 16 turns and multiple overtaking opportunities, has become renowned for close and fast racing.

Positioned near the end of the 2027 calendar, Qatar Grand Prix stand to carry significant weight in the closing stages of the season, offering crucial points across both the Drivers' and Constructors' Championships as the title fights reach their peak. In the meantime, tickets for this year's Qatar Grand Prix are still available to purchase now at tickets.lcsc.qa.

Rahm noncommittal on LIV 2.0, sees ‘opportunity’ for DP World Tour

LONDON: Jon Rahm continues to be noncommittal when asked about his interest level in LIV Golf 2.0, the vision of CEO Scott O’Neil to keep the league competing in 2027. In the week since Rahm said he was “more than willing to fulfill” his LIV 1.0 contract, the league has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. In that filing, Rahm at \$7.47 million had the largest claim among players still owed money, and he is reportedly still owed more than \$100 million overall on his LIV Golf contract. While Rahm’s contract was not automatically voided because of the bankruptcy filing, LIV has asked for court permission to reject its existing player contracts. Should the court grant the request, Rahm’s contractual obligations could end at that point. Rahm is in England for this week’s BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth Club. He was asked on Tuesday whether his comments about honoring a contract with LIV 1.0 means he does not have a commitment to 2.0 yet. “I said what I said,” Rahm offered. “No, nothing’s changed. It would be the same answer.”

The Spaniard known for his fiery disposition on the course said he is not fed up with questions regarding LIV, and laughed at the suggestion he is being very patient with the media’s constant inquiries. “It’s not always the strongest of my traits, but thank you for that,” Rahm said with a laugh. LIV Golf was bankrolled by the Saudi Public Investment Fund from its inception in 2022 until this year, when the sovereign wealth fund decided to pull its financing. LIV ‘NOT DISSOLVING’ O’Neil said that LIV’s decision to file for bankruptcy is not a sign that it is dissolving, but rather a step toward restructuring under a new business plan. The league has an agreement in place with BC Partners Advisors for restructuring support. However, the agreement includes a condition that at least 50% of players with financial claims against the league must agree to participate in LIV 2.0 within 35 days of the bankruptcy filing. That group must also represent at least two-thirds of the total dollar amount of player claims.



Jon Rahm during the Pro-Am at the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth Club in Surrey yesterday. (Reuters)

With the restructuring support agreement executed Sept. 8, that makes Oct. 13 a critical deadline. While Rahm is seen as a critical piece of the player equation, he’s also focused on returning home after Wentworth with his wife pregnant with the couple’s fourth

child. “There’s a long legal process they have to go through before a lot of things fall into place. I really can’t give you an answer right now,” Rahm said when asked if his contract being voided would lead to him departing LIV. “I’m very close

to expecting our fourth. Hopefully playing good this week, and at the end of the year. “So, until this current season is done, I really won’t be able to give you an answer.” Rahm is coming off a tie for 23rd at the Irish Open. Depending on

when his wife gives birth, he plans to play the Spanish Open the second week of October and then in the DP World Tour’s season-ending events in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. With commissioner Brian Rolapp saying on Tuesday that the PGA Tour is not planning any additional special pathways back for LIV Golf members similar to that accepted by Brooks Koepka earlier this year, Rahm was asked if a potential opportunity is emerging for the DP World Tour. “To be able to answer that, I think we need to know how exactly LIV 2.0 is going to shape up,” he said. “I think this is another opportunity for the DP World Tour to make some adjustments and gain some strength. That’s 100%.” “I think the tour’s in a good spot, and with the changes coming in the future, mainly in ‘28 on the PGA Tour, (DP World Tour CEO) Guy (Kinnings) and his team are going to have to change some things. But that always opens doors to strengthen some areas. “I think this next year and a half, year, is going to be possibly important to hopefully elevate the DP World Tour a little bit more.”

ANNOUNCEMENT

Rohit and Kohli in ODI squad for West Indies series

INDIA REPLACE INJURED CHAKRAVARTHY IN ASIAD SQUAD



India’s one-day international veterans Rohit Sharma (left) Virat Kohli will play against the West Indies in a three-match series next month.

AFP
New Delhi

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were named in India’s ODI squad yesterday for the West Indies series starting this month, as the team continue to prepare for next year’s World Cup. Both Rohit, 39, and Kohli, 37, only play the 50-over format internationally after retiring from Test and T20I cricket. Shubman Gill will lead the 15-man squad for the three-match series starting September 27 in Thiruvananthapuram. According to media reports, Rohit’s place was in doubt despite

hitting 138 in his last ODI outing against England at Lord’s in July. The two stalwarts of Indian cricket are keen to play in next year’s ODI World Cup, but fans and pundits are divided over their places in the side. All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja returns to the squad, having last played an ODI in January. Medium-pace bowler Aaquib Nabi and batting all-rounder Naman Dhir could be in line for their international debuts after receiving their maiden call-ups. India will also play the Caribbean tourists in five T20 internationals, starting on October 6 in Lucknow. Selectors also made changes to India’s Asian Games squad,

with spinner Varun Chakravathy ruled out due to a side strain injury he suffered during the ongoing Afghanistan T20 series in New Delhi. He will also miss the one-off T20 against Japan in Sano on September 22. All-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy, who was originally included in the Asian Games squad, has been withdrawn and will instead feature in the ODI series against the West Indies.

ODI squad Shubman Gill (capt), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Ruturaj Gaikwad, KL Rahul (wk), Dhruv Jurel (wk), Nitish Kumar Reddy, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Prasidh Krishna, Gurnoor Brar,

Mohammed Siraj, Aaquib Nabi, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Naman Dhir **T20I squad** Shreyas Iyer (capt), Abhishek Sharma, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Ishan Kishan (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Arshdeep Singh, Prince Yadav, Mayank Yadav **Updated Asian Games squad** Shreyas Iyer (capt), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Shivam Dube, Tilak Varma, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Yash Thakur, Vipraj Nigam

SPOTLIGHT

Brook keen to learn from ‘hero’ Pietersen after stunning century



England’s Harry Brook celebrates after the end of the innings during the first Twenty20 International against Sri Lanka at the Ageas Bowl, Southampton, Britain, on Tuesday night. (Reuters)

AFP
Southampton, United Kingdom

England white-ball captain Harry Brook hopes “hero” Kevin Pietersen can inspire him to even greater heights after watching highlights of the 2005 Ashes before smashing a 42-ball century against Sri Lanka. Brook finished on 114 not out off 49 balls to lay the foundations for a 119-run win in the first T20 at Southampton on Tuesday. Former England captain Pietersen watched from the dressing-room balcony after returning to the national set-up as a specialist mentor with the limited-overs side. “Obviously we haven’t had too much time together so far but he’s a great figure to have in the changing room - the type of player he was, he looked at batting slightly differently, in a similar way to me as well,” Brook said of Pietersen. “He always wants to try and look to put the bowlers under pressure, and I’m looking forward to working with him a lot more.” Pietersen, one of England’s greatest batsmen, was brought into Brendon McCullum’s coach-

ing set-up to work with the team in the build-up to next year’s 50-over World Cup in southern Africa. “I was actually watching his (Pietersen’s) highlights earlier, funnily enough,” said Brook. “He was a phenomenal player. The way he accessed different areas of the ground made it really tricky to captain and bowl to, and I’m looking forward to having a lot of conversations about that.” He added: “That’s not just for white-ball cricket, that’s for Test cricket as well. Hopefully he can have a big impact on my career. “He’s a hero to a lot of players in that changing room. We all grew up watching him and admiring his work and it’s just awesome to have a man of his calibre in the changing room.” Brook shared a 128-run second-wicket partnership with Jos Buttler and struck 30 runs in the fifth over alone, clubbing three sixes and three fours off Dunith Wellalage. Former Test captain Ben Stokes watched on television and was clearly impressed. “I don’t even think the genius of KP (Pietersen) could come close to what Harry Brook has talent-wise,” Stokes posted on social media. “You are an absolute freak, Harry.”

Pogacar back in the saddle on road to 2027 return

Cycling star **Tadej Pogacar** has resumed training on a stationary bike and is targeting a full recovery for next season after fracturing his collarbone and neck in a crash at the Vuelta a Espana. The five-time Tour de France champion suffered multiple injuries after a fall two weeks ago and will not defend his world title at the upcoming world championships in Canada. However, the 27-year-old Slovenian posted a video on *Instagram* yesterday, saying his recovery was on track and that he was gradually building towards the 2027 season. “Not quite how we planned to spend September,” wrote Pogacar. Before his crash on stage eight of the Vuelta, Pogacar had planned to chase a record-equalling third world road race title in Montreal



later this month before setting his sights on a sixth consecutive Giro di Lombardia victory in October. “It’s just nice to be back on the bike. I’m taking it step by step at the moment and slowly building things back up towards next season,” said the UAE Team Emirates rider.

COMMENT

Samson relishing battle with teen Sooryavanshi

AFP
New Delhi

Teenager Vaibhav Sooryavanshi’s rise has intensified the battle for places in India’s line-up but **Sanju Samson**, competing with the batting prodigy for the opener’s slot, says he relishes the challenge. The 31-year-old hit an attacking 57 to lead India to a series-clinching win over Afghanistan in the second T20 international in New Delhi on Tuesday after being picked in the team ahead of Sooryavanshi. Fast-tracked into the senior team after a stellar IPL season, 15-year-old Sooryavanshi became the youngest cricketer to represent India when he played

against England at Manchester in a T20 international in July. The left-hander was also India’s highest scorer with 151 runs in the team’s 3-0 sweep against hosts Zimbabwe in July. But in the first two matches against Afghanistan, India opted for Samson to partner another swashbuckling opener, Abhishek Sharma. Samson scored 10 in the opener but responded with a 22-ball blitz in the second match as India chased down their target of 160 with seven wickets and 31 balls to spare. “We may be competitors to the outside world, but we are a team and we are playing for a country and we want to win the game first,” Samson told reporters after the victory. “We just have to be ready for



our own opportunity. We can’t sulk that, ‘Oh, I didn’t get (the chance), or why did they give it to him?’ Those kind of mindsets don’t work here,” he said. “It is a very challenging place to be in... I know how hard these decisions are (for the management) when everyone has been

performing really well.” Samson made his T20 debut in 2015 but was not always the first choice of selectors due to his patchy batting form on the international stage. But he came of age during the T20 World Cup in India in March despite being benched at the start of the tournament. He impressed with the bat in the semi-final and final with attacking half-centuries as India defended their crown. Samson said he switches off his internet to screen out external noise over selection choices. “I try to turn off the Wi-Fi,” he told reporters. “But sometimes the Wi-Fi comes back on and I see the comments of the senior players. At first, it feels bad. I am not a machine. We are not robots that it wouldn’t affect us at all. It definitely matters, and you kind of get a bit affected.”

ASIAD

China wary of hosts Japan in T-T

Reuters
Nagoya, Japan

China's table tennis team are wary of the threat presented by hosts Japan at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games as the sport's super-power looks to bring on younger talent with an eye on the 2028 Olympics.

Olympic champions Sun Ying-sha, Wang Manyu and Wang Chuqin will lead China's campaign but the 10-strong team also includes seven players making their debut at the Asiad.

China have dominated table tennis at the Asian Games since their first appearance in 1974, sweeping all of the gold medals in 1978, 2010 and 2018.

The South Korean pairing of

Jeon Ji-hee and Shin Yu-bin denied China the sweep with a women's doubles triumph in Hangzhou three years ago but women's head coach Ma Lin is more concerned about the threat of the host nation this year.

"We have analysed Japanese players' playing styles and know exactly what we are up against," Ma told Xinhua news agency as the team departed for Japan yesterday. We need to stay vigilant, treat every ball seriously and hold ourselves to strict standards in training."

The rivalry between China and Japan in the women's game has grown from extremely close team finals at the last two editions of the World Table Tennis Championships.



Sun led China to comeback wins in both and was only recently usurped as world number one by teammate Wang Manyu with Japanese teenager Miwa Harimoto ranked third. We are closely matched," said Sun, who won three gold medals in Hangzhou. It all goes down to on-court performance and team cohesion. That counts most."

Harimoto, born in Japan to Chinese parents, and partner Hina Hayata top the rankings in women's doubles, while South Koreans Shin and Lim Jong-hoon are number one in mixed doubles, but Ma was upbeat about China's chances of a title sweep.

"We will go all out to fight for every gold medal," the former men's

world number one added.

"Huge challenges lie ahead, yet we have full confidence. Whatever obstacles come our way, we will fight to win."

The men's team are less experienced with defending singles champion and world number one Wang Chuqin the only one of the four players with previous Asian Games experience.

Japan's Sora Matsushima and Tomokazu Harimoto, Miwa's brother, are third and fourth in the men's singles rankings but China's head coach Qin Zhijian thought the mix of youth and experience would come up trumps.

"The three Olympic champions pass on their experience to the seven young players, while the younger ones bring passion and drive to inspire the Olympic medallists," he said.

Pakistan to miss India hockey event over security fears

The Pakistan Hockey Federation said yesterday that the national team will not tour India for an Asian tournament, citing security concerns and calling for the event to be moved to a "safer" country.

Pakistan and five other nations were due to compete in the Asian Champions Trophy from October 27 to November 5 in Mohali and Jalandhar, India.

The Indian and Pakistani teams have boycotted each other since New Delhi stalled all bilateral sporting ties in the wake of 2008 attacks on Mumbai, which it blamed on militants based across the border.

Arch-rivals India and Pakistan share a deep distrust, and last year fought a deadly four-day conflict triggered.

Mohyuddin Wani, president of the Pakistan Hockey Federation, said the decision not to tour India had been conveyed to the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF).

"Considering the sensitive situation between the two countries, it is not advisable to send our players to India so we have demanded from the AHF to relocate the event to a safer country," Wani said in a statement.

Pakistan also withdrew from last year's Asia Cup hockey event in India, citing security fears and tension at the border.

Pakistan's hockey team last toured India for the 2023 Asian Champions Trophy, finishing fifth amongst six teams.

(Reuters)

TENNIS

WTA Finals to be held in Charlotte from 2027: Chair

WTA to operate Charlotte event itself under public-private partnership

Reuters
London

The Women's Tennis Association will stage its season-ending WTA Finals in Charlotte, North Carolina, for at least three years from 2027, Chair Valerie Camillo said, as the tour seeks to take greater control of its flagship event amid concerns over its finances.

The Finals, featuring the season's top eight singles players and doubles teams, will be played at Charlotte's Spectrum Center, with a fan festival planned at the nearby convention center.

Camillo said the WTA would operate the event itself rather than rely on the type of outside-promoter arrangement used in the past, describing the new structure as a public-private partnership involving the city, county, state and local corporate community.

"The WTA will be taking greater ownership and control of the event and investing alongside our partners," Camillo told reporters this week, saying the tour wanted to build the Finals into the "Super Bowl of women's sports."

Financial details of Charlotte's package were not disclosed ahead of a planned announcement by local partners. Camillo said it represented a "meaningful investment" that gave the WTA confidence to commit to the city.

The move follows the WTA's decision to relocate the November 2026 Finals to Indian Wells, California, after ending an agreement under which Riyadh had hosted the event with the backing of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina lifts the trophy after defeating Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in the final of the Women's WTA Finals in Riyadh on November 8, 2025. (AFP)

The Telegraph reported last week that internal WTA projections showed the tour could run out of cash next year and move into debt by autumn 2027 if its spending pattern continued.

The report said the WTA expected operating losses of \$23mn in 2026 and cited the loss of revenue associated with the Saudi Finals deal as a major contributor.

Camillo said 2026 was a transitional year and that the tour was tightening spending while absorbing the unexpected cost of moving the Finals to Indian Wells.

She said the WTA had a "clear path" to consistent and sustainable financial performance from 2027, backed by revenue and audience growth.

Asked whether remaining in Riyadh for a third year would have been financially easier, Camillo said relocating the event to Indian Wells was a strategic decision that would help lay the groundwork for the Charlotte plan.

The WTA has not yet set prize money for the 2027 Finals. Camillo said equal prize money remained an important goal, but added that the tour was considering alterna-

tives including a profit-sharing model with players. "We want this event to be built together with the players," she said. "Why stop at equal prize money?"

Charlotte Sports Foundation Chief Executive Will Pitts said the city hoped the Finals could eventually help establish a longer-term WTA 500 tournament, although he said that would require construction of a suitable first-class tennis facility.

The WTA also plans to establish a greater operational presence in Charlotte as it builds the event, Camillo said.

DAVIS CUP

US Open champion Zverev, Shelton back on court for qualifiers

AFP
Paris, France

Newly-crowned US Open champion Alexander Zverev makes a quick return to action this weekend as he bids to help Germany reach the Davis Cup Finals, while American Ben Shelton hopes to put his Flushing Meadows final defeat behind him.

World number two Zverev downed Shelton in four sets on Sunday to continue a dream season after ending his long wait to win a Grand Slam title at the French Open in June.

Leading Germany to a first Davis Cup crown since 1993 would cap off his year in style.

But to reach November's eight-team Finals, the Germans must first get through a second-round qualifying tie against Croatia in Halle on Saturday and Sunday.

The seven qualifiers will be decided this week, joining hosts and three-time defending champions Italy in Bologna in two months' time. Zverev admitted that his coaching staff were not keen on him being back on court so quickly.

"I really, really would like to play in the Davis Cup. Everyone around me is trying to talk me out of it," he said after lifting the US Open trophy, which he initially did not realise he had won after match point.

Michael Kohlmann's Germany will be strong favourites to get the better of a Croatia team including 37-year-old Marin Cilic and youngster Dino Prizmic. The Croatians have not reached the Finals since a group-stage exit in 2023, when there were still 16 teams taking part.

"Now the goal is to stand our ground against a strong opponent, together with the team and the fans," Zverev said last month. "We want to experience a fantastic weekend of tennis together and qualify for the Finals once again."

Germany came up just short in the Finals last year, as Tim Puetz and Kevin Krawietz suffered only their second defeat in 24 Davis Cup matches together in a deciding doubles rubber against Spain in the semi-finals.

The United States, record 32-time winners of the competition, face a serious test in their

bid to end a 19-year wait for a 33rd title when they take on a strong Czech Republic side in Prague on Friday and Saturday.

There will be even more pressure on Shelton to deliver after world number 10 Taylor Fritz and Tommy Paul both withdrew from the American team.

Rising star Learner Tien and world number 104 Martin Damm were named as their replacements. Damm shares his name with his Czech-born father, a 2006 US Open men's doubles champion.

French Open semi-finalist Jakub Mensik, 24th-ranked Jiri Lehecka, Tomas Machac and Vit Koprivka make up the home outfit, captained by Tomas Berdych.

It will be a rematch of the second-round qualifying tie from last year, when Mensik beat Frances Tiafoe in a deciding singles rubber to give the Czechs a surprise 3-2 victory in Delray Beach.

USA skipper Bob Bryan, who was in the team the last time they won the trophy in 2007, will need Shelton at his best, despite the new world number four admitting he was "tired before I took the court" for the US Open final. The winners of the contest between South Korea and India in Seoul will become the first Asian country to reach the quarter-finals since Kazakhstan in 2021.

The Koreans have included Kwon Soon-woo and Chung Hyeon, a former Australian Open semi-finalist now ranked 549th in the world, in their team.

Rafael Nadal, who turns 20 on Thursday, will make his Davis Cup debut for Spain as they continue their tilt at a seventh title against Chile in Santiago.

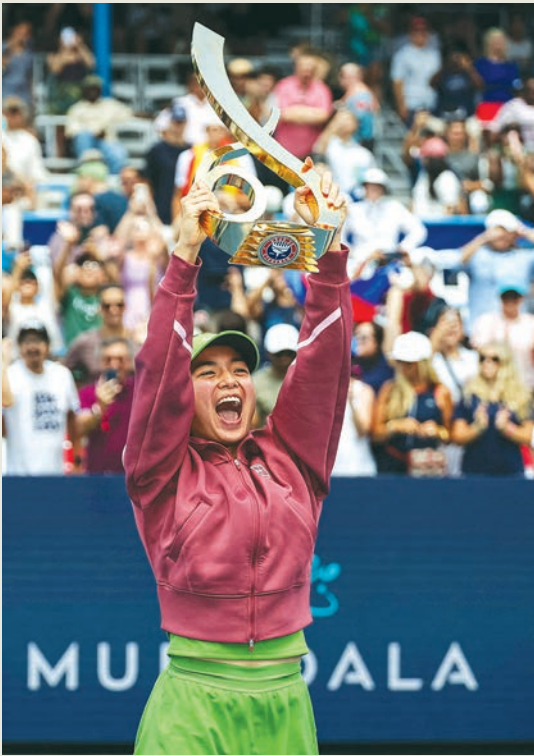
"It's so exciting to be able to represent Spain for the first time," said the world number 14.

"I was a hitting partner two years ago in Valencia and it was an incredible experience. I can't imagine what it's like as a player."

Britain, featuring surprise Wimbledon semi-finalist Arthur Fery, welcome Ecuador to London, while Austria take on Belgium, for whom Alexander Blockx withdrew following his run to the US Open quarters.

Felix Auger-Aliassime and Arthur Fils are slated to go head-to-head as Canada face France in Quebec City.

PHILTA seeks WTA exemption as Eala skips China Open for Asian Games



The Philippines Tennis Association (PHILTA) has filed a request with the WTA on behalf of Alexandra Eala, requesting an exemption from the mandatory China Open so that the world number 18 can represent her country at the Asian Games.

Eala, who has become a fan-favourite with wins over some of the biggest names on the circuit including Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff, is the highest-ranked player in the women's singles draw at the Asian Games, which begin on Saturday and conclude on October 4. However, the Aichi-Nagoya Games schedule overlaps with the mandatory WTA 1000 tournament China Open, which starts in Beijing on September 30. Skipping a mandatory WTA 1000 competition without an official exemption results in a ranking penalty, and may attract fines.

"We have formally requested an exemption and we respect the WTA's process. At the same time, Alex has made her decision to represent the Philippines at the Asian Games, and we fully support her," PHILTA Secretary General John Rey Tiangco said in a statement to media on Tuesday. Reuters has reached out to the WTA for a comment. Earlier this week, Indonesian Janice Tjien withdrew from the Asian Games as she was unable to secure an exemption from participating in the China Open.

Eala, however, will compete at the Asian Games regardless of the WTA's decision, Philippine Olympic Committee President Abraham Tolentino said in a statement. "The WTA has its rules and breaking the rules has penalties. But Alex will be in Nagoya, for flag and country," he added.

Nadal to play in exhibition matches

Retired Spanish tennis great Rafael Nadal will return to the court in front of a crowd for the first time since retirement in October to celebrate his academy's 10th anniversary.

The Rafa Nadal Academy confirmed Wednesday the 40-year-old, who won 22 Grand Slams in a glittering career before retiring in November 2024, will participate in some exhibition matches.

Nadal will compete at his academy in his home town Manacor in Mallorca "in a series of exhibition matches together with big names from the sport", said the academy in a statement.

The other players will be announced in the coming days, and will be "some of his rivals and friends who have accompanied him throughout his career".

A clay court expert, Nadal won the French Open 14 times in a remarkable career which spanned more than 20 years.



Leading Germany to its first Davis Cup title since 1993 would give Alexander Zverev the perfect finale to a memorable year.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar flag raised at Athletes' Village ahead of Asian Games



Qatar delegation pose after a flag-raising ceremony at the Athletes' Village in Nagoya yesterday ahead of the Asian Games.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The national flag of Qatar was raised during a ceremony at the Athletes' Village at Nagoya in Japan with the Qatar delegation in attendance at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games yesterday.

Qatar will be represented by 243 athletes, including 184 men and 59 women,

at the 20th edition of the Asian Games, which will be held from September 19 to October 4 across Aichi Prefecture and Nagoya. The Qatari contingent will look to build on its performance at the previous edition in Hangzhou, where Qatar won 14 medals, including five gold, six silver and three bronze.

More than 17,000 athletes and officials are expected to take part in 43 sports at the Aichi-Nagoya Games. While some events have already begun, the opening ceremony

is scheduled for September 19, with the Games set to conclude on October 4.

QATAR WOMEN SUFFER DEFEAT TO VIETNAM IN VOLLEYBALL

Qatar's women's volleyball team began its Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 campaign with a straight-sets defeat to Vietnam in Group D in Japan yesterday.

The Vietnamese side dominated from the start, securing a 25-3, 25-8, 25-9 victory to open its campaign on a winning



Qatar women's lost to Vietnam in volleyball group stage match.

note. Qatar will look to bounce back when it takes on South Korea today, before completing its Group D fixtures against Hong Kong tomorrow. South Korea also began its campaign with a straight-sets victory, defeating Hong Kong 25-23, 25-12, 25-12

in yesterday's other Group D match. The Asian Games women's volleyball competition features 14 teams divided into four groups in the preliminary round. The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarter-finals.

LA LIGA

Atletico cruise to comfortable win over Osasuna

Espi saves Real Madrid with late winner at Elche on Tuesday

AFP
Madrid

Atletico Madrid thrashed Osasuna 4-0 on Wednesday to move third in La Liga and build some form ahead of Sunday's derby clash against rivals Real Madrid.

Jonathan David, Lee Kang-in, Robin Le Normand and Alex Baena's goals helped Diego Simeone's side cruise to a comfortable home victory. They were without injured striker Julian Alvarez but it did not matter after they secured a second straight win to cut the gap on top two Barcelona and Real Madrid.

The comfortable victory was important for an Atletico side with lots of new faces still bedding in, after two defeats in their three matches prior. Ademola Lookman fired over and Lee was denied by Osasuna stopper Aitor Fernandez as Atletico started well. At the other end Rojiblancos goalkeeper Jan Oblak made a fine save to deny Raul Garcia.

David fired Atletico ahead midway through the first half with a quick reaction to finish off a rebound after his first shot was saved following enterprising work by Alejandro Grimaldo on the right wing.

It was the Canada international's second goal for the club after scoring his first on Sunday to help Atletico beat Real Sociedad and get back on track after losing against Athletic Bilbao and Liverpool.

Baena whistled a shot from distance narrowly wide as Atletico hunted for a second goal. It came early in the second half, with David teeing up Lee to drill into the bottom corner. Le Normand claimed Atletico's third in the 63rd minute with an emphatic finish after a corner was cleared into his path.

Johnny Cardoso created the fourth for Baena with a perfect pass for the playmaker to sweep home to finish the rout. Sevilla rose to fourth, level on 13 points with Atletico, with a 1-0 win at Deportivo La Coruna.

Miguel Sierra opened the scoring for the Andalucians and Depor could not fight back, particularly after Angelino's red card before the hour mark for a high tackle from behind.

Later Wednesday La Liga leaders Barcelona host promoted side Racing Santander, aiming



Atletico Madrid's Lee Kang-in (centre) fights for the ball with Osasuna's Abel Bretones (right) and Unai Santos during the La Liga match in Madrid. (Reuters)

to extend their 100 percent start to the season, while Levante host Athletic Bilbao. On Tuesday Real Madrid pulled level with the Catalan giants with a 3-2 win at Elche, snatched with a 91st-minute goal by Carlos Espi.

The striker, who already saved his team at Espanyol in their opening game with a late strike, tucked home at the back post in the 91st minute after Madrid threw away a two-goal lead. Espi, who Madrid signed this summer from Levante, has not started a game for the club but both of his goals have been vital for Jose Mourinho's side.

"(Espi) comes on with great motivation, (but) he has in front of him a player who is not a normal player," said Mourinho of Kylian Mbappe, who also scored for Madrid. "Playing with the two of them is not easy... with the

changes I made late on I risked everything, because a draw was not enough."

Mourinho was unhappy with his team not extending their 2-0 lead and allowing Elche, now bottom of La Liga, to fight back. "There are games which seem to be over... which we're not killing off, and after not killing them off they go from easy to being out of control," added the veteran coach.

Mourinho rested Jude Bellingham for the first time this season, bringing Arda Guler into the team in his place. Players from both teams wore t-shirts in support of residents from the city of Ceuta after the recent migration crisis in the Spanish territory in north Africa, although Mbappe, Vinicius Junior and Ibrahima Konate rolled them halfway up, appearing to slightly obscure the message "we are all Ceutans".

manager in June, reminded reporters of a controversial incident when he was Guardiola's assistant in the 2022/23 season.

Bruno Fernandes's goal was given despite the presence of Marcus Rashford in an offside position in a 2-1 win for United at Old Trafford.

Maresca said he was still waiting for officials to say sorry. "Three years ago, when I was here, it happened exactly the same against Man United," said the former Chelsea boss.

"We lost the derby there. The goal was not a regular goal, if you remember. To be honest, no one apologised. We are still waiting for the apology for that goal. Sometimes it happens for you, sometimes it happens against you. It's football."

Maresca brushed aside a question on whether he was pleased there would be no VAR in place in the early rounds of the League Cup, bringing the focus back to Sunday's win.

FOOTBALL

Messi set for Argentina farewell in Benin friendly

AFP
Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi was on Tuesday named in Argentina's squad for a friendly against Benin on October 6, a match that will serve as his farewell appearance after announcing his international retirement last month. The 39-year-old said in August he was retiring from Argentina duty after a two-decade international career that included winning the 2022 World Cup and Copa America triumphs in 2021 and 2024.

"We made the decision to invite the best player in the world, the symbol of our national team, our captain, Lionel Andres Messi, so that he can have the farewell he truly deserves on October 6 here in Argentina," said Argentine FA president Claudio Tapia.

The match against Benin will take place at River Plate's Estadio Monumental in Buenos Aires, which can accommodate 85,000 spectators.

Tapia also invited all of Argentina's 2022 World Cup winners to join Messi for what he said would be an "unforgettable" occasion.

Argentina begin a series of three friendlies against Bolivia on September 30 in Cordoba - their first match since losing the World Cup final to Spain - before taking on Burkina Faso in Buenos Aires on October 3. Messi has been included in the squad for the third match against Benin, when he is expected to make his 208th and final appearance for the national team. He is Argentina's all-time record scorer with 125 goals.

Following the death of his father Jorge last month, Messi had said he had "serious doubts" about continuing to play football of any sort



Lionel Messi will retire from Argentina duty after a two-decade career that included winning the 2022 World Cup and Copa America triumphs in 2021 and 2024. (AFP)

for "much longer".

"It was a decision that hurt and still hurts deep in my soul but I understand that it is the right time," Messi said when he called time on his Argentina career.

His contract with Major League Soccer club Inter Miami runs until the end of the 2028 season. Last month FIFA ordered Argentina to play their next home match with capacity reduced to 50 percent for breaches of its disciplinary code relating to using a sports event for making demonstrations of a non-sporting nature.

After Argentina beat England 2-1 in a tense World Cup semi-final in July, several players held up a banner saying: "The Falklands are Argentine".

The friendlies are also expected to count towards suspensions handed down following incidents after Argentina's World Cup final defeat by Spain. Midfielder Leandro Paredes received a 10-match ban, while defender Nahuel Molina was suspended for seven games and Thiago Almada for one.

FIFA says review of shelved investment plan to be presented to Council

FIFA said on that a review of the withdrawn FFE proposal would be presented to the world football body's Council, after criticism from Denmark's football chief Jesper Moller over a lack of answers regarding the abandoned project. Moller last week criticised world football's governing body for declining to answer what he described as "critical questions" at a Legal Committee meeting about the scrapped proposal, launched by FIFA President Gianni Infantino, to sell commercial stakes in tournaments to outside investors.

The FIFA Council comprises 37 members, including President Infantino, eight vice-presidents and 28 members elected by FIFA's member associations.

Infantino's proposal to sell a 20% stake in the World Cup and other FIFA events triggered a global backlash, with UEFA, the AFC and CONCACAF among the confederations calling for changes to FIFA's leadership structure.

The possibility of a no-confidence vote against Infantino was also discussed.

Several European national associations have since withdrawn support for Infantino's re-election bid, with Greek Football Association President Makis Gagatsis and former Germany national team director Oliver Bierhoff joining UEFA's push for change in FIFA's

leadership on Tuesday, underscoring a united European front.

However, multiple sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters that the FIFA president retains sufficient backing to secure another term, meaning opponents will need to shift strategy and focus on curbing his powers.

The FIFA presidential election is scheduled for March 18, 2027, in Rabat, where Infantino will seek a fourth term in office.

AL TAAWOUN HIT WITH STADIUM CLOSURE AND FINE OVER 'JOTA' CHANTS

The Saudi Arabian Football Federation's Disciplinary and Ethics Committee ordered Al Taawoun to play their next two home Saudi Pro League matches behind closed doors and fined the club 100,000 riyals (\$26,660) after supporters chanted the name of the late Portugal forward Diogo Jota during match against Al Hilal.

The sanctions stem from an incident involving Al Hilal midfielder Ruben Neves, a close friend and former teammate of Jota, who died in a car crash in Spain last year alongside his brother Andre Silva. Neves was among the pallbearers at Jota's funeral. The chants sparked widespread criticism, including from Al Nassr captain Cristiano Ronaldo, who urged authorities to take strong action.

FOCUS

Man City's Maresca defends VAR officials

AFP
London

Manchester City boss Enzo Maresca expressed sympathy for VAR officials after his team benefited from a clear error in their 1-0 win against Manchester United.

Erling Haaland scored a controversial winner in the 60th minute at Old Trafford on Sunday to make it four wins out of four for City in the Premier League.

Haaland was initially flagged offside but VAR ruled he was being played onside by United defender Patrick Dorgu, neglecting to take account of the position of Enzo Fernandez, who was clearly offside and was interfering with play.

Refereeing body Pro Ref acknowledged an

"error of judgment", saying that the video assistant referee should have recommended an on-field review.

But Maresca spoke up for the officials ahead of today's League Cup third round match against Championship side Norwich.

"Sometimes they go for you, the decisions, sometimes they go against you," he said. "But also it's not easy, I think, for the VAR, for the people that are in front of the screen, and in 10 seconds, 20 seconds they have to make a decision. It's not easy for them. Sometimes they make some mistakes. I make mistakes, players make mistakes, I think it's part of our job."

Maresca said he was unhappy with the intense focus on the offside goal following an impressive win for his team, who were reduced to 10 men when Phil Foden was sent off in the first half.

The Italian, who replaced Pep Guardiola as