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SPOTLIGHT

Qatar track and field stars eye Asian Games glory

Qatar won six athletics medals at the previous Asian Games in Hangzhou, including three gold

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Athletics stars will be among the leading medal hopefuls for Qatar at the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, which begins on Saturday and runs until October 4.

The athletics team features a strong line-up of established performers and emerging talents across track, field and jumping events, with the athletes aiming to add to Qatar's impressive record at the continental showpiece.

Ammar Ismail and Ashraf Osman will compete in the 400m, while Abderrahman Samba and Bassem Hemeida will line up in the 400m hurdles.

Hatem Hameed and Abubaker Haydar will contest the 800m, with Mohamed Waheed and Ibrahim Abbas entered in the 1500m. Zakaria Ibrahim will compete in the 3000m steeplechase.

In the field events, Moaaz Ibrahim will take part in the discus throw, while Ashraf El-Seify and Abderrahman Ibrahim will compete in the hammer throw. Ahmed Jebrin will contest the shot put.

Mutaz Barshim will lead Qatar's challenge in the high jump, while Saif Mohamed will compete in the pole vault.

Qatar won six athletics medals at the previous Asian Games in Hangzhou, including three golds. Barshim won in high jump, Mohamed Al-Garni took the 1500m title and Samba claimed gold in the 400m hurdles. The three silver medals came from the 4x400m relay team of Samba, Bassem Hemeida, Ismail Daoud and Ashraf Osman, El-Seify in the hammer throw and Hemeida in the 400m.

QATAR U-23 SEEK RESPONSE AGAINST SAUDI ARABIA

Qatar's U-23 football team will look to revive its Asian Games campaign when it takes on Saudi Arabia in the second round of Group D at Mizuho Park Stadium in Nagoya today. The match kicks off at 1:30pm Doha time, with Qatar seeking a positive result after suffering a 4-1 defeat to South Korea in its opening game.

Head coach Jose Angel Lacunza and his staff have used the training sessions since that defeat to address the shortcomings exposed against South Korea and prepare the players for another demanding encounter. Saudi Arabia will pose a different challenge, but Qatar knows it needs to collect points to keep its hopes of advancing from the group alive. The players will be determined to put the opening result be-



Qatar's track and field team features a strong line-up of established performers such as Abderrahman Samba and Bassem Hemeida, alongside a number of emerging talents.

hind them, improve their performance and produce a stronger display against their Gulf rivals.

QATAR WOMEN SEEK WINNING FINISH IN VOLLEYBALL

Qatar's women's volleyball team will look to end its Asian Games campaign on a positive note when it faces Hong Kong in the third and final round of Group D today.

The Qatari side is seeking a response after suffering a heavy straight-sets defeat to South Korea in its second group match, going down 25-6, 25-6, 25-10. Qatar had also lost its opening match to Vietnam in straight sets.

With the top two teams from each of the four groups advancing to the quarter-finals, Qatar's final group match will provide an opportunity for the players to gain valuable experience.

The team will be keen to show improvement and finish its campaign with a competitive performance, using the experience gained in Aichi-Nagoya as a platform for future development.

QATAR 3X3 TEAMS AIM TO MAKE AN IMPACT

Qatar's 3x3 basketball teams will be looking to make an impact at Asian Games, with the men's side targeting a strong run on the continental stage.

The men's team features Mohammed Hashim, Hamad Yassin, Nizar and Mubarak Jama. Qatar begins its campaign on September 21 against Indonesia before taking on Chinese Taipei.



High jump icon Mutaz Barshim has won three medals at the Asian Games, capturing gold at every single edition he has competed in. He also holds the current Asiad record.

The team has stepped up preparations with a training camp in Doha, where it held intensive sessions and played a series of warm-up matches, including games against Serbia.

The fast-paced and physical nature of 3x3 basketball leaves little room for error, and Qatar will look to make a positive start through disciplined defence, accurate shooting and efficient finishing.

The opening matches will provide an



Qatar Olympic Committee Secretary General Jassim bin Rashid al-Bueinain visited the Qatari delegation's headquarters at the Athletes' Village ahead of the start of the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan. Al-Bueinain toured the headquarters and reviewed the arrangements and workflow put in place by the administrative team to meet the needs of Qatar athletes.



Qatar's women's volleyball team have suffered a straight-sets defeat to South Korea.

early test as the team seeks to build momentum and progress to the later stages of the competition.

The women's 3x3 competition begins on September 22, with Qatar facing Sri Lanka and China. Both teams will be aiming to make the most of their Asian Games experience and strengthen Qatar's presence in the rapidly growing 3x3 format.

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

Qatari athletes will compete in 26 sports and 32 disciplines under 18 national sports federations.

The sports include athletics, football, basketball, 3x3 basketball, handball, volleyball, beach volleyball, squash, padel, taekwondo, judo, artistic gymnastics, golf, shooting, swimming, jiu-jitsu, esports, sailing, equestrian, karate, fencing, archery, wrestling, boxing, weightlifting and table tennis.



FOOTBALL

Lopetegui names Qatar squad for Gulf Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Julen Lopetegui has named a 26-man Qatar squad for the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup in Saudi Arabia, with Tarek Salman returning after missing the World Cup, Lusail midfielder Naif al-Hadhrani earning a recall after a two-year absence and Hashim Ali also making the cut.

Al Hashemi al-Hussein, Lucas Mendes and forward Mohammed Muntari, who has struggled with injuries, have been left out.

Beyond those changes, however, there is little fresh about Lopetegui's selection, with the Spaniard sticking largely to the same core that represented Qatar at the World Cup in North America in June and July. The coach has also included several players who have not been regular starters for their clubs.

Lopetegui has been a regular presence at Qatar Stars League matches in recent weeks as he assessed his options ahead of the tournament. His final squad, though, points to continuity rather than a major overhaul.

Veteran forward Hassan al-Haydos is also in the squad. The 35-year-old Al Sadd forward reversed his decision to retire from in-



ternational football ahead of the World Cup qualifiers and returned to the national team at Lopetegui's request. He scored in Qatar's 3-1 defeat by Bosnia and Herzegovina at the World Cup but was mostly used as a substitute following his return.

Striker Akram Afif and Almoez Ali remain the main attacking figures, while goalkeepers Mahmoud Abunada, Meshaal Barsham and Salah Zakaria have retained their places.

Midfielder Assim Madibo is also included despite being handed a five-match ban for the tackle that broke the leg of Canada midfielder Ismael Kone during Qatar's 6-0 defeat in Vancouver at the World Cup.

Qatar endured another group-stage exit at the World Cup, opening with a spirited 1-1 draw against Switzerland to earn their first point in the football showpiece before suffer-

ing heavy defeats by Canada and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Despite that campaign, Lopetegui appears to retain the backing of the Qatar Football Association, with the team's main priority now being to defend their AFC Asian Cup title. Saudi Arabia will host the tournament from January 7 to February 5, 2027, with Qatar bidding for a third successive Asian Cup crown.

Before then, Qatar will begin their Gulf Cup campaign in Group B against defending champions Bahrain on September 24. They will face Yemen three days later before completing the group stage against the United Arab Emirates on September 30.

Hosts Saudi Arabia are in Group A alongside Iraq, Oman and Kuwait. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals. Kuwait are the most successful team in Gulf Cup history with 10 titles, followed by Iraq with four. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have won the tournament three times each, while Oman, the UAE and Bahrain have two titles apiece. Yemen have yet to win the competition. The tournament will be played from September 23 to October 6, with matches at Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City Stadium and Prince Abdullah Al-Faisal Sports City Stadium.

SPOTLIGHT

Smith still haunted by ‘Sandpapergate’ scandal

AFP
Sydney

Steve Smith says he is still traumatised by the infamous “Sandpapergate” ball-tampering scandal in 2018, but the former Australia skipper is undaunted about returning to South Africa for his first Test series since.

The prolific batsman was sent home in disgrace, banned for a year and sacked as captain after conspiring to alter the ball using sandpaper during the third Test in Cape Town eight years ago.

David Warner, considered the ringleader, was suspended for 12 months and stripped of all leadership roles while Cameron Bancroft was slapped with a nine-month ban. Smith, preparing for the first Test in Durban on October 9 before the series moves to Gqeberha and Cape Town, said he still suffers flashbacks to a traumatic period of his life.

He is haunted by memories of leaving Johannesburg airport,

with cameras clicking furiously around him, and a harrowing Sydney press conference on his return when he broke down in tears.

“I’m not a big fan of cameras ... I get anxious around cameras to be honest,” he told News Corp. in an interview published yesterday.

“That was a traumatic experience in my life and when I hear the flash of a camera it makes me revisit that in a way.

“The 24-48 hours of being told by James Sutherland (then-Crick-et Australia chief executive) that I was getting banned for a year. That and going through the airport in Johannesburg getting absolutely mobbed, and then flying back and doing that press conference.

“I still have little flashbacks here and there of it.”

Smith bore the brunt of the scandal that is considered one of Australian sport’s darkest moments, but bounced back emphatically. He smashed a superb century against England on his return and has gone from strength to strength, with 10,920 Test runs so far at an average of 56.

“It was certainly a difficult period, particularly the initial period a few days after,” he said.

“The mental state I was in was not great. That’s somewhere I’d like not to get to again, but I certainly learned from that and have been able to move forward with my life. I’ve tried to kind of erase a lot of 2018 and what happened,” he added.

“I can’t remember a lot about the series. I’ve tried to block most of it out of my memory bank.”

Smith has been back to South Africa for a white-ball series since 2018, but not for a Test and he is bracing for hostile crowds.

But the 37-year-old is unperturbed, having negotiated multiple Ashes tours to England since 2018, where the Barmy Army abused him relentlessly. “It’s something I’m kind of used to. I’ve copped a lot at times away from home at different venues across my career and it’s something that I take in my own stride,” he said.

“I use it as motivation to try and go out and do well and try and take a positive from it.”



Australia's Steve Smith was sacked as captain after conspiring to alter the ball using sandpaper during the third Test in Cape Town eight years ago. (AFP)

CRICKET

Abhishek slams record ton as India sweep series 3-0

Opener hit a 30-ball century before Afghanistan collapsed to 94 all out

AFP
New Delhi

Opener Abhishek Sharma hit a record T20 century off 30 balls to set up a crushing 127-run win for India in the third match against Afghanistan and sweep the series 3-0 yesterday.

Left-handed Abhishek's ton was the fastest in a T20 international between full Test-playing nations as he guided India to 221-7 at New Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium. Afghanistan, who were the official hosts for the series, checked the opposition surge after Abhishek departed for 108 off 34 balls and India lost their way from 142-1 in 10 overs.

But the Afghan batters once again disappointed and were bowled out for 94 in 14.1 overs. Afghanistan had posted 156-8 and 159-8 while batting first in the first two matches. Left-arm spinner Axar Patel struck twice in his first over to send back Rahmanullah Gurbaz, for 15, and Sediqqullah Atal, for one, and Afghanistan could never recover from the losses.

Seam bowler Nitish Kumar Reddy also took two wickets in one over to return figures of 3-25. Leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi wrapped up the Afghanistan innings with his third strike of the match.

Abhishek stood out with his third T20 century as he surpassed Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza's ton off 33 balls against Gambia in 2024 and Finn Allen's effort from the same number of deliveries in New Zealand's T20 World Cup semi-final win over South Africa earlier this year in India. “It’s just watch the ball and play according to it,” said Abhishek, who was named player of the match.

“It’s very simple from day one. I just want to express myself. Just



India's Abhishek Sharma celebrates after scoring a century during the third T20I against Afghanistan in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

see the ball and hit the ball. You can't be sure you'll be doing well all the time but the culture we've developed in our team is to dominate and it's been going well so far.”

The only two faster T20I hundreds came in matches between the lower-tiered associate members of the ICC. Sahil Chauhan of Estonia holds the overall record of 27 balls after his century against Cyprus two years ago while Muhammad Fahad needed just 29 balls for his ton for Turkey against Bulgaria in 2025.

Abhishek tore into the Afghanistan bowling attack after India were invited to bat first. “It wasn't an easy wicket, but the way Ab-

hishek played today was flawless, and it was just pleasing to the eye,” said India captain Shreyas Iyer.

The swashbuckling opener hit a six to reach 99. He completed the hundred with a single and sat in meditation pose to celebrate.

He finally fell for 108 off 34 balls to leg-spinner Rashid Khan. The 26-year-old's knock was laced with nine fours and 11 sixes.

His opening stand of 142 with Sanju Samson, who hit 50, put India on course for a big total but the Afghan bowlers hit back with regular wickets. Tilak Varma was run out for two by Rashid and Samson departed after his second successive half-century as

he fell to pace bowler Azmatullah Omarzai. Omarzai struck another blow helped by a stunning catch by Rashid in the deep to send back Shivam Dube for 14.

India raised their 100 in six overs but managed just 79 from the last 60 balls. India now head to Japan for the Asian Games starting September 19 at Nagoya-Aichi.

Afghanistan will send a largely different team to the Asian Games under Darwish Rasooli.

BRIEF SCORES: India 221 for 7 (Abhishek 108, Samson 50, Omarzai 2-27) **beat Afghanistan 94** (Zadran 25, Reddy 3-25, Bishnoi 3-26) **by 127 runs.**

Leicestershire docked points for poor pitch

Leicestershire have been docked 27 points over the state of the pitch during a match against Glamorgan last month, with the county side's head groundsman blaming the playing conditions on a Bollywood shoot and scorching weather.

Leicestershire beat the visitors by 42 runs at Grace Road but the match referee rated the pitch as “poor” in his report. Glamorgan head coach Richard Dawson said the uneven bounce had led to batters being hit. After a formal hearing, the independent Cricket Discipline Panel (CDP) ordered Leicestershire on Wednesday to forfeit the 19 points for the win and handed them an eight-point sanction, leaving them at the bottom of the table.

“There was a lot of circumstances leading up to the game that were just out of my control,” head groundsman Callum Lewin said, according to a judgement document released by the CDP.

“The weather was 35 degrees (Celsius) and we had an unscheduled Bollywood filming event four days before. I wasn't allowed to work on the pitch. I wasn't allowed to cover it or anything.”

Leicestershire, who have won only two of their 12 matches so far and drawn six, were also fined £5,000 (\$6,700) and given an additional eight-point deduction suspended until the end of the 2027 season. “Having received the panel's decision, the club is reviewing its position and considering all available options,” Leicestershire said in a statement.

MOTORSPORT

Evans on brink of world title after Saudi Arabian round cancelled

Reuters
London

Elfyn Evans' chances of becoming Britain's third world rally champion were boosted yesterday after the final round of the season in Saudi Arabia was dropped due to safety concerns, with the title set to be decided in Sardinia next month.

The governing FIA said the decision to drop the Jeddah-based round from the championship calendar was due to the situation in the Middle East.

Toyota's Evans will now go into the last round in Italy with a 17-point advantage over Finnish teammate Sami Pajari and is on the brink of following the late Colin McRae (1995) and Richard Burns (2001) on the list of British champions.

Sweden's Oliver Solberg, also for Toyota, is third overall and 21 points behind Evans, who could finally shrug off his nearly man tag after being runner-up five times in the last six seasons. The cancellation leaves a maximum 35 points on the table, rather than 70.

Toyota have already clinched the manufacturers' title for the sixth year in a row. Saudi Arabia was due to end the season on November 11-14, after the Alghero-based Italian round on gravel roads on October 1-4.

The Jeddah-based Rally Saudi Arabia will still be held but as part of the Middle East championship.

The FIA said in a statement that “ongoing uncertainty in the region and its effect on lo-

gistical arrangements, requires the WRC element of Rally Saudi Arabia not to proceed in 2026.”

“Saudi Arabia remained ready to host the event safely and successfully,” it added.

Iran-backed Houthis have launched drones and missiles repeatedly from neighbouring Yemen into Saudi Arabia over the past week causing alarms over cities in the south and west.

“We have worked closely with our partners in Saudi Arabia, our Member Club the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation, WRC Promoter and our championship stakeholders in recent months to explore every possible route that would allow Rally Saudi Arabia to take place as planned,” said FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem.

“However, ongoing regional developments mean that the WRC element of Rally Saudi Arabia will not proceed this year. These are never easy decisions, particularly after the significant work undertaken by everyone involved in preparing for the event.”

The rally decision comes as Formula One faces a similar decision over its season-ending races in Qatar and Abu Dhabi in late November and December, with Italy's Imola circuit being lined up as a replacement should they also be cancelled.

Saudi Arabia is also due to host the season-opening round of the all-electric Formula E championship in December, with that series already stating that Mexico City in January will be the first round otherwise. The Kingdom is also due to host the Dakar Rally in January.



China out of Asian Games women's cricket without a ball being bowled

China's women returned to Asian Games cricket for the first time in 12 years on Thursday - only to be knocked out without a ball being bowled two days before the opening ceremony.

On a seemingly perfect day for T20 cricket under blue skies and sunshine at the Korogi Athletic Park in Nagoya, a sodden outfield caused by days of rain prevented any play from taking place in China's morning quarter-final against Bangladesh.

Bangladesh went through to the semi-finals by virtue of being the higher ranked side under Asian Games competition rules.

There they will meet Pakistan, whose last-eight match against Thailand later in the day was reduced to 11 overs per side after the start was delayed by 90 minutes as groundstaff worked to dry the outfield.

Thailand, anchored by wicketkeeper Nannapat Koncharoenkai's 49, posted a competitive 91-4

in their 11 overs. Pakistan lost wickets at regular intervals before avoiding an upset by reaching 92-7 with two balls to go.

Record rainfall a week ago caused flooding in Nagoya and caused some Asian Games athletes to be evacuated from their accommodation.

Parts of the Korogi Park outfield had still clearly not recovered from the deluge in time to stage both Thursday's matches.

“We knew it was going to be tough to get a game given the weather in the last week here and all the challenges there have been,” said China's Australian coach Alan Newington.

“We're grateful to the ground staff for trying their best, but we thought it was going to be tough to get a game.

“But we're very disappointed. We were hoping the world could see the China women play for the first time in a big tournament. But we'll

reset and we'll try again.”

The Nagoya-Aichi Games officially begin with an opening ceremony on Saturday.

Clear skies are forecast for Friday's remaining quarter-finals -- Sri Lanka v Malaysia and hosts Japan v India.

But the weather forecast is poor for Sunday and Tuesday when the semi-finals and medal finals are due to take place, with a typhoon threatening to pass close by.

The men's cricket competition begins with a preliminary round on next Thursday before heavyweights India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh enter the fray at the quarter-final stage.

India have a star-studded squad featuring many of the players that won the T20 World Cup earlier this year, plus 15-year-old batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

(AFP)

FOCUS

Asian Games chief defends ‘functional’ rooms after outcry

More than 17,000 competitors and officials are expected at the Games

AFP
Nagoya, Japan

Accommodation for Asian Games athletes in Japan is “functional” and efforts are being made to deal with numerous complaints from disgruntled teams, a chief organiser told AFP.

More than 17,000 competitors and officials are expected at the continent’s biggest sporting spectacular, which opens tomorrow in Nagoya.

In a bid to cut costs, organisers are housing athletes and officials in temporary accommodation ranging from a cruise liner and wooden containers to hotel rooms.

The plan has run into immediate problems, with South Korean officials branding the container huts the “worst ever” and saying the beds are too short.

An official from another team told AFP that he entered the facility, took one look at the arrangement and booked a hotel room instead. Several countries have also complained about a shortage of accommodation.

Speaking ahead of the opening ceremony, organising committee president Hideaki Omura said efforts are being made to ensure athletes are comfortable.

“If there are different opinions then we will respond to them appropriately,” said Omura, who also serves as governor of Aichi prefecture.

“At this point, while we are responding to individual opinions, we have been improving everything as issues arise and we will continue to respond that way.”

Byeon Jun-hyeong, a player with South Korea’s men’s basketball team, posted a video on social media showing a leaking sink and soaked floor in his hut accommodation. He posted the caption, “Please help us”.



Aichi Prefecture Governor and Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games Organising Committee President Hideaki Omura delivers a speech during a ceremony marking the arrival of the Costa Serena cruise ship at the Port of Nagoya in Nagoya, Aichi prefecture on Tuesday. (AFP)

Hundreds of athletes were briefly evacuated from their accommodation last week as record rainfall lashed Nagoya.

About 2,000 people are supposed to stay in the huts.

Omura said plans for the huts, which were built this year, had been given a favourable assessment by a committee of former athletes, including Olympians.

“We explained everything to them and had them take a look around, and they said it looked functional and good,” he said.

About 4,000 athletes and officials will also stay on the Italian cruise ship Costa Serena, which arrived in Nagoya on Tuesday.

Cruise ships have been used previously as accommodation at

international sports events but never on this scale. The Asian Games are taking place at a time when typhoons are common in Japan, and Nagoya has experienced heavy rainfall in recent weeks.

Omura said the priority was to keep athletes and officials on board safe.

“We believe we can provide accommodation that guarantees athletes’ safety and allows them to deliver their best performance,” he said.

Athletes from 45 countries and territories will compete in more than 40 sports across over two weeks. Omura said ticket sales were going “fairly well”, especially for the marquee events.

But he admitted that lesser-

known sports had yet to capture the Japanese public’s imagination.

That includes cricket, which is practically unknown in Japan.

“India have a superstar cricket squad coming and Indian residents in Japan are saying, ‘I can’t believe we get to watch matches like this’, but ticket sales haven’t been very strong,” said Omura.

“A lot of people in Japan have never seen cricket, so I really hope they take this chance and go and watch.”

Events at the Games including basketball and football have been under way since last week.

Omura said he was in attendance as the first action began when Qatar took on Iran in men’s basketball.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar begins campaign at Chess Olympiad

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar national chess team is taking part in the 46th World Chess Olympiad which began in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on September 10th and runs till 24th.

The Qatari delegation comprises players Hamad al-Kuwari, Mohammed Irfan, Khalid al-Jumaia, Mohammed Jarbi and Turki al-Kuwari. International arbiters Yousef Khalil al-Mahasneh and Sara al-Muhanadi are also participating in the Olympiad’s officiating team.

FIDE has appointed Mohammed al-Mudahka, President of the Qatar Chess Association (QCA), to oversee the current edition of the World Chess Olympiad. The appointment recognizes al-Mudahka’s contributions to the development and promotion of chess internationally, as well as Qatar’s successful hosting of the World Chess Championship last December. The event received praise from FIDE and participating players.

Al-Mudahka expressed delight at his appointment to oversee one of the most prominent events on the global chess calendar, conveying his appreciation for the trust placed in him by the international chess community.

On Qatar’s chess players’ participation, he said, “We have confidence in the abilities of our players and look forward to them performing at the expected level. Reaching the Olympiad is a significant achievement, but our ambition goes beyond mere participation; we aim to compete and secure the best possible results.”

Qatar’s team opened their

campaign against Bolivia in the first round of the 11-round Swiss-system competition.

Hamad al-Kuwari lost to Ricabado Roderick, while Mohammed Irfan was beaten by Jimmy Daniel. Khalid al-Umaia drew with Pinto Daniel, and Turki al-Kuwari lost to Tichoca Daza. Qatar will face Cape Verde in the second round.

FIDE was established on July 20, 1924, during the 8th Olympic Games in Paris, with representatives from 15 national federations. It serves as the international governing body for chess. The Chess Olympiad is held every two years under FIDE supervision, with the host country selected by the federation.

Qatar achieved its best Olympiad performance in recent years at the 42nd edition in Azerbaijan in 2016, finishing first among Arab nations and 48th overall in the open competition. That edition featured 180 countries in the open section and 140 countries in the women’s competition.

India face tough outing against Indonesia

Defending champions India were held to a tough outing against Indonesia in the second round of the Olympiad, with reigning World Champion D Gukesh among three Indian players forced to settle for half a point before Nihal Sarin secured the team’s lone win.

Indonesia put up determined resistance throughout the Open section match, with Gukesh, Vidit Gujrathi and R Praggnanandhaa all being held to draws, according to the FIDE website. Nihal, however, produced a strong performance to claim the only win for India and keep the defending champions among the leading teams in the standings.



QCA president Mohammed al-Mudahka al-Mudahka overseeing the Chess Olympiad in Samarkand.

FOOTBALL

Japan coach Moriyasu targets Asian Cup glory before bowing out

AFP
Tokyo

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said yesterday that he wants to leave a legacy for his successor by winning January’s Asian Cup before stepping down after more than eight years in charge.

Moriyasu will lead Japan as they try to capture the continental title for the first time in 16 years at the tournament in Saudi Arabia.

He will then hand over the reins to Go Oiwa, who is currently in charge of Japan’s Under-23 team.

Japan were knocked out of this year’s World Cup by Brazil in the last 32 after a last-minute goal condemned them to a 2-1 defeat.

Moriyasu kept faith with the bulk of those players as he named his squad for four upcoming home friendlies, and said he wanted to leave the job with a bang.

“The leadership will change but whoever is in charge will have the same aim, to help Japan win and develop,” he said.

“We want to keep building towards the Asian Cup and then pass the baton over in a good way.”

Japan will play Uruguay and Venezuela this month before taking part in a four-team tournament with Ecuador, New Zealand and Panama in October.

Moriyasu included new Aston Villa goalkeeper Zion Suzuki in his squad alongside Crystal Palace pair Daichi Kamada and Takehiro Tomiyasu and Ipswich Town’s Daizen Maeda.

Six of the World Cup squad were left out, while there were four new call-ups including Southampton’s Kuruyu Matsuki.

Moriyasu said his job was “not to dismantle the team but to continue along the same path”.

“I understand that staying on this course gives us a better chance of winning the Asian Cup,” he said. “But it’s not just a case of more of the same - there is always growth and competition among the players.”

Japan have been drawn in an Asian Cup group with champions Qatar, Thailand and Indonesia.

They were knocked out in the quarter-finals by Iran at the tournament three years ago in Qatar.

Japan also play Brazil and Paraguay in friendlies in Singapore in November.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Klopp calls up 44 players in Germany squad

AFP
Frankfurt

Germany coach Jurgen Klopp handed 16 players their first call-ups yesterday as he unveiled a 44-man squad for his first camp since taking over as coach in the summer.

Teams are restricted to naming 20 outfield players and three goalkeepers for each match but the former Liverpool manager took the unusual step of naming a larger squad. Klopp has split the group into two separate squads for Germany’s four upcoming Nations League fixtures.

The first group will be available for the games fixtures against the Netherlands in Amsterdam on September 24 and at home to Greece three days later in Augsburg. The second group will be available for Germany’s matches against Serbia in Munich on October 1 and Greece in Thessaloniki on October 4.

“It’s very unusual that you’ve got four games in two weeks with the national team,” Klopp said at a press conference in Frankfurt.

“I want to get to know as many players as possible in that time... It’s not an A-team and a B-team, but the two squads have been created in a way that each fits well together.”

Klopp was named as the replacement for Julian Nagelsmann in July after the four-time World Cup winners were eliminated at the last-32 stage of the 2026 World Cup, their third successive early exit from the tournament.

“It really felt like you had the feeling after the World Cup that German football is on its knees and we have no talents, no footballers,” Klopp said.

“In the past four weeks as we’ve been looking closely and plenty of talents have caught our eye.

“It’s a squad for two or three



Germany’s coach Juergen Klopp gestures as he addresses a press conference to announce his squad in Frankfurt yesterday. (AFP)

years from now, not just for the next four international games.”

Ter Stegen goalkeeper, Kimmich captain

Leroy Sane, Deniz Undav, Leon Goretzka and goalkeeper Oliver Baumann have been left out, while veterans Manuel Neuer and Antonio Rudiger have since retired from international football.

Marc-Andre ter Stegen will be Germany’s number one option in goal. Klopp said the 2015 Champions League winner was the preferred option “for the moment”.

Ter Stegen left Barcelona for Ajax on a season-long loan in the summer after a torrid run of injuries which restricted him to just 12 competitive matches in the past two years. Bayern midfielder Joshua Kimmich, the most experienced member of the squad with 114 caps, has retained the captain’s armband.

The 31-year-old is set to move from right-back to central mid-



Germany’s goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen will be Germany’s number one option in goal. (AFP)

field, where he plays at club level.

Undav, one of the few bright spots for Germany at the World Cup, has been omitted. German media reported the former Brighton forward will be given time off to recover from an Achilles tendon injury.

Among the 16 potential debutants are Eintracht Frankfurt’s Younes Ebnoutalib, who was in

the second division a season ago, along with Stuttgart defender Finn Jeltsch, Brentford midfielder Vitaly Janelt and Celtic midfielder Mika Baur.

“There’s a couple of lads here who will surprise you, that’s clear, but we saw something in the lads, plenty of potential, and we want to be part of their development,” Klopp said.

Former doubles World No. 1 Salisbury retires

Britain’s former world number one doubles player Joe Salisbury has retired from professional tennis at the age of 34. The six-time Grand Slam doubles champion’s last match was his semi-final defeat alongside American long-time partner Rajeev Ram at this month’s U.S. Open. “Tennis has been my life for as long as I can remember and I have been incredibly fortunate to have had all the opportunities, experiences and success that I have,” he posted on Instagram. “I gave it my all and know I can be proud and look back with no regrets.” Salisbury won three successive U.S. Open men’s doubles titles alongside Ram, the first duo to achieve the feat. He also won the Australian Open men’s doubles with Ram and two Grand Slam mixed doubles titles.

SQUASH

El Hammamy, Orfi set up Qatar Classic title showdown



World No.1 Hania El Hammamy survived a gruelling 87-minute battle against Malaysia's Sivasangari Subramaniam.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hania El Hammamy and Amina Orfi will meet in the women's final at Qatar Classic after both Egyptians booked their places in the title decider in contrasting fashion at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex yesterday. The final will have added significance, with the Qatar Classic title and the women's World No.1 ranking both at stake.

World No.1 El Hammamy survived a gruelling 87-minute battle against Malaysia's Sivasangari Subramaniam, winning 8-11, 11-9, 15-13, 9-11, 12-10 in one of the most dramatic matches of the tournament. Sivasangari, ranked fifth in the world, pushed the top seed all the way and twice came close to forcing the match in her favour in a tense deciding game.

El Hammamy held match ball



Amina Orfi, the reigning world champion, defeated England's Jasmine Hutton 11-5, 11-6, 11-6.

at 10-9 but saw Sivasangari level before finally closing out the contest when the Malaysian clipped a backhand drop into the tin. "It was very tough. Extremely tough playing against her," El Hammamy said. "I knew she was going to be on form today, she's playing for a spot in the

Olympics next week. I knew she was going to be fiery and produce a good level of squash. I'm really pleased with how I fought with my squash there. I think I'm getting better day by day, so I'm really happy to get through today."

El Hammamy has held the No.1 ranking for almost a year, but Orfi now has the opportunity to take over at the top if she wins the final. Orfi, the reigning world champion and world No. 2, produced a far more straightforward performance as she defeated England's Jasmine Hutton 11-5, 11-6, 11-6.

The 19-year-old controlled the contest from the outset, using her power and accuracy to keep Hutton under sustained pressure. The Englishwoman improved in the third game and briefly led 4-2, but Orfi responded by winning nine of the next 11 points to seal victory.

"I'm really happy to make the final. Last year I got knocked out in the semis, so playing the final to-

morrow, hopefully I can win tomorrow," Orfi said.

ASAL AND CROUIN FACE OFF IN MEN'S FINAL

In the men's draw, world No.1 Mostafa Asal continued his pursuit of a first Qatar Classic title with a ruthless 11-3, 11-1, 11-3 victory over compatriot Marwan ElShorbagy. Asal needed just 33 minutes to complete the one-sided semi-final, dropping only seven points.

"I'm really pleased with my performance today, it was sharp, it was accurate and I'm looking forward to the final," Asal said. He will face France's Victor Crouin, who overcame Egypt's Karim Gawad 11-2, 11-7, 9-11, 14-12.

Crouin made a blistering start and appeared in control after taking the opening two games. Gawad fought back to take the third and pushed the fourth into a tense tie-break, but the Frenchman held his nerve to secure his place in the final.

LEAGUE CUP

Carrick takes the blame as United suffer more misery

Carrick and his players were booed off at final whistle following defeat to Brighton

AFP
Manchester

Michael Carrick took the blame for Manchester United's stunning League Cup collapse against Brighton after furious fans jeered his side at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Carrick and his players were booed off at the final whistle following a miserable 3-2 defeat featuring a blown two-goal lead. Shea Lacey and Mason Mount put United two up by the 10th minute.

But the hosts suffered a woeful collapse as Charalampos Kostasoulas reduced the deficit and Pascal Gross equalised before Maxim De Cuyper grabbed the winner. For the first time in 50 years, United had lost a home game after leading 2-0.

It was another brutal blow for United after their controversial 1-0 home defeat against Manchester City on Sunday. Carrick branded the third round loss unacceptable, but took the majority of the responsibility himself.

"We had the game exactly where we wanted it and let it get away from us. That's the story of the game," he said. "There are a number of things we will look at and dissect. I know quite a bit about where it went wrong. We can't accept that as a group. Listen, I take responsibility for that, with the performance towards the end of the second half. That is on me."

Having led United to third place last season in his spell as interim boss, Carrick was expected to oversee a title challenge this term after being appointed on a permanent basis. But United have already lost three times in six games in all competitions, putting Carrick under pressure to turn the tide at Fulham in the top-flight on Sunday.

Amid criticism of United's close-season transfer recruitment, Carrick's decision to make eight changes against Brighton ex-



Manchester United players react after their loss to Brighton in the League Cup third round match at Old Trafford in Manchester. (AFP)

posed the lack of depth in his squad. A defeat in west London at the weekend would leave United in a full blown crisis barely a month into the new campaign.

"We will all be better. We have to be better. We have a big game on Sunday that we have to prepare for. We are out of this competition. We've got to get back to winning football matches," Carrick said.

"It doesn't feel good at the moment, let me tell you. It doesn't feel good. We can get back to winning football matches and we can do a lot of things better. We want to win and we want to win quickly. It's as simple as that. The next game is Sunday and that

is purely all I'm thinking about. We will get better with a number of things."

Carrick was a decorated member of the United sides that won Premier League titles and the Champions League under Alex Ferguson. His successful interim spell had raised hopes that he could be the man to lead United to their first English title since Ferguson retired in 2013.

But the former England midfielder, whose only previous managerial experience came with second tier Middlesbrough, is in danger of being dragged into a fight to save his job unless results improve quickly.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe, who runs

the club's football operations, has already sacked Erik ten Hag and Ruben Amorim during his reign.

Asked if he understood why the fans were so frustrated by United's latest failure, Carrick said: "It's pretty obvious isn't it? I totally understand the feelings of the supporters. You have to accept it. I totally accept it. It is on me ultimately you know, as a team, what we look like, how we play, what results we get. "I will take that. I will take the praise and I will stand here and take the criticism and the upset. I totally understand it tonight for the way the game went. We have got to win games."

QSI completes acquisition of Belgian club KAS Eupen

Doha: Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) has announced that it has completed the acquisition of KAS Eupen. This formalises QSI's full ownership of the club, following its takeover of KAS Eupen's sporting operations in December 2025.

Since then, QSI and KAS Eupen have been working closely together to build a strong foundation for the Club's long-term sporting and commercial development. This has included strengthening the Club's sporting structure and first-team squad, further developing pathways for young players, and establishing new commercial partnerships.

While benefiting from QSI's international expertise and network, KAS Eupen will continue to build on its unique identity as the only professional football club of Belgium's German-speaking Community and remain deeply connected to its supporters, partners, and regional stakeholders.

Under QSI appointed Sporting Director Pasquale Sensibile and Head Coach Felice Mazzù, KAS Eupen has assembled a younger squad and continues to strengthen the pathway between its academy and first team. Off the pitch, the Club has also built new commercial momentum, including the recent appointment of Entain's bwin.tv as premium partner and shirt sponsor, and Robey Sportswear as its new equipment supplier.

With the acquisition now finalised, QSI will continue working alongside KAS Eupen's management, players, staff, supporters and local community to build on this progress and support the Club's sustainable long-term growth.

KAS Eupen joins QSI's international football portfolio alongside its investments in Paris Saint-Germain and Sporting Clube de Braga.

LA LIGA

Barca rout Racing after Raphinha hat-trick

Reuters
Barcelona

Hansi Flick became the first Barcelona manager to win the club's opening seven competitive matches of a season as the LaLiga leaders thrashed Racing Santander 7-2 at Camp Nou on Wednesday to move three points clear of second-placed Real Madrid.

Raphinha grabbed a hat-trick, while Joao Cancelo, Gabriel Jesus and Lamine Yamal scored and Racing's Asier Villalibre put through his own net as Barcelona overwhelmed a much-changed Racing side, although two defensive lapses offered the visitors brief encouragement.

Barcelona were on the front foot from the outset and took the lead after eight minutes when Cancelo's long-range strike went in off the crossbar.

Racing coach Jose Lopez had rested several regular starters, while Flick named a largely first-choice lineup, and the difference in rhythm between the two sides was clear.

Raphinha doubled the lead from the penalty spot in the 25th minute after Pedro Felipe brought him down, but Maguette Gueye pulled one back against the run of play after brushing aside a weak challenge from Cancelo.

Quick to atone for his poor defending, Cancelo unleashed another long-range shot five minutes later that was credited as an own goal after taking a deflection off Asier Villalibre.

Raphinha made it 4-1 three minutes before halftime, converting Dani Olmo's pass, before



Barcelona's Raphinha celebrates scoring a hat-trick against Racing Santander. (AFP)

Barcelona squandered the chance to add a fifth. Karim Adeyemi was fouled inside the area, but Racing goalkeeper Julien Agirrezabala saved Lamine's penalty.

Wojciech Szczesny replaced Joan Garcia in the Barcelona goal at halftime and in the opening moments of the second period, Juan Arana passed up a golden opportunity to score for Racing, before Lamine struck the inside of the post at the other end.

Racing's Yassir Zabiri capitalised on an error by Szczesny to reduce the deficit in the 65th minute, but Barcelona responded almost immediately. Karim Adeyemi was brought down inside the area for the second time and Raphinha converted his second penalty to complete his hat-trick.

The goals conceded underlined the defensive vulnerability that has persisted despite Barcelona's superb start, but their attacking potency again ensured it did not prove costly.

Jesus curled into the top corner from Lamine's pass with 11 minutes remaining before the 19-year-old completed the rout in the final minute after good work from Adeyemi.

Barcelona, who have scored 28 goals in six league matches, top the table with a perfect 18 points, while Racing are 10th with seven points.

Athletico Madrid cruised to a 4-0 win over Osasuna earlier on Wednesday at the Metropolitan, with Jonathan David scoring on his first start for the club.

The Canada striker goes into the derby against Real Madrid on Sunday in form, having also scored on Sunday against Real Sociedad. Lee Kang-in, Robin Le Normand and Alex Baena also joined him on the scoresheet, in what was Athletico's most complete performance of the season.

Julian Alvarez was absent from the squad as he continues his recovery from a muscle injury, leaving his availability for the derby uncertain.

Deportivo A Coruna suffered their first defeat of the season as Sevilla won 1-0 at Riazor. Levante's home match against Athletic Club was postponed because of a waterlogged pitch.

SPOTLIGHT

Alonso says Chelsea ambition 'very clear' after end of Boehly era

AFP
London

Xabi Alonso said Chelsea's ambition was "very clear" after Clearlake Capital took full control of the Premier League club, ending Todd Boehly's chairmanship. Chelsea announced late Wednesday that Clearlake, led by co-founders Behdad Eghbali and Jose E. Feliciano, would acquire the stakes of Boehly and director Mark Walter. US billionaires Boehly and Walter partnered with Clearlake to buy the club from Roman Abramovich in May 2022 in a sale mandated by the British government.

Prior to the new deal, private equity company Clearlake had owned 61.5 percent of the club, with Boehly and Walter carving up the remaining shares with another investor, Swiss billionaire Hansjorg Wyss. Chelsea said Wyss would "remain an important stakeholder and partner in

the ownership group."

Boehly and Walter are among the co-owners of the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team, while Walter recently sold the Los Angeles Lakers basketball franchise for \$12.5bn. The Financial Times reported that the pair were set to receive £950mn (\$1.27bn) for their combined stakes in Chelsea, in a deal that values the club at about \$5 billion including debt.

In a fresh statement, Chelsea said: "Our ambition is clear: to compete at the highest level, to win major trophies, and to build sustained success."

Blues boss Alonso, who started his role at Chelsea on July 1, told reporters that the change was "an important day for the club".

"Thanks to the former owners for what they've done. I was not here, but I know they played an important role," he said on the eve of Chelsea's Premier League match at Brentford today.

Since the takeover in 2022, Chelsea's highest Premier League finish is fourth, in 2024/25.