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GULF TIMES SPORT

20th Asian Games
Aichi-Nagoya 2026

QOC chief meets head of Syrian Olympic Committee

President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani met yesterday with head of the Syrian Olympic Committee Firas Mualla at Bayt Qatar in Nagoya, Japan. The meeting focused on strengthening cooperation between the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Syrian Olympic Committee, with particular emphasis on supporting the development of the Syrian sports movement. The two officials also exchanged views on a number of issues of mutual interest, including the progress of the 20th Asian Games, Aichi-Nagoya 2026, which are currently underway in Japan. The meeting highlighted the importance of continued collaboration within the Asian Olympic movement and efforts to further support athletes and sports development across the region.



MEDAL TALLY

R	COUNTRY	G	S	B	T
1	China	80	30	20	130
2	Japan	20	34	37	91
3	South Korea	10	12	28	50
4	Kazakhstan	8	8	9	25
5	Uzbekistan	6	12	8	26
6	Iran	6	10	4	20
7	Thailand	5	4	7	16
8	Hong Kong	4	10	9	23
9	North Korea	3	3	3	9
10	Bahrain	3	2	0	5
13	QATAR	2	1	1	4

FOCUS

Qatar 3x3 basketball team reaches Asiad semi-finals

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS QATAR FACE HOSTS JAPAN IN THEIR FINAL GROUP A HANDBALL MATCH

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's 3x3 basketball team advanced to the semi-finals of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games after beating Mongolia 18-14 in the quarter-finals yesterday. Qatar will face Iran in the last four. The quarter-final was closely contested, with both teams battling for control. Qatar remained composed and gradually took charge to secure the win. The result keeps alive Qatar's hopes of improving on the silver medal they won at the previous Asian Games in Hangzhou, China.

Hamstring injury ends al-Tamimi's medal hopes
Qatar squash star Abdullah al-Tamimi withdrew from his round of 16 match against Japan's Ryunosuke Tsukue at the Asian Games after suffering a hamstring injury. Al-Tamimi, who won bronze in Hangzhou, had hoped to challenge for another medal but was unable to continue. He revealed that he had been managing a minor hamstring tear before the tournament, but the injury worsened during the match. "I was trying to manage the injury and stay in the competition, but the tear worsened significantly, and I couldn't continue playing. I had hoped to keep going and fight to the very end, especially since I aspired to go as far as possible and contend for a medal. When I felt the injury getting worse, I could no longer move or play naturally, so withdrawing was the right decision," al-Tamimi said. He expressed hope of making a speedy recovery and returning to competition.

Al-Athba, al-Sharshani finish fourth in mixed skeet
Qatar shooters Rashid Saleh al-Athba and Reem al-Sharshani finished fourth in the mixed team skeet shotgun event yesterday. The pair topped the qualification standings to reach the final but missed out on a podium finish. China won gold, with South Korea taking silver and India securing bronze. The fourth-place finish came after a successful skeet campaign for Qatar. Nasser Saleh al-Attiah, al-Athba and Ali Ahmed al-Ishaq won the men's team skeet gold on Wednesday, while al-Ath-



Qatar 3x3 basketball team defeated Mongolia 18-14 in the quarter-finals yesterday.



Discus thrower Moaaz Ibrahim finished fifth with a best effort of 59.39m.

ba claimed individual gold with an Asian record. Masoud al-Athba, head of the shotgun department at the Qatar Shooting and Archery Association, praised Rashid al-Athba and al-Sharshani for their performance in the mixed team skeet event. He said the pair produced an excellent display in qualifying to top the standings against a field featuring world and Olympic champions, although they were unable to secure a medal in the final. **Ibrahim finishes fifth** Moaaz Ibrahim finished fifth in the men's discus throw with a best effort of 59.39 metres. Meanwhile, Ammar Ismail and Ashraf Osman will take part in the men's 400m heats today. The two athletes will be aiming to qualify for the final, which is also scheduled for today at Mizuho Park Stadium in Nagoya.

Qatar's athletics team is looking to build on its record at the Asian Games after winning six medals, including three gold and three silver, at the previous edition. **Handball team face Japan for top spot** Qatar's handball team face hosts Japan today in their final Group A match at the Asian Games. Both teams have four points from two matches, making today's encounter a battle for top spot and a place in the quarter-finals as group winners. Qatar opened their campaign with a 40-17 win over Hong Kong before beating China 30-25. Japan have also won their two matches. Defending champions Qatar know they face a test against the hosts but will draw on their experience and ambition as they seek to maintain their run. Qatar have won the handball gold

at the past three Asian Games in Incheon in 2014, Jakarta in 2018 and Hangzhou in 2022. **Abdulwahab brothers advance in table tennis** Qatar's Mohammed Abdulwahab and Abdullah Abdulwahab advanced to the second round of the men's singles table tennis competition. Mohammed defeated Indonesia's Junindra Muhammad 4-0 (11-2, 11-7, 11-6, 11-9) and will face Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto in the second round today. Abdullah beat Laos' Anany Phongsak 4-1 (11-2, 11-6, 11-8, 10-12, 11-5) and will meet Singapore's Quek Yong today. Meanwhile, Qatar's gymnastics team concluded its participation at the Asian Games yesterday. On the final day of competition, Rakan al-Harith scored 13,900 points on the pommel horse, while Mehrdad Ghadimi recorded 13,400. In the women's vault, Salma Nasser Hamed scored 11,516. The Asian Games provided Qatar's gymnasts with experience against Asia's leading competitors. **Qatar riders begin dressage challenge** Qatar's Jassim Mohammed al-Jaham al-Kuwari and Saud Ahmed al-Buainain begin their dressage campaigns at the Equestrian Park in Nagoya today. The individual dressage competition is being held over two days, with the final scheduled for Sunday.



Qatar's Mohammed Abdulwahab and Abdullah Abdulwahab advance to the second round of the table tennis competition.



Qatar's mixed skeet team of Rashid Saleh al-Athba and Reem al-Sharshani finished fourth yesterday.

FORMULA 1

Russell leads Mercedes 1-2 in Azerbaijan GP practice

Russell was fastest in one minute and 43.347 seconds to outpace Red Bull's Verstappen by 0.552sec

AFP
Baku

George Russell topped the times ahead of team-mate and world championship leader Kimi Antonelli as Mercedes dominated yesterday's second practice for the Azerbaijan Grand Prix.

The pair delivered a 1-2 as Russell completed a 'double top' ahead of Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen by eight-tenths of a second.

Russell was fastest in one minute and 43.347 seconds to outpace his Italian partner by 0.552sec in a convincing display of speed on the fast and unforgiving barrier-lined streets of the Azeri capital.

Charles Leclerc was fourth ahead of his Ferrari team-mate seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, with reigning world champion Lando Norris sixth for McLaren ahead of Alpine's Pierre Gasly and his McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri.

"We are miles off," said Norris. "We're up there, let's say, we're in the position we expected to be in,

but I'm 1.5 seconds off the pace. So, pretty pants.

"We'll see what work we can do tonight. The car didn't feel that bad so, yeah, it's a knife in the heart when you see how far off you are."

Isack Hadjar was ninth in the second Red Bull, having returned to action after breaking his wrist.

Several drivers survived narrow escapes from brushes with the barriers and walls, but the session was halted only once for a red flag when Racing Bulls' rookie Arvid Lindblad crashed in the narrowest section of the circuit, but was unhurt.

Russell and Verstappen set the early pace before Norris, his car using cable ties to retain the floor boards, went top only for the Dutchman to respond as the drivers settled into a groove of fast laps.

After 15 minutes, Antonelli was still in the pits as his car was being rebuilt following an engine change after he suffered a hydraulics failure during FP1.

"I felt comfortable in the car, despite the disruption, and we focused on maximising every opportunity," said the 20-year-old.

"Losing laps in practice is not



Mercedes' British driver George Russell makes a pit stop during the second practice session ahead of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit yesterday. (AFP)

ideal, particularly on a street circuit like Baku where confidence builds with every lap and run."

Hadjar was running with a fresh

gearbox after struggling on his return to action. Verstappen, Leclerc and Russell clocked fastest lap times as Hamilton upset Lawson

when he inadvertently baulked him. "Oh my God, that is so dangerous," he said. The stewards noted. But Russell emerged quickest,



Mercedes' George Russell seen ahead of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix practice. (AFP)

just as he did in the earlier opening practice, to complete a solid day's work for constructors' championship leaders Mercedes.

Aston Martin drivers Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll are set to start at the back of the grid after taking significant grid penalties for exceeding their permitted number of engine component changes.

They propped up the field in second practice, with Alonso only completing 11 laps as he finished last.

CRICKET

Breetzke's century guides South Africa to 67-run win

Reuters
Durban

Matthew Breetzke scored a superb 112 to guide South Africa to a 67-run victory over Australia in the first one-day international in Durban yesterday, but the tourists will rue the loss of cheap wickets as they faltered in their chase.

South Africa posted 297 for eight in their 50 overs and Australia were well on course after a fast start, until poor shot selection caused their charge to collapse and they finished on 230 all out, losing their last nine wickets for 101 runs.

Australia will welcome the likely return of captain Pat Cummins for the second match in the three-game series in Johannesburg on Sunday, but if this series is a fact-finding mission ahead of the 2027 Cricket World Cup in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, there will be much food for thought.

The toughest time to bat was in the morning and Australia won the toss and decided to bowl, strangling the South African run-rate early on.

But when Breetzke came in at number four, he played conventional cricket shots to get his innings started, before he found a willing partner in big-hitting Marco Jansen.

Breetzke, who averages over 60 with the bat in his 15 ODIs, scored his 112 from 106 deliveries and Jansen equalled his career best with 75 in 59 deliveries as the pair



South Africa's Matthew Breetzke raises his bat and helmet to celebrate after scoring a century during the first one-day international against Australia at the Kingsmead stadium in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

put on 107 for the sixth wicket. At one stage South Africa looked as though they may not make 250, so their score of 297 for eight was above par.

Australia started their innings in brilliant fashion as Mitch Marsh blasted 60 from 36 balls and put on 90 in 9.2 overs for the first wicket with Travis Head (36 from 37 balls).

But too many batters threw their wickets away under little pressure and from being well on top in the chase, the momentum changed as wickets slowed the run-rate.

Jansen's sensational diving one-handed catch in the outfield to dismiss Matt Renshaw (44) left Australia on 215-7, a position they never recovered from.

South African spinners Keshav Maharaj (4-20 in 9.2 overs) and Bjorn Fortuin (2-34 in 8) were the catalyst for the change in momentum with brilliant control over line and length.

"We're pretty disappointed," said Marsh.

"We pushed to get those last few wickets but they hammered us in the last 10 overs," Marsh said at the post-match presentation.

"I thought Marco Jansen batted very well."

Marsh said Australia failed to build on his stand with Head.

"We got the (required) run rate down. We had opportunities with the bat but we weren't able to form partnerships."

Breetzke said: "It was tricky early on. With a bowling attack like that I really had to dig deep."

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 297 for 8 (Breetzke 112, Jansen 75, Ellis 3-57) **beat Australia 230** (Marsh 60, Maharaj 4-20) **by 67 runs**

BOTTOMLINE

Wellalage, Mendis shine as Sri Lanka level series

AFP
Leeds, United Kingdom

Dunith Wellalage took three wickets after captain Kusal Mendis hit a fine century as Sri Lanka beat England by 16 runs at Headingley yesterday to level a three-match one-day international series at 1-1.

England were seemingly cruising to a target of 322 as Tom Banton (73) and Ben Duckett (67) shared a first-wicket stand of 143.

Sri Lanka had been hammered 3-0 in a preceding T20 series but Wellalage dragged them back into this match. He removed both openers and home captain Harry Brook to reduce England to 157-3. The left-arm spinner finished with figures of 3-49



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis plays a shot during the second one-day international against England at Headingley yesterday. (AFP)

England's Jos Buttler then threatened to win the game by himself with a barrage of

boundaries. But on 64 he pulled up with what a team spokesman later said was a "left hamstring

twinge" and retired hurt, with England still requiring 68 off 75 balls for victory. Rehan Ahmed immediately fell for a duck, caught down the legside by wicketkeeper Mendis off Dilshan Madushanka.

The runs dried up as Sri Lanka's previously wayward quicks gaining reverse swing with the old ball.

When Jamie Overton holed out, a hobbling Buttler resumed his innings with England 295-7 and needing 27 runs off 14 balls.

The teams head to the Oval for a series-decider on Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 321 for 6 (Kusal 121, Kamindu 54) **beat England 305 for 9** (Banton 73, Buttler 69, Duckett 67, Jacks 52, Wellalage 3-49) **by 16 runs**

FOOTBALL

Lusail begin QSL Cup campaign with 1-0 win over Al Markhiya

Lusail's first football team began its campaign in the 2026-27 QSL Cup with a 1-0 victory over Al Markhiya in a match played at Thani bin Jassim Stadium as part of the tournament's opening round.

Portuguese coach Emmanuel Mesquita started the match with Amir Katoul in goal, while the lineup also included Ali Malallah, Franco Russo, Abdullah Makki, George Stojanovski, Saud Ali, Khaled Walid, Amath Ndiaye, Thiago Ghos, Mohamed Ayash and Mohamed Khan.

Lusail entered the match looking for a strong start and a positive result in their opening game.

The team created several op-

portunities in the first half and sought to threaten Al Markhiya goalkeeper Osama Adel's goal, but their efforts failed to produce a breakthrough, with the first half ending goalless.

Lusail came out strongly in the second half and scored the only goal of the match in the 54th minute through George Stojanovski, giving the team three valuable points at the start of its QSL Cup campaign. Lusail will face Al Waab in the second round on September 29 at 8:15pm at Al Ahli Stadium's Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium. The team will seek to maintain its positive results and secure its second victory in the popular competition.



BOXING

Joshua-Fury to face off in Cardiff on December 11

Reuters
London

The long-awaited showdown between British former heavyweight champions Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury will take place in Cardiff on December 11, promoter Turki Alalshikh announced on social media yesterday.

Fury and Joshua ruled the division for much of the past decade, but a bout between them to unify all the major belts never came to fruition. Both were later beaten by Oleksandr Usyk, who became the undisputed heavyweight champion.

"For 15 years no one has been able to make this fight... I can now confirm that Fury Vs Joshua will be coming to the UK, as I promised British boxing fans," Alalshikh posted on X.

The bout will take place in Cardiff's Principality Stadium, after

media reports said the promoters had previously proposed to stage it at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Joshua's promoter Eddie Hearn told *The Independent* last month that they had insisted on the fight taking place in the United Kingdom.

"We don't want the money, we'd rather it was in the UK," Hearn told the British newspaper.

Fury, 38, is coming off a win over Mariusz Wach, while 36-year-old Joshua knocked out Kristian Prenska in July.



A night shot of Cardiff's Principality Stadium.

FOOTBALL

Kane eyes Shilton's record as England take on Spain

‘Hopefully I am able to play the four games and then be back in November and be able to break it’

AFP
London

Harry Kane is in line to move level with Peter Shilton as England's most-capped player over the next fortnight, but is wondering why the record of 125 appearances for the national side is not higher.

Kane is currently four short of Shilton's haul but a quartet of Nations League fixtures against Spain, Croatia and the Czech Republic (two) could allow him to equal the celebrated goalkeeper's record.

"Growing up, the dream was just to play for England and being most capped was never even in my mind at that stage," said Kane, the Three Lions' all-time top goalscorer.

"The journey has been incredible to this stage, and we have achieved so much as a group and personally achieved so much and been in finals, taking the England team to a level that it hasn't been for a long, long time.

"So, to be four away from the all-time is just incredible and hopefully I am able to play the four games and then be back in November and be able to break it."

Kane is just one of 10 men to have reached a century of caps for England.

By contrast, Cristiano Ronaldo has represented Portugal a world-leading 233 times, with contemporaries Lionel Messi (Argentina) and Luka Modric (Croatia) also having passed 200 caps for their respective countries.

Kane's former Tottenham teammates Christian Eriksen, Jan Vertonghen and Ivan Perisic are among a variety of modern-day



England's striker Harry Kane makes a thumbs-up gesture as he arrives to take part in a training session at St George's Park, central England, ahead of their UEFA Nations League group match against Spain. (AFP)

Most-capped England players	
Player	Caps
Peter Shilton	125
Harry Kane	121
Wayne Rooney	120
David Beckham	115
Steven Gerrard	114
Bobby Moore	108
Ashley Cole	107
Bobby Charlton	106
Frank Lampard	106
Billy Wright	105

players to have featured in over 150 internationals. "It makes you wonder why (not) as well with

England," added Kane. "Is it a cultural thing? Is it a mentality thing? Is it maybe the pressure from the outside?"

"Why have some of our great England players not reached that 160, 170, 180 (caps) like some of the other nations?"

"From my point of view, it will be an honour but ultimately there is still a long way to go and still hopefully a lot more caps I can achieve."

Despite his prolific record of 85 international goals, a major tournament victory is the one thing missing from Kane's England career.

A home Euros in two years' time

could present his final opportunity and he is targeting tomorrow's clash against world champions Spain at Wembley as a chance to lay down a marker.

"Look, we're playing the reigning European champions, the reigning world champions, so it doesn't get any tougher in terms of who we're going to face," Kane added.

"But ultimately if we want to be Nations League champions, European champions in a couple years, we're going to have to beat teams like Spain and Croatia and the bigger nations.

"It's good for us to test ourselves, test the group."

Zidane admits emotion on eve of first game as France coach

France legend **Zinedine Zidane** yesterday admitted to feeling "immense emotion" as he prepared to take charge of Les Bleus for the first time in their UEFA Nations League clash with Turkey. "I feel even more emotional than I did ahead of my first game as a player. Today I feel immense emotion at being able to be here in charge of France," Zidane said ahead of today's Group A1 game at the home of Kocaelispor in northern Turkey.

The 54-year-old star of the France team that won the World Cup in 1998 was appointed in July to succeed his former international colleague Didier Deschamps, who stepped down after 14 years at the helm.

Zidane was a superstar as a player and remains an icon in his home country, two decades after hanging up his boots. He has since enjoyed success as coach of Real Madrid and there is huge anticipation in France at his appointment. "That is entirely logical," Zidane acknowledged.

"But the protagonists are the players. I will stick to my job and try to put something in place with the players to get them winning games.

"That's what interests me." Zidane also revealed that captain Kylian Mbappe was back training normally again after struggling with illness earlier in the week. After the clash with Turkey, Zidane and France face Belgium in Brussels next Monday before



a home double-header against Italy and Belgium at the Stade de France at the start of next month. Midfielder Adrien Rabiot believes having the spotlight on Zidane could benefit the players. "We know how important he has been for French football. His aura means he takes up a lot of space and people expect a lot from him," said the AC Milan man. "He is trying to stay out of the spotlight to allow the players to fully express themselves, and so that people talk as little as possible about him. "That is obviously difficult but it's maybe a good thing because talking more about the coach than about certain players could allow them to be left a bit more in peace."

(AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Mancini's Italy facing battle to 'win back' dispirited fans after poor results

AFP
Coverciano, Italy

Roberto Mancini embarks on his bid to turn around Italy's fortunes for a second time as coach this week, but he also needs to win over sceptical fans left apathetic towards the Azzurri after an unprecedented series of setbacks.

The four-time world champions, for so long the sporting pride of the nation, have hit one embarrassing low after another, while the likes of tennis world number one Jannik Sinner, runaway Formula One championship leader Kimi Antonelli and Italy's Olympic athletes have delivered history-making successes.

The men's national football team failed to qualify for the past three World Cups, having not missed out previously since 1958.

Luigi GIAQUINTO wistfully watched a

video of Giorgio Chiellini lifting the European Championship trophy five years ago three times on a loop.

"It all feels like so long ago," says the 27-year-old Italy supporter and electrician at the national team's museum in Coverciano, near Florence.

"It's incredible to think that our national team won the Euros just five years ago, yet failed to qualify for the last World Cup. It's tough being an Italy fan."

Alessandro MAURILLO, who accompanied GIAQUINTO to the small museum next to the Italian football federation's national training centre, used to follow "international football more than club football", until recently.

Italy have not even played a World Cup knockout match since winning the 2006 final against France, and also suffered a last-16 exit at the hands of Switzerland at Euro 2024.

The one bright spot during their miserable 10-year stretch was the brilliant Euro

2020 triumph, with Mancini at the helm, as part of a then-world record unbeaten run of 37 matches.

Mancini has admitted that his team need to "win back" supporters, starting with today's Nations League match against Belgium in Rome.

The former Manchester City boss will also have some personal persuading to do, after abruptly ending his first spell as coach in 2023 to take over the Saudi Arabia national side.

"We will achieve this by taking the national team back to where it deserves to be, by playing with enthusiasm, and by giving our all," Mancini said.

But recent results have shattered fans' optimism.

The Euro defeat by the Swiss was massively disappointing, but losses in qualifying play-offs for the 2022 and 2026 World Cups, by North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina respectively, were real low points.

"When you can't beat so-called 'small' teams like Switzerland and Bosnia, there's a problem," says MAURILLO, pointing out the Azzurri pale in comparison to the country's other sports teams "where Italy excels".

BARELY HALF OF TICKETS SOLD

Italian clubs have also struggled to scale previous heights in recent years - a Serie A team has not won the Champions League since Inter Milan's 2010 victory under Jose Mourinho.

"The problems facing the national team - and Italian football more broadly - mirror those of Italian society," added MAURILLO, a 29-year-old insurance agent.

"Young people aren't given a chance. Young players struggle to break through because they get little to no playing time in Serie A.

"It's a bit like the job market, where many young people are forced to go abroad to find work."

As he examines one of the earliest official Italy jerseys, a woollen one worn in 1928 by Elvio Banchemo, Giacomo Benvenuto criticises the lack of character among the key players.

"Players like (Nicolo) Barella and (Gianluigi) Donnarumma - the experienced ones - don't have the balls that Chiellini, (Andrea) Barzaghi, or (Gennaro) Gattuso had," bemoans the 57-year-old physiotherapist.

"They don't bring that extra spirit to the pitch, they don't strike fear into their opponents."

Supporters may be about to vote with their feet, as only 32,000 of the 70,000 tickets available for today's Group A1 game against Belgium at the Stadio Olimpico had been sold as of Wednesday.

Italy face a daunting trip to Turkey on Monday before hosting France, then play the reverse fixture against the Turks to conclude the expanded international break.

TENNIS

Fit Alcaraz shrugs off pressure of packed calendar at 'joyful' Laver Cup

AFP
London

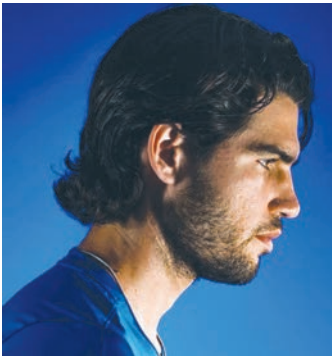
Carlos Alcaraz said yesterday that competing in team events during a packed schedule helps bring back the "joy" of tennis as he prepares to spearhead Europe's Laver Cup challenge against Team World.

The three-day tournament, taking place at London's O2 Arena from Friday, is effectively a high-profile exhibition, with no ranking points on offer.

World number three Alcaraz is headlining Europe's challenge alongside US Open champion Alexander Zverev, while Team World's roster includes Australia's Alex de Minaur and former Grand Slam finalist Taylor Fritz.

The Davis Cup is well established as the top team competition in men's tennis, but the Laver Cup was launched in 2017, with Roger Federer one of the driving forces.

Alcaraz, who only returned to action at the US Open after a four-month injury lay-off, said in New York that he planned to play fewer tournaments in future, blaming an



"impossible" tennis calendar for a rising number of injuries in the sport.

But the Spaniard, a seven-time Grand Slam champion, was in positive mood on the eve of the Laver Cup, saying he relished being part of a team in a sport dominated by individual competition.

"I love team events, team tournaments," the 23-year-old said. "Spending time with them, having fun, as you could see the previous year, how much fun I had on the court, off the court.

"It is a week that I might be training, I might be resting or something, but these kind of weeks help me a lot to bring my joy back

on the court, bring my joy back on playing tennis. It helps me a lot for the next tournaments when it is not team events."

Zverev is chasing the world number one spot currently held by the sidelined Jannik Sinner after winning the French Open and US Open. But the world number two said he was putting individual targets aside this week.

Zverev, who won the ATP Finals at the same venue in 2018, was asked whether he felt different after collecting his first two Grand Slams.

"Yes and no," the German said. "At the end of the day, we have great champions on the team who all know what it takes to win.

"For me, personally, it was quite a satisfying year but we're here at the Laver Cup as a team. I think for us, the main goal is to lift the Laver Cup trophy, to bring the Laver Cup trophy back to Europe."

The event pits six men's players from Europe against six players from the rest of the world in singles and doubles matches.

Team World defeated Team Europe 15-9 last year in San Francisco and has won three of the past four editions.

AGASSI DEMANDS PROPER BREAK FOR EXHAUSTED TENNIS STARS

LONDON: Andre Agassi has demanded a proper off-season for exhausted tennis players as he prepares to lead Team World against Team Europe at the Laver Cup in London.

The retired eight-time Grand Slam champion will captain a six-man group headlined by Australia's Alex de Minaur and former Grand Slam finalist Taylor Fritz at the three-day event, starting today. The Laver Cup, played on a hard court, is effectively a high-profile exhibition, with no ranking points on offer.

Agassi, 56, said he was always on the side of the players after US Open finalist Ben Shelton recently pulled out of the Ryder Cup-style event at the O2 arena.

"I said to him, 'Ben, before you can say anything, I need you to know that nothing matters more to me than my players'. And that's there, not just for the Laver Cup, but for their careers," Agassi told reporters yesterday.

Former world number one Agassi, who retired in 2006, said tennis had become more physically demanding since he quit.

"Courts and balls like these are sort of the most brutal form of the sport," he said. "And these guys still go out there and put themselves through it. I think that they cover more real estate than (vice-captain) Pat (Rafter) and I ever really had to do in our day."

Agassi said players deserve a proper rest at the end of each season -- long a talking point in the sport.

This year the Davis Cup men's team competition finishes on November 29, with the Australian swing starting just a few weeks later.

"It would be my hope (for) an off-season of some relative form of security for both the players, but



A warm welcome is accorded to retired tennis great Rod Laver (seated, second left) from Roger Federer (seated second right), Yannick Noah (left), Andre Agassi (right), and Tony Godrick, the Laver Cup Founder and Chairman, in London.

also for the fans so that they look forward to the game," said Agassi. "Cut them back. Every sport has it. There are a lot of times in life where... less is more. I think in a lot of cases, tennis would benefit from that." But Agassi said despite the packed calendar, he would not want to lose the Laver Cup, named after Australia great Rod Laver.

"I'd hate to see the compromise ever come on an event like this that is hosted under such a magnificent name and person that none of us would be here today without in this game," he said. "So this wouldn't be the place I would choose to cut some edges. "But I would like to see these awesome athletes always be at their best. I think everybody wins with that."

FOCUS

Japan's Ohashi lights up home Asiad with world record

Ohashi breaks Qin's 2023 breaststroke record, China's swimmer Zhang claims sixth gold of the Games

Reuters
Nagoya, Japan

Japanese wunderkind Shin Ohashi followed in the slipstream of China's Yu Zidi to become the latest teenage sensation to set the Asian Games pool alight yesterday, shattering the men's 200 metres breaststroke world record.

A day after 13-year-old Yu capped her fairytale Asian Games debut with a hat-trick of golds, 17-year-old Ohashi produced a blistering 2:04.83 to eclipse the mark of 2:05.48 set by China's Qin Haiyang at the 2023 world championships in Fukuoka.

It came little more than a week after Ohashi fell ill with COVID-19, which he said may have been a blessing in disguise.

"The world record was my goal so I'm very happy to get it," hesaid at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre.

"My next goal is for the gold medal at the world championships," added the teenager, showing why French superstar Leon Marchand views the Japanese prodigy as a serious rival.

"I'm scared. I'm very scared of him," Olympic 200m breaststroke champion Marchand said of Ohashi earlier this week.

"He's still so young. His coach is really good. I think his entourage, the people around him, are really good, so I hope he's going to keep improving."

Zhang Zhanshuo won his sixth gold of the Aichi-Nagoya Games after helping China to the men's 4x100m freestyle relay title.

Elsewhere, Carlos Yulo, the Philippines' first Olympic gymnastics champion, added an Asian Games title to his trophy cabinet



Japan's Shin Ohashi (also inset) competes in the final of the men's 200m breaststroke swimming event during the 2026 Asian Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre yesterday. (AFP)

with victory in the floor exercise, and felt redemption after disappointment at Jakarta 2018.

Yulo, who honed his craft in Japan on a scholarship from the local Olympic committee, scored 14.666 to edge Kazakhstan's Milad Karimi (14.600) in a cliffhanger.

His brother Karl Eldrew also competed in the final.

The 26-year-old was delighted to complete a career grand slam of world, Olympic and continental crowns.

"This medal, it's like winning the Olympics," Yulo told Reuters.

"It's really a good story, and I feel like I redeemed it in this competition."

Eight-times Olympian Oksana Chusovitina missed out on a medal at the age of 51, coming fifth in the women's vault final, 32 years after she took bronze at Hiroshima

1994. But the Uzbek said Nagoya would spur her on to try to qualify for a ninth Olympics at Los Angeles 2028.

"Honestly, I get so much enjoyment out of seeing the crowd and stepping onto the podium. It brings me immense pleasure, and

that's why I keep going." Sporting powerhouse China continued their imperious march through the multi-sport event, breaching the 75-gold mark.

On the shooting range, Jiang Yiting held her nerve with her final shot to complete a hat-trick of golds at the Aichi-Nagoya Games.

The 22-year-old's poise denied South Korea and earned China the skeet mixed team title, adding to her individual and women's team victories.

China also commanded the trails, with Wu Zhifan and Liang Zhenglan securing a one-two finish in the women's cross-country mountain bike final.

Away from the competition venues, local organisers spent another day defending the athletes' accommodation after local residents added their voices to concerns over the shipping container-style modular units.

Organisers scrapped the original plans for a dedicated Athletes' Village to control costs, housing 17,000 athletes and officials across a mix of hotels, container-style modular units and a cruise ship instead.

Several athletes have voiced dissatisfaction over the cramped dimensions of their cabins and beds - a criticism echoed by local residents who toured a prototype unit near the Nagoya TV Tower.

"Once inside, I noticed that the space was quite long and narrow," 49-year-old nurse Wada, who shared only her surname, told Reuters. Asian Games Organising Committee official Yuta Matsuo, however, maintained that athlete feedback had been taken into consideration from the very beginning.

GYMNASTICS

Sweet redemption for Philippines' Yulo

Reuters
Nagoya, Japan

Philippines gymnast Carlos Yulo said winning the Asian Games floor exercise gold yesterday felt like another Olympic triumph, elevated by redemption after he buried the disappointment of Jakarta 2018.

Yulo, the only Filipino to win two Olympic gold medals, added another major title to his collection with a score of 14.666 at the Nagoya City General Gymnasium, edging Kazakh runner-up Milad Karimi (14.600) and Japan's bronze-medal winner Shoma Tsukiya (14.566) in the tightest of podiums.

It came eight years after Yulo missed out on the medals in his only previous Asian Games in Indonesia when he fell in a tumbling pass and crashed to seventh after being the top qualifier for the floor final.

"This medal, it's like winning the Olympics, also because it's kind of the same back when I was 18 years old, at the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games," the 26-year-old said.

"I kind of messed up my routine there. I was a finalist on floor and vault, but it wasn't really a good performance."

"And at the same time in Tokyo Olympics, it's kind of the same. It was really messed up," added Yulo, who failed to qualify for the floor final at those Games.

"It's really a good story, and I feel like I redeemed it in this competition."

ROAD TO LOS ANGELES OLYMPICS

Yulo has come a long way since those setbacks, becoming his nation's first Olympic gymnastics champion when he won the floor title at Paris 2024 before adding a second gold in vault.

Yulo said the Asian gold was another milestone on the long road to defending his titles at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, though his



Gold medalist gymnast Philippines' Carlos Edriel Yulo celebrates on the podium after winning the men's floor exercise final in Nagoya. (Reuters)

focus was on staying healthy and enjoying his sport.

"That's a big one, and I feel like there's still a lot of time," he said of Los Angeles.

"I'm preparing myself right now. This competition is part of it also, and I'm building my confidence also through these competitions."

"I know when the time comes when we are there, I just pray that I'm safe, and I enjoy that moment and I appreciate that moment."

Yulo's 18-year-old brother Karl Eldrew also qualified for the Nagoya final and finished seventh out of eight after a messy landing early in his routine.

His older brother may be the

ultimate role model in rebounding from setbacks. "He's having a hard time, maybe, and I know that he will overcome this and take it as a lesson. It's part of the journey," said Carlos Yulo.

The Japan-trained gymnast's celebrity has reached a point in the Philippines where his every movement draws a crowd, much like the nation's top women's tennis player, Alex Eala, who will bid for Asian Games gold next week.

"I know she's going to smash it," said Yulo, offering best wishes to the 21-year-old.

"I know she can do it, really. And I'm just really excited for other athletes also to compete and give their best."

GULF CUP

Qatar begin campaign with 2-0 win over champions Bahrain

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar began their title challenge at the 27th Gulf Cup with a 2-0 win over defending champions Bahrain at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium in Jeddah yesterday, despite playing the final stages with 10 men.

Boualem Khoukhi gave Qatar the breakthrough in the 61st minute before Hassan al-Haydos settled the contest with a penalty in the ninth minute of stoppage time. Julien Lopetegui's side played with 10 men after Ahmed Fathi was sent off for his second yellow card of the match in the 70th minute.

United Arab Emirates, who thrashed Yemen 4-0, lead the group, followed by Qatar. Al An-nabi will next meet Yemen on Sunday, while Bahrain face the UAE on the same day.

Qatar could have taken an early lead but Almoze Ali failed to control an intelligent headed pass from Akram Afif early in the match. Afif then shot over the bar as Qatar looked for the opening goal.

After the cooling break, Fathi should have scored from a Sultan Al Brake cutback but sent his shot well wide. Afif also fired over the bar as Qatar remained goalless despite creating several opportunities, while Bahrain struggled to put pressure on the Asian champions.

Khoukhi then shot straight into the goalkeeper's hands as Qatar continued their quest for a goal after the break.

But Khoukhi was clinical in



Qatar's Bualet Khoukhi celebrates scoring against Bahrain during their opening Gulf Cup match in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

heading home Afif's delivery from a free kick to give Qatar the lead shortly after Lopetegui made a triple substitution.

Al-Haydos came in for Almoze, Yusuf Abdurisag replaced Ahmed Al Ganehi, while Edmilson Junior came off the bench for Karim Boudiaf. Bahrain put pressure on Qatar after Fathi's sending-off. Kumail Aswad's low shot just missed the left post, while Ibrahim Al Khatal headed over the bar.

Abdurisag could have put the game to bed but failed to beat goalkeeper Ebrahim Lutfalla in a one-on-one situation.

Al-Haydos drove the ball from the halfway line and was goal-bound before being brought

down inside the box by Abbas Al-Asfoor, who was sent off with a red card. Al Haydos calmly slotted the spot-kick into the right corner in the ninth minute of stoppage time to seal Qatar's win in style.

Earlier in the first Group B match at Al-Inma Stadium in Jeddah, Nicolas Gimenez opened the scoring in the 26th minute before Nader Sahal's own goal doubled the UAE's lead.

Luanzinho made it 3-0 before half-time, while Gimenez headed his second six minutes after the break from Marcus Meloni's cross. Hosts Saudi Arabia will meet Oman, while Kuwait will take on Iraq in Group A action tomorrow.

CHINA'S WOMEN TEAM CLAIMS BADMINTON GOLD

China swatted aside the hosts 3-0 to win women's team badminton gold at the Asian Games yesterday. Japan's 11-year-old eSports whizz-kid Yuki Kurihara crushed the competition, beating opponents almost three times his age. The bespectacled primary school student, who says he eats eel to prepare for contests, is the youngest athlete at the Games. He competes in Puyo Puyo Champions, a puzzle game where players try to clear their screen

of coloured blobs by lining them up and popping them. Kurihara beat all four opponents he faced to top Group A and put him on track for gold. The men's cricket began with hosts Japan losing to Afghanistan by 48 runs and Malaysia crushing Hong Kong by eight wickets in preliminary group matches. Favourites India and fellow Asian heavy-weight Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh are seeded directly into the quarter-finals next week.