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Iyer hits ton as India hammer West Indies in T20 opener



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Zidane begins France reign unbeaten with full of optimism

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TENNIS  
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FOCUS

# Qatar among seven nations vying for 2036 Olympics: IOC

INDIA, GERMANY, HUNGARY, SOUTH KOREA, SOUTH AFRICA AND TURKEY COMPLETE THE LIST

Reuters  
Berlin

Seven countries, including Qatar, India and Germany are in the running to stage the 2036 Summer Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said yesterday.

Hungary, Turkey, South Africa and South Korea complete the list of interested parties, who are in preliminary talks with the IOC, with a shortlist to be drawn up in March next year and some countries progressing to a strategic dialogue phase.

“Wherever the Games take place, one thing must never change: athletes have to be at the heart of everything we do,” said IOC President Kirsty Coventry.

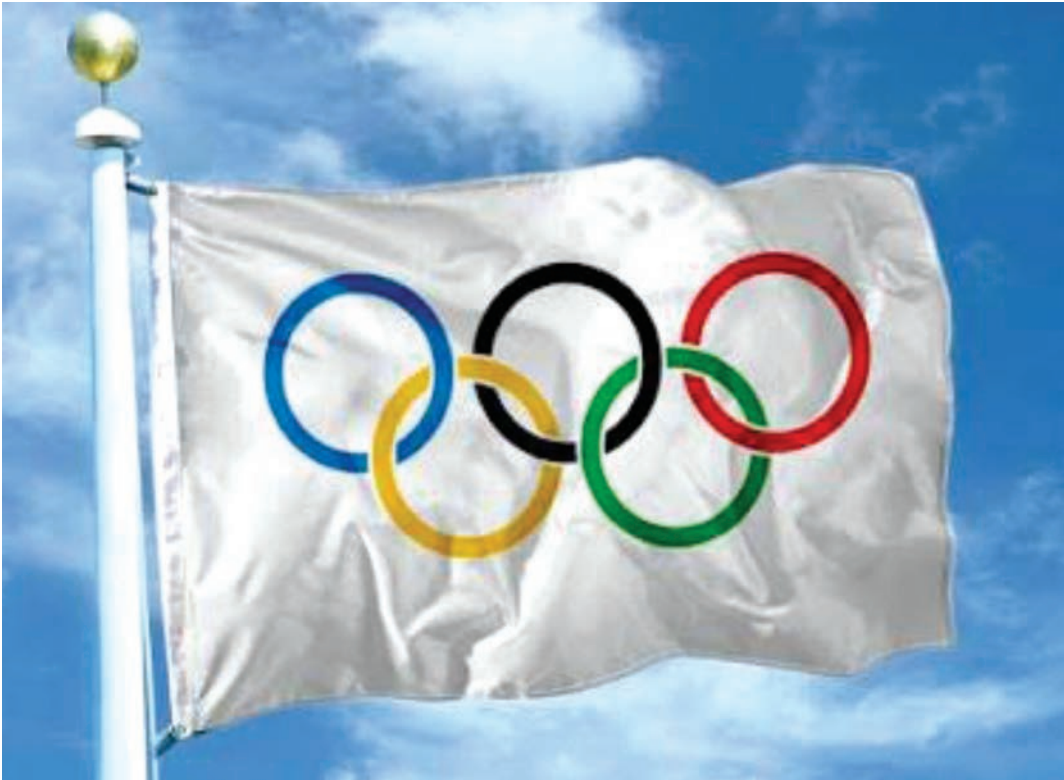
“That is why, for every future host, delivering the best possible experience for the athletes must always be the starting point.”

India, the world’s most populous nation, is attempting to land its first Olympics, while 2022 FIFA World Cup hosts Qatar, which has bid before with Doha, is campaigning to become the first Muslim-majority nation to host the world’s biggest multi-sports event. An Olympics in the Gulf would have to be moved to later than its traditional July-August slot due to the heat.

Hungary, which most recently bid for the 2024 Olympics, has never staged the Games while Munich, host of the 1972 Olympics, is Germany’s candidate.

Turkey’s Istanbul has failed in five previous attempts while South Africa is hoping to become the first African host of the Olympics. South Africa has major event experience, having organised the 2010 soccer World Cup.

South Korea has staged both summer and winter Olympics in Seoul in 1988 and Pyeongchang in 2018. Preferred hosts will be named after the dialogue phase



In March 2027, the IOC Executive Board will draw up a shortlist of the interested parties, who will then enter dialogue with the Olympic body.

in 2028 and a final decision is expected in mid-2029. Any other interested countries have until October 31 to come forward but new candidates are highly unlikely to emerge with less than four weeks before the deadline.

Bidding rules changed under Coventry this year, adding the strategic dialogue stage and involving members more throughout the process. It is also very likely that more than one country will be named as preferred hosts, unlike in past votes where just one bidder was put forward by the IOC executive board.

Los Angeles will stage the 2028 Summer Games and Australia’s Brisbane will host them four years later.

Next Steps for the 2036 Olympic Games Host Selection

31 October 2026

No other interested parties considered for 2036 after this date

November 2026

Virtual presentations to the Future Host Commission

By March 2027

IOC Feasibility Assessments

March 2027

Opening of 2036 Strategic Dialogue by the IOC Executive Board

Interested Parties for 2036 the NOCs of:

Germany  
Hungary  
India  
Qatar  
Republic of Korea  
South Africa  
Türkiye

IOC.ORG @IOC MEDIA

Major global and world championships hosted in Qatar since 2005

2005 World Weightlifting Championships: Held in November 2005, marking a major milestone as Doha began hosting top-tier global athletic events.

2010 IAAF World Indoor Championships (Athletics): Held at the Aspire Dome, bringing elite global indoor track and field competition to the Middle East for the first time.

2014 FINA World Swimming Championships (25m): Hosted at the Hamad Aquatic Center, gathering the world’s best short-course swimmers.

2015 World Men’s Handball Championship (IHF): Hosted across state-of-the-art venues like the Lusail Sports Arena, where the host nation famously finished as tournament runners-up.

2015 AIBA World Boxing Championships: Held at the Ali Bin Hamad al-Attiah Arena.

2015 IPC Athletics World Championships: The premier global competition for Para-athletics, hosted at Qatar Sports Club.

2016 UCI Road World Championships (Cycling): Brought elite international cycling

to Doha, featuring iconic street circuits and desert stages.

2018 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships: Hosted at the Aspire Dome, marking the first time the Artistic Gymnastics World Championships were held in the Middle East.

2019 World Athletics Championships (IAAF): Held at the Khalifa International Stadium, featuring late-night events and the iconic midnight marathon.

2023 World Judo Championships: Hosted at the Ali Bin Hamad al-Attiah Arena, drawing top judokas from around the globe for the world title and Olympic qualification points.

2024 World Aquatics Championships: The 21st edition of the championships, covering swimming, artistic swimming, diving, open water swimming, and water polo—the first time the event was held in the Middle East.

2025 World Table Tennis Championships (ITTF Finals): Hosted at the Lusail Sports Arena, showcasing the world’s finest table tennis players competing for individual and doubles world crowns.

FOOTBALL

# Saudi Arabia end 22-year Gulf Cup wait with victory over UAE

By Sports Reporter  
Jeddah

Saudi Arabia returned to the top of Gulf football after a 22-year wait, defeating the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 2-0 in the final of the 27th Gulf Cup at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah yesterday.

The victory saw the Saudis reclaim the prestigious regional title, completing a deserved triumph after an impressive performance in the final.

Saudi Arabia made a blistering start, scoring twice within the opening 15 minutes to put the UAE under immediate pressure. The early goals gave the hosts control of the contest and set the tone for the remainder of the match.

Humam al-Humami broke the deadlock in the 11th minute. His shot from the edge of the box clipped the Emirati defence and wrong-footed goalkeeper Khalid Eisa, nestling in the net.

Three minutes later, Firas al-Buraikan doubled the lead. He raced clear through on goal and slotted home with a low left-footed finish.

The Saudis continued to threaten as they looked to put the result beyond doubt. They came close to

adding a third when Saleh Abu al-Shamat struck the post, narrowly missing the opportunity to extend Saudi Arabia’s advantage.

Despite efforts from the UAE to fight their way back into the match, Saudi Arabia held firm to secure a convincing 2-0 victory and lift the Gulf Cup for the first time in 22 years.

The triumph marks a significant moment for Saudi football, as the national team once again celebrates regional supremacy after more than two decades.

It is their fourth Gulf Cup, drawing them level with Iraq as the second most successful nation in the competition, six behind runaway leaders Kuwait.

For the UAE, the drought goes on. Beaten in the final, they have now gone 13 years without the trophy, having last lifted it for the second time in 2013.

Saudi Arabia defeated Qatar 3-2 on penalties to reach the final of the Gulf Cup for the first time since 2019.

Saudi Arabia players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Gulf Cup at King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah yesterday. (Reuters)



FOCUS

# Australia's Green ruled out of first Test



Reuters  
Durban

Australia all-rounder **Cameron Green** will miss the first Test against South Africa after failing to recover from an abdominal strain, coach Andrew McDonald said on Tuesday.

Green was hurt during the last one-day international against South Africa in Potchefstroom on Wednesday after being struck in the stomach by a full toss from Corbin Bosch that left him writhing in pain. Two balls later, his at-

tempted pull shot bounced off his gloves and he was not only caught but strained his muscles as he fell to the ground.

"It's an odd one and had our medical team scrambling, so I'm not going to go down what the medical said around it, but there's not a hell of a lot of evidence in these injuries in cricket," McDonald told a press conference.

"They said it's a stabilising muscle, so I think that's a better result than a rotational muscle."

Green remains in contention for the second Test in Gqeberha and the third in Cape Town.

"He's progressing pretty well,

all things considered, on the back of the injury that he had to his abdominal.

McDonald said. "He's still here for a reason, so there is some light at the end of the tunnel. It'll just be a matter of going through the rehab.

"It's a bit of an unknown, but there's still optimism that he'll take part in the series at some stage," the coach added.

## BEGAN TOUR WITH SORE SHOULDER

The 27-year-old started the tour of southern Africa with a sore shoulder which kept him out of the three

ODIs against Zimbabwe, but he did play in the three ODIs versus South Africa.

Green's absence will be a blow as he is considered one of the form players in the touring party, especially after he scored a first home Test century when Australia suffered a shock loss to Bangladesh in Darwin in August.

Cooper Connolly, 23, could be in line for a second Test appearance after his February debut in Galle against Sri Lanka as Green's replacement although Australia will not be settling on their line-up until they better assess the pitch conditions, McDonald added.

MATCH REPORT

# Iyer slams 102 as hosts India ease past West Indies

Indian captain in ruthless batting form against hapless WI bowlers

AFP  
Lucknow, India

Captain Shreyas Iyer struck his maiden T20 international century to lead India to a convincing eight-wicket win over the West Indies in the opening match yesterday.

With India chasing 172 for victory, Iyer hit an unbeaten 102 off 43 balls to steer his team home with 32 balls to spare in Lucknow. India lead the five-match series 1-0.

With eight needed off 36 balls and Iyer on 95, hard-hitting batsman Ishan Kishan handed his captain the strike and the top-order batter reached his ton with a six and then took a single to complete the chase.

Iyer and the T20 team produced the win after they landed in India on Monday evening with an Asian Games men's T20 gold medal.

While they were in Japan, a completely different India squad, led by opening batsman Shubman Gill, beat West Indies 2-1 in an ODI series.

Swashbuckling Abhishek Sharma gave the hosts a brisk start in his 10-ball 21 before spinner Roston Chase got the left-hander caught out.

Left-arm spinner Akeal Hosen then struck in his 100th T20 for the West Indies to send back Sanju Samson caught and bowled for 11.

Iyer and the left-handed Kishan, who made 37, then took



India's captain Shreyas Iyer (right) is congratulated by West Indies captain Shai Hope after winning the first T20 international at the Ekana cricket stadium in Lucknow yesterday. (AFP)

charge with a string of boundaries and put on an unbeaten stand of 137.

Iyer raised his first half-century off 28 balls after 10 T20 innings and then changed gear for his next set of 50 in 14 balls.

Earlier in the match, Indian spinners set up victory with debutant Naman Dhir returning

figures of 3-31 to bowl out West Indies for 171. India elected to field first and despite a quick start by skipper Shai Hope, who made 52 off 37 balls, the spinners struck regular blows.

Sherfane Rutherford top-scored with 56 but bowlers kept India in control.

Kuldeep Yadav and fellow

spinner Axar Patel took two wickets each.

The second T20 is on Friday in Ranchi.

## BRIEF SCORES

**India 172 for 2** (Iyer 102\*, Kishan 37\*) **beat West Indies 171** (Rutherford 56, Dhir 3-31, Axar 2-26) **by eight wickets**

## Bhuvneshwar returns to India's T20 squad for New Zealand tour

**NEW DELHI:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar has returned to India's T20 squad after a four-year absence from international cricket as selectors yesterday named him for the tour of New Zealand.

The 36-year-old Bhuvneshwar, who last played a T20 for India in November 2022, is part of the 16-member squad for five matches starting October 22 in Christchurch. India will also play five one-day internationals and two Tests on the tour, the squad for which will be announced later, said the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

Bhuvneshwar's return comes on the back of two successful Indian Premier League seasons for champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

The veteran pace bowler shined in IPL 2026 with 28 wickets at an outstanding economy rate of 7.95 as Bengaluru defended their title.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy also makes a return to the squad, led by Shreyas Iyer. Speedster Jasprit Bumrah has been rested as part of workload management after he played a key part in the team's recent Asian Games gold medal in Japan.

**India squad:** Shreyas Iyer (captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Ishan Kishan (wk), Tilak Varma (vice-capt), Axar Patel, Shivam Dube, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Naman Dhir, Prince Yadav, Mayank Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Varun Chakaravathy, Kuldeep Yadav

## FARBACE APPOINTED LANCASHIRE'S DIRECTOR OF CRICKET

ancashire have appointed former Sri Lanka coach and ex-England assistant Paul Farbrace as their new director of cricket following the

worst season in the English county's history. Farbrace will arrive at Old Trafford after Lancashire finished second-from-bottom in the Second Division of the 2026 County Championship.

## 2027 WORLD CUP TICKET DEMAND TOPS 1 MILLION APPLICATIONS

Applications for more than 1.1 million tickets were submitted during the opening weekend of ballot registrations for the Men's Cricket World Cup 2027, organisers said yesterday. Details have showed more than 320,000 fans have registered for the ticket ballot, which remains open until November 21, for the tournament co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The India-Pakistan match has generated the strongest demand, attracting more than 110,000 ticket applications.

ANNOUNCEMENT

# Ganguly returns to IPL's Delhi Capitals as coach

AFP  
New Delhi

Former India captain **Sourav Ganguly** has been named head coach of Indian Premier League team Delhi Capitals, the franchise announced Tuesday.

The 54-year-old is back at the franchise he joined as an advisor in 2019 and later served as the director of cricket for both the men's and women's teams.

"Delhi Capitals is a franchise very close to my heart, and one that I have shared a strong relationship with over the years," Ganguly said in a statement.

"We have a talented group and have played a good brand of cricket in the recent past. I am looking forward to working with the squad, the new season, and building a strong and fearless team."

He will take over from Hemang Badani, who led Delhi to a sixth-place finish in the competition this year.

Delhi have not won the IPL title since the inaugural edition in 2008.



"I am excited to see him take on this role and I'm sure that under his guidance and visionary leadership Delhi Capitals will be best prepared to challenge for the IPL title," Delhi chairman and co-owner Parth Jindal said.

"I cannot wait for all our players and staff to learn from Dada (Ganguly) and am looking forward to seeing DC in action at the earliest."

Ganguly made his coaching debut last year at Delhi's sister franchise Pretoria Capitals in the South African SA20 T20 league.

Ganguly represented India in 113 Tests and 311 one-day internationals between 1992 and 2008.

BOTTOMLINE

# Mandhana named India women's team captain after Kaur quits

AFP  
New Delhi

India's cricket board yesterday named **Smriti Mandhana** as the new captain of the women's team after Harmanpreet Kaur resigned from the job earlier in the day.

The 37-year-old Kaur, who recently led India to an Asian Games

gold medal in Japan, had captained the team to their first women's global title at last year's ODI World Cup.

Mandhana, 30, has been the backbone of India's batting in recent years and played a key part in the Asian Games victory, including a stellar 45-ball 79 in the final against Sri Lanka.

"To be given the responsibility of leading India is a very special

honour," Mandhana said in a statement by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"Representing India has always meant a great deal to me, and to now have the opportunity to lead the team is something I will value deeply."

Mandhana, a swashbuckling left-handed opener, has played nine Tests, 120 ODIs and 179 T20s for India since her debut in the

white-ball format in 2013. "The BCCI has full confidence in Smriti and I am sure she will approach this role with the same commitment and professionalism that she has shown throughout her career," BCCI president Mithun Manhas said.

Earlier Kaur stepped down from the role through a social media post on Tuesday morning. "This is not an easy decision," Kaur wrote.

"It carries years of memories, emotions, sacrifices, and moments that will stay with me for the rest of my life," she said.

"I have given everything I had to this team and to Indian women's cricket - my blood, my sweat, my time, and many times, a part of my own game and personal ambitions."

However, Kaur indicated she would continue to play.



TENNIS

# Unbeaten Beijing bond: Djokovic wins China Open

The 39-year-old extends a perfect record to 34 wins in as many matches for his seventh title in Beijing

AFP  
Beijing

Tennis great Novak Djokovic credited his “never-die spirit” for carrying him to the 102nd title of his career as he won the China Open yesterday when his opponent Alex de Minaur retired injured from the final.

With the win, the 39-year-old Serbian extended a perfect record to 34 wins in as many matches for his seventh title in Beijing - his first since 2015.

Djokovic said afterwards that in more than two decades as a professional player, “the grit and the dedication and the kind of never-die spirit that really is always with me” have carried him through.

Tennis is “quite a cruel sport” with players competing in knock-out tournaments year-round, Djokovic told reporters, adding that the stakes and pressure of performing in front of fans made the sport “so demanding and so special”.

“You can feel so much weight on your shoulders, but it is what I have been destined to do,” he said. In front of a jam-packed stadium, Djokovic won the first set in the tie-break 7-6 (7/3) and was down a game in the second set when the Australian ended the match early.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic (right) signs a fan's shirt after winning the singles final at the China Open in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

“I always want to visualise myself with the trophy, particularly here in Beijing,” Djokovic said during the trophy ceremony. “But I was also quite aware that reality is a little bit different these days,” he said, adding that it had been a challenging year with “physical and health issues”.

“I was just trying to find the good feeling on the court,” he said. The first set was a physical battle that lasted more than one hour, and both men needed medical timeouts before the second.

De Minaur, the world number nine, won the first game of the second set before retiring due to a left adductor strain.

The 27-year-old had walked back onto the court after his medi-

cal timeout with a white wrap around his left thigh.

“I don’t feel great,” de Minaur told the crowd afterwards.

“I want to say sorry to the amazing fans that came to watch... I didn’t want to finish like this.”

De Minaur advanced to the final after his opponent Hubert Hurkacz retired injured from their semi-final on Monday, while Djokovic moved through when Daniil Medvedev was disqualified for hitting a fan with a ball.

But Djokovic, a 24-time Grand Slam champion, put on a valiant show to lift the trophy, ousting top seed Alexander Zverev in the quarter-final after defeating home hope Bu Yunchaokete in a demanding three-set match.

It means Djokovic will end the season with at least one title for the 21st consecutive year, and as the oldest man to win a singles final after Ken Rosewall in Hong Kong in 1977 at age 43.

## ‘REALLY GRATEFUL’

In the women’s draw, Karolina Muchova beat former world number one Naomi Osaka on her ninth match point to reach the quarter-finals, triumphant in a tense tie-break.

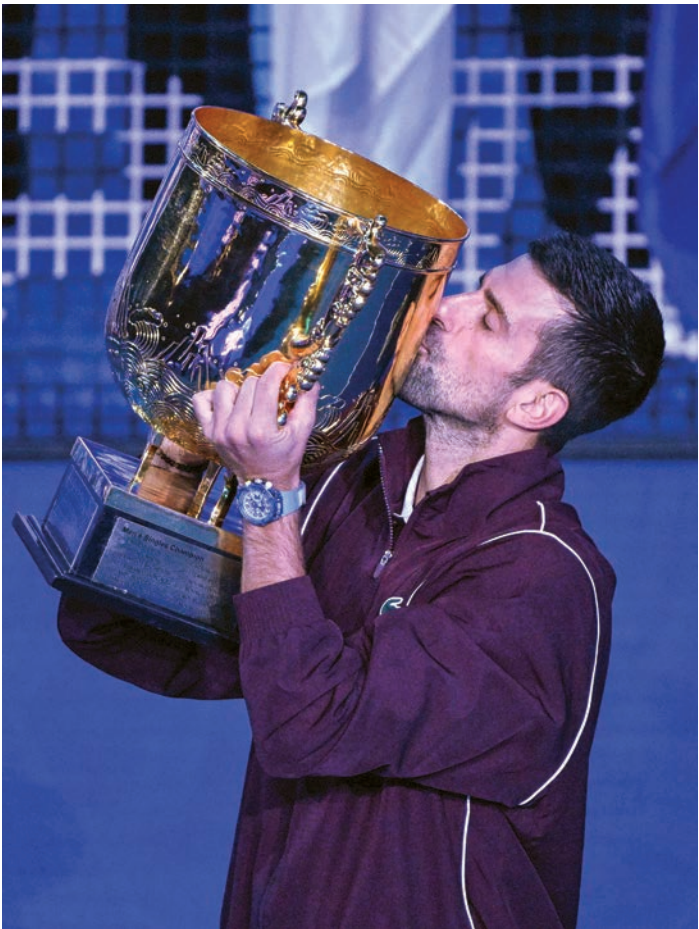
Muchova, the seventh seed, overcame 50 unforced errors across the two-hour-and-52-minute match to beat Osaka 7-5, 1-6, 7-6 (9/7).

Osaka, who represents Japan, saved eight match points but could not get past Muchova’s match-winning volley.

“I was shaking. I’m happy I made the last volley... Naomi could be standing here. It’s me, and I’m really grateful for it,” the 30-year-old Czech player told the crowd.

She next faces compatriot Nikola Bartunkova.

Earlier, Russia’s Mirra Andreeva beat Ukraine’s Daria Snigur 6-2, 6-2 to book her quarter-final spot against fellow Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova. Alexandrova, ranked 28th, upset Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova 6-2, 6-2, ending the Czech player’s bid to return to the Beijing final that she reached last year.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates with the trophy after winning the China Open in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

## ALCARAZ WINS JAPAN OPEN FOR FIRST TITLE SINCE INJURY RETURN

TOKYO: Carlos Alcaraz said he “didn’t want to take anything for granted” after winning his first title since returning from a four-month injury layoff in yesterday’s Japan Open final. The top seed and defending champion beat world number 19 Jiri Lehecka of the Czech Republic 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in Tokyo to lift his first trophy since the Qatar Open in February. It was his second singles tournament since coming back from a wrist injury, following a run to the US Open quarter-finals. Alcaraz also played at the Laver Cup team event in London last week. The world number three said he “wanted to earn everything” but did not know how quickly he would find his form again. “I don’t want to take anything for granted,” he said. “I didn’t know if I was going to win

a tournament this soon or if I was going to win a tournament this season. “I just want to arrive at a tournament, give my best, try to play my best and let’s see how the tournament goes.” Alcaraz’s win gave him his third title of the year including the Australian Open, and the 27th of his career. It came hours after world number one Jannik Sinner announced that he had brought a premature end to his season due to an ongoing knee injury. “I think at this tournament I was way far from my best level, but in terms of finding solutions and playing the best level that I could in the most important moments, I think it was a great week,” said Alcaraz. “I’m really happy about lifting the trophy in the second official tournament since the injury.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy and coaches after winning the final against Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka. (Reuters)

“Hopefully it’s not going to be the last one this season,” he added.

## TOKYO DOUBLE

Alcaraz is scheduled to play in the Shanghai Masters which will start today.

He pulled out of last year’s tournament at the last minute after winning in Tokyo, blaming “physical issues” and taking aim at tennis’ packed schedule. Alcaraz went into the Tokyo final with a 3-1 career head-to-head

record against Lehecka, who was looking to win his first title of the year. Alcaraz had his service broken immediately by a confident-looking Lehecka, who gave his top-seeded opponent no time to settle. The Spaniard broke back in

a long tussle midway through the first set and followed that up with a brutal display of power tennis in the next game. Lehecka proved a tough nut to crack though, and Alcaraz needed to pull out a pair of spectacular drop shots to clinch the first set in a tiebreaker. Lehecka continued to give Alcaraz problems, but the defending champion went a break up midway through the second set and made no mistakes to close out the victory. Alcaraz won in his Tokyo debut last year after injuring his ankle in his opening game. He said returning to Japan to lift the trophy again was a “special” experience. “Winning the tournament after my injury, back to back here, it means a lot,” he said. “Everything I’ve done to be in this position, everything I’ve worked for, for this moment, it feels even more special.”

ATHLETICS

## No more the ‘silver man’, Bednarek eyes Olympic glory after Budapest sprint double

Reuters  
New York

Kenny Bednarek says he is gunning for gold at next year’s world championships in Beijing and the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028 after shedding his “silver man” tag with a sprint double at the World Athletics Ultimate Championship last month.

The American has been a perennial contender over 200 metres, winning two Olympic and two world championships silver medals, but his breakthrough sprint double in Budapest offered proof he is a threat over both distances on the big stage.

Bednarek, 27, told Reuters in a video interview that his multiple runner-up finishes had left him wanting more.

“It’s one of the most important things to be somebody who’s always there, but it’s also a bittersweet situation because ... you’re clearly one of the best but not the best,” he said.

“That was the thing I wanted to improve on going into this year, hit a lot of good times and get some wins here and there. My goal was to make sure to put everything together when it mattered the most.

“Finally getting global championships, gold medals, it was a sigh of relief. You’ve probably heard people call me the ‘silver man’ and all that. So it was getting that stigma off of me and proving myself right.”

The headband-wearing American, nicknamed “Kung Fu Kenny”, finished seventh in the Paris Olympics 100m final but said the work he has been doing to improve his start has been paying off. With sprint king Usain Bolt watching from the stands in Budapest, Bednarek clocked 9.85 seconds to beat Jamaican world champion Oblique Seville. “My Achilles heel has always been my reaction



Kenneth Bednarek of the US celebrates winning the 100m final at the World Athletics Ultimate Championships in Budapest on September 12, 2026. (Reuters)

time and sometimes maybe just not getting out of the blocks the way I wanted to,” said Bednarek, who posted a personal best of 9.79 seconds in the 100m last year. When we were going into this year, it was about being consistent and more intentional with what I was doing coming out of the blocks, not trying to sit in when the gun goes off.”

## ‘CHANGE MY LIFE’

Winning the 200m in Budapest over a field that included 2020 Olympic champion Andre De Grasse and Paris Games gold medallist Letsile Tebogo was a huge confidence booster, he said.

“Winning the 100m and 200m, especially in the fashion I did doing four races in two

days, that made my confidence go through the roof,” he added.

“It’s something I’ve been trying to do over the last few years and I was finally able to. Knowing exactly what I did, the preparation and work I put in leading up to the races gives me a blueprint of what I need to do in the future.

“I’m very confident doing the same thing, going to the world championships and the Olympics.”

Bednarek looked forward to competing at an Olympics on home soil in 2028 and said winning gold would be life changing.

“I think it plays a little bit of a role ... it’s in Los Angeles, so all my family members will definitely be able to go,” he added.

MOTORSPORT

## Russell faces another blow with likely back of grid start in Singapore

Reuters  
Singapore

George Russell is set to start from the back of the grid in Singapore this weekend in another big blow to the unlucky Mercedes driver’s rapidly fading Formula One world title hopes.

The team confirmed yesterday that the Briton had no engines left in his season’s allocation of four and would have to take a new one for the sprint weekend, with the corresponding penalties likely sending him to the back row for Sunday’s race.

Russell retired from the Bahrain Grand Prix in Malaysia last weekend with a power unit problem five laps from the finish while he was in third place.

The pre-season title favourite remained second overall but now a considerable 84 points behind championship-leading teammate Kimi Antonelli.

Saturday is the last sprint of the season - with engine penalties not applying for that 100km race - and there are six rounds scheduled after Singapore, meaning 20-year-old Antonelli is on track to clinch the title as Formula One’s youngest champion with several races to spare.

Russell and Mercedes had always known he would need a new



engine, with a penalty, but had hoped to take it at the US Grand Prix in Austin - the race after Singapore - when the team had also planned to introduce an engine upgrade that could now be brought forward.

That Texan circuit, unlike tight and slow Singapore, generally sees plenty of overtaking. Antonelli took his engine penalty at Monza, his home race, and won it from 19th place on the grid.

Russell won last year in Singapore, one of the most gruelling races on the calendar with sweltering heat and humidity, from pole position.

The lowest winning grid position at the Marina Bay track is 15th for Spaniard Fernando Alonso in a now-notorious 2008 race in which his Brazilian teammate Nelson Piquet crashed his Renault deliberately on team orders. Of the 16 races held there to date, 11 have been won from pole.

SPOTLIGHT

# Hopeful Zidane begins France reign unbeaten

‘We were pretty good in our matches even though we can always do better’

Reuters  
Paris

**Z**inedine Zidane's first two weeks in charge of the French national team were eagerly awaited after 14 years under Didier Deschamps, and the new manager came through the international window unbeaten in the Nations League, with a few glimmers of promise.

The 1998 Ballon d'Or winner was the first France men's coach to win his debut game since Aime Jacquet in 1994, with a 1-0 victory in Turkey, and the first to go undefeated in his first four matches since Raymond Domenech in 2004.

After a laboured win over Turkey, France beat Belgium twice and were held to a 1-1 draw by Italy on Friday in Zidane's first home game in charge.

"We were pretty good in our matches even though we can always do better," Zidane told a press conference on Monday.

"We did this over 15 days, in a first international window. It's encouraging and I'm very optimistic for what comes next. We worked really well, and it was important to put in fifteen days of real quality," he added.

Les Bleus struggled with the same issues across their four games: plenty of control - an average of 62% possession - but too few chances and not enough cutting edge in the final third.

"Even if not everything from the first half should be thrown away, we lacked penetration in the final thirty meters, something that let



France's head coach Zinedine Zidane reacts during the Nations League Group A1 match against Belgium at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, Paris. (AFP)

us down in the other three matches," Zidane said.

Playing without captain Kylian Mbappe for the last three matches after he was injured after scoring the winner against Turkey, France did not score in the first half during their last eight games.

But Zidane's squad have shown character, with Michael Olise snatching a late winner in Belgium and substitutes Desire Doue, Rayan Cherki and Olise turning the second clash against the Belgians on its head in the final 15 minutes.

"I'm happy with the reaction from the whole team, and to finish

these fifteen days on a very, very positive note. I think it's deserved given everything we've done," Zidane said.

Zidane has changed his line-up from one match to the next. He gave first international caps to six players: Guillaume Restes, Jeremy Jacquet, Andy Diouf, Lucas Da Cunha, Esteban Lepaul and Leny Yoro.

"For this international window, it was planned. We played four matches in fifteen days and the players have only just started their season. I also wanted to see everyone," Zidane said.

Liverpool defender Jacquet and Como midfielder Da Cunha were among the players who staked a claim for the future, while Ousmane Dembele struggled. The 2025 Ballon d'Or winner failed to make an impact, whether used as a striker or on the right wing.

Olise was the attacking leader of the side, with four goals and two assists in four matches.

"What he's doing is just exceptional," Zidane said.

France visit Italy before hosting Turkey next month with a Nations League quarter-final spot on the line.

FOCUS

## Pochettino says tried to sign striker David ahead of US-Canada clash

AFP  
Los Angeles

**F**ormer Spurs, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain coach **Mauricio Pochettino** said he tried to sign striker Jonathan David multiple times with his previous clubs, as he prepares his US side to face Canada.

David has started the season in blistering form with Atletico Madrid, which he joined on loan last month after a difficult spell at Juventus.

He has scored three goals in as many games for Atletico, and is expected to lead the line for Canada when the North American rivals clash in an international friendly at Allianz Field in Minnesota today.

"When we were in different clubs, he always was on our radar to try to sign him. That is true," said Pochettino.

He added: "It's going to be a difficult player for us tomorrow. We need to be focused on him, of course, because he's one of the greatest strikers today in the world.

"Not only here or in Europe, but in the world."

Now 26, David enjoyed five prolific seasons in France, scoring 109 goals for Lille after joining them for a Canadian record 30 million euros in 2020.

Nicknamed the "Iceman," he joined Serie A giants Juventus on a free transfer in 2025, where his impact was more limited and he scored just eight goals.

Joining Atletico on loan last month he hit the ground running, netting in their last three games.

That included a goal in their 2-1 win against bitter rivals Real Madrid just before the international break.

According to Spanish media, Atletico have an option to buy David worth around 25mn euros (\$29mn).

"Now seeing him in La Liga in

a club like Atletico Madrid with a coach like Diego Simeone is fantastic," said Pochettino, who played and coached in Spain's La Liga with Espanyol.

"I think he's a fantastic striker with a very good mix (of) qualities and for sure scoring goals with confidence."

The US clash with Canada is the fourth of an intense international window for Pochettino's team.

Pochettino has used the post-World Cup period to blood a number of exciting young prospects, and has been rewarded with three emphatic wins.

The US beat Peru 4-1, Chile 4-2 and Mexico 3-0, with teenagers Cavan Sullivan, Julian Hall and Mathis Albert all among the goalscorers.

Canada also racked up wins over Chile and Peru, with David bagging the sole goal in the victory over Chile.

Los Angeles FC striker Jacob Shaffelburg was on target twice in Canada's 2-0 defeat of Peru on Saturday.

Pochettino said he expected Jesse Marsch's men and their supporters to be fired up for the clash with Canada's giant neighbor to the south.

"It's obvious that every time that we play against teams like Canada or Mexico, always the competitiveness is there, and the fans want to win," he said.

"I think we all know what means to play against Mexico and Canada."



COMMENT

## ‘We’re working to keep football clean’, Turkish minister says

AFP  
Istanbul

**T**urkey's justice minister yesterday said that prosecutors were working "to keep football clean" as they looked into a match-fixing scandal which has seen the country's top referee official and others arrested.

Ferhat Gundogdu, head of the Central Referees Committee (MHK), and four others were on Saturday placed in jail pending trial on charges of manipulating the referee administration process.

And a referee and an assistant referee from Turkey's top-flight Super Lig were jailed in the same investigation on Monday.

"Turkish football needs to be clean ... We want referees to manage matches without being beholden to anyone, adhering to

the rules," Justice Minister Akin Gurlek said in a televised interview with state news agency Anadolu.

"But unfortunately, our investigations show this is not the case."

He said investigators were probing allegations that some referees were given preferential treatment, while others were "demoted or subjected to workplace bullying" or deliberately prevented from officiating.

They were also investigating claims that referee exam questions were distributed in advance.

On Monday, Turkish Football Federation (TFF) chief Ibrahim Haciosmanoglu denied any involvement in the scandal.

"Don't try and pin 30 years of corruption in football on me," he said in an interview with Hurriyet newspaper.

The scandal came exactly a

year after the TFF suspended 149 referees on charges of illegal betting, although they only faced disciplinary sanctions.

In an investigation involving 571 referees from the professional leagues, the TFF found that 371 had sports betting accounts and 152 were actively placing bets.

"The TFF has provided us with data from players and managers, notably in betting issues," Gurlek said.

"There absolutely should not be any bribery, match-fixing... or referees deliberately letting something happen," he said.

"Our main goal is to keep football clean."

Until now, UEFA has not commented on the scandal in the week since the top refereeing official was arrested.

According to Turkish media, the TFF was expected to make a decision on whether or not to hold an early election.

BOTTOMLINE

## FIFA chief Infantino hit by Norwegian double complaint

AFP  
Paris

**E**mbattled FIFA president Gianni Infantino has been accused of a potential abuse of power and conflict of interest after the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) filed formal complaints to two FIFA committees.

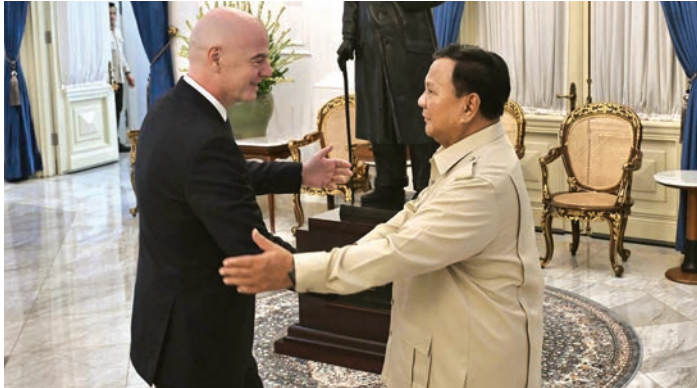
They revolve around three matters: Infantino's aborted plan to open up the World Cup to private investors, the lifting of the suspension of US star Folarin Balogun at the 2026 World Cup following an intervention by Donald Trump, and FIFA's awarding of a so-called Peace Prize to the US president.

The first filing made yesterday "asks the Ethics Committee to examine the conduct of FIFA President Gianni Infantino and any other individuals identified through the investigation for potential breaches of FIFA's Code of Ethics".

The second filing is aimed at FIFA's Governance, Audit and Compliance Committee (GACC) and "asks whether FIFA's governance, financial oversight, internal controls and decision-making processes (have) worked as intended".

Lise Klaveness, the NFF's straight-talking president and longtime critic of Infantino, told The Times newspaper that Trump was the common thread in all three issues. Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner's brother Josh's venture capital firm was to be the chief investor in the ill-fated FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) plan.

Infantino's plan, launched just after this year's hugely successful World Cup co-hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States in July would have allowed private investors to acquire stakes in a company created under the FFE initiative. The backlash that followed led to Infantino making a humiliating climbdown within days. "FIFA Forward Enterprise is



Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto welcoming FIFA President Gianni Infantino at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta on Monday. (AFP)

a governance issue but it's connected to the two other cases because (of) conflict of interest and abuse of position, potentially," Klaveness told *The Times*. "There is a line between all these three cases and it's the same political regime."

Klaveness, a former international footballer, said Infantino had some serious questions to answer over a lack of transparency.

Balogun's red card in the last-32 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina during the World Cup resulted in an automatic suspension for the match with Belgium. But FIFA stepped in and suspended his ban, leading to widespread condemnation, especially when it emerged that Trump had intervened by phoning Infantino. The FIFA Peace Prize award that Infantino presented to Trump in December has been widely ridiculed.

"These are three very different factual cases, but they all have something in common that we want examined," said Klaveness.

"Is it an abuse of power, an abuse of position? Is it a breach of political neutrality?"

"Is it in accordance with the rules of governance, as the FIFA Council should be the strategic body, and the president shouldn't really have any unilateral power?"

Klaveness, 45, had in August called upon Infantino to resign

and forego his bid to be elected to a fourth and final term as president.

The 56-year-old Swiss has insisted he will seek re-election in Rabat next March and as yet no other candidate has declared.

Infantino, who was first elected in 2016, must secure a majority of the 211 votes from the organisation's members in order to be re-elected. The deadline to declare to run is November 18.

Klaveness has said she will not be a candidate - despite some observers, including Infantino's predecessor Sepp Blatter, believing she would be a good fit as FIFA chief. Aleksander Ceferin, president of European football's governing body UEFA, has said he is not interested. UEFA have been unsparing in their verbal assaults on Infantino and FIFA, dismissing the FFE plan as "a shady and opaque backroom deal".

The likeliest rival is thought to be Canadian Victor Montagliani, president of CONCACAF, whose body along with UEFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) have formed an anti-Infantino alliance. However, while a swathe of UEFA's members have publicly withdrawn their support for the 56-year-old Swiss, some of the AFC's associations, such as 2034 World Cup hosts Saudi Arabia and 2022 hosts Qatar, have pledged their loyalty to him.

### Crisis-hit Italian FA placed under national Olympic committee control

The crisis-hit Italian Football Federation (FIGC) was placed under the guardianship of Italy's Olympic Committee (CONI) yesterday, but with the newly-elected Giovanni Malago remaining at its helm. Under the terms of a compromise reached with CONI president Luciano Buonfiglio and approved by the Olympic body's executive committee, Malago remains acting head of Italian football but with an interim title of FIGC Extraordinary Commissioner. And the FIGC must hold new elections by January 31, 2027, CONI said in a brief statement. Malago took over after Gabriele Gravina resigned last June following Italy's loss to Bosnia-Herzegovina in the European play-off final for the 2026 World Cup. But his election, secured with 68.6 percent of the vote, was challenged by a lawyer who found that he did not hold a valid FIGC membership card at the time of his candidacy. Both the FIGC and CONI launched proceedings but reached different conclusions, with the Olympic body initially deeming that Malago's election should be invalidated. Yesterday's compromise allows the rebuilding of Italian football to continue after the four-time winners' failure to qualify for the last three World Cups. Malago, 67, has been a key figure in Italian sports for more than 20 years and is a former CONI president who spearheaded this year's Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics.

### Cardiff's Bielik banned and fined for clash with fan

Cardiff defender Krystian Bielik has been banned for two matches and fined £10,000 (\$13,272) following an altercation with a Portsmouth fan during his side's 2-0 defeat in an English second-tier match at Fratton Park last month. The incident occurred in the second half at Portsmouth's ground when Bielik went to retrieve the ball from a stand packed with Pompey supporters. Video footage showed Poland centre-half Bielik becoming involved in an altercation with a teenage boy, who caught the ball and then appeared to be pushed in the throat by the Cardiff player after he had thrown it back towards the pitch. Hampshire Police launched an investigation following the match but took no further action after concluding their enquiries. "Krystian Bielik has been suspended for two matches and fined £10,000 for misconduct during Cardiff City's EFL (English Football League) Championship match against Portsmouth on Saturday 5 September," England's governing Football Association said yesterday. "Krystian Bielik subsequently admitted the charge. An independent regulatory commission imposed these sanctions following a hearing."