

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2

Australia need six wickets on final day to win first Test



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Premier League in limbo as Manchester City soar

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Tuesday, October 13, 2026
Jumada I 2, 1448 AH

GULF

TIMES

SPORT

TENNIS

Bergs stuns Alcaraz in Shanghai as Zverev claims year-end No.1 spot

Page 3

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Gharafa lose to Esteghlal as Shamal settle for draw

Sassi cancelled out Asani's strike before Goudarzi's 60th-minute winner ensured Esteghlal victory



Al Gharafa and Esteghlal players battle for the ball during the AFC Champions League Elite match at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Al Gharafa and Al Shamal endured contrasting fortunes in the AFC Champions League Elite yesterday. Gharafa suffered a 2-1 defeat to Iran's Esteghlal at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, while Shamal were held to a goalless draw by Tractor FC in Muscat.

Ferjani Sassi's 48th-minute goal cancelled out a stunning strike by Jasir Asani in the first half before Hossein Goudarzi's 60th-minute winner ensured Esteghlal finished with another three points.

Both sides took their time to settle, with Esteghlal edging possession and Saman Fallah's off-tangent header off a corner in the 12th minute their first look at goal.

Another corner at the opposing end in the 21st minute gave the home side their chance to threaten, with Seydou Sano rising high in the box but nodding wide of the left post.

There were no shots on target in the first half hour, but Asani made sure that the Iran Pro League side's first strike in the 37th minute mattered when he came down the right and unleashed a spectacular 20-yard shot that dipped beyond Ahmad Kone's fingertips and into the top left.

Kone made a superb save from Saeid Saharkhizan four minutes into stoppage time while Habib Abbasi denied Al Gharafa's first on-target attempts through Adam Ounas and Abdulrahman Faiz Al Rashidi to close the half.

The Qatar outfit's strong start to the second half paid off three minutes in when Sassi emerged from a pack of bodies inside the Esteghlal box to side-foot past Abbasi for the equaliser.

Esteghlal, however, took advantage of slack goalkeeping by Kone in the 60th minute to regain the lead when Goudarzi was given too much space on the left and struck from range, his shot bouncing off the custodian's palms and rolling into the bottom left.

Saharkhizan saw his shot deflect off mid-fielder Ayoub Aloui in front of goal in the 79th minute while Abbasi made himself big to block Alaa Hasan's point-blank effort five minutes later and Rustamjon Ashurnatov cleared off the line from Aloui to con-



Al Shamal's Federico Bais (right) and Tractor's Shahriyar Moghanlou vie for the ball during the AFC Champions League Elite match in Muscat yesterday.

sign Al Gharafa to their second defeat.

In Muscat, Tractor FC and Al Shamal SC played out a goalless draw. The stalemate sees Iran's Tractor picking up their first point in the league Stage while Al Shamal settled for a second consecutive draw in their debut campaign.

It was a cagey start with neither team able to gain a foothold on the game although Al Shamal enjoyed a lot more possession.

In the 15th minute, there was a half-chance for the visitors when Ben Romdhane collected the ball on the left flank and tried to find Federico Bais in the box, only for Tractor goalkeeper Parsa Jafari to read the situation.

As the first half progressed, Tractor started to get a grip on the game but their best effort was only a Shojae Khalilzadeh header in the 35th minute from Farshad

Faraji's long throw which bounced harmlessly into the grasp of Babacar Seck.

The intensity improved after the interval as both teams went in search of the breakthrough.

Yousouf Sabaly set up Bais for a rasping shot from outside the box in the 53rd minute which Jafari had to react fast to push over the bar.

At the other end, Seck produced a brilliant double stop four minutes later, a strong right hand to parry Mohammad Naderi's fierce drive before putting his body on the line to stop Daniel Esmaelifar's point-blank follow-up.

Al Shamal had chances to snatch a late winner with Romdhane stopped by a superb Faraji sliding challenge, then Michael Termanini drove into the box only to drag his shot wide and in the end, both teams had to settle for a share of the spoils.

PREVIEW

Sadd face tough test against Hilal

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd will be looking to get their AFC Champions League Elite campaign back on track when they host Saudi giants Al Hilal at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today. The Qatar champions suffered a 3-0 defeat to Iran's Esteghlal FC in their opening match and face another tough test against an Al Hilal side aiming for a second consecutive victory in the league stage of the continental competition.

Al Sadd, who are seeking their second continental title, will be eager to bounce back after the disappointing start, having entered the tournament in good domestic form. However, they will need to be more defensively disciplined against an Al Hilal team determined to reclaim the trophy they last won in 2021.

Al Hilal began their campaign with a victory over Qatar's Al Gharafa and will be confident of maintaining their momentum. Despite topping the West Zone league stage in each of their last two campaigns, the Saudi giants fell short in the knockout rounds and will be keen to go further this time.

Al Sadd coach Razvan Lucescu acknowledged the challenge posed by his former club but said his focus was firmly on securing the team's first win of the campaign.

"We are playing our second match in this edition of the tournament, and we know that we are also coming from a domestic loss, but



Al Sadd players at a training session.

we are not thinking about anything other than facing Al Hilal," said the Romanian at Monday's pre-match press conference. "After the league match, we talked about this loss, even though we played a good match."

Lucescu said his team had shown consistency in their performances but needed to address lapses in concentration that had proved costly in recent matches.

"Yes, I coached Al Hilal previously, and it is an excellent team with good players currently. Al Hilal is on the right track, and the match

has a personal meaning for me with a former team," he said. "I am now the coach of Al Sadd, and I am striving to achieve the best result in this match. We must have the focus that we lacked in the three matches."

Asked about Al Sadd conceding nine goals in their last three matches, Lucescu said the team had worked to correct its defensive shortcomings. "We suffered from a kind of lack of focus and conceded many goals, even in the match in which we won and scored six goals. We worked on addressing the flaws and individual errors that caused this number of goals, and we are fully prepared for the match that will be held at our stadium," he said.

The coach also called on the fans to turn out in force, stressing that their support could prove crucial in a difficult encounter.

Al Sadd defender Paulo Otavio echoed his coach's sentiments, describing the match as particularly important given the team's need to get its campaign moving. "This is the most important match for us given its current timing, and it is against one of the best clubs in Asia. We are looking forward to achieving our first victory in the current edition of the tournament," Otavio said. "I am confident that we will perform well and win this match, so we are working to be at the highest level of readiness."

Otavio said the players were determined to deliver a performance worthy of the supporters. "We, as players, are ready to give our all in this match. We have a distinguished lineup of players in attack and defence, and we know it will be a match for the fans," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar SC replace Lopez with al-Kubaisi

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar SC have parted ways with Spanish coach Marquez Lopez by mutual consent after a disappointing start to their Qatar Stars League campaign.

The club announced the decision in a statement yesterday, thanking Lopez for his efforts and wishing him success in his future career. Qatar SC are languishing in 11th place in the 12-team standings with just two points from five matches, having suffered three defeats.

Rashid al-Kubaisi, who previously coached the club's U-23 team, has been appointed head coach following Lopez's departure, the club said.

Lopez previously coached Qatar's national team, leading them to their second consecutive AFC Asian Cup title in February after replacing Carlos Queiroz in December 2023. However, he left the national team following Qatar's disappointing performance in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers, with his assistant Luis Garcia taking



over as head coach.

Al-Kubaisi said he was looking forward to achieving success with Qatar SC, a club he knows well, and hoped to give his best for the team. Qatar SC will face Iraq's Al Zawraa SC in their opening Gulf Club Champions League match at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha today.

"We are ready for tomorrow's match and aim to go far in the tournament. Al Zawraa are one of the strong teams in Iraq and have several outstanding players. We have studied our opponents, but our full focus is on our own team and preparing properly," he said.

CRICKET

Aussies need six SA wickets on final day to win first Test

Matt Renshaw’s dream match continues as the left-hander makes 82 after his 190 in the first innings

Reuters
Durban

Australia’s Matt Renshaw played a leading role to leave his side needing six wickets on the last day of the first Test to beat South Africa as the hosts were 102-4 at the close of play at Kingsmead yesterday.

Set 421 runs to win after Australia declared their second innings on 314-6, South Africa saw opener Ryan Rickelton, David Bedingham, captain Temba Bavuma and Tristan Stubbs all dismissed before stumps with part time spinner Renshaw weighing in with his first Test wicket as his dream performance continued.

Aiden Markram (45 not out) and Wiaan Mulder, unbeaten on five, will resume on the final morning, needing to lead a stoic rearguard action if the home side are to avoid defeat.

Rickelton’s place in the Test side looks under threat after another early dismissal.

He was out for a duck after three balls of the first innings and scored two on Monday before an attempted pull shot saw him edge Josh Hazlewood’s rising delivery to wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Bedingham was the second wicket to fall, making 46 before being trapped lbw by Hazlewood and ending a patient 66-run partnership with Markram, while Bavuma scored a single run, prodding at Renshaw’s off spin and being caught bat-pad at short leg.

Stubbs also made one, getting a thick edge to captain Pat Cummins’ delivery with another example of the poor shot selection that



Australia’s Matt Renshaw raises his bat as he celebrates after scoring a half-century on day four of the first Test against South Africa at the Kingsmead stadium in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

has dogged South Africa’s batting.

RED-HOT BATTING FORM

Earlier, Renshaw continued his red-hot batting form to allow his side to declare at tea, picking up where he left off in the first innings when he scored 190 of Australia’s 390 runs.

The 30-year-old Queenslander continued to dominate the home bowlers, scoring 82 in the second innings before a controversial

caught and bowled from Keshav Maharaj ended his contribution.

It was the top score for Australia, who accelerated their run accumulation in a bid to give themselves time to put South Africa into bat and chase down the 10 wickets required for victory.

They resumed on 33-0 and scored 141 runs in a fast-moving first session for the loss of four wickets and a further 140 in the afternoon.

CAPTAIN CUMMINS IN WHIRLWIND BATTING DISPLAY

Opener Nic Maddinson, who made a duck in the first innings on his return after a decade out of Test cricket, played some expansive shots before Anrich Nortje clean bowled him for 48, and there were useful contributions from Beau Webster, 39 not out, and Cummins, who bludgeoned four sixes in his whirlwind 12-ball 32.

Travis Head’s 11 runs at the top



Australia’s Pat Cummins appeals for a wicket on day four of the first Test against South Africa in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

of the Australia innings and 37 again from Marnus Labuschagne did not help their individual causes, although Labuschagne’s 53-run partnership with Steve Smith (27) for the third wicket did accelerate the run rate and put Australia into an advantageous position.

Smith was struck on the helmet by Nortje and is being assessed under concussion protocols. He batted on after the hit but did not join

the rest of the Australian team on the field at the start of South Africa’s chase and could be a doubt for the second Test, which starts in Geberha on Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 284 & 102 for 4 (Bedingham 46, Markram 45*, Hazlewood 2-20) **trail Australia 390 and 314 for 6 dec** (Renshaw 82, Maddinson 48, Maharaj 2-56, Nortje 2-56) **by 319 runs.**

SPOTLIGHT

Young pretender Seixas threatens to rule cycling

AFP
Paris, France

At just 20 years and 16 days, Paul Seixas made history as the youngest ever winner of the Giro di Lombardia and ensured that his stunning breakout season would end in glory.

He was also the fourth youngest ever winner of one of cycling’s prestigious Monument one-day classics.

By contrast, that was more than two years younger than Tour de France king Tadej Pogacar and Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel when they won Liege-Bastogne-Liege in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

Even the great Eddy Merckx was 260 days older than Seixas when he won Milan-San Remo in 1966. It has been a truly remarkable season, mostly as a teenager. Seixas announced himself in February with his first senior victory at the Faun-Ardeche Classic, where he simply rode a host of strong climbers off his wheel.

It was the same at Lombardia. “He didn’t really attack, he just kind of made his own pace, a high pace,” said Tom Pidcock, who finished sixth. “He was super strong.”

Seixas won his first World Tour level events in April -- the week-long Tour of the Basque Country and the Fleche Wallonne one-day classic.

Then, in July, he finished fourth in his debut Grand Tour, while



Decathlon CMA CGM Team’s French rider Paul Seixas celebrates on the podium after winning the 120th edition of the Giro di Lombardia between Bergamo and Como. (AFP)

under intense media scrutiny at the Tour de France.

But there had been a feeling in some quarters that he was running out of steam as he was beaten by Isaac Del Toro in a sprint finish at the Montreal GP last month after losing concentration in the run-in.

Then, back in Montreal at the world championships two weeks ago, he cramped up in the final few kilometres when in medal contention and limped home in 15th. However, a week before that he won an impressive time-trial world bronze medal.

And in Lombardia, he seemed to be back in the kind of form that made him the only rival able to even attempt to follow a

swashbuckling Pogacar when he launched his long-range attacks at Strade Bianche and Liege.

‘INCREDIBLE MENTAL MATURITY’

Some people criticised Seixas for lacking panache at the Tour, but he had crashed out of the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes a month earlier, was riding a three-week tour for the first time in his life, and, like everyone else, was trying to manage riding through a heat-wave with 40C temperatures.

“We all know about his physical attributes, but he has incredible mental maturity,” said Seixas’s sporting director at Decathlon CMA CGM, Julien Jurdie.

“He already masters all the el-

ements. He’s a true champion -- everyone listens to him.”

And he has delivered in a way that makes him stand out.

Pogacar at the same age was still racing at under-23 level.

Seixas’s results this year are better than Pogacar’s achievements were at a year older, in 2019 when he won the Tour of California and finished third at the Vuelta a Espana. But within a couple of years, Pogacar was already looking virtually unbeatable - whether in one-day classics or stage races.

Until he crashed out of the Vuelta in late August, Pogacar had won six out of nine Grand Tours, twice finishing second to Jonas Vingegaard at the Tour and coming third in his debut at the Vuelta. He has not finished outside the top five of a Monument since the 2020 Milan-San Remo, winning nine of his last 13.

Seixas is not at Pogacar’s level and it remains to be seen whether he can progress as much.

“We keep working hard... to win as much as we can until he destroys everybody!” Pogacar said after being pushed to the limit by Seixas at Liege in April.

It is perhaps unlikely that the Frenchman makes the same meteoric improvement, though, as Pogacar was not as diligent in his preparation in his early career as Seixas is already.

But that dedication will stand Seixas in good stead.

“I’m always motivated, I take training seriously. It’s my passion,” said Seixas.

ONE-OFF TEST

Bangladesh eye win over Afghanistan after Litton’s edgy century

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Bangladesh pushed towards a big win over Afghanistan in the one-off Test after a brilliant century from Litton Das helped them set a target of 479 runs in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Litton scored 102, his seventh Test hundred, as Bangladesh declared on 372-7 on day four at Sheikh Zayed Stadium, having achieved a 106-run lead in the first innings.

Afghanistan finished the day on 132-3 with Sediqullah Atal and Hashmatullah Shahidi batting on 35 and 19 respectively.

Bangladesh will expect their pacers and spinners to seal victory on a wearing pitch today.

Bangladesh seamer Ebadot Hossain gave his team an early breakthrough when he dismissed Abdul Malik for two in just the second over of the innings.

Hasan Mahmud, who took a hat-trick during his five-wicket haul in the first innings, had Shahidullah Kamal caught behind for 19 before Rahmat Shah and Atal added 82 for the third wicket.

Shah, who made a century in Afghanistan’s first innings of 240, compiled a battling 51, hitting five fours and a six, before Hossain had him caught behind by Litton.

It was Litton’s eighth dismissal behind the stumps in the match, setting a new record for Bangladesh.

The previous best was seven dismissals by Khaled Mashud against Zimbabwe in February 2004.

Earlier, Bangladesh resumed at 223-6 and were indebted to a seventh-wicket stand of 149 between Litton and Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who finished with 52 not out.

Afghanistan were sloppy in the field as they let off Litton on 14, 26 and 67, also missing a run-out chance against Miraz, capping a disappointing day.

Mohammad Saleem, Zia-ur-Rehman and Yamin Ahmadzai took two wickets apiece for Afghanistan.

BRIEF SCORES

Afghanistan 240 and 132 for 3 (Sediqullah 35*, Hashmatullah 19*, Ebadot 2-32) **need another 347 runs to beat Bangladesh 346 and 372 for 7** (Litton 102, Shanto 82, Mushfiqur 81, Zia 2-86)

BOXING

Alvarez will go ahead with title fight in Riyadh

Reuters
Riyadh

Saul “Canelo” Alvarez will fight in his world title bout against Christian M’billi in Saudi Arabia this month, promoter Turki al-Sheikh said after a strike on Riyadh’s international airport killed at least 12 people and wounded more than 300.

Yemen’s Iran-aligned Houthis movement claimed responsibility for Saturday’s attack, the deadliest in the kingdom in more than a decade.

On Sunday, one more person was killed and nearly a dozen hurt

in another attack on the international airport in Riyadh, where Alvarez and WBC super-middleweight champion M’billi are set to clash on October 31.

“Canelo reached out and told me he’ll still fight in Riyadh this October, no matter what happens. He fears nothing,” said al-Sheikh, chairman of Saudi Arabia’s General Entertainment Authority, in a post on social media on Sunday.

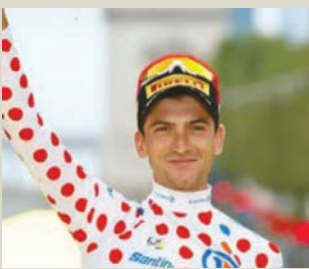
Alvarez’s representatives did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside business hours in Mexico. The Mexican boxer has not fought since he was beaten by American Terence Crawford in September 2025.

Italian Ciccone joins Pinarello from Lidl-Trek

MILAN: Italian **Giulio Ciccone** has signed a three-year contract with Pinarello Q36.5, the Swiss team said yesterday, after the 31-year-old mutually parted ways with Lidl-Trek after eight seasons. Ciccone’s last race in the Lidl-Trek colours ended with a third-placed finish in Saturday’s Giro di Lombardia, after the team announced his departure on

the eve of the race despite still having three years left on his contract. “After eight years with the same team, this is a big decision, but one I genuinely wanted to make,” Ciccone said in a Pinarello Q36.5 statement. “I feel I still have a lot to give, and I needed a new challenge, fresh motivation and an environment where I could feel

at home.” The climbing specialist, who has won the mountains classification at both the Tour de France and Giro d’Italia, will link up with British rider Tom Pidcock at Pinarello. “I’ve always admired him, not only because of his talent, but because he’s a rider who thinks differently and isn’t afraid to do things his own way,” Ciccone said.



PAN ARAB GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP

Qatar juniors strike gold in double triumph

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's young golfers enjoyed an impressive outing at the 2026 Pan Arab Junior and Girls Golf Championship in Egypt, winning gold medals in both the boys' under-18 individual and team events at Madinaty Golf Club from October 7 to 10.

Daniil Sokolov led the way with a dominant performance in the individual competition, finishing 15-under-par after three rounds to claim the gold medal by a remarkable 15 strokes. He then teamed up with Kamil Benrokiya to help Qatar secure the team title, completing a memorable campaign for the national junior squad.

Sokolov's performance put him well clear of the field, with Palestine's Abdul Halim al-Yaqoubi finishing second at even par, while Jordan's Mohammad al-Rawashdeh took third place at three-over-par.

The Qatari golfer was the only player among the top three to finish under par, underlining his consistency and control throughout the competition.

Qatar's success continued in the boys' under-18 team event, where Sokolov and Benrokiya combined for a score of seven-over-par to take gold. Palestine and Libya shared second place at 19-over-par, 12 strokes behind the Qatari pair.

The double gold marked a significant achievement for Qatar's emerging golf talent and reflected the progress being made in developing the sport among young players in the country.

The Qatari delegation was led by Fahad Nasser al-Naimi, Secretary-General and Executive Committee Member of the Arab Golf Federation, who praised the team's performance and commitment.

"We are proud of our junior national team. Winning gold in both the individual and team events reflects their discipline, commitment and team spirit, and gives



our young players strong motivation to keep improving," al-Naimi said.

He highlighted the importance

of consistency, concentration and composure in a competition that tested players over three rounds.

"Our players delivered per-

formances worthy of recognition. We see this achievement as an important step in the development of Qatari golf and as further motiva-

tion to provide our young talent with the preparation and competitive opportunities they need to build on this success," he added.

Al-Naimi also stressed the importance of the Pan Arab Junior Golf Championship, which is held annually under the umbrella of the Arab Golf Federation and provides a valuable platform for young golfers across the region to test their skills against strong competition.

He said the results reflected the Qatar Golf Association's continued efforts to nurture young talent through structured training and participation in international tournaments, with the aim of achieving further success at both regional and international levels.

With two gold medals secured in Egypt, Qatar's junior golfers have added another encouraging chapter to the country's golfing progress, while Sokolov's individual triumph and the team's combined success provide a strong foundation for future competitions.

TENNIS

Bergs stuns Alcaraz as Zverev claims year-end No. 1 spot

Zverev becomes first German to finish year at number one

AFP
Shanghai

Carlos Alcaraz fell to Zizou Bergs in straight sets at the Shanghai Masters yesterday, interrupting the former world number one's in-form return to the professional Tour after being sidelined for months by injury.

The 39th-ranked Belgian beat the second-seeded Spanish star 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) in the third round to land the tournament's biggest upset yet, and will play Tommy Paul next.

"Today wasn't a good match from my side. I didn't feel good," Alcaraz told reporters, crediting Bergs for taking chances and serving big.

"In a few important moments I didn't play my best, and I would say there were a few moments that he was lucky," the 23-year-old said of their two-hour battle.

Alcaraz said he was "disappointed" by a loss riddled with errors, which came a week after he won the Tokyo Open, adding he would return home and hit practice.

"Right now, you know, all the negative thoughts come to my mind and none of the positives, but I think I will take it, you know, the good things," he said.

His loss also ensures current world number two Alexander Zverev, the reigning French Open and US Open champion, will replace Jannik Sinner as world number one by the year's end, with the Italian's season over due to a knee injury.

Zverev, the top seeded player in Shanghai, will face Alexander Bublik in the last 16 on Tuesday.

Alcaraz started with more quality until Bergs broke the Spaniard's



Belgium's Zizou Bergs (left) shakes hands with Spain's Carlos Alcaraz after their Shanghai Masters match in Shanghai yesterday. (AFP)

serve to go up 3-2 in the first set.

Alcaraz grabbed back that break in the next game but was uncharacteristically off-target, sending a mess of shots into the net.

He double-faulted to hand Bergs a critical break point in the 11th game, and lost the first set when a volley went short.

Alcaraz, currently ranked third in the world, was visibly frustrated during the second set as he vented to his corner following a series of misfired shots that left him with no points in the fourth and eighth games.

He forced a tie-break but could not reach a third set as Bergs closed things out on the first match point.

"It's a little disbelief and not feeling too much," Bergs, 27, said after winning.

"You're just really in the moment, being focused on the points you have to play," he said.

Earlier, Stefanos Tsitsipas came back to beat Taylor Fritz 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 and earn fourth round meeting with Daniil Medvedev, who brushed aside qualifier Dalibor Svrčina 6-2, 6-3.

A wardrobe malfunction delayed victory for the Greek world number 43 when a tennis ball tumbled out of the American's pocket a second time and forced the men to replay a match point.

A tired-looking Fritz, seeded 11th, hung on for a bit longer to

save the eighth game but could not stick around beyond that, with Tsitsipas holding serve to win at the fifth time of asking.

"I could have done a few things easier, but I ended up being my biggest enemy," Tsitsipas told the crowd afterwards.

"I turned things around really well towards the end and became friends with myself and played some incredible tennis," he said.

Felix Auger-Aliassime, Casper Ruud and Rafael Nadal also went through to the last 16.

American world number 18 Paul sent off last year's winner Valentin Vacherot 6-4, 6-2 while Botic van de Zandschulp beat eighth-seeded Arthur Fils 7-5, 6-4.

FORMULA 1

Mercedes' Russell could take next engine penalty at Las Vegas Grand Prix



Reuters
Singapore

Mercedes driver **George Russell** could take another engine penalty at next month's Las Vegas Grand Prix, by which time teammate Kimi Antonelli is likely to have clinched the Formula One championship.

Russell, second in the standings but 102 points behind the Italian with six rounds remaining, started at the back of the grid in Sunday's Singapore Grand Prix after exceeding his season's allocation of power units.

He said last week that he would be taking another penalty before the end of the season.

"It'll probably be later in the season now, to be honest. Maybe looking at Vegas," he told Sky Sports television after finishing ninth at Marina Bay.

"Now we've got the choice to take it when we wish, and we'll be choosing a slightly easier track than this one."

Russell and Mercedes had not planned to take a new engine in Singapore, a circuit where it is hard to overtake, but their hands were forced by a failure

that sidelined the Briton at the previous Bahrain round in Malaysia and gave them no choice.

Austin, Texas would have been the preferred choice option on October 25. Antonelli, 20, has his first chance to become the sport's youngest ever champion in Austin.

The winner of eight grands prix this year will have to win there, however, to become Italy's first champion since 1953 with five rounds to spare - and it will still depend on Russell or Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton not scoring enough to remain in contention.

Mexico a week later, or Brazil the weekend after, look more likely venues to witness the championship success before Las Vegas.

There can be no doubt that Antonelli will prevail eventually, with third-placed Hamilton now 111 points adrift and only 125 available after Austin.

If Antonelli wins in Texas then Red Bull's Max Verstappen, Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and McLaren's reigning champion Lando Norris will be out of title contention immediately.

Four-times champion Verstappen, winner on Sunday, will be chasing his third successive victory in the next race.

EALA SHOCKED BY WORLD NUMBER 217 IN WUHAN OPEN FIRST-ROUND EXIT

Filipina star Alexandra Eala suffered a shock 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 first-round defeat against 217th-ranked Chinese qualifier Shi Han at the Wuhan Open yesterday. Eala, the 13th seed, missed last week's China Open in order to compete in the Asian Games in Japan, where she claimed a bronze medal for the Philippines. Her return to the tour did not go as planned. Just one week separates Eala and Shi in age and despite the gulf in their experience, very little separated the two 21-year-olds on Monday. Eala is ranked 19 in the world, a title winner on the WTA Tour and a former semi-finalist at the WTA 1000 level. Shi, meanwhile, is ranked outside the top 200 and entered the clash with just two tour-level victories under her belt. For large stretches of their showdown though, their contrasting positions were

completely unnoticeable. Eala shook off trouble on her own serve and converted her first break point opportunity of the match to scoop the opening set in 54 minutes. The second set followed a similar pattern but this time Shi utilised her powerful backhand to break Eala for a 4-3 advantage and she soon drew level to force a decider. Riding a wave of momentum, Shi grabbed a seventh game in a row to leap to a 3-0 lead in the final set as Eala faded. Shi finished the job to claim the first tour-level top-100 victory of her career and book a second-round date with former US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez. Earlier, world number 91 Wang Xiyu opened up the evening session with a near-flawless 6-2, 6-0 performance against her compatriot Wang Xinyu in what was a highly-anticipated Chinese derby.

The left-handed Xiyu, who recently clinched the gold medal at the Asian Games to secure qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, won the last nine games of the contest with Xinyu to set up a second-round meeting with fellow wildcard Mia Pohanokova. Meanwhile, freshly-crowned China Open champion Zheng Qinwen announced her withdrawal from her home tournament in Wuhan citing fatigue and a right shoulder injury, a day after becoming the first Chinese player to clinch the Beijing title. Mirra Andreeva, the player Zheng beat in the Beijing final, also withdrew, citing a change of schedule, as the duo joined a growing list of high-profile Wuhan absentees that includes world number one Elena Rybakina, last year's champion Coco Gauff and reigning Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova.



China's Shi Han hits a return during their Wuhan Open match yesterday. (AFP)

Younousse and Tijan storm into Doha Open final



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan booked their place in the final of the AVC Beach Tour 2nd Doha Open 2026 with a 2-0 (21-18, 21-17) victory over Australia's Joshua Howat and Finley Bennett in the semi-finals yesterday. The Qatari pair had earlier defeated Thailand's Netitorn and M. Wachirawit 26-24, 21-16 to reach the last four. Australia's Oliver Merritt and Jed Walker also advanced to the final after beating compatriots Solomon Bushby and Justin Schumann 2-0 (21-18, 21-19). They will now face the Qatari favourites in the title clash in Doha.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arsenal lose Hincapie and Zubimendi in freak double blow

Reuters
London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said he had never known a similar situation in his seven years at the club after Piero Hincapie and Martin Zubimendi were injured in a post-match training session after their Premier League win over Leeds United.

Hincapie, 24, came on in the 82nd minute as Arsenal won 2-1 against Leeds on Saturday, while Zubimendi, 27, was an unused substitute. Both players are now doubts for Arsenal's Champions League clash against Lille today.

"It's never happened in seven years I've been here. It could happen in the training session the next day," Arteta told reporters. "It's happened now and hopefully it doesn't happen again, but what can you do?"

The Spaniard said the pair were injured during an additional session arranged for players who did not get enough minutes against Leeds.

"We had a training session planned after the match for everyone that didn't get enough minutes, and in two unfortunate actions we lost two players," he said. "They'll have further scans to see where they are and we'll have that time frame for how long they are going to be out for."

Arteta said the extra work was necessary to ensure

squad players were ready when called upon. "If they never train, they don't get injured. The consequence of that is when you ask them to play they have no rhythm and no impact in the game," he said.

Hincapie has made three Premier League appearances off the bench this season but started Arsenal's Champions League win over Napoli last month. Zubimendi has also largely featured as a substitute, making five league appearances from the bench this campaign. Last season's Champions League finalists beat Napoli in their opening match in the competition last month. Arsenal are second in the Premier League, three points behind Manchester City.



Arsenal's Martin Odegaard and Declan Rice train as manager Mikel Arteta looks on. (Reuters)

FOOTBALL

Premier League in limbo as Man City soar

No sanction has yet been decided, but the club could face a severe points deduction

AFP
Liverpool

Manchester City silenced a hostile Liverpool crowd in their first match since being found guilty of breaching Premier League financial regulations but there is a deep sense of uncertainty over what it actually means.

Enzo Maresca's men are top of the table with six wins out of six after their impressive 3-0 win at Anfield on Sunday. Yet those points could count for nothing unless City are successful in their appeal against the findings of an independent commission that found them guilty of more than 100 breaches of Premier League rules.

No sanction has yet been decided, but the club could face a severe points deduction leading to relegation, or even expulsion from the English top flight. There is even speculation that City could be stripped of the three Premier League titles they won between 2009 and 2018, the period to which the charges relate.

The Premier League, which has a huge global reach, faces an appeal process likely to drag on for months, putting a question mark against every City result, and with huge potential implications for other clubs.

"We're sat here not knowing what it means," former Manchester United captain turned pundit Gary Neville told *Sky Sports* on Sunday. "City supporters will be delighted (with the win), but I don't think they recognise right now the stain, the stigma and the damage this is going to do to them."

The BBC's chief football writer, Phil McNulty, said the team's impressive win at Anfield had been overshadowed by what was happening off the pitch. "Every victory, every league table, will come with a metaphorical asterisk until clarity and finality comes," he said. "No one knows when this will be."

Andoni Iraola's Liverpool are ninth in the table, nine points behind leaders City. But even if Liverpool fail to challenge for the title, the three points lost on Sunday could



Manchester City are top of the table with six wins out of six after their impressive 3-0 win at Anfield on Sunday. (AFP)

cost them dearly in the battle for a place in the Champions League.

Potential sanctions against City could also have an impact on the battle for relegation. "That today, what does it mean going forward?" former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher said on *Sky Sports*.

"This has to be done before the end of the season. There's no way this can carry on to the end of the season because we're all getting kidded."

The Premier League announced late last month that an independent commission had found that City had arranged "sham" deals to artificially inflate revenues and reduce costs by more than £900mn (\$1.2bn)

between 2009 and 2018. Liverpool feel particularly aggrieved, having finished second behind the Manchester club in the Premier League three times in the past 12 years.

City's rivals believe the Abu Dhabi-backed club's spending in the 2009-2018 period built the foundations for a golden era that continues to bear fruit.

The Premier League leaders spent around £460mn (\$609mn) in the 2026 summer transfer window – a new Premier League record for a single window – as new boss Maresca reshaped the squad following the departure of Pep Guardiola.

One of City's expensive new signings, midfielder Elliot Anderson, admitted the

criticism of the club had galvanised the players as they stepped out at Anfield.

"We've got to stick together," said the England midfielder.

"I think it really brings us together. It gives you that determination to come out here, everyone is against you, and turn them over, which we did."

Anderson and his teammates will have to get used to their new reality as the whole of English football waits for a definitive decision in a case that has rumbled on for years. As chants, banners, flags and scarves at Anfield showed, City stand accused of cheating their way to the top – and opposition fans will not be silenced.

UK PM met Man City chairman during his role as Manchester mayor

London: British Prime Minister Andy Burnham met Manchester City chairman Khaldoon al-Mubarak at an investment summit several years ago when he was mayor of the city, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority said.

The announcement comes after Burnham said he would be "really concerned" if City's owners sold the club following the decision to find the 10-time English champions guilty of breaching the Premier League's financial rules. Burnham, who was mayor of Greater Manchester from 2017 to June 2026, faced criticism for appearing to express support for City's hierarchy. Downing Street subsequently had to backtrack, insisting no one was "above the rules".

But there were demands for clarification regarding Burnham's relationship with City's owners, who have driven significant investment in Manchester through partnerships with local authorities.

City are owned by Abu Dhabi United Group (ADUG), controlled by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan, a member of the United Arab Emirates royal family.

A Greater Manchester Combined Authority spokesman said: "In October 2021 Andy Burnham, in his role as mayor of Greater Manchester, had a formal meeting with Khaldoon al-Mubarak at the UK Government's Global Investment Summit arranged by the Department for International Trade. "In his capacity as mayor, he was a guest of Manchester City FC at home matches on a small number of occasions, including attending Vincent Kompany's testimonial match in September 2019, where he met the chairman informally in the stands. These have been declared in the usual way."

The statement added that during Burnham's time as mayor "representatives of Greater Manchester sporting clubs would routinely join business delegations as part of mayoral international visits."

"This included representatives from Manchester United travelling to Austin and Dublin, Lancashire Cricket Club joining a delegation to India, and Manchester City FC staff supporting visits to China and Japan."

City have been found guilty of breaking more than 100 Premier League financial regulations by arranging "sham" contracts to artificially inflate revenues and reduce costs in a nine-season between 2009 and 2018.

The Premier League leaders have appealed against the verdict, saying it contains "clear material errors, of law, principle and fact, and is unsafe".

City could be hit with a huge points deduction or even face expulsion from the Premier League if they lose the appeal.

But Louie French, the opposition Conservatives spokesman for sport, said the statement contained "precious little information about these meetings, what was discussed and what may have been agreed".

It was far "from the full transparency that football fans deserve. Burnham cannot hide behind the GMCA - he must take responsibility for this himself", French added.

FOCUS

Carrick's United 'hungry and eager' to fix worst start

AFP
Madrid

Manchester United coach Michael Carrick insisted his team can weather the storm after making their worst start to a season in 40 years.

The Red Devils conceded a late goal to draw against 10-man Tottenham in the Premier League on Saturday, leaving them with six points after six games, their worst tally at the same stage since 1986.

United visit Spanish side Atletico Madrid in the Champions League today looking to improve on just one victory in their last six matches across all competitions.

"We definitely need to start strong tomorrow evening... we know what we're expecting tomorrow night, we'll be ready for it, the boys are ready for it," Carrick told reporters. "The way we responded (against Tottenham) in the second half in particular, I think you could see that, so that gives me a lot of faith that I had already in the boys,



that they are hungry and eager to put things right."

Carrick said he could understand people saying the current situation was a "disaster" but that was not something he bought

into. "I understand when it's not going too well, there's a real kind of clamour, and a real feeling of 'it's a disaster' and 'it's all wrong' and 'everything needs to be changed,'" he continued.

"I kind of get that, obviously, but that's not in our mindset, that's certainly not in my mindset. To achieve anything, really, you've got to be able to deal with things that are difficult and you've got to overcome things. That's part of it, I did it throughout my career just to be here... we're right there now in the middle of it, but I totally believe that we'll come through it."

Carrick confirmed Luke Shaw and Kobbie Mainoo had not travelled to Madrid after sustaining knocks in the draw with Tottenham. The coach said he was not feeling outside pressure despite the team's poor start to the campaign and the corresponding scrutiny.

"I think there's our own expectation. We know what we want, what we're capable of doing as a team... and that comes from us," said Carrick. "I certainly don't look outside or elsewhere at what it should look like. I've

felt the ups and I've felt the downs, I don't feel a pressure from that at all. It's us wanting to succeed and we want to win, we want to be part of something successful, so that's the drive."

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone encouraged goalless striker Julian Alvarez to keep improving ahead of the team's Champions League clash against Manchester United. Atletico lost their first league phase game at Liverpool.

Former Manchester City striker Alvarez has not scored this season for Atletico in a slow start to the campaign after trying to force his way out of the club in the summer with a move to Spanish champions Barcelona. "I think strikers with Julian's characteristics always need goals, not just him," Simeone told reporters.

"It's true that beyond his finishing, he's a team player, a player that can link very well, he can assist, and he's got many more tools than just goalscoring."

Alvarez hit the post as a substitute against Alaves on Saturday as Atletico won to move second in La Liga.