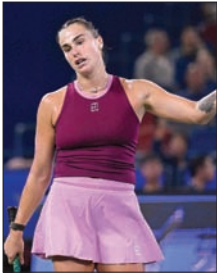


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CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Mahrez joins Qatar’s Al Shamal as a free agent

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Algerian winger Riyad Mahrez has joined Al Shamal on a free transfer after leaving Saudi Pro League side Al Ahli, the Qatar Stars League club announced on Wednesday. The 35-year-old, who announced his international retirement following this year’s World Cup, departed Jeddah-based club Al Ahli after a decorated three-year stint. “His left foot made history and our ambition is writing the next chapter. Riyad Mahrez in Al Shamal colours,” the Qatari club posted on X. He joined Al Shamal’s training sessions as David Prats’ side prepare for their upcoming domestic and continental commitments, including the AFC Champions League. Mahrez signed his contract in the presence of Al Shamal football department head Meshaal Al Ali after arriving in Doha last week to complete the move.

Al Shamal are fifth in the Stars League standings with eight points from five games. They finished runners-up last season and are seeking to strengthen their squad following a cruciate ligament injury to Morocco international Mohamed Rabie Hrimat. Mahrez made his professional breakthrough at French side Le Havre before he joined Leicester City in 2014, where he became a central figure in the English club’s fairytale Premier League triumph in 2016. The 2016 African Footballer of the Year later featured for Manchester City, winning four Premier League titles and the Champions League before moving to Al Ahli. Mahrez helped Al Ahli clinch back-to-back AFC Champions League Elite titles in 2025 and 2026. The winger, who was born in France, played a key role in Algeria’s successful campaign to win the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations and helped the team reach the last 32 at this year’s World Cup. He scored 40 times in 119 international appearances.



Algerian star Riyad Mahrez poses with his jersey after joining Al Shamal.

FOOTBALL

Rayyan suffer narrow defeat against Taawoun

Saudi side rally past Rayyan thanks to goals from al-Kuwaykibi and El Bahraoui

By Sports Reporter
Buraidah, Saudi Arabia

Al Rayyan suffered their first defeat in the AFC Champions League Two as they went down 2-1 to Saudi Arabia’s Al Taawoun in their Group B clash in Buraidah on Wednesday. Ahmed al-Ganehi scored for the Qatari side, but Mohammed al-Kuwaykibi and Younes El Bahraoui struck for the hosts to help them climb to the top of the group with four points from two matches. Al Rayyan had opened their campaign with a thrilling 4-3 victory over Jordan’s Al Faisaly, while Al Taawoun began with a 1-1 draw against Oman’s Al Nahda. Al Taawoun looked the livelier of the two sides, with Marin Petkov firing wide from distance in the third minute before al-Kuwaykibi saw his long-range effort blocked. El Bahraoui then blazed over the bar in the 16th minute but the hosts’ pressure eventually paid off three minutes later when Abdulrahman Hindi recycled a corner kick into the path of El Mahdioui who set up al-Kuwaykibi, who drilled his shot past Al Rayyan goalkeeper Mahmud Abunada. Al-Kuwaykibi threatened again in the 29th minute, firing wide from Ibrahim Mahnashi’s pass, but Al Rayyan drew level three minutes later when Wesley teed up al-Ganehi to finish from the centre of the box following a swift counter-attack. Parity lasted just six minutes as al-Kuwaykibi turned provider for El Bahraoui, who restored Al Taawoun’s lead with a long-range strike. Al Taawoun continued to threaten after the break, with El Bahraoui’s close-range header from al-Ghamdi’s cross blocked in the 47th minute before Petkov forced Abunada into a low save eight minutes later. Al Rayyan introduced Aleksandar Mitrovic and Gregore for Wesley and al-Ganehi just before the hour mark, but the hosts



Al Rayyan and Al Taawoun players vie for the ball during the AFC Champions League Two clash in Buraidah, Saudi Arabia.

remained on the front foot, with the Qatari side coming agonisingly close to an equaliser in the 87th minute. Andre Amaro rose highest to meet Otavio’s delivery of a set-piece situation, only for his headed attempt to smash against the

bar as they finished empty-handed. LUCESCU RUES MISSED CHANCES AFTER SADD DEFEAT TO HILAL Meanwhile, Al Sadd coach Razvan Lucescu rued his side’s failure to capitalise on their

chances after they suffered a second consecutive defeat in the AFC Champions League Elite, losing 2-0 to Saudi Arabia’s Al Hilal SFC at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday. Despite matching the Saudi giants for much of the contest, Al Sadd were let down by poor finishing and an impressive display by Al Hilal goalkeeper Yassine Bounou. The Qatar champions remain at the bottom of the West Zone standings without a point after two matches. “I saw my team working hard and diligently and they went toe-to-toe with the opposition,” said Lucescu. “We created significant, dangerous chances, but unfortunately, we didn’t capitalise on those moments as well as we could have. We are also going through a peculiar phase following this long break, especially with some players returning from injury and not yet reaching peak physical fitness. Essentially, we are now resuming the work and effort we put in during the summer preparation period, albeit under different circumstances.” Al Hilal coach Simone Inzaghi, meanwhile, praised his players for securing a second successive victory despite limited preparation time following their Saudi Pro League match against Al Ittihad Club on Saturday. Goals from Ollie Watkins and Ruben Neves sealed the win for the visitors, who relied heavily on video analysis rather than on-field training sessions ahead of the encounter in Doha. “I am happy with the players’ performance, we played a great match and controlled most of the proceedings,” said Inzaghi. “I witnessed a fantastic performance from the team. Given the limited time available, our preparations relied more on video analysis of the opponents than on on-field training sessions. This away match was by no means easy, and I thank our wonderful fans for their presence and continued support of the team.”

Saudi Arabia postpones exhibition tennis tournament after Houthi attacks

Riyadh: The chairman of Saudi Arabia’s General Entertainment Authority on Wednesday said that the exhibition Six Kings Slam tennis tournament has been postponed, after Yemen’s Houthis carried out several deadly attacks on the kingdom. Novak Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev were all due to take part in the competition next week, alongside Taylor Fritz, Learner Tien and Alex de Minaur. The event, originally scheduled for October 21-24 and to be streamed live by Netflix, will now take place from December 27-30. “The Six Kings Slam tournament has been postponed due to logistical reasons and will now take place on December 27,” wrote Turki Alalshikh on X, sharing a statement from the Riyadh Season entertainment programme. Earlier this week, three Saudi Pro League football matches, including one involving Cristiano Ronaldo’s Al Nassr, were also postponed. The matchweek nine fixtures have been pushed back in the calendar for “logistical considerations, taking into account the mandatory minimum rest period between matches”, according to a statement published on Tuesday on the SPL’s website. The meeting between league leaders Al Hilal and Al Riyadh and the match between Al Ittihad and Al Shabab have been postponed to December 19, while the clash between Al Ahli and Ronaldo’s Al Nassr has been rescheduled for March 6, 2027. The SPL added, however, that the other matchweek nine fixtures “will be played according to the previously announced schedule with no changes”. Al Nassr’s Asian Champions League match against Neftchi Fergana was delayed by an hour two days ago after the Saudi-led military coalition said it had intercepted a missile fired by the Houthis towards Riyadh. Ronaldo went on to score his 981st career goal in a 3-1 win. There was a sparse crowd in the stands of Al Awal Park for the game. A violent battle between a Saudi-led coalition and Yemen’s Houthis has erupted in recent days, with missile strikes on airports and energy facilities across the kingdom. The latest round of fighting was triggered by Houthi strikes on Riyadh’s international airport at the weekend that left 13 people dead and operations suspended in the worst attack since 2015. Saudi Arabia’s sporting programme has been heavily hit since the outbreak of the United States and Israel’s war with Iran in late February. The Formula One Saudi Arabian Grand Prix slated for April in Jeddah was cancelled. The WTA Finals were also scheduled to be held in Riyadh next month but will instead take place at Indian Wells in the US. The WTA Finals brings together the top eight players from the previous season.

GULF CLUB CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Duhail open campaign with easy win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail made a winning start to their GFF Gulf Club Champions League campaign with a convincing 3-0 victory over Oman’s Al Shabab at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium. Al Duhail took an early lead through Captain Almoez Ali, who put the hosts in front in the seventh minute. The striker

struck again shortly after the restart, doubling the advantage in the 51st minute and putting Djamel Belmadi’s side in control of the contest. Omar Sekou then completed the scoring in the 77th minute as Al Duhail began their Gulf campaign with a comfortable victory. Al Duhail are competing in the tournament after missing out on the AFC Champions League this season, with coach Belmadi emphasising before the match that his side would approach the competition

with seriousness and the ambition of going as far as possible. The coach had also highlighted the tournament as an opportunity to give more playing time to squad members who have had limited opportunities in domestic competitions, while maintaining the team’s competitiveness. Al Duhail will now look to build on their positive start as they pursue the title in a group that also features Saudi Arabia’s Neom and Yemen’s Shaab Hadramout.



Al Duhail captain Almoez Ali (centre) scored a brace against Al Shabab.

COMMENT

No need for knee-jerk reaction: Conrad

Reuters
Durban

South Africa coach Shukri Conrad cautioned against any drastic changes after their first Test loss to Australia but warned his charges “need to get bloody better” if they are to stand any chance of a come-back in the three-match series.

South Africa, who had beaten Australia in last year’s World Test Championship final in London, were handed a 214-run defeat on Tuesday in the first Test at Kingsmead.

“We just lost a cricket Test match. It doesn’t mean that you’ve now got to go soul-search-

ing and questioning all the things that we’ve done really well and are doing really well. We just need to get bloody better,” he told reporters on Wednesday.

“We obviously need to look at how we can improve the side without being knee-jerk in our decision-making and panicky. We need to show composure.

“The question is always, will it make the boat go faster if we make changes, or will it slow the boat down?” he asked.

Conrad hinted at some changes, however, with fast-bowling ace Kagiso Rabada almost certain to return after a hamstring injury that has kept him sidelined since June and potential changes higher up the batting order.

“We keep talking about the batting because that’s where we felt we let ourselves down the most,” he said. “Dismissals in batting sit in one of three places. They are technical, tactical or mental. If we’re brutally honest, a lot of our dismissals sat in the mental corner. Is that an easier fix than technical and tactical? Probably not. So we need to see our guys pull up fresh enough.”

South Africa did show some glimpses of being capable of a stoic approach, notably at the start of the last day as they attempted to block the Australian attack and save the test.

But after resisting for almost two hours, wickets tumbled and in the end they were dismissed for

206 runs in their second innings with Aiden Markram the only home batsman to score more than 50 in the Test. “Aiden showed us in the second innings that there’s nothing fancy about test match cricket. That single-bloody-mindedness, where I’ve got to bat for a day and a half now, irrespective of what it looks like, some of our batters can take a leaf from his book,” Conrad added.

“There’s always noise, and I think the top players are able to park that noise, and still be able to execute what they wanted to do.”

It was a first defeat for South Africa after a run of 15 unbeaten Tests. The second Test at St George’s Park in Gqeberha starts on Sunday.



South Africa's coach Shukri Conrad feels mental approach needs to be better. (AFP)

TWENTY20

Hope ton helps West Indies level series with India

West Indies bowlers reined the hosts in after Samson’s 56 off 23



West Indies’ captain Shai Hope plays a shot during the fourth T20 match against India in Hyderabad yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Hyderabad, India

Shai Hope led from the front with an unbeaten 102 to guide the West Indies to a series-levelling 24-run win over India in the fourth T20 international yesterday.

West Indies posted 247-3 in Hyderabad, powered by skipper Hope’s blistering 50-ball knock and his unbroken 91-run stand with Sherfane Rutherford, who finished on 49 not out.

Keemo Paul then led the bowling charge with figures of 5-41 to bowl out India for 223 as West Indies bounced back to level the five-match series at 2-2, setting up a decider on Sunday in Bengaluru.

“I think all the guys, we back our skills and we feel we could beat any team on our day,” said Paul. “So it’s just about staying calm and believing in ourselves and I think we’re doing that really well.”

Hope struck his third T20 international hundred – the most by any West Indian batter – and his second of the series.

West Indies started briskly before they lost Jewel Andrew for 21, but Shimron Hetmyer, who hit 33 off 12 balls, gave Hope company in another quick partnership.

Pace bowler Prince Yadav had Hetmyer caught and bowled but West Indies were never short of power as Rovman Powell contributed 24 off 17 balls.

Hope kept up the onslaught in tandem with Rutherford and

brought up his century with the final ball of the innings after hitting Nitish Kumar Reddy for successive sixes. “We were unfortunate we couldn’t execute our plans in bowling and that’s where we fell a bit short,” said India skipper Shreyas Iyer. In reply, Sanju Samson got India off to a strong start with his 23-ball 56 but the West Indies bowlers struck regular blows to keep India in check.

Medium-pace bowler Paul struck twice in the fifth over to dismiss Samson and then Ishan Kishan in the space of four balls.

Iyer struggled for momentum before he fell to Shamar Springer for 16. Left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie also took wickets in one over, removing opener Abhishek Sharma for 29 before Naman Dhir

was stumped for a first-ball duck.

With India needing around 14 per over to win the game, Tilak Varma, who hit 43, and Reddy (41) attempted to pull things back in their quickfire partnership worth 70. Romario Shepherd had Varma caught and then Paul struck thrice in an over, including the wicket of Reddy, to claim his second five-wicket T20 haul and shut down India’s chase. Number 10 Arshdeep Singh retired hurt after getting hit on his shoulder by a Shamar Joseph bouncer and India’s innings folded in 19.3 overs.

BRIEF SCORES: West Indies 247 for 3 (Hope 102*, Rutherford 49*, Prince 1-36) **beat India 223** (Samson 56, Paul 5-41, Motie 2-13) **by 24 runs.**

FOCUS

Aussie veteran bowling quartet continues to improve with age

Reuters
Durban

Age appears no closer to catching up with Australia’s veteran bowling quartet produced yet another decisive performance in the first Test against South Africa to put the tourists 1-0 up in the three-match series.

While batter Matt Renshaw took the plaudits after scores of 190 and 82 helped Australia to a 214-run win at Kingsmead in Durban on Tuesday, their bowlers skittled South Africa twice to secure the emphatic victory.

Josh Hazlewood, 35, returned his best test figures of 6-49 to wrap up the win and received strong support from Pat Cummins, 33, fellow seamer Mitchell Starc, 36, and 38-year-old spinner Nathan Lyon.

It is no accident that the four have enjoyed such longevity in the test arena, with captain Cummins praising the bowlers’ preparations.

“So much since (last year’s) Ashes has been how are we going to get ourselves to this position and in as good a spot as we can be,” Cummins said.

“Before that Darwin test (against Bangladesh in August) we did a lot of work, a big training block to get ahead of the eight ball and pay dividends down the track, which is, I guess, now.”

There is also buy-in from the bowlers to rest when neces-

sary and Cummins said back-up quicks Scott Boland and Michael Neser, who have been working in the nets, were looking as sharp as the others.

After overcoming a hamstring injury, Lyon said he was in the best shape of his career, despite being on the cusp of 39.

“The amount of work that I’ve put in, I’ve never had any doubt that I’ll get back,” he said of a vigorous training programme.

“I haven’t had any alcohol for a fair while now, but I’m just trying to squeeze as much out of the lemon as possible that I can.

“I still feel like there’s a lot of decent cricket ahead of me, that’s for sure.”

Hazlewood is also back on form after injuries kept him out of the last Ashes.

“It couldn’t have gone any better,” he said of his bowling on the last two days in Durban. “I’m a bit older than I used to be, but everything’s feeling good.”

Hazlewood now has 311 Test wickets and has moved above Brett Lee into eighth in Australia’s all-time list. “He obviously gets spoken about a lot for his consistency, but I think that undersells him,” said Cummins. “He’s really skilful with the new ball, but once you get a reversing ball, he’s just as skilful; he can swing it both ways.”

The captain also praised Hazlewood and Starc for their willingness to put the team first.

“They’re just, whatever the team needs, they’ll just roll up their sleeves and go to work,” he added. “A captain’s dream.”



Australia's Josh Hazlewood celebrates the dismissal of South Africa's David Bedingham on day four of the first Test at the Kingsmead stadium in Durban. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

Renshaw’s heroics do little to solve Australia’s opening puzzle

Reuters
Durban

Matt Renshaw’s match-winning heroics against South Africa have given Australia another strong middle-order option but done little to resolve the uncertainty over their opening combination ahead of the second Test in Gqeberha.

With Renshaw producing a majestic 190 and second-innings 82 batting at number five in the commanding 214-run victory in Durban, the Queenslander’s shift down the order looks to have been a masterstroke.

Captain Pat Cummins said it would take a compelling argument to shift Renshaw again for Sunday’s second Test, though he was

enthusiastic about the options available.

“I still think he can be a great opener, and now he’s got another string to his bow that he’s found this week,” Cummins said.

Coming nearly 10 years after his first test century against Pakistan, 30-year-old Renshaw’s second ton was a reward for perseverance for a player dropped repeatedly since his 2016 debut.

His breakthrough has not settled the lingering questions over the team’s opening batters, however.

Travis Head, who had great success as a middle-order blaster, has continued at the top of the order after a brilliant Ashes as a stand-in opener, but doubts remain over his suitability for the role.

After a lean home series against Bangladesh, Head managed a to-

tal of 20 runs in Durban operating with Nic Maddinson, the latest to emerge through Australia’s revolving door of selections.

“Travis Head’s done a very good job as an opener, but my gut feel is that he’s better off in the middle order,” said former Australia captain Allan Border.

Supported by a handy lead, 34-year-old Maddinson smashed 48 from 38 balls in his second innings after an ugly, 33-ball duck under greater pressure in the first innings. The possible return of Cameron Green from an abdominal strain could further complicate Australia’s selection decisions, though the all-rounder would be restricted to batting duties if cleared to play.

While it was the rejuvenated Renshaw setting the platform for victory, it was Australia’s time-

worn attack delivering the knock-out blow, led by Josh Hazlewood’s career-best 6-49 in the fourth innings. Like Mitchell Starc before him, Hazlewood has made a hugely impressive comeback from a difficult period of injuries, helping to keep an ageing team at the top of test cricket.

Coach Andrew McDonald has said changes are inevitable as the team progresses through a grueling schedule of 20 tests through next year’s Ashes, or 21 if they reach the World Test Championship final at The Oval in June.

Cummins suggested none of his bowlers would be putting their hands up for a rest.

“One thing I’ve always loved about Joshy and Starcy is they’re just so happy getting into the grind. They’ll never shy away from having a bowl,” he said.



Australia's Matt Renshaw plays a shot on day four of the first Test against South Africa at the Kingsmead stadium in Durban. (AFP)

TENNIS

Top seed Sabalenka falls at first hurdle in Wuhan

AFP
Wuhan

A frustrated Aryna Sabalenka suffered a second successive early exit as her bid for a fourth Wuhan Open title was foiled by American world number 31 Ann Li 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) in round two yesterday.

The top-seeded Sabalenka fell to Nikola Bartunkova in the third round at the China Open last week and squandered a 6-3, 4-2 lead against Li to stumble at her very first hurdle in Wuhan.

The Belarusian four-time major winner lost her number one ranking to Elena Rybakina last month and has not won a title since March.

Playing with protective taping around her right knee, Sabalenka was in control of the match until Li swung the momentum in her direction halfway through the second set.

Sabalenka asked for the trainer when she was broken early in the decider and appeared to be struggling with her movement. Still, she was able to wipe a 2-5 deficit, saving nine match points along the way.

Li steadied the ship, though, and finished the job in two hours and 27 minutes on her 10th opportunity, to set up a last-16 clash with Indonesia's Janice Tjen.

Meanwhile, second-seeded Jessica Pegula, the runner-up in Wuhan last year, was also sent packing.

The American suffered a 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 upset at the hands of Jelena Ostapenko, wasting three match points en route.

Ostapenko is the first player to beat Pegula in her opening match at a WTA 1000 event since Indian Wells two and a half years ago, snapping Pegula's 22-event winning streak in openers at this level.

Relentless Swiatek

Earlier, six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek launched her Wuhan Open campaign by triumphing 6-2, 6-1 in an all-Polish battle against lucky loser Magdalena Frech.



Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka reacts after a point against USA's Ann Li (below) during the Wuhan Open match yesterday. (AFP)

Swiatek posted her 40th victory of the season in one hour and 42 minutes and no longer has Sabalenka as a potential roadblock in the quarter-finals.

"We know each other pretty well, so I just wanted to focus on being consistent and playing as good as possible," Swiatek, the seventh seed, said of Frech.

"I know she is running to every ball always and sometimes using the power of the opponent, so I wanted to not play too crazy but play solid and I'm happy that I did that," said Swiatek, who is chasing a qualification spot for the year-end WTA Finals.

Despite the lopsided scoreline the opening set was tight, lasting over an hour and requiring Swiatek to erase a 0-2 deficit and save seven of eight break points before she finally took the lead on her fourth set point.

Upping the pressure with her relentless forehand, Swiatek breezed through the second set to advance to a round of 16 meeting with American lucky loser Ashlyn Krueger.

Wimbledon finalist Karolina Muchova weathered a three-hour

Swiatek launches campaign by defeating compatriot Frech 6-2, 6-1



storm to come through 3-6, 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (7/4) against American qualifier Caty McNally to extend her record in tiebreaks this season to a perfect 10-0. The sixth-seeded Muchova will face Diana Shnaider in the round of 16.

British world number 170 Sonay Kartal, who missed six months this year with a spinal stress fracture, upset ninth-seeded Belinda Bencic 6-0, 7-5 to book a third-round date with Italian 15th seed Jasmine Paolini.

SHANGHAI MASTERS

Medvedev sees off Tsitsipas to reach quarter-finals

AFP
Shanghai

Daniil Medvedev beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets to reach the quarter-finals of the Shanghai Masters yesterday, setting up a meeting with Tommy Paul.

Medvedev did not face a single break point in defeating the 28-year-old Greek 6-4, 7-5.

"I felt like I was playing very well today," said Medvedev, the fifth seed.

"I put a lot of pressure on him in the first set.

"Second set, different story. Very tight one. I'm happy that I managed... to get some good returns, get some good rhythm," the 30-year-old said.

The Russian broke his opponent's serve to go up 6-5 in the second set and closed things out in one hour and 24 minutes.

The players were meeting in the singles draw for the 16th time on Tour, with 6th-ranked Medvedev improving his head-to-head record to 11 wins.

Medvedev won the Shanghai tournament in 2019. His next opponent Paul meanwhile beat Zizou Bergs 7-6 (7/5), 6-4.

"I know sometimes it's hard to back up a big win," Paul said of the 39th-ranked Belgian, who

upset second-seeded Carlos Alcaraz in the previous round.

Though Paul said Bergs "raised his level" in the second set, narrowing a 0-4 deficit to trail by just one game, it was the American who triumphed in the end.

Rising Spanish star Rafael Jodar earlier beat Botić van de Zandschulp 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2 to secure his quarter-final spot.

It was not without incident, though, with Jodar handed a code violation in the second set for swearing at a ball boy in Spanish when asking for a towel.

Jodar will play Casper Ruud in the quarter-finals. The Norwegian advanced when fourth-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime retired injured when down 2-5 in the first set.

Ruud, ranked 24th in the world, said his opponent's trouble appeared to start in the fourth game of the first set.

"It seemed to me that he maybe twisted his knee... it looked like he kind of stumbled a bit with a wrong step," Ruud told reporters.

"From that moment it seemed like he was in a lot of pain," he said.

Auger-Aliassime needed a medical timeout after the fifth game, starting the next game down 1-4 with white strapping around his left knee.



Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return to Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas during their Shanghai Masters match yesterday. (AFP)

Richardson sent home from cycling worlds

Leading British sprinter Matthew Richardson has been sent home from the world track cycling championships in Shanghai, after a media report that he had been accused of "serious misconduct". The 27-year-old, who won three medals at the 2024 Paris Olympics for Australia before switching allegiance to Britain, had been preparing for the start of the championships on Wednesday. "British Cycling can confirm that Matt Richardson has been withdrawn from the Great Britain cycling team squad for the upcoming 2026 track cycling world championships in Shanghai, China," British Cycling said in a statement, without giving any reason for the decision.

(AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Last of the French musketeers Monfils officially retired

AFP
Paris

Gaël Monfils, the last of his generation's French musketeers, has officially retired from tennis, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) confirmed to AFP yesterday.

The 40-year-old had signalled his intention to leave the sport at the end of 2026 but received a wildcard for an ATP 250 event in Lyon and was widely expected to make a farewell appearance at the Paris Masters at Bercy at the start of November.

The ITIA, however, confirmed that Monfils has been on their retired players list since October 5, ruling him out of any tournaments for the next six months.

Under the rules of the body responsible for anti-doping in tennis, players on this list must make themselves available for random doping tests for at least six months before they are allowed to return to competition.



The former world No. 6 played his last official match in early September when he lost to Learner Tien in the second round of the US Open.

His first round win over Adolfo Daniel Vallejo at Flushing Meadow made him just the third man aged 40 or over to win a match at the New York slam in the Open era after Ken Rosewall in 1977 and Jimmy Connors in 1992. He had earlier reached the semi-finals of the mixed doubles with his wife Elina Svitolina.

Although Monfils, winner of 13 ATP titles, had not yet made any public statement on Wednesday morning, his retirement marks the end of an era for French tennis.

After the retirements of Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, Gilles Simon and Richard Gasquet, "La Monf" is the last of the four "musketeers" of his generation to hang up his racquet.

But unlike his contemporaries, all of whom now hold positions connected to tennis, the current world No. 254 had stated in September his intention to move into the world of finance and become a wealth manager for a Swiss company.

Having turned professional in 2004, the right-hander reached the semi-finals of the French Open in 2008 and US Open in 2016, and also made it to three Masters 1000 finals.

A spectacular player admired the world, Monfils produced his final tour de force at the start of the 2025 season.

By winning the Auckland tournament at the age of 38, he became the oldest player to win a title on the main tour since 1977, a record since broken by Novak Djokovic.

He went on to reach the round of 16 at the Australian Open, notably defeating world No. 4 Taylor Fritz along the way.

The three athletes, listed by the Russian federation as reigning champion Angelina Melnikova, Viktoria Listunova and Anna Kalmykova, are set to miss out on the October 17-25 world artistic gymnastics championships. The Russian Gymnastics Federation slammed the decision on Tuesday as "discrimination" and a "violation" of the principles of equal competition, accusing the Dutch authorities of deliberately trying to keep the "strongest gymnasts" out of the championships. It said it would appeal the decision to the World Gymnastics governing body and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Gymnastics body says refused Russian visas down to local authorities

World Gymnastics said yesterday that the decision to refuse visas for three Russian gymnasts competing at the world championships in Rotterdam was the responsibility of the authorities in the Netherlands. "The issuance of visas to all participants is a process determined solely by the Dutch authorities," the gymnastics body said in a press release. "World Gymnastics is not in a position to explain why a select number of application requests have been refused." The organisation added that it was "in ongoing dialogue with the Dutch authorities, the Local Organising Committee, and the Russian Gymnastics Federation".

FOCUS

Kenya hosting world championships will help doping fight, says Coe



AFP
Nairobi

Kenya hosting the 2029 World Athletics Championships will help combat the endemic doping problem among its athletes, World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said on a visit to Nairobi yesterday.

The east African nation is a global athletics powerhouse, particularly in long-distance and middle-distance running, but has seen a surge in doping cases in recent years.

Around 140 Kenyan athletes have been suspended, including a positive test announced as recently as Tuesday by monitoring body Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU).

"The championships will help us in that quest" for a cleaner Kenyan athletics scene, Coe told AFP on the sidelines of a press

conference in Nairobi. "Is there more work to be done? Yes. Will these championships lend more focus to that? Absolutely," he said. The AIU is "very clear in their reports to me that progress is being made" in Kenya, he said, adding the country had come a "long way".

Kenya has won the right to host the World Championships in Africa for the first time.

At last year's edition in Tokyo, Kenya finished second overall behind the United States, taking home 11 medals: seven gold, two silver and two bronze.

Yet Kenya's triumph was undermined by the fact that dozens of Kenyan athletes, mainly long-distance runners, have been suspended for doping since 2017, more than any other nation.

Marathon world record holder Ruth Chepngetich was handed a three-year ban by the AIU in October 2025 after admitting to doping. Earlier that year, Benard

Kibet, who finished fifth in the 10,000m at the Paris Olympics, was also suspended by the AIU.

In March, Albert Korir, who won the New York Marathon in 2021, was handed a five-year ban after testing positive for a banned performance-enhancing drug.

Athletics is a national sport in Kenya - where unemployment remains high and well-paid jobs scarce - and is viewed by many as a way out of poverty.

Coe said that having spoken with Kenya's previous and current leader, integrity in Kenyan athletics is seen as a "key national imperative" and "should be in the best shape possible".

The Briton acknowledged that although Kenyan authorities had improved resources to fight doping, "we'll never be in a perfect world".

"But we're significantly further ahead than we were when we started out on this journey in 2015."

HORSE RACING

September Leaves lands season-opening Al Ghariyah Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Eida Racing's September Leaves got the new racing season off to a winning start, claiming the first silverware with an impressive victory in the Al Ghariyah Cup at the QREC's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The five-year-old bay mare showed plenty of determination to secure the fifth win of her career in the 1,200m Thoroughbred Fillies & Mares contest.

Settling towards the rear early on, September Leaves gradually made up ground in the home straight before producing a strong finishing effort. She asserted her authority inside the final 100m and crossed the line 1½ lengths clear of her rivals to seal a well-deserved victory.

In the process the mare completed a double on the day for both trainer Jassim al-Ghazali and jockey Alberto Sanna. The meeting also saw trainer Hamad al-Jehani record three wins.

Earlier in the day, Sanna guided Injaaz Stud's Bin Narain to seven lengths victory in the 1700m race for Local Thoroughbred Maiden, three-six-year-olds, while al-Ghazal-trained Lord Deputy, in the silks of Al Ghazali Stud, won the 1700m contest for the thoroughbred Handicap 50-70.

In the penultimate race of the day,



Connections of Al Eida Racing's September Leaves celebrate after the mare won the Al Ghariyah Cup yesterday.

jockey Lukas Delozier rode Rashid Awajan al-Khayarin-owned and Hamad al-Jehani-trained Toromona to a comfortable 7 ½ lengths victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap 75-95, for the three-year-old+ contest.

Jalila Alghania, in the colours of Sheikh Talal Nasser al-Thani, won the Purebred Arabian Handicap 70-90 for three-year-old+ over 1200m. Al-Jehani added another victory when Guindol Dei Ribo, ridden by Nicolas Baudet, won the Purebred Arabian Novice by a length. Classical Style, trained

by Hamad Ahmed Hassan al-Malki and ridden by Baudet, edged the Thoroughbred Maiden by a nose.

Al-Jehani's first win of the day came in the card opener, when Lady De Faust, ridden by Arnaud De Lepine, won the Purebred Arabian Maiden by 1¾ lengths.

Today's Al Hamla Cup meeting will feature nine races.

RESULTS 1ST AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING - AL GHARIYAH CUP WINNERS: Horse, Trainer, Jockey



Alberto Sanna rides Al Eida Racing's September Leaves to Al Ghariyah Cup victory at the QREC's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaim

- 1 - Al Ghariyah Cup, Thoroughbred Fillies & Mares**
September Leaves, Jassim al-Ghazali, Alberto Sanna
- 2 - Thoroughbred Handicap 75-95**
Horse: Toromona, Hamad al-Jehani, Lukas Delozier
- 3 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 70-90**
Jalila Alghania, Hadi al-Ramzani, Youssef Lachhab
- 4 - Purebred Arabian Novice**
Guindol Dei Ribo, Hamad al-Jehani, Nico-

- las Baudet
- 5 - Thoroughbred Handicap 50-70**
Lord Deputy, Jassim al-Ghazal, Marco Casamento
- 6 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden**
Bin Narain, Jihad El Ahmad, Alberto Sanna
- 7 - Thoroughbred Maiden**
Classical Style, Hamad Ahmed Hassan al-Malki, Nicolas Baudet
- 8 - Purebred Arabian Maiden**
Lady De Faust, Hamad al-Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Barcola scores hat-trick as Liverpool rout LASK

Barcola has come under fire for his lacklustre performances since his £123mn move

AFP
Linz, Austria

Bradley Barcola silenced his critics as the Liverpool forward ended his goal drought with a hat-trick in a chaotic 6-3 win against LASK in the Champions League yesterday.

Barcola had come under fire for some lacklustre performances since his blockbuster £123mn (\$161mn) move from Paris Saint-Germain in August. But the France forward finally started to live up to his hefty price tag with his first goals for Liverpool in his seventh appearance.

Barcola struck twice before the interval at the Raiffeisen Arena after Ronald Araujo put Liverpool ahead in the first half with his maiden goal for the club. Jeremie Frimpong netted the fourth after the break against the Austrian champions before Barcola completed his treble.

There was still time for Lewis Koumas to score his first Champions League goal as Liverpool maintained their 100 percent record in this season's tournament after beating Atletico Madrid in their opening game. It was a welcome boost for Iraola following his first defeat in eight games as Liverpool manager when Premier League leaders Manchester City won 3-0 at Anfield on Sunday.

Iraola this week said he has "100 percent" trust in Barcola and Florian Wirtz, who has struggled mightily since joining from Bayer Leverkusen last year. Injuries to Alexander Isak, Cody Gakpo and Dominik Szoboszlai, who all missed the trip to Austria, increased the pressure on Wirtz and Barcola to carry the Liverpool attack.

The pair repaid Iraola's faith with a



Liverpool's Bradley Barcola scores past LASK's goalkeeper Lukas Jungwirth during the UEFA Champions League match at the Raiffeisen Arena in Linz, Austria. (Reuters)

much-needed display of their undoubted qualities. Now Iraola will demand they produce that level of intensity and quality on a regular basis. The trip to Linz was the second of six games in 18 days for Liverpool, forcing Iraola to make changes in a bid to save his players from burnout.

Reds captain Virgil van Dijk, Milos

Kerkez, Alexis Mac Allister and Victor Munoz were all rested as Frimpong, Kostas Tsimikas, Trey Nyoni and Rio Ngumoha came in.

After some disjointed displays at the start of Iraola's reign, this was an indication of what they can become under the former Bournemouth boss, although he will still

be concerned about their defensive issues. Araujo put Liverpool ahead in the 22nd minute, rising highest to meet Tsimikas's corner with a thumping header past LASK keeper Lukas Jungwirth.

The on-loan Barcelona defender's goal was swiftly followed by one for Barcola 96 seconds later. Ngumoha was the catalyst with an incisive run into the LASK area and Barcola applied the finishing touch as he guided a clinical finish beyond Jungwirth.

Iraola's men were running riot and Barcola scored their third in the 37th minute. It was a riposte to the criticism of Wirtz and Barcola as the pair combined to cut through the LASK defence.

Barcola picked out Wirtz and the German played a pinpoint return pass that allowed the 24-year-old to fire past Jungwirth. Frimpong has also frustrated Liverpool fans since signing last year, making his goal in the 51st minute a welcome tonic for the Dutch right-back.

Tsimikas got to the byline and lofted a cross towards Frimpong, who belied his diminutive stature with a towering header into the bottom corner. Robert Ljubicic reduced the deficit in the 63rd minute with a composed finish from Yvan Dibango's pass.

But Barcola sealed his treble with a nimble finish from Frimpong's pass in the 66th minute. Teed up by Frimpong, Koumas hit Liverpool's sixth with a searing strike in the 72nd minute.

Despite the introduction of Van Dijk and fellow defender Joe Gomez, Liverpool lost control in the closing stages. Florian Flecker's diving header two minutes later punished slack Liverpool defending. Flecker struck again with a close-range finish in the 77th minute, but nothing could spoil Barcola's big night.

Real Madrid's Vinicius banned for Clasico after red card

Madrid: Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior will miss the upcoming Clasico in La Liga against Barcelona after being issued a four-match suspension following his red card for hair-pulling against Villarreal last week. The Spanish football federation's disciplinary committee confirmed the Brazilian will be banned for several matches including the visit to face league leaders Barca on October 25 for both the red card and his subsequent protests.

The committee said Vinicius had been suspended for two games for "behaving violently... (while) not being in a position to challenge for the ball" and a further two matches for "protests" to the officials.

As well as the Clasico, Vinicius will be unavailable to face Sevilla (October 18), Racing Santander (November 1) and Valencia (November 7) in La Liga.

Despite Vinicius's red card against Villarreal, Jose Mourinho's fourth-place Madrid earned a 1-0 win to stay six points behind Barcelona. The 26-year-old winger reacted angrily to the decision, made after a VAR review, which also chalked off a goal he had scored in the aftermath of his pull on Nathan Saliba's hair.

Vinicius had to be held back by his team-mates as he remonstrated with referee Isidro Diaz de Mera. Mourinho, also upset by the officiating, refused to participate in his post-match press conference. Vinicius apologised to his teammates and Madrid supporters after the match. The attacker has endured a difficult start to the campaign, scoring just once in nine matches, and was dropped to the bench against Villarreal, with his red card occurring around 20 minutes after he was introduced.

SPOTLIGHT

United's Martinez blasts board's lack of investment

AFP
Madrid

Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez blasted the club's board for a perceived lack of investment this summer, after the team were beaten by Atletico Madrid in the Champions League on Tuesday.

United are winless in five games across all competitions after the 2-0 defeat in the Spanish capital and have made their worst start to a Premier League season in 40 years.

"Really poor?" Martinez said when asked about the team's performance against Atletico. "I have to control myself a lot but sometimes is a reflection... (or) mirror of how our club is at the moment."

Martinez said he "100 percent" expected more investment in the squad during the summer after United finished third in the Premier League last season to return to Europe's top competition. "I expect more from our technical director (Jason Wilcox), I have to be honest, as players we have to do more but it is also important



Manchester United's Lisandro Martinez (left) fights for the ball with Atletico Madrid's Alejandro Grimaldo in Madrid. (AFP)

when you make a strong squad to be ready for these kind of nights," he continued.

Martinez said last season the club had "created the base to create an amazing team", which was not followed through on. Pressure is mounting on coach Michael Carrick after five games without a

win but Martinez suggested sacking the Englishman was not the way forward.

"You can't keep changing, changing, changing the manager. What about other areas? I can't say more," said Martinez. "Tonight it is easy to say the coach (is to blame), easy to say the players, but also we

have to see other areas."

Red Devils minority owner Jim Ratcliffe was in the stadium to watch the league phase defeat by last season's semi-finalists. Man United spent around 140mn pounds (\$185mn) this summer on midfielders Carlos Baleba, Yuri Tielemans and Andrey Santos, but fans were upset the club did not reinforce in other positions, including left-back and striker.

Speaking to reporters after the game, Carrick said he had not heard Martinez's comments and so could not judge them. "I think it's a little bit on the emotions of the game as well, of coming here and being disappointed not to get something from the game," said the coach.

Former Manchester United and England striker Wayne Rooney said Martinez's criticism was excessive.

"I think he's maybe gone a bit too far, and that should have stayed internal," Rooney said. "You can clearly see that he cares and he wants the club to invest more money in more players, and to do that he's probably one of the players who'll be out the door if I'm being honest."

FIFA to offer members \$6.35bn development fund windfall

Paris: Football's world governing body FIFA is planning to set up a \$6.35bn development fund for the next four years, a source told AFP. The plan is due to be approved at its Council meeting today in Zurich, where FIFA president Gianni Infantino and the 36 other members of the federation's executive will gather. To finance this development fund for the 2026-2030 period, which would allow money to be distributed to FIFA's 211 federations as well as to the regional confederations, it would draw in part on its financial reserves after a commercially successful 2026 World Cup.

The plan, first revealed by the Associated Press, would allow for the payment of \$25mn to each of its 211 member federations. This is far more than the \$10mn called for by two of Infantino's chief critics, Aleksander Ceferin, the boss of the European confederation UEFA, and Victor Montagliani, the head of CONCACAF, the confederation of North and Central America and the Caribbean.

Today's gathering is the first such meeting since April 28,

and comes amid a crisis in the governance of world football, following Infantino's announcement this summer of his desire to open FIFA's premium competitions such as the World Cup to private investors.

That plan was ultimately abandoned in the face of widespread criticism from the football world, with a rebellion led by UEFA, CONCACAF, and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). At the end of September, Infantino launched a consultation process with the federations to reform how the global body operates, announcing that the first proposals could be examined as early as today's Council meeting.

The 56-year-old, who has headed FIFA since 2016, is running for re-election in March 2027. His opponents have so far failed to agree on a candidate.

Ceferin has chosen to stand for a new term at the helm of UEFA and, according to several media outlets, Montagliani is expected to do the same at CONCACAF. The deadline for submitting candidacies is November 18.