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FOOTBALL

Infantino offers apology but ‘no answers’ at FIFA meeting

FIFA chief has been under severe pressure after he announced in July about his World Cup plans

AFP
Zurich

FIFA president Gianni Infantino gave “no satisfactory answers” when grilled yesterday during a meeting to discuss his attempts to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors, senior members of football’s global governing body said, but he did offer an apology for the failed project.

“We asked a great many critical questions, but there were no satisfactory answers from my point of view,” said Bernd Neuendorf, the head of the German Football Association (DFB), who is also a member of the FIFA Council.

Neuendorf was speaking after the Council met behind closed doors at the body’s Zurich headquarters, where Infantino’s FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) proposal was one of the main topics on the agenda. Infantino has been under severe pressure since his announcement in late July that he wanted 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, with a rebellion led by European governing body UEFA, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and CONCACAF, which runs the sport in North and Central America and the Caribbean.

“I apologised for the mistakes that we made in relation to the communication and consultation process related to the



Gianni Infantino apologised to the FIFA Council, but English and German football chiefs said they remained unconvinced he was fit to continue as president.

FIFA Forward Enterprise project,” Infantino said in a video published by FIFA. “But what is important to remember is that it was a proposal, so in no way a done deal, just a proposal, that actually intended to enable FIFA to invest more in our member associations.”

However, the FIFA chief reaffirmed that the FFE initiative “has been permanently withdrawn and will not reappear in any form.”

Infantino has headed FIFA since 2016 and is running for re-election next March, despite calls for him to stand down in the

I apologised for the mistakes that we made in relation to the communication and consultation process related to the FIFA Forward Enterprise project. But what is important to remember is that it was a proposal, so in no way a done deal, just a proposal, that actually intended to enable FIFA to invest more in our member associations

— Gianni Infantino
FIFA president

wake of the FFE plan. For the moment, no heavyweight candidate has put themselves forward to run against him. Debbie Hewitt, the chair of the English Football Association who is also a FIFA vice-president, told reporters that Infantino is “not fit to be FIFA president” unless he releases all documents pertaining to the failed sell-off plan and answers key questions.

Hewitt and Neuendorf are among the 36 members of the FIFA Council, along with Infantino. “We were asked to submit our questions” in relation to the plan which was not put to the FIFA Council before the July announcement, Hewitt said.

“One of the disappointing things was we didn’t get answers. We didn’t get answers to anything we had specifically requested, for example getting the papers from FFE, and so we asked the question why and why not?”

Many leading European national associations have withdrawn their support

for Infantino in the upcoming election because of the uproar caused by FFE and other controversies, including his relationship with US president Donald Trump.

Chief among those were Infantino’s decision to create a FIFA Peace Prize and award it to Trump at last December’s World Cup draw, and the decision to suspend a ban for United States striker Polarin Balogun following a red card during the World Cup after Trump intervened directly by phoning Infantino.

“I speak for myself as a Council member – from my position nothing has shifted,” Hewitt added. “I have no new information that makes me feel any differently to how I felt when I went in, other than we do have a president of FIFA who is apologetic about what has happened, and secondly a promise again that we will get the information that we have requested.”

FIFA confirmed its intention to set up a \$6.35bn development fund for the next four years, a plan which is expected to be finalised by the Council at its next meeting in December.

To finance the fund, 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 would allow for the payment of \$25mn to all 211 member federations. Infantino may hope the latest plan reinforces his position ahead of the election. The deadline for submitting candidacies is November 18.

BASKETBALL

Thirty two schools to compete in Mini World Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Local Organising Committee of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, in collaboration with the Qatar School Sports Federation (QSSF), has announced the group allocations for the new season of the Mini World Cup, which will bring together 32 schools in a competition designed to broaden student participation in basketball and strengthen their connection with the highly anticipated global event.

The announcement was made at a press conference, attended by Abdulla al-Mawlawi, Executive Director of the Communications and Guest Relations Committee at the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organising Committee; Predrag Bogosavljev, Director of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027; and Abdulrahman al-Muftah, Executive Director of the School Olympic Program, alongside representatives of participating schools.

The group allocations were determined based on the final standings from the inaugural edition, held during the 2025–2026 academic year, with schools ranked from first to 32nd place.

The draw also gave schools the opportunity to select the countries they would represent, creating an experience inspired by international basketball competitions and enabling students to explore the sport from both an athletic and cultural perspective.

The initiative combines sporting competition with learning, encouraging students to play basketball, develop teamwork and embrace the values of respect, sportsmanship and intercultural understanding.

On the occasion, al-Mawlawi said the tournament offers school students a valuable opportunity to experience healthy competition, promote sportsmanship and foster intercultural understanding, contributing to the wider development of basketball among younger generations.

He noted that the partnership with the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and the Qatar School Sports Federation advances the tournament’s sporting and community goals, reinforces basketball’s presence in schools and creates opportunities to discover emerging talent.

He also thanked the partners and local me-



Abdulla al-Mawlawi, Executive Director of the Communications and Guest Relations Committee at the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organising Committee; Predrag Bogosavljev, Director of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027; and Abdulrahman al-Muftah, Executive Director of the School Olympic Program, pose after the press conference.

dia for their outstanding efforts and instrumental role in supporting the FIBA World Cup Qatar 2027 and its promotional initiatives.

Bogosavljev said: “Whenever we host a sporting event, we must ensure that we leave a lasting legacy that extends beyond the conclusion of the event itself. We look forward to educating families and younger generations about basketball, its rich heritage and our future aspirations for the sport.”

Al-Muftah, Executive Director of the School Olympic Program, said the tournament brings together sport and learning, introducing students to the heritage of basketball in Qatar and around the world. He added that representing different countries provides participants with an opportunity for cultural exchange and

strengthens their connection with the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

Al-Muftah explained that the initiative is exclusively for boys and offers them the opportunity to experience a simulated version of the Basketball World Cup. He thanked the partners involved in organizing the mini tournament, particularly the participating schools and teams, for their contributions to the initiative’s success.

The new season of the Mini World Cup will also feature interactive activities designed to familiarize the school community with preparations for hosting the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, while encouraging greater participation in basketball and raising awareness of the sport’s cultural dimensions.

Gulf Cup U-17 to kick off in Doha

Doha: The second edition of the U-17 Gulf Cup will get underway today, with Qatar hosting 10 teams across 23 matches in the largest edition in the tournament’s history.

The tournament is organised by Qatar’s Local Organising Committee in coordination with the Gulf Football Federation. Hosts Qatar are drawn in Group A alongside the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and China, while defending champions Saudi Arabia are in Group B alongside Iraq, Yemen, Kuwait and Egypt. China and Egypt will participate as guest teams, offering the Gulf side valuable experience against teams from outside the region.

The opening match will see Qatar face debutants China at Grand Hamad Stadium today, with kick-off at 5:45pm. The UAE will face Bahrain in the second Group A fixture of the day at Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium, with kick-off at 8pm.

Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia could be postponed but ‘no hurry’ to decide: AFC

Zurich: The Asian Cup scheduled for January in Saudi Arabia could be moved back a year to 2028 “if we need to”, the continent’s top football official said, following a series of Houthi attacks on the country. But AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa also said they were in “no hurry” to make a decision over Asia’s premier football tournament.

The 2027 Asian Cup is supposed to kick off on January 7 in the Saudi cities of Jeddah, Riyadh and Al Khobar. The kingdom has in recent days come under sustained attack in a dramatic escalation in the war with the Iran-backed Houthi group.

“We can wait until the end of November,” the Asian Football Confederation president told reporters in Zurich on Wednesday about a decision on the fate of the Asian Cup. “Things can change very quickly for better or worse in the region and it is a question of seeing what happens,” he added.

“If we need to make a decision then we will, but we could move back a year to 2028 if we need to. But at the moment we are monitoring the situation and everything is on schedule.”

Cristiano Ronaldo’s Al Nassr saw their Asian Champions

League match delayed by an hour on Monday after the Saudi-led military coalition said it had intercepted a missile fired towards Riyadh.

Three matches in Saudi domestic football, including one involving Al Nassr, were this week postponed. The exhibition Six Kings Slam tennis tournament, due to include Novak Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev, was pushed back to the end of December. The Saudi International, the final event of the Asian Tour golf season, was also postponed.

Australia, one of the 24 teams set to play at the Asian Cup, said this week it was “closely monitoring” the situation in Saudi Arabia. The organisation representing South Korean players on Thursday said there was “serious concern regarding the safety of all players participating in the Asian Cup”.

“The ongoing military tensions and security instability in the Middle East are issues that cannot be taken lightly,” said Lee Keun-ho, president of the Korea Professional Footballers Association (KPFA). Lee added that “no tournament’s value can take precedence over the lives and safety of players and football fans”.

CRICKET

Australia open to changing batting order, says coach

McDonald said all-rounder Green still to prove fitness for second Test

Reuters
Gqeberha

Selectors are open-minded about Australia's batting order and could make further changes for the second Test against South Africa depending on the surface at Gqeberha, coach Andrew McDonald said.

Selectors surprised by picking Nic Maddinson to open the batting with Travis Head in the series-opening win in Durban, the former's first Test in nearly 10 years, while having opener Matt Renshaw bat at number five.

The gambit proved effective as Renshaw scored a match-winning 190 and a second-innings 82 at Kingsmead, while Maddinson chipped in a quickfire 48 in the second innings to help Australia thrash the hosts by 214 runs.

McDonald, who sits on the selection panel with George Bailey and Tony Dodemaide, said they were not set on defined roles for the batters.

"Every time that we plan out an opponent (and) surface, we're really open-minded to what our batting order can look like," he told reporters. "I suppose the external sort of view on that is that you know you need specific orders at certain times, and this person's an opener, this person's a middle-order player.

"We're more open-minded than that, but it doesn't make it right either. So we'll assess what we need to do going to the next test."



Australia head coach Andrew McDonald and captain Pat Cummins. (Reuters)

Former Australia captain Steve Waugh called on selectors to stop "messaging around with the top order", saying it had not worked for two years.

"They've got to pick and stick now," Waugh told Australian media, adding that Renshaw should stay at number five rather than return to the top of the order.

"Don't mess around with that

now. (Renshaw) has been successful, and he's comfortable, so I'd keep him there, for sure."

McDonald said all-rounder Cameron Green had yet to prove his fitness to return for the second Test after missing Durban with an abdominal strain.

"Cam hasn't started batting yet, he's done some physical (work)," the coach said.

"So he's got a few things to go through in the next three to four days."

Wicketkeeper-batter Josh Inglis, another potential middle-order option, was more advanced in his recovery from a broken finger.

"Josh had a couple of hits during this Test match out the back of the nets during lunchtime, that's gone well," said McDonald.

MOTORSPORT

Brazilian Camara to replace Ocon at Haas F1 team next season

Reuters
London

Brazilian Rafael Camara will race for Haas next season on a multi-year deal, with the US-owned Formula One team saying yesterday he was clearly the quickest in a shoot-out test for the seat.

The 21-year-old Ferrari Academy driver leads the Formula Two standings with two rounds remaining, after winning the F3 title last year.

He will be the second Brazilian on the starting grid, with Gabriel Bortoleto already racing for Audi, and plans to take the number 50 since his compatriot races with the 5 that would have been his first choice as a driver born on May 5, 2005.

Camara replaces Frenchman Esteban Ocon, whose departure was announced last month, at the Ferrari-powered team.

Britain's Oliver Bearman, who also came through the Ferrari Academy, is yet to be confirmed but sure to stay as the more experienced team leader. The signing dashed the immediate hopes of Australian Jack Doohan, the reserve who had been hoping for a return to a full-time race seat after a split from Renault-owned Alpine last year.

"He (Camara) was the quickest, very simple answer. He was impressive," Haas team principal Ayao Komatsu told reporters on a video call when asked what had decided the choice.

RESERVE DOOR REMAINS OPEN FOR DOOHAN

Komatsu said Doohan's future with the team was "still up in the air" but the door remained open for him to continue in his current role. "We've been talking with him and his manager to see if we can do something together beyond this year," he added.

Camara, a former teammate of Mercedes' 20-year-old Formula One championship leader Kimi Antonelli in the FRECA European junior series, showed his pace when he drove last year's Haas in a Testing of Previous Cars (TPC)

outing in Portugal at the Algarve Circuit in August.

"He showed... that he could handle himself very well with not a huge amount of time to learn the car, he showed us more than just raw speed," said Komatsu.

"Rafa managed to create an environment to get the best out of himself, it was very impressive and certainly the laps he completed were special."

The 21-year-old Ferrari Academy driver leads the Formula Two standings with two rounds remaining, after winning the F3 title last year.

The Recife-born Brazilian, who leads Red Bull-backed Bulgarian Nikola Tsolov by seven points in the F2 standings, said his first reaction when Komatsu called to say he had the job was to reply, "Are you sure?"

"I'm extremely happy, especially for my parents," he told reporters. "It was a lot of sacrifice on their side. We are not even from the motorsports world, we didn't really know exactly what was the way to go and to be here.

"We moved from Recife to Sao Paulo and then eventually they were always travelling with me. So their life, the normal life that they had, they couldn't be doing any more."

Camara revealed that his grandmother had raced with a DKW Vemag in the 1960s, but said that was not the reason he had started. Instead the adventure began when the son of a work colleague of his father began karting and his brother then also got the chance but proved reluctant and eventually stopped. "I was always the one that was following and wanting to go but I was still too young, I was five," explained Camara, who has the late triple champion Ayrton Senna as his racing hero.

"When I was six I kept asking my dad... and it became something a bit more serious now."

Haas are seventh of 11 teams ahead of next week's US Grand Prix in Austin, Texas. Bearman has scored 23 of their 30 points.

South Africa call up Breetzke as batting reshuffle looms after defeat

South Africa have called up Matthew Breetzke and dropped Tristan Stubbs from their squad for the second Test against Australia in Gqeberha, their coach Shukri Conrad said.

It will mean a batting order reshuffle for the contest, which starts on Sunday, as Conrad also announced Ryan Rickelton will be the wicketkeeper, which is likely to mean Kyle Verreynne, who has not scored a Test fifty in his last 13 innings, will also be dropped though he remains with the squad. The changes follow South Africa's 214-run defeat in the first test

that ended in Durban on Tuesday. Stubbs scored 33 runs in his two innings in the match at Kingsmead. Breetzke, who has played two previous tests for South Africa, in Bangladesh in late 2024 and Zimbabwe last year and has a first-class average of 37, last played a first-class match in February. But he did score a century in the first One Day International last month when South Africa beat Australia. "Matt has been part of the squad before and the fact that his ODI form is as hot as it is gave him an inside lane and also, more importantly, the attitude and the

character Matt brings, and has, will go a long way," Conrad said.

"With Ricks (Rickelton) taking the gloves, there are obviously decisions to be made over whether he does move down the order or whether he can continue to open the batting and take the gloves, which he has done before," Conrad said. "We'll have a look at what the conditions are like, but there are a few things to consider before play starts."

That puts Breetzke in contention to open with Aiden Markram while Tony de Zorzi again misses out with the hamstring injury he suf-

fered in last month's ODI series. Lead pace bowler Kagiso Rabada, who sat out of the first test as a precaution because of long-standing hamstring trouble, is expected to be fit to play.

SQUAD: Temba Bavuma (captain), Marques Ackerman, David Bedingham, Matthew Breetzke, Corbin Bosch, Gerald Coetzee, Simon Harmer, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Anrich Nortje, Dane Paterson, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Kyle Verreynne.

SPOTLIGHT

Captain Hope worried about excess baggage after landing another award

Reuters
New Delhi

West Indies captain Shai Hope is worried he may have to fork out excess baggage fees after picking up his third Player of the Match award on their tour of India.

The opener's unbeaten 102 in the fourth Twenty20 International on Wednesday set up a series-levelling win in Hyderabad. He also smashed a century in the second T20 in Ranchi.

Hope has been in sizzling form throughout the tour, hitting two hundreds in the earlier One-Day International leg. And while he was pleased with his performances he said he was struggling to fit his awards in his luggage. "To be honest, they are a bit heavy, and we have got to look at the luggage weight," he quipped after West Indies prevailed by 24 runs.

"I think we are going to have some problems going back home," Hope said getting off to a good start in Hyderabad was key.

"We got 50-plus opening partnership," he added. "So it was good for us to start innings and then obviously we got that foundation, you can express yourself a bit more in the middle period and then try to give the team the best



West Indies' captain Shai Hope celebrates after scoring a century during the fourth T20 match against India in Hyderabad. (AFP)

finish as could as possible." Hope clobbered nine sixes in his 50-ball knock and drew the admiration of his opponents.

"We need to respect what he has been doing," India opener Sanju Samson said. "He has been playing some really good cricketing shots, not taking that much risk, and respecting the bowlers

as well."

Hope will look to give himself more baggage problems in Saturday's series decider in Bengaluru.

West Indies will next visit Bangladesh for a two-test series later this month. The hosts will breathe easier knowing Hope is being rested ahead of ODI World Cup qualifiers in February.

FOOTBALL

Martinez blames 'anger' for dig at Man United hierarchy

AFP
Manchester

Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez said "anger and frustration" at defeat to Atletico Madrid led to his swipe at the club's board for a lack of investment in the transfer market.

The English giants lost 2-0 in Spain on Tuesday in the Champions League. They are also off to their worst start to a Premier League season for 40 years.

Martinez took aim at technical director Jason Wilcox, saying he "100 percent" expected more investment in the squad during the transfer window after United finished third in the Premier League last season to return to Europe's top competition.

United signed three midfielders - Carlos Baleba, Youri Tielemans and Andrey Santos - for around £150mn (\$198mn), but their spending fell far short of some of their Premier League rivals. "After the match, I spoke out of anger and frustration at not getting the result we all wanted," Martinez posted on social media. The Argentine international's comments were backed by some fans, but Mar-



Manchester United's Lisandro Martinez fights for the ball with Atletico Madrid's Pablo Barrios during the Champions League match in Madrid.

tinez has been criticised for his own part in United's poor start to the season.

He scored an own goal in a 1-1 draw at bottom-of-the-table Fulham last month and was out-muscled by Dominic Solanke as 10-man Tottenham salvaged a point at Old Trafford last weekend. "When I talk about wanting more, I'm talking about the ambition we must all have as part of this club. To keep growing, to become stronger and to have everything we need to compete at the highest level.

"These are standards we must

all hold ourselves to, starting with me. 'I believe in my teammates, our manager and everyone working to help this club move forward. I'm convinced that the way forward is to keep working together, with ambition and commitment."

The pressure is rising on United boss Michael Carrick just months after he was handed the job on a permanent basis.

Carrick's men travel to historic rivals Leeds on Sunday before another Champions League trip, to Italian side Como, on Wednesday.

HORSE RACING

Rayyan Bu Thaila claims Al Hamla Cup, double for Sanna

THE MEETING ALSO PRODUCED A HAT-TRICK FOR TRAINER NERBONNE AND JOCKEY DELOZIER



Jockey Alberto Sanna guided Rayyan Bu Thaila to the Al Hamla Cup win at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Rayyan Bu Thaila carried his strong form from last season into the new campaign, making a winning start with victory in the Al Hamla Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Representing Injaaz Stud, the five-year-old gelding won the 1400m Local Thoroughbred Conditions race after a well-judged ride by Alberto Sanna, who completed a double at the second meeting of the Qatar Racing and

Equestrian Club's domestic season. Rayyan Bu Thaila was patiently ridden behind the leaders before producing an impressive turn of foot to sweep into the lead inside the final 200m and score convincingly by 1¼ lengths. Jihad El Ahmad trained the winner.

QREC Racing Manager Abdulla bin Rashid al-Kubaisi, awarded the Al Hamla Cup.

The meeting also produced a hat-trick for trainer Rudy Nerbonne and jockey Lukas Delozier, who enjoyed three victories while trainer Hamad al-Jehani also celebrated a double.

Jadwat Al Shahania began

Nerbonne's winning run in the Purebred Arabian Maiden, with Delozier in the saddle, scoring by three-quarters of a length.

Assfa Al Shahania followed in the Purebred Arabian Rated Maiden, with Faleh Bughenaim aboard, winning by 2¾ lengths.

Mehbas Al Shahania completed Nerbonne's hat-trick in the Local Purebred Arabian Maiden under Delozier, winning by a length.

Al-Jehani's double came through Sidi Star and Dapper Charm. Sidi Star won the Purebred Arabian Handicap 85-105 under Nicolas Baudet, while Dapper Charm took the Thoroughbred



Connections of Rayyan Bu Thaila celebrate after the gelding won the Al Hamla Cup. PICTURES: Juhaïm

Handicap 70-90 with Delozier aboard. Sanna's second victory came aboard Maraahab, trained by Hadi al-Ramzani, in the Thoroughbred Handicap 45-65. The pair secured the race by three-quarters of a length.

De Bruyne, trained by Ahmed al-Jehani and ridden by Ghanim Ahmed al-Jehani, edged the Thoroughbred Handicap 0-75 by a head in one of the day's closest finishes.

RESULTS
2nd Al Rayyan Race Meeting - Al Hamla Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer,

Jockey)
1 - Al Hamla Cup, Local Thoroughbred Conditions
Rayyan Bu Thaila, Jihad El Ahmad, Alberto Sanna
2 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 85-105
Sidi Star, Hamad al-Jehani, Nicolas Baudet
3 - Thoroughbred Handicap 70-90
Dapper Charm, Hamad al-Jehani, Lukas Delozier
4 - Local Thoroughbred Novice
War Boy, Alban de Mieulle, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri
5 - Thoroughbred Handicap 0-75

De Bruyne, Ahmed al-Jehani, Ghanim Ahmed al-Jehani
6 - Thoroughbred Handicap 45-65
Maraahab, Hadi al-Ramzani, Alberto Sanna
7 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden
Mehbas Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
8 - Purebred Arabian Rated Maiden
Assfa Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Faleh Bughenaim
9 - Purebred Arabian Maiden
Jadwat Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

TENNIS

Swiatek avoids seed exodus to breeze into Wuhan last eight



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return to USA's Ashlyn Krueger during their Wuhan Open match yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Wuhan, China

Iga Swiatek hit a new milestone yesterday as she stormed into a second consecutive Wuhan Open quarter-final with a 6-1, 6-4 win over American lucky loser Ashlyn Krueger.

The six-time Grand Slam champion recorded the 150th WTA 1000 victory of her career to continue her march towards a 13th title at this level.

Since the Tier I/WTA 1000 format's introduction in 1990, Swiatek is just the third player to claim 150 wins from her first 50 main-draw appearances in such events, after Martina Hingis (162) and Serena Williams (153).

"I just wanted to focus on adjusting and being brave and, at

the end, I'm happy that I was," said the seventh-seeded Swiatek, who needs a title this week to strengthen her chances of qualifying for next month's WTA Finals in Indian Wells. "For sure I feel like I am playing better than at the beginning of the season, so I'm ready to push and I'm happy to be in the quarters for sure."

The 25-year-old Pole, who awaits Ann Li or Janice Tjen in the quarter-finals, is one of just two top-10 seeds still standing in a draw that has witnessed a slew of high-profile exits.

A day after the shocking departures of the top two seeds, Aryna Sabalenka and Jessica Pegula, sixth-seeded Karolina Muchova and 10th-seeded Iva Jovic also bid Wuhan farewell.

Maja Chwalinska, a finalist at the French Open this year, enjoyed

a 6-4, 6-1 triumph over American world number 11 Jovic to set up a quarter-final with Greece's Maria Sakkari. Diana Shnaider's 7-5, 6-3 victory against Muchova was the Russian's fourth career triumph over a top-10 opponent.

The 22-year-old will next take on Jelena Ostapenko for a place in the final four. British world number 170 Sonay Kartal sent another seed packing after knocking out ninth-seeded Belinda Bencic in the second round.

This time she delivered a crushing 6-2, 6-0 blow to last year's Wuhan semi-finalist Jasmine Paolini, the number 15 seed.

World number six Elina Svitolina avoided the seed exodus as she eased into the quarter-finals by ending the inspired run of Chinese wild card Guo Hanyu 6-1, 6-4.

She plays Kartal next.

ATP proposes rankings system changes, extra player bonuses

The ATP unveiled plans to change its ranking system, centre the tour more on its Masters 1000 events and increase bonus payments for players from 2028 yesterday. Players take their best results from 19 regular-season tournaments, as well as the eight-man ATP Finals should they qualify, to form their ranking. The current system allows players to replace up to three of their results from the eight mandatory 1000-level events with better performances from lower-tier competitions. But the ATP wants to take away that possibility, ensuring points from all Masters tournaments count towards a player's ranking regardless of their results.

"Today, players can replace up to three of their weaker results from ATP Masters 1000 events with better results from ATP 500 or ATP 250 events later in the season," the ATP said in a Q&A posted on its website. "That can create pressure to add tournaments after an early loss to make up the points. The proposals would remove this, so results at the biggest events count in full and players can plan their schedules around them rather than chasing points and risking overplaying."

Top players have regularly complained of burn-out in recent seasons, with several notable absentees from big events, especially later in the year.

World number one Jannik Sinner has not played since winning Wimbledon in July due to a knee injury, while seven-time Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz was also sidelined for large parts of 2026. "The demands of the season fall hardest on the players who go deepest at the biggest events," the ATP said. "Many players, including those in the mid-rankings, find it hard to protect time for recovery when the system rewards them for adding one more tournament."

The governing body for the men's tour added it was looking into weighting ranking points more favourably for players who go deep into tournaments. It is also "reviewing a limit on how many ATP 250 results count towards the rankings of top players". Several players, including Sinner, protested against perceived low prize money at both this year's French Open and Wimbledon. The ATP does not organise the Grand Slam tournaments, but it has announced plans for a large increase in bonus payments and pension contributions from the tour. Players ranked in the world's top 250 would share a year-end rankings bonus worth a total of \$25 million, while the bonus pool for top-ranked players available at 1000 events is slated to increase from \$21.5mn to \$50mn by 2028.

FOCUS

Zverev cruises past De Minaur to reach Shanghai semi-finals

AFP
Shanghai

Top seed Alexander Zverev took "a huge step up" to dismantle Alex de Minaur 6-4, 6-4 yesterday and roll into the Shanghai Masters semi-finals.

He will play Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who advanced when France's Arthur Gea retired injured from their quarter-final after 22 minutes.

Zverev, who will end the year at world number one, was tested by the Australian's speed in the first set but sent down a string of dazzling forehands to convert a break point in the fifth game.

Despite a double-fault the German saved three break points in a row to hold serve and was rewarded in the 10th game, taking the first set with a buttery backhand at the net.

Zverev refused to relent in the second set, setting up another break point in the seventh game to go up 4-3 when De Minaur served into the net.

The 27-year-old Australian clung on for a bit longer but Zverev wasn't sticking around, clinching victory on the first match point.

"Good match for me," Zverev,



Germany's Alexander Zverev hits a return to Australia's Alex de Minaur during their Shanghai Masters quarter-final in Shanghai. (AFP)

29, said. "Very satisfied with my level... it was a huge step up from the last couple matches."

Zverev needed three sets to win his two previous matches.

France's Gea was in the biggest match of his career when he quit his quarter-final with muscle issues.

The 21-year-old took a medical timeout for work on his lower right side when he was down 1-4 in the first set.

He returned to play but ended the match minutes later.

"I felt this morning, during a

warm-up, pain in the psoas," he said, referring to a muscle in the lower back.

He said he received "treatments" and decided to step on court despite being unsure about his fitness.

"I tried from the beginning, but it was not enough to play full and too dangerous for the end of the season."

"I'm really sad, but it's the best choice I could do," said 56th-ranked Gea, who was playing in his first tournament at the prestigious ATP 1000 level.

ALCARAZ TO PLAY IN VIENNA AFTER SAUDI POSTPONEMENT

The Vienna ATP event said yesterday it had added world number three Carlos Alcaraz to the tournament's line-up, pouncing when a Saudi Arabian exhibition event was cancelled.

"When indications emerged on Wednesday that the Six Kings Slam... would be postponed until the end of December, tournament director Herwig Straka reacted immediately and contacted Carlos Alcaraz's management," Vienna organisers said in a statement. "Everything happened very quickly after that, and Carlos agreed to come to Vienna without much hesitation," said Straka. "His commitment is a tremendous honour for our tournament."

The lucrative Six Kings Slam exhibition, originally scheduled for October 21-24 and to be streamed live by Netflix, was postponed after Yemen's Houthis

carried out deadly attacks on the kingdom. Organisers now hope to hold the tournament on December 27-30. US Open champion Alexander Zverev, Alex de Minaur and Learner Tien had already planned to play in Saudi Arabia and then in Vienna, which starts on October 26. Further top-10 players already announced for Vienna, an indoor, hard-court ATP 500-level event, are Daniil Medvedev, Flavio Cobolli and Frances Tiafoe. Alcaraz only previously played the Vienna tournament in 2021, when he reached the semi-finals. The former world number one has shown inconsistent form since returning from a long injury layoff at the US Open at the end of August.

He won in Tokyo in September but was knocked out in the third round of the Shanghai Masters in straight sets by Zizou Bergs on Monday.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Sadd seek revival against Duhail in key clash



Al Sadd have lost their last two matches, suffering a defeat to Al Arabi in the Qatar Stars League before going down to Saudi giants Al Hilal in the AFC Champions League Elite.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Struggling to find their best form, Al Sadd will return to the Qatar Stars League with a tough tie against traditional rivals Al Duhail at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Sunday.

Al Sadd recently lost to Saudi giants Al Hilal 2-0 in the AFC Champions League Elite. Ahead of the match against Duhail, Sadd's Romanian coach Razvan Lucescu said: "We are not in our best form at the moment. In football, it is natural for a team to go through periods when it is not at its best. However, we will fight again and work hard to return to winning ways."

Al Sadd would therefore look to regroup against Al Duhail. While Al Sadd are currently second in the QSL standings with 12 points, one point adrift of leaders Al Rayyan, Al Duhail are third with 9 points.

Meanwhile, Al Ahli and Al Wakrah will kick-start round six at the Al Thumama Stadium today. Al Ahli arrive after a resounding 5-0 win over Al Sailiya and are currently 6th with seven points.

Al Wakrah eked out a 3-2 win against Al Gharafa in their previous round to move up to 5 points to be 9th in the table.

Al Wakrah coach Jose Luis Sierra said, "We are well aware that we are facing tough opponents with quality players across all positions. They also secured an impressive result in their last match and are looking to keep their own winning momentum going."

Al Ahli coach Borja Jimenez said, "We look forward to continuing our good form and improving our position in the overall

standings. Securing a win will require a high level of focus, especially against a strong opponent like Al Wakrah, one of the best teams in terms of tactical organisation and quality of individual players."

In today's second game, Al Shahania will face Al Arabi at the Khalifa International Stadium. Shahania won against Lusail last week and are 7th with seven points.

Al Arabi head into the match in high spirits having beaten Al Sadd 3-2, a result that lifted them to 9 points and into the top four.

Al Arabi coach Cosmin Contra said, "We have moved ahead from our victory over Al Sadd and the focus is now on the next challenge. League matches demand consistent tactical and mental discipline. Al Shahania are well-organised defensively and possess a good squad."

Al Shahania coach Younes Ali opined, "It is difficult facing Al Arabi, a well-organised side with significant experience and players capable of making a decisive impact. My prior familiarity with Al Arabi is a positive factor even though they have since brought in new players and technical staff," he stressed.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE FIXTURES

Today: 5.30pm: Al Ahli vs Al Wakrah at Al Thumama Stadium; 7.45pm: Al Shahania vs Al Arabi at Khalifa International Stadium
Tomorrow: 5.30pm: Al Sailiya vs Qatar SC at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium; 7.45pm: Lusail vs Al Shamal at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium
Sunday: 5.30pm: Al Sadd vs Al Duhail at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium; 7.45pm: Al Gharafa vs Al Rayyan at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium

Al Sadd sign Muntari for two seasons



Striker Mohammed Muntari trains after joining Al Sadd.

Doha: Al Sadd have signed Qatar international striker Mohammed Muntari from Al Gharafa on a two-year contract as the reigning Qatar Stars League champions look to strengthen their attacking options. The club announced the signing of the 32-year-old through its official account on X.

Muntari joined Al Jaish in 2012 before moving to Al Duhail. He also had a loan spell at Al Ahli in 2018 before joining Al Gharafa ahead of the 2024-25 season. He made 29 appearances for Al Gharafa, scoring six goals.

At international level, Muntari made his Qatar debut in 2014 and has since earned 70 caps, scoring 16 goals. He scored Qatar's only goal at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, finding the net against Senegal. He was also part of Qatar's squad for the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Muntari's arrival comes as Al Sadd seek to regain their winning form after suffering a 3-2 defeat to Al Arabi in the last round, their first loss of the league campaign. The result saw them surrender the top spot and drop to second with 12 points, one behind leaders Al Rayyan.

Al Sadd will face Al Duhail at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Sunday as they look to get their title defence back on track.

The Wolves are also seeking to revive their AFC Champions League Elite campaign after losing their opening two matches against Iran's Esteghlal and Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

PSG 'got lucky' to win City thriller: Enrique

'We could have lost this match if they scored the chances that they created'

AFP

Manchester, United Kingdom

Paris Saint-Germain boss Luis Enrique said the European champions rode their luck to beat Manchester City 4-2 and maintain a perfect start to their defence of the Champions League.

The visitors ran riot in the first half of City's first home game since being found guilty of breaking Premier League financial rules as they raced into a 3-0 lead.

Desire Doue, Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha were on target in a near flawless first 45 minutes by the French champions. But City roared back after the break as Erling Haaland struck twice, while they also hit the woodwork twice and were denied by a brilliant goalline clearance by Nuno Mendes.

"We could have lost this match if they scored the chances that they created," said Enrique. "I think it was a very nice match, but the way they play, it's amazing. We like to play these kind of matches."

Maghnes Aklouché briefly restored PSG's three-goal lead in the second half, while Ferran Torres also missed a late penalty for the visitors. "We try to win every single match. We try to score. We don't stop if we score one or two goals," added Enrique. "It's very nice to feel that but I have to repeat, today we were lucky because in the second half we could have conceded more goals."

Victory took PSG top of the Champions League table after two games, while City drop to 17th.

Enzo Maresca had made a perfect start to the daunting challenge of replacing Pep Guardiola as City manager by winning his first eight games in all competitions.



Manchester City's Erling Haaland misses a chance to score against Paris St Germain. (Reuters)

Guardiola, who won 20 trophies in a 10-year spell at City, made his return to the Etihad Stadium in a show of support after City were found guilty on more than 100 charges of financial impropriety between 2009 and 2018.

But he saw his former players fall to their first defeat of the season despite a spirited fightback after being thoroughly outplayed in the first half. "From tonight we can learn many things," said Maresca. "Even if we concede two goals (in two minutes) against

the best team in Europe, we need to continue. I try to continue to learn from the players because I just arrived three months ago, but the feeling at the moment is very good."

City had arrived on the back of a 3-0 thrashing of Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday and Maresca felt they generated enough chances to salvage something even after digging themselves a three-goal hole. "Even with 3-0 in the first half, with the amount of chances we created in the second half, we deserved more," he

said. "Luis (Enrique, PSG's manager) said at the end of the game that they were quite lucky today. You have to be clinical but not lose the balance," Maresca said.

On the pitch, they remain three points clear of Arsenal atop the Premier League table ahead of tomorrow's home game against Ipswich.

Asked if he had a message for supporters, Maresca said: "We are sorry for the first half for sure. Saturday is a Premier League game and we need to continue our run."

Lyon down Palace in Europa League

Paris: Ligue 1 club Lyon held off Crystal Palace 3-2 in the Europa League, while Sunderland made a late comeback to break the hearts of Portuguese second-division side Torreense.

Bayer Leverkusen went top of the table with a 4-0 win, while AC Milan strolled to victory by the same scoreline.

It was a painful return to his old home for Crystal Palace boss Pierre Sage as his side fell to their fourth defeat of the season. Lyon took the lead inside the opening 10 minutes when Corentin Tolisso was quickest to react to the dropping ball at a corner to prod the hosts in front. Ernest Nuamah doubled Lyon's advantage two minutes into first-half injury time. A clever set-piece routine allowed Yerey Pino to halve the deficit for Palace early in the second period. Pavel Sulc then restored the two-goal buffer for Paulo Fonseca's charges just inside the final quarter hour.

Kamada smashed home a second for Palace with nine minutes on the clock but the home side held out.

SPOTLIGHT

Mourinho blasts 'shameless' timing of Vinicius ban decision

AFP

Rome

Jose Mourinho hit out at the "shameless" decision by Spanish football authorities to announce that Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior had been slapped with a four-match ban just hours before their Champions League clash with Roma kicked off.

The Brazil international was handed the punishment on Wednesday after being sent off during Saturday's 1-0 La Liga win over Villarreal for pulling the hair of an opponent. It is a costly ban, depriving Mourinho of one of his star attackers for an important run of league games that includes a Clasico clash with rivals Barcelona, who hold a six-point lead over Real at the summit of the table.

Vinicius started as Mourinho's side pulled off an incredible late comeback to beat Roma 4-3 in the Champions League, having trailed 3-1 with seven minutes remaining. But the Portuguese made his feelings clear about how the timing of the



announcement had disrupted preparations in a post-match press conference.

Mourinho said: "Do you think it's normal that a player from a Spanish team, who has to play a match that is also important for Spanish football, that two hours before

the match a player knows he's been given a four-match suspension?

"Couldn't they do it now? Couldn't they do it tomorrow morning? Do we have to come by bus and almost arrive at the stadium when we find out Vinicius has a four-

match suspension?"

Mourinho added: "They do things shamelessly now. The cat is out of the bag now. Two hours before the match, a player must know he has a four-match suspension. A Spanish team that has earned three points for Spanish football, for the rankings, for the prestige of Spanish football. You want to kill a player two hours before the match; it doesn't seem normal to me."

Mourinho also highlighted his unhappiness with scheduling, with his side set to face AEK Athens in the Greek capital on 4 November, before travelling to Valencia in La Liga on 7 November.

Asked what the Vinicius ban announcement says, Mourinho replied: "At the very least, a lack of respect. Playing in Athens on Wednesday night, arriving in Madrid probably at 5am, something like that, and then playing Saturday in Valencia, on a weekend that precedes a week of national team matches. It makes absolutely no sense, they make you play on Saturday in Valencia, which is an extremely difficult match, it doesn't seem innocent to me."

"The usual excuses, I don't buy them,

because this wasn't 25 years ago. The excuses from TV, that it was TV that decided, that it was TV that chose the match for Saturday, I don't buy this anymore. I'm too old to swallow this. And this Vinicius story, two hours before a match, knowing that he has a four-match suspension, doesn't deserve comment. Real Madrid fans aren't stupid and I will do everything possible to open people's eyes."

It was a good night for Mourinho on the pitch, as his substitutions turned the game in Real's favour after they were outplayed for much of the game until the closing stages.

Donyell Malen's double had given Roma a 3-1 lead early in the second half, but two of Mourinho's substitutes scored, Endrick and Carlos Espi, and another, Arda Guler, provided two assists in the late rally.

"I'm not going to be a genius and say I had prepared everything for a 3-1 to 4-3 victory, it's not true," Mourinho said. "But I genuinely thought that in the last 20 minutes I had substitutions I could make, and I had substitutions that could change things."