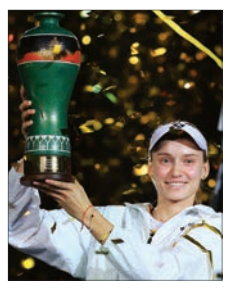
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TENNIS | Page 3

Rybakina brushes aside Fernandez to win Ningbo crown



MOTORSPORT | Page 4

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CRICKET

Shadab ton stuns England as Pakistan reach tri-series final

Page 2

FOOTBALL

Sadd seek crucial win against Qadsiah to revive campaign

Two consecutive defeats have left the Qatari side bottom of the table in the continental competition.



Al Sadd star Akram Afif trains ahead of the AFC Champions League Elite match against Saudi Arabia's Al Qadsiah.

By Sports Reporter
Dammam, Saudi Arabia

Al Sadd will be desperate to revive their AFC Champions League Elite campaign when they take on Saudi Arabia's Al Qadsiah at the Prince Mohammed Bin Fahd Stadium in Dammam today, with the 2011 champions needing a victory to boost their hopes of reaching the round of 16.

Two consecutive defeats have left the Qatari side under pressure ahead of their third match in the continental competition. They will also be looking to end a six-match winless run against Saudi Arabian opposition, having lost five and drawn one while conceding 17 goals in the process.

Al Sadd coach Razvan Lucescu acknowledged the challenge posed by Al Qadsiah but insisted his team would fight for a positive result.

"I am happy to be here, and we have a tough match ahead of us against a strong team with quality players. This is our third match in the tournament, and we hope to achieve a positive result," Lucescu said at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

"Every match has its own circumstances and character, and we will work to achieve the best possible result. We must show a strong fighting spirit, perform at our best, demonstrate Al Sadd's character on the field and aim for victory," the Romanian added.

Lucescu also highlighted the importance of the competition in helping players develop and prove their abilities, stressing that his squad must be prepared for the demands of a busy schedule. "The AFC Champions League is a great incentive for any player who wants to prove his abilities and develop, and we must be ready for this competition," he said.

"The team must be ready, and the injured players have substitutes of the same level. With the demands of the competition, we need all players to be ready in order to continue our campaign and advance in the tournament."

Al Sadd defender Tarek Salman echoed his coach's sentiments, stressing the need for concentration against an Al Qadsiah side he described as a good and improving team.



Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martinez speaks at a press conference ahead of his team's match against Saudi's Al Ahli.

"We have an important match ahead of us against Al Qadsiah, a good and developing team, and we must be fully focused throughout the match," Salman said. "We will work hard to win and collect our first three points in the tournament. We look forward to delivering a strong performance and achieving the result we want."

Al Qadsiah, meanwhile, will be eager to maintain their unbeaten start and make the most of home advantage. Avoiding defeat would see them become only the third Saudi Arabian club to remain unbeaten in their opening three matches of the competition, but they will be targeting all three points after a strong start to the season.

AL GHARAFA FACE HOLDERS AL AHLI

Meanwhile, Al Gharafa face a formidable challenge against defending champions Al Ahli of Saudi today, with coach Pedro Martinez urging his side to build on their performances against Al Hilal and Esteghlal.

Martinez expects another fiercely contested encounter, similar to their previous match against Saudi Arabian giants Al Hilal, and believes his players can challenge the title holders.

"I expect the match against Al Ahli to be at the same level as the big matches that are full of strong competition, and to be similar to the previous match against Al Hilal," Martinez said.

He acknowledged the quality of Al Ahli, who have won the continental title in the past two editions, but insisted Al Gharafa were focused on securing the points. "Al Ahli are a strong team and the title holders for the past two seasons, with distinguished players in their ranks, but we are fully focused and will fight to get the points," he said.

Martinez added that Al Gharafa had performed well in their previous two matches against Al Hilal and Esteghlal but had been unable to turn those displays into victories.

"We performed well in the previous two matches against Al Hilal and Esteghlal, but luck was not on our side in winning. We know that small details make the difference in this type of match," he said.

Al Gharafa forward Yacine Brahimi also stressed the team's determination to deliver a positive result and reward their supporters. Acknowledging the quality of the opposition, Brahimi said Al Gharafa also had players capable of making a difference.

Al Ahli are unbeaten in their last six AFC Champions League Elite meetings with Al Gharafa, winning and drawing three each, after losing their first two clashes and they have failed to score in just one of their eight encounters with the Qatari side.

They have to, however, be tight in defence after conceding in both their earlier matches - which included a last-gasp draw with Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor in their opening tie.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Carrick on the brink as Man United misery mounts

AFP
London

Michael Carrick was pushed to the brink of being sacked after Manchester United slumped to a miserable 3-0 home defeat against Bournemouth, while Alexander Isak extended his hot streak in Liverpool's 2-0 win against Brighton.

Carrick's bold decision to drop captain Bruno Fernandes backfired as defeat stretched United's winless run to eight games and left them 16th in the Premier League, just one point above the relegation zone. For the third time in four seasons, the Cherries won by a three-goal margin at Old Trafford as strikes from Rayan, Marcus Tavernier and Evanilson secured a fully deserved victory for Marco Rose's side.

Fernandes was critical of Carrick's tactics in a 4-1 Champions League thrashing at Como on Wednesday.

The United boss said the decision to leave out last season's Premier League Player of the Year was "purely football" driven, but it was hard to believe Fernandes was not being punished as he was left on the bench for the entire match.

Carrick was taunted with chants of "you're getting sacked in the morning" from the Bournemouth fans. But on this evidence, dismissing another manager is far from a quick fix for a club that has fallen dramatically from grace since Alex Ferguson's retirement after winning their most recent English title 13 years ago.

"It's a tough situation. What is next? I don't know," Carrick said after United's winless run reached eight games in all competitions.

"I'll always do what's best for this football club. I've said it all along, I don't change that now. I love what I do. I love the responsibility, but we'll have to wait and see."



Michael Carrick's bold decision to drop captain Bruno Fernandes backfired as defeat to Bournemouth stretched Manchester United's winless run to eight games and left them 16th in the Premier League, just one point above the relegation zone. *(AFP)*

A strong finish to last season during Carrick's interim spell in charge secured third place in the Premier League. Yet with just one win against promoted Ipswich, United have taken just seven points from eight league games so far this season – their lowest tally at this stage of a season since 1986-87. United's players were booed off by the few frustrated fans that remained inside Old Trafford at the end of their heaviest home defeat since 2024. United's co-owners the Glazer family and Jim Ratcliffe were also targeted for angry chants, although Carrick largely avoided the fans' ire. It is unlikely that sympathy vote will spare the former United midfielder from the axe.



Alexander Isak scored a brace in Liverpool's 2-0 win against Brighton.

ISAK STARS FOR LIVERPOOL

At Anfield, Liverpool struck twice in quick succession in the first half, with Pascal Gross's own goal followed by Isak's latest strike. Isak has netted six times in seven league games this season and has three goals in his last four matches.

After a turbulent debut season following his acrimonious move from Newcastle, the Sweden striker is finally beginning to repay his £125mn ($167mn) fee.

It was a welcome first taste of top-flight success at Anfield for Reds boss Andoni Iraola, who had failed to win his first three league games on Merseyside since arriving from Bournemouth in the close season.

The Spaniard, who had won Champions League and League Cup games at Anfield, has led Liverpool to four successive victories in all competitions since the chastening 3-0 home defeat against Manchester City. Liverpool have climbed to fourth place, just one point behind third-placed Brighton after inflicting the high-flying Seagulls' second league loss this term.

William Osula and Harvey Barnes scored in the second half as Newcastle piled pressure on Crystal Palace manager Pierre Sage with a 2-0 win at Selhurst Park. Thrashed 5-0 at rivals Brighton last weekend, 17th-placed Palace have won just twice in eight league games under Sage, who arrived from Lens in the close season to replace Oliver Glasner.

Hull have not tasted victory for seven games after a 1-1 draw with Brentford at the MKM Stadium. Oli McBurnie's 24th-minute penalty, awarded when Aaron Hickey fouled Tim Iroegbunam, put Hull ahead, but Dango Ouattara equalised in the 63rd minute.

Sunderland remain rooted to the bottom of the table after a 0-0 draw against Leeds at the Stadium of Light.

SPORT

CRICKET

Shadab sparkles as Pakistan beat England in thriller

Pakistan secure a place in the tri-series final with one-wicket win

AFP
Lahore, Pakistan


Pakistan's Shadab Khan (right) and teammate Haris Rauf celebrate after their win over England in Lahore yesterday. Pakistan won by one wicket. *(AFP)*

Shadab Khan's maiden century rescued Pakistan from a dire situation and took them to a stunning one-wicket victory over England in the one-day international in Lahore yesterday, booking the hosts' spot in the final of the tri-series.

Defending a modest 242-run target, England were on the cusp of victory with the home team reduced to 154-9, but Shadab's unbeaten 113 condemned Harry Brook's side to a third defeat in five days in the series, which also involves Sri Lanka.

England, who failed to defend a 430-run target against Sri Lanka on Thursday, were left stunned as number 11 Haris Rauf cracked the winning boundary with 17 balls to spare, sparking huge celebrations in the Pakistan dug-out.

Haris, who scored an unbeaten seven, ably played his part in a match-winning 89-run partnership with Shadab for the last wicket.

Shadab, who cracked five sixes and 13 boundaries, was lucky to survive a leg-before decision off Gus Atkinson with 20 needed.

But while trudging off distraught, he took a review which overturned the decision. Restored to the crease, the 28-year-old guided Pakistan to victory and a spot in next Saturday's final.

Pakistan had lost opener Fakhar Zaman and Babar Azam for 10 each and Saim Ayub for six in a poor start before Saad Baig (32) and Salman Agha (26) briefly revived the innings. Match-winner Shadab then entered the fray in the 24th over with Pakistan on 103-6.

Defeat means England's chances of reaching a place in the October 31 final hang in the balance as they need Pakistan to beat Sri Lanka tomorrow and then win themselves against the island nation on Thursday.


England's Ben Duckett celebrates after scoring a century. *(AFP)*

Earlier, England's 241 all out was aided by a century by opener Ben Duckett, who anchored the innings with 105. Duckett's knock and Sam Curran's 42 during a 93-run fifth-wicket stand revived England from a precarious position of 19-3. Atkinson contributed an unbeaten 36 at the bottom of the order.

For Pakistan, Shaheen Shah Afridi claimed 4-46, while Razaullah took 2-38 on his ODI debut as England were bowled out in 46.4 overs.

Duckett hit 10 fours and two sixes before falling to spinner Arafat Minhas, who finished with 2-26.

Opting to bowl first, Pakistan skipper Shaheen removed Tom Banton for four in the opening over -- his 150th ODI wicket.

The lanky left-armer is the 13th bowler from Pakistan to take 150 or more wickets.

In his next over, Shaheen got the prized wicket of Joe Root for five, caught cutting a short delivery.

England plunged into further trouble when Harry Brook -- who scored the fastest-ever ODI double century in his team's shock defeat to Sri Lanka -- was run out for one.

Duckett's fifth ODI hundred and Curran's resolute batting briefly steadied England before Shaheen took two more wickets to end the innings.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 243 for 9 (Shadab 113*, Overton 3-43) **beat England 241** (Duckett 105, Curran 42, Afridi 4-46) **by one wicket**

SPOTLIGHT

Anderson sad to see 25-year Lancashire journey come to an end


James Anderson has taken more wickets than any other fast bowler in the history of men's Test cricket. *(Reuters)*

Reuters
London

Fast bowler James Anderson expressed disappointment yesterday after Lancashire decided not to renew his contract, bringing an end to a 25-year association between England's all-time leading Test wicket-taker and his home county.

Anderson, who claimed 704 Test wickets for England, will leave Lancashire as the county look to move on from the 44-year-old and rebuild their squad for a promotion push from Division Two of the County Championship.

The veteran bowler made 112 first-class appearances for Lancashire, claiming 443 wickets, and was involved in their County Championship title triumph in 2011.

"I've supported Lancashire since I was a kid, and so to get to play for them for 25 years was a dream come true," Anderson said in a statement. "I have always found it special walking out to play at Old Trafford and have some incredible memories of doing so including the honour of being captain. If it was up to me it wouldn't have ended like this but I wish the players and fans all the best for the future."

Anderson, who was appointed Lancashire's red-ball captain for the first time in his career in the 2026 season, took 50 wickets at an average of 17.68 this summer, but the county finished seventh out of eight teams in the second division.

"I spoke to Jimmy about our ambitions to rebuild our men's squad that is capable of securing promotion from Division Two of the County Championship and then challenging to win Division One over the next three to four years," said Paul Farbrace, Lancashire's incoming director of cricket.

"We are keen to begin that rebuild now, both in terms of the playing squad and the wider professional cricket set-up, and to make important progress over the coming months.

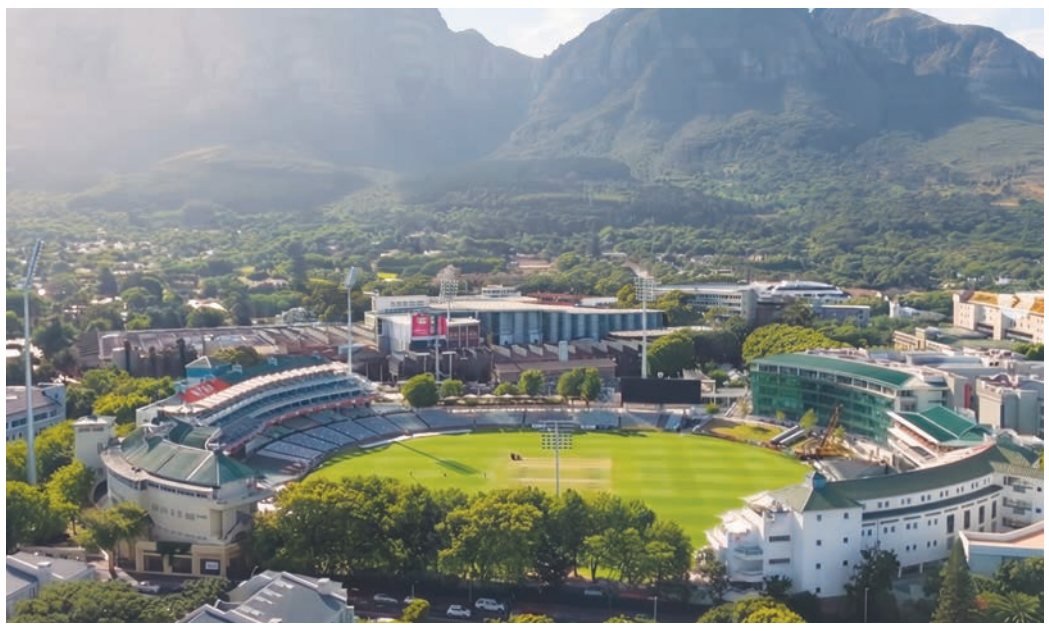
"As part of those plans, I informed Jimmy that we had taken the incredibly difficult decision not to extend his playing contract for the 2027 season."

Lancashire Cricket had honoured Anderson's contribution to the club by renaming the Pavilion End at Old Trafford the James Anderson End. He was also knighted in 2025 in recognition of his services to cricket.

PREVIEW

A test of character for Australia at Newlands

Reuters
Cape Town


An aerial view of the Newlands cricket ground in Cape Town where the third Test between hosts South Africa and Australia begins tomorrow.

Australia return to the scene of one of the darkest days in the country's cricket history when the series-deciding third Test against South Africa starts at Newlands tomorrow.

The battle may be mental as much as one of skill for several of the Australian players, not least former captain Steve Smith, who was at the centre of the Sandpapergate ball-tampering scandal in 2018.

Current skipper Pat Cummins was part of that side, as were fellow seamer Josh Hazlewood and spinner Nathan Lyon, though they say they had no knowledge of the attempt to alter the condition of the ball with a piece of sandpaper.

Smith bore the brunt of the considerable fallout in Australia eight years ago and having not reached the heights he might have expected on this tour, averaging a little over 20 with the bat, he would see this as the perfect time to put that right.

There has so far been little chatter in South Africa about Sandpapergate but that could change at Newlands, where the first three days' ticket sales have been strong after sparse crowds at the first two Tests in Durban and Gqeberha.

"He'll be fine," Australia opener Travis Head said of Smith.

"I think he showed that in 2019 in England.

"We support him. He's been through a lot in that space and handles it well. "Sometimes it brings the best out of him, as we've seen in the past."


Steve Smith was at the centre of the ball-tampering scandal in 2018 at Newlands.

The series is level at 1-1 after big wins for both sides in the opening two games and Australia wicket-keeper Alex Carey told reporters on Sunday that it looked to be another good Test-match pitch.

"We are still a couple of days out but it looks another great surface," he said.

"If you look back at Durban it was a five-day Test match and a great contest between bat and ball.

"The same in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) and this should be no different."

There has never been a Test match played at Newlands in October, and just three in November, all against Australia.

The tourists won the first two in 1902 and 1921, but the most recent November fixture was an eight-wicket victory for South Africa in 2011 when Australia were famously bowled out for 47 in their second innings.

South Africa will be without fast bowler Anrich Nortje, who injured his groin in the second Test.

Captain Temba Bavuma said they would pick horses for courses in terms of his replacement.

"You've got guys like Gerald (Coetzee), Pato (Dane Paterson), as well as (Corbin) Bosch, and we have Sen (Senuran Muthusamy) as well, so the options are there," Bavuma said.

"Whoever we decide, we'll be confident they form part of our best XI for the conditions," the South African added.

MOTOGP

Australian Grand Prix called off as rain spoils Phillip Island send-off



MotoGP riders take part in a farewell lap following the cancellation of the last Australian Grand Prix to be held at the iconic Phillip Island due to inclement weather conditions. *(Reuters)*

Reuters
Phillip Island, Australia

The final Australian MotoGP at the Phillip Island Grand Prix Circuit was called off yesterday due to heavy rain, ruining the farewell for one of the championship's most beloved circuits.

It was a crushing blow for the sold-out crowd at Phillip Island, with the Australian Grand Prix moving to the streets of Adelaide next year.

The Moto2 and Moto3 races were cancelled first and the MotoGP race was delayed by two hours due to the weather, before organisers threw in the towel and finally called it off at 3:40pm (0440 GMT).

"Due to limited visibility affecting the operation of the medical helicopter the MotoGP Grand Prix race has been cancelled," MotoGP said in a statement. "The MotoGP riders will do a lap behind the safety car and stop on the main straight to greet the fans. Pitlane will open for the farewell lap at 15:45 local time."

RIDER PARADE

The dark clouds and pelting rain brought down the visibility around the circuit, affecting the medical helicopter, which would take 45 minutes to reach the circuit from mainland Melbourne in an emergency.

Other than two years lost to the COVID-19 pandemic, the seaside track south of Melbourne had been a fixture on the world championship calendar for 30 years and produced some of Australian motorcycling's most memorable moments.

Australian two-times world champion Casey Stoner celebrated six wins in succession from 2007 to 2012, while compatriot Mick Doohan sealed his fifth and final world title with victory in the 1998 race.

The raincoat-clad fans who persevered through the rain were treated to a farewell lap from the MotoGP riders, who waved as they slowly made their way around a soaking wet track.

Home racer Jack Miller did his best to entertain his supporters with a series of tricks, including a stand-up wheelie over the finish line, before heading over to the grandstand and throwing his gloves and boots into the crowd.

MILLER DEJECTED, SIGH OF RELIEF FOR MARTIN

The Pramac Racing rider, a very strong performer in the wet, cut a dejected figure when he was interviewed after completing his lap.

"This is a tough pill to swallow," said the 31-year-old, who will be leaving MotoGP at the end of the season after more than a decade to join Pata Maxus Yamaha in the World Superbike Championship.

"You know, I was praying for rain all weekend. We got the rain, but obviously we weren't organised enough to get the racing going, so it's a tough one."

TENNIS

Rybakina brushes aside Fernandez to retain Ningbo crown

Kazakh building up momentum ahead of WTA Finals defence

Reuters
Ningbo

Elena Rybakina blazed past unseeded Canadian Leylah Fernandez 6-2 6-2 in the Ningbo Open final yesterday to retain her title and lift her first trophy as the world number one ahead of the WTA Finals next month.

The victory in Ningbo also helped the Kazakh to take a big step towards securing the year-end number one ranking, further burnishing a spectacular season in which she won the Australian Open title before adding the US Open crown to reach the summit.

"It's amazing to play in front of you... it's my second year here and my second win," Rybakina told the crowd in the eastern Chinese city after collecting a tour-leading fourth title of the season and 15th overall.

"It's such a special place for me. Thanks so much Ningbo."

Rybakina's latest triumph is a timely lift after setbacks in Beijing and Wuhan, as she turns her attention to the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo this week before she launches her title defence at the season finale in Indian Wells, California, from November 8.

Top seed Rybakina made the breakthrough with her trademark power in the fifth game and then unleashed a searing crosscourt backhand winner to go 4-2 up, before the 27-year-old wrapped up the opening set in 38 minutes.

World number 30 Fernandez made a bright start to the next set but Rybakina absorbed the pressure and raised her level to force an error and break for 2-1, with the three-times Grand Slam champion breezing to victory from there.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates with the trophy after winning against Canada's Leylah Fernandez in the Ningbo Open final in Ningbo, China, yesterday. *(AFP)*

Fernandez, who won the Singapore Open last month, remained upbeat despite a disappointing showing in the final and backed herself to finish the season strongly after a gruelling run of matches in Ningbo.

"I'd like to congratulate Elena for a wonderful week and a wonderful year. Congratulations to you and your team," the 24-year-old said, before addressing her own team.

"We're having a good end of year. We've just got to keep going and keep working hard."

MEDVEDEV DEFENDS ALMATY OPEN TITLE TO CLOSE IN ON ATP FINALS

Top seed Daniil Medvedev shook off a first-set stumble to beat Nikoloz Basilashvili 6-7(6) 6-1 6-3 to defend his Almaty Open title yesterday, picking up his fourth trophy on the ATP Tour this year.

The win was a boost for Medvedev's hopes of securing his place early in the ATP Finals, which he won in 2020.

Alexander Zverev, Carlos Alcaraz and Ben Shelton have already qualified for the tournament, while the injured Jannik Sinner will not feature in the eight-man season finale in Turin from November 15-22. "I always said, it's just a matter of luck, time, moment," said Medvedev after the first successful title defence of his career. "I was feeling fresh, I was feeling physically good... I'm happy to finally do it I guess," the 30-year-old added with a smile.

Former US Open champion Medvedev saved two set points to force a tiebreak in the first set, but netted two attempted winners as qualifier Basilashvili, ranked 128th in the world, clinched the set with a powerful cross-court backhand.

The world number five regained control in the second set, forcing backhand rallies and pressuring an error-prone Basilashvili into shooting wide.

Georgian Basilashvili, playing in his first final on the tour since 2022, struggled with his nerves in the third set, netting a backhand drop shot to bring up Medvedev's first match point, before shooting wide from the baseline to lose the match. Medvedev is set to play in the Vienna Open starting on Monday, and the Paris Masters from October 31, as he looks to secure his place in Turin.

FOCUS

Osaka could quit tennis if daughter asks her to

AFP
Tokyo

Former world number one Naomi Osaka cast doubt on her future yesterday saying she would consider quitting tennis if her three-year-old daughter asked her to.

The four-time Grand Slam champion from Japan took 15 months away from the sport after the birth of her daughter Shai, before returning in 2023.

She is in Tokyo to play at the Pan Pacific Open this week and said becoming a mother had reshaped her priorities. "I wouldn't say I'm part-timing it but my entire day doesn't consist of that," said the 29-year-old, now ranked 19 in the world.

"It's tough, sometimes I look towards my future and I often wonder how long I'm going to play. Because if my daughter did say she didn't want me to travel as much, I'm not the type of person to ignore that."

Osaka also stepped away from tennis in 2021 to prioritise her mental health. She said her "mindset is changing a lot" with age. "My daughter is my biggest priority," she said.

"I try my best to put as much energy as I can into tennis.

"If I think about it in certain ways, I'm really proud of where I am now because it's not like I can dedicate my entire time to the sport."

Osaka said juggling her duties as a player and a mother was something she was "figuring out little by little".

She also offered support to the American Coco Gauff, who said she had received an "insane" amount of racist abuse on the internet at this month's China Open.

World number five Gauff, who is Black, said the experience had been "kind of draining".

Osaka, whose mother is Japanese and father from Haiti, said "nobody should have to go through that".

"It's sad but I'm used to it on my end," she said.

"I feel like for me, I've dealt with that my entire career through decisions that I make that seem to make some people upset. It's tough."

Osaka said efforts made by women's tennis governing body the WTA to combat social media abuse did not "ever seem to fully work all the way".

"I know that some people are like, OK, if it bothers you that much, stay off social media," said Osaka.

"But sometimes that's the best way to connect with your fans. From my end, what I do about it is I don't really go on social media at all."

Osaka is seeded seven in Tokyo and plays Italy's Jasmine Paolini in the first round.

World number one Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan and Philippines sensation Alexandra Eala are also competing.

Osaka said she was "not far off" refinding her best form and was "optimistic for next year".



Japan's Naomi Osaka attends a press conference during the Japan Open at the Ariake Coliseum in Tokyo yesterday. *(AFP)*

WEIGHTLIFTING

Russia to host world championship in Olympic federation first in 2030

AFP
Paris

Moscow was announced yesterday as host of the 2030 world weightlifting championships, the sport's governing body becoming the first Olympic federation to hand Russia global staging rights since 2022.

No world championships in an Olympic sport, summer or winter, have been held in Russia since the start of the war against Ukraine.

The 2025 world swimming champs, intially attributed to the Russian city of Kazan, were moved to Singapore.

"Concerning the IWF (Senior) World Championships in 2029, it will be staged in Ahmedabad (India), and Moscow (Russia) will host the 2030 edition," the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) said in a statement.

IWF general secretary Jose Quinones added that "all the bids we received were excellent and we are sure that the championships in your respective countries will be a huge success".

In a post on Telegram, Russian Weightlifting Federation president Aleksandr Vinokurov thanked the IWF "for their trust", with the 2030 world champs also serving as a qualifying event for the 2032 Olympic Games.

"Russia has all the necessary experience and capabilities to host competitions of the highest level," he said. "Moscow has repeatedly staged major international sporting events and has modern infrastructure."

The federation toasted its success in snagging the hosting rights.

"The Russian Weightlifting Federation is the first Olympic sports federation to succeed in bringing a top-level official competition back to the country in many years," it said.

The decision to name Moscow as the host is a ground-breaking one and comes in the wake of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announcing a pathway for Russian athletes to compete in international competition.

A state-sponsored doping programme implemented, according to the World Anti-Doping Agency, at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, and the assault on Ukraine launched by President Vladimir Putin in 2022 resulted in Russians competing in various guises at international competition, most recently as Individual Neutral Athletes.

However, on July 7 Russia came in from the cold when the IOC eased restrictions on Russian athletes and opened a pathway for them to compete in qualifying events for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

A furious Ukraine filed an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) requesting that the IOC decision be annulled.

Musetti downs Fritz in Lyon for 'dream' first title in four years

Italy's former world number five Lorenzo Musetti lifted his first ATP title since 2022 yesterday as he beat American Taylor Fritz 6-3, 6-4 in the final of the 250 event in Lyon.

It was a third career title on the main tour for the 24-year-old, following victories four seasons ago in Hamburg and Naples, and brought an end to a seven-match losing streak in tournament showpieces.

In a dominant 81-minute performance in southeast France, Musetti secured two breaks of serve early in each set and forced his second-seeded opponent into 28 unforced errors.

The routine victory stood in juxtaposition to Musetti's grinding route to the final, in which the sixth seed had to show great physical resilience to beat France's Luca Van Assche in a three-and-a-half-hour marathon in the quarter-finals, as well as a lengthy last-four success against his compatriot Fabio Cobolli in which he saved four match points.

"The spirit of fight was the key for this tournament," Musetti said.

"I had an incredible attitude. I have to say thanks to my team... Today I felt more relaxed inside my head and my tennis was more fluid and it was a great performance.

"It is such a dream I don't want to wake up."

MOTORSPORT

Dakar Rally to be moved from Saudi

AFP
Paris

The 2027 Dakar Rally will be moved from Saudi Arabia "following recent developments in the region", organisers said yesterday, after repeated attacks on the kingdom by Yemen's Houthis.

"Dakar 2027 will go ahead. The 2027 edition will take place in a different territory" but still be organised by ASO, which runs the Dakar along with Saudi Motorsport Company (SMC), read a statement from the organisers.

A new location will be announced in the "coming days", it added.

It is the latest sporting event to be cancelled, postponed or relocated amid the fallout from the wider US-Iran war that erupted in February. Saudi Arabia and the government it backs in Yemen have come under sustained attack in recent weeks from the Houthis as a years-long truce broke down in the summer, shifting the focus of the war.

Yemen's civil war, pitting the Iran-backed Houthis against the Saudi-supported and internationally recognised government, had been dormant since a ceasefire in 2022, but reignited in July as the wider Middle East war roiled the region.

According to specialist media, the preferred option for next year's Dakar would be a start in Spain with Morocco as the destination.

It would be the first time since 2007 that the gruelling multi-stage rally, created in 1978, returns to Africa.

The race, formerly called the Paris-Dakar, used to be staged from the French capital following a route to the Senegalese capital Dakar. But security threats along its route in North Africa meant that from 2009 it was held in South America and from 2020 in Saudi Arabia.



This picture shows the sculpted logo of the 2023 Dakar Rally on the eve of the technical check-up, in the bivouac near the Red Sea town of Ynabu on December 28, 2022, ahead of the rally. *(AFP)*

Organisers said they intend to bring the rally back to Saudi Arabia in 2028 to celebrate its 50th edition. This season's Formula One grand prix in Jeddah was cancelled, while the race in Bahrain was called off and later rescheduled under the same name in Malaysia.

The final round of the World Rally Championship in Saudi Arabia next month has also been scrapped.

An exhibition tennis tournament due to feature Novak Djokovic, Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev has been postponed until late December. 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 last two races of the F1 season in Qatar (November 29) and Abu Dhabi (December 6) are still on the calendar, as is the Qatar MotoGP next month, but they are the subject of intense internal debate.

Dakar Rally organisers had hoped to keep the 2027 race in Saudi Arabia by working on a new route in the northern part of the country.

But the latest strikes, including one targeting Riyadh airport this month, which killed 13 people and injured hundreds more, have rendered that impossible.

In recent weeks, Houthi attacks on Saudi civilian infrastructure have reached a scale unprecedented since the start of the conflict in Yemen in 2014.

CYPRUS RALLY

Al-Attiyah clinches record 21st Middle East rally title



Qatar's Nasser al-Attiyah celebrates with Spanish navigator Candido Carrera yesterday after winning the Cyprus Rally, which earned him a record 21st Middle East Rally Championship title.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Nasser al-Attiyah clinched a record-extending 21st Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) title after the Qatari ace won the Cyprus Rally for the 10th time in his career, beating Simos Galatariotis by just 4.63 seconds in a thrilling finish.

The victory margin was the second-smallest in the history of the Cyprus Rally, which has been organised by the Cyprus Automobile Association since 1970. The narrowest margin was recorded in 2018, when Galatariotis beat Magalhaes by just 0.7 seconds.

Galatariotis and co-driver Antonios Ioannou, in a Skoda Fabia RS, headed into the final special stage with a 3.6-second lead after winning three consecutive stages to overturn a one-minute deficit to al-Attiyah and his Spanish navigator Candido Carrera.

Al-Attiyah had encountered problems in the first two stages of the afternoon and finished with their Skoda Fabia damaged. However, al-Attiyah mounted a dramatic fightback in the final stage, pushing hard without a spare tyre and finishing 8.7 seconds faster than his Cypriot rival to snatch victory. Galatariotis secured a place on the Cyprus Rally podium for the third time, his first since winning the event in 2018.

The 52nd Cyprus Rally was the fifth and final round of the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship.



Nasser al-Attiyah won six special stages at the Cyprus Rally.

"Winning the Middle East title for the 21st time and the Cyprus Rally for the 10th time is a source of great pride and honour," al-Attiyah said. "Winning the rally was not easy. I faced many difficulties until the final metres, but I never lost confidence in my ability to fight back and secure victory, with the help of my Spanish navigator, Candido Carrera, and all the team members."

Al-Attiyah also expressed his gratitude for the support he receives from Qatar, saying it continued to motivate him to achieve success and raise the country's flag on the international stage. He added that his victories were the result of hard work and determination, and that he hoped to bring further honours to Qatari sport in future events.

Al-Attiyah and Carrera won six special stages, while Galatariotis and Ioannou claimed four. The rally covered 657.74km, including 183.92km across 12 gravel special stages. One special stage, the first scheduled for Sunday, was cancelled after spectators failed to comply with instructions from safety marshals.

BUNDESLGIA

Bayern reclaim top spot after Kompany illness

Bayern preserve their unbeaten start with a 3-1 win at Freiburg

AFP
Berlin

Bayern Munich reclaimed top spot in the Bundesliga with a 3-1 win at Freiburg yesterday, days after coach Vincent Kompany was hospitalised when he collapsed at training.

Bayern were missing several first-team players and Kompany, but cruised to a two-goal lead at half-time with Dayot Upamecano and Serge Gnabry scoring.

Freiburg pulled one back and were pushing for a point in stoppage time when goalkeeper Mio Backhaus was caught out up the field, allowing Michael Olise to slide the ball into an empty net. Kompany remains in hospital and is being treated for a mystery virus, with Bayern saying Saturday the coach is likely to be out for "days, not weeks".

Bayern leapfrogged Borussia Dortmund to top the table ahead of the duo's clash in Munich next week. Harry Kane had a close-range effort saved late in the second half but failed to find the net a day before the Ballon d'Or ceremony in London, with the England captain one of the favourites.

Bayern arrived in the Black Forest after a tumultuous few days which left them lacking leaders. With coach Kompany still in hospital after collapsing on Friday, Englishman Aaron Danks was in the Bayern dugout.

The visitors were also without injured captain Manuel Neuer, Luis Diaz, Jamal Musiala, Aleksandar Pavlovic and Kim Min-jae, while midfielder and Germany captain Joshua Kimmich was on bereavement leave due to the sudden death of his father.

Bayern were in the unusual position of sitting back and absorbing pressure as Freiburg pushed, but took the lead after 16 minutes when Upamecano started and finished a length-of-the-field counter.

The France defender won possession near his own box, played a one-two with Olise before thundering goalwards and sending a cool shot past Backhaus.

Bayern doubled up just before the break when Gnabry latched onto a Nathaniel Brown pass and nutmegged Backhaus to score. With 10 minutes remaining, Kane stung Backhaus's palms from close range and the hosts went on an immediate counter, forcing Tom Bischof into conceding an own goal. The goal sparked Freiburg to life and Bayern 'keeper Jonas Urbig needed to make crucial saves from Igor Matanovic in the dying moments. With Freiburg and Backhaus pushing high, Olise won possession and scored to wrap up the victory.

Hoffenheim scored three goals in the final 11 minutes, including the 1,000th league goal in their history, as they snapped Bayer Leverkusen's six-game winning streak with a 3-0 home victory.

Hoffenheim, who beat Lyon by the same scoreline in the Europa League on Thursday, have now won three in a row.

Leverkusen, who had claimed 13 of a possible 15 points before Sunday's match, could have gone into third place with victory but instead sit fourth.

The best chance of the opening half fell to former Leverkusen forward Adam Hlozek when he rattled the post with 38 minutes gone. With the match looking headed for a scoreless draw, Leverkusen captain Edmond Tapsoba swept Fisnik Asllani's ankle while defending a cross, with the referee pointing to the spot after a VAR review.

Andrej Kramaric's 79th-minute penalty was the 1000th goal in the club's history and put Hoffenheim on track for victory.

With Leverkusen pushing for an equaliser, Hoffenheim broke on the counter and Alexander Prass scored, but he picked up a second yellow for removing his shirt in celebration, before leaving the pitch slapping himself on the forehead in dismay.

Max Moerstedt added a third despite the one-man disadvantage in the sixth minute of stoppage time.



Bayern Munich's Jonathan Tah and Freiburg's Lucas Hoeler (right) vie for a header during the Bundesliga match in Freiburg in Germany. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

Inter rally late to down Fiorentina and regain Serie A lead

AFP
Rome

Inter Milan struck twice in stoppage time to complete a remarkable 2-1 comeback win over Fiorentina and return to the summit of Serie A, while Juventus returned to form with a routine victory at Lecce.

Alex Jimenez's rocket strike had struggling Fiorentina heading for a shock win at San Siro, but Marcus Thuram levelled in the 91st minute before winning a penalty that Piotr Zielinski converted in the 98th minute.

The result meant the Nerazzurri returned to first place, level with surprise fellow pace-setters Lazio on 22 points, while the Florence club's winless run stretched to four games to keep them in 18th spot.

In Lecce, goals from Weston McKennie and Douglas Luiz earned Juventus a 2-0 win that lifted them into seventh on 14 points after a poor recent run of form.

Inter's fifth comeback win of the season came after they conceded for the 10th time, but head coach Cristian Chivu was unconcerned by his side's defensive issues. Chivu's side had the better of the first half but could not find a way past David de Gea, who made a fingertip stop on a Pio Esposito header before showing quick reactions to parry Thuram's angled drive.

De Gea was alert again to parry a fierce Thuram strike over the bar early in the second half, but it was the visitors who struck first against the run of play after 65 minutes.

Former AC Milan player Alex Jimenez took debutant Inter goalkeeper Ivan Provedel by surprise with an audacious angled strike from distance that flew into the top corner.

Inter piled forward in search of an equaliser, with Carlos Augusto's glancing header coming off the top of the bar and De Gea denying substitute Petar Sucic, but they could not find a way through until the game was into added time.

Thuram guided a shot into the bottom corner to level the scores before winning a penalty when he was dragged down by Victor Valdepenas in the box, which Zielinski converted to complete a pulsating victory.

Juventus claimed a much-needed win away at Lecce to relieve some pressure on head coach Luciano Spalletti and his underperforming players after a run of one win in five league games. Last weekend's humbling 3-0 defeat at home to Lazio left Juve in mid-table and a 2-2 midweek Europa League draw with Rennes did little to improve the mood in Turin.

But Juventus bounced back as McKennie steered home a Luiz free-kick after half an hour before the Brazilian midfielder scored one of his own by whipping a shot into the bottom corner before the break. Lecce responded in the second half as Youssef Maleh and substitute Paco Esteban threatened, but their evening ended on a sour note when Kialonda Gasper was sent off in the final minute.

There was an eight-goal thriller in Bergamo as Atalanta and Frosinone played out a 4-4 draw in which both sides came from behind twice, extending La Dea's winless run to three games.


Inter Milan players celebrate after midfielder Piotr Zielinski scored a penalty during the Serie A match against Fiorentina in Milan. *(AFP)*

Monaco hold Lille as Rennes cruise past Strasbourg to go top of Ligue 1

Monaco: Lille were made to pay for Tanguy Nianzou's red card as Monaco fought back to hold them to a 1-1 draw in Ligue 1, opening the door for Rennes to take the summit of the table thanks to a 3-0 win over struggling Strasbourg.

With Paris Saint-Germain and Lyon's match pushed back to today due to protests taking place across France this weekend, a winner in the principality would have gone three points clear at the top of the table. But Lille have to content themselves with second spot on goal difference in the standings ahead of Monaco as both sides moved to 15 points -- one ahead of Lyon, reigning champions PSG and Paris FC.

Rennes then took full advantage of the draw as they eased past 16th-placed Strasbourg in Brittany to climb to 16 points.

At the Stade Louis II, Ethan Mbappe's goal midway through the first period put Lille in the driving seat but a straight red for Nianzou just after the hour was swiftly punished by Edan Diop as the hosts forced a draw.

The younger brother of France and Real Madrid star Kylian showed the crisp finishing instincts associated with the Mbappe name as he darted into the box and whipped a first-time shot with his left foot past Lukas Hradecky on 24 minutes.

Monaco rarely threatened through the rest of the opening period but the match burst into life in the second half as Monaco's Paris Brunner passed up a golden opportunity in the 65th minute, before Lille defender Nianzou was given his marching orders for a reckless challenge.

The hosts then levelled in the 74th minute as Diop's cross toward Brunner evaded everyone and nestled in the far corner. First-half goals for Boulaye Dia and Sebastian Szymanski put Rennes in the driving seat against Strasbourg.

Polish midfielder Szymanski netted just after the hour to secure the points for Franck Haise's team as they moved into top spot in Ligue 1.

That situation could change today when PSG take on Lyon, although Luis Enrique's team will be without Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, captain Marquinhos and winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, who suffered an anterior cruciate ligament against Barcelona in midweek.