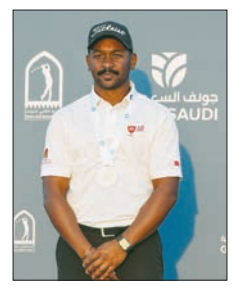
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TENNIS

Sabalenka and Andreeva make winning starts at WTA Finals

Page 3

SPOTLIGHT

QOC creates new opportunities for athletes at Youth Games

The Games will feature three sports: shooting, archery and padel, for boys and girls aged 12 to 17

By Sports Reporter
Doha



The Organising Committee members of the 2026 Youth Games pose after the press conference yesterday.

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) has announced that the 2026 Youth Games will be held from November 18 to 22 under the slogan "Towards a Sporting Generation and a Promising Future".

The event will welcome a broad range of young male and female sporting talents, highlighting the QOC's ongoing commitment to developing young athletes and investing in the next generation.

The announcement was made at a press conference held by the Organising Committee at Al Wajba Hall, at the QOC headquarters. The event was attended by Abdullah al-Athba, Head of the Support Services Committee; Abdullah al-Abdullah, Head of the Technical Committee; Abdulrahman al-Mulla, Padel Competition Manager; and Masoud al-Athba, Shooting and Archery Competition Manager.

Al-Athba, Head of the Support Services Committee, welcomed and thanked the attendees before presenting the sports program for the Games. The program includes three sports: shooting, archery and padel, targeting boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17.

He also highlighted the readiness of the competition venues, including their facilities, equipment and logistical arrangements, as well as the availability of organisational staff and volunteers to assist participants, their families and spectators at The Dome in Qatar Foundation and the Lusail Indoor Shooting Range.

Al-Abdullah, Head of the Technical Committee, outlined the technical and officiating framework for the competitions, noting that its implementation will involve close coordination with the Qatar Shooting and Archery Association and the Qatar Padel Federation.

Al-Mulla said the padel competitions aim to build on the sport's growing popularity and turn young people's enthusiasm into opportunities to identify promising players and develop future champions. He added that technical support and qualified officiating would help create the right competitive environment for young talent to flourish.

Al-Athba, meanwhile, noted that shooting and archery offer more than sporting competition, helping young people develop discipline, responsibility, concentration and precision. He said the competitions also aim to identify promising Qatari athletes who can build on the country's record of sporting achievements.

According to the latest figures from the Organising Committee, 338 young people have registered for the Games, comprising 276 boys and 62 girls.

A total of 95 participants are registered for the 10-metre recurve archery event, while 177 will compete in the 10-metre air rifle and air pistol events. Padel will feature 33 teams.

The competitions will be held daily from 4pm to 9pm, giving young athletes the opportunity to showcase their abilities and gain valuable competitive experience. The Games will reach their conclusion on November 22 with the finals in shooting, archery and padel, followed by awards for the first- and second-place finishers in both the boys' and girls' categories across all three sports.

Hind al-Ibrahim, Director of the 2026 Youth Games, said the event will help identify young athletes with strong potential and assess their readiness for further development.

Outstanding participants may be considered for specialised training and preparation programs, paving the way for them to represent Qatar in future competitions. She said this approach forms part of the QOC's commitment to building a comprehensive and sustainable pathway for nurturing sporting talent.

She added that preparations for the Doha 2030 Asian Games make the development of young athletes even more important. By equipping them with the experience and competitive skills needed to perform at the highest level, Qatar is laying the foundations for a new generation capable of strengthening the country's presence at major regional, continental and international sporting events.

Meanwhile, Najlaa al-Khayareen, Head of the Games' Marketing and Communications Committee, affirmed that the committee had adopted a promotional strategy centered on strengthening community engagement and bringing the Games closer to the public through direct interaction with different segments of society.

She explained that the campaign, which began several weeks ago, involved a range of promotional activities across the community, including an event at Gewan Island that offered visitors the opportunity to experience padel and archery first-hand.

Al-Khayareen noted that the considerable turnout and enthusiastic engagement of young people and families demonstrated the positive impact of these initiatives in raising awareness of the Games and strengthening their connection with the community.

She added that the committee had also put in place comprehensive media and digital coverage for the duration of the Games, ensuring that the public remains at the heart of the event.

Through the official social media platforms, audiences will be able to follow the latest results, key highlights, photographs and stories documenting the participants' experiences and achievements.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar, Abu Dhabi F1 GPs to go ahead: FIA chief

AFP
Paris



Formula 1 to complete its calendar of Qatar on November 29 and Abu Dhabi the weekend after.

The final races of the Formula One season in Qatar and Abu Dhabi will go ahead as planned despite tensions in the Middle East, the president of motorsports' governing body Mohammed Ben Sulayem said yesterday.

The last two Grands Prix of the year are scheduled for November 29 in Qatar and December 6 in Abu Dhabi. The Saudi Arabia Grand Prix earlier this year was scrapped following the outbreak of the United States and Israel's war with Iran, while the Bahrain race was delayed and moved to Malaysia.

"We are ready for Qatar and Abu Dhabi," FIA chief Ben Sulayem said on social media. "We are fully prepared and committed to delivering two outstanding Grands Prix weekends and a spectacular conclusion to the Formula One world championship. We look forward to welcoming drivers, teams and fans to two iconic circuits for an unforgettable finish to the season. See you on the grid."

Ben Sulayem's comments echo those made by F1 boss Stefano Domenicali last month. The teams competing in the championship have been informed of the decision, with Formula One saying all 11 were supportive. The move comes after MotoGP held its Qatar round successfully at the Lusail circuit near Doha last weekend.

One of the options discussed was moving the Emirati race to Imola in Italy if the Middle Eastern races could not go ahead, but F1 told media on Tuesday the Italian track had been told to stand down.

"We cannot let Imola wait indefinitely. Therefore we have informed them today that we will not require them at the end of the season," an F1 official source said.

Drivers have expressed mixed feelings about racing in the Middle East, with four-time world champion Max Verstappen among those to air his reservations. But F1 is confident the races can proceed as scheduled.

"Travel advice still allows travel, travel insurance is valid, events are taking place (for example MotoGP last weekend in Qatar) and business has returned to a normal level in both countries," the F1 source added.

"If the situation develops negatively in the coming weeks before the events in the Middle East we will not hesitate to do the right thing and the safety of everyone will always be the priority."

Italian youngster Kimi Antonelli has already wrapped up the drivers' world championship title, while his Mercedes team secured the constructors' crown last weekend in Sao Paulo.

The decision means the F1 calendar will be 23 rounds and that the Formula Two feeder series will be decided on the track, with Qatar and Abu Dhabi hosting the remaining races. Brazilian Rafael Camara, who made his Formula One race debut with Haas in his home race at the weekend, leads Red Bull-backed Bulgarian Nikola Tsolov by seven points.

Several events in Saudi Arabia, which borders Qatar and the UAE, have been cancelled or postponed in recent weeks following attacks on the country by Yemen's Houthis.

Formula One could still cancel the races if the situation flares up, with safety a priority. The next race is in Las Vegas on November 21.

ISSF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP DOHA

Yang sets world record to win 25m pistol gold

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Yang Jiin produced a record-breaking performance to win the women's 25m pistol title at the ISSF World Championship Doha. The South Korean set a new world record with 44 hits in the final at the Lusail Shooting Range.

Vietnam's Trinh Thu Vinh finished just one hit behind with 43 to take silver, while China's Zhang Yueyue secured bronze with 34 hits. The top three finishers secured Olympic quota places for their countries at the LA28 Games.

Yang set the pace from the opening stages and maintained her composure through the elimination rounds. With the world title within reach, she continued to produce consistently under pressure, eventually reaching 44 hits to set a new world record and claim the gold medal.

India's Manu Bhaker finished fourth with 27 hits, followed by Portugal's Joana Castelao, who placed fifth with 24 after a shoot-off. Hungary's Veronika Major was sixth with 20, Germany's Doreen Vennekamp seventh with 17, and India's Esha Singh eighth with 11.



South Korea's Yang Jiin celebrates after winning the 25m pistol title at the ISSF World Championship at the Lusail Shooting Range.

CRICKET

FIRST TEST

Hosts Pakistan gain upper hand against Sri Lanka

Pakistan declare at 434 for 9 and then grab three Sri Lanka wickets

AFP
Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Debutant pace bowler Saqib Khan grabbed two wickets as Sri Lanka struggled to 114-3 by the end of day two of the opening Test after Pakistan declared at 434-9 in Rawalpindi yesterday.

Saqib dismissed Dinesh Chandimal for one in his second over and then removed a well-set Lahiru Udara for 42 to leave Sri Lanka on 65-3.

His experienced pace partner Mohammad Abbas took the first wicket, having opener Pasindu Sooriyabandara caught behind for a duck in the third over.

Kamindu Mendis (40) and Dhananjaya de Silva (22) were unbeaten at the close, with Sri Lanka still trailing by 320 runs on the first innings.

Bad light again stopped play 25 minutes before schedule.

De Silva was dropped by spinner Arafat Minhas in the penultimate over of the day.

Saqib had the figures of 2-54, while Abbas took 1-23.

Pakistan middle-order batter Saud Shakeel earlier missed his century by seven runs, a miscued hook off Asitha Fernando giving wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis his fifth catch in the innings.

Shakeel, who became Fernando's 100th wicket in 29 Tests, hit nine boundaries in his 199-ball innings.

He lifted Pakistan from 281-5 overnight with a resolute 96-run stand with Ghazi Ghori for the sixth wicket. Ghori scored a confident 48.



Pakistan's Saqib Khan (right) celebrates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Lahiru Udara (left) during the second day of the first Test at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

Shakeel said he was disappointed at missing a fifth Test century.

"Yes, you get disappointed when you miss a milestone and it looks bad," said Shakeel. "But we have put up a good total with Arafat chipping in with a half century."

Sri Lankan fielding coach Jordan Gregory hoped his batters show grit to match Pakistan's total.

"We have to take the match session by session and hope that the Kamindu-De Silva partnership goes on and make a match of it because the pitch has enough to produce a result," said Gregory.

Debutant Minhas made a stylish 52, the fifth half-century of the innings, that included nine boundaries and a six.

Sri Lanka had hoped for early wickets but struggled on a seemingly hard and green pitch, despite taking the second new ball after 80 overs.

Dilshan Madushanka finally made the breakthrough when Ghori edged him to gully, where Sooriyabandara held a low catch.

Pace bowlers Fernando and Madushanka were the pick of the Sri Lanka attack, both taking three wickets.

The second and final Test is in Lahore from November 17.

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 114 for 3 (Udara 42, Kamindu 40*, Saqib 2-54) **trail Pakistan 434 for 9 dec** (Shakeel 93, Asitha 3-107, Madushanka 3-108) **by 320 runs**

DECISION

Scotland suspends ties with Afghanistan outside ICC events

Reuters
Glasgow



Cricket Scotland said it will not schedule matches against Afghanistan outside International Cricket Council (ICC) events, citing concerns over the treatment of women and girls under the Taliban government and broader human rights issues.

Women's sport has effectively disappeared in Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, while access to education and employment opportunities for women has been severely curtailed.

The Taliban say they respect women's rights in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic law and local customs and that internal matters should be addressed locally.

Scotland's move aligns with decisions by Cricket Australia and the England and Wales Cricket Board to suspend bilateral ties with Afghanistan, which the ICC made a Full Member in 2017.

"This policy will be kept under review annually or following any significant ICC decision or material change in circumstances," Cricket Scotland said.

It added that its decision was based on its commitment to growing women's and girls' participation in the sport, as well as the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

Reuters has contacted the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) for comment.

Scotland have not faced Afghanistan in a full international match since the 2021 Twenty20 World Cup, but the governing body said the ACB had requested training facilities in July ahead of their men's series against Ireland.

The ACB had made another request for training facilities in Scotland in September regarding the T20 Afghanistan Premier League, it added.

Cricket Scotland also said it would continue to consider its contractual obligations to players and would issue no-objection certificates (NOCs) if the ICC gives the Afghan league official approval. "If an NOC is issued, participation by that player/s must not be interpreted as an endorsement by Cricket Scotland of the current Afghan regime or its policies," the statement said.

FOCUS

New Zealand-India ODI abandoned due to rain



A "match abandoned" announcement is made on a screen after rain continues to fall during the third ODI between New Zealand and India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. *(AFP)*

Reuters
Hamilton

The third one-day international between India and New Zealand in Hamilton was abandoned due to rain yesterday, with the tourists retaining their 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

The outcome ended New Zealand's streak of 11 consecutive home ODI series victories since 2019. Rain delayed the start of the match, which was initially reduced to a 40-over contest at toss.

India captain Shubman Gill elected to bowl but play could not start and the match was eventually called off following multiple ground inspections by the umpires.

Mount Maunganui hosts the last two matches of the series on Friday and Sunday.

India won the preceding Twenty20 series 3-2.

SPOTLIGHT

'Sandpapergate' done and dusted, says Greenburg

Reuters
Melbourne

Cricket Australia (CA) boss Todd Greenberg has ruled out another investigation into the 'Sandpapergate' scandal despite Usman Khawaja and David Warner's remarks that knowledge of the 2018 ball-tampering plot was widespread throughout the team.

Greenberg told local radio station SEN yesterday that players had "very different views" to Khawaja's version of events of the 2018 tour of South Africa as described in his new autobiography, which was released yesterday.

"There are specific details in his book that contradict the versions that have been provided by others," Greenberg said.

"But we have said we're comfortable with the outcome of the investigation based on the information we've received.

"That includes what we've seen from Usman, and our position hasn't changed on that. We don't see any compelling reason to open the investigation or revisit this again, I don't think there's anything that can be gained from that."

CA imposed bans and other penalties on Warner, Steve Smith and former Test opener Cameron Bancroft four days after the incident came to light during the Cape Town test.

Khawaja, in extracts from his autobiography published in Australian media, said "open, lighthearted discussions" were held during the South Africa series about ways to scuff up the ball, including by using sandpaper. He said discussion of tampering was not confined to batters, bowlers or staff but extended throughout the team.

"It was all of us," Khawaja said in the book, according to Australian media.

Warner, who retired from international cricket more than two years ago, broke his silence about the incident on Monday to throw his support behind Khawaja.

In a video posted on social media, Warner described his former teammate's account as 100% accurate and the CA investigation as "botched" and "rushed".

Former CA CEO James Sutherland, who was in charge of the governing body during the incident, declined to comment on Tuesday.

Bancroft, who played his last international in 2019, declined to comment to Australian media on Monday.

He said in a 2021 interview with *The Guardian* that it was "self-explanatory" that teammates apart from Smith and Warner were aware of the ball-tampering plan. The four Australia bowlers who played at Cape Town in 2018 and continue to represent the nation -- Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon -- issued a joint statement in 2021 denying any knowledge of the plot.

Captain Cummins said in South Africa last month that he had spoken to Khawaja about his autobiography and was not concerned about any potential fallout.

"Answered every question a million times. So, yeah, it was dealt with then," he said.

COMMENT

Labuschagne says he will be back soon

www.icc-cricket.com
Sydney

Marnus Labuschagne remains confident about returning to Australia's Test side after being omitted from selection for the upcoming home series against New Zealand.

"I've got no doubt I will be back there. When? Who knows," Labuschagne told reporters.

"I think my path back into the Australian team will work itself out. I've done it before. It's something that I truly want."

Australia's selectors informed the 32-year-old that he would not be considered for the four-match ICC World Test Championship series beginning in December, after a prolonged lean run with the bat that continued during Australia's recent series against South Africa.

Labuschagne's latest setback comes after he managed only 131 runs at an average of 21.83 with a high score of 39 across three Tests in South Africa.

Since his last Test hundred, scored against England at Old Trafford during the 2023 Ashes, Labuschagne has accumulated 1,094 runs at an average of 24.31.

Despite those numbers, the Queensland batter believes he can rediscover the consistency that once made him one of the leading players in the format.

"(Six) scores above 30 in 11 innings is not someone who's not batting well," Labuschagne said.

"It's someone who's making mistakes when they're in, and a lot of those mistakes potentially coming from the pressure of having to keep scoring runs and being on the verge of losing my spot.

"Some of those dismissals (in South Africa) feel like they've come from a lack of clarity on potentially what the team needed and my own personal battle with scoring runs and missing out."

In 68 Tests, he has scored 4,861 runs at an average of 42.64.

Starc denies knowledge of ball-tampering plot

SYDNEY: Fast bowler Mitchell Starc denied yesterday any prior knowledge of Australia's plot to tamper with the ball during the 2018 tour of South Africa, as Cricket Australia boss Todd Greenberg ruled out another investigation into 'Sandpapergate'.

Starc is the first of Australia's bowlers to respond to Usman Khawaja's assertions in his autobiography and on social media that the whole team knew of a plan to manipulate the ball in order to get it to reverse swing.

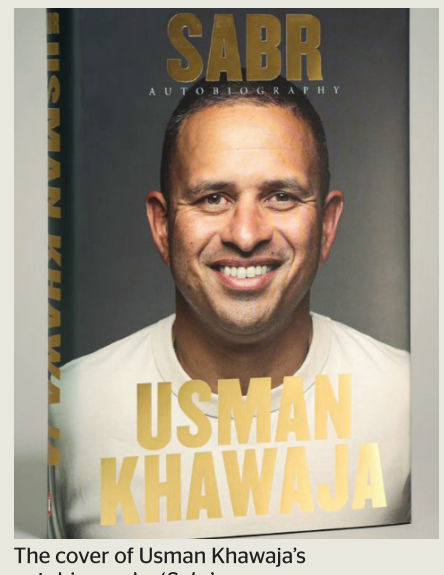
Starc reiterated the bowlers' positionfrom a 2021 statement that they did not know a "foreign substance" had been taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball.

"I haven't really paid much attention to be fair, obviously there's differing opinions of eight years ago," Starc told reporters in Sydney yesterday.

"We were heavily drilled through the process at the time, and since and I guess I won't speak on behalf of the bowlers, but where I stand, my opinion hasn't changed. My recollection hasn't changed from what we said in 2021."

The scandal triggered an integrity probe by Cricket Australia (CA) and led to bans and other penalties for then-captain Steve Smith and former test openers David Warner and Cameron Bancroft four days after the incident came to light during the Cape Town Test.

Khawaja said the team began tampering with the ball at the second Test against South Africa in Gqeberha, not in the third at Cape Town where they were caught.



The cover of Usman Khawaja's autobiography '*Sabr*'.

Starc said Khawaja's account was the first time he was aware of ball-tampering taking place in Gqeberha.

"I'll leave said authors to explain," he said.

Warner, who retired from international cricket more than two years ago, broke his silence about the scandal on Monday to throw his support behind Khawaja.

In a video posted on social media, Warner described his former teammate's account as 100% accurate and the CA investigation as "botched" and "rushed".

Media pundits, including former captain Michael Clarke, have demanded CA re-investigate the case.

However, Greenberg told local radio station SEN yesterday there was "no compelling reason" to reopen the investigation and could not see anything to be gained from it.

Former Cricket Australia CEO James Sutherland, who was in charge of the governing body during the incident, declined to comment yesterday.

Bancroft, who played his last international in 2019, declined to comment to Australian media on Monday.

Captain Pat Cummins said in South Africa last month that he had spoken to Khawaja before the release of the autobiography and was not concerned about any potential fallout.

"Answered every question a million times. So, yeah, it was dealt with then," he said.

Some commentators have questioned why Khawaja waited eight years to speak out and accused him of trying to boost sales of his book "*Sabr*". Khawaja responded on social media on Tuesday, saying he had no commercial motives. "I'm very fortunate, I don't need the money," he said.

TENNIS

Sabalenka and Andreeva make winning starts

'SHE'S SUCH AN INCREDIBLE PLAYER. ALWAYS TOUGH BATTLES'

Reuters
Indian Wells

World number two Aryna Sabalenka got her WTA Finals campaign off to a winning start with a hard-fought victory over Karolina Muchova, while Mirra Andreeva eased past Elina Svitolina as Group 2 action got underway on Monday.

Making her sixth consecutive appearance at the season-ending tournament, Sabalenka had to work hard to overcome a determined Muchova 7-6(2) 7-5, with the Czech making her debut at the event after a breakthrough season that included titles in Doha and Bad Homburg and a run to the Wimbledon final.

The Belarusian, who is seeking her first WTA Finals crown, had to dig deep in the opening set, breaking back when Muchova served for it at 5-4 before dominating the ensuing tiebreak to take the lead after almost an hour.

Sabalenka appeared to have gained control in the second set with a 4-2 lead, but the Czech refused to go away, breaking back when her opponent was serving for the match to level at 5-5.

Muchova's resistance proved short-lived, however, as Sabalenka broke again before finally serving out the contest.

"She's such an incredible player. Always tough battles. I was just trying to stay calm and focus point by point. She can come back any time. You have to be focused from beginning till the end," Sabalenka said on court.

"I'm super happy with the level I played. To get the first win, it's really important. Great start."

In a meeting between youth and experience, French Open champion Andreeva made an impressive debut by dispatching the 2018 WTA Finals champion Svitolina 6-4 6-0.

The Russian needed just one break of serve to take the opening set before raising her level considerably in the second, where she swept through all six games to complete a commanding victory.

Svitolina, who beat Andreeva at the Australian Open, struggled to find answers this time around, failing to convert any of the six break points she earned.

"I was trying to think about was that she beat me in Australia earlier this year. I really tried not to think about the match we had last year on these courts," Andreeva said of her 2025 Indian Wells win over Svitolina.

"I remember how I was playing when I beat her here, but I knew it would be a tricky match. She's an amazing player. I'm just very happy I was able to get through the match."



Aryna Sabalenka in action against Karolina Muchova of Czechia during their WTA Finals match at Indian Wells Tennis Garden. *(AFP)*


Mirra Andreeva reacts during her WTA Finals match against Elina Svitolina of Ukraine at Indian Wells Tennis Garden. *(AFP)*

REACTION

PTPA presses player fatigue concerns after Rybakina's WTA Finals withdrawal

Reuters
Indian Wells

The Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA) reiterated its criticism of the tennis schedule yesterday, saying world number one Elena Rybakina withdrew from the season-ending WTA Finals as "her body had nothing left to give".

Defending champion Rybakina said on Saturday she was not physically ready to compete at the tournament, with organizers citing a viral illness for the Kazakh's withdrawal. Rybakina, who won two Grand Slam titles this year, also withdrew from the Tokyo quarter-finals last month because of a neck injury.

"She finishes 2026 with two Grand Slam titles and four titles overall. And still, by the season's final event in November, her body had nothing left to give," the PTPA said in a post on social media. "Players shouldn't reach the biggest event of the year running on empty. The PTPA continues to push for a season that leaves players healthy enough to finish it."

The WTA Tour did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The elite women's tour has previously said athlete welfare is a top priority and that it has listened to players' views on the calendar.

Concerns over player workload are echoed on the men's ATP Tour, with American Taylor Fritz saying on Sunday that the sport's brief off-season left players with little opportunity to recover.

"It's just so year-round, round-the-clock," he said on "*The Running Interview Show*". "We have a one-month off-season and, if you take that off-season off, you'd be showing up without practice at the beginning of the year.

"So, essentially, you can only really take, max, two weeks off, and then you have to be training. So we essentially get no time off ever. You are literally living out of a suitcase."

The ATP has said players retain choices over their schedules and that it is working to create incentives for an appropriate number of matches to be played during the season.


Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina takes photographs with fans as she signs autographs after retiring due to an injury from her quarter-final against Canada's Leylah Fernandez during the WTA Pan Pacific Open at Ariake Coliseum in Tokyo on October 30, 2026. *(AFP)*

LENS SACK COACH CAHUZAC

Lens have sacked coach Yannick Cahuzac less than a week after their 9-1 Champions League defeat at home to Como, a source close to the French club told AFP yesterday, confirming a report from sports daily *L'Equipe*.

Cahuzac, who was appointed by Lens less than two months ago, lost his job after the French Cup winners' humiliating loss to Como last Wednesday, as well as a subsequent 2-1 reversal at their Stade Bollaert-Delelis home against Marseille on Sunday in Ligue 1.

"We feel like we're in a bad way. We feel that Wednesday's result has left its mark," Cahuzac admitted after the match against Marseille. "We've managed to pick ourselves up. But we've got quite a few gaps in the team, and we feel we've lost our confidence."

The former Lens captain took over from Dino Toppmoeller in mid-September following the German coach's surprise departure after just four Ligue 1 matchdays. In nine matches in charge of Lens, Cahuzac has secured just three wins and suffered six defeats across all competitions as Lens lounge in 11th place domestically.

SPOTLIGHT

Carlsen leads star-studded field at Total Chess World Championship

Agencies
Budapest

Magnus Carlsen and some of the biggest names in world chess have arrived in Budapest for the Total Chess World Championship Tour Pilot, a new tournament aimed at testing an innovative format and exploring a fresh direction for professional chess.

Carlsen, the world No. 1 for 15 consecutive years, is the headline attraction in a 24-player field featuring elite Grandmasters, former world championship challengers and leading players from the next generation.

The tournament carries a $650,000 prize fund and will determine the inaugural champion of a competition that combines three major forms of chess: fast classical, rapid and blitz.

The field includes Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Anish Giri, Alireza Firouzja, Jan-Krzysztof Duda, Liem Le, Richard Rapport, Levon Aronian, Hans Moke Niemann, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Ian Nepomniachtchi and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave.

Other participants include Jorden van Foreest, Haik M Martirosyan, Vladislav Artemiev, Abhimanyu Mishra, Andrew Hong, as well as leading women players Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan and India's Vaishali Rameshbabu. The event is designed to identify the most complete player by testing competitors across different time controls rather than relying solely on traditional classical chess.


Magin Carlsen, the world No. 1 for 15 consecutive years, is the headline attraction in a 24-player field featuring elite Grandmasters.

The 24 players will begin in four groups of six, with each group playing a double round-robin over five days. Every player will contest 10 fast classical games, with 45 minutes on the clock plus a 30-second increment. A win is worth three points and a draw one.

A nine-round blitz Swiss tournament before the group stage will determine the players' tie-break rankings.

The leading players will then advance to knockout brackets based on their group positions. Each knockout tie will be played over two days and feature four Blitz games at 3+2, two Rapid games at 15+10 and one Fast Classical game at 45+30.

The scoring system gives greater weight to longer formats, placing a premium on consistency and versatility. If a knockout match remains level, an Armageddon game will decide the winner.

The four highest-ranked players across the Tour will qualify for the Grand Final, where the semi-finals and championship match will determine the inaugural FIDE World Combined Champion.

Organisers say the pilot is intended not only to crown a champion but also to test how elite chess can be presented to a wider audience. The event will feature enhanced broadcast production, expert commentary, live insights and post-match studio analysis designed to give viewers a closer look at the players, their strategies and the drama of each contest.

The tournament will be distributed through international broadcast and digital partners in more than 200 countries and territories.

Fans will also be able to follow the competition through Chess.com, ChessBase India, Norway's TV 2 and the Norway Chess YouTube channel.

With Carlsen leading a field packed with established stars and emerging talent, the Budapest event will provide an early test of whether the combined format can add a new dimension to top-level chess.

FOCUS

McIlroy says DeChambeau would bring 'eyeballs' to European Tour

AFP
Dubai

Rory McIlroy says Bryson DeChambeau would bring "eyeballs" to the European Tour if he decides to accept membership on the circuit following the collapse of LIV Golf.

The breakaway league said last week it was shutting down operations after lead investors BC Partners pulled out because a majority of players had not signed up for LIV Golf 2.0. Several LIV stars, including Jon Rahm and Tyrrell Hatton, have already confirmed that they will play on the European Tour next year. DeChambeau has not committed to anything and is one of the players seeking to bring BC Partners back to the negotiation table. Two-time major champion DeChambeau will be able to secure a card on the European Tour thanks to his 2024 US Open triumph, but 2027 is the last year before that privilege runs out.

"I think a name like Bryson DeChambeau, and everything he brings with him, good and bad, he brings eyeballs, which is a good thing for tournaments," said McIlroy yesterday ahead of this week's Tour Championship in Dubai.

"I'm certainly not in his shoes, and nor would I ever want to be, but it doesn't seem like he's got many options. If he wants to play competitive golf, it doesn't seem like he's got many options."

The reigning Masters champion is hoping his envious record at the Earth course will help him win an unprecedented fourth European Tour Championship title and also match Colin Montgomerie's record of eight Order of Merit crowns on the circuit.

McIlroy arrives at the season-ending event ranked second behind Eugenio Chacarra in the Race to Dubai. He trails the Spaniard by 533.93 points, but there are 2,000 points available for the champion and a win would guarantee him the season-long title. McIlroy also has seven top-five finishes in 15 starts in the event. In the 60 rounds he has played on the course, a staggering 53 of them have been under-par. His worst finish is a tie for 22nd in 2023. McIlroy felt his experience would give him an edge over Chacarra and the rest of the chasing pack. The top nine players in the field of 50 have a mathematical chance of winning the Race to Dubai.



"It's been a course that's been very good to me over the years, and I have a lot of experience on it, a lot of experience up at the top end of the leaderboard," said McIlroy, who finished third in Abu Dhabi last week. "The course has changed and evolved a little bit over the years...

"But when you come back to a golf course that you've played a lot on, and you've done well on, that always gives you a little bit of an advantage starting the week.

"I'm very excited to be back here, and very excited to be in contention for the eighth. I made some ground up last week, maybe not as much as I wanted, but I felt like it was a step in the right direction."

Among those chasing Chacarra and McIlroy is Rahm, winner last week in Abu Dhabi, a result that helped him jump to sixth place in the season standings.

Rahm has played only five Tour Championships, but he has won three of them and has never finished outside the top five.

ARAB GOLF CHAMPIONSHIPS

El Halli leads Morocco to gold, Qatar's al-Kaabi grabs silver

Individual champ El Halli cards 10-under to lead Morocco to team gold while al-Kaabi helps hosts to bronze





Winners of the 45th Arab Men's Golf Championship celebrate with Qatar Golf Association and Arab Golf Federation officials at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Morocco's Reda El Halli was the standout performer at the 45th Arab Men's Golf Championship, while Qatar's Saleh al-Kaabi delighted the home crowd by winning the individual silver medal after four days of competition at Doha Golf Club yesterday.

El Halli, who led from the opening round, maintained his advantage to finish on an impressive 10-under 278 and claim the individual gold medal. Al-Kaabi produced a determined performance to finish runner-up on 4-unde 284, earning a silver medal for the host nation. The UAE's Sam Mulani completed the individual podium with a 3-under 285 for bronze.

The UAE's Jonathan Silvraj finished fourth on 1-under, while Morocco's Hugo Troumter was fifth on 288.

Qatar's Daniel Sokolov finished sixth on 4-over, with Bahrain's Khalifa al-Marisi and Morocco's Mohamed Bouhamou sharing seventh place. The UAE's Mohamed Skik and Tunisia's Bahaa Boulkmine completed the top 10.

Morocco also secured the men's team gold, finishing on a combined total 1-under of 863. The UAE took team silver with a total of 869, while Qatar claimed bronze on 885. Bahrain and Tunisia finished fourth and fifth, respectively. For the hosts, al-Kaabi's individual silver and Qatar's team bronze provided a rewarding finish to a challenging championship.

Fahad Nasser al-Nuaimi, secretary general of the Qatar Golf Association (QGA), expressed his satisfaction with the team's performance, describing the results as positive in light of the quality and depth of competition.

He particularly highlighted the significance of Qatar's third-place finish in the team event, alongside al-Kaabi's runner-up position in the individual standings.

Al-Nuaimi said the championship had featured a high technical standard, with talented players and experienced competitors from across the Arab world raising the level of competition throughout the four days.

He also pointed to the weather conditions, particularly during the final two rounds, as a factor that tested the players and influenced the performances of some participants. Beyond the sporting results, al-Nuaimi praised the work of the organising committee, saying the positive feedback received from participating delegations and guests was a source of pride for Qatar.

He stressed that the successful delivery of the championships reflected the QGA's commitment to staging major sporting events to the highest standards and further strengthening Qatar's reputation as a host of international and continental competitions.



Qatar's Saleh al-Kaabi celebrates with his silver medal yesterday.

Al-Kaabi, meanwhile, was pleased with his silver medal, although he admitted that his ambitions had been set even higher. "Naturally, I was aiming for first place and the Arab title, but I am grateful for the outcome. I am pleased with the level of play I displayed and the result I reached by the end of the tournament, which featured intense competition among the participating national teams, particularly those from Morocco and the UAE, reflecting the strength of the championship and the high technical caliber of the competitors," al-Kaabi said.

He said: "Finishing in second place serves as a great motivation for me to continue working hard and developing. We look forward to performing even better in upcoming tournaments; we are currently preparing for the Bahrain Open Golf Championship, scheduled for the end of this month, as well as the GCC Championship, which will take place in Oman this December. Our goal is to compete strongly for the title and achieve results that make Qatar proud."

AGF HAILS ORGANISATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SUCCESS

Adel al-Fayyad, second vice president of the Arab Golf Federation (AGF), also praised the championship, describing it as a success on both the organisational and technical fronts.

Al-Fayyad commended the standard of golf displayed by the participants and the competitive spirit maintained throughout the four days, while recognising the efforts of the QGA and the organising committee in providing the necessary conditions for a successful event. Al-Fayyad also highlighted the importance of the meetings held alongside the championship, with the AGF's Executive Committee and General Assembly discussing a number of strategic issues concerning the future development of the sport.

Among the key decisions was the approval of a revised competition format for future championships. Under the new structure, juniors, youth and girls will be grouped into one category, while veterans and men will form another, offering greater flexibility in organising regional competitions.

In another significant development, the AGF signed a twinning agreement with the African Golf Federation aimed at strengthening cooperation, facilitating the exchange of expertise and supporting the development of golf across both regions.

The meetings also addressed the federation's general budget and its future development programmes.

The closing ceremony brought the four days of competition to an end, with the medals and trophies presented by Hamad Abdullah al-Mana, president of the QGA and chairman of the championship's supreme committee, alongside Mustafa al-Zain, first vice president of the AGF; Adel al-Fayyad, second vice president; and Ali Reza, secretary general of the AGF.

FOOTBALL

Man Utd dysfunction leaves Carrick waiting to learn his fate

AFP
London



Michael Carrick drove away from Manchester United's training ground yesterday with his future hanging in the balance after the latest contentious move by the troubled club's chaotic hierarchy.

Carrick had awoken to reports that he would be sacked after a torrid start to the season left United languishing in the Premier League relegation zone. It would be hard for even Carrick's most ardent fan to complain if the axe fell following United's worst opening to a campaign for 40 years.

But, in keeping with the muddled thinking that seems to afflict United's leadership whenever they are faced with a major decision, Carrick got back in his car after yesterda's training session still none the wiser about his fate.

Rather than put Carrick out of his misery - or hand him an unexpected reprieve - the 45-year-old United boss was left to twist in the wind. His future will be decided by influential shareholder Jim Ratcliffe, chief executive Omar Berrada and director of football Jason Wilcox at a meeting in Monaco today. Although it is said that no final call has been made, Berrada and Wilcox are reportedly leaning towards dismissing Carrick.

Ratcliffe and United owners the Glazer family would likely accept that recommendation, plunging the club into yet another managerial crisis.

Weary of their team's steep decline since their last English title in 2013, United fans could be forgiven for feeling a sense of deja vu.

Just two years ago, Erik ten Hag led United out at Wembley for the 2024 FA Cup final against Manchester City amid intense speculation that he would be sacked regardless of the result.

But United's shock win forced Ratcliffe to spend weeks debating Ten Hag's future, including a close-season meeting with Thomas Tuchel in Monaco that ended with the German rejecting the job.

Ten Hag was eventually handed a one-year contract extension prior to the 2024-25 season. Yet when results dipped at the start of that campaign, he was sacked just three months after being given the new deal.

"They promised me loyalty, they promised me backing, they promised communication. The promises, they didn't keep," Ten Hag fumed.

It was a damning indictment of Ratcliffe and his coterie of advisors, including then sporting director Dan Ashworth. Ashworth's brief role at United underlined the dysfunction gripping the corridors of power at Old Trafford.

Lured from Newcastle, Ashworth lasted just five months before leaving by mutual consent in 2024, reportedly because he disagreed with the decision to hire Ruben Amorim as Ten Hag's replacement. Perhaps they should have listened because Amorim's miserable 14-month reign ended acrimoniously in January this year after he warned his bosses to stop interfering.

Carrick stepped into the breach as interim boss and his humble demeanour initially served as a welcome tonic to Amorim's scorched earth approach. United qualified for the Champions League, earning Carrick a permanent contract.

Tickets on sale for 2027 Qatar MotoGP and WEC Qatar 1812 KM

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has launched ticket sales for the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2027 and the Qatar 1812 KM - FIA World Endurance Championship 2027.
Scheduled just two weeks apart in March 2027, the two events give motorsport fans the chance to experience two world class racing championships in Qatar within the same month at the same venue.
The MotoGP Grand Prix of Qatar will take place from March 12 to 14, 2027 as round 2 of the season, followed by the Qatar 1812 KM, the season opener of the 2027 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) from March 25 to 27, 2027.
The MotoGP Grand Prix of Qatar returns for 2027 as the first full season of the new 850cc bikes gets underway, with 22 riders on the grid. Constructed in 2004, LIC made its debut the same year by hosting the first Qatar GP, marking the country's entry into the MotoGP.
To this day, LIC remains the only circuit on the calendar to host night races. Tickets for the three-day event are priced at QR200 and include free seating in the main grandstand as well as the Lusail Hill general admission zone at Turn 1. They also give access to the fan zone with entertainment and activities for all ages, MotoGP merchandise and other retail outlets.
The road to the 2027 FIA World Endurance Championship begins in Qatar, with LIC hosting the prologue on March 21 to 22, followed by the Qatar 1812 KM the following week which will bring together the world's leading manufacturers and elite drivers for the season opener.
Fans can watch the battle unfold across the Hypercar and LMGT3 categories, with up to 10 hours of racing under the lights, complemented by a line-up of off track entertainment. For just QA50, a three day ticket gives fans two prime viewing areas, the main grandstand and the elevated Lusail Hill at Turn 1, along with entry to the entertainment filled fan zone with access to official merchandise outlets
Tickets for both events include free parking coupled with taxi pick up and drop off zones.
Fans purchasing a full-price adult ticket can book up to six complimentary child tickets for children under the age of 12 per adult ticket, provided their tickets are registered during the purchase process, while children aged two and under enter free without a ticket.
Wheelchair ticket holders can request one free companion ticket by contacting tickets@lcsc.qa.
Tickets for both championships are available now through the official LIC ticketing platform at tickets.lcsc.qa. For corporate and group requests, please contact corporatesales@lcsc.qa .
For more information and to stay updated with the latest news, follow LIC on social media and visit the official website: https://www.lcsc.qa/



The MotoGP Grand Prix of Qatar will take place from March 12 to 14, 2027 at Lusail International Circuit.

SPOTLIGHT

Mbappe in good frame of mind, says Konate

AFP
Paris

France defender Ibrahima Konate said that Kylian Mbappe was in a good place as he returns to national team action despite missing out on the Ballon d'Or and the controversy in China sparked by his comments about Mao Zedong.

Mbappe, who missed Les Bleus' last three matches through injury, has returned to coach Zinedine Zidane's squad ahead of their Nations League matches with Italy and Turkey this week. "He's in a very good frame of mind; you can see that from his recent matches - he's been decisive. He's absolutely vital for us in Madrid," Konate, who also plays with Mbappe at Real Madrid, said.

Mbappe narrowly lost out on the Ballon d'Or to England and Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane in late October and then had to apologise after a social media storm following a video in which he joked about former Chinese leader Mao. In a clip from an interview with French show "The Bridge", which has since been taken down, Mbappe had said he was amused by an internet meme showing his face photoshopped onto "some guy, think he's a Chinese dictator", an apparent reference to Mao. Major Chinese brands subsequently cut ties with the 27-year-old, and Spanish La Liga matches have been pulled from state television broadcaster CCTV. Konate added that the 2018 World Cup winner had also put any Ballon d'Or disappointment firmly behind him.

Recovering Kompany returns to training centre

Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany has returned to the club's training centre as he continues his recovery from meningeal irritation, the Bundesliga champions said yesterday. The Belgian was rushed to hospital after collapsing on the training pitch in Munich last month, before being diagnosed with the illness.
"Vincent Kompany is on the road to recovery and has been back at the training ground at Sabener Strasse since the start of the week," Bayern said in a brief statement. "Kompany was under medical care recently, with assistant coach Aaron Danks filling in."
The club also said Kompany was receiving treatment for a shoulder injury at the training centre. Bayern said after his collapse that the 40-year-old would return to take back head coaching duties from Danks in a "matter of weeks, not days". The Bavarians' next match is not until November 20, against Cologne, due to the international break. Kompany was visibly sick and walked with a limp during Bayern's 6-1 home win over RB Leipzig in mid-October. He was in doubt for their home Champions League clash with Arsenal four days later, but took to the dugout for the 2-2 draw, two days before his training-pitch collapse.