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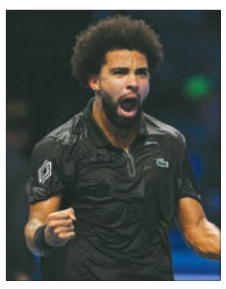

TENNIS | Page 3

Frenchman Fils edges injury-hit Jodar at ATP Finals in Turin



FOOTBALL | Page 4

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CRICKET

Sri Lanka bundled out for 98 as fast bowlers put Pakistan in charge

Page 2

FOOTBALL

Qatar beaten by South Korea after another subdued display

Se-hun's 43rd-minute header settled a match dominated by the visitors as Qatar players failed to fire

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

Qatar suffered another disappointing defeat yesterday, going down 1-0 to South Korea in an international friendly at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium.

Oh Se-hun's 43rd-minute header settled a match dominated by the visitors, with Qatar goalkeeper Salah Zakaria producing a series of outstanding saves to prevent South Korea from winning by a much wider margin.

For Julen Lopetegui's side, it was another sobering night following Friday's 3-0 defeat by Australia. Qatar had hoped to respond strongly against another of Asia's leading teams, but once again struggled to match their opponents for intensity, quality and attacking threat.

South Korea controlled the game from the outset, with Qatar failing to register a single attempt in the first half. The visitors finished with 22 shots to Qatar's two, and only Zakaria's impressive performance kept the scoreline respectable.

Zakaria, who replaced Mahmoud Abunada in goal, was called into action as early as the sixth minute when Song Min-kyu struck the post after getting past Bassam al-Rawi and creating space inside the box.

The Qatar goalkeeper then denied Lee Kang-in from a free-kick in the 16th minute before producing another fine save three minutes later to keep out Son Heung-min's close-range effort.

South Korea continued to apply pressure, with Zakaria again coming to Qatar's rescue in the 35th minute when he punched away Oh's header.

But the pressure finally told two minutes before half-time. Song raced into the box from the left and delivered a cross towards the centre, where Oh rose above the Qatar defence and headed into the top-left corner beyond Zakaria.

The goal was a fair reflection of South Korea's dominance and left Qatar facing another uphill task after the break. Lopetegui made nine substitutions in the second half and Qatar showed some improvement, but they still struggled to build sustained pressure or seriously threaten the visitors' defence.

South Korea continued to create the better chances, with Lee hitting the side netting in the 58th minute after being played through by Son.

Qatar were spared again in the 65th minute when Choi Jun's effort appeared destined for the net, only for Boualem Khoukhi to block the shot just in front of the goal line.

Zakaria remained Qatar's standout performer. He saved another effort from Oh in the 68th minute and, two minutes later, made another brave intervention to deny the South Korean striker.

At the other end, Qatar struggled to produce anything of similar quality. Their attack, which had also been largely subdued against Australia, once again failed to seriously trouble South Korea. South Korea goalkeeper Song Bum-keun enjoyed a remarkably quiet evening as Qatar failed to register a shot on target.

The defeat leaves Qatar ending the year on another disappointing note after successive losses to Australia and South Korea. It could also prove to be Lopetegui's final match in charge of Al Annabi. The former Real Madrid and Spain coach is reportedly set to leave when his contract expires in April, with no talks currently under way between him and the Qatar Football Association over a new deal.

Meanwhile, South Korea interim coach Robert Moreno said he would be ready to help the team improve if given the opportunity to continue in the role. The Korea Football Association appointed Moreno on a caretaker basis in early September, two months after Hong Myung-bo resigned following South Korea's group-stage elimination from the FIFA World Cup.

Moreno's six-match spell has produced three wins, one draw and two losses, with his contract due to expire on November 27. "Obviously, I believe I can help the team and make it better in many areas," Moreno said at his post-match press conference.

"Considering the time constraints in these FIFA international match windows, I think we will need more stability and need help in formulating long-term plans. And in order to study Korean players and identify the ones that can help the national team, I think it is important to have enough time to do so. Building trust is also crucial."



Qatar's Yusuf Abdurisag (left) battles for the ball with South Korea's Song Min-Kyu during the international friendly at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.



Oh Se-hun of South Korea (left) celebrates after scoring against Qatar.



Qatar goalkeeper Salah Zakaria produced a series of outstanding saves to prevent South Korea from winning by a much wider margin.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar welcomes Asia's rising stars for cricket extravaganza

By Sports Reporter
Doha

With the DP World Asia Cup Rising Stars kicking off in Doha tomorrow organisers Qatar Cricket Association (QCA) are hoping to top last year's huge turnout and social media buzz.

Mohammed al-Meer, the Tournament Director, said yesterday that the QCA was hugely successful in drawing fans to the West End Cricket Stadium where Pakistan Shaheens beat Bangladesh A to win the title last November in the T20 over contest.

For the current edition, which will be a 50-over tournament, a powerful India A side will be captained by Tilak Varma.

Defending champions Pakistan Shaheens, who will have Abdul Samad as their captain, are in Group A along with the UAE, Nepal and India A.

In Group B, Sri Lanka A will be joined by Bangladesh A, Afghanistan A and Hong Kong.

"Last year was a great success. More than 37,000 spectators attended the matches at the stadium," al-Ameer said before a trophy unveiling ceremony yesterday.

"We were told that almost 30mn television viewers followed the tournament we hosted last year. We also saw more than 660mn social media engagements during last year's event. We want to thank the fans who came to the stadium," al-Meer added.

"On behalf of the Qatar Cricket Association, I welcome all teams, players, officials and commercial partners to this edition of the DP World Asia Cup Rising Stars. We are proud to host this tournament for the second consecutive year," he said.

"This year's tournament will run from Nov 19 to 29. The matches will be played at two venues: the West End Cricket Stadium and the University of Doha for Science and Technology stadium. It is a great opportunity for Asia's promising cricketers to show what they can do at this level," al-Meer said. "Finally, I would like to thank the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) for backing this tournament and all the people working behind the scenes," he concluded.

Usman Bajwa, Director of Events at ACC, said: "On behalf of the ACC, I would like to thank the Qatar Cricket Association for its efforts to stage a great tournament last year. The players are the main attraction of this tournament. I would urge the players to show respect to their opponents."

Khalid al-Suwaidi, the Chief Executive Officer of QCA, said: "We are thrilled to have the Asian teams in Doha. We are here to announce the start of the DP World Asia Cup Rising Stars. We are pleased with the trust the ACC has placed in us. Welcome to all the players and officials. We saw some exciting cricket last year. I am sure it will be the same this year as well."



Tournament Director Mohammed al-Meer, Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Cricket Association Khalid al-Suwaidi and Director of Events at Asian Cricket Council Usman Bajwa at a press conference in Doha yesterday.



India A captain Tilak Varma (right) speaks to UAE skipper Basil Hameed during trophy unveiling ceremony for the Asia Cup Rising Stars 50-over tournament.



Pakistan players train at the West End Cricket Stadium yesterday.

CRICKET

PREVIEW

‘Good headache’ for Gill in Wellington Test

Reuters
Wellington

India will field four frontline pacers in the opening test against New Zealand this week, but with a surfeit of fast bowling options at his disposal captain Shubman Gill is having a hard time deciding who to leave out.

Jasprit Bumrah returns to lead the pace attack, and Mohammed Siraj is likely to keep his place for the tourists, who won the preceding Twenty20 and one-day international series.

Prasidh Krishna and Gurnoor Brar are also in contention but Akash Deep and Anshul Kamboj could have the edge as they can contribute with the bat lower down the order.

“Honestly, it’s a bit of a headache but good kind of headache to have,” Gill told reporters yesterday.

“We definitely want four fast-bowling options, but we are still deciding which are those fast bowlers, and we want to cover all the aspects.

“We have seen at times on day three, four and five, the wicket, especially with the old ball, does go a little bit flat.

“So from our fast-bowling unit, we would want someone who has pace, someone who can hit the areas consistently, and then obviously going in with one spinner to control from one end, because it won’t be easy to bowl against the wind if the wind is strong.”

Rishabh Pant will return from a side strain to take his place behind the stumps for the opener in the two-Test series beginning in Wellington tomorrow.

Gill said he is not worried about the wicketkeeper’s lack of recent game time.

“He scored hundreds all over the world. As a wicketkeeper, he scored hundred in Australia, South Africa, and England,” he added.

“This is probably the only country where he hasn’t. So I think he’ll also be looking forward to that.”

Brar handed demerit point for aggressive conduct

India fast bowler Gurnoor Brar has been reprimanded and handed one demerit point for his aggressive celebration following the dismissal of New Zealand batter Tim Seifert during the fourth ODI in Mount Maunganui on Friday. It was Brar’s second offence in a 24-month period, taking his tally to two demerit points.

The ICC found Brar to have breached Article 2.5 of its Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to “using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon his/her dismissal.”

The incident took place at the end of the 12th over of New Zealand’s innings, when Brar dismissed Seifert. He admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by match referee Ranjan Madugalle.

Under the ICC’s disciplinary regulations, Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand and a maximum fine of 50% of a player’s match fee, along with one or two demerit points.

Demerit points remain on a player’s disciplinary record for 24 months from the date they are imposed. If a player accumulates four or more points during that period, they are converted into suspension points, with two suspension points resulting in a ban from one Test or two ODIs or two T20Is, whichever comes first.



Indian captain Shubman Gill bats in the net in Wellington yesterday. India take on New Zealand in the first of two Tests from tomorrow.

SECOND TEST

Pakistan pacers shine as Sri Lanka bowled out for 98

ABBAS, RAZAULLAH AND JAMAL TAKE THREE WICKETS EACH

AFP
Rawalpindi



Pakistan’s players celebrate the dismissal of Sri Lanka’s Dinesh Chandimal during the first day of the second Test at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

Pakistan’s pace trio of Mohammad Abbas, Razaullah and Aamer Jamal bundled Sri Lanka out for 98 before the home team reached 121-3 on the opening day of the second Test yesterday.

Abbas (3-14), Razaullah (3-21) and Jamal (3-24) excelled to dismiss Sri Lanka in 35.3 overs, justifying the decision to bowl first on a green-tinged pitch.

The hosts led by 23 runs when bad light stopped play, with Azan Awais on 47 and nightwatchman Saqib Khan on two.

Tayyab Arif, who made 46, and Awais put on a solid 80-run opening stand before Sri Lanka fought back in the last session.

Mohammad Taha fell to spinner Prabath Jayasuriya for eight and skipper Babar Azam was bowled while leaving a Lahiru Kumara delivery, also on eight.

Before that it was a sorry tale of Sri Lankan batting in which only skipper Kusal Mendis (32) and Sonal Dinusha (21) scored double figures.

They added 49 for the sixth wicket after Sri Lanka were tottering at 36-5.

Kusal hit five fours before falling to a miscued hook off Jamal on the stroke of lunch while Dinusha fell to the same bowler in the same fashion.

Sri Lanka bowling coach Ryan van Niekerk said getting out for such a low total was a shock.

“You never expect to get out for under 100 in a Test,” Van Niekerk said after the lowest total by any team at the venue, beating England’s 112 last year. “Now the reality is to fight back with some early wickets through some attacking bowling, say a session of four wickets tomorrow would be great.”

Jamal praised the pitch.

“It’s a positive sign to prepare a pitch for fast bowlers and then we won a very good toss,” said Jamal. “We have lost wickets but we can take a good lead.”

Saqib, who took seven wickets on debut in the drawn first Test, struck in the fourth over when he drew an edge off Pasindu Sooriyabandara, on two, with wicketkeeper Ghazi Ghori taking the catch. Abbas then had the experienced Dinesh Chandimal caught at short leg by Awais for seven and Kamindu Mendis caught by Tayyab at short cover for eight.

Sri Lanka were 25-3, which soon became 36-5 when Razaullah struck twice.

Opener Lahiru Udara was caught at first slip by Taha for a laborious four off 34 balls and first Test centurion Dhananjaya de Silva was trapped lbw for one.

The first match of the two-Test series ended in a draw.

Yesterday, Sri Lanka and Pakistan were fined and docked crucial World Test Championship points for slow over-rate.

Sri Lanka were the bigger casualty as they were docked 15 points, slipping from seventh to eighth in the nine-team World Test Championship (WTC).

Hosts Pakistan were five overs short, losing five points and remained ninth and last.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 121 for 3 (Awais 47*) lead **Sri Lanka 98** (Kusal 32, Abbas 3-14, Razaullah 3-21, Jamal 3-24) **by 23 runs.**

JO’BURG TEST

South Africa collapse after Bavuma injury



South Africa’s Temba Bavuma plays a shot on day three of the first Test against Bangladesh in Johannesburg yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Johannesburg

An injury to captain Temba Bavuma preceded a South Africa collapse on the third day of the first Test against Bangladesh at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday.

South Africa were 386 for seven, still 14 short of Bangladesh’s first innings total of 400, when rain and lightning prevented any play after lunch in the first of two Tests.

Visiting wicketkeeper Litton Das held six catches - a Bangladesh Test record.

He became only the third player in Test history to score a century and make six dismissals in an innings.

South Africa seemed to be well on course to take a substantial lead as Bavuma and Ryan Rickelton took their total to 358 for four after resuming on 287 for four.

But Bavuma retired hurt with a calf injury on 49, shortly after Bangladesh took the second new ball. Three wickets then fell for the addition of just 15 runs.

Bavuma had received extensive treatment on the field but retired when he could only hobble through for a single after Rickelton had played the ball into the deep for what would normally have been an easy two.

His departure sparked a dramatic change in fortunes.

Wiaan Mulder flashed at a wide ball from Taskin Ahmed and was caught by Das.

Marco Jansen became Das’s fifth victim and Taskin’s second before Simon Harmer edged Hasan Mahmud to the wicketkeeper.

Rickelton, who was dropped by Mahfijul Islam at cover off Mehidy Hasan when he had 30, was unbeaten on 56.

According to a statement from Cricket South Africa during the lunch break, Bavuma was being assessed for discomfort in his right calf and would return to bat.

But dark clouds were building up and an initial delay because of lightning was followed by thunderous rain which ended play for the day.

Mahmud left the field with a right elbow injury after bowling four balls in his second over of the day but returned with the elbow strapped up and was Bangladesh’s most successful bowler with four for 72.

All three instances of six catches and a century in an innings have occurred in Johannesburg. South Africa’s Denis Lindsay achieved the feat against Australia in 1966/67 and AB de Villiers did it against Pakistan in 2012/13.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 386 for 7 (Ackerman 157, Hamza 83, Rickelton 56*, Mahmud 4-72, Taskin 2-88) **trail Bangladesh 400 by 14 runs**

Head, Starc released before IPL 2027 auction

NEW DELHI: Travis Head, Mitchell Starc, Jacob Bethell and Trent Boult were among the high-profile names released by their Indian Premier League franchises yesterday ahead of the IPL 2027 auction on December 16.

Sunrisers Hyderabad and Delhi Capitals released Head and Starc respectively, with *ESPNcricinfo* saying the Australians want to manage their workloads amid a demanding schedule leading up to next year’s One-Day International World Cup.

Australia are due to play a four-Test home series against New Zealand from December, followed by the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India in January and the 150th anniversary Test in March, before IPL 2027 begins.

After the league concludes, Australia could face an equally demanding run, with the World Test Championship final followed by the Ashes in England.

Mumbai Indians released 13 players including New Zealand fast bowler Boult and India seamer Deepak Chahar.

They also traded captain Hardik Pandya to Punjab Kings in exchange for left-arm seamer Arshdeep Singh ahead of IPL 2027.

Holders Royal Challengers Bengaluru, who secured a second successive IPL title in 2026, retained Virat Kohli and captain Rajat Patidar.

Bethell, meanwhile, will miss IPL 2027 after suffering a setback in his recovery from injury. The England all-rounder has been sidelined since July and is set to undergo knee surgery, ruling him out of next month’s tour of South Africa.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni was released by Chennai Super Kings after bringing down the curtain on his IPL playing career and taking up a mentoring role with the franchise.

All-rounder Prashant Veer was the most expensive player released as Chennai parted with him despite his Rs142mn ($1.52mn) price tag.

Head, whose previous retention fee was Rs140mn, was the next most valuable player among those released.

Shami joins Rajasthan as Curran moves to Lucknow

India pace bowler Mohammed Shami will join Rajasthan Royals from Lucknow Super Giants, while England all-rounder Sam Curran will move in the opposite direction, the Indian Premier League said yesterday.

The 36-year-old Shami, who retired from Test cricket earlier this month, joins inaugural champions Rajasthan at a reduced fee of $856,000, having originally been bought by Lucknow for $1.07mn.

Shami, who has 145 wickets from 132 IPL matches, will join Rajasthan along with Indian left-arm spinner Manimaran Siddharth.

ANNOUNCEMENT

IPL career over, Dhoni unveiled as Chennai Super Kings team mentor

Reuters
New Delhi

Mahendra Singh Dhoni will take over as team mentor at the Chennai Super Kings (CSK), the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise said yesterday, confirming the retirement of arguably the most adored player in the history of the league.

The 45-year-old, who captained Chennai to a record five IPL titles and two Champions League Twenty20 crowns, quit international cricket in 2020.

“There is no CSK without MS Dhoni,” Super Kings owner N Srinivasan said in a statement.

“In 2008, I insisted that Dhoni should be part of CSK...It turns out that’s the best decision I took. Not because of all his achievements for the franchise, but for the kind of human he is.”



“Dhoni will always be a part of our identity. This will always be his home.”

Dhoni, who hails from Ranchi, enjoys huge popularity in the southern Indian city of Chennai where crowds throng stadium just to get a glimpse of their “Thala”, the Tamil word for leader. Runs stopped flowing from his blade in recent years but legions of his fans still filled the stands to watch Dhoni batting lower down the order.

Even that was not possible this year, however, and Dhoni sat out the entire season with a calf strain, which effectively signalled the end of his career.

Dhoni has been the face of the franchise since joining them in 2008 and played two seasons with Rising Pune Super Giant only when Chennai were handed a two-year suspension following a corruption scandal. “While we will miss seeing him in yellow on the field, we are glad that he will keep guiding our players,” Chennai managing director KS Viswanathan said.

TENNIS

Frenchman Fils edges injury-hit Jodar at ATP Finals

'I PLAYED A GREAT MATCH AGAINST BEN, I WAS JUST UNLUCKY'

AFP
Turin

Frenchman Arthur Fils fought back to beat Spaniard Rafael Jodar 4-6, 6-2, 6-2 yesterday to keep his hopes of a place in the ATP Finals last four alive.

The 22-year-old lost 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 to American Ben Shelton on Sunday in his opening match of the tournament in Turin before his comeback victory over Jodar.

Jodar, 20, started brightly before requesting medical help after the first set and won only four games after that.

"I played a great match against Ben, I was just unlucky," Fils said.

"Here, the first set was a bit 'so-so' with a little bit of frustration.

"But I'm very happy with how I handled the second and the third, and a little bit of relief now," he added.

Jodar is the first player to reach the Finals in his debut season on the ATP Tour with the highlight of a gruelling campaign coming with a quarter-final at the French Open.

"I'm better now, but it was tough obviously, because I felt that I couldn't compete and physically, I wasn't at the level today, especially in the last two sets," Jodar said of his injury.



Arthur Fils celebrates after victory against Rafael Jodar during the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. *(AFP)*

"But it happens. It has happened to everyone on tour because we're playing so many matches.

"It's a thing that we have to deal with and we have to move on and think about what we can do to prevent these situations," he added.

Fils's victory ended France's 15-year wait for a win at the ATP Finals since Jo-Wilfried Tsonga's semi-final success in 2011.

Fils has one group game left when he faces top seed and world number one Alexander Zverev on Thursday while Jodar plays Shelton. The top two from the two four-man pools advance to the semi-finals.

WOODS TO RETURN TO COMPETITIVE GOLF NEXT MONTH

Tiger Woods will return to competitive golf for the first time in more than two years next month when he tees off at the Hero World Challenge event in the Bahamas, organisers said yesterday.
Woods, 50, was named in the line-up for the limited field PGA Tour event taking place in Albany from December 3-6. It will mark the first time Woods has played an official PGA Tour event since July 2024.
The 15-time major champion has battled injuries and legal problems since his last appearance.
In March he was involved in a rollover car crash in Florida which led to him having his driver's license suspended for five years.
Authorities determined the 15-time major champion had not been drinking alcohol but found he appeared to be impaired.
Woods, who has undergone multiple back operations and surgeries on severe leg injuries suffered in a separate 2021 California car crash, had two pills containing the opioid painkiller hydrocodone in his pocket. He refused a urine analysis and was charged, jailed and released on bond.

FOCUS

DeChambeau to join DP World Tour after LIV collapse

Reuters
London

American Bryson DeChambeau will bring his big-hitting game to the DP World Tour next season after the collapse of LIV Golf, the European organisation said yesterday.

The 33-year-old DeChambeau, a two-time US Open champion, was one of the highest-profile players to leave the PGA Tour for the Saudi-backed venture four years ago.

DeChambeau's move is the latest boost for the DP World Tour which also announced that major champions Dustin Johnson, Cameron Smith and Bubba Watson have signed agreements to receive invitations to a specific number of tournaments next season.

Spain's twice major winner Jon Rahm, who also defected to LIV Golf, sealed a triumphant return to the DP World Tour this month by winning the Abu Dhabi Championship. Briton Tyrrell Hatton and Spaniard Sergio Garcia are also rejoining the European Tour.

"The addition of Bryson DeChambeau joining as a member for the first time in Category 1 takes the total of major champions in exempt membership to 22 for the 2027 season," the DP World Tour said in a statement.

LIV Golf, which shook professional golf to its foundationswhen it launched its breakaway tour in 2022, announced this month that it would begin winding down operations after losing key players and the funding needed to continue operating.

DeChambeau was a staunch LIV Golf loyalist but its demise meant his future was unclear.

He was ineligible to return to the US PGA Tour for at least 12 months after his last appearance for LIV Golf.

DeChambeau has been welcomed by the DP World Tour, though, and his 2024 US Open victory ensures him Category 1 status, meaning he can play as many events as he chooses.

World number two Rory McIlroy has been a fierce critic of LIV Golf and has had a frosty relationship with DeChambeau but said this month the American would add interest to the DP World Tour.

"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," McIlroy said.

DeChambeau finished 14th at the British Open at Royal Birkdale this year after being docked two shots in his second round after video footage showed he improved his swing path by trampling down grass at the fifth hole. While he can be a divisive personality, DeChambeau is generally popular with galleries and has his own YouTube channel with more than 3 million subscribers.



2024 US Open victory gives Bryson DeChambeau Category 1 status on DP World Tour. *(Reuters)*

MOTORSPORT

Alonso to enter Dakar Rally with Loeb and Aston Martin team

Reuters
London

Double Formula One champion Fernando Alonso will compete in next January's Dakar Rally in an Aston Martin Dreadnought entry run by engineering partner Prodrive.

The 45-year-old Spaniard, a 32-time Grand Prix winner and two-time Le Mans 24 Hours winner, will be racing in the annual event for the second time after competing with Toyota in 2020, finishing 13th. France's nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb and Brazil's reigning world rally-raid champion Lucas Moraes will be his teammates in a three-car entry.

The 49th edition of the Dakar Rally will be held in Morocco from January 9 to 23, with a prologue and first stage in Portugal, after being moved from Saudi Arabia due to security concerns. The 24-round Formula One season is due to start in Bahrain in March after testing in late February.

Alonso, who will again have compatriot and five-time motorcycle Dakar winner Marc Coma as co-driver, is racing in the Las Vegas Grand Prix this weekend.

He said he had turned his thoughts to Dakar after deciding to continue in Formula One with Aston Martin.

"In the end, the decision became simple. I wanted to embrace the challenge completely and take on both Formula One and the Dakar Rally in the same year," he explained in a statement.



Fernando Alonso to combine Dakar and F1 in the same season in 2027.

"In 2020, Dakar was one of the most challenging and enjoyable experiences of my career. I have enormous respect for this race and the specialists who have mastered it.

"Formula One remains my priority. But I am a racing driver, and challenges like this are why I love competing. I'm looking forward to seeing what we can achieve."

In October, Alonso told reporters at the Singapore Grand Prix that he felt the desert endurance race would be physically incompatible with his Formula One commitments.

Loeb, 52, will also be chasing a first Dakar win after 10 previous attempts that have brought him 28 stage wins to date.

"Winning the Dakar is very important to me," said the Frenchman, who will be partnered by Belgian Fabian Lurquin. "We have come close several times, and the motivation is there to keep working until we achieve it."

The Dreadnought is a digital-only tactical SUV created exclusively for gamers playing "Call of Duty:Modern Warfare 4" that will now be brought into the real world by Prodrive, Aston Martin's partners in endurance GT racing.

The Dakar will be Aston Martin Racing's debut in the world rally-raid championship.

"Aston Martin's ambition for this programme has been clear from the outset: to create a car capable of competing at the front of the world's toughest motorsport event," said Prodrive Chairman David Richards.

IRISH BOXER REEVES DIES AGED 31

Irish boxer Lee Reeves has died at the age of 31, three months after suffering serious injuries during a bout, promoter Queensberry said yesterday. Local media reports in Reeves' hometown of Limerick said he underwent surgery after his knockout loss to Gary Cully in a junior welterweight bout in August in Dublin and had been in a medically induced coma since.
The reports added that he had contracted an infection over the weekend which led to his death on Monday.
"Everyone at Queensberry is devastated to learn of the passing of Lee Reeves," the promoters said in a statement. "Lee was an immensely talented boxer, as well as a true role model and inspiration to his community." Cully described Reeves as "a character and a gent". Reeves won 16 of his 18 professional bouts, including 11 by knockout.

BOXING

Benavidez targets cruiserweight supremacy, a bigger piece of the pie

Reuters
New York

David Benavidez has collected titles across three divisions in a rapid rise through boxing's ranks, but the undefeated American says next month's cruiserweight unification bout against Michal Cieslak represents the biggest moment of his career.

Benavidez, 29, stepped up to cruiserweight this year and claimed the WBO and WBA belts with a dominant sixth-round knockout win over Gilberto Ramirez in May. In just his second fight at 200 pounds (90 kg) on December 5, he could add the WBC title to his collection with a victory in his hometown of Phoenix, Arizona.

"I feel like I'm finally finding myself. I feel like this is the best I've ever felt," Benavidez told Reuters by video call.

"It's a good way to prepare for this, and it's a good feeling to have, because this is the biggest moment of my life. I'm fighting for three belts, unifying the cruiserweight division, WBC, WBO, WBA."

Benavidez said it had been his lifelong dream to become an undisputed champion. "I'm very close to accomplishing that dream. After this fight, there's only going to be one more belt left to help me become undisputed," he added.

Should he get past Poland's Cieslak, Benavidez said he would look at fighting Jai Opetaia or Oleksandr Usyk.

He has traded barbs with former IBF champion Opetaia and promised to face the Australian in 2027, while Usyk has also expressed an interest in fighting Benavidez at cruiserweight.

Ukrainian Usyk unified the cruiserweight belts in 2018 before moving up to heavyweight and repeating the feat in 2024.



The 39-year-old vacated his heavyweight belts in June to pursue a "last dance" final fight.

Benavidez said a fight against Usyk would do more for his career.

"Usyk didn't duck nobody," he said.

"So not only does this fight do more for me financially, but I'm going in there and I'm fighting the best fighter that the world of boxing has seen in the past 20 years. It just does everything for me."

MOVES TO TAKE CONTROL

Benavidez has also made moves to take control of his financial future, announcing in October that he would be launching his own promotion. His fight against Cieslak is his last under promoter Sampson Lewkowicz.

"The way boxing works is you get the biggest deal that you could possibly get. Once you have a promoter, you give 10% to that," he said.

"I was signed with a promoter for 10 years, Sampson Lewkowicz. I paid my dues. After this, I'm saving the 10% for myself. Once you're talking about millions of dollars, 10% is a lot of money.

"The short-term goal for me is negotiating these contracts and getting the bigger piece of the pie. Because at the end of the day, I'm really the one who's doing everything."

Benavidez said he hopes to give back to the sport in the future by helping develop new fighters.

And should his 6-year-old son eventually follow in his footsteps with a career in the ring, Benavidez said he wants to be there to guide him.

"By the time my son's career really takes off, I could be the one managing his whole career," he added.

FIFA PRESIDENCY

France's Diallo claims backing beyond Europe

'MY VISION WILL BE ONE OF OPEN, COLLEGIATE GOVERNANCE'



French Football Federation president Philippe Diallo answers journalists questions during a press conference after his candidacy for the FIFA presidency was officially accepted in Paris yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Paris

France's Philippe Diallo said yesterday he had the backing of countries beyond Europe in his bid to depose Gianni Infantino in the upcoming FIFA presidential election.

"To beat him you need 106 votes, which is a majority," said Diallo, the president of the French Football Federation (FFF) who already has the "unanimous" backing of European governing body UEFA. "It is now up to me and my team to go and convince those on other continents, but already since yesterday I have received spontaneous signs of strong support which will be revealed in the coming days."

Diallo was speaking to reporters in Paris the day after accepting an invitation from UEFA to stand against Infantino in the election which will take place next March.

UEFA, which has 55 member associations, said that European nations had "unanimously pledged their full support" to Diallo, ahead of today's deadline for candidates to declare themselves.

Under its Slovenian president Aleksander Ceferin, UEFA has led the opposition to Infantino since his plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors was revealed in July.

Infantino quickly abandoned the proposal in the face of widespread uproar, but UEFA has since gone to a court in Florida in an attempt to gather evidence for a potential complaint of "criminal mismanagement" against the current FIFA president in Switzerland.

Diallo announced in September that the FFF was withdrawing its backing for Infantino in the election, following similar announcements from other European associations. At the time he said that "the trust placed in the FIFA president has been betrayed".

"There can no longer be a type of single-handed governance where the biggest issues in football are decided behind the scenes, without any transparency and without anyone being consulted, without going through the executive committee," Diallo said yesterday. "My vision will be one of open, collegiate governance, in which the different bodies really play their part."

UEFA had been struggling to find a credible candidate to stand against Infantino in the election, which will take place at the FIFA Congress on March 18 next year in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.

Arsene Wenger, the French former Arsenal manager and FIFA's current chief of global football development, had at one point been seen as a potential candidate that could get Europe's backing but he will not stand.

"I was not initially a candidate but the insistence of my European colleagues along with other invitations led me to accept the proposal," Diallo added.

The Asian Football Confederation, which consists of 47 member associations, announced last month that it was backing Infantino for re-election having previously indicated it would oppose him. FIFA has a total of 211 member associations, with each having one vote in the presidential election. A majority is needed for a candidate to win.

Diallo, the 63-year-old son of a Senegalese-born father who boxed for France at the 1960 Olympics in Rome, has been president of the FFF since January 2023.

Kozo Tashima, honorary president of the Japan Football Association and a member of the FIFA Council, said at the start of this month that he also intended to stand against Infantino.

Swiss former Tottenham Hotspur defender Ramon Vega has also stated his intention to run for the top job at world football's governing body.

Infantino, a former UEFA secretary general, has been in charge of FIFA since 2016.

England's Stanley Rous is the only sitting FIFA president to have been beaten in an election – by Brazil's Joao Havelange in 1974. Infantino's predecessor Sepp Blatter resigned in 2015 amid corruption allegations.

FRIENDLY

Vinicius hits 12-minute hat-trick as Brazil thrash Singapore 7-0

AFP
Singapore

Vinicius Junior hit a 12-minute hat-trick in the first half as Brazil turned on the style in a 7-0 trouncing of Singapore yesterday.

Endrick, Estevao, Rayan and substitute Allan also scored as the South Americans brushed aside the hosts with a dominant performance at the National Stadium.

Brazil were much changed from their 3-2 loss to Japan on Saturday in which manager Carlo Ancelotti and captain Raphinha were shown red cards, with Vinicius one of only four players retaining their places in the starting line-up.

Bruno Guimaraes took over as skipper and set up the opener after nine minutes, playing a quick pass to Vinicius who wrong-footed Singapore captain Hariss Harun with his first touch before despatching a left-footed shot past goalkeeper Izwan Mahbud.

The Real Madrid forward notched his second in the 15th minute after a quick counter-attack as Endrick laid the ball off for his unmarked team-mate to slot home.

Vinicius was denied by Izwan shortly afterwards but he completed his hat-trick in the 21st minute when he was found unmarked in the six-yard box by Estevao's low centre.

Rayan had an effort disallowed for offside but Endrick added to Brazil's lead in the 31st minute with a low effort from range which found the bottom right corner.

Estevao also had a goal disallowed for a foul by Vinicius but the Chelsea winger added to Brazil's tally just after the interval with a deflected shot from the edge of the box.

Rayan rocked the crossbar soon after but the endeavour of the Bournemouth forward was rewarded in the 65th minute when he rounded substitute goalkeeper Syazwan Buhari to make it 6-0.

Brazil rang the changes in the closing stages and Allan came off the bench to grab the seventh goal in the 74th minute.

Speaking in the absence of the suspended Ancelotti, Brazil assistant Francesco Mauri lauded the commitment shown by Vinicius.

"His attitude was fantastic. As we discussed before the match, you shouldn't focus solely on the quality of the opponents, you just have to give your absolute best," said the Italian.

"He was a constant threat, providing great depth to our attack. He forced the opposition to double-mark him, which in turn allowed us to defend a bit more effectively."

Despite lengthy travel for the friendlies in Singapore, Mauri felt the effort had been worthwhile for the squad's development. "Before the game, we told the players that it was really important to finish in the best way in these November FIFA dates because after this we have to wait until March for our next games, so it's good to go home with a good feeling," he said.



Brazil's Vinicius Junior celebrates scoring a goal against Singapore during the Mizuho Blue Challenge Kallang Football Series international friendly match in Singapore yesterday. *(Reuters)*

NATIONS LEAGUE

This could turn into something, says Klopp after thrashing Dutch

AFP
Berlin



Germany's Florian Wirtz shoots and scores his team's second goal during the UEFA Nations League Group A2 match against the Netherlands at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin. *(AFP)*

Germany coach Jurgen Klopp said he felt his side were building towards something special after Monday's 5-0 Nations League thrashing of the Netherlands in Berlin.

The Germans came into the game in third spot on the table but finished top of the group after Monday's win and are through to the quarter-finals of the Nations League.

The former Liverpool coach took over as Germany manager in the summer after the four-time champions suffered a third-straight early World Cup elimination.

Tasked with improving Germany's flagging fortunes and handed a contract which includes the 2028 Euros and the 2030 World Cup, Klopp said his side was capable of something big.

"Everyone will go home with a smile on their face, and for at least the next three or four months, no one will be questioning the German national team," Klopp said to ARD.

"Instead, they'll be thinking: 'This could really turn into something,'"

"We have wonderful footballers, great characters," Klopp said, and added: "The lads are even surprising themselves."

Germany were unplayable at times as they sliced through the Netherlands, who were yet to lose in this season's Nations League.

Florian Wirtz scored twice and Derry Scherhant, Nico Schlotterbeck and Brajan Gruda also scored, with the latter grabbing two assists.

Monday's match came 150 days after Germany's last-32 defeat by Paraguay at the World Cup and Klopp praised the present and future of his squad.

"We've got some incredible players here and the next generation is coming along," Klopp said.

Germany's next opponent remains unclear, with the draw in Switzerland on Friday, but could be world champions Spain, or Portugal or Belgium.

"I've taken a look at it. It's a really tough lineup. I'm already looking forward to it."

Al-Buenain attends Executive Board Meeting of GCC Olympic Committee chiefs



Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee, participated in the 102nd meeting of the Executive Board of the Council of Presidents of the National Olympic Committees of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Bahrain. The meeting reviewed the report on the fourth GCC Games, which were hosted by Doha last May. The schedule of upcoming GCC multi-sport Games for the period from 2029 to 2032 was also discussed along with several matters related to developing joint Gulf sports cooperation and strengthening coordination among the GCC nations.

Rooney says he contemplated suicide during playing career

Former England and Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney contemplated suicide during his playing career, he said in a podcast. One of the country's most decorated players, Rooney spent the early years of his career battling mental health issues and alcoholism, he told the "Life at the Midpoint" podcast.

"It took until my mid-20s, until I hit rock bottom (before I started feeling comfortable with myself)," Rooney, 41, said. "I'd go home and lock myself in the house for two days, and just drink. Probably at the best part of my career playing-wise. I got to a place where you're contemplating suicide. You just didn't want to be around anyone. I didn't want to see people in the streets. I didn't want to go into shops."

Rooney said it pushed his marriage to breaking point but wife Coleen was key in his recovery. Even so, he said he did not feel alcohol abuse affected his performances on the pitch. "I was always comfortable on a football pitch, but everything else (I) really struggled with it."

Although Rooney eventually attended therapy sessions, he said the culture around mental health and masculinity in football prevented him from seeking help earlier. "You don't want to show any weakness, so you try to mask it," he said.