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TENNIS

Alcaraz eases injury concerns with Cobolli win to stay perfect at ATP Finals

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FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP QATAR

Italy, Spain and Morocco taste big victories on thrilling day

Cote d'Ivoire struck late to edge Uzbekistan. Tajikistan prevailed in an eight-goal thriller against Cuba

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The second day of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 produced plenty of drama at the Aspire Zone, with 40 goals scored across eight matches as the tournament's leading sides made their presence felt.

European champions Italy, four-time runners-up Spain, Belgium and Morocco all recorded convincing victories, while Cote d'Ivoire struck late to edge Uzbekistan. Tajikistan prevailed in an eight-goal thriller against Cuba, while Senegal fought back from a goal and a man down to draw with Croatia.

Italy made the biggest statement of the day, sweeping aside Jamaica 6-0, with Federico Croci scoring twice and adding an assist.

Croci opened the scoring after pouncing on a deflected effort before producing a superb individual finish for his second. He then turned provider, setting up Diego Perillo, whose header also played a part in Italy's fourth as the ball came off Jahmarie Nolan and into the net.

Gioele Giammettei added a spectacular scissors-kick finish before Thomas Corigliano completed the rout. "I am very happy, because wearing the Italy jersey is always a source of pride, representing the country," said Croci. "I hope these won't be the last two goals that I score, but rather the beginning of a good journey."

Cote d'Ivoire left Uzbekistan heartbroken after Abass Diarrassouba struck late to secure a 2-1 victory. Hubert Yao gave the African champions an early lead after Yann Cisse created the opening, but Uzbekistan responded strongly after the break. Muhammad Khakimov levelled with a powerful header and the match appeared headed for a draw before Diarrassouba found the winner in the closing stages.

Cuba and Tajikistan produced the most thrilling contest of the day, with Tajikistan winning 5-3 after seven goals were scored in the second half. Cuba stunned the Asian side when Yojanny Gonzalez struck just before half-time, but Tajikistan responded emphatically. Komiljon Sharipov, Parviz Bobonazarov and Asadbek Makhtumov, who scored twice, put Tajikistan 4-1 ahead.



Spain began their bid for a first U-17 World Cup title in impressive fashion, thrashing China 5-0 at the Aspire Zone yesterday.



Belgium survived a scare from debutants Vietnam before prevailing 3-2.

Cuba refused to surrender, with Gonzalez taking advantage of a defensive error to score his second before Yankarlos Iglesias headed home to make it 4-3. Substitute Bikhishti Radzhabzod then settled the contest with a superb curling finish.

Senegal produced one of the day's biggest fightbacks to draw 1-1 with Croatia despite playing with 10 men. Luka Bartolovic put Croatia ahead in the eighth minute with a powerful left-footed strike that went in off the crossbar. Senegal were then reduced to 10 men when Abdou Diallo was shown a straight red card for bringing down Jakov Dedic.

But the African champions responded almost immediately, with Sega Mbodji expertly meeting an inswinging Emile Sadio free-kick to level the scores.

"We started really strong, scored the first goal, had the opportunity for more, but we conceded on a set piece," said Croatia coach Marijan Budimir. "In this competition, you don't have time to mourn your 'losses'. We wanted the three points, but we'll take this one and prepare for the next matches."

Belgium survived a scare from debutants Vietnam to begin their campaign with a 3-2 win. Vietnam stunned the Europeans when Le Sy produced an extraordinary backheel from a corner that flew into the top-left corner. Belgium responded quickly, with Tinus Moorthamer firing in a powerful drive before Kiyan Achahbar smashed home a cutback from Xander Dierckx. Anthony Philips then extended Belgium's advantage with a neat run and finish. Chu Ngoc gave Vietnam hope with a goal directly from a corner, but Belgium held on.

"In the first 15 minutes, I think Vietnam were just more aggressive than us. They started better and I think after the first part of the game, we bounced back and we showed our qualities," said Moorthamer.

Mali also made a winning start, beating New Zealand 3-0 with Halidou Maiga scoring twice. Maiga opened the scoring with a neat finish from inside the box before his deflected effort doubled Mali's advantage. Makan Sacko completed the scoring to cap a dominant display.

Spain began their bid for a first U-17 World Cup title in impressive fashion, thrashing China 5-0. Ebrima Tunkara scored a superb free-kick and Owen Mira added a quick-fire brace as Spain took control. Wan Xiang came close to giving China a consolation, but Spain goalkeeper Diego Piqueras produced a stunning fingertip save to preserve the clean sheet.

Morocco were equally ruthless, thrashing Fiji 6-0. Ismail El Aoud opened the scoring in the third minute before Ibrahim Rabbaj quickly added a second. Imran Talai then struck a spectacular effort off the crossbar to make it 3-0. Ziyad Baha scored twice, including from the penalty spot, before Rami Lougmani completed the rout late on.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Sadd edge Lusail to go top as Duhail stunned by Qatar SC



Akram Afif scored a brace in Al Sadd's 3-2 win over Lusail in the Qatar Stars League at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd moved to the top of the Qatar Stars League on Friday after edging Lusail 3-2, while Al Duhail missed the chance to keep pace with the leaders after suffering a 2-1 defeat to Qatar SC.

Both sides remain on 21 points, but Al Sadd sit first on goal difference. Al Rayyan, also on 21 points, can reclaim top spot when they face Al Shahania today, with victory enough to move them back into first place. Al Sadd survived a spirited fightback from Lusail to secure a hard-fought victory at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. Lusail made a flying start, taking the lead through Khaled Mohammad in the sixth minute and putting Al Sadd under early pressure.

The hosts responded strongly, with Alessio Romagnoli restoring parity in the 23rd minute before Akram Afif struck five minutes later to put Al Sadd ahead.

Afif then converted a penalty in the 38th minute to complete his brace and extend Al Sadd's advantage to 3-1. Lusail refused to surrender and reduced the deficit through Rodrigo Moreno three minutes into first-half stoppage time, setting up an intriguing second half.

Despite Lusail's efforts to find an equaliser, Al Sadd held firm to preserve their slender advantage and secure three valuable points.



Ali Saoudi scored in the 90th minute to seal a memorable victory for Qatar SC against Al Duhail.

The victory marked an important response from Sadd after they had suffered a dramatic 4-3 defeat to Al Rayyan in the previous round. Lusail remained seventh with 12 points.

At the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Qatar SC produced a spirited performance to stun 10-man Al Duhail. Joao Pedro opened the scoring for Qatar SC in the 20th minute. Al Duhail's hopes of a comeback suffered a major setback when Eissa Ahmad was shown a red card in the 51st minute.

Despite their numerical disadvantage, Al Duhail fought back and restored parity in the 71st minute through an own goal by Qatar SC's Sergean Fallou. Qatar SC, however, refused to settle for a draw and snatched a dramatic winner through Ali Saoudi in the 90th minute to seal a memorable victory and move to nine points but at still 11th and in relgation battle.

Elsewhere, Al Gharafa scored twice in the final four minutes to complete a dramatic 3-2 comeback win over Al Arabi at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium.

The victory took Al Gharafa eighth with 12 points, while Al Arabi remained on fourth with 14 points.

Al Arabi raced into a 2-0 lead through Oussama Tannane in the 10th minute and Youssef Snana in the 21st. Tannane finished a Pablo Sarabia assist after Al Arabi broke forward down the left, before Snana deflected a Tannane cross into the net from inside the box.

Al Gharafa pulled one back in the 34th minute when Florinel Coman fired home from just outside the box. The Cheetahs then completed their comeback late in the game. Frank Magri headed in a Yacine Brahimi free-kick in the 90th minute to make it 2-2, before Brahimi converted from the penalty spot in the fourth minute of stoppage time to seal the win.

CRICKET

MATCH REPORT

Pakistan crush Sri Lanka to win two-Test series

Captain Babar Azam thrilled with performances of his young side

AFP
Rawalpindi, Pakistan



Pakistan players pose with the series trophy after winning the second Test against Sri Lanka at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

Pakistan sealed a crushing eight-wicket victory over Sri Lanka yesterday in the second and final Test in Rawalpindi to win the series.

Sri Lanka put up some fight to avoid an innings defeat on Thursday, but folded for 316 on the fourth morning Friday after adding just seven runs to their overnight total of 309-9.

Pakistan completed their first Test series win this year by reaching the slender 90-run target in 13 overs, with Aamer Jamal scoring 34 not out and Azan Awais an unbeaten 32.

Pakistan lost opener Tayyab Arif for 13 and Mohammad Taha for four, but there were no hiccups as Jamal hit the winning boundary off spinner Prabath Jayasuriya to seal the win.

The first Test, also in Rawalpindi, ended in a draw.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam said he was satisfied with team's win.

"This is a new team with some new players, but they showed some good performances and winning always gives you satisfaction and confidence," he said.

"We are looking to create a positive environment so everyone has the fighting spirit alive regardless of what the match situation is."

Sri Lankan skipper Kusal Mendis said the 98-run first innings hurt his team.

"We have to improve in some areas when it comes to batting and fielding, but we bowled well in patches," he said.

The day began with Sri Lanka hoping to extend their 82-run lead and Milan Rathnayaka hitting a boundary, but the innings was done in the second over when Mohammad Abbas trapped Asitha Fernando lbw for two.

Rathnayaka cracked 12 fours in his fighting 88-ball 66 not out.

Abbas was the pick of the Pakistan bowlers with 3-55 while Jamal took 3-67 and Razaullah 2-116. It was Pakistan's first series win in this cycle of the World Test Championship, having drawn with South Africa and the West Indies and losing 2-0 in Bangladesh and 3-0 in England.

Pakistan's pace quartet exploited the green-tinged pitch to maximum effect, dismissing Sri Lanka for 98 in their first innings to get an ideal start on the first day.

The home team then posted 325 to take firm control of the match. Sri Lanka staved off an innings defeat on the back of half-centuries from Rathnayaka, Sonal Dinusha and skipper Kusal Mendis but could not save the Test.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 325 and 90 for 2 (Jamal 34*, Awais 32*, Kumara 1-27) **beat Sri Lanka 98 and 316** (Rathnayaka 66*, Dinusha 54, Mendis 53, Abbas 3-55, Jamal 3-67, Razaullah 2-116) **by eight wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

India punish Kiwi errors after Nicholls' superb 175

AFP
Wellington


India's Yashasvi Jaiswal plays a shot on day two of the first Test against New Zealand at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. *(AFP)*

India seized on drops and missteps by New Zealand to reach 159-1 after day two of the first Test yesterday in Wellington, a deficit of 209 runs.

The opening pairing of Yashasvi Jaiswal and KL Rahul combined for a 130-run partnership in just 27.5 overs, punishing the hosts for early missed chances.

Jaiswal, who made 85 from just 89 deliveries, was dropped on zero and six by New Zealand's first-innings centurions Henry Nicholls and Glenn Phillips.

Partner Rahul should have been out lbw to Matt Henry on five but New Zealand did not review umpire Kumar Dharmasena's decision.

They lived to rue those missed chances as the pair pounded 81 runs in the hour after tea, hitting 20 boundaries between them as New Zealand's seamers bowled poor lines.

"This place sucks to catch," Phillips said of the Basin Reserve, which is surrounded by red brick seating.

"Honestly, if you're square of the wicket, two feet in front of you, you see it. And then by the time you've got your hands up, it's a little bit too late.

"Obviously we'd love chances to go to hand. Credit to the way he (Jaiswal) batted, coming out with a lot of positivity."

Jaiswal seized on any width from the bowlers to cut and drive with power, while also moving in the crease to alter New Zealand's lengths.

He eventually departed, caught sharply behind the wickets by Tom Blundell up to the stumps from Henry.

Rahul ended the day 52 not out, alongside Devdutt Padikkal on 16.

Henry was New Zealand's best bowler, finishing with 1-43.

Indian seamer Akash Deep said the pitch was becoming more and more friendly for batting, and was difficult to bowl on.

He praised the top order for their start and the intent to force a result.

"To get a result in a Test match on such a pitch, you have to score quickly," Deep said. "When batters attack aggressively like that it puts the opposition bowlers on the back foot."

GRITTY NICOLLS

The home side relied on Nicholls' gritty, unbeaten 175 as they were bowled out for 368 after lunch.

Phillips scored his second Test century as part of a 216-run partnership with Nicholls to rescue New Zealand from 70-5 early on the first day.

Jasprit Bumrah's return to Test cricket after a year was fruitful, taking 4-92 from 29 overs for the visitors while Deep was his best support with a miserly 3-53 in 23 overs.

Nicholls resumed on Friday on 113 with New Zealand's total 243-5 and showed the same patience which brought his 12th Test century. He was chanceless throughout the morning as he brought up his 150. He faced 335 balls and hit 21 fours in a 589-minute stay.

Phillips brought up his 193-ball hundred, which included 13 fours, early in the morning session.

India's attack struggled to bowl a consistent length to the pair throughout the opening day, and their issues persisted on day two, either straying too full and allowing simple drives or pitching too short, allowing easy leaves.

Even Bumrah strayed too full and was expensive in his early spell, conceding 15 runs in two overs.

When Deep did find the right length he produced a peach to bowl Phillips for 118, ending a partnership that lasted 63 overs.

New Zealand's last four batters could only muster 30 runs between them. Anshul Kamboj took 2-69 and Prasidh Krishna 1-100.

The two-match Test series concludes next week in Christchurch.

BRIEF SCORES
India 159 for 1 (Jaiswal 85, Rahul 52*, Henry 1-43) **trail New Zealand 368** (Nicholls 175*, Phillips 118, Bumrah 4-92, Akash Deep 3-53, Kamboj 2-69) **by 209 runs**

Government urges transparency as Cricket Australia faces backlash


Australia's Test and NSW Blues batsmen Steve Smith (left) and Sean Abbott look on during training in Sydney yesterday. *(AFP)*

MELBOURNE: Cricket Australia should ensure its forum into Sandpapergate is handled as independently and openly as possible, a government spokesperson said yesterday, as former players slammed the governing body's attempts to defuse an escalating controversy surrounding the 2018 ball-tampering scandal.

CA bosses said on Wednesday that an independent forum would be set up to allow players to give their accounts of the incident, but the results would not necessarily be made public and no sanctions would follow.

The move has been ridiculed by past players and pundits, including former captain Michael Clarke, who said the Australian public had been lied to about who was party to the cheating during the South Africa test series.

A spokesperson for Sports Minister Anika Wells said integrity mattered to "every kid with a bat or a ball".

"This is Cricket Australia's process to run and it is a matter for them to work through. Australians will expect this to be run independently and as openly as possible," the spokesperson said in a statement.

"We have a summer of cricket to look forward to and I'm sure all of Australia will get behind our team."

NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

CA did not provide immediate comment when asked by Reuters on Friday to respond and to provide more details about its forum.

The eight-year-old Sandpapergate scandal has reignited this month following allegations by former Australia batter Usman Khawaja that other players and staff knew of the ball-tampering - and not just the three who were found culpable and sanctioned after a rapid investigation by CA's integrity unit during the South Africa tour.

CA banned then-captain Steve Smith and David Warner for 12 months, and Cameron Bancroft for nine.

Test captain Pat Cummins and fellow pace bowler Mitchell Starc have since rejected Khawaja's allegations, saying they had no prior knowledge of ball-tampering.

But three other players involved in the 2018 tour came forward to back up Khawaja's account, including Warner and Bancroft, who said "the whole team" knew, including coaching staff and a media manager.

Clarke, who captained Australia from 2011 to 2015, said Bancroft's explosive 4,000-word statement shared with media on Wednesday had made CA's forum redundant. "The public don't want any more bullshit," he said on his podcast "Beyond23". "The public want the complete truth to allow us to move on."

The scandal has heaped pressure on Cummins, one of the game's most devastating pace bowlers, who boasts a strong portfolio of corporate sponsors.

Cummins called Khawaja's allegations "complete and utter nonsense" in an hour-long press conference last week, and criticised his former teammate for being "casual" with others' lives and reputations.

He declined to comment to a large media scrum camped outside his Sydney home on Thursday and at training, but his manager said Cummins' position remained steadfast and he had no need to respond to Bancroft's statement.

A poll of 13,000 readers of Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper had 82% saying they believed Khawaja's, Warner's and Bancroft's accounts of Sandpapergate versus 18% for Cummins and Australia's bowlers who denied prior knowledge.

A majority of 6,000 readers in a poll in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said they did not expect Cummins to remain as captain for the first Test of the home summer against New Zealand, which starts December 9.

Former Australia bowler Mitchell Johnson said the public pressure on Cummins to stand down as captain would be too much.

"I just can't see how his captaincy and personal brand survives this," Johnson wrote in a column for the *West Australian* newspaper.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Beardman, Bartlett ruled out of England T20s

Reuters
Sydney

Fast bowlers Mahli Beardman and Xavier Bartlett have been ruled out of Australia's five-match Twenty20 series against England due to injury, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

Beardman has suffered a quadriceps strain in his left leg, while Bartlett injured his left knee. Their absence adds to Australia's concerns in the fast-bowling department, with Nathan Ellis already sidelined by a side strain.

Billy Stanlake has been called up as a replacement for the series, which begins today in Melbourne. Australia's T20 squad was already missing several key players, including Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, who have been rested as they prepare for next month's test series against New Zealand.

Travis Head, Matthew Renshaw, Cameron Green, Josh Inglis and Cooper Connolly are also absent.

Beardman made an immediate impact last week, claiming 6-24 against England on his one-day international debut, the best bowling figures by an Australian debutant in the format. Cricket Australia said Beardman is expected to return for the Big Bash League, while Bartlett will undergo further assessment.

Squad
Mitch Marsh (captain), Billy Stanlake, Nikhil Chaudhary, Tim David, Joel Davies, Ben Dwarshuis, Jack Edwards, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Sam Harper, Spencer Johnson, Riley Meredith, Mitch Owen, Lachlan Shaw, Henry Thornton, Adam Zampa.

FOCUS

Markram to lead SA in 2nd Test against Bangladesh as T20, ODI squads named

Reuters
Cape Town

Cricket South Africa (CSA) have confirmed injured captain Temba Bavuma will not feature in Monday's second Test against Bangladesh in Centurion and has been replaced in the squad by spinning all-rounder Senuran Muthusamy.

Aiden Markram will captain the side in the second Test. It is likely batter Tony de Zorzi will come into the playing XI in place of Bavuma, who is recovering from a calf problem. South Africa were victorious in the first Test by nine wickets and need to keep winning to maintain their chances of appearing in a second successive World Test Championship final, having beaten Australia to the title last year. CSA have also named the squad for the three-match one-day international series against Bangladesh that will be staged from December 1-7.

Bavuma has not been selected for the ODIs either, with Keshav Maharaj captaining the team, and young batters Dewald Brevis and Lhuan-dre Pretorius included.

There is a return for seamer Lungi Ngidi from a hamstring injury, while wicketkeeper-batter Sinethemba Qeshile gets a recall after his only two ODIs in Pakistan in November 2025

Qeshile is also in the Twenty20 squad for the three-match series

ODI squad: Keshav Maharaj (captain), Dewald Brevis, Corbin Bosch, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Bjorn Fortuin, Jordan Hermann, Duan Jansen, Nqobani Mokoena, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, Sinethemba Qeshile, Tristan Stubbs

T20 squad: Bjorn Fortuin (captain), Dewald Brevis, Gerald Coetzee, Connor Esterhuizen, Donovan Ferreira, Jordan Hermann, Duan Jansen, Kwena Maphaka, Nqobani Mokoena, Nqaba Peter, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Sinethemba Qeshile, Tristan Stubbs, Prenelan Subrayen



ASIA CUP RISING STARS

Pakistan beat UAE, India hammer Nepal

By Sports Reporter
Doha


India A players celebrate a wicket against Nepal in their Asia Cup Rising Stars match at the West End International Stadium in Doha yesterday.

Arch-rivals Pakistan Shaheens and India A launched their Asia Cup Rising Stars 2026 campaigns with commanding Group B victories in Doha yesterday, setting the stage for a blockbuster showdown between the two sides tomorrow.

At the University of Doha for Science and Technology, defending champions Pakistan Shaheens opened the day with a clinical 61-run win over the UAE.

Put into bat, Pakistan posted 245 in 46.4 overs on the back of brisk half-centuries from openers Shamyl Hussain (62 off 39) and Maaz Sadaqat (53 off 63).

Their bowling attack then dismantled the UAE for 184 in 40.5 overs, spearheaded by early strikes from Ali Raza (3-40) and a suffocating middle-overs spell from spinner Sufyan Moqim (3-35). For the losing side, Mohammad Shahdad top-scored with 45 off 60 balls, including four fours and a six.

INDIA A TOO POWERFUL FOR HAPLESS NEPAL

Hours later across town at the West End Park International Cricket Stadium, India A delivered an even more emphatic statement, obliterating Nepal by 306 runs.

Powered by twin centuries from Kumar Kushagra (117) and Tilak Varma (107), India A piled up an imposing 332 for 9 in their 50 overs.

India's bowlers then ran riot, skittling Nepal for a mere 26,led by Prince's devastating 5-6 and Rana's 4-16.


Pakistan Shaheens player Shamyl Hussain celebrates with his Man of the Match award for his 62 against UAE in the Asia Cup Rising Stars in Doha yesterday.

With both heavyweights sitting atop Group B in peak form, all eyes now turn to tomorrow's high-stakes clash between India A and Pakistan Shaheens in Doha.

Varma, India A captain, said yesterday: "We did a pretty good job today. Really happy with my batting. Wicket was pretty challenging; not easy to score runs. Me and Kumar were just discussing that for new batsman coming in, it won't be easy."

He added: "If we batted the last ten overs, we could get 100 runs. Honestly, we discussed that 280 would be a good score. End of the innings, the way Suryansh finished was tremendous to watch. It is really important for them [(Rana and Prince), coming back from injury. We just want to focus on our basics what we've practiced."

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan Shaheens 245 all out (Hussain 62, Sadaqat 53, Samad 39; Hameed 4-37, Ali Shah 2-42) **beat UAE 184 all out** (Shahdad 45, Alam 39, Ali Shah 32; Moqim 3-35, Raza 3-41) **by 61 runs**

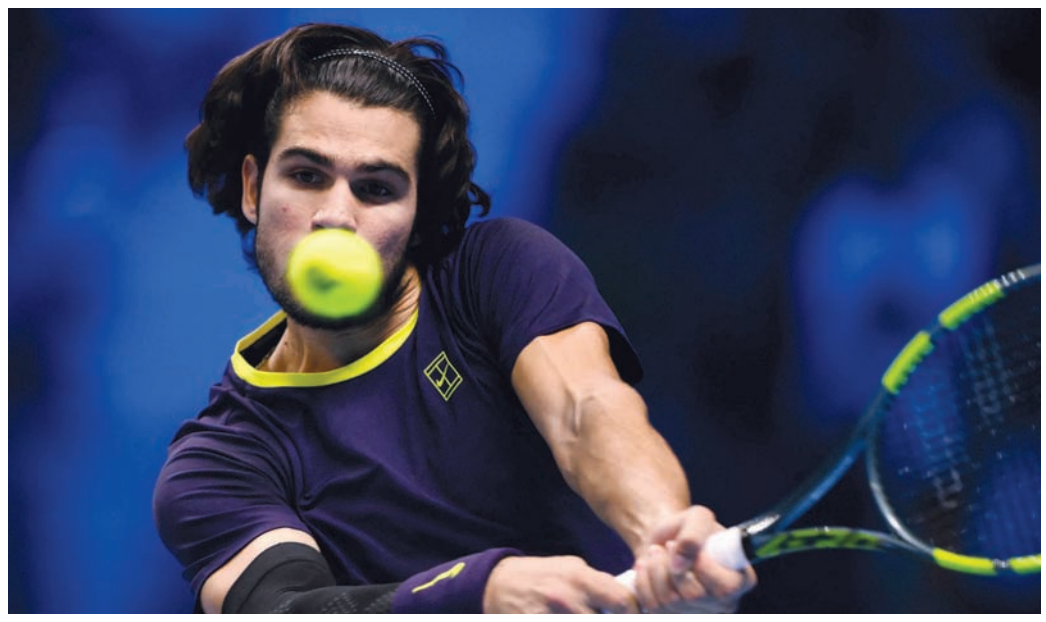
India A 332 for 9 (Kushagra 117, Tilak 107, Rajbanshi 3-61, Lamichhane 3-61) **beat Nepal 26** (Prince 5-6, Rana 4-16) **by 306 runs**

TENNIS

Alcaraz eases injury concerns with Cobolli win

The 23-year-old delivered an efficient display, keeping rallies short

Reuters
Turin, Italy


Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return to Italy's Flavio Cobolli during their match at the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. *(AFP)*

Seven-times Grand Slam champion Carlos Alcaraz eased concerns about a hamstring injury by cruising past Italian fifth seed Flavio Cobolli 6-4 6-1 in his final ATP Finals round-robin match in Turin yesterday, completing an unbeaten group-stage campaign and securing momentum ahead of the semi-finals.

The Spaniard had already booked his place in the last four after victories over American seventh seed Frances Tiafoe and 2021 US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, but his fitness came under scrutiny after he left the court with heavy strapping on his left leg following Wednesday's win over the Russian.

Any doubts were quickly dispelled as Alcaraz broke the already-eliminated Cobolli in the opening game and surged into a 2-0 lead.

The 23-year-old delivered an efficient display, keeping rallies short and dictating play without putting unnecessary strain on his body.

He carried that momentum into the second set, breaking for a 2-0 lead and again to move 4-1 ahead before closing out a 65-minute victory. Alcaraz finished with 29 winners to Cobolli's nine.

Alcaraz underwent an MRI scan on his left hamstring on Thursday, with Spanish media reporting that the examination ruled out a serious injury. He also cancelled a practice session that day and delayed his scheduled warm-up from 1045 to 1300 local time earlier yesteray.

While the convincing win eased immediate concerns over his availability for the knockout stage, the defending Australian Open champion will continue to manage the issue as the season-ending tournament reaches its decisive phase.

Alcaraz is enjoying a resurgent end to the year after spending more than four months sidelined with a wrist injury sustained at the ATP 500 event in Barcelona.

Since returning at the US Open in September, where he was beaten by Ben Shelton in the quarter-finals, Alcaraz has claimed titles in Tokyo, Vienna and Paris to re-establish himself among the favourites for the season-ending crown. With three wins from three in the Ivan Lendl group, Alcaraz heads into the semi-final against American third seed Shelton in strong form as he bids to capture his first ATP Finals title.

Five-times Grand Slam champion Jannik Sinner has already ended his season because of a persistent knee injury, while world number one Alexander Zverev remains among the leading contenders in Turin.

SPOTLIGHT

$350mn for ATP players from 2028 season

AFP
Turin, Italy

Players on the ATP circuit will from 2028 share more than $350mn in prize money, tournament profit and bonuses, the organising body for men's professional tennis said yesterday.

In a statement, the ATP said its projections indicate that players ranked in the men's top 100 will receive at least $1.1mn - a 39 percent increase compared to 2025.

Those in the top 175 will receive at least $450,000 (up 47 percent), and those in the top 250 will receive no less than $250,000, an increase of two thirds.

"When Grand Slam prize money is included, the total is projected to increase to more than half a billion dollars," said the ATP.

Included in the sum is a bonus pool which has more than doubled to $50mn and will be allocated to the world's top 30 players heading into the ATP's top-tier Masters 1000 events.

The ATP said that the world number one - currently Alexander Zverev - would be "eligible for $2mn per event".

Andrea Gaudenzi, the president of the ATP, said that the idea behind the bonus pool was to "drive that value to those players who are actually playing deep into the draws, semi-finals and finals".

"Alcaraz, Sinner, Sascha (Zverev), the top four that actually are the ones doing the extra work, doing the extra effort, and spending the extra days in those tournaments," Gaudenzi told reporters during a conference at the ATP Finals in Turin.

The ATP also announced $25mn for a new end-of-year ranking bonus for players finishing inside the world's top 250.

"We're planning actually to pay $100,000 to our players equally, which will be a meaningful amount for a player ranked 100 to 250 to receive a cheque of $100,000 at the end of the year," added Gaudenzi.


ATP president Andrea Gaudenzi

The ATP also announced reforms of the calendar and ranking system for 2028.

Players can currently replace three bad results in Masters 1000 tournaments with better results in the lower-ranked 250 and 500 series events.

This option is going to be removed in order to stop players eliminated early from top-ranked tournaments from making last-minute entries into smaller ones, a practice which increases the stress of a calendar which is packed with events from January to November.

"What we hope it will drive is basically the players focusing on quality, focusing on ranking as the main goal," Gaudenzi explained yesterday. "And if also we want to achieve the goal of making the offseason longer, we need to reduce the number of tournaments. There is no other solution."

The 2028 calendar, which should see the number of 250 series events cut from 28, will be published at the start of next year, said the ATP.

EQUESTRIAN

Al-Qahtani claims Gold Tour top spot at Hathab


Riding De Ruit, Faris Saad al-Qahtani clocked 48.23 seconds to claim first place in the 140cm Gold Tour class.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Faris Saad al-Qahtani topped the Gold Tour during the sixth leg of the 10th edition of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena.

Riding De Ruit, al-Qahtani clocked 48.23 seconds to claim first place in the 140cm class, which featured a Joker fence. Hamad Nasser al-Qadi finished second in 49.30 seconds aboard Happy Tina, while Cyrine Cherif took third place in 49.58 seconds on Calamando.

In the team competition, Bu Thaila claimed top honours with a combined time of 103.69 seconds.

Al Kass Channels finished second in 107.29 seconds, followed by Al Shaqab Academy in 109.17 seconds. Ahmed al-Badawi, president of the championship's ground jury, presented the awards to the winners.

Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi won the 110cm Open Class against the clock, finishing in 51.17 seconds on Cancador. Khalid Jassim al-Thani was second in 51.70 seconds aboard Palmer, while Hamad Abdullah al-Attiyah took third place in 51.99 seconds on Coffee.

Earlier, Nayla Mohammed al-Thani won the 70cm Future Riders class, clocking 14.62 seconds aboard Malaga. Hamad Mohammed al-Thani finished second in 14.73 seconds on Violet, while Sultan Mohammed al-Suwaidi took third place in 15.11 seconds, also riding Violet. Mohammed Saleh al-Marri, head of the tournament's facilities and logistics committee, presented the prizes.

In the junior category of the same class, Khalid Jassim al Thani topped the standings, followed by Hamad Abdullah al-Attiyah and Noura Abdulaziz al-Rumaihi, who finished third in 54.03 seconds aboard Twinkle.

The sixth leg, organised by the Qatar Equestrian Federation in partnership with Al Shaqab, concludes today with the 90cm Future Riders two-phase competition, followed by the 120cm Bronze Tour for individuals and teams. The programme will conclude with the 150cm Diamond Tour.

The final day will also feature dressage competitions in the Preliminary, Elementary and First Level categories.


Nayla Mohammed al-Thani won the 70cm Future Riders class, clocking 14.62 seconds aboard Malaga.

Agreement in principle for F1 to have V8 engines in 2030, says Brown

Las Vegas: Formula One stakeholders have agreed in principle a switch away from the current crop of V6 hybrid engines to louder V8s from 2030, team bosses said ahead of the Las Vegas Grand Prix.

McLaren's Zak Brown said it was now a matter of dotting the i's and crossing the t's, and Alpine's de facto team principal Flavio Briatore agreed.

"We have the agreement, basically. It's not signed, but it looks like everybody's agreed to 2030 V8s," said Italian Briatore.

"I think it's the right way to go. We need an engine with a lot of noise, and a simple engine, and we need to be racing with that because, in the end, I believe the best for the spectator, for everybody is a very simple engine, a lot of noise and basta (enough)." McLaren and Alpine both use Mercedes engines.

Cadillac's Dan Towriss said he was also happy with developments, with the team set to continue using Ferrari engines until the end of 2029 and a Cadillac V8 engine available from 2030. "Our new power unit facility opens up on December 18th, so as a new manufacturer coming into the sport, the direction is obviously very helpful," he added.

FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem signalled this week that the V8s would be back for 2030. Formula One last used naturally aspirated V8 engines from 2006 to 2013.

OCA CHIEF SHEIKH JOAAN MEETS EL SALVADOR PRESIDENT



Nayib Armando Bukele, President of El Salvador, received HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), at the Presidential Palace in the capital, San Salvador. During the meeting, they exchanged views on prospects for future cooperation and the role of sport in building bridges of friendship and understanding among peoples and strengthening ties between them. Sheikh Joaan also met with Jose Armando Bruni Ochoa, President of the El Salvador Olympic Committee, to discuss ways to strengthen cooperation in sport and the Olympic movement. He also met with Yamil Bukele, President of the Salvadoran Football Federation and a member of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) Central Board, to discuss ways to enhance sporting cooperation.

SPOTLIGHT

Globe-trotting Infantino's Asian focus keeps FIFA presidency rivals at bay

Reuters
Bangkok

Gianni Infantino's appearance at the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) awards ceremony in Bangkok on Thursday underlined the size of the task facing Philippe Diallo and Kozo Tashima as they seek to unseat him as head of world football.

Hours after the three candidates for March's FIFA presidential election were confirmed, Infantino was centre-stage at Asia's annual gala, handing out gleaming gold trophies.

Tashima, former president of the Japan Football Association (JFA), was in the audience. Diallo, current head of the France Football Federation and UEFA's candidate of choice, was nowhere to be seen.

Wherever Asian football leaders have gathered since the collapse in July of Infantino's Fast Forward Enterprise (FFE) proposal - a plan to sell stakes in the World Cup and other major competitions - the FIFA president has been among them.

The AFC had backed him unanimously for re-election before the World Cup, but joined UEFA and CONCACAF in the opposition camp



in the fallout from the FFE plan. Late last month, after a broad Infantino charm offensive, it completed a backflip. Infantino's itinerary is one the largely self-funded Tashima acknowledges he cannot hope to match. "We'll start discussing from now how much budget is needed," Tashima told a press conference after returning to Tokyo.

"The JFA's budget for this year is already set, so I would like support from the JFA. But we'll also have to gather funds, for example by creating a fund or running crowdfunding. I also have no intention of flying by private jet or anything like that. I intend to do this properly with what I have."

By the time Tashima declared his candidacy this month, the Swiss-Italian, armed with a private jet provided by Qatar Airways, had been criss-crossing Asia for more than three months, urging its 47 national federations to press the AFC to restore its support for him.

In August, he attended the final of the ASEAN Championship in Vietnam, meeting informally in Hanoi with several influential figures from the region. In October, the 56-year-old made high-profile visits to Hong Kong and Indonesia for the FIFA ASEAN Cup, a newly established regional tournament backed and promoted by FIFA.

Infantino also stopped off briefly in Bhutan, prompting speculation that FIFA would establish a Himalayas Cup similar to the ASEAN Cup, before moving on to the Gulf Cup final in Saudi Arabia.

Last month he also oversaw the AFC's backflip at an extraordinary congress in Tokyo. On Saturday, he attended the ASEAN Football Federation's congress in Manila, where he pledged almost $20mn to refurbish the Philippines' national stadium.

Infantino's omnipresence, coupled with his status as an incumbent backed by the trappings of office, means any challenger faces an uphill task. Tashima said he wanted to return the focus to the sport and away from administrators in any case.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Pochettino vows to 'build something' at Man United

Pochettino faces a baptism of fire with a trip to bitter rivals Liverpool tomorrow

AFP
Manchester

Mauricio Pochettino said that the Manchester United job was too big to turn down as he vowed to "build something" at the fallen Premier League giants.

The Argentine left his role as USA coach to take on the daunting challenge of reviving United's fortunes after Michael Carrick was dismissed last week with the team in the relegation zone.

Former Tottenham and Chelsea boss Pochettino faces a baptism of fire with a trip to bitter rivals Liverpool tomorrow. The new United manager was upbeat at his first press conference, choosing to focus on the future rather than criticising United's underperforming players. "We are here not to denounce things," said Pochettino, who has signed a two-and-a-half-year deal at Old Trafford. "We are here to build something with our players and with the club and try to perform and win games."

United's fortunes have plummeted in the 13 years since Alex Ferguson retired but Pochettino said the job remained a huge draw. "A club like Manchester United you cannot turn down. You cannot say no," said the 54-year-old, who won the French league title with Paris Saint-Germain. "It's difficult to find another club, the size of club, that is Manchester United."

Carrick led the Red Devils to third place in the Premier League last season during a successful interim spell in charge but this season has been a disaster. United are in the bottom three with just one win in their opening 10 league games – their worst start to a top-flight campaign for 40 years.

Pochettino believes he has inherited a talented squad, despite their current predicament. "Our most important job is to try to get the best from them," he said. "To create the environment for them to express their talent because we have talented players on the squad. That is our main focus."

Pochettino confirmed that Bruno Fernandes would remain as captain even though the Portugal midfielder's future at the club is uncertain.

Fernandes questioned Carrick's tactics following a 4-1 Champions League thrashing by Como last month and was dropped for the following game.

Last season's Premier League player of the year is out of contract in June, although United have the option to extend his deal by a year. "Bruno is our captain and I think he is a very important player," said Pochettino. "But all the players need to feel that they are important from the top to the bottom."

United's under-fire CEO Omar Berrada believes Pochettino can kickstart a revival, though he admits sacking Carrick was a "very difficult decision".

"He has a tremendous amount of passion and energy," Berrada said. "We see it already in the two days he's been with us. I think he's coming just at the right time for him and us to be able to help the team and take us forward."

Berrada defended the club's signings in the summer transfer window after defender Lisandro Martinez publicly criticised the hierarchy for a lack of investment.

United signed midfielders Carlos Baleba, Youri Tielemans and Andrey Santos but failed to address shortcomings in attack and defence. Berrada insisted the club remained in the market for "top talent" despite reportedly being priced out of some of their prime targets.

"We have the ambition to win – to win the Premier League, to win the Champions League, to win the domestic cups and for that, we need top talent," he said. "When we find the right opportunities, we will spend. But what we don't want to be doing is spending just for the sake of it."



Mauricio Pochettino left his role as USA coach to take on the daunting challenge of reviving Manchester United's fortunes with the team in the relegation zone.

FOCUS

Saliba fit for Arsenal's Newcastle trip, Zubimendi out

Reuters
London

Arsenal centre back William Saliba is available for today's Premier League trip to Newcastle United after recovering from a back injury sustained during the World Cup but Martin Zubimendi is out with a hamstring injury, manager **Mikel Arteta** said.

Saliba was forced off the field during France's World Cup semi-final loss to Spain in July, and underwent a long rehabilitation programme. The 25-year-old appeared for Arsenal's U-21 side earlier this month, and recently played a friendly against Watford behind closed doors.

"He's ready. He's in a good condition. He played two games, one behind closed doors and one more official and he did really well," Arteta told a press conference.

Arsenal have excelled in Saliba's absence, with close-season signing Ezri Konsa slotting in alongside Gabriel at the heart of the defence. The Frenchman was a standout performer in their run to the Premier League title last season, but is not guaranteed to immediately reclaim his place in an Arsenal defence that has conceded only five goals in 10 league games this season.



Arsenal, however, will be without defensive midfielder Zubimendi for a few weeks after the Spain international suffered a hamstring injury during Sunday's Nations League clash with England.

"He's out, he has a slight problem in his hamstring. But after the MRI scan there is an injury and he's going to be out for a few weeks," Arteta added. Winger Bukayo Saka, who is out with a quadriceps injury, is still four weeks away from a possible return, the manager confirmed.

Champions Arsenal are top of the table after five straight wins, sitting five points above second-placed Brighton & Hove Albion. Arsenal's former Newcastle midfielder Bruno Guimaraes will return to St James' Park for the first time since leaving the club in the close season.

Guimaraes spent four-and-a-half seasons at Newcastle, and played a key role in their 2025 League Cup win.

Arteta said he hoped the Brazilian would get a good reception at Newcastle.

"I think he was one of the main players there and I think he came to the club in a really important part when they had a massive lift in performance and what they achieved together was impressive," the coach said.

Newcastle are 12th, with one win in the last six games in all competitions.

"We have another training session this afternoon to make sure we nail the preparation... Bruno knows them really well. (We're) ready for that," Arteta added.

LIVERPOOL'S IRAOLA WARY OF UNITED UNDER POCHETTINO

Meanwhile, Liverpool manager Andoni Iraola wants his side to be prepared for surprises when Manchester United, under new boss Mauricio Pochettino, visit Anfield in the Premier League tomorrow.

United, a lowly 18th in the table, are winless in the league since August, but Iraola believes the rivalry with Liverpool and the arrival of a new manager could breathe new life into their lacklustre campaign.

"We have to acknowledge the importance of the game... they have a new manager, new challenges for us," Iraola told a press conference on Friday.

"It's true that they have this small advantage, we don't have references to prepare, because they can go different ways that we honestly don't know right now."

Iraola said United's players would try to impress the new manager and that Liverpool would have to deal with that early in the game.

"The beginning of the game will be important... we know their players very well, who they are, the strengths and weaknesses they have shown," the Spaniard said.

Liverpool are fourth in the league and have won six of their last eight matches in all competitions, including their penalty shootout victory over Chelsea in the League Cup. Their home form continues to bother Iraola, however, with the team winning only one of their five league games at Anfield.

United have not lost to rivals Liverpool since September 2024, and they have not been beaten at Anfield since a famous 7-0 thrashing by Juergen Klopp's side in March 2023.

Spain face France, England take on Norway in Nations League quarters

Paris: World champions Spain will face France while England will play Norway in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Nations League, after the draw took place yesterday.

Spain beat France 2-0 in the semi-finals of the World Cup in the United States in July, on the way to winning the trophy. They also defeated Les Bleus 5-4 in the semi-finals of the last edition of the Nations League, last year.

"This will not be about getting revenge for the World Cup semi-final," Zinedine Zidane, who was appointed France coach following that tournament, said. "We knew we were going to get a strong opponent and we have got the reigning world champions."

The quarter-finals will be played over two legs in late March, with Spain at home first after coming second in Group A3, while France topped Group A1. Spain won the Nations League in 2023 while France beat them to win the 2021 final.

England topped Group A3 on goal difference after beating Spain away in their last outing, and their reward is a two-legged last-eight tie against Norway with the first leg on Norwegian soil. England edged Norway in the World Cup quarter-finals this year before losing to Argentina in the semi-finals.

"Any one of our possible quarter-final opponents were going to pose a significant threat so we know what to expect against the Norwegians," said England coach Thomas Tuchel. "I'm sure our loyal supporters are equally as excited and we look forward to creating more memories both on the road and at Wembley."

The other quarter-final ties pitched reigning Nations League champions Portugal against the Netherlands, and Belgium against Germany. "So much can happen in the time between now and then," Germany coach Jurgen Klopp said.

"We're very happy with the last impression we left, but we're also fully aware that we are right at the beginning of a development process," added Klopp, whose team topped Group A2 after thrashing the Netherlands 5-0 in Berlin on Monday.

The winners of the quarter-finals will advance to the final stages, which will be held in June in a venue yet to be decided. Spain or France will play the Netherlands or Portugal in the semis, with England facing Belgium or Germany should they get past Norway.

There will also be play-offs for relegation between Leagues A and B in late March, with Wales -- who finished bottom of Group A4 -- fighting for top-tier survival in a two-legged tie against Slovenia. Ireland, who came second in their group in League B, will play Croatia while Denmark face Bosnia and Herzegovina and Hungary play Serbia. The four nations already promoted to League A are Switzerland, Northern Ireland, Austria and Sweden. The Nations League quarter-finals and play-offs in March will all take place at the same time as qualifying begins for Euro 2028.