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CRICKET | Page 2

Bangladesh whitewash T20 champs England 3-0



OLYMPICS | Page 3

IOC has 'last word' on Russian inclusion, says Paris 2024 chief

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FOOTBALL

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Page 4

MOTORSPORT

Qatar International Baja boosted by global strength of FIA T3, T4 Categories

Lusail Boulevard to host ceremonial start tomorrow



Saudi Arabia's Dania Akeel finished as runner-up last season and will be looking to recover quickly from a disappointing Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in her Can-Am.

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

The record entry for this week-end's Qatar International Baja has been boosted by the global strength and popularity of the FIA T3 category for lightweight prototype machines and the secondary FIA T4 section for modified production side-by-side vehicles.

The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) has announced that 21 vehicles had been entered in T3 with a further 13 in T4, although Saudi Arabia's Saleh al-Saif has since confirmed that he will not be able to attend the event and defend his early lead in the T3 category of the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas.

The FIA T3 class is booming, largely due to the success of the South Racing and FN Speed Can-Am Maverick X3s, the new X-raid Yamaha YXZ 1000 R prototype, the XtremePlus Polaris RZR, the PH-Sport Zephyr and the G Rally Team's OT3.

In al-Saif's absence, the defending champion Fernando Alvarez has the perfect opportunity to move ahead in the rankings. The Spaniard finished second at the opening event in Saudi Arabia and only trails al-Saif by eight points heading into what is sure to be a challenging weekend coping with the heat, possible winds and the tricky navigation that makes Qatar's Baja such a challenge.

Dania Akeel finished as runner-up to Alvarez last season and will be looking to recover quickly from a disappointing Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in her Can-Am. The Saudi holds third in



QMMF driver Nasser al-Kuwari is registered for the FIA World Cup.

the rankings, three points clear of the Dutch businessman Kees Koolen in his G Rally Team OT3.

Other regular championship contenders present include Spain's Santiago Navarro, Brazilian Otavio Sousa, Argentina's Hector Diego Martinez and Kuwait's Meshari al-Thefiri.

Yasir Seaidan leads the FIA Middle East's T3 category but is not present at the Qatar Baja. His absence paves the way for fellow countrymen Hamad al-Harbi and Abdullah al-Shegawi to battle it out for valuable points against a fierce local line-up.

The QMMF has entered seven Can-Ams for a selection of Qatar's leading drivers and former FIA World T2 Champion Adel Abdulla, Rashid al-Muhannadi, Mohamed al-Meer and Nouef Hassan al-Suwaidi are registered to score points in the FIA Middle East Cup, along with Lebanon's Henry Kahy, a former FIA MERC3 champion.

The remaining three QMMF drivers, Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, Nasser al-

Kuwari and Ahmed al-Muhannadi, are registered for the FIA World Cup, alongside Frenchman Lionel Baud in a second OT3, Frenchman Jean-Luc Ceccaldi in a PH-Sport Zephyr and Portuguese privateer Mario Franco (Yamaha YXZ 1000 R).

Spaniard Pau Navarro holds a six-point advantage over Frenchman Jeremie Warnia in the FIA World Cup's T3 standings. But the young FN Speed Team Can-Am driver faces a strong field in Qatar that includes Warnia and his other title rivals – Brazilian Cristiano de Sousa, Uruguay's Luis Henderson, Italy's Pietro Cinotto and Spain's Ricardo Ramilo.

Kuwait's Salem Al-Dhafeeri arrives in Lusail with a five-point advantage over Saudi female driver Maha al-Hameli in the FIA Middle East Cup's T4 championship.

Adding strength to the T4 category are a quartet of local drivers registered for the FIA Middle East Cup, with former biker and quad rider Ahmed al-Kuwari leading the way in his Yamaha. He is joined by Khalid al-Mohannadi (Polaris), Abdullah al-Khelaifi (Yamaha) and Mohamed al-Attiah (Can-Am). Italy's Stefano Marrini has also entered in a Can-Am.

The competitive action gets underway with a Prologue stage tomorrow from 14.15hrs onwards. This precedes the ceremonial start at a new location on Lusail Boulevard, starting with the motorcycles and quads from 19.30hrs.

Today, administration checks and scrutineering will take place at Lusail before several of the leading riders and drivers attend the official pre-event press conference from 18.00hrs at the Lusail Sports Complex.

FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas points tally

- T3 positions after round 1**
1. Saleh al-Saif (SAU) 38pts
 2. Fernando Alvarez (ESP) 30
 3. Dania Akeel (SAU) 25
 4. Kees Koolen (NLD) 22
 5. Santiago Navarro (ESP) 18
 6. Otavio Sousa (BRA) 17
 7. Hector Martinez (ARG) 11
 8. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT) 9

- T4 positions after round 1**
1. Pau Navarro (ESP) 38pts
 2. Jeremie Warnia (FRA) 32
 3. Michele Cinotto (ITA) 24
 4. Ricardo Ramilo (ESP) 22
 5. Cristiano Batista (BRA) 18

6. Luis Henderson (URY) 16
- FIA Middle East Cup for Cross-Country Bajas**
- T3 positions after round 1**
1. Yasir Seaidan (SAU) 40
 2. Hamad Al-Harbi (SAU) 33
 3. Abdullah al-Shegawi (SAU) 26

- T4 positions after round 1**
1. Salem Al-Dhafeeri (KWT) 38pts
 2. Maha Al-Hameli (SAU) 33pts
 3. Saeed Al-Mouri (SAU) 28pts



FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas defending champion Fernando Alvarez of Spain.



تحذير

بتاريخ ١٦ - ١٨ مارس ٢٠٢٣ سيقام سباق باها قطر الدولي الجولة الثانية من بطولة العالم للسيارات و الدراجات النارية بمناطق -بوئيله/جنوب العطورية/وادي العب/ الجميلية/بوسدرة/جري الذياب/جنوب الزبارة/ام/الما/ زكريت / طريق الشحانية/ جنوب طريق الشحانية/ الخرسعة/ ام باب/ الخراج/ طريق ام باب/الكرعانة/الخراره/سيلين/خور العديد/شمال العامرية وسيتم استخدام الطرق الموضحة في الخريطة يرجى اخذ الحيطة و الحذر الشديد اثناء القيادة أو التخييم في المناطق المذكورة.

WARNING

On 16th - 18th March 2023 Qatar International Baja , 2nd Round of FIA Cross Country Bajas Middle East Cup & 2nd Round of FIM Baja World Cup will be held in - **Bu Thaila / South Ufouriya / Wadi Al Waab/ Al-Jumayliyah / Bu Sidra / Jery Al Theyab / South Zubara / Umm Almaa / Zekreet / Al Shahhaniya Street / South Al Shahhaniya Road / Al Kharsaah / Umm Bab / Al Kharaij / Street Umm Bab / Al-Kiranah / Al Kharrara / Sealine / Khawr al Udayd / North Al Aamriya** areas using the routes marked on the map. Please take extra care if you are driving or camping near these areas.



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QSL announces new Ooredoo Cup final date

Doha: The Qatar Stars League has announced that the 2022-2023 season Ooredoo Cup final will be played on March 28 instead of March 27. The final will be played at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium of Al Sadd club at 10pm, as was announced previously, the QSL said in a statement. Both the semi-finals will be held on March 23, with Umm Salal facing Al Arabi and Al Duhail taking on Al Sadd.

QATAR JUNIOR OPEN SQUASH CHAMPIONSHIP BEGINS
The Qatar Junior Open Squash Championship, organized by the Qatar Tennis Squash & Badminton Sports Federation (QTSBF), kicked off yesterday at the Khalifa International Sports Complex.
More than 40 players are competing in the five-day

tournament in Under 11, 13, 15, 17 and U19 categories. The championship also has the participation of national players such as Khaled al-Baker, Abdullah al-Sharshani and Ahmed al-Maraghi.

Tournament director Saad al-Mohannadi said: "The tournament has recorded a wide participation of players who are aiming to gain experience and to enhance their technical levels."

Al-Mohannadi, who also holds the position of Executive Director of the Qatar Tennis, Squash and Badminton Federation, stressed that the federation is committed to developing national players as a priority to advance the game, in addition to its keenness to spread squash in the local community.

CRICKET

SPOTLIGHT

Bangladesh whitewash T20 champs England

Set 159 to win, England manage only 142 for the loss of six wickets in the final T20



Bangladesh players celebrate with the trophy after winning the series. (Reuters)

AFP
Dhaka

Liton Das smashed a Twenty20 career-best 73 as Bangladesh stunned world champions England to sweep the series 3-0 yesterday in a massive upset in front of an ecstatic home crowd. In a major humiliation for England's normally clinical white ball unit ahead of the 50-over World Cup in India later this year, Bangladesh won the third and final T20 in Dhaka by 16 runs.

Bangladesh had taken the first game by six wickets and the second by four wickets to give the home side their first series victory over defending T20 and ODI World Cup champions England in any format. "It's really disappointing obviously to lose but congratulations to Bangladesh.

They outplayed us and they deserve their victory," said England captain Jos Buttler.

Set 159 to win after winning the toss and opting to bowl, England managed only 142 for the loss of six wickets despite a strong start as Taskin Ahmed took 2-26. Debutant Tanvir Islam dismissed Phil Salt for a duck in the very first over.

But Dawid Malan, who survived on review after being given out lbw for six, and Buttler looked to be cruising, putting England on track with a second-wicket stand of 95. Mustafizur Rahman added the first twist in the contest by removing Malan for 53, which brought him his 100th T20I wicket.

Buttler was soon run out for 40 with a direct hit from Mehidy Hasan that brought Bangladesh firmly back into the contest and got the crowd going. But-

ler admitted that his dismissal "potentially cost (us) the game." "I was) really disappointed in myself for not diving and not making my ground. You know you should be fully committed to making that run," Buttler said after the match.

Taskin claimed the wickets of Moeen Ali (nine) and Ben Duckett (11) before Shakib Al Hasan got rid of Sam Curran (four) to complete the rout. Put into bat, opener Liton had given Bangladesh a positive start, putting on 55 runs with Rony Talukdar in the opening stand.

England's first breakthrough came when Adil Rashid dismissed Rony for 24 but Najmul Hossain and Liton added 84 runs for the second wicket to keep up momentum. England missed a chance to dismiss Liton soon after the right-hander completed his ninth T20I half-century

when Duckett dropped him on 51 at deep mid-wicket off Jofra Archer.

Chris Jordan brought an end to Liton's 57-ball innings, forcing him to give a catch to Salt at deep mid-wicket. England did well to contain the Bangladeshi batsmen after Liton's dismissal with only one boundary struck in the death overs. But Najmul, who survived on 40 after being given lbw off Jordan, ensured Bangladesh still had a decent score with his third 40-plus innings in the series. Jordan and Rashid finished with 1-21 and 1-23 for England respectively.

"The wicket played better as it went on and I thought it was a good score to restrict them to. And we got into a position where hopefully we (could) kick on and win the game," Buttler said. "But that didn't happen."

Bangladesh skipper Shakib

said his batsmen had performed well on a tricky wicket. "We were really good in this T20 series, I thought we fielded exceptionally throughout these three matches. I think all the bowlers bowled well, they have been always good," Shakib said. "I thought we batted really well on a tricky wicket," he said. "We knew we had to bowl well and... stick to our plans."

England, who won the ODI World Cup at home in 2019 and the T20 title in Australia last year, won the preceding three-match one-day international series 2-1.

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 158-2, 20 overs (Liton Das 73, Najmul Hossain 47; C. Jordan 1-21, A. Rashid 1-23)
bt England 142-6, 20 overs (D. Malan 53, J. Buttler 40; Taskin Ahmed 2-26) by 16 runs

Smith to captain Australia in India ODIs, Warner returns



Australia's captain Steve Smith.

AFP
New Delhi

Steve Smith will lead Australia in the upcoming one-day international series against India as David Warner returns to the side after recovering from an elbow injury, selectors said yesterday. The three-match series beginning Friday will give the Australians more useful practice on local wickets ahead of the ODI World Cup in India later this year.

Smith will stand in for Pat Cummins, who returned home after leading Australia in the first two Test matches to care for his ailing mother who died last week. The visitors lost the series 2-1 – the fourth straight defeat to India – with the last match in Ahmedabad ending in a draw on Monday.

Star batsman Warner played in the first two Tests but returned to Australia after a blow to the head and injuring his elbow.

He was due to rejoin the squad in Mumbai on Tuesday following "two final rehabilitation sessions on his elbow", Cricket Australia said. Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Marsh, Sean Abbott, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa, Josh Inglis, Ashton Agar and Nathan Ellis – coming in for Jhye Richardson – arrived in India on Friday and trained in Ahmedabad.

SQUAD: Steve Smith (capt), Sean Abbott, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, David Warner, Adam Zampa

to an extended period in Asian conditions will be beneficial to their development and given the World Cup this year is in India, the more exposure to these conditions the better, despite it being a different format," he said in a statement.

Ireland have played just three Test matches, losing all of them, since being given Test status in 2017. They are due to play their fourth, in Bangladesh, in early April. In June they are set to take on England in a one-off Test at Lord's.

Ireland squad: Andrew Balbirnie (capt), Mark Adair, Curtis Campher, Murray Commins, George Dockrell, Fionn Hand, Graham Hume, Matthew Humphreys, Tom Mayes, Andrew McBrine, James McCollum, PJ Moor, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker, Ben White.

Latham to captain New Zealand for Sri Lanka ODI series

Tom Latham will captain New Zealand in one-day internationals against Sri Lanka with a host of Black Caps stars released to their Indian Premier League clubs. Latham will be skipper for the whiteball matches at Auckland's Eden Park on March 25, Christchurch three days later and Hamilton on March 31.

Kane Williamson (Gujarat Titans), Tim Southee (Kolkata Knight Riders), Devon Conway and Mitchell Santner (both Chennai Super Kings) are not available, New Zealand Cricket said. The quartet will join their Indian franchises after the second Test against Sri Lanka, which starts in Wellington on Friday.

Williamson steered New Zealand to a thrilling last-ball win over Sri Lanka in the first Test on Monday on a rain-disrupted final day in Christchurch. With a host of stars absent, Black Caps coach Gary Stead has added South African-born batter Chad Bowes and seamer Ben Lister to the ODI squad.

Lister made his Twenty20 debut in India last month while this is the first time Bowes has been selected for the Black Caps.

New Zealand will host Sri Lanka in three Twenty20 matches following the ODI series.

NEW ZEALAND ODI SQUAD: Tom Latham (c), Finn Allen, Tom Blundell, Chad Bowes, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Ben Lister, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Glenn Phillips, Henry Shipley, Ish Sodhi, Blair Tickner, Will Young

Ireland to play two Tests in Sri Lanka after schedule tweak

Ireland's tour of Sri Lanka next month will now include two Test matches – the visitors' fifth and sixth ever – after a scheduling rejig, officials said. The tour initially comprised one Test match and two ODIs, but both teams agreed to play a second Test and skip the 50-over games.

Both Test matches will be played in Galle, the first starting on April 16 and the second on April 24. Richard Holdsworth, of Cricket Ireland, said they agreed to the late change in schedule because the Test series is preceded by six white-ball matches in Bangladesh and followed by three further ODIs after they return home.

"Exposing our playing group

India to monitor workload of players in IPL ahead of WTC final



India's captain Rohit Sharma (R) listens to his teammate Virat Kohli during the fifth day of the fourth and final Test cricket match between India and Australia in Ahmedabad on Monday. (AFP)

Bengaluru: India will monitor the workload of their players in the build-up to the World Test Championship (WTC) final against Australia, with some of them set to play key roles with their teams in the Indian Premier League, captain Rohit Sharma said.

Rohit, whose side sealed a 2-1 homes series victory over the same opponents to qualify for the WTC title clash, will also explore the possibility of sending some players to Britain earlier than scheduled to prepare for the match. The IPL kicks off on March 31 and the final is scheduled for May 28, while the WTC decider begins at The Oval on June 7.

"I think it's quite critical for us," Rohit said. "We're going to keep in constant touch with all our players who are going to be part of that final and to monitor their workload and what's happening with them."

India pacers Mohamed Siraj (Royal Challengers Bangalore), Mohamed Shami (Gujarat Titans) and Umesh Yadav (Kolkata Knight Riders) are among those expected to be heavily involved in the domestic Twenty20 competition. Rohit said India would make sure the trio were ready for the WTC final.

"We're sending some (red) Duke balls to all fast bowlers as well," Rohit said. "I believe in

preparation and it's again going to be key for us. Around May 21, there will be six teams who will possibly be out of the IPL playoffs, so whichever players are available, we'll try get them to the UK as early as possible."

India's success against Australia came on turning tracks but Rohit expects a different ball game at a neutral venue. "Both teams have played lot of cricket in that part of the world and I won't say it'll be alien conditions," Rohit said.

"But yes, compared to what it's like playing India in India or Australia in Australia, it's not going to be like that, it'll be slightly different. I'm sure both teams will prepare for it." (Reuters)

Waset Al Shaqab and Farha Ainain champion stallion and mare at 8th Qatar National Peninsula Horse Show for Individual Owners



Waset Al Shaqab won the Senior Stallions Championship gold while Farha Ainain won gold in the Senior Mares Championship on the second and final day of the 8th Qatar National Peninsula Horse Show for Individual Owners which concluded at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena. Yazeed Al Rayyan and AK Dana claimed gold in the Junior Colts and Fillies' Championships respectively. The Yearling Fillies Championship gold went to LD-Ghalia Al Marroona. Earlier the 11th Qatar National Arabian Horse Show for Individual Owners was held from March 10-12.

OLYMPICS

Paris 2024 chief says IOC has ‘last word’ on Russian inclusion

AFP
Paris

The head of the Paris Olympics organising committee Tony Estanguet said in an interview to mark 500 days before the start of the Games that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would have the “last word” on whether athletes from Russian and Belarus will be allowed to compete next year.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, assisted by its ally Belarus, there have been calls from across the sporting world either to ban their athletes or have them compete under a neutral flag. Last week, however, the International Fencing Federation (FIE) became the first Olympic sport to reopen events to athletes from the two nations when it decided to allow fencers to compete in Olympic qualifying events, sparking outrage in Ukraine.

“The international federations are currently refining their qualifications, to know if Russian or Belarusian athletes will be allowed to participate in these qualifying competitions,” Estanguet said. “And then the IOC, depending on what the international federations have done, even if Russian or Belarusian athletes have qualified, will be able to say whether it will allow them to participate in these Games or not. This decision has not been taken. And Paris 2024 is not in a position to decide.”

Estanguet said the priority, however, was not the Olympics but “how the situation can be resolved quickly and how we can best support the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian athletes.” The three-time Olympic gold medalist said he had discussed the Russia/Belarus question with French President Emmanuel Macron.

“Of course there are exchanges between us and the president of the republic, and between the president and the IOC,” Estanguet said. “Again, it is the IOC that has the last word.”

In spite of the crisis surrounding the ongoing war in Ukraine, Estanguet sounded upbeat as he looked ahead to next year’s Olympics and Paralympics in the French capital. “We feel that all the ingredients are in place for the magic of the Games to work,” he said.

“The athletes are already qualifying, the infrastructure continues to advance... fans are readying themselves. Three million tickets were sold in the first phase of sales, in less than three weeks, a record in France. The green light is on, we are on schedule, we still have the same ambitions.”

In spite of the high sales, the organising committee has come in for criticism for the high price of tickets and the

system being used to sell them. “There are many more people interested than there are tickets available, even though we have 13 million tickets,” he said, citing numbers for the Olympics and the Paralympics combined.

“There are still opportunities (to get tickets). That starts with the second phase (beginning on Wednesday). There will not be enough for everyone and I expect that this second phase will continue to generate disappointments and frustrations. It’s inevitable. But some people will be lucky, you have to take your chances.”

Estanguet also said there was “still time to refine” the opening ceremony which organisers intend to hold on the Seine, the river that cuts through Paris. “There are still adaptations to be made,” he said. “It is normal and I think that there will be many between now and July 26, 2024.”

Performers dressed as the event mascots The Phryges pose during the unveiling of a digital countdown panel 500 days ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympic Games in Bobigny, a suburb of Paris, yesterday. (AFP)



Performers dressed as the event mascots The Phryges pose during the unveiling of a digital countdown panel 500 days ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympic Games in Bobigny, a suburb of Paris, yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Alcaraz, Swiatek march on at Indian Wells

Wells, Murray falls

Fourth-seeded Jabeur was beaten 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 by Czech Vondrousova

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Carlos Alcaraz fended off tenacious Tallon Griekspoor 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 on Monday to reach the fourth round at Indian Wells as he and women’s top seed Iga Swiatek passed tough tests in the California desert. Alcaraz, 19, had a testing time breaking through against his determined Dutch foe, who had won their only prior hard court meeting.

He didn’t face a break point in the first set, nor could he convert either of his two. A strong start in the tiebreaker proved the difference, Alcaraz locking up the set with a forehand winner on his second set point. He rolled from there, breaking Griekspoor in the second game on the way to a 3-0 lead in the second set.

“It has been a really tough match,” Alcaraz said of his 100th ATP Tour match win. “Tallon is playing great, I had to be really focused. Of course playing with a lot of wind like today is also tough. I had chances at the beginning of the first set, I didn’t take it. The second set, I took my chances that I had in the beginning and thanks to that I was able to play more relaxed.”

Alcaraz will face Britain’s Jack Draper for a place in the quarter-finals after Draper overcame former world number one Andy Murray 7-6 (8/6), 6-2. Women’s world number one Swiatek, seeking to become the first woman since Martina Navratilova in 1990 and ‘91 to win back-to-back titles in the combined WTA and ATP Masters 1000 event, elevated her game when she had to for a 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) victory over Canadian Bianca Andreescu.

Andreescu, whose 2019 Indian Wells title proved the springboard to a breakout season that included a US Open crown, pushed Swiatek through punishing baseline rallies, trading six breaks of serve with the reigning French and US Open champion in the second set only to be overpowered in the tiebreaker. “Bianca can change the rhythm pretty well on this surface, it can get tough,” Swiatek said, but added she was “glad that I had a chance to play under pressure a little bit more and see how I’m going to cope with that.”

Swiatek next faces another former US Open champion in Britain’s Emma Raducanu, who earned an impressive 6-1, 2-6, 6-4 victory over big-hitting Brazilian Beatriz Haddad Maia. Raducanu, who has battled nagging wrist trouble and tonsillitis in recent weeks, notched her best win by ranking since she captured the US Open two years ago.

Reigning Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan punched her ticket to the fourth round with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over former champion Paula



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain in action against Tallon Griekspoor of Netherlands at the Indian Wells Masters. (AFP)

Badosa of Spain. Rybakina, ranked 10th in the world after a runner-up finish to Aryna Sabalenka at the Australian Open in January, had lost her last three matches against Badosa – her doubles partner this week.

Fourth-seeded Tunisian Ons Jabeur, playing her first tournament since missing Doha and Dubai in the wake of knee surgery, was beaten 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 by Czech Marketa Vondrousova – the same woman who upset Jabeur in the second round of the Australian Open. In another rematch of an Australian Open second-round clash, fifth-seeded Caroline Garcia beat Canadian Leylah Fernandez 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1.

In other men’s action, defending champion Taylor Fritz cruised past Argentina’s Sebastian Baez 6-1, 6-2. Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka, 37, beat 19-year-old seventh seed Holger Rune 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 7-5.

A former world number three now ranked 100th, Wawrinka avenged a first-

round defeat to the Dane at the Paris Masters in November, where Rune saved three match points to launch his run to a first Masters title. Murray, 35 and trying to grind his way back after hip replacement surgery, couldn’t pull off a similar feat against his 21-year-old compatriot Draper.

Draper led the first set 3-1 but was broken at love as he served for the set at 5-4. He had to save a set point with an ace but never trailed in the tiebreaker. Draper won the last four games to win his first meeting with his childhood hero.

“I’ve looked up to Andy since I was so young,” Draper said. “I watched him win Wimbledon for the first time in 2013 ... He’s a really special person, a great champion, great human being and I’m privileged to play against him on this court.”

THIRD ROUND RESULTS

Men: Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) bt Tallon Griekspoor (NED x31) 7-6 (7/4), 6-3; Jack Draper (GBR) bt Andy Murray (SCO) 7-6

(8/6), 6-2; Tommy Paul (USA x17) bt Hubert Hurkacz (POL x9) 4-6, 6-2, 6-4; Félix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x8) bt Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x27) 7-5, 6-4; Taylor Fritz (USA x4) bt Sebastián Báez (ARG x30) 6-1, 6-2; Márton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Alex Molcan (SVK) 6-4, 6-2; Jannik Sinner (ITA x11) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA) 7-6 (9/7), 6-4; Stan Wawrinka (SUI) bt Holger Rune (DEN x7) 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 7-5

Women: Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Bianca Andreescu (CAN x32) 6-3, 7-6 (7/1); Emma Raducanu (GBR) bt Beatriz Haddad Maia (BRA x13) 6-1, 2-6, 6-4; Sorana Cirstea (ROM) bt Bernarda Pera (USA) 6-3, 6-1; Caroline Garcia (FRA x5) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN x30) 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1; Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN x4) 7-6 (7/5), 6-4; Karolina Muchova (CZE) bt Martina Trevisan (ITA x23) 6-4, 3-6, 6-4; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x10) bt Paula Badosa (ESP x21) 6-3, 7-5; Varvara Gracheva (RUS) bt Daria Kasatkina (RUS x8) 6-4, 6-4

FOOTBALL

Real outcast Hazard ‘caught in a spiral’

Real Madrid forward Eden Hazard says he is “caught in a spiral” and only game time with the European champions can lift him out of it. The 32-year-old has not played a minute for Madrid in La Liga or the Champions League since the World Cup however.

Signed from Chelsea in a blockbuster deal in 2019, he has a year left on his contract. “The only thing that can lift me out of this spiral is game time and even then I know I won’t be scoring five goals in my first game. “I don’t speak with the coach,” the player conceded of his relations with Carlo Ancelotti when interviewed on Belgian television. “I want to stay here and prove I can still play football, which some people doubt.”

Hazard said he wanted to stay at Real and would not leave in the next transfer window even if some of his teammates were advising him to move on. “I’m not asking for a full game, I just want to feel useful,” said Hazard, who stepped down from international football with Belgium after the World Cup.

RAMSEY NAMED WALES CAPTAIN AFTER BALE RETIREMENT

Aaron Ramsey was named as the new Wales captain following the retirement of Gareth Bale, as the team prepare for their opening Euro 2024 qualifiers. The 32-year-old, who has won 78 caps, will lead his country for the first time in matches against Croatia and Latvia later



this month. Former Arsenal and Juventus midfielder Ramsey, who is currently at French side Nice, will spearhead a youthful 24-man squad named by Wales manager Rob Page. Bale announced his retirement in January after winning a record 111 caps for Wales’ men’s team.

Ramsey has done the job before, having been appointed captain at the age of 20 by the late Gary Speed in March 2011.

Speed’s successor, Chris Coleman, gave the armband to Ashley Williams the following year. As well as the departure of Wales’ record-scorer Bale, Chris Gunter, Joe Allen and Jonny Williams have also retired from the international scene since the team’s disappointing World Cup campaign in Qatar, where they scored just once and finished bottom of their group.

Page has named four uncapped players in his squad for the trip to World Cup semi-finalists Croatia on March 25 and the home game with Latvia three days later.

Midfielders Jordan James and Ollie Cooper both feature, along with Fulham youngster Luke Harris and Ipswich forward Nathan Broadhead.

Golf’s governing bodies propose rule change to reduce ball distance

London: Golf’s governing bodies have proposed a new rule to give tournament organisers the option to require the use of a distance-reducing ball over fears that elite players are taming courses too easily. Advances in fitness and technology have enabled golfers to hit the ball further – at last week’s Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass, world number three Rory McIlroy hit a tee shot 362 yards.

The R&A, which organises the British Open, and fellow rule-makers US Golf Association (USGA), said in 2020 they intended to “break the ever-increasing cycle of hitting distance”. Since then they have been consulting with equipment manufacturers and yesterday they announced the proposal of a Model Local Rule (MLR) that would give organisers the option to use specially adapted balls.

Speaking in 2021, Masters chairman Fred Ridley said a specific “Masters ball” would be a last resort in the battle to limit hitting distances. The par-five 13th hole at Augusta National has been extended by 35 yards for next month’s Masters. The MLR is intended for use only in elite competitions and, if adopted, would have no impact on recreational golf.

The proposal was sent to equipment manufacturers on Monday and they can provide feedback until August 14. If adopted, it would take effect in January 2026. Under the proposals, a ball struck at a laboratory-controlled swing speed of 127 miles per hour must not travel more than 320

yards (293 metres). The change is expected to reduce hitting distance by 14 to 15 yards on average for the longest hitters with the highest clubhead speeds. “Hitting distances at the elite level of the game have consistently increased over the past 20, 40, and 60 years, said USGA CEO Mike Whan. “It’s been two decades since we last revisited our testing standards for ball distances. Predictable, continuous increases will become a significant issue for the next generation if not addressed soon.”

R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers said: “We believe the proposed Model Local Rule will help us move forward in a way that protects the inherent qualities of the sport and reduces the pressure to lengthen courses. “This is an important issue for golf and one which needs to be addressed if the sport is to retain its unique challenge and appeal.”

The US PGA Tour said it would continue its own “extensive independent analysis” and would collaborate with the USGA and the R&A. “The Tour remains committed to ensuring any future solutions identified benefit the game as a whole, without negatively impacting the Tour, its players or our fans’ enjoyment of our sport,” it said in a statement.

David Maher, the chief executive of leading equipment company Acushnet, warned the proposal “would be detrimental to golf’s long-term well-being”, stressing the need for a unified set of rules.

Qatar Promotion Padel Tournament from today

Doha: The main rounds of the Qatar Promotion Padel Tournament will kick off today at the Khalifa International Complex and will continue until Sunday.

Organised by the Qatar Tennis Federation and supervised by the International Padel Federation, the international tour-

nament for men will see the participation of a group of Qatari players, including: Khalid Saadoun al-Kuwari, Abdullah al-Shammari, Mohamed al-Mahmoud and Abdulaziz al-Baker, along with a number of foreign players.

Secretary General of the Qatar Tennis,

Squash and Badminton Federation Tariq Zainal said that the first Promotion Tournament will be held on the courts of the Qatar Tennis Federation in line with the federation’s vision to develop the game and increase its popularity.

Zainal added that the tournament is

of great importance for players who are seeking to make their way towards professional circuit as it provides them with an opportunity to improve global rankings, and enables them to participate in higher-ranked tournaments.

SPOTLIGHT

World Cup 2026 to feature 12 groups of four teams

Eleven venues will be in the USA, with three in Mexico and two in Canada

AFP

Kigali, Rwanda

The expanded 2026 men's World Cup in North America will start with 12 groups of four teams in a change from the original planned format of 16 groups of three, football's world governing body FIFA announced yesterday. The next World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico will be the first to feature 48 teams, a sharp increase from the 32 sides at last year's tournament in Qatar.

"The revised format mitigates the risk of collusion and ensures that all the teams play a minimum of three matches, while providing balanced rest time between competing teams," FIFA said. It means that there will be 104 matches, a huge rise compared to the 64 games played in the 2022 tournament and an increase even on the original plan that the 2026 World Cup would feature 80 matches.

FIFA's initial plan for 2026 was for 16 groups of three teams, from which the top two countries would advance to the last 32. The new decided format means the top two in each group will go through to the knockout round along with the eight best third-placed sides.

As a result, the finalists, and the teams finishing third and fourth, will play a total of eight games instead of the current seven. The decision comes after a dramatic and entertaining group stage at the tournament in Qatar convinced FIFA that a rethink to its original 2026 blueprint was needed. "The groups of four have been absolutely incredible until the last minute of the last match," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in December.

Yesterday's decision was announced following a FIFA Council meeting in the Rwandan capital Kigali, at which it confirmed the next men's World Cup final will be played on Sunday, July 19, 2026. FIFA said that the total number of days between when clubs must stop playing and release players for international duty, and the final, would be 56, identical to the previous three tournaments. Nevertheless the World Cup itself may be played over a longer period, after Qatar 2022 was held over just 29 days.

Infantino is expected to be waved in for a new four-year term as president as he stands unopposed for re-election at tomorrow's FIFA Congress. Expanding the World Cup had been a priority for Infan-



The next World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico will be the first to feature 48 teams, a sharp increase from the 32 sides at last year's tournament in Qatar, which was won by Lionel Messi's Argentina.

tino following his election in 2016, when he took over from the disgraced Sepp Blatter at the head of world football.

The last World Cup in North America, in the United States in 1994, featured just 24 teams before it grew to 32 teams in France four years later. The number of venues for the 2026 finals will double, from eight stadiums in Qatar to 16. Eleven venues will be in the USA, with three in Mexico and two in Canada. FIFA has projected a huge increase in revenues in the four-year cycle leading up to 2026, up to \$11bn from \$7.5bn in the four years up to 2022.

The body is also hoping that a new, expanded 32-team Club World Cup will boost revenues too. FIFA said the competition will start in June 2025 and will be held every four years with club rankings determining qualifiers. However, an annual competition will also be held, similar to the existing seven-team Club World Cup which is to be discontinued after the 2023 edition.

The yearly competition will involve the six continental club champions and conclude with a final at a neutral venue between the winner of the UEFA Champions League and the winner of play-offs

between the other teams. The annual tournament was approved "given the need expressed by the confederations for the champions of their premier club competitions to play each other annually to stimulate competitiveness", FIFA said.

Confederation champions from 2021-2024 will be eligible to play in the new Club World Cup, which means Chelsea and Real Madrid have already qualified. Should either club win the Champions League again, a club ranking calculation based on sporting criteria will be used to determine which other team will qualify.

The current version of the FIFA Club World Cup — an annual competition with seven teams — will be discontinued after 2023, with a new yearly club competition approved from 2024. "This competition will feature the champions of the premier club competitions of all confederations and conclude with a final to be played at a neutral venue, between the winner of the UEFA Champions League and the winner of intercontinental play-offs between the other confederations," FIFA said.

FIFA said clubs will have to release players for the World Cup from May 25, 2026 unless they are in a major final —

such as the Champions League showpiece — for which clubs will have until May 30 to allow players to join their national teams. "With 56 days, the total combined number of rest, release and tournament days remain identical to the 2010, 2014 and 2018 FIFA World Cup editions," FIFA added. A newly structured international calendar was also approved with nine-day windows in March and June for two games each, a 16-day window for four matches in September-October followed by another nine-day two-match window in November.

The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) said they were worried about "physical fatigue and mental burnout" due to the congested schedule with its CEO Maheta Molango saying the football calendar needs a "complete reset". "The expanded World Cup format being announced for 2026 means that, yet again, more games are being forced into an already overcrowded schedule," he said.

The PFA said they were encouraged to see FIFA had prioritised concerns such as the need for a "minimum of 72 hours between games, a mandatory day off each week and an annual rest period".

FOCUS

Morocco joins Spain-Portugal 2030 World Cup bid

AFP

Rabat

King Mohamed VI of Morocco announced yesterday that his country had joined the bid by Spain and Portugal to host the centenary World Cup in 2030. The announcement means that war-torn Ukraine is likely to be dropped from the bid.

King Mohamed made the announcement in a message delivered as he was named the winner of the African Football Confederation 2022 Award of Excellence in Kigali, where world governing body FIFA is holding its annual congress.

The Spanish and Portuguese federations did not respond to requests for confirmation of Morocco's inclusion. Spain and Portugal declared their joint candidacy in 2021, before adding Ukraine to their bid last October.

In contrast to the distance between Ukraine, and Spain and Portugal, Morocco is separated from Spain only by the Strait of Gibraltar. A South American bid including Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay and Chile is set to challenge the Iberian bid, and Saudi Arabia hopes to lead a joint ticket with Egypt and Greece. The World Cup has had joint hosts before.

In 2002 Japan and South Korea shared the competition. In 2026, the finals will be played in the United States, Mexico and Canada, when 11 of the 16 planned venues will be in the US. The 2026 World Cup will expand from 32 teams to 48 and, under the format FIFA announced on Tuesday, will stretch over 104 matches, up from 64 in Qatar last year.

Morocco was the other candidate for 2026 but finished a distant second in the voting. That was the fifth time Morocco had bid to host the finals after trying for 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2010 World Cups. Morocco had already said it planned to bid for the 2030 World Cup, which has been held in Africa once, in South Africa in 2010.

"This candidature will be a gathering of the best on both sides, and the demonstration of an alliance of genius, creativity, experience and means," said King Mohamed in his message, read by the Moroccan Minister of Sports Chakib Benmoussa.

At the last World Cup, in December in Qatar, Morocco became the first nation from ether Africa or the Arab world to reach the semi-finals. The first World Cup, in 1930, was hosted and won by Uruguay, which is making a joint bid with Argentina, Paraguay and Chile.



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UEFA boss Ceferin vows to take games from teams banning away fans

Berlin: UEFA boss Aleksander Ceferin yesterday threatened to take games away from clubs when away fans are banned, after Naples shut out all Frankfurt residents ahead of today's last 16 tie. The Champions League clash between Napoli and Eintracht Frankfurt will have no official away section as a consequence of the shutout.

The UEFA President said the ban could set a dangerous precedent in European competitions. "This situation is intolerable and we urgently need to do something about it, because the decision is absolutely wrong" Ceferin told German TV yesterday. "We have to say 'if something like this happens, then the clubs won't play there'. It's simple, we'll change the rules."

The Italian Interior Ministry initially banned all supporters from Germany from attending due to violence surrounding

the first leg in Frankfurt. The ministry imposed the ban after violence in the first leg in Frankfurt when nine people were taken into custody.

The ban was overturned on Saturday after an appeal from the German club, but on Sunday the prefecture of Naples banned all Frankfurt residents. Eintracht's attempt to challenge the ban was rejected and the German club decided to waive the 2,700 guest tickets to which they were entitled under UEFA rules. Ceferin said it was not acceptable "for the Italian authorities to just decide that the German fans aren't allowed". Ceferin revealed UEFA "supports and has joined a lawsuit launched by Eintracht Frankfurt" about the ban. Napoli hold a 2-0 advantage after the first leg in Germany. The Italian club, 18 points clear in Serie A, have never qualified for the Champions League last eight.

BOTTOMLINE

Eintracht's Glasner focussing on Napoli comeback

AFP

Naples, Italy

Eintracht Frankfurt manager **Oliver Glasner** said yesterday that he is not worried about a lack of away support as his team try to overturn a two-goal deficit at Napoli and reach the Champions League quarter-finals. The Bundesliga side have decided against selling tickets for the away section at the Stadio Maradona for today's second leg after the Naples prefecture decided on Sunday to ban residents of Frankfurt from buying tickets for the match.

On Saturday, an initial ban on Eintracht fans, imposed on Friday by the Italian interior ministry which targeted all

people residing in Germany, had been overturned. Sunday's decision came after violence in the first leg won 2-0 by Napoli in Frankfurt, which led to nine people being taken into custody.

"It would have been nice to have our supporters, but we are concentrating on the match and on what can have an impact on this match", he said.

Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti said that he respected the decision of the authorities, saying it was made after a first leg "where public order wasn't guaranteed for our supporters".

"There are professionals who work on public order... I can't give my opinion, all I know is that if there is the fear that something can happen it's right to take action," said Spalletti. "This hasn't got

anything to do with the club."

Glasner is without his star striker for the clash, Randal Kolo-Muani suspended after being sent off in the first leg, but the coach said he had "other players capable of scoring".

Spalletti meanwhile confirmed that injury doubts Hirving Lozano, Alex Meret and Kim Min-jae "are all available".

Goalkeeper Meret has recovered from a wrist injury suffered before Napoli's 2-0 win over Atalanta on Saturday, a match in which South Korea defender Kim hurt his calf. "They are all 100 percent available," added Spalletti.

"You could see their desire to play during this morning's training session, they could already see the full stadium that will greet them tomorrow night."



Reuters

Madrid

Real Madrid will not be complacent against Liverpool in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie at home despite their three goal advantage from the first leg, coach Carlo Ancelotti told a news conference yesterday. Bidding for a record-extending 15th Champions League title, the Spanish and European champions came from behind to complete a 5-2 win at Anfield last month.

But Ancelotti said that his players will not forget that they had to fight back from two goals down to earn their win and that Liverpool are well capable of springing a dramatic Champions League upset at the Bernabeu

yesterday. "On a psychological level, I think the game is more complicated for us than for Liverpool," Ancelotti said.

"Liverpool will have to go all the way to get the best from the first minute, no matter what. The result of the first leg, in this aspect, puts us a little in doubt. We will try to go all in out there from the first minute, but we have more questions and responsibility than our rival."

Also fresh in Ancelotti's mind is last season's quarter-final against Chelsea, when Real won the first leg 3-1 in London but fell behind 3-0 at home, having to fight back to secure a 3-2 result that ensured their place in the semi-finals.

"The Chelsea game is very much alive in our minds," Ancelotti said.

"It will help us to play a different game

(on Wednesday)... We are not going to play a closed game, but play our best offensive soccer. The players understand that. That's why I think it will be an open game. We have to do both things well: defend and attack, but we're thinking more about attacking."

Defender Antonio Ruediger, who was a Chelsea player last season, agreed with his manager about the attitude the team needs to take. "We have to approach the game better than we did in Anfield, we can't afford to fall asleep, we saw what happened," Ruediger said. "When you play against Real Madrid you feel something different in the atmosphere of the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. For me it's an honour to be here and to play with teammates of the level of (Karim) Benzema and (Luka) Modric. We will play our best to advance."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Real not taking 3-goal advantage over Liverpool for granted, says Ancelotti



Real Madrid's Luka Modric (left) and coach Carlo Ancelotti during a training session in Madrid. (Reuters)