



CRICKET | Page 2

Stokes set to play as batsman only at World Cup after ODI U-turn



ATHLETICS | Page 3

Fast times, big crowds as Worlds return to Europe



Thursday, August 17, 2023
Safar 1, 1445 AH

GULF TIMES
SPORT



FOOTBALL

Ruthless England beat Australia to set up World Cup final with Spain

Page 4

EXPO STARS LEAGUE

Olwan's stoppage-time strike helps Shamal hold Arabi

In the opening match of the new season, Wakrah hit two goals in four minutes to beat Muaither 3-0

By Sports Reporter
Doha

An injury-time goal helped Al Shamal hold Al Arabi to a thrilling 1-1 draw in their opening clash of the Expo Stars League at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday. Earlier, the league kicked off with Al Wakrah cruising past promoted side Muaither 3-0 at the Al Janoub Stadium.

Arabi seemed to be opening their campaign with a victory – riding on an own goal in the 29th minute by Al Shamal's Matias Nani. However, Poya Asbaghi's team fought till the end with Ali Olwan goal equalising in the stoppage time to force a telling draw.

The equaliser also underlined Shamal's resolve after they had conceded the goal when Nani deflected the ball into his own net while trying to negotiate action following a corner kick. Despite the setback, Shamal fought hard even as Al Arabi also tried to consolidate the lead.

In the end, Al Arabi's error in defence saw Olwan snatch on a chance to first take the ball over an advancing goalkeeper Jassim al-Hail's head before rushing on to head the ball into the goal. It was a delightful end for Al Shamal while Al Arabi's coach Younes Ali looked on in dismay.

It was a contest of absorbing action at the one of the World Cup stadiums and both sides displayed fine football but their defence line and goalkeepers also stood out. In the very 11th minute of the match, a kick from Al Arabi's striker Youssef Msakni was well saved by Al Shamal custodian Babacar Seck. Msakni was fed by the assist from Ibrahim Kalla. Three minutes later it were Al Shamal raiding the rival den but forward Ricardo Gomes' threatening right-footed shot from top of the box went on to hit the left post. Gomes had picked on teammate Ali Olwan's header.

Gomes was again in action in the 23rd minute and this time his kick went on to hit the outside of the left goal post after deflecting from a defender's foot. In the 31st minute, another of Gomes' attempt was saved by Al Arabi keeper Jassim al-Hail in the bottom left corner.

Minutes later, an Ali Olwan shot went wide to the left. Early in the second half, Al Arabi came team rolling but Al Shamal fought off well and soon launched a counter but luck continued to elude then as a successful strike of Gomes in the 57th minute was ruled offside by the referee and rightly so. Gomes continued to work hard and in the 67th minute picked on an Omid Ebrahimi cross to head from the centre of the box but once again goalkeeper Al Hail was alert to make a collection in the bottom left corner.

There were more attempts later by Al Shamal's Nani whose header was a bit too high, and Al Arabi's Omar al-Somah whose low kick was averted. And just when it looked like Al Arabi were heading for a win, the added time action from Al Shamal and their Jordanian forward Olwan pulled things back for the side.

Earlier, Wakrah sailed past Muaither thanks to Ayoub Assal's brace (45+3 and 72nd minute) and Mohamed Benyettou strike (44th minute). The Blue Wave gave Muaither, who earned promotion to the top flight as Second Division champions, a taste of what to expect in the premier division. The first attempt at goal of the game, and indeed the season, fell to Muaither's Aymane El Hassouni in the third minute, but his right-footed shot from outside the box off an assist by Nassim Benaissa, though close, slightly missed to the right. The two teams had a couple of early chances, but both sides were not clinical enough to finish them off.



Al Shamal's Ali Olwan celebrates after scoring against Al Arabi in the Expo Stars League at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday.



Mohamed Benyettou struck a brace as Al Wakrah beat Muaither 3-0 at Al Janoub Stadium.

Just as the match seemed to be heading for a goalless first half, Al Wakrah sprang a surprise with two goals in four minutes. Benyettou fired his side to a deserved lead in the 44th minute with a well-driven right-footed shot from the left side of the six-yard box to the centre of the goal, before Assal made it two in the third minute of injury time after his right-footed shot from the centre of the box caught goalkeeper Ivanildo Rodrigues napping with the ball sailing to the high centre of the goal. The goal was assisted by Hazem Shehata.

Muaither substituted Saif Hassan al-Mohannadi for Yousef Sabri Yahri at half-time, while Denis Alibec came in for Mohamed Salah in the 67th minute as Jose Murcia's men desperately searched for an answer to Al Wakrah's challenge.

Despite the changes, it was Al Wakrah who extended their lead, with Assal scoring his second of the night in the 72nd minute with a right-footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner to effectively bury Muaither's chance of a comeback. Muaither will be hoping to bounce back from the defeat as they play away to Al Duhail in Week 2, while Al Wakrah welcome Al Shamal.

DIALLO JOINS ARABI

Meanwhile, Al Arabi yesterday announced the signing of Senegalese defender Abdou Diallo from Paris Saint-Germain before their match. The 27-year-old signed a three-year contract with the Amir Cup champions, with room for another one-year extension.

The centre-back had a successful stint with PSG, being part of the unstoppable French champions on their way to clinch two Ligue 1 titles, two French Cups, and a League Cup during his tenure with the club.

Diallo began his career with AS Monaco, making his debut in 2014 before he played a role in their Ligue 1 victory in 2017.

Diallo spent a season on loan at RB Leipzig, where he faced a setback due to a serious injury, and was omitted from PSG's pre-season tour in Asia.

FOCUS

New-look Rayyan face Markhiya today, aim for elusive title

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Rayyan will kick off their new Expo Stars League season when they take on Al Markhiya at Al Janoub Stadium. Both teams are poised to showcase a thrilling match, but Al Rayyan will definitely have the upper hand, having received a significant upgrade to their line-up. Rayyan, who concluded last season in the ninth position, look stronger than ever, having expanded its ranks with a number of foreign additions in the calibre of Brazilian Roger Geddes, Spaniard Rodrigo Moreno, Brazilian Gabriel Pereira, and former Lyon star Tiago Mendez.

Morrocan Soufiane Boufal and Japanese Shogo Taniguchi continue to strengthen their squad as the Leonardo Jardim-coached side looks to reclaim their prestige after narrowly avoiding danger zone last season. Having secured seventh place in the previous season, Al Markhiya too are embarking on a new era under coach Anthony Hudson, the first American to lead a Qatari club. The team's preparations have been bolstered by new signings of Tamim al-Muhaiza, Moayad Hassan, Abdulaziz Metwally, and Mohamed al-Abbasi. Joining them are foreign players such as Portuguese Rochinha, Gambian striker Yousufa Nji, Portuguese midfielder Joao Teixeira, and Dutch youth Novel Benes.

During a pre-match press conference, coach Rayyan Jardim did not hide his aspirations. "We're aiming to be competitive from the very start, and our goal is clear: to secure victory," Jardim stated.

Jardim also revealed the club's ambitions to rival powerhouses Al Sadd and Al Duhail this season. "We have a desire to compete for championships and to be among the leading teams such as Al Sadd and Al Duhail," Jardim said.

Elsewhere today, Qatar SC and Al Gharafa will face off in another high-octane showdown at the Khalifa International Stadium. Both Qatar SC and Al Gharafa have reinforced their squads ahead of the season, welcoming fresh talent into their ranks. Qatar SC secured the fifth spot last season while Al Gharafa trailed closely in sixth.

For today's encounter, Qatar SC's coach Youssef Safri will be banking on a strong lineup which includes Abdullah al-Ahrak, Abdullah Moftah, Ali Malallah, Abdulrahman al-Karbi, and Sebastian Soria, alongside foreign recruits Bruno Tabata, Ali al-Saudi, Raul Sanda, Bashar Resan, Malango, Javier Martinez, and Badr Bennon.

Under the guidance of Portuguese coach Pedro Martinez, Al Gharafa also start with a formidable line-up which includes Algerian star Yacine Brahimi, Tunisian Ferjani Sassi, Ivorian Yohan Boli, former Al Rayyan player Farid Wilayat, Othman al-Yahri, Nasser al-Ahrak, Amro Seraj, Yousef Hassan, Homam al-Ameen, and Ahmed Alaaeldin as the stage is set for a mouthwatering clash on the second day of the new Expo Stars League season.

Qatar's al-Athba wins gold at Brazzi Championship



Qatar's Rashid Hamad al-Athba (centre) won the gold medal at the Brazzi International Trap Championship in Poland. Al-Athba said that the results achieved by the Qatari shooting is a result of the Qatar Olympic Committee's support to the Qatar Shooting and Archery Association.

SPORT

CRICKET

Stokes to play as batsman only at World Cup after ODI U-turn

The return of Stokes, the player of the match in 2019 World Cup final, comes at the expense of Harry Brook

AFP
London

England are prepared to play **Ben Stokes** as a batsman only when they defend their 50-over men's World Cup title in India after the Test captain reversed his decision to retire from one-day internationals.

The all-rounder, troubled by a longstanding left knee injury that restricted his bowling during the recent drawn Ashes Test series at home to Australia, said playing in all three international formats was "unsustainable" when calling time on his ODI career 13 months ago. The 32-year-old had planned to use a six-month gap until England next play Test cricket, away to India, in order to attend to his chronic problem. But he is now set for a role as a specialist batsman as one of nine survivors named in a 15-man squad to face New Zealand in three home ODIs next month that is also set to double as England's party for a World Cup in India that runs from October 5-November 19.

"It wasn't really a case of changing his (Stokes's) mind," said England national selector Luke Wright after the squad was unveiled yesterday. "Once his body was in a good place and he'd had a rest, he was really keen to play. He still has time to do his rest and rehab, which he's doing, and he says his knee does feel like it's improving.

"The one thing we won't be doing is pushing him to bowl unless he's absolutely fit and raring to go. That was a big part of the decision for him, being able to just play as a batter and that was an easy decision for us. Ultimately the decision came down to it's a World Cup we want to win and we feel like we are better, and have more chance, with Stokesy than we haven't. If ever there's someone for the big moments it's Ben Stokes."

The return of Stokes, the player of the match in the 2019 World Cup final against New Zealand at Lord's and the man whose unbeaten fifty led his side to victory in the Twenty20 equivalent last year, comes at the expense of Harry Brook. The Yorkshire batsman has been the rising star of the England set-up during the past year, with the 24-year-old having compiled four hundreds in 12 Tests, while boasting strike rates of 98.85 and 137.77 in ODIs and T20s respectively.

Dawid Malan, who made ODI hundreds in Australia, South Africa and Bangladesh during the 2022/23 English winter – has retained his place ahead of Brook.

"It's as hard a decision as you're ever going to get," said Wright, who labelled Brook a "superstar" before adding: "But unfortunately in a 15-man squad, someone's going to have to miss out. On this occasion it's been him."

Uncapped Surrey fast bowler Gus Atkinson, who has been clocked at 95mph (153kph), is also in the squad, seemingly as cover for Jofra Archer. The 25-year-old



was not even in Surrey's XI at the start of the season but has impressed across all formats, especially in The Hundred for the Oval Invincibles. The injured Archer, the Super Over star of the 2019 World Cup final, is currently recovering from his latest elbow injury.

Archer last played for England in March and Wright, once a teammate of the 28-year-old at county side Sussex, said: "There has got to be a duty of care with Jof, we know how desperate we all are to have him, there's no doubt about that, but we've also got to get it right for him.

As much as the temptation is to try and rush him in and get him in for the start of this World Cup, unfortunately we're just going to run out of time. The best case scenario for Jof at the moment would probably be available for the back end of the tournament. But obviously, a lot of things have still got to go right with his rehab before then." England begin the series against the Black Caps in Cardiff on September 8.

A separate squad for a series with Ireland later in September will be named nearer the start of that series.

England must name their final 15-strong World Cup squad, plus three travelling reserves by September 25. They begin their white-ball home season with four Twenty20 internationals against New Zealand from August 30 to September 5. Hampshire seamer John Turner has earned his first senior call-up while Atkinson could make his England debut in the series, with Stokes not a member of the T20 squad.

England ODI squad to play New Zealand: Jos Buttler (capt/wkt), Moeen Ali, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, David Willey, Mark Wood, Chris Woakes
England T20 squad to play New Zealand: Jos Buttler (capt/wkt), Rehan Ahmed, Moeen Ali, Gus Atkinson, Jonny Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, John Turner, Luke Wood
England v New Zealand fixtures *(all start times GMT)*
T20 series: Aug 30: 1st T20, Chester-le-Street (1700); Sep 1: 2nd T20, Old Trafford, Manchester (1700); Sep 3: 3rd T20, Edgbaston, Birmingham (1330); Sep 5: 4th T20, Trent Bridge, Nottingham (1700)
ODI series: Sep 8: 1st ODI, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff (1130); Sep 10: 2nd ODI, Ageas Bowl, Southampton (1000); Sep 13: 3rd ODI, The Oval, London (1130); Sep 15: 4th ODI, Lord's, London (1130)

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan pacer Riaz retires from international cricket

AFP
Lahore



Pakistani fast bowler **Wahab Riaz** announced his retirement from international cricket yesterday, three years after playing his last match for the country.

The 38-year-old left-armer said he felt it was the right time to draw the curtain on a 15-year international career.

"I wanted to play the 2023 World Cup but felt that I stand no chance of a comeback, so this is the right time," Riaz told a news conference in Lahore.

Known for his pace and aggression, Riaz made his one-day debut in 2008, and played his first Test in the spot-fixing-marred 2010 series in England.

The last Test of that series resulted in five-year bans for captain Salman Butt, Mohamed Asif and Mohamed Amir for conspiring to bowl deliberate no-balls in return for money.

Riaz went on to anchor Pakistan's pace attack, and made a big impact with a five-wicket haul in the highly charged 2011 World Cup semi-final against arch-rivals India in Mohali, which he called "the most memorable match in my career".

"I could have achieved more than what I did but there are no regrets," he said.

Riaz took 83 wickets in 27 Tests, and 120 wickets in 91 ODIs. He also grabbed 34 wickets in 36 Twenty20 internationals.

Riaz was appointed sports minister in the caretaker Punjab government earlier this year, but says he will continue playing T20 league cricket, and may get into coaching.

West Indies' Samuels found guilty of anti-corruption code breach

Former West Indies player Marlon Samuels has been found guilty of four breaches of the Emirates Cricket Board's (ECB) Anti-Corruption Code, the sport's governing body (ICC) said yesterday.

Samuels, who has represented West Indies in all three formats and retired from cricket in 2020, was first charged in 2021 and was found guilty earlier this month after a hearing before a tribunal.

The breaches, which relate to his conduct while playing in the Abu Dhabi T10 league in 2019, include failing to disclose "the receipt of any gift, payment, hospitality ... that could bring the Participant or the sport of cricket into disrepute".

Samuels also failed to disclose "receipt of hospitality with a value of $750 or more."

The ICC added that Samuels had failed to co-operate with the anti-corruption official's investigation into the incident, and that he had delayed the investigation by "concealing information that may have been relevant". The tribunal will outline sanctions after considering the submissions of each party involved. Samuels was previously banned for two years in 2008 for passing on team information to a bookmaker during a one-day series in India in January 2007.

Molinari named fifth vice-captain for Europe's Ryder Cup team

Team Europe captain Luke Donald has named Italy's **Francesco Molinari** as his fifth and final vice-captain for next month's Ryder Cup at Rome's Marco Simone Golf and Country Club, the team announced yesterday.

Molinari, who made his debut in the 2010 edition when Europe regained the trophy in Wales, joins brother Edoardo Molinari, Spaniard Jose Maria Olazabal, Belgian Nicolas Colsaerts and Denmark's Thomas Bjorn as vice-captains.

"I started the year hoping to be there as a player, but it is still a great honour to be there as a vice-captain," Molinari, who won the 2018 British Open, said.

"I got a phone call from Luke asking if I was interested and obviously it was a clear answer from me. He is assembling a really good team of people.

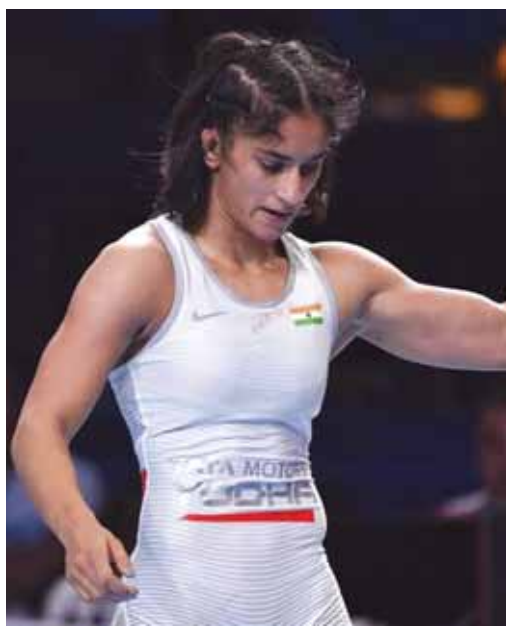
"... It's a Ryder Cup which is particularly close to my heart being played in Rome so I will do whatever I can to help Luke and the team and hopefully bring the trophy back to Europe." The United States won the last Ryder Cup in Wisconsin last year. Europe have not lost a Ryder Cup on home soil since a 15-13 defeat at The Belfry in England in 1993. The Ryder Cup will be held from September 26-October 1.



FOCUS

Indian wrestler Phogat out of Asian Games with knee injury

AFP
New Delhi



Indian wrestler **Vinesh Phogat**, who helped lead protests demanding the sport's national chief step down over sexual harassment allegations, has pulled out of next month's Asian Games with a knee injury.

Phogat, who won gold in the women's 50kg freestyle in the last edition of the Asian Games, injured herself during training and will undergo surgery today.

"It was my dream to retain my Asian Games gold medal for India which I won in 2018 in Jakarta," Phogat, 28, wrote in a post on social media Tuesday.

"But unfortunately, this injury has ruled out my participation now."

Phogat and other wrestlers accused Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh of sexual misconduct in January and led a long sit-in demanding he step down.

Police broke up the New Delhi protest camp in May after demonstrators attempted to march on parliament, and Phogat was briefly detained after scuffling with officers.

Singh, 66, also a lawmaker for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), denies all charges and has said he is a victim of a "conspiracy".

Phogat's injury also rules her out of the World Championships in Belgrade next month.

An election for Singh's replacement at the WFI was due to be held on the weekend but was postponed indefinitely after a last-minute court challenge. Rising star Antim Phangal will join India's wrestling squad for the Asian Games, starting September 23 in Hangzhou, China, after winning selection trials in the 53kg category.

INJURY CUTS SHORT IN-FORM INDIA BATSMAN SHAW'S COUNTY STINT

LONDON: India batsman Prithvi Shaw will play no further part for Northamptonshire in English domestic cricket's ongoing One-Day Cup after suffering a knee injury, the county club said yesterday.

Shaw, who has been in superb form for Northamptonshire, sustained the injury fielding against Durham on Sunday.

Northamptonshire said in a statement "the injury is worse than initially expected". Shaw is currently being monitored by the Board of Control for Cricket in India's medical team and is set to see a specialist in London on Friday.

Shaw, who has played in all three formats for India, has scored two hundreds in four innings for Northamptonshire, including an extraordinary 244 at home to Somerset on August 9.

The 23-year-old, opening the batting, faced just 153 balls, including 28 fours and 11 sixes as Northamptonshire piled up 415-8 en route to an 87-run win.

Shaw's innings was the sixth highest individual score in any limited overs match. Only Ali Brown, with 268 for Surrey against Glamorgan back in 2002, has posted a higher solo total at this level in county cricket.

"In his short stint Prithvi has made a huge impact on us as a club. It's a huge shame he won't be with us for the remainder of this competition," said Northamptonshire coach John Sadler in a statement.

Shaw has long been tipped for batting stardom after making a mammoth 546 in a single innings as a 14-year-old during a school match and four years later he posted a century on Test debut.

(Reuters)

ATHLETICS

Fast times, big crowds as Worlds return to Europe

The return to sport's heartland will give it a big lift a year out from Paris Games

Reuters
London



American Sha'Carri Richardson hopes to make a belated entrance onto the global stage after missing the 2021 Olympics following a positive drugs test. *(AFP)*

Forty years after its first edition, the world athletics championships get underway in Budapest on Saturday with over 2,000 athletes from 202 countries taking part over nine days of what could be record-breaking action.

Launched initially as a four-yearly event at great pains not to undermine the Olympics, the championships switched to biennial in 1993 and, thanks to Covid, this time take place for a second consecutive year following the 2022 event in Eugene in the United States.

Poor crowds and low TV audiences undermined the impact of the first hosting in the sport's powerhouse nation 12 months ago and, coming after Doha 2019, officials will hope the return to the sport's European heartland will give it a big lift a year out from the Paris Olympics. Hungary itself has a woeful world championship record, having never won a gold medal. It has claimed seven silver and seven bronze - half of them coming in the hammer throw.

However, World Athletics says ticket sales have been "strong" and the purpose-built 30,000-capacity stadium, which boasts the same bouncy Mondo track that contributed to so many fast times in Tokyo.

The fans should be in for top-quality action, with WA president Sebastian Coe saying the record-laden first half of the season points to potentially "the best world championships performance-wise of all time".

Top of the bill on the back of three world records this summer is Kenyan superstar Faith Kipyegon. Still only 29, she is appearing in her sixth world championships seeking a third gold to add to two Olympic 1,500m titles.

In the women's sprints, American Sha'Carri Richardson will hope to make a belated entrance onto the global stage after missing the 2021 Olympics following a positive drugs test and failing to qualify for Eugene.

JAMAICAN STREAK

Jamaica has taken gold in six of the last eight 100m finals - five by Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce - who goes again at the age of 36 but is up against it after an injury-hit season.

However, 2022 silver medallist Shericka Jackson, the season leader with 10.65 seconds, looks well-placed to continue the Jamaican streak.

Dutchwoman Sifan Hassan goes for another treble, having claimed 10,000/5,000m gold and 1,500 bronze in Tokyo, before winning this year's London Marathon in her debut over the distance.

The men's 100m looks as hard to call as the 2021 Olympics, when Italian Lamont Marcell Jacobs was the shock champion.

Briton Zharnel Hughes is the fastest in the world this year with 9.83 seconds, closely followed by Kenyan Ferdinand Omanyala. Defending champion Fred Kerly leads the US challenge after Americans swept the podium last year.

Norwegian duo Jakob Ingebrigtsen (1,500m) and Karsten Warholm (400m hurdles) are among the big names expected to triumph in the longer distances.

The field events could start with a bang with the men's shot on opening night when American Ryan Couser, who added a massive 19cm to his own world record this season, will expect to retain his title. One person who won't be back is Nigerian 2022 100m hurdles world champion Tobi Amusan, who broke the world record in the semi-finals last year, but was suspended last month after missing three drugs tests.

Coe says accepting such "negative headlines" is the price to be paid for running an effective anti-doping programme and the medal table 40 years ago would have had a very different complexion had today's measures been in place.

TENNIS

Stephens stuns defending champion Garcia, Jabeur rallies

Reuters
Cincinnati


Sloane Stephens of the United States reacts to winning a point against Caroline Garcia of France during their third round match at the Cincinnati Open in Mason, Ohio. *(AFP)*

American Sloane Stephens battled back to defeat defending champion Caroline Garcia 4-6 6-4 6-4 and reach the third round of the Cincinnati Open on Tuesday while Tunisia's Ons Jabeur mounted an incredible comeback of her own to also advance.

Stephens was ecstatic after executing a perfect volley on match point to claim the win as the 2017 US Open champion looks to sharpen her game ahead of the year's final major, which kicks off later this month in New York.

"Thank you guys so much, it was so electric in here and so fun," Stephens said in an on-court interview under the lights. "I felt like I played really well and was really consistent but honestly there is nothing better than playing in the US in front of an American crowd. Incredible audience and atmosphere."

Fifth-ranked Jabeur, in her first match since suffering "the most painful loss" of her career in the Wimbledon final, clawed her way from a 1-5 deficit in the final set to beat Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina 6-3 6-7(2) 7-6(2).

"It's really nice to know where I can go, what I can push, you know, and today was really tough. It was tough to believe I could win this match," said Jabeur, who is into the third round after a first-round bye. "A lot of frustration in that third set but I'm glad I kept going."

Twice champion Victoria Azarenka upset Czech 11th seed Barbora Krejcikova 6-3 7-5 to reach the second round. The 34-year-old unseeded Belarusian Azarenka broke Krejcikova four times, saved three of five break points and won the final five games of a match lasting one hour 45 minutes.

Danish wildcard Caroline Wozniacki lost her opening match 6-4 6-4 to lucky loser Varvara Gracheva of France. Czech ninth seed Petra Kvitova, a Cincinnati finalist last year, also booked her spot in the second round with a 7-6(2) 6-0 win over Russian Anna Blinkova.

Wozniacki, Venus, Isner among US Open wildcard entries

Former world number one Caroline Wozniacki and seven-time Grand Slam singles champion Venus Williams were among those awarded US Open wildcard spots yesterday by the US Tennis Association. US star John Isner received a wildcard spot on the men's side for the year's final Grand Slam event, which begins August 28 on the New York hardcourts. Wozniacki, a 33-year-old Dane, will make her first Grand Slam appearance since retiring after the 2020 Australian Open to start a family, giving birth to two-year-old Olivia and 6-month-old James before starting her comeback earlier this month. The 2018 Australian Open champion was the US Open runner-up in 2009 and 2014. Williams, 43, will make her 24th appearance in the main draw at Flushing Meadows, where she captured back-to-back titles in 2000 and 20021. Isner, 38, hasn't missed a US Open main draw since his 2007 debut and will make his 17th appearance in New York this year. His best Grand Slam run was to the 2018 Wimbledon semi-finals. *(Reuters)*

FOCUS

Misfiring Alcaraz survives Thompson scare in Cincinnati

Reuters
Cincinnati


Carlos Alcaraz of Spain celebrates a point during the Cincinnati Open match against Jordan Thompson of Australia in Mason, Ohio. *(AFP)*

Carlos Alcaraz battled past unseeded Australian Jordan Thompson 7-5 4-6 6-3 to reach the Cincinnati Open third round on Tuesday as the world number one wobbled again in his build-up to the US Open starting later this month.

An off-colour Alcaraz trailed midway through the opening set which was briefly halted by rain, but the 20-year-old recovered to break Thompson's serve having squandered eight opportunities earlier and clawed his way back to 4-4 with a hold.

The reigning Flushing Meadows champion, who crashed in the Toronto quarter-finals last week, pounced again for a 6-5 lead before wrapping up the set but was under immediate pressure in the next as Thompson raced ahead 5-2. Alcaraz won the next two games but his comeback fizzled out as he continued to struggle on his serve and forehand to allow world number 55 Thompson to force a third set.

An early break handed Alcaraz the advantage in the decider and the Spaniard slowly returned to his dominant best to claim his 50th tour level win of 2023 in a little over three hours.

"It wasn't an easy match but I found my best level at the end," Alcaraz said. "We were waiting around all day to play the match and when you step on court you have to start with the rain, so it wasn't easy. "But you have to find a way to win these matches in this type of situation."

Earlier, title holder Borna Coric beat American Sebastian Korda 7-6(5) 6-4, while another home hope Taylor Fritz survived a first-set thriller to beat Czech Jiri Lehecka 7-6(14) 6-2. Croatian Coric crashed out in Toronto in the opening round but produced a pristine display in Cincinnati with few unforced errors, wrapping up the match that began on Monday but was suspended due to bad weather.

Korda, who has suffered a handful of early exits since reaching the Queen's Club semi-finals, appeared to have the edge as he converted a breakpoint in the third game. But 15th seed Coric levelled in the sixth and mounted a fine defence to rally from a 4-1 deficit in the tiebreak.

He won the crucial break in the third game of the second set, where he dropped only one first-serve point as Korda's level declined across the board, and pumped his fist as he closed the affair with an unreturnable serve.

"I was a little nervous coming into the match as I know I need to defend my title, so I put a little more expectation on myself," Coric said. He next faces Poland's Hubert Hurkacz who beat Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis 7-6(2) 3-6 7-6(1). Top American Fritz mustered all of his resources in an epic 30-point first set tiebreak with Lehecka.

The Monte Carlo semi-finalist saved five set points in the tense and closely fought opening set, where he produced fewer unforced errors to get the upper hand.

The momentum belonged to Fritz in the second set, though, when he never faced a break point and won all but one of his first-serve points.

Gael Monfils also advanced with a 3-6 6-4 6-3 victory over Briton Cameron Norrie after requiring a medical timeout late in the opening set to tend to his left calf.

"I tried to keep it very simple with my game. I think the ATP physio came on the court and did a great job, not only the treatment but he managed to secure my head," said Monfils.

FOOTBALL

Messi on target as Miami rout Union to reach Leagues Cup final

AFP
Chester, United States



Inter Miami's Argentine forward Lionel Messi celebrates scoring during the CONCACAF Leagues Cup semi-final against Philadelphia Union at Subaru Park Stadium in Chester, Pennsylvania. *(AFP)*

Lionel Messi extended his remarkable goal-scoring streak as Inter Miami powered into the final of the Leagues Cup with an emphatic 4-1 victory over Philadelphia Union on Tuesday. The Argentina superstar took his tally to nine goals in six appearances for Miami in an entertaining semi-final at Philadelphia's Subaru Park.

Venezuelan international Josef Martinez, Messi's former Barcelona team-mate Jordi Alba, and substitute David Ruiz scored Miami's other goals, with Alejandro Bedoya the lone scorer for outgunned Philadelphia.

The result leaves Messi preparing for the 42nd final of his career with Miami facing Nashville SC in Saturday's final of the World Cup-style tournament for teams from Mexico and Major League Soccer. Nashville booked their place in the final later Tuesday with a 2-0 win over Mexican side Monterrey and will host the final this weekend.

Miami meanwhile were left basking in a victory which also sees them qualify for the CONCACAF Champions Cup regional tournament next season - potentially opening up a route into FIFA's expanded Club World Cup in 2025. "Our goal was to qualify for international competition next season and we've done that tonight," said Miami head coach Gerardo 'Tata' Martino.

"This most important thing was achieving qualification for CONCACAF Champions Cup, and now we have to prepare to win this tournament, which has us feeling very motivated and confident."

Miami's semi-final in Philadelphia was in theory supposed to be the toughest assignment yet faced by Messi since he made his debut for Miami on July 21 after joining from Paris Saint-Germain. Philadelphia are one of the strongest teams in MLS, and are third in the Eastern Conference standings while Miami are bottom of the table.

The Union have also been practically invincible at home, losing only once in their previous 38 games at Subaru Park. But the home side were left in disarray just three minutes after kick-off as Miami took the lead. A long ball forward from Ukrainian defender Sergii Kryvtsov sowed panic in the Union back line, and Martinez latched onto the pass before rifling a shot past diving Philadelphia goalkeeper Andre Blake.

Philadelphia should have equalised five minutes later when Hungary international Daniel Gazdag went through on goal only to shoot straight at Miami goalkeeper Drake Callender. Gazdag had another good chance after 19 minutes, but saw his curling shot from the edge of the area fly just wide. If that chance encouraged Philadelphia, the optimism was short-lived as Messi struck once again to punish slack Union defending. Damion Lowe was caught napping and Martinez spun away from the defender to release Messi, who was given far too much time and space to direct a fierce low strike from outside the area into the bottom corner past Blake.

Philadelphia responded with sustained pressure, and Gazdag tested Callender from long range once more with a rasping shot on 29 minutes.

Although Union enjoyed plenty of territory and possession, it was Miami who struck the decisive blow on half-time. Finland international Robert Taylor held the ball up well in midfield and took his time before picking out the overlapping Jordi Alba.

The former Barcelona star controlled and buried a clinical finish to leave Miami 3-0 up at the break.

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Ruthless England beat Australia to set up Spain final

'We played a hard game but again we found a way to win'



England players celebrate after their win over Australia in the Women's World Cup semi-final at Stadium Australia in Sydney yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Sydney

Lauren Hemp and Alessia Russo did the damage late on as England shattered Australian dreams yesterday with a clinical 3-1 win in Sydney to set up a Women's World Cup final against Spain.

The Lionesses had stumbled at the same stage twice before but the European champions made no mistake this time to silence most of the 75,000 crowd and roar into the final for the first time. They deservedly took the lead nine minutes before the break with Manchester United's Ella Toone unleashing a rocket just inside the box with the outside of her boot.

A fit-again Sam Kerr, starting for the first time this tournament, hit back for the home side just after the hour with a world-class goal that set the game on fire.

The skipper picked up the ball, went on a weaving run through England's half and let fly from 30 yards into the top corner. It sparked ecstatic scenes but the crowd were silenced just eight minutes later when Hemp muscled her way into the box and stabbed into the corner, before Russo put the icing on the cake with four minutes left of normal time.

"We played a hard game but again we found a way to win," said England coach Sarina Wiegman, who also took her native Netherlands to the 2019 final, before losing 2-0 to the United States. "We have been talking about ruthlessness and this team has ruthlessness, whether it is up front or in defence. I never take anything for granted, but it's like I'm living in a fairytale or something," she added.

England now face a final on Sunday, also at Stadium Australia, against a dangerous Spanish side that beat Sweden 2-1 in the last four. "Every game in this tournament has been of the highest level so we have to be ready," said Russo.

"But we've been dreaming since we were little girls. We're excited, we'll recover and be ready."

England had been in this position before, in 2015 and 2019, losing 2-1 on both occasions, with a third-place finish their best World Cup before now. But Wiegman led them to the European title last year on home soil and captain Millie Bright said before the semi-final they were now better-placed to handle big-pressure games. They demonstrated their resilience at a pumping and partisan Stadium Australia, successfully blanking out the boos and jeers to silence an expectant home nation.

Despite losing Australia have enjoyed their best World Cup ever, with a third-placed play-off against Sweden on Saturday still to play.

"I feel for so many tonight, the players left it all out there," said Australia coach Tony Gustavsson. "But it was one of those nights. England were clinical. Our defending in the first half was solid, but we were not brave enough on the ball. In the second half we started playing the type of game we can play."

With influential striker Kerr fit again, Gustavsson moved Emily van Egmond to the bench in one of two changes with defender Clare Polkinghorne in for an ill Alanna Kennedy. England stuck to the same XI that beat Colombia 2-1 with striker Lauren James serving the second of a two-match ban – she will be eligible to play on Sunday.

Kerr was in the thick of the early action and England ruthlessly looked to close her down with some heavy challenges, one of them earning Alex Greenwood a yellow card. But as England grew in confidence they began controlling the midfield battle. Goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold rescued Australia when she deflected Georgia Stanway's strike with her legs.

The breakthrough came in the 36th minute with Toone, in the side for James, arrowing her shot into the top right corner after Hemp pulled the ball back from the touchline.

With 45 minutes to save their tournament, Australia frantically pressed forward and it paid dividends when Kerr's wonder strike drew them level. But England were unmoved and when Ellie Carpenter misjudged a long ball into the box, Hemp hustled her way through to score from close range. Kerr then missed a golden chance to draw level again, and a minute later Russo found herself alone in the box and finished calmly with her right foot to seal a deserved win for England.

SPOTLIGHT

Kerr says Australia inspired nation with World Cup run

AFP
Sydney

An emotional Sam Kerr said her Australia side had inspired the host nation despite the crushing disappointment of a 3-1 defeat to England in the Women's World Cup semi-final yesterday. Australia's skipper and talismanic striker scored a stunning goal to drag the home side level in front of 75,000 in Sydney, before England pulled away with two goals late on to set up a final against Spain.

The Matildas still have a match left, against Sweden on Saturday to decide who comes third. Whatever happens, this is Australia's best World Cup ever. On top of that, the team's exploits in reaching the last four for the first time have captivated Australia and won them legions of new fans.

Kerr, who missed a golden chance to equalise for a second time just a minute before Alessia Russo scored England's third goal, said: "I can't put all the blame on myself. I have to think of all the things the team have done, and I have done, to be where we are now and to inspire a nation. It is just really disappointing."

Kerr was named in Australia's starting line-up for the first time at the World Cup following a calf injury. The 29-year-old Chelsea forward, who was supposed to have been the face of the tournament but saw her game time severely restricted by the injury, said their historic run into the last four should be the catalyst for broader change.

"I can only speak for the Matildas but we need funding in our development, we need funding in our grassroots," she told reporters at Stadium Australia. "We need funding, you know, we need funding everywhere."

That call was echoed by Australia's coach Tony Gustavsson, who was nevertheless proud of his players and said European champions England had been more clinical on the night.



Australia's forward Sam Kerr (left) reacts as her teammate goalkeeper Mackenzie Arnold walks past after their loss to England. *(AFP)*

Juve defend treatment of outcast Bonucci after union outrage

Milan: Juventus insisted yesterday that there was nothing wrong with their treatment of ageing outcast Leonardo Bonucci after the Italian footballers' association said his "dignity is being trampled on". In a statement which didn't mention Italy captain Bonucci, Juve defended the "legitimacy of its actions towards all registered players who are recognised and are fully guaranteed all the rights" agreed in professional football's collective bargaining agreement.

Defender Bonucci has been frozen out by Juve and is not training with the first team, even missing out on the Serie A club's pre-season tour in the USA last month. Italian media report that Bonucci, who is 36 and has one year left on his contract, has formally requested via his legal representatives he be reinstated in the first team.

Juve added that the club is "also ready... to defend the full legitimacy of its behaviour" should Bonucci launch legal action against the team he captained last season.

Bonucci was a key component of the Juve team which dominated Italian football for a decade, winning eight league titles between 2012 and 2020 and twice reaching the Champions League final with the so-called 'Old Lady'. He also became a national hero two years ago thanks to his decisive role alongside central defensive partner Giorgio Chiellini in Italy winning Euro 2020.

FOCUS

Arsenal's Timber 'gutted' at facing lengthy lay-off with knee injury

AFP
London



Arsenal's **Jurrien Timber** said he felt "gutted" after the Premier League club announced yesterday the Dutch defender would be sidelined with a major knee injury.

The 22-year-old damaged the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee during the Gunners' 2-1 win at home to Nottingham Forest in their opening match of the new Premier League season last weekend. Timber only joined Arsenal, bidding to go one better than last season's second place in the Premier League, in July in an initial 40mn euro ($45mn) move from Dutch giants Ajax.

He played in the Gunners' penalty shoot-out win over Manchester City in the Community Shield before sustaining his injury against Forest. Arsenal were unwilling to put a timeframe on Timber's absence as the player took to Instagram to thank the club's fans for their support.

"Gutted to share my injury is more serious than expected, especially after the warm welcome I've received," Timber wrote.

Timber won two Eredivisie titles in 121 appearances for Ajax and was a member of the Netherlands squad that reached the quarter-finals of last year's World Cup. He can operate at both centre-back and right-back and it had been hoped he would bring added depth to an Arsenal defence that struggled to cope with injuries to William Saliba and Takehiro Tomiyasu towards the end of last season.

Timber's arrival came as a part of a pre-season spending spree that also saw Declan Rice and Kai Havertz join Arsenal, with the trio's combined transfer fees totalling in excess of £200mn ($254mn). Arsenal, however, may now have to go into the transfer window again to get cover for Timber, with Mikel Arteta's side looking to overhaul treble-winners Manchester City as Premier League champions. The Gunners' next match is away to Crystal Palace on Monday.

Barca coach Xavi banned two games for red card

Madrid: Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez will serve a two-match suspension after being sent off in his team's La Liga season opener against Getafe, it was announced. Xavi was punished for his touchline behaviour during Sunday's 0-0 draw at Getafe, in which Barcelona winger Raphinha also received a red card in the first half for elbowing an opponent.

Former Barcelona midfielder Xavi was dismissed with 20 minutes to play after leaving his technical area to remonstrate with the fourth official over a refereeing decision. Referee Cesar Soto Grado said in his report that he had already warned Xavi, who was critical of the officiating in his post-match press conference. Xavi and Raphinha will both miss Sunday's game against Cadiz and the trip to Villarreal on August 27.

Meanwhile, Barcelona announced that former player Deco was taking over as sporting director. The 45-year-old Brazilian-born Portuguese international midfielder has signed a three-year contract. Deco first joined Barcelona from Benfica in 2004 and won La Liga twice and the Champions League in 2006 in four seasons at the club.

The appointment follows a reshuffle Barcelona announced in May. The team's current director of football Mateu Alemany is leaving the club when the transfer window closes. Sporting director Jordi Cruyff left in May.

ROMA SIGN PAREDES AND SANCHES FROM PSG

Roma completed a double swoop to bolster their midfield, signing both Leandro Paredes and Renato Sanches from Paris Saint-Germain. Paredes has signed "a contract until June 30, 2025" reportedly worth 4 million euros a season. Sanches joins "in a loan deal with an obligation to buy if certain conditions are met", Roma said. Paredes, who triumphed with Argentina at last year's World Cup, was a Roma player between 2014 and 2017 before being sold to Zenit Saint Petersburg. The 29-year-old will wear the number 16 shirt made iconic by home-grown hero and fellow World Cup winner Daniele De Rossi.

Paredes moves to Roma after Juventus didn't take up their option to buy him at the end of his loan from PSG at the end of last season. Paredes won three league titles and two French Cups for Qatar-backed PSG, and was a losing Champions League finalist three years ago.

Following the departure of Nemanja Matic to Rennes, Portugal international Sanches joins after an unconvincing season with PSG. Sanches arrives on a 1mn euro loan which will become a permanent move for 14mn euros should he feature in 60 percent of Roma's matches. The 25-year-old, who won Euro 2016 with his country but hasn't played an international match since 2021, joins compatriot Jose Mourinho at Roma who begin their season with the visit of Salernitana on Sunday.

UNITED IN 'FINAL STAGES' OF GREENWOOD PROBE

Manchester United said they are working "through the final stages" of an internal investigation before deciding whether Mason Greenwood will return to playing for the club.

The 21-year-old forward has been suspended by the Premier League giants since January 30, 2022, over allegations relating to a young woman after images and videos were posted online.

Greenwood was facing criminal charges, including attempted rape and sexual assault, until the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for England and Wales announced in February that the case had been discontinued.