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Azam, Ahmed hit hundreds as Pakistan crush Nepal in Asia Cup



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China exit Basketball World Cup in first round as US cruise



Thursday, August 31, 2023
Safar 15, 1445 AH

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WORLD RALLY RAID CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Attiyah wins 3rd stage to maintain grip on Rally Argentina

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his Toyota Gazoo Racing co-driver Mathieu Baumel remained in contention for their second consecutive FIA World Rally Raid Championship (W2RC) title by extending their overall lead with third win at the Rally Argentina (Desafio Ruta 40) yesterday.

The five-time Dakar Rally champion, al-Attiyah yesterday finished the 464 kilometre third stage (196km road/268km Special) at Belen 2:54:53.

Al-Attiyah's arch-rival Yazeed al-Rajhi of Saudi Arabia came second yesterday, finishing 1 minute and 41 seconds behind the Qatari to slightly cut down the time between him and Argentinian Juan Cruz Yacopini in the general standings.

In the overall standings, al-Attiyah has an advantage of 10'28'' over Yacopini and his co-driver Dani Oliveras, who came third yesterday. The Argentinian is a legitimate contender for the final podium, which would be his first in a W2RC round, after two near-misses in the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (fourth) and the Sonora Rally (fifth). Al-Rajhi is 18'12'' behind the Qatari race leader.

The event is the penultimate round of the World Rally Raid Championship (W2RC), won by al-Attiyah in its inaugural edition in 2022.

Al-Attiyah currently leads the W2RC standings with 144 points after winning the Dakar and Sonora rallies earlier this season.



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel in action during the third stage of Rally Argentina (Desafio Ruta 40) yesterday.

US OPEN

Djokovic ramps up title bid as Swiatek and Gauff stroll

Tsitsipas crashes out to 21-year-old Swiss qualifier Stricker in five sets


Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after defeating Spain's Bernabe Zapata Miralles in the US Open second round in New York yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
New York

Novak Djokovic sailed into the US Open third round yesterday in his quest for a 24th Grand Slam triumph as Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff stayed on a quarter-final collision course in New York.

Djokovic climbed through the gears against 76th-ranked Bernabe Zapata Miralles, winning 13 of the last 15 games to ease through 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 in two hours on Arthur Ashe Stadium court. Next up for the Serbian is compatriot and 32nd seed Laslo Djere, with Djokovic keeping up his record of always reaching at least the last 32 in New York.

"At 36 years of age, after 20 years of coming to New York, I still have the hunger to play my best tennis on this court," said Djokovic, a three-time US Open champion. "I have the experience and understanding of what needs to be done in the important moments. Preserving the energy and focusing on the present moment."

Defending champion and world number one Swiatek swept past Australia's Daria Saville 6-3, 6-4. The Pole is bidding to become the first woman to successfully defend her US Open crown since Serena Williams won a hat-trick of titles from 2012-2014.

"It wasn't easy but I'm happy I tried to play my game and play aggressively with a lot of intensity and I'm just happy to be in the third round," said Swiatek, aiming for her fifth Grand Slam triumph. Swiatek will now play Slovenia's Kaja Juvan for a place in the last 16.

Gauff, 19, brushed aside 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva, the youngest player in the draw, 6-3, 6-2 to continue her strong run on hard courts this summer after titles in Washington and Cincinnati. The sixth seed, viewed as one of the favourites in New York, takes on Belgium's Elise Mertens for a place in the last 16 after getting the better of Andreeva for the second time in three Grand Slams.

"I just learned to be aggressive, because if you give her something she is going to take advantage," said Gauff, who overcame Andreeva in three sets at Roland Garros in June. "She has a great future in front of her – I think she is going to be back on this stage many more times."

Mertens, the 32nd seed, battled back from the brink by saving two match points in the second-set tie-break to knock off the dangerous Collins, last year's Australian Open runner-up. The Belgian, who had the support of three-time US Open winner Kim Clijsters in her box, advanced 3-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-1 and now awaits Gauff.

Stefanos Tsitsipas' miserable US Open run continued as he crashed out to 21-year-old Swiss qualifier Dominic Stricker in five sets. Tsitsipas served for the match at 5-3 in the fourth set but the 128th-ranked Stricker rallied to prevail 7-5, 6-7 (2/7), 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 in just over four hours. "I don't know how. I did it somehow. Actually a bit speechless but it's a great day," said Stricker, who had won just one Grand Slam match before this week.

Greece's Tsitsipas, the seventh seed and a two-time Grand Slam finalist, has never progressed beyond round three in six visits to New York. Czech 10th seed Karolina Muchova, this year's French Open finalist, sailed past Magdalena Frech in straight sets.

Olympic gold medallist Belinda Bencic ended the run of British qualifier Lily Miyazaki 6-3, 6-3, but Brazilian 19th seed Beatriz Haddad Maia was dumped out by Taylor Townsend 7-6 (7/1), 7-5.

Fifth seed Casper Ruud, runner-up at three of the past six majors including last year's US Open, was taking on China's Zhang Zhizhen in his second round match late last night. Elena Rybakina, the women's fourth seed, was playing Australian Ajla Tomljanovic in the night session on Louis Armstrong, while old rivals Petra Kvitova and Caroline Wozniacki also meet.

DIAMOND LEAGUE

Kennedy pips Moon to win Zurich pole vault in train station

AFP
Zurich

Australian Nina Kennedy, fresh from sharing world championships gold with American Katie Moon in Budapest last week, ensured a standalone victory in another nail-biting pole vault competition at the Zurich Diamond League meeting yesterday.

Kennedy and Moon, who won Olympic gold in Tokyo two years ago and took the 2022 world title in Eugene under her maiden name of Nageotte, shared gold after tying in the Hungarian capital. There was no shortage of drama in Zurich, but another shared victory never looked likely as Kennedy won with an Oceania record, personal best and meet record of 4.91 metres.

"I am really surprised! And I am so happy. This is all my dreams come true, I love Zurich," said Kennedy. "Now I will fly home to Australia before travelling to Eugene where I hope to win the final," she said in reference to the Diamond League finals in Oregon on September 16-17.

The pole vault was held a day earlier than the main Diamond League programme at the famed Letzigrund Stadium, on a specially constructed track at Zurich Hauptbahnhof, the city's main train station. A seated temporary tribune overlooked the runway, while thousands of commuters swelled around the landing mat, lending the event a surreal feeling as trains pulled in and out of platforms just metres away.

Dance music boomed and the crowd, often just passing, were left roaring in delight or gasping in disappointment as the 10-strong field took it in turns to thunder down the raised track. American Sandi Morris, who missed out on US selection for the Budapest world championships, twice pulled it out of the bag, vaulting clear at the third time of asking at 4.66 and 4.76.

Moon, however, vaulted just once until then, clearing 4.66m with ease. When Kennedy passed 4.81m on her first attempt – a personal best and Oceania record – the pressure was back on Moon, but the American kept her nerve to mirror the Australian's success. The bar was raised to 4.86, Morris having had one failure at 4.81.

Morris bombed her first attempt at 4.86 but Kennedy improved on her PB and Oceania record by vaulting clear to set a new world-leading mark. Morris, who set a Zurich Diamond League record of 4.87m at the same station setting back in 2017, was then eliminated, leaving just Moon and Kennedy in the running.

Moon boldly passed at 4.86 and the bar was raised to 4.91. Kennedy was first on the runway, making no mistake in a remarkable vault, but Moon didn't get close on her first effort. Moon skipped and the bar went up to 4.96m. Kennedy failed on her opening effort at the height, as did Moon.

The Australian didn't get anywhere near on her second effort, but neither did Moon, handing Kennedy the victory amid an electric atmosphere. "I did not get my run dialled in soon enough. It took me a minute to get comfortable with the runway," said Moon, adding that she was not surprised at Kennedy's winning height. "I had a feeling it would go high today."

Finland's world bronze medallist Wilma Murto had three no marks to finish in last place.


Australia's Nina Kennedy celebrates after winning the pole vault event at the Zurich Diamond League meeting yesterday. *(AFP)*

SPORT

CRICKET

Azam, Ahmed hit centuries as Pakistan ease past Nepal

The Pakistan skipper scores 19th hundred in just his 104th One-Day International in Multan

AFP
Multan, Pakistan

World number one batsman Babar Azam and Iftikhar Ahmed scored punishing hundreds as Pakistan thrashed Nepal by 238 runs in the opening game of the Asia Cup in Multan yesterday.

Skipper Azam smashed a 131-ball 151 for his 19th ODI hundred while Ahmed scored an unbeaten 109 in 71 balls for his first as Pakistan piled up 342-6 in 50 overs.

The home team then bundled out Nepal for a mere 104 in 23.4 overs with leg-spinner Shadab Khan taking 4-27 while the pace duo of Haris Rauf took 2-16 and Shaheen Shah Afridi 2-27.

Only Sompal Kami (28), Aarif Sheikh (26) and Gulsan Jha (13) made it into double figures as Nepal struggled against Pakistan's much-vaunted bowling attack.

The win gives Pakistan, who rose to world number one in the ODI rankings last week, an ideal start and perfect tune up for the high profile clash against arch-rivals India in Pallekele on Saturday.

The Asia Cup is being played on a hybrid model this year with Pakistan hosting four matches and Sri Lanka nine after India refused to tour Pakistan because of political tensions.

Pakistan, India and Nepal are in Group A while title-holders Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are in Group B

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh meet in Pallekele on Thursday.

Azam admitted victory was the perfect platform for the duel against India – first ODI between the arch-rivals since 2019.

"This game was good preparation for the India game because it gave us confidence," said Azam who became the fastest to 19 ODI hundreds in 102 innings, beating South Africa's Hashim Amla whose 19 came in 104.

"We want to give 100 per cent every match."

Nepal skipper Rohit Paudel described the match as "a good learning" experience.

"We started well. We restricted them to under 240 with the ball but let ourselves down with the bat. Wicket-taking balls weren't there in the middle overs, credit goes to Babar and their team as well. Learning from the game is we need to improve in the death overs, and we need to do well with the ball."

Nepal, playing in the Asia Cup for the first time, had bowled well to keep the home team down to 124-4 in the 28th over but were helpless in the final overs against the onslaught from Azam and Ahmed.

The pair added a robust 214 off 131 balls for the fifth wicket, which took Pakistan to a formidable total.

Azam cracked 14 boundaries and four sixes while Ahmed hit 11 boundaries and four sixes, helping Pakistan to 129 runs in the last 10 overs including 67 in the final five.

Azam was dropped on 55 when Karan Chhetri put down a caught-and-bowled chance, while Nepal's ground fielding also often faltered.

Pakistan lost opener Fakhar Zaman for 14 in the sixth over, while Imam-ul-Haq was run out for five to leave Pakistan tottering at 25-2.

Azam added 86 for the third wicket with Mohamed Rizwan (44) before Rizwan was also run out. Agha Salman fell for five, leaving Azam and Ahmed to mount a rescue operation.

Ahmed's previous best ODI score was 94 not out against New Zealand in Karachi this year. Fast bowler Kami was the best for Nepal with 2-85.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 342-6 in 50 overs (Babar Azam 151, Iftikhar Ahmed 109 not out, Mohamed Rizwan 44) **v Nepal 104 in 23.4 overs** (Shadab Khan 4-27)
Result: Pakistan won by 238 runs
Playing Thursday: Sri Lanka v Bangladesh, Pallekele

Most hundreds for Pakistan in ODI matches

Batsman	Era	Matches	Centuries
Saeed Anwar	1989-2003	247	20
Babar Azam	2015-2023	104	19
Mohamed Yousuf	1998-2010	281	15
Mohamed Hafeez	2003-2019	218	11
Fakhar Zaman	2017-2023	74	10
Ijaz Ahmed	1986-2000	250	10
Inzamam-ul-Haq	1991-2007	375	10



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (left) and Iftikhar Ahmed run between the wickets during the Asia Cup 2023 match against Nepal at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan yesterday. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

Captain Marsh leads from the front as Australia win

AFP
DURBAN

A career-best unbeaten 92 from new captain Mitch Marsh propelled Australia to a comprehensive 111-run victory over hosts South Africa in the first Twenty20 International in Durban yesterday.

Australia took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series after posting 226 for six in their 20 overs, the highest score at Kingsmead, before restricting South Africa to 115 all out in a reply that never really got going.

The second match in the series is tomorrow before it concludes two days later. All three games will be played in Durban. Both sides are missing several of their regulars.

After being sent in to bat, Australia's innings was anchored by Marsh, who reached his 50 in 22 deliveries.

He put on 97 in 50 balls for the fifth wicket with Tim David, who had no trouble clearing the small boundaries with four sixes on his way to 64 from 28 balls.

"It's nice to contribute for the team," Marsh said at the post-match presentation. "I thought Tim David was fantastic with the way he took pressure off me."

South Africa were sloppy in the field and at times battled to control line and length with the ball. Seamer Lizaad Williams was the pick of the home attack with 3-44 in his four overs.



Australia's Mitchell Marsh in action as South Africa's Tristan Stubbs looks on during the first IT20 at Kingsmead Cricket Ground in Durban, South Africa, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Opener Reeza Hendricks led a near lone challenge to Australia's total with a well-constructed 56 from 43 balls, as the home side were pegged back by an excellent spell of 4-31 from debutant leg-spinner Tanveer Sangha.

"Sangha has done well in the Big Bash and he's a fantastic talent," Marsh said.

Seamer Marcus Stoinis pitched in with 3-18 in a fine display of swing bowling.

Australia also handed debuts to opening batter Matthew Short all-rounder Aaron Hardie and fast bowler Spencer Johnson, while South Africa's under-strength side included new faces in batter Dewald Brevis and seamer Gerald Coetzee.

"The wicket played really well and there was a bit of rust in every discipline," South Africa captain Aiden Markram said. "We have to come back strong on Friday."

BRIEF SCORES
Australia 226-6 in 20 overs (M. Marsh 92 not out, T. David 64; L. Williams 3-44) **v South Africa 115 in 15.3 overs** (R. Hendricks 56; M. Stoinis 3-18, S. Johnson 2-33, T. Sangha 4-31)
Result: Australia won by 111 runs
Remaining matches:
September 1: 2nd T20 international, Durban
September 3: 3rd T20 international, Durban

Carse, Malan shine as England beat New Zealand



England's Dawid Malan celebrates reaching his half century against New Zealand. *(Reuters)*

Chester-le-Street, United Kingdom: England Twenty20 international debutant Brydon Carse took three wickets on his Durham home ground to set up a seven-wicket win over New Zealand in the series opener at Chester-le-Street yesterday.
The 28-year-old South Africa-born paceman, in for the injured John Turner, returned fine figures of 3-23 from his maximum four overs as New Zealand were held to a modest 139-9.
Left-arm quick Luke Wood also took three wickets, following an expensive first over of the match that cost 18 runs, on his way to 3-37.
Twenty20 world champions England made light of the chase, finishing on 143-3 with six overs to spare, as they went 1-0 up in a four-match series.
They lost dangerman Jonny Bairstow to just the second ball of their chase, when he edged New Zealand captain Tim Southee to slip, but otherwise England had few alarms. Dawid Malan made 54 off 42 balls and Harry Brook an unbeaten 43 before Liam Livingstone ended the match in style by hooking Adam Milne high over deep square-leg.

BRIEF SCORES
New Zealand 139-9, 20 overs (B Carse 3-23, L Wood 3-37) **v England 143-3, 14 overs** (D Malan 54)
Result: England won by 7 wickets
Series: England lead 4-match series 1-0

CYCLING

Groves wins second successive stage as Evenepoel retains lead



Stage winner Team Alpecin's Australian rider Kaden Groves (second left) sprints to cross the finish line with Team Ineos' Italian rider Filippo Ganna (centre) and Team TotalEnergies' Belgian rider Dries Van Gestel (second right) during the fifth stage of the 2023 La Vuelta, yesterday. *(AFP)*

Reuters
Madrid

Kaden Groves won for the second day in succession as the Australian edged out a charging Filippo Ganna to claim stage five of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday.

A relatively uneventful 186.5km trek from Morella to Burriana ended in the predicted bunch sprint, with Alpecin-Deceuninck's Groves holding off a surging Ganna.

Belgium's Remco Evenepoel retained the overall leader's red jersey after finishing safely in the pack having picked up useful time bonuses on the last intermediate sprint.



Team Quick Step's Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel celebrates on the podium after retaining the overall leader's red jersey yesterday. *(AFP)*

Defending champion Evenepoel now leads Spain's Enric Mas (Movistar) by 11 seconds heading in to the sixth stage. Lenny Martinez is 17 seconds back with Jonas Vingegaard and Primoz Roglic, the co-favourites, 37 and 43 seconds in arrears.

Groves strengthened his hold on the green jersey after following up on Tuesday's effort. "It's a fantastic feeling, the second win of this Vuelta, and two in a row, it's a great feeling especially doing it with the green jersey," Groves said.

"At the end, it was a pretty hectic final today, similar to yesterday but without climbing. The wind and roundabouts made it quite nervous but my team was fantastic again."

Uruguay's Eric Fagundez (Burgos BH) had spent most of an undulating stage in the province of Castellon out in front alone after making an early move that did not tempt any other riders.

Having pushed his advantage to more than five minutes Fagundez was eventually caught on the day's only categorised climb by Argentina's Eduardo Sepulveda (Lotto Dstny) around 40km from the finish – Sepulveda adding to his lead in the climbers category, before being swallowed up by the chasing peloton.

A crash 3km from the finish raised the tension but once Groves was positioned into the lead by his teammates he held on despite the efforts of Italian Ganna who finished like an express train.

After two flattish days, the road goes up again today with a harsh summit finish at the end of a 182km route.

BASKETBALL

China exit World Cup in the first round as US post win

'We have to learn that every possession is important, that every small thing is important'

AFP
Manila

Puerto Rico dumped China out of the Basketball World Cup yesterday, as the United States, Serbia, Spain and Luka Doncic's Slovenia advanced to the second round with perfect records.

Georgia, Brazil and Greece also made it past the group stage, as South Sudan and Cape Verde bowed out after impressive World Cup debuts.

China lost their first two matches and had to beat Puerto Rico in Manila and hope that the other result in the group went their way to stand any chance of progressing.

But they were outclassed from the start, slumping to a 107-89 defeat to tumble out of the tournament.

China still have the chance of a qualifying spot at the Paris Olympics to play for but head coach Aleksandar Djordjevic said his team would "have to be smarter".

"We have to learn that every possession is important, that every small thing is important," he said. "We just gave too many second opportunities to the Puerto Rico team and they know how to handle the ball."

China, where basketball is a national obsession, will qualify for the Paris Games if they finish as the highest-placed Asian team at the World Cup.

Japan already have one win, while the Philippines, Jordan, Iran and Lebanon have none.

"This is a dogfight, and it's going to be like that tomorrow," said Djordjevic, whose team play Angola in the classification matches today.

"You have to keep your head cool and continue fighting for our goal. Tomorrow is a new game."

Puerto Rico went through as runners-up behind Serbia, who beat South Sudan 115-83.

South Sudan finished third in Group B and turned their attention towards claiming an Olympic berth.

"You win some, you lose some, but we will fight for another day," said head coach Royal Ivey.

The US qualified as the top team in Group C after cruising to a 110-62 win over Jordan.



Puerto Rico's Isaiah Pineiro and China's Kaier Li in action during their FIBA World Cup Group B match at Araneta Coliseum, Quezon, Philippines, yesterday. (Reuters)

Minnesota Timberwolves shooting guard Anthony "Ant-Man" Edwards took centre stage, scoring 22 points and claiming eight rebounds and four assists in an all-action performance.

Head coach Steve Kerr lauded the way his players combined, saying "the chemistry on this team is amazing".

"It's fun watching them together, they're laughing and having so much fun," he said.

"I don't need to motivate them – they motivate themselves because they love the game."

Greece joined the United States in the next round after roaring back to beat New Zealand 83-74 in a winner-takes-all showdown.

The Greeks trailed by 15 points at one stage but upped their game after half-time and held New Zealand to just 31 points after the interval.

"We've been through adversity," said head coach Dimitris Itoudis, who lost star player Giannis Antetokounmpo on the eve of the tournament when he failed to recover from knee surgery in time.

"I know it's not a time now to summarise it all but it's not an easy thing to come from down 15 and fight and keep believing that we're going to find the right way."

Doncic again flirted with a triple-double in Slovenia's 92-77 win over Cape Verde.

The Dallas Mavericks superstar scored 19 points and had seven rebounds and nine assists to help his team pick up their third win out of three.

Georgia went through in second place in Group F after a 70-59 win over Venezuela.

Defending champions Spain finished their first-round campaign with the minimum of fuss, beating Iran 85-65 for their third win out of three.

Brazil went through from Group G in second place after beating Cote d'Ivoire 89-77.

Knocked out but heads high: South Sudan cheers defeated basketball team

Juba: As the final whistle rang out, signalling South Sudan's defeat to Serbia and their elimination from the Basketball World Cup yesterday, diehard fan Deng Makuc said he was disappointed but proud.

"We have shown (the world) that it's not only the war that we have in our country, but we can do better in other fields," the Juba resident told AFP.

Ranked 62 in the world, the South Sudanese side stunned China to claim their first-ever victory on Monday during their World Cup debut in Manila – offering their citizens a rare respite from the long-running crises facing the young country.

The impoverished, violence-wracked nation won independence from Sudan in 2011, before descending into a five-year civil war that killed nearly 400,000 people between 2013 and 2018.

South Sudan played their first official international basketball game just six years ago.

Hopes were high yesterday as hundreds of fans gathered at the Nimra Talata basketball stadium in the capital Juba to cheer the team, blowing vuvuzelas and donning the colours of the national flag while a giant screen broadcast the action from the Philippines.

Even the 115-83 loss by their team, which is nicknamed the Bright Stars, did little to dampen their spirits.

"For me as a person, I do not care about the outcome. What I care about is the way they have played, the way they have tried and the way they have put us on the map in the world of basketball," Mary Nyanut told AFP.

"I know the best is yet to come," she added.

The team's rise has been masterminded by Luol Deng, former Chicago Bulls player and now president of the country's basketball federation.

As the team's coach during the qualifiers, the charismatic double NBA All-Star led the team to a historic qualification for the World Cup.

Currently the assistant to head coach Royal Ivey during the World Cup, he is aiming to secure the team a place in the Paris Olympics which will be awarded to the best of five African nations, with Cape Verde, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Angola also in the running.

One of the poorest countries on the planet despite large oil reserves, South Sudan has spent almost half of its life as a nation at war and continues to be roiled by outbreaks of politically motivated ethnic violence.

But its basketball dreams have brought South Sudan together, with several fans telling AFP the nation was standing as one to cheer the team.

"As you can see, there is no tribe, there is no what, people are coming together to support their team," said Hillary Gaga Michael.

"South Sudan's image in the outside world has been best known for bad things such as war and conflict, (but) our boys there... did remarkable things," he added.

"It is really historic for us as South Sudanese," he said.

NEARLY HALF OF AUSTRALIAN ELITE ATHLETES LIVING BELOW POVERTY LINE – SURVEY

Sydney: The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has urged the government to invest more money in sport after a survey of elite athletes found nearly half were living on incomes that placed them below the poverty line.

The survey of by the Australian Sports Foundation (ASF), a charity that raises money for sport, found that 46% of elite competitors were living on less than A$23,000 ($14,860) a year.

Many of the 2,304 athletes surveyed said the situation was getting worse as the cost of accommodation and travel rose, while two thirds of females said their mental health had been impacted by the stress of trying to make ends meet.

Worryingly for Australian hopes of a good showing at the Brisbane Olympics, the survey revealed that 43% of athletes hoping to compete at the 2032 Summer Games had considered giving up their sports.

"We cannot afford to see these inspiring young athletes walk away from their dreams," AOC chief executive **Matt Carroll** said in a statement.

"Financial pressure, impacts on athletes mental health and the risks of athletes exiting their sports as a consequence, is of huge concern."

In March, Carroll said that the AOC had identified a A$2bn



shortfall in sports funding over the 10 years to 2032 and urged the government to make it up or risk failure at the Brisbane Games.

Last month, the government announced the establishment of a A$20mn fund to help Australian athletes prepare for next year's Olympics and Paralympics in Paris.

The government recently announced a A$200mn increase in funding of women's sport after the success of the Australian soccer team in reaching the semi-finals of the Women's World Cup the country co-hosted.

The national and Queensland state governments have also pledged to pour in some A$7bn for the construction of the venues for the 2032 Olympics.


Sailing star Mat Belcher leads the Australia contingent at the Tokyo Olympic Games 2020 Closing Ceremony in August 2021. *(@AUSOlympicTeam)*

FORMULA ONE

Super Verstappen eyes record 10th win in a row

Reuters
Monza

Red Bull's Max Verstappen can chalk up a record 10th Formula One win in a row on Sunday but those hoping against hope for a different winner at Monza can still find some comfort in history.

The Dutch driver, 138 points clear of teammate Sergio Perez after 13 of 22 races, won at home in Zandvoort last Sunday to equal Sebastian Vettel's 2013 nine streak, also with Red Bull.

Verstappen won the Italian Grand Prix from seventh on the starting grid last year with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc on pole but finishing second.

Red Bull have won every race so far this season, 14 in a row including the 2022 finale in Abu Dhabi, and are again favourites at Monza's fast layout.

No team have ever gone unbeaten through a season of more than 10 races, however.

Monza proved the stumbling block for McLaren in 1988, a year in which they won 15 of 16, when Austrian Gerhard Berger led Ferrari teammate Michele Alboreto in an emotional one-two four weeks after the death of Enzo Ferrari.

Since Lewis Hamilton's fifth Italian GP win with Mercedes in 2018 no driver has managed a repeat victory in the former royal park outside Milan.

Leclerc won in 2019 and crashed in 2020. Pierre Gasly triumphed in 2020 and retired after three laps in 2021 while Daniel Ricciardo, absent this time through injury, won in 2021 and failed to finish in 2022.

Talk of a 'Monza jinx' may be premature but this is a season where straws are being clutched more desperately.

Gasly and Ricciardo both won at the 'Temple of Speed' against the odds, with Verstappen retiring in 2020 (engine problem) and 2021 (collision with Hamilton), and the track can always spring surprises.

Until last year, Verstappen had never finished on the podium there.

The race will be a first Italian Grand Prix as Ferrari principal for Fred Vasseur and the team will be racing with a special livery paying tribute to this year's Le Mans 24 Hours victory, the relationship with Monza and Ferrari's 'racing DNA'.

Ferrari got only one car to the finish at Zandvoort, with Carlos Sainz finishing fifth, and they will be determined to give the 'tifosi' something to cheer.



Red Bull's Max Verstappen (left) receives a new Hungarian Grand Prix trophy that was accidentally broken by McLaren driver Lando Norris (right) during podium celebrations last month. Verstappen won the Hungarian Grand Prix in July and was given an ornate porcelain trophy that was broken by Norris by mistake. *(@Max33Verstappen)*

"We want to execute the weekend perfectly from every point of view so that the drivers can get everything there is to be had out of our package," said Vasseur.

The weekend will be the second trial of the 'Alternative Tyre Allocation' format with teams having only 11 sets of tyres per driver – three hard and four each of the medium and soft. The last European race before a swing through Asia, the Americas and Middle East, Monza is also the first in Italy this year after Imola was cancelled in May due to flooding.

It is likely to be a familiar battle behind Red Bull to be best of the rest, with Aston Martin, McLaren, Mercedes and Alpine also in the mix. "Monza has been a good track for us in the past, so it's a special place for me," said McLaren's Lando Norris.

For Gasly, who lives in Milan, it is effectively a home race and one with a special place in his heart.

"It will be a challenging weekend but we have some confidence and momentum right now," the Frenchman said after finishing third in Zandvoort behind Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso.

QUEIROZ HOLDS A CO-ORDINATION MEETING WITH QSL COACHES





Qatar football team's head coach Carlos Queiroz held a co-ordination meeting with Qatar Stars League coaches at the Aspire Academy yesterday. In the meeting, Queiroz discussed strategies and preparation plans for the upcoming period, to achieve the best results in all upcoming competitions with the national team.

SPOTLIGHT

Postecoglou defends selection after Spurs crash out of League Cup

Fourth-tier Salford beat Leeds on penalties after a 1-1 draw with Championship club

AFP
London

Ange Postecoglou defended his team selection after suffering his first defeat as Tottenham boss after Fulham won 5-3 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in the League Cup second round on Tuesday.

Postecoglou had masterminded an encouraging start to his first season in charge of Tottenham, with successive Premier League wins against Manchester United and Bournemouth following a draw against Brentford. But the former Celtic boss paid the price for making nine changes to his starting line-up at Craven Cottage. Postecoglou handed a full debut to Manor Solomon, while Giovani Lo Celso and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg started despite speculation over their futures. Fulham boss Marco Silva made six changes himself, but it was Tottenham's understudies who struggled.

Micky van de Ven's 19th-minute own goal gave Fulham the lead as the defender turned Tom Cairney's cross past keeper Fraser Forster. Tottenham took advantage of a curious incident that left Fulham down to 10 men to equalise in the 56th minute.

A problem with Kenny Tete's boot meant the Fulham defender had to sprint down the tunnel to find a replacement in the dressing room. Moments later, Ivan Perisic whipped in a cross from the position Tete would have been defending and Richarlison headed home from an acute angle.

But Tottenham were unable to find a winner and in the shoot-out Davinson Sanchez's effort was saved by Marek Rodak before Tete, now with boots on both feet, fired the decisive kick. Currently enduring a trophy drought that stretches back to 2008, Tottenham already have one less competition in which to end that barren run this term. Postecoglou had introduced stars James Maddison and Son Heung-min in the second half, but defended his decision to select his fringe players. "How am I going to find out about my players? It doesn't mean the cup, or any game, isn't a priority for us," the Australian said.



Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou reacts during League Cup second round match against Fulham at the Craven Cottage in London on Tuesday. *(Reuters)*

"We are very much at the discovery stage and we need to give the players the opportunity. We are going to need these guys if we get disruptions along the way with injuries."

Fourth-tier Salford, co-owned by former Manchester United stars David Beckham, Gary Neville, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes, beat Leeds 9-8 on penalties after a 1-1 draw with the Championship club. "Absolutely incredible. I would have never imagined this game to go so far, never mind to go to penalties and to win. Such a big night for all these Salford fans," Neville said.

Hoping for a reunion with his old club in the third round, Neville added: "Us lads as owners, we love Man United and we love this club as well. To have the opportunity to play them is the special night that we want."

His manager, Neil Wood, was asked if United are Salford's dream draw in the third round. "I'm from Stretford and support them so it would be [great]," he said. "I haven't spoken to Neville yet. They don't come often these nights so you have to enjoy them. I was proud of our resilience."

Luton beat fourth-tier Gillingham 3-2 at Kenilworth Road to win for the first time this season. After losing to Brighton and Chelsea in their first two Premier League games, Jacob Brown, Alfie Doughty and Cauley Woodrow scored for Luton, who are playing in the top-flight for the first time in 31 years.

Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola earned his first win in English football as Ryan Christie's last-gasp goal clinched a 3-2 victory at second-tier Swansea. The Spaniard had overseen a draw with West Ham and defeats by Tottenham and Liverpool in his first three league games. Brentford needed a 3-0 penalty shoot-out victory to advance after a 1-1 draw at fourth-tier Newport. Crystal Palace survived a scare as they fought back from two goals down to win 4-2 at second-tier Plymouth thanks to Jean-Philippe Mateta's hat-trick.

Reyna misses out on Berhalter's first US squad since return

New York: United States forward Gio Reyna was the notable omission as Gregg Berhalter named his first squad since being reappointed as US coach yesterday.

Borussia Dortmund forward Reyna has not played since injuring his calf during the CONCACAF Nations League in June but is reportedly back in training with the Bundesliga giants.

Reyna and Berhalter were embroiled in an acrimonious bust-up during last year's World Cup in Qatar that led to Berhalter's future as US national team coach being thrown into doubt. But the coach said his absence was simply down to his injury and fitness situation.

"Unfortunately, he was ruled out for this camp, but I look forward to continuing to monitor his progress at Dortmund and hopefully getting him back into camp in October," he said. Berhalter, who led the team to the last 16 in Qatar, did not have his contract extended amid a bitter public row with Reyna and his parents.

Part of the feud included the revealing by Reyna's mother of a physical altercation in 1991 between Berhalter and his then girlfriend, now wife, which prompted a US Soccer investigation. The probe subsequently found there were no grounds not to reappoint Berhalter, and the coach was re-hired in June.

Berhalter said following his return there was "work to do" in rebuilding his relationship with Reyna, describing him as "an important player to this team."

Berhalter suggested there had been some contact with the player. Berhalter's squad face friendlies against Uzbekistan in St. Louis on September 9 before taking on Oman in St. Paul three days later. One surprise inclusion in the squad was Inter Miami's 18-year-old midfielder Benjamin Cremaschi, who has enjoyed a good run of form playing alongside Lionel Messi.

Miami-born Cremaschi, who has played at youth level for the United States, is also eligible to play for Argentina through his parents.

ROUND-UP

US forward Balogun joins Ligue 1 side Monaco from Arsenal

Folarin Balogun has left Arsenal to join Ligue 1 club Monaco on a five-year deal after impressing on loan at Reims last season, the two clubs announced yesterday. The 22-year-old has not played for the Gunners in a competitive match since netting 21 goals in 37 Ligue 1 appearances for Reims last term. According to a source at the principality club, Monaco paid an initial transfer fee of 30mn euros ($32.8mn) which could rise to 40mn euros.

Balogun will undergo a medical before being presented to the press today. Despite scoring seven goals in 13 appearances for England's Under-21 team, the New York-born Balogun switched international allegiance to the United States. He netted his first international goal in the USA's CONCACAF Nations League final victory over Canada in June.

Balogun came through Arsenal's academy but only played 10 matches in all competitions for the club. Monaco lead the early Ligue 1 table with seven points after scoring 10 goals across their first three games.



LUKAKU COMPLETES LOAN TO ROMA FROM CHELSEA

Romelu Lukaku completed his season-long loan move to Roma from Chelsea after being welcomed as a hero by supporters. Roma are yet to make their official announcement but Serie A have confirmed that the deal is done on their list of completed transfers.

Thousands of fans greeted Belgium striker Lukaku after he touched down at Ciampino airport just outside the Italian capital on Tuesday, his arrival a boost for Roma following a worrying start to the new Serie A season. Italian media report that Chelsea accepted Roma's offer of around 6mn euros to take outcast Lukaku for this season, giving the Italians the striker they have been looking for since Tammy Abraham damaged knee ligaments at the end of last season.

Lukaku has agreed to take a pay cut from nearly 11mn euros to around 7.5mn euros in order to move to Roma, who are operating under a Financial Fair Play settlement agreement made with UEFA. Roma have collected one point from their first two matches and their inability to convert dominance into goals was fully on display during Saturday's 2-1 loss at Verona.

Chelsea meanwhile have been trying to permanently offload Lukaku all summer in a bid to end a disastrous transfer which cost the Premier League club a 115mn euro purchase fee from Inter Milan and his whopping annual salary.

VARANE RULED OUT FOR 'A FEW WEEKS' AS MAN UNITED INJURIES MOUNT

Raphael Varane has been ruled out for "a few weeks" as Manchester United's injury issues pile up ahead of their Premier League trip to Arsenal. Erik ten Hag's side head to north London on Sunday without several players for their final match before the international break. Luke Shaw and Mason Mount are currently out of action, while new signing Rasmus Hojlund has yet to make his debut due to a back complaint. Tyrell Malacia, Amad Diallo, Kobbie Mainoo and Tom Heaton have missed the start of the campaign and now experienced French defender Varane faces a spell on the sidelines.

FRANKFURT'S MUANI SKIPS TRAINING TO FORCE PSG MOVE

French international forward Randal Kolo Muani skipped training with Eintracht Frankfurt, as he continues to try to force a move to Paris Saint-Germain. The German club confirmed Kolo Muani, 24, had chosen to miss the training session due to "his desire to be transferred to another club before the transfer window ends on Friday evening." The club confirmed Kolo Muani would not play in today's Europa Conference League qualifier at home to Levski Sofia. The away tie in Bulgaria finished 1-1, with Kolo Muani scoring Frankfurt's goal. Frankfurt sporting director Markus Kroesche said "we know Randal differently and know his real character", saying "the behaviour has no influence on transfer activities."

The forward's contract in Frankfurt runs until 2027. Frankfurt are reportedly holding out for a bid of 100 million euros ($108 million) from PSG for the forward.

Kolo Muani moved to Germany from Ligue 1 side Nantes on a free transfer in 2022 and had a breakout season in Frankfurt, scoring 23 goals and making 17 assists in 46 games.