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SPOTLIGHT

Qatar's Essam, Nassim win Asian Games opener



Qatar's beach volleyball pair Mahmoud Essam and Abdullah Nassim beat their South Korea opponents at Hangzhou Asian Games yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Each volleyball duo Mahmoud Essam and Abdullah Nassim got Qatar's Hangzhou Asian Games campaign rolling yesterday with a 2-0 victory over South Korea yesterday.

Beach volleyball, Football and Volleyball events kicked off yesterday in Hangzhou, but the Games officially open on Saturday, with the opening ceremony also scheduled on that day.

Yesterday, Essam and Naseem were clinical as they eased past their South Korea opponents in their opening group fixtures. The duo are slated to face teams from Iran and Macau next.

Meanwhile, Qatar's top beach volleyball pair Ahmed Tijan and Cherif Younousse will begin their defence of the gold medal today, as they take on the Indonesia pair. Tijan and Younousse are third in the world rankings with 6,580 points, and will fancy their chances of retaining the gold they won in 2018 in Jakarta.

The football team will also be in action today as they face formidable Japan in their opening Group D match at the Xiaoshan Sports Center Stadium. Asian Games men's football squads are made up of under-23 players but teams are allowed three older players. The Qatar's U-23 squad is coming off a successful run in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup 2024 Qualifiers in South Korea, where they won all three matches in the qualifying group.

Coach Ildio Vale will hope his team can maintain their recent form against Japan, who are one of the fancied teams to win gold. Qatar also take on Palestine in the group stage, where the teams are divided into six groups. The top two teams from each group and the four best third-placed teams across all groups will progress to the round of 16.

Meanwhile, the Qatar volleyball team will face Thailand today. On the other hand, the sailing team began its prepara-



Qatar Football Association President Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain meets Qatar's U-23 football squad at the Xiaoshan Sports Centre Stadium in Hangzhou yesterday, on the eve of their Asian Games Group D match against Japan.

tions after the delegation arrived in China on Monday, as it aims to give the best possible performance despite the strong competition. The Qatari sailing team consists of Faris al-Bakri and Ahmed al-Mulla, who will be in action today.

Qatar has sent 182 athletes, who will take part in 27 sports. At the Jakarta-Palembang 2018 Asian Games, Qatar won 13 medals: 6 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze.

NORTH KOREA WIN ON INTERNATIONAL RETURN

Meanwhile, North Korea returned to major international competition for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic with a 2-0 win over Taiwan in men's football at the Asian Games yesterday.

North Korea closed its already tight borders in early 2020 following the Covid outbreak and skipped the Tokyo Olympics, which were pushed back to 2021 because of the pandemic.

The country was then banned from the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics for failing to



take part in Tokyo. But North Koreans are competing at the Asian Games in the Chinese city of Hangzhou in sports including athletics, gymnastics, basketball, football, boxing and weightlifting.

North Korea is competing at its first multisport event since the Asian Games in Jakarta in 2018. Rivals South Korea began their quest for a third men's Asian Games gold in a row with a 9-0 demolition of Kuwait. There was home delight as China began their Games football campaign with a 5-1 thumping of India.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Duhail fail to breach Istiklol defence in goalless draw

Al-Braik went closest to breaking the stalemate 15 minutes from time

By Sports Reporter
Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Last year's AFC Champions League semi-finalists Al Duhail will take a point back to Qatar from their Group E clash against FC Istiklol after Hernan Crespo's side shared a 0-0 draw with the Tajikistan champions at the Central Republican Stadium yesterday.

Sultan al-Braik went closest to breaking the stalemate 15 minutes from time when his attempt from the edge of the penalty area took a huge deflection and came back off Rustam Yatimov's right post before bouncing to safety. But, in a game of few clear-cut scoring opportunities, Istiklol's defensive discipline ensured Al Duhail were limited to trying their luck from distance, a tactic that yielded little to seriously trouble goalkeeper Yatimov throughout the 90 minutes.

It was the home side that had the first sight of goal through Sen-in Sebai with 26 minutes on the clock, but his left footed attempt was well off target.

Al Duhail's AFC Asian Cup-winning striker Almoez Ali lashed at his attempt a minute later, sending the ball well wide of the target in a move that reflected the strug-



Al Duhail's Isaac Lihadji (centre) vies for the ball with Istiklol's players during the AFC Champions League Group E match at the Central Republican Stadium in Tajikistan yesterday.

gles of Hernan Crespo's team.

Assim Madibo and al-Braik were also reduced to trying their luck from distance before Almoez was again well wide of the mark as the opening period drew to a close.

The hosts showed greater urgency at the start of the second half, with Alisher Dzalilov rushing his shot when he was found in space inside the Al Duhail penalty area

within a minute of the resumption while Ehsan Panjshanbe pulled his effort from distance wide of Salah Zakaria's goal. Dzalilov then took aim when Istiklol were awarded a free kick, but again the strike was not close enough to the target to cause concern for Zakaria.

Fortune looked like it was about to favour al-Braik in the 75th minute when the ball fell to him

via Almoez as Al Duhail launched another attack, but his deflected shot looped up and came back off the woodwork to leave the visitors frustrated and the points shared.

Duhail face a tough fixture next as they run into Iranian powerhouse Persepolis on October 2 at home. Persepolis were facing Saudi side Al Nassr in their opening match in Tehran last night.

FOCUS

World Aquatics Championships Doha 2024 mascots unveiled

Nahim, a playful Qatari whale shark, and Mayfara a walking, talking, smiling coral, were yesterday unveiled as mascots for the World Aquatics Championships, Doha 2024.

Nahim and Mayfara are intimately tied to Qatar's heritage and represent the inclusivity of the World Aquatics Championships and its commitment to promoting sustainability.

The whale shark is the world's biggest fish and commonly found in the safety of Qatari waters. The gentle giant, Nahim, a funny, friendly, and fun character that will be on hand to entertain the crowds. Mayfara, reflects the vibrancy and diversity of the coral ecosystem with a family of clownfish living in her fringe anemone and a laid-back starfish on her forehead. A great team player, Mayfara will raise awareness about the importance of protecting our oceans and help to light up the World Aquatics Championships, Doha 2024.

Sheikha Asma bint Thani al-Thani, Director of Marketing and Communications, Opening and Closing Ceremonies Committee at the World Aquatics Champi-

onships - Doha 2024 said: "We are excited to introduce Nahim and Mayfara as the official mascots of the World Aquatics Championships, Doha 2024. Together, they embody our passion for aquatic sports and our commitment to ensuring that Doha 2024 is an unforgettable celebration for all. We want everyone visiting Doha to have an exceptional time; from watching the world's best athletes compete, to experiencing Qatar's wealth of history, culture and entertainment."

"Nahim and Mayfara will engage and entertain thousands of athletes and fans from more than 190 countries in attendance at the World Aquatics Championships, Doha 2024. But they will also have an important role to play in promoting the importance of sustainable action. Whale sharks and coral reefs are integral to the health of Qatar's waters and are a reminder that it is only through working together that we can bring about meaningful change."

The Aspire Dome, the Old Doha Port and the Hamad Aquatics Centre are the three venues to host the World Aquatics Championships, Doha 2024.



GOLF

Stage set for tough Spanish course at the Solheim Cup

PLAYERS FROM BOTH THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE SAY FINCA CORTESIN IS IN FINE SHAPE

Reuters
Andalucia, Spain

Finca Cortesin Golf Club in Andalucia, Spain, will provide a test both athletically and physically for golfers competing in the Solheim Cup this week, and they said yesterday that they're ready for the challenge.

The par-72, 6,903-yard course offers a bit of everything: elevation changes, more than 100 bunkers and views of the Estepona Mountains. Players from both the United States and Europe said Finca Cortesin is in fine shape but know what awaits them when the competition begins on Friday.

"It's going to be just as much of a physical test this week as a mental test," Leona Maguire of Ireland, making her second Solheim Cup appearance, said yesterday. "We have a lot of things this week, a lot of dinners, so managing energy throughout the week is going to be key to make sure we still have plenty in the tank for Sunday."

France's Celine Boutier, who also played with Maguire at Duke, is heading into her third Solheim Cup.

"I've been, you know, trying to rest as much as I could," she said. "I feel like everyone kind of prepared us ahead of time saying that it was going to be a very physical course, so I think just trying to prepare the best you can and at the same time save some energy for the actual tournament."

The United States is looking to reclaim the Solheim Cup for the first time since 2017. Team Europe bested the Americans 15-13 two



years ago at the Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio.

Their members, too, have had a chance to walk the course in practice and know what they are up against.

"It's obviously in spectacular shape," said Ally Ewing, who is playing her third Solheim Cup. "I don't know how much play there's been recently or, you know, over the course of the year, but it's in really good shape."

"It's really hilly. You're going to hear that from a lot of players and caddies. So the recovery off the golf course is going to be really important. It's a long week as it is, so taking care of our feet and our bodies off the course is going to be really important."

For Lexi Thompson, in her sixth Solheim Cup competition, Finca Cortesin presents both opportunities and challenges.

"Yeah, the course is unbelievable. It's in great shape," she said. "I don't know if there's been much play, but I feel like I'm the first divots out there. But it's a tricky golf course. At the same time, it's a really good layout and risk-reward golf course as well. But I think we're all very excited to go out there. It's not an easy walk, so making sure that we pace ourselves along the week."

The captains - Suzann Pettersen of Europe and Stacy Lewis of the United States - have yet to announce the pairings.

The players said yesterday that the chance to represent their countries is a feeling like no other.

"Anytime you get to wear the red white and blue and represent your country at any level of competition it's a big honour," American Danielle Kang said. "My entire team, and I can speak for, you know, everyone,

that we come out here to represent it as best as we can and we've been preparing for this, so just excited."

Members of Team Europe are feeling the energy from being back on the continent.

"It's always so much fun, and to be able to come back on European soil with the fans is definitely something I'm looking forward to," Boutier said. "Already today seeing a few faces, and the encouragement on the course was already pretty nice feeling, so very looking forward to the rest of the week."

Maguire said she saw several people from Ireland on her flight to Spain and already fans wearing the country colours at the course yesterday.

"Really excited and nice to have the fans cheering along and everybody so excited for us to be here," she said. "Hopefully we can give them some things to cheer about."

My gambling crossed the line 'into addiction': Mickelson

Los Angeles: Less than a month after the release of a book that detailed his gambling ventures, Phil Mickelson announced yesterday that he will refrain from wagering on football games this season after he struggled with a betting addiction.

The book, written by famous Las Vegas gambler Billy Walters, came out on Aug. 23 and revealed that Mickelson lost nearly \$100mn due to betting. It also made note of a five-year gambling partnership between Walters and Mickelson. Walters accused Mickelson of trying to bet on the 2012 Ryder Cup, but Mickelson denied those claims, telling *Golf Digest* that he "would never undermine the integrity of the game."

But yesterday's statement had nothing to do with golf, as Mickelson offered some words of caution for those who plan to turn to a sportsbook this football season.

"Most of you will enjoy this football season with moderation while having lots of fun and entertainment. The fantasy leagues will provide banter amongst friends and money won or lost betting won't affect you," Mickelson said on Twitter, now known as X. "I won't be betting this year because I crossed the line of moderation and into addiction which isn't any fun at all."

"The money wasn't ever the issue since our financial security



has never been threatened, but I was so distracted I wasn't able to be present with the ones I love and caused a lot of harm. This lack of presence has been so hurtful."

The six-time major winner also encouraged others not to follow in his footsteps.

"If you ever cross the line of moderation and enter into addiction, hopefully you won't confuse your enablers as friends like I did," Mickelson said. "Hopefully you won't have to deal with these difficult moments publicly so others can profit off you like I have."

"But hopefully you WILL have a strong and supportive partner who is willing to help you through being your worst self," Mickelson mentioned that he has been receiving professional help for years, hasn't been gambling and is in recovery from his addiction. He added that he is slowly mending the relationships that were affected by his betting habits.

New Zealand prepare for Bangladesh ODI series



New Zealand's players attend a practice session at the Sher-E-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka ahead of their first one-day international (ODI) against hosts Bangladesh. The first ODI will be played tomorrow followed by matches in Dhaka on Sept 23 and 26th. (AFP)

CRICKET

Hosts Qatar to face UAE today in Gulf T20 event

QNA
Doha

Qatar's cricket team will face the United Arab Emirates team today in its fourth match in the first Gulf Cricket T20 Championship hosted by Doha, with the participation of 6 teams: Qatar (the host), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the Emirates, and Bahrain.

The Qatari team is looking for-

ward to achieving its third victory in the championship to gradually progress to the final and win the title.

The Qatari team will face Saudi Arabia tomorrow, while the final match is set to be held on Saturday, Sept. 23.

The Gulf Cricket T20 Championship Qatar 2023 is accredited by the ICC and in accordance with its laws and rules.

The Doha event comes as part of the calendar of ICC's international tournaments.



FOCUS

Mongolian women's batters out for 15 to start Asian Games action

AFP
Hangzhou, China

Mongolia's women's cricket team were in tears after being bowled out for 15 runs in a thrashing by Indonesia on the opening day of action at the Asian Games yesterday.

The Games in the Chinese city of Hangzhou officially open on Saturday but sports including cricket, volleyball, beach volleyball and football begin before that. Mongolia's women were making their debut at an international tournament and were given a harsh lesson as Indonesia made 187-4 in the Twenty20 preliminary-round match. Indonesia's total included 49 extras, 38 of them wided by the Mongolian bowlers. In reply, an outclassed Mongolia were out for 15 in 10 overs.

Mongolia's coach David Talalla said he was proud of his young team - their average age is just 19 - given their very limited resources and experience of the sport. More than half of his players had never even left Mongolia before and this was their first experience of a grass wicket, having been used to an artificial pitch at home.

Mongolia's kit is second-hand from Australia, and their four bats donated by a French ambassador whose wife is English and a cricket fan, said Talalla, who is



Players of Mongolia and Indonesia in action on the opening day of women's cricket competition at the Hangzhou Asian Games.

working for free. I know we've only made 15 runs but none of our girls have played the game for longer than two years and we know what a technical game it is," said Talalla. "We've only got a squad of 12 - that's all we could afford to bring," added Talalla, saying all of his players were in tears afterwards.

"The whole idea is the longer picture - cricket in Mongolia, who would have thought it?" he said.

"Even myself, I've only been in the job here for five weeks as a high-performance coach but six months ago, I didn't even know they played cricket in Mongolia. I think most of the world didn't."

SPOTLIGHT

Eight charged with corruption attempts in Abu Dhabi T10 league

Reuters
Dubai

Eight people, including two co-owners of a team, have been charged for breaching the anti-corruption code of the 2021 Abu Dhabi T10 Cricket League, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday.

The group include a former Bangladesh international, two domestic players and three team officials, who tried to corrupt matches in the tournament, said the ICC, which oversaw the tournament's anti-corruption measures.

"The charges relate to the 2021 Abu Dhabi T10 Cricket League and attempts to corrupt matches in that tournament - these attempts were disrupted," the ICC said in a statement.

Sanctions could include life bans from the game.

"Ten Sports Management expresses disappointment over the charges levied against eight participants of the 2021 T10 tournament held in the UAE," tournament organisers said. "We take all allegations of this nature seriously and have a zero-tolerance policy for any kind of corruption."

"We will continue to work closely with the ICC on our calendar of T10 tournaments and do everything within our control to ensure the integrity of cricket is upheld."

One team co-owner failed to disclose corrupt approaches and did not co-operate with the tournament's anti-corruption unit, while another placed bets on the outcome of matches.

A batting coach has been charged with attempts to fix matches, while the players have been accused of offering "rewards" to fellow players to be part of the fixing attempts, the ICC said.

Bangladesh bowler sorry for misogynist remarks

A Bangladeshi cricketer has apologised for social media posts condemning working women but denied he was a misogynist because "his mother is a woman", the country's cricket board said yesterday.

Tanzim Hasan Sakib took the wicket of India captain Rohit Sharma with only his fourth international delivery when the neighbours met in the Asia Cup last week before helping secure victory for Bangladesh.

But the resulting adulation for the 20-year-old turned to scorn from women's rights activists and feminists after his misogynist social media posts came to light. "He said he was sorry," Bangladesh Cricket Board cricket operations chief Jalal Yunus told reporters in Dhaka.

He added that Tanzim had been warned not to make similar social media posts in the future.

TENNIS

Nadal still aiming to finish career in 2024

AFP
Barcelona

Spanish tennis star **Rafa Nadal** reiterated yesterday that finishing his career in 2024 remains his goal, while admitting he has taken two operations to try and heal his hip injury.

"I said that possibly 2024 was my last year, I maintain that, but I can not confirm it 100 percent because I do not know," Nadal told *Movistar*.

The 37-year-old announced in May that the hip injury he suffered at the Australian Open in January meant he had to step away from the sport to try and come back stronger.

Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam winner, reiterated yesterday that he "would like to play again and

be competitive again." "My hope is not to return to win Roland Garros or win (in) Australia, so that people are not confused, all that is a long way off," he said in the interview.

"I am well aware of the difficulties that I face, one is insurmountable, that is age, and the other are physical problems.

"What makes me hopeful is to play again, to be competitive again."

Nadal had two surgeries on his hip injury, one of which he announced publicly in June which was set to take around five months to heal.

When Nadal won the French Open title in 2022, he beat Novak Djokovic of Serbia to the record of winning the most Grand Slam singles titles (22). However, Djokovic soon caught up, securing four more majors with Wimbledon in 2022 and then the Australian,

French and US Opens in 2023. He now has 24 Grand Slam trophies under his name.

Britain drawn to face Serbia in Davis Cup Final 8

Britain who topped Group B in the Davis Cup after their win over France on Sunday now face Serbia, as the draw for the Final 8 Knock-out stage was announced yesterday.

Serbia finished second behind Czech Republic, but clinched their place in the Final 8 with a win over Spain.

Novak Djokovic beat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina just five days after winning the US Open to help Serbia to a 3-0 win over Spain in Valencia.

Whoever comes out on top between Serbia and Britain will then face the winner of Italy v Netherlands in the semi-final. Reigning

Davis Cup champions Canada will continue their title defence against Finland, who came through as runners-up in Group D after surprise wins over Croatia and the United States, while Canada topped their group ahead of Italy. The winner of Canada v Finland will take on either Czech Republic or Australia in the semi-final. Australia finished runners-up to Britain. The Final 8 takes place in Malaga, Spain, and begins on Nov. 21.

- Winner Group A v Runner-up Group D
- Canada v Finland**
- Winner Group C v Runner-up Group B
- Czech Republic v Australia**
- Runner-up Group A v Winner Group D
- Italy v Netherlands**
- Runner-up Group C v Winner Group B



RUGBY WORLD CUP

Coach Galthie calls premium players for Namibia clash

'WE BUILD OUR LINE-UP ON A WEEKLY BASIS, THERE IS NO LONG-TERM PLAN IN THAT AREA'

Reuters
Aix-en-Provence, France

France coach Fabien Galthie recalled his premium players for their third Pool A match against Namibia as Les Bleus look to pick up momentum after a see-saw start to their World Cup campaign.

France started in inspired fashion with a 27-13 victory against New Zealand but the reserve side was largely disappointing as they beat Uruguay 27-12 six days later, leaving assistant coach Laurent Labit saying the team had done 'too little' so far.

A few tweaks were made from the team who played against the All Blacks, with loosehead prop Cyril Baille returning from injury to boost the French pack with Galthie insisting being able to adjust to circumstances was key to a successful tournament.

"We build our line-up on a weekly basis, there is no long-term plan in that area," Galthie told a press conference.

"We can talk about Darwin. His theory is that it is the strongest or the smartest who prevail, but those who can adjust and adapt."

Left wing Louis Bielle-Biarrey is handed his second start in a row at the expense of Gabin Villiere while Anthony Jelouch, who made his comeback from a long-term injury against Uruguay, starts at number eight with Gregory Alldritt being rested after picking up a mi-



France's head coach Fabien Galthie looks on as he attends a team announcement press conference at the Cite du Livre in Aix-en-Provence, southern France, before the match against Namibia at the Rugby World Cup. **Inset:** Namibia's centre and captain Johan Deysel poses for photographs in Colomiers, south-western France. (AFP)

nor knee injury during training on Monday. Francois Cros will start as blindside flanker while Jonathan Danty is back at centre after

nursing a thigh injury. Villiere and Jean-Baptiste Gros will not feature on the match sheet, but it does not mean Galthie is not count-



ing on them. "No, no, they've not been demoted. We have a rotation so other players will be involved against Namibia. We need every-

one in the squad, especially those two," he said. New Zealand destroyed Namibia 71-3, scoring 11 tries and although

France will not be looking to emulate that performance, the scoreline will matter and the returns of Danty and Baille should help.

"They are two players who have been in all our big battles in the last four years," Galthie said. "They're important players who have a lot of experience."

The biggest boost, however, will come from scrumhalf Antoine Dupont and flyhalf Matthieu Jalibert.

"I'm happy to play. We were several players who needed to recuperate (after the New Zealand game) and we are now ready to deliver, in terms of result and performance," captain Dupont said.

France top Pool A with eight points from two games, three ahead of three-time world champions New Zealand. They will play their last pool game against Italy in two weeks before a potential quarter-final clash against Ireland or South Africa.

- Team:**
15-Thomas Ramos, 14-Damian Penaud, 13-Gael Fickou, 12-Jonathan Danty, 11-Louis Bielle-Biarrey, 10-Matthieu Jalibert, 9-Antoine Dupont, 8-Anthony Jelouch, 7-Charles Ollivon, 6-Francois Cros, 5-Thibaud Flament, 4-Cameron Woki, 3-Uini Atonio, 2-Peato Mauvaka, 1-Cyril Baille
- Replacements:**
16-Pierre Bourgarit, 17-Reda Wardi, 18-Dorian Aldegheri, 19-Romain Taofifenua, 20-Paul Boudelent, 21-Baptiste Couilloud, 22-Yoram Moefana, 23-Melvyn Jaminet

BASKETBALL

India make history with big win over Sri Lanka; Australia in quarter-finals

www.fiba.com
Doha

Japan were only one point away from joining New Zealand, India and China as teams to reach 100 points in their wins yesterday after beating Saudi Arabia 99-43. Young Akatsuki Japan were led by a second great from Kenishiro Benedict who had 18 points, 11 rebounds, 4 assists, and 6 steals.

New Zealand handled their business against Bahrain, winning 117-43. The Junior Tall Blacks grabbed 75 rebounds, tied for the second-most amount of rebounds in a single game by a team in the U16 Asian Championship since the statistic was officially archived in 2013.

Two players scored at least 20 points for New Zealand, Troy Plumtree (22 points) and Lachlan Crate (20 points).

China had no issues dealing with Kazakhstan in a 119-57 victory. Seven players scored in double-digits led by Boyuan Zhang who had 24 points.

Australia do not look like they will be slowing down, claiming another win 111-43 against Lebanon.

The win officially clinches the defending champions their direct



India's point guard Lavish in action against Sri Lanka in Doha yesterday. India won 112-39

ticket to the quarter-finals of the competition. Dash Daniels led the way for the Crocs in this game with 21 points and had six players scoring in double-digits with all but one player scoring in this game.

History made again for India

After a historic win over Lebanon, India set new highs yet again with a 112-39 win over Sri Lanka.

The game saw the most amount of points scored by India in their

history competing in the U16 Asian Championship as well as the largest margin of victory. Five players scored at least 10 points for India with Ankush leading all scorers with 22 points.

In another match, Iran took care of business for a 86-65 win over host Qatar.

Sina Mohammadi had a second straight game of scoring over 20 points with 26 points to go with 3 rebounds, 3 assists, and 4 steals.

ITALY EXPECT PHYSICAL BATTLE WITH URUGUAY TODAY

Paris: Italy's first objective at this Rugby World Cup is to win their opening two games, and after disposing of Namibia, winning 52-8, they now face a Uruguay side who should not be underestimated today.

Uruguay lost their opening game, going down 27-12 to hosts France, but impressed many with their battling performance. It was something which Italy coach Kieran Crowley expected.

"It never surprised me at all. Look at World Cups and there's only been one or two games maybe where the games have been one-sided at halftime," Crowley told reporters at his team announcement on Monday.

"The tier two countries are getting a hell of a lot closer. Look at all these teams, Uruguay, Chile, Portugal, they have got full-time training programmes."

Many, including Fiji's coach Simon Raiwalui, have hopes for more chances to take on the top rugby nations, something which Crowley also believes will benefit countries like Uruguay.

"They get everything that every other team is getting. The only other thing they're not getting is consistent competitive games against tier one countries," he said.

"Once that is sorted out, you are going to have a hell of a lot more equilibrium in world rugby." For now, the focus is on the present, and Italy know that this Uruguay side already pose a serious challenge.

"Uruguay pose a massive threat. We are expecting that physical battle. You saw in the France game that their breakdown work was outstanding," he added.

Captain Michele Lamaro agreed with his coach. "We have analysed their match against France and we know it will be a physical game. We know they are a team which plays with a lot of passion," the Italian backrow said.



Italy's Tommaso Allan during training at Allianz Riviera, Nice, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

"We want to dominate from the start and as well as cranking up the pressure with the forwards, we can then exploit our strength in our backs."

Apart from changing four players from the side which defeated Namibia, Crowley has also moved Ange Capuozzo back to his usual fullback position, with Tommaso Allan returning to flyhalf.

"You know what he (Capuozzo) does from 15. He will probably have more opportunities to have the ball in his hands. But you can only do that if the guys up front do the job," the coach said.

"If we can get some go-forward ball then he has the opportunity to influence the game. You can't influence the game if you don't win the gain-line battle."

Italy play today at the Stade de Nice, and Italy prop Danilo Fischetti spoke about the prospect of rain. "If I had to pick between rain and sun, then it would be sun. But not in the afternoon heat when it is 38 degrees. That's not very pleasing and you feel tired very fast," Fischetti said yesterday.

"I just hope weather does not influence the game."

SPOTLIGHT

Mars, Diab and Alesso to perform during Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix

Lasail International Circuit (LIC) unveiled its exciting entertainment line-up ahead of Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix, which will take place from October 6-8.

With tickets selling fast, a host of regional and international superstars will headline the weekend's entertainment in the venue's concert area which will be accessible by all ticket holders. The post-race concert is as follows:

On Friday, October 6: Record-breaking Egyptian artist Amr Diab will dazzle audiences with a medley of his best-loved hits.

On Saturday, October 7: Superstar Alesso will light up the stage with his world-renowned brand of music. And finally on Sunday, October 8: The weekend's entertainment will finish in style with an exclusive performance from global megastar Bruno Mars.

The reopening of LIC signifies a new chapter in the circuit's history, with LIC currently being the only circuit in the region to host both Formula 1 Grand Prix and MotoGP. As part of the reopening, the popular circuit layout remains, but with brand new, state-of-the-art facilities incorporated to improve and enhance the experience for all racegoers.

LIC said yesterday that tickets were selling fast, with some select

category tickets for race weekend already officially sold out.

However, fans can still get their hands on tickets for remaining select categories for the event and should head to <https://tickets.lisc.qa/> for more information.

This year will mark the second edition of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix, which first took place at the LIC in 2021.

With Qatar hosting the fourth F1 Sprint weekend of the season, on-track action will kick off on October 6 with a free practice session, followed by a Qualifying session which will set the grid for Sunday's Grand Prix race. On October 7 fans will be treated to two highly competitive sessions with the "Sprint Shootout" which will set the order for the F1 Sprint race later in the day.

Finally, the weekend will culminate under the floodlights on October 8 to celebrate the coveted first, second and third place winners, followed by a spectacular fireworks display. Recently, LIC announced The F1 Roadshow: a series of immersive activities in malls across Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which gives local fans an exciting advance preview of the weekend's events. LIC will also host the 2023 edition of the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar from November 16-19.



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Howe 'proud' of Newcastle's Milan draw

'I think we'll get better and better as time goes on'



AC Milan's Olivier Giroud (right) and Newcastle's Sven Botman go for a header during the UEFA Champions League Group F match at the San Siro stadium in Milan yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Milan

Edie Howe was proud of Newcastle United's dogged return to Champions League football after two decades away, holding seven-time European kings AC Milan to a goalless draw in yesterday's opening Group F match. Howe was the happier of the two managers with taking a point from the clash at the San Siro as his team were mostly on the back foot against last season's losing semi-finalists.

Newcastle did little in their first fixture in Europe's top club competition since 2003, the Saudi Arabia-backed club barely creating a chance and lucky to escape with a draw on the balance of play. Milan should have won after wasting a string of chances, particularly in the first half, and dominating the play on Sandro Tonali's return to his old stomping ground after being sold to Newcastle in July.

"Definitely pride in result and the performance and the mentality shown," Howe told reporters. "Within the squad the result wasn't underestimated. Also they are very honest players that acknowledge the fact that we can perform better. I think we'll get

better and better as time goes on. Hopefully can grow into the tournament."

Stefano Pioli's Milan sat top of a tough group before Paris Saint-Germain's opener with Borussia Dortmund at the Parc des Princes later yesterday, level with their Premier League opposition.

Tonali's father was at the San Siro and saw much more football played by the hosts than by his son, back in the Newcastle starting line-up after missing international duty and the weekend's 1-0 win over Brentford with injury.

Before kick-off and during the match the Italy midfielder was loudly cheered by supporters who don't resent his mega-money move to England.

But home fans, who watched their team thumped 5-1 by local rivals Inter Milan on Saturday, were left frustrated by their side's poor finishing and Newcastle's at times desperate defending which left the match goalless.

"You have to win when you play so much better than such a good team. Unfortunately we weren't able to capitalise on the situations we created," said Pioli. "It's a shame that we didn't win the first match because it's going to be a difficult group. We're not happy with the result... We were lacking

the most important quality of all!"

First Tommaso Pobega had a well-struck drive pushed away by Nick Pope in the 13th minute and moments later the Newcastle goalkeeper got his body in the way of Samu Chuckwueze's header. Barely a minute had passed from those two chances when Olivier Giroud then nearly poked home after bustling to get in front of Pope, and unmarked Theo Hernandez had his head in his hands when he failed to score with his free header from Rade Krunic's corner.

With less than 20 minutes gone Milan fans were wondering how their team weren't leading by at least one goal, and just after the half-hour mark Giroud wasted another golden opportunity when he misdirected his flicked finish from Hernandez's low cross past the near post.

Cries of frustration came pouring down the San Siro stands and supporters could barely believe their eyes when the disappointing Rafael Leao surged into the area and beat two defenders only to attempt a backheel instead of shooting and fall over his own feet.

Leao wasted another gilt-edged opportunity in the 74th minute when he flung his head at substitute Alessandro Florenzi's brilliant cross and sent wide.

United manager relishing pressure before Bayern tie

Munich: Manchester United coach Erik ten Hag yesterday backed his side to come through their early-season struggles ahead of today's Champions League tie with Bayern Munich. After a narrow opening win in the Premier League over Wolves at home, United have won just one of their next four league games, conceding ten goals to leave them 13th.

Ten Hag was booed for the first time as Man United boss after his side lost at home to Brighton on Saturday, but said these struggles would steel his side for future challenges. "That's football, I've had this experience in the past. Things aren't always going up - and you have to deal with it. I like these situations, because now we have to handle it, we have to manage this, you have to know what to do and that is focusing on the process."

United have several players missing through injury and ten Hag confirmed under-fire defender Harry Maguire was injured and did not make the trip. Ten Hag acknowledged the club's injury struggles but said the team had recruited wisely.

Ten Hag returned Man United to the Champions League with a third-placed finish in 2022-23 but the Red Devils face an in-form Bayern.

PREVIEW

Arteta wants Arsenal to make 'beautiful memories' on CL return

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta has told his Arsenal players to make "beautiful memories" on their return to the Champions League after a six-year absence. Arteta's side face PSV Eindhoven in their opening Group B match at the Emirates Stadium today.

It will be the Gunners' first game in Europe's elite club competition since they were thrashed by Bayern Munich in the last 16 in 2017. The long-awaited return has stirred Arteta's soul as the Arsenal manager recalls his own playing days with the north London club in the Champions League.

On the eve of his first match as a boss in the Champions League, the Spaniard issued a passionate rallying cry to his team. "Proud and excited. We've been fighting for it and now we've got it," Arteta told reporters. "I've played in a few for the club and I have beautiful memories about them. We have to make the most out of it."

Arsenal have made an unbeaten start to the Premier League season as they bid to make amends for the late collapse that gifted Manchester City the title last term. But the chance to advance to the latter stages of the Champions League - a competition they have never won - is a major incentive for Arsenal this season.

"It's been a long time for the club since we have been in the competition and obviously it's the first time for me as a manager, so I'm really looking forward to it," Arteta said. "Every time I watched it and we weren't there, I felt it. I think you put pressure on yourself. This club has to be in the Champions League. When I have the job that I have, I have the responsibility to try to bring the club to the biggest stages, to the biggest tournament and then be fighting for them."

While Arsenal are not among the favourites to win the competition given the lack of Champions League experience among the likes of Declan Rice, Bukayo Saka and William Saliba, the

Gunners boss wants his players to learn quickly. "I think it's a learning process. When you're looking to achieve, you have to take some lessons from that. I think we did that and we got better as a team and we did the right things as well to improve the squad," he said.

Arteta refused to reveal who will start in goal for Arsenal today after he surprisingly dropped England's Aaron Ramsdale for Sunday's win at Everton, giving David Raya his first appearance since his loan move from Brentford. "I understand the questions and I understand what happened, but for me there is nothing different," Arteta said. "It's my job to have to answer the questions in the best possible way and the most honest way. As a manager it is my job to do as I feel and what I feel always is the best for the team and the club."

Asked if Ramsdale had complained about being axed, Arteta added: "Honestly I don't want to talk about the response of every single player in the squad whether they play or not."

Arsenal forward Gabriel Jesus scored 14 times in 22 Champions League appearances for Manchester City, a goal spree that reflected his boyhood love of the tournament. "I remember the times I watched at home, the times I missed school to watch and my mum got crazy. As a kid, you do things you don't control!" Jesus said. "It starts from there. It was different to hear the music, to see the best clubs."

TODAY'S FIXTURES

(Kick-offs 1900 GMT unless stated):

Group A: In Istanbul, Turkey (1645 GMT): Galatasaray (TUR) v Copenhagen (DEN); In Munich, Germany: Bayern Munich (GER) v Manchester United (ENG)

Group B: In Seville, Spain: Sevilla (ESP) v Lens (FRA); In London: Arsenal (ENG) v PSV Eindhoven (NED)

Group C: In Madrid (1645 GMT): Real Madrid (ESP) v Union Berlin (GER); In Braga, Portugal: Braga (POR) v Napoli (ITA)

Group D: In San Sebastian, Spain: Real Sociedad (ESP) v Inter Milan (ITA); In Lisbon: Benfica (POR) v Salzburg (AUT)



Arsenal's players attend a training session yesterday, on the eve of their Champions League match against PSV Eindhoven. (AFP)

FOCUS

Klopp, Tuchel back Nagelsmann amid Germany job rumours

AFP
Berlin

Jurgen Klopp yesterday joined Thomas Tuchel in backing the rumoured appointment of Julian Nagelsmann for the Germany national team job. Klopp said before Liverpool's Europa League clash with Austrian side LASK "I find Julian to be a really great solution, because he's a great coach. I'd be really pleased if it was to happen."

German media reported earlier yesterday that Nagelsmann was on the verge of being named coach of the men's national team following the sacking of Hansi Flick, just nine months out from Germany hosting the European Championship. Klopp joined Bayern Munich coach Tuchel who showed his support for Nagelsmann, the man he replaced in the Munich dugout.

"Why not?" said Tuchel, speaking at a pre-match press conference ahead of Bayern's Champions League match against Manchester United today, when asked about Nagelsmann's possible appointment. "Julian has the quality and (if) the DFB has



reins on a deal which will run to the end of Euro 2024. Flick became the first Germany coach in history to be dismissed from his post after his side slipped to a 4-1 friendly loss against Japan earlier in September. Flick's men also failed to get out of the group stage at the World Cup in Qatar last year. Germany have lost four of their six matches since then, as they prepare to host Euro 2024. Nagelsmann had succeeded Flick in the dugout at the perennial Bundesliga champions. Germany's reported dream solution for the coaching gig was Klopp, but the Reds manager said "my heart is here in Liverpool."

"I have a duty of loyalty here in Liverpool!" Klopp, whose contract runs until 2026, said. "I signed a contract here and as far as I remember, I was not tied up or drugged - it was a free decision" Klopp joked.

Nagelsmann has been seen as a rising star after impressive spells as coach of German sides Hoffenheim and RB Leipzig. Nagelsmann's name was mentioned as a possible candidate for a number of top club vacancies over the summer, being linked with English sides Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur.