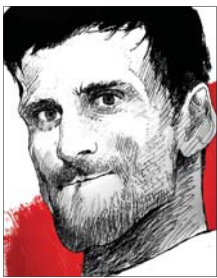


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India searches for answers after latest letdown in World Cup



TENNIS | Page 3

Djokovic has 'highest ambitions' after record ATP Finals triumph

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Indian football is a gold mine that needs to be explored: Wenger

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FOOTBALL

Confident Qatar target first away win against hosts India

‘OUR GOAL IS TO BE THE BEST ON THE FIELD, AS IT GIVES US MORE CHANCES TO SCORE AND WIN’

By Sports Reporter
Bhubaneswar

India will face a test of their credentials when they host Qatar in Group A of the Preliminary Joint Qualification – Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar today.

India will face the reigning Asian champions who were simply unstoppable in an 8-1 win over Afghanistan on Thursday with head coach Carlos Queiroz setting them the target of a perfect campaign.

However, Queiroz is also expecting a tough challenge from India as Qatar seek their second consecutive victory in Group A and first away win.

“We are evolving day by day as a team, having a good opportunity to showcase an excellent image of the squad. Our goal is to be the best on the field, as it gives us more chances to score and win,” said Queiroz.

Qatar captain Hassan al-Haydos felt the team was fully focused against the hosts.

“I’ve played many times against the Indian national team, a team that is progressing day by day. We’ve turned the page on the last game and our aim is to secure three points in our second match of the qualifying stage,” he said.

Coached by Croatian Igor Stimac, India also opened the competition with a win, claiming an away 1-0 victory over Kuwait.

Qatar had met India in the qualifying event of the previous edition beating them 1-0 in the reverse fixture after a goalless draw in a home game.

Qatar will be a different challenge altogether with head coach Igor Stimac expecting an extremely difficult encounter.

Almoez Ali starred with four goals against Afghanistan but Qatar’s strength is across the squad and they will fancy their chances of another win despite playing away.

The Indian team is yet to find a win against Qatar. They have faced Qatar thrice before this upcoming match but have never won a single match. Qatar has won two matches while India managed to draw a game.

“It’s a game, where there is nothing to lose for us but a lot to win for. So let’s go for it all out,” said Stimac at the pre-match press conference.

“We cannot control the external factors. We can only control our performances at the individual level and as a team. The only thing for us to do is to give our best for 90 minutes when the first whistle sounds.”

The Croatian, however, was ex-



Qatar’s Almoez Ali with teammates during their training session yesterday, ahead of the Preliminary Joint Qualification match for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 against India at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar.

tremely pleased with his team’s performance against Kuwait.

“Kuwait are our strongest opponents for the second spot. To start with a win against them gives us a clear idea of what we need to do in the remaining games (to qualify for the third round).”

Stimac reiterated that this year has been the most consistent one for India under his tenure.

“When you play high-level games consecutively without losing, facing Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait three times, Lebanon twice, Iraq and you don’t lose matches and keep clean sheets, it’s quite evident that you are consistent,” he said.

Accompanying the coach in the press conference was goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, who delivered one of the performances of his life, making 11 saves as India had held Qatar 0-0 in their own den in the World Cup Qualifiers in 2019.

“Hopefully I have less work (this time),” he chuckled. “Maximum points with the least work possible is a goalkeeper’s dream. I want the players in front of me to enjoy, get on the scoresheet and give us the win.”

In the other fixture of the day, Afghanistan will take on Kuwait, with both teams aiming to rebound after having suffered defeats in round one.

With only the top two teams advancing to the third round, Afghanistan and Kuwait will have no room for error when they meet in the neutral venue of Dammam.

Kuwait were disappointed to have finished empty handed against India with head coach Rui Bento accepting responsibility for the defeat. Bento, however, will expect his side to bounce back against a young Afghanistan side at the Abdullah Al Dabil Stadium.

TODAY’S FIXTURES
India v Qatar
Venue: Kalinga Stadium (Bhubaneswar)
Kick-off: 4:30pm
Afghanistan v Kuwait
Venue: Al Ettifaq Club Stadium (Dammam)
Kick-off: 8:00pm

Indian players going through their drills in a training session at Kalinga Stadium yesterday.



AFC U23 Qatar 2024 draw to be held on November 23

Battle lines will be drawn for the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 when the official final draw ceremony takes place on November 23 at 12pm local time at the Al Bustan Ballroom of the Wyndham Doha West Bay in Doha.

The top 16 U23 teams in Asia will vie for supremacy at the sixth edition of the competition, set to be played between April 15 to May 3, 2024 in Qatar.

Adding to the excitement, the top three finishers of the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 will

qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, while the fourth-placed team will participate in a Play-off against an opponent from the Confederation of African Football (CAF) for a chance to compete at the Olympics.

Hosts Qatar, who qualified automatically, will be joined by 15 teams that successfully navigated the qualifiers in September – 11 group winners and four best second-placed teams overall – in the final draw.

Eight teams – Australia, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Korea Republic, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan – have been present at every edition to date, while Indonesia are set to make their tournament debut.

As the host association, Qatar will be placed in the pots as the top seed and the other teams ranked by their performances at the AFC U23 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2022, where Saudi Arabia emerged victorious. The 16 sides will be divided into four equal groups to contest a one-round league

format and the top two finishers in each group qualify to the quarter-finals.

The seedings for the draw are as follow:
Pot 1 (Ranked 1st to 4th): Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Japan
Pot 2 (5th to 8th): Australia, Iraq, Vietnam, Korea Republic
Pot 3 (9th to 12th): Thailand, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait
Pot 4 (13th to 16th): Malaysia, Tajikistan, Indonesia, China PR

BEST RUNNERS-UP

Qatar	Australia	Uzbekistan	Japan
Saudi Arabia	Iraq	Vietnam	Korea Republic
Thailand	Jordan	United Arab Emirates	Kuwait
Malaysia	Tajikistan	Indonesia	China PR

REVIEW

India search for answers after final loss

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Cricket-obsessed India was left grappling for answers yesterday after the team's devastating defeat to Australia in the final of their home World Cup extended a drought in global tournaments.

A much-fancied India team led by skipper Rohit Sharma went into Sunday's final in front of nearly 100,000 fans in Ahmedabad undefeated and favourites to capture the one-day crown.

But they were outplayed by Pat Cummins' Australia, going down to a six-wicket defeat and leaving players, fans and pundits with a familiar feeling of disappointment.

"You can't deny the fact that it's been more than 10 years since they won a global title," Indian sports journalist R Kaushik said yesterday.

"If you look at the semi-final

losses then there is a pattern, maybe there is something wrong in the planning," he added.

"You can interpret that as, 'Yes, they freeze on the big stage, or you can say that, 'On that day they were not good enough! But it's hard to say they freeze mentally.'"

India's record makes for painful reading for its hundreds of millions of fanatical supporters.

Their last global title came a decade ago with the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Sunday was also India's second loss to the Australians in a final in five months, after they went down in the World Test Championship decider in June.

India won the one-day World Cup in 1983 and 2011, but then faltered at the semi-final stage in 2015 and 2019.

"India are the real chokers, they are the new chokers," fan Abir Saini, wearing a Virat Kohli Indian jersey, fumed as he trudged away from the world's biggest cricket

stadium. "They play well but fall at the final hurdle."

'Can't pin it down'

Fans had turned anticipating an Indian victory after the hosts stormed into the final with 10 straight victories in the lead-up matches.

But it was Australia who triumphed to win a record-extending sixth World Cup crown, with Travis Head hitting a sparkling 137.

India coach Rahul Dravid appeared as baffled as anyone at his team's inability to get over the line.

"I mean, I guess if I knew the answer, I would say that," Dravid, who was appointed coach in 2021 until this year's World Cup, told reporters.

"I just think we haven't played really well on the day," he said of India's succession of near-misses," he added.

The former captain said that "there's not one particular reason you can pin it down to," adding



India players look dejected after losing the ICC Cricket World Cup final against Australia in Ahmedabad on Sunday. (Reuters)

that on Sunday "we didn't bat well enough".

Indian media attempted to look on the bright side.

The Hindustan Times said in a headline: "Champions, nonetheless."

But it noted there were some

"harsh lessons", prime among them lack of depth in the batting department.

"Don't despair, let's celebrate this India team," said *The Times of India*, highlighting several memorable moments during the six-week tournament - including an emphatic win over Pakistan.

India's dire record when it really counts is in stark contrast to Australia's, who have won six of the eight ODI World Cup finals they have contested.

Osman Samiuddin, a senior editor at *ESPNews*, said Australia had been clear underdogs against what he called India's best-ever one-day side.

But he singled out for praise Australia's fast bowlers, their fielding and skipper Cummins, and most of all their winning mentality.

"As in, Australia, world champions, inevitably," he wrote, saying there was an air of inevitability to their latest success.

FOCUS

Australia show who the boss is in World Cup finals

Pat Cummins also captained his team to WTC trophy win in June



Australia players celebrate with the trophy after winning the ICC World Cup in Ahmedabad on Sunday. (Reuters)

Reuters
Melbourne

India dominate the business side of global cricket by virtually every metric but Australia showed commercial clout counts for little when teams battle on the game's biggest stage.

With a pitch offering little comfort for pace bowlers and terraces packed with blue-clad fans, Sunday's World Cup final could not have been better set up for the hosts to emerge unbeaten champions.

Instead, Australia, led by a Travis Head century and their brilliant trio of quicks, humbled India and their batting riches in a dominant six-wicket win that may rank the finest of their six World Cup triumphs.

Having claimed the World Test Championship in June, Pat Cummins's team have shown greatness across formats and will no doubt fancy completing a sweep of the game's biggest prizes at next year's T20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies.

Australia's 'golden era' under captains Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting, when they won three one-day World Cups in succession from 1999-2007, has cast a long shadow over the teams that followed.

But some feel Cummins's squad is at least worthy of comparison.

"They've won a T20 World Cup, they're the world Test champions and now they're the World Cup winners in India," former England captain Michael Vaughan said on

India dominate WC team of the tournament

Ahmedabad: Six players from finalists India and two from champions Australia were selected in the World Cup team of the tournament announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday. Leading run scorer Virat Kohli - who was named player of the tournament - captain Rohit Sharma, K L Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja, Jasprit Bumrah and top wicket-taker Mohamed Shami were all included in the team. All-rounder Glenn Maxwell and spinner Adam Zampa were also selected in the line-up after helping Australia win a record-extending sixth title with Sunday's six-wicket victory. Maxwell scored a double century against Afghanistan and a 40-ball 100 against the Netherlands earlier in the event. The selection panel consisted of West Indies great Ian Bishop and former Australia batter Shane Watson among others.

Team of the Tournament:

1. Quinton de Kock (wk) (South Africa) - 594 runs at 59.40
2. Rohit Sharma (c) (India) - 597 runs at 54.27
3. Virat Kohli (India) - 765 runs at 95.62
4. Daryl Mitchell (New Zealand) - 552 runs at 69
5. K L Rahul (India) - 452 runs at 75.33
6. Glenn Maxwell (Australia) - 400 runs at 66.66 and six wickets at 55
7. Ravindra Jadeja (India) - 120 runs at 40 and 16 wickets at 24.87
8. Jasprit Bumrah (India) - 20 wickets at 18.65
9. Dilshan Madushanka (Sri Lanka) - 21 wickets at 25
10. Adam Zampa (Australia) - 23 wickets at 22.39
11. Mohamed Shami (India) - 24 wickets at 10.70
- 12th man: Gerald Coetzee (South Africa) - 20 wickets at 19.80

BBC Test Match Special. "This group now needs to be talked about in a similar vein."

As a spectacle, the final in Ahmedabad could not hold a candle to the tied 2019 classic in which England edged New Zealand on boundary count.

Australia, however, do not do nail-biters. Their opponents in finals are not so much beaten as remorselessly crushed by technical brilliance and consummate execution.

Since losing the 1996 final to Sri Lanka, Australia have developed every team they have faced in the decider, starting with an eight-wicket thrashing of Pakistan in 1999.

India were embarrassed in a 125-run defeat in the 2003 final, Sri Lanka hammered by 53 runs in the rain-hit 2007 decider, and in 2015 New Zealand crashed to a seven-wicket loss at a heaving Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Six years later, Australia added

their first T20 World Cup title to the mix, cruising past New Zealand in the Dubai final.

With Australia's pedigree of big-match success, Cummins gave short shrift to the idea of his team being underdogs before Sunday's final.

"At least a dozen of the 15 have won a World Cup and know what it takes," he said of his squad. "(They) won't be afraid to go out there and be brave, take the game on."

And so it proved. Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood took seven wickets between them, choking the life out of an Indian batting lineup that had dominated the tournament. Already ranked among the best Australian pace attacks, the trio leave India with reputations further enhanced.

Australia's fielding was in the crosshairs earlier in the tournament with a series of dropped catches but on Sunday they gave nothing away, holding India without a boundary for an hour at one point.

Cummins also departs with doubts about his captaincy banished.

The Test skipper entered the World Cup having led the ODI side only a handful of times but has now joined Waugh, Ponting and Allan Border as Australia's title-winning captains.

In Sunday's final, his gutsy decision to field first, his decisive bowling changes and his taking of Virat Kohli's wicket set the tone for a team who thrives when the stakes are highest.

World Cup thrills cannot erase future ODI concerns

Ahmedabad: A World Cup that started with questions over the future of 50-over one-day internationals ended with doubts still being expressed about their worth outside the context of a showpiece event. Australia's six-wicket win over India in front of a 92,000 crowd at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium may have been a disappointingly one-sided final for home and neutral fans. But the memory of several more dramatic contests earlier in the tournament was still vivid, with Afghanistan overwhelming defending champions England by 69 runs and non-Test nation the Netherlands defeating eventual semi-finalists South Africa. One of the plus points of an ODI is that it allows a team to stage the kind of epic comeback more often associated with a Test match, while still producing a result in a day. And while the high velocity, smash-and-grab Twenty20 game may be increasingly important to the finances of players and national boards alike, as evidenced by the lucrative Indian Premier League, it rarely produces drama to compete with cricket's longer formats. Nowhere was this more evident at this World Cup than during Australia's remarkable pool play victory over Afghanistan when, on the brink of defeat at 91-7 chasing 292, a staggering double century from Glenn Maxwell secured an extraordinary three-wicket win. Pat Cummins, who kept Maxwell company during an unbroken stand of 202 in that memorable match at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, admitted to mixed emotions after leading Australia to a record-extending sixth World Cup title. "It's hard to say. Maybe because we won, but I did fall in love with

ODI again this World Cup," said fast bowler Cummins, who took a superb 2-34 from his maximum 10 overs as Australia held India to a modest total of 240 all out. Australia briefly wobbled at 47-3 in reply before Travis Head's 137 and the opener's partnership of 192 with Marnus Labuschagne (58 not out) took Cummins's side to victory with seven overs to spare. "I think the scenario where every game really matters, it does make it a bit different to just a bilateral (ODI)," said Cummins after a win that ended a run of three straight World Cup titles for a host nation following 2011, 2015 and 2019 triumphs for India, Australia and England respectively. This was Australia's eighth appearance in a World Cup final, having been involved in the inaugural 1975 showpiece game, losing to the West Indies in a celebrated clash at Lord's. "The World Cup's got such rich history, I'm sure it's going to be around for a long time," said the 30-year-old Cummins, with the next edition scheduled for 2027 in southern Africa. "There's so many wonderful games, so many wonderful stories within this last couple of months. So, I think there's definitely a place (for it)." But the issue of what happens to ODIs between World Cups remains to be discussed. Prior to this edition, incoming MCC president Mark Nicholas called for all ODIs between World Cups to be scrapped. "We believe strongly that ODIs should be World Cups only," he told *ESPNews*. "They're not filling grounds in a lot of countries. And there is a power at the moment to T20 cricket that is almost supernatural." He added: "In a free market, the most money wins."

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan look for fresh start in Australia

AFP
Lahore, Pakistan

Under a new skipper in Shan Masood, Pakistan yesterday named a squad of fresh faces for a tough tour of Australia starting next month, seeking a fresh start after a disastrous World Cup campaign.

Following the World Cup where Pakistan lost five of their nine matches and finished fifth, the country's cricket board overhauled the national team, with Babar Azam resigning as captain of all three formats.

Team director Mickey Arthur and head coach Grant Bradburn have been removed from their positions with former skipper Mohamed Hafeez taking over both their roles.

Masood was given the reins of the Test captaincy while Shaheen Shah Afridi was appointed Twenty20 captain.

Wahab Riaz, another former fast bowler, was appointed chief selector following Inzamam-ul-Haq's resignation and stressed performers in domestic competition were chosen for the three-match Test tour.

"Australia is always a tough tour but we think that these players



have the capability and capacity to not only do well, but come out winners."

Pakistan have performed poorly in Australia, however, losing 14 Tests on the trot with a last success in 1995. The series starts with the first Test in Perth (December 14-18) followed by the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne (26-30) and Sydney (January 3-7).

Squad: Shan Masood (captain), Aamer Jamal, Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Khurram Shahzad, Mir Hamza, Mohamed Rizwan, Mohamed Wasim, Noman Ali, Saim Ayub, Agha Salman, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi

TENNIS

Battle-hardened Djokovic eyes ‘Golden Slam’

‘WELL, YOU CAN WIN FOUR SLAMS AND AN OLYMPIC GOLD’

Reuters
Turin, Italy

Novak Djokovic wrapped up his 2023 season by adding the ATP Finals trophy to the three major titles he won this year and the Serb immediately set the bar even higher for next season by targeting a ‘Golden Slam’.

Djokovic, who won his seventh ATP Finals on Sunday with a straight set win over Jannik Sinner, missed out on Grand Slam this year after losing to Carlos Alcaraz in the Wimbledon final.

The 36-year-old told reporters in Turin he wanted a clean sweep of the majors next year as well as the singles gold medal at the Paris Olympics.

Steffi Graf is the only player to have achieved the ‘Golden Slam’, winning the Australian, French and US Opens, Wimbledon and a gold medal at the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

“Well, you can win four Slams and an Olympic gold,” Djokovic said. “I have always the highest ambitions and goals. That’s not going to be different for the next year. The drive that I have is still there. My body has been serving me well, listening to me well. I have a great team of people around me.

“Motivation, especially for the biggest tournaments in sport, is still present. It still inspires me to keep going.”

The 24-times Grand Slam winner said he was “very, very proud” of his season.

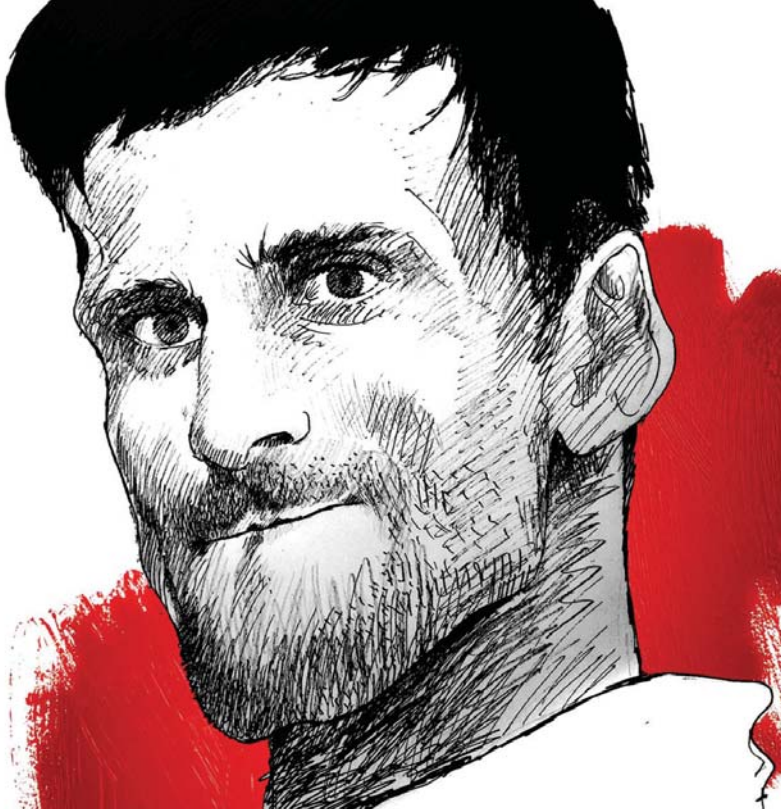
“Four out of five tournaments ... I couldn’t ask for more to be honest,” he added. “It’s a great reward for what my team and I have been through this year, being one of the most successful years in my career that I’ve ever had.”

Meanwhile Djokovic will seek to complete one of the best season’s of his incredible career by leading Serbia to the Davis Cup title for a second time in Malaga.

Serbia are one of the eight surviving nations from September’s group phase and will face Britain on Thursday.

Action begins today when

 XFL
GULFTIMES
21-11-2023



reigning champions Canada take on Finland, while tomorrow the Czech Republic are up against Australia. Italy also face the Netherlands on Thursday.

Djokovic reached all four Grand Slam finals this year, winning three of them to move past Rafa Nadal to a record 24 major titles. On Sunday he beat Italy’s Jannik Sinner to win a record seventh ATP Finals title.

But Djokovic is not finished yet and the 36-year-old would like nothing more than leading Serbia to the men’s team prize for the first time since 2010 when he was instrumental in a memorable victory against France in Belgrade.

“The season is not finished yet. I really would like to win the Davis Cup with Serbia. That’s a goal. It’s an important week for us, for our nation. We’ll do our best.”

Serbia’s task has been made a little easier by injuries ruling out Dan Evans and Andy Murray from Britain’s line-up, although they still have world number 18

Cameron Norrie and youngster Jack Draper in the squad as well as a strong doubles line-up including world number three Neal Skupski.

Canada beat Australia in last year’s final and Felix Auger-Aliassime wants to prove that feat was no fluke.

“Whenever we come together as a team we always have belief that we can win,” Auger-Aliassime told the ITF’s website.

“We are focussed but also more relaxed knowing we won the trophy last year.”

Canada are without the injured Denis Shapovalov and will have former Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic in their ranks against a Finnish squad which has already achieved the country’s best result in the competition.

Oddly, a large Finnish population live close to Malaga so they will not be lacking support, according to their number one player Emil Ruusuvuori. “I heard there’s 6,000 coming,” he said.

Traditional Davis Cup powerhouse Australia have not won the Davis Cup for 20 years but under captain Lleyton Hewitt they believe they can go one step further than last year.

“All the guys in our team lift when they play for their country,” Hewitt said.

“They play with a lot of passion and pride.”

Alex De Minaur is Australia’s top singles player and arrives in Spain confident after an impressive year which he ended just outside the world’s top 10. “I’m kind of a local here now,” De Minaur, who trains in Alicante and Marbella said.

“It’s basically a home tournament for me.”

The Davis Cup will also be a chance for Sinner to shake off any lingering disappointment at losing to Djokovic in the ATP Finals on Sunday. World number four Sinner leads a strong-looking Italy side who will be favourites to beat the Dutch.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar’s gymnastics team wins 12 medals at Confederations Cup



QNA
Lisbon, Portugal

Qatar’s artistic gymnastics team (boys-girls) won 12 medals (4 gold, 3 silver, and 5 bronze) in the Confederations Cup Championship held in Anadia, Portugal.

During the competition, Fayrouz Hisham won two gold medals in the general individual and vaulting horse equipment competitions.

Dorra al-Feki won one gold in the individual apparatus competitions. Ahmed Samir won four gold medals (apparatus parallel bars – apparatus horizontal – vault apparatus – and pommel horse gymnastics apparatus).

The three silver medals were won by Loujain Attia in the vaulting horse equipment, Ahmed Samir in the general individual competition, and Omar al-Hafnawi in the floor apparatus.

The four bronze medals were achieved in the team category by Yasmine al-Qasimi in the general individual and balance beam competitions (two bronze), Ahmed Samir in the floor apparatus competition, and Omar al-Hafnawi in the pommel horse.

President of Qatar Gymnastics Federation Ali al-Hitmi praised the achievements of Qatar’s artistic gymnastics team in the Con-



President of Qatar Gymnastics Federation Ali al-Hitmi

federations Cup Championship in Portugal. Al-Hitmi said in a press statement that the victory of the national teams players in a large number of various medals, is considered a great achievement in light of the fierce competition from various countries in this very strong tournament, and an achievement that satisfies our ambition and we look forward to more in the upcoming tournaments.

He added that this achievement is the result of the efforts of all the employees of the Qatar Gymnastics Federation, pointing out that Qatari gymnastics is on the right path, expressing his hope that the national teams champions will achieve the largest number of medals in the upcoming championships.

Luiten loses three clubs in a tree

Dubai: Golfers losing balls is a common enough occurrence but Dutch professional Joost Luiten took mislaying equipment to another level when he lost three of his clubs up a tree at the DP World Tour Championships in Dubai on Sunday. Days after Rory McIlroy’s tee shot landed on a spectator’s lap, Luiten, frustrated after making a bogey, threw his driver at a tree where it got stuck. He threw another club in a bid to retrieve the driver but the tree’s thick branches and leaves caught that as well.

As a tournament official climbed the tree and threw sticks at the well-lodged clubs in vain, Luiten continued his own rescue efforts by launching a third club at the tree. A couple of throws later he had lost a third club. Luiten tried jumping and hitting the tree with a standard bearer’s sign before eventually giving up. He played the rest of the hole with 11 clubs before a volunteer rescued the lodged clubs. The Dutchman ended the championship three-over-par, placing third from the bottom. Nicolai Hojgaard won the tournament.

GOLF

Amy Yang wins Tour; Lilia Vu captures POY honours

Reuters
Naples, Florida

Amy Yang of South Korea posted a 6-under 66 in her final round to win the CME Group Tour Championship on Sunday in Naples, Florida.

Yang, 34, had not won on the LPGA Tour since February 2019 and missed significant time with a tennis elbow injury that happened while rock climbing.

That didn’t hold her back in the final round as she earned the tournament’s \$2mn first prize, the largest paycheck on tour.

Yang shot 27-under 261 for the week at Tiburon Golf Club to outpace Alison Lee and Japan’s Nasa Hataoka by three strokes. Lee also shot 66 on Sunday and Hataoka settled for a 69.

“You know, I still can’t believe I did it,” Yang said. “So great to have – and feeling honoured to have – my first win in the US, especially CME Group Tour Championship.”

Lilia Vu finished a distant fourth at 21 under, but her final-round 65 was enough for her to secure the Rolex Player of the Year Award. Vu, who also owns the No. 1 world ranking, won four tournaments this year, including two major championships.

Vu, who is notoriously hard on herself, said she still was self-critical this season, “but much nicer.”

“Just kept my goals really small, and I think that really helped me achieve Player of the Year,” the 26-year-old from California said.

“Honestly, I don’t think I thought much about it today. I just was trying to play my best out there.

“Probably have more time to reflect tonight and figure out what it means to me.

“I mean, I went to the Rolex dinner on Thursday and Annika (Sorenstam) is an eight-time



Amy Yang of Korea looks on during the trophy ceremony after winning the CME Group Tour Championship at Tiburon Golf Club in Naples, Florida. (AFP)

Player of the Year and I thought it was just amazing to be up there with her.”

The highlight of Yang’s round was an eagle 2 from the fairway at the par-4 13th hole.

“That hole, I had about 80 yards to the pin, and it was helping down a little,” Yang said. “Had a 58 wedge in my hand and I played about 75, just a little off. It went straight to the pin and I saw it land really close to the pin. I had just a quick feeling that, ‘Oh, this might go in.’ And was just so excited to see it went in.”

That brought Yang to 25 under for the tournament, where she was safe from the rest of the field before finishing with two of her five birdies at Nos. 17 and 18.

Lee did not record a bogey either Saturday or Sunday and birdied six holes in her final round, but it wasn’t enough to keep up with Yang. Lee

finished second for her third straight LPGA start.

“I feel like I put up a good fight today,” Lee said. “Did everything I could to put some pressure on (Yang and Hataoka). Amy had a phenomenal round. Once she made her eagle on 13 I think, I mean, I think that really turned the course of the whole entire day for her.

“She just played so unbelievable and played super solid and it was really tough to catch. I feel like I tried my best to put some birdies on the board, put some pressure on them, but she just played way too good. Definitely hurts a little bit.”

Atthaya Thitikul of Thailand shot a bogey-free 66 and finished fifth at 20 under. She won the Vare Trophy for the season’s lowest scoring average at 69.533.

Ruoning Yin (69) and Xiyu Lin (70), both of China, tied for sixth at 19 under. Nelly Korda (68) and Australia’s Minjee Lee (70) tied for eighth at 18 under.

US PGA Tour RSM Classic scores
Miami: Leading final-round scores in the PGA Tour RSM Classic at St. Simons Island, Georgia (USA unless noted):

253 - Ludvig Aberg (SWE) 67-64-61-61
257 - Mackenzie Hughes (CAN) 68-66-60-63
260 - Tyler Duncan 68-65-62-65, Eric Cole 66-66-61-67
263 - Adam Svensson (CAN) 68-66-67-62, Ben Kohles 66-67-67-63, Denny McCarthy 65-67-66-65
264 - Taylor Montgomery 69-65-67-63, Ben Griffin 67-67-69-61, Austin Eckroat 65-68-66-65, Ryan Moore 70-67-62-65, Greyson Sigg 66-68-64-66
265 - J.J. Spaun 68-70-64-63, Russell Henley 72-66-65-62, Charley Hoffman 68-70-62-65, Peter Kuest 67-66-66-66, Vince Whaley 66-69-64-66, Sam Ryder 67-65-65-68

Spieth replaces McIlroy on PGA Tour board

New York: Jordan Spieth will serve the remainder of Rory McIlroy’s term as a player director the PGA Tour’s policy board. Commissioner Jay Monahan announced the change to tour members yesterday. The term runs through the end of 2024. Spieth’s selection was voted on by the five other player directors: Tiger Woods, Patrick Cantlay, Charley Hoffman, Peter Malnati and Webb Simpson.

“With Rory McIlroy resigning from the PGA Tour Policy Board last week, per the PGA Tour Tournament Regulations, the five remaining Player Directors have elected Jordan Spieth to serve the remainder of Rory’s term which expires at the end of 2024,” Monahan wrote to members, according to an email obtained by *Golf Channel*. “Jordan has extensive experience with the Tour’s governance process, having served two years on the Player Advisory Council (2017-18) including PAC Chairman in 2018 and three years (2019-21) as a Player



Director.” McIlroy resigned last week, citing the time commitment as the biggest factor. He also acknowledged that the agreement between the PGA Tour and DP World Tour with Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF), which backs LIV Golf, over future co-operation affected his role on the board. Spieth, 30, is a 13-time winner on the PGA Tour with major victories at the Masters (2015), US Open (2015) and The Open Championship (2017).

Aberg wins RSM Classic in Georgia



Ludvig Aberg of Sweden poses for a photo with the trophy after winning The RSM Classic on the Seaside Course at Sea Island Resort in St Simons Island, Georgia. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Al Shaqab International Showjumping League on November 24-25

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shaqab yesterday announced the launch of the Al Shaqab International League, a distinguished showjumping event.

With a rich history of organising numerous successful events over the years, Al Shaqab has played a pivotal role in advancing sport in Qatar. In particular, the centre's contribution aligns with Qatar's National Vision 2030, aimed at promoting the nation as a premier sporting destination.

The mission of the Al Shaqab International League Showjumping Event is to establish a premier showjumping league that provides a prominent stage for riders of all backgrounds, with a strong emphasis on promoting opportunities for female and junior riders. The event is dedicated to prepar-

ing them for the highest level of equestrian sport while instilling confidence and sportsmanship, enabling them to excel as athletes.

Registration for the event is open to all Riding Academy members and external riders. All classes will adhere to the rules and regulations set by the FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale), except for the introductory classes.

The competition will take place at Longines Indoor Arena on November 24 and 25 from 2:00pm to 9:00pm, and will comprise a series of six competitions which will be announced soon.

The local tournaments include multiple categories, including training categories: Intro 1, Intro 2 and Intro 3. The main local categories are: Future Champions, Junior Champions, Youth Champions, Al Farissa and the Open Class.

Each round will feature different categories catering to the needs of riders at various levels

and age groups. Points will be accumulated for all main local categories to crown the best rider, male or female, at the end of the season for the main categories.

The main international categories taking place on November 24 and 25 are:
- Future Champions - Ages 12 to 14 (Height 105cm-110cm), qualified for the finals of the International Equestrian Federation for group seven championship.
- Junior Champions - Ages 14-18 (Height 115cm-120cm), qualified for the finals of the International Equestrian Federation for group seven championship.
- Youth Champions - Ages 16-21 (Height 125cm-130cm) qualified for the finals of the International Equestrian Federation for group seven championship.
- Ladies Category - Ladies Amateurs (Height 105cm)
- Open Class - (Height 125cm-130cm)



FOOTBALL

Wales boss Page focused on reaching Euros automatically

'This is the first time that we've had two games in quick succession'

AFP
London

Wales manager **Rob Page** said yesterday he wanted his players to ignore talk of a potential Euro 2024 play-off as they bid to snatch automatic qualification for the tournament.

Page's side must beat Türkiye in their last Group D qualifier today and hope Croatia do not defeat Armenia. That combination of results would seal a top two finish and send Wales to next year's tournament in Germany.

If they fail to qualify via that route, Wales are guaranteed a play-off place in March, but it is not an option Page wants to contemplate.

Page and Ian Mitchell, Wales' head of performance psychology, have addressed the issue with the squad ahead of the sell-out clash at the Cardiff City Stadium.

"We're having no talk of play-offs. If we're talking play-offs, we may as well call the game off on Tuesday. That's our mentality and attitude," Page told reporters.

"We're fully focused on the job we've got and we don't want any regrets when that final whistle goes.

"I addressed that at a meeting with the players and I got Mitch to speak about it as well.

"We're not admitting defeat and thinking 'why not?' because potentially we can qualify if the other result goes our way.

"What I don't want to do is walk off at the end of the game, the result's gone for us, and we could have taken charge of it," he added.

Wales are attempting to reach a fourth major tournament in their last five attempts.

They had automatic qualification in their own hands before Saturday's disappointing 1-1 draw in Armenia. Croatia took advantage by winning 2-0 in Latvia to move into second spot behind already-qualified Türkiye.

Page suggested that he would be kept informed of events in the Croatia game in Zagreb today as Wales seek to clinch qualification in the most dramatic fashion.

"What we do need, from minute one, is energy. Off the back of (Türkiye's) result against Germany and the threat they pose, we have



to have energy in that team," Page said.

"This is the first time in a while that we've had two competitive games in quick succession.

"We're not blessed with a pool of players coming in that are playing too much domestically.

"There potentially could be changes, or at least coming off the bench and having an impact."

Southgate targets No. 1 ranking for England

Gareth Southgate says he is driven to make England the world's top-ranked team, stressing there is no room for "sloppiness" as they seek to end their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign on a high.

England, who face North Macedonia in Skopje, are all but assured of being among the top seeds in next month's draw for the finals in Germany.

But they were disappointing in

Friday's 2-0 victory against Malta at Wembley and will be keen to improve against lowly North Macedonia, whom they hammered 7-0 at Old Trafford in June.

"Qualification's done," the England boss told British media ahead of the Group C finale.

"With the games at the weekend, we might be ranked third in the world at the minute (England are fourth in the latest published FIFA rankings), but we're two places off where we need to be so we can't waste games.

"Some of the players have got three games to get into a squad, some have got maybe three to get into a team."

Southgate said the level of performance had to be "spot on every time".

World Cup winners Argentina are top of the rankings, with France in second place and Brazil third. England have been in

the top five for five straight years. Asked if being number one drives him on, Southgate said: "Yeah, because ultimately you achieve that through consistency and you've got to play well in the tournaments as well because the ranking points are higher in the tournaments.

"Also, it sets behaviours every day on the training pitch, off the training pitch.

"If you are going to be the top-ranked team, there's no room for sloppiness or casualness. That's got to be our drive."

England's final camp of the year has been disrupted by absentees.

Five players withdrew from the original squad through injury and two more departed the squad before they flew to the Balkans.

The Football Association announced Kieran Trippier had gone home due to a personal issue, while injury meant Jarrod Bowen left the camp on Sunday.

FOCUS

Indian football is a gold mine that needs to be explored, says Wenger

Reuters
New Delhi

Arsene Wenger believes there is a "gold mine" of football talent in India that needs to be tapped so that the country can play a more significant role on the world stage.

"My target is to improve football in the world. And it is impossible that a country like India, 1.4 billion, is not on the football world map," former Arsenal manager Wenger said during a visit to India in his role as FIFA's chief of Global Football Development.

"My main target here is to convince people that there is a gold mine here, but at the moment it is not completely explored, exploited and encouraged," he added during a meeting with the president of the All India Football Federation Kalyan Chaubey yesterday.

The Frenchman said a robust development programme can improve a country's performance. "I was in Japan at the start of their football in 1995. In 1998, they were at the World Cup," he said.

"So that means it is possible. You have to start early.

"I believe you have huge assets, fantastic qualities that make me very optimistic about what you can do here."

"What will football be like in 2030? How can we imagine what our needed quality is in 2030? But what is for sure, is where we start with technique. Football is a technical sport. We have to equip the players from five to 15 with the best possible capacity to be technically at the top. That means, basically, to make it simple, is to make the ball his friend. The rest can be developed later. And this is absolutely vital.

"So, this is where we have to start and that's where we want to help people to make young players technically perfect. The start of our programme is to identify the talent and then put the best talents together," he said.

Speaking on India's potential aspirations and goals, Wenger said, "So imagine the potential that is here if we work well.

"And my main target here is to convince people that there is a gold mine here but at the moment it is not completely explored, exploited and encouraged."

India have never taken part in a World Cup. They opted not to participate in the 1950 tournament despite being invited.



FIFA's chief of Global Football Development Arsene Wenger (left) with president of the All India Football Federation Kalyan Chaubey.

Messi's 2022 World Cup jerseys predicted to top \$10mn at auction

A set of six jerseys that Lionel Messi wore during Argentina's victorious 2022 World Cup run will be auctioned in December, Sotheby's announced yesterday, estimating their value at more than \$10mn.

The football star donned these shirts during the first halves of the group-stage rounds against Saudi Arabia and Mexico, as well as later games against Australia, the Netherlands and Croatia - and the final against France. Argentina's winning run in Qatar last year was the final feather in the forward's cap, having failed to secure the championship in four previous World Cups.

If the jerseys indeed fetch above \$10mn, that could make the sale the most valuable collection of sports memorabilia ever auctioned off, Sotheby's

said. The most expensive individual jersey ever sold at auction was one that basketball legend Michael Jordan wore during his NBA finals run with the Chicago Bulls in 1998. It sold for \$10.1mn last year.

Auction houses have increasingly taken note of sports memorabilia in recent years, considered a growing market. The shirts are being brought to auction by US tech startup AC Memento, which helps athletes manage memorabilia collections.

A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the UNICAS Project, an initiative with a Barcelona children's hospital that helps kids with rare diseases. The jerseys will be available for free public viewing when they are up for auction, from November 30 to December 14.

Austria ready for 'explosive duel' with Germany, says coach Rangnick

Austria coach Ralf Rangnick warned his side were prepared for an "explosive duel" in today's friendly with his native Germany in Vienna.

The former Manchester United manager told reporters the match-up between the two neighbours was a "special game for both nations", explaining "in club football,

you'd call it a derby". Rangnick, 65, who was named Austria coach in April, said the clash would be the perfect preparation for next year's Euros, to be held in Germany.

"We're really looking forward to the Euros. What is most important is that we develop into a real tournament team," the German coach

said. "Against Germany, we'll get a chance to see how it feels to play one of the top teams in Europe."

With six wins out of eight matches, Austria have secured qualification for next year's tournament. Austria have only lost one of nine matches in 2023, going down 3-2 to group winners Belgium in Vienna in October.

Austria take on a Germany side in transition, having won one of three under new manager Julian Nagelsmann, including Saturday's 3-2 loss to Türkiye in Berlin.

Austria captain David Alaba echoed his coach's sentiments, calling the match "a very special game for all of us" and saying "we want to end the year successfully".