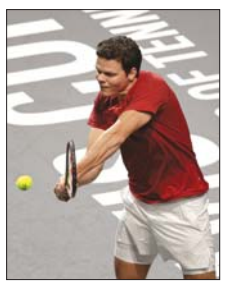
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CRICKET | Page 2

Suryakumar to captain India for Australia T20 series



TENNIS | Page 3

Raonic quick off the blocks for Canada but Finland hit back

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FOOTBALL

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Page 4

2026 FIFA WORLD CUP AND 2027 AFC ASIAN CUP QUALIFIER

Qatar trounce India 3-0 for second consecutive win

MOUSTAFA MASHAL, ALMOEZ ALI AND YOUSUF ABDURISAG ON TARGET FOR ASIAN CHAMPIONS

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Asian champions Qatar proved their superiority with an easy 3-0 win against India in Group A match 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 yesterday.

Qatar continued their winning start with the second successive win that opened up a three-point gap for Qatar at the top of the group. Carlo Queiroz's men had brushed aside Afghanistan 8-1 in their opening match, while India came away from Kuwait with a valuable three points, winning 1-0 last week. The defeat also produced India's first international defeat at home in 2023 and first loss in the crucial qualifiers.

Ranked 61st in the men's team standings, Qatar dominated in every department from the word go. Moustafa Mashal, the star forward Almoez Ali and substitute winger Yousuf Abdurisag were on the target for the visiting team.

Akram Afif ran the show in the first half with being consistent threat down the left side. He missed an easy opportunity to score the goal in the opening minute but kept finding gaps in the final third.

Qatar's opening goal came from a corner after Udanta Singh's poor clearance at the edge of the outside box. Mustafa Mashal thumped his effort past the Indian defence to give his side a lead in the fourth minute. Qatar missed a golden opportunity inside the first two minutes when Akram Afif was found all alone six-yards out. However, he failed to convert and India survived the first real chance of the match.

Qatar's dominance continued as they hit 10 corners inside the hour, as they continued to look to add to their ten goals scored against both Afghanistan and India.

India's best chance of the match fell to Naroem Singh, after Suresh Wangjam found him through the middle all on his own, but the substitute dragged his effort wide of the target.

Qatar recorded eight corners in the first 35 minutes but India enjoyed some possession in the final ten minutes. Star midfielder Anirudh Thapa created the first chance with sharp dribbling skills inside the box but Apuia Ralte missed an open opportunity with an effort going wide of the net.



Qatar's Almoez Ali (right) celebrates with teammate Yousuf Abdurisag after scoring a goal against India in their Group A match 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 yesterday.



Qatar's Mustafa Mishal celebrates after scoring the opening goal yesterday.

Wave after wave of attack continued for the visitors, including a free header from the goal scorer Meshaal, but they weren't able to add to their tally before half-time.

With minutes until the half-time whistle, Qatar's centre-back Boulalem Khoukhi carelessly gave the ball near his own area, but Anirudh Thapa spurned his shot in what was India's biggest and only chance of the half.

As with the first half, Qatar were ruthless from the off. Almoez Ali doubled Qatar's lead inside 60 seconds of the restart after Afif's shot fell to the striker less than a yard out, who steered the ball home for his fifth goal of the qualifiers.

Ali came close to scoring his second of the match, and Qatar's third, when he opened up his body and curled one to the far corner from the edge of the box. Everyone was beaten but his effort clipped the top of the crossbar.

Qatar were able to score their third in the final few minutes of the match.

A cross in from the left from Mohamed Waad found Yusuf Abdurisag who was able to steer his header into the roof of the net.

Next up, India will take on Afghanistan away from home in the new year, while Qatar host Kuwait in Group A.

Palestinians fly flag in emotional World Cup qualifier

Palestinian flags and the black-and-white keffiyeh scarf flew high in Kuwait's Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium as football fans vented their emotions in a World Cup qualifier yesterday. Thousands of Palestinians and their sympathisers turned out at the 60,000-seat venue for the game against Australia, Palestine's first in front of fans since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

"Palestine is in our hearts. We came to the stadium, old and young, in support," Anfal al-Azmi, a 45-year-old Kuwaiti woman, told AFP.

Defender Harry Souttar's 18th-minute goal was all that separated the teams in a 1-0 win for Australia where the action on the pitch was almost incidental.

It unfolded about six weeks after Palestinian Hamas militants killed 1,200 people and took around 240 hostages, Israeli officials say, in an attack launched from the Gaza Strip on October 7.

"We do not care about the match. We came to deliver a message," said Wael Youssef Labbad, 40, a Palestinian from Ashkelon.

"We, the Palestinian people, are always present with the keffiyeh and the flag."

Palestine's red, black, white and green flag was ubiquitous at the game – which shifted from Ramallah in the West Bank because of the war – and many fans twirled the distinctive keffiyehs as they chanted.

Others held up "Free Gaza" banners and pictures of keys, symbolising the homes lost by Palestinians during the 1948 creation of Israel.

Australia's players will donate a portion of their match fee to humanitarian operations in Gaza, whose situation was described as "horrific" by visiting coach Graham Arnold. Not all the fans were Palestinian, with many coming from other communities in the oil-rich Gulf country.

"Kuwait and Palestine are one. Today we are guests of Palestine in their land," said Kuwaiti Ahmed al-Anezi, 36, who was draped in the Palestinian flag and wore a keffiyeh.

"Today I and my entire family came to provide support to the Palestinian people and to consolidate the first Arab cause in the souls of my children."

Syrian university student Yahya Shaher, 18, said: "We are here to support our brothers. We are one and victory is ours."

In Dammam, a strong second half display saw Kuwait march to a 4-0 win over Afghanistan in Group A at the Al Ettifaq Club Stadium yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

QMMF to host MENA Karting Cup 2023 from December 12 to 16

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) has announced details of the upcoming MENA Karting Cup 2023, scheduled to take place from December 12-16 at the Lusail International Circuit's karting track where aspiring young racers from Middle East and North Africa (Mena) region will compete in 6 categories.

Entrance to the event will be free and open to the public at the Lusail Karting Track. The detailed schedule of the MENA Karting Cup 2023 will be shared at a later stage.

The MENA Karting Cup 2023 will feature intense wheel-to-wheel racing with competitors from as young as 8 to adult in divisions which includes Micro Max (ages 8-11), Mini Max (ages 10-13), Junior Max (ages 12-15), Senior Max (ages 14+), DD2 (ages 15+), and DD2 Masters (ages 31+).

Additionally, there are 2 more categories of races RD1 Elite Sprint and RD1 Elite Endurance where ages 15+ can register and participate. With potential participation from drivers representing countries across Mena nations, competition is anticipated to be fierce across all categories during the five days of racing. "Hosting the MENA Karting Championship 2023 at Lusail International Circuit's karting track marks a thrilling milestone in our pursuit of making Qatar a regional hub of motorsports. We take this opportunity to welcome the region's finest drivers to ignite their passion for speed on our world-class track. This championship embodies our commitment to fostering motorsport talent and uniting enthusiasts across the Mena region." said Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, President of Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation and Lusail International Circuit.

Additionally, Mohamed Ahmad Sultan Ben Sulayem, President of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), said: "We are delighted to see that the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation will be hosting the fourth MENA Karting Championship. Initiatives like this are essential if we want to reach our goal of doubling motor sport participation by 2025."

The Lusail International Circuit will provide a professional karting venue for the racers to compete. With its combination of high-speed straights, sweeping curves, and hairpin turns, the track is sure to challenge the racers' nerve and driving abilities. Registration for regional team participation remains open until 25 November 2023.



CRICKET

SPOTLIGHT

Suryakumar to captain India for Australia series

The five-match series begins tomorrow in Vishakapatnam

AFP
New Delhi


India's Suryakumar Yadav in action against Australia during their ICC World Cup final in Ahmedabad on November 19, 2023. *(Reuters)*

Suryakumar Yadav will captain India in their five-match T20 series against Australia, leading a squad with just three members of the team that lost the World Cup final.

India went into Sunday's World Cup final in front of nearly 100,000 fans in Ahmedabad undefeated in the lead-up games of the tournament and favourites to capture the one-day crown.

But Rohit Sharma's team was outplayed by Pat Cummins's Australia, suffering a six-wicket defeat and breaking the hearts of millions across the country.

Suryakumar, who was just one of three players from the one-day team to be selected for the T20 squad, will captain India for the first time.

India and Australia had also faced each other in a three-match series in September ahead of the World Cup, also in India, which the hosts won 2-1.

The T20 series opens tomorrow in Visakhapatnam in the south-eastern state of Andhra Pradesh, followed by Thiruvananthapuram on November 26 and Guwahati on November 28.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said that Shreyas Iyer will join the squad as vice-captain for the last two T20s, in Raipur on December 1 and in Bengaluru on December 5.

Australia's Warner withdrawn from T20 series against India

Australia opener David Warner has been withdrawn from the Twenty20 series against India after starring at the 50-over World Cup. The lefthander was Australia's leading scorer with 535 runs at an average of 48.63 during their run to a sixth World Cup title in India.

"Selectors decided Warner would return home on the back of a successful yet demanding World Cup campaign," Cricket Australia said in a statement yesterday.

Emerging Western Australian all-rounder Aaron Hardie has replaced Warner in the squad after making his ODI and T20 International debuts during the recent tour of South Africa.

Warner hopes to finish his Test career at his home Sydney Cricket Ground against Pakistan in January but has put his hand up for more international white-ball cricket, with the T20 World Cup coming up next year.

Test and ODI captain Pat Cummins and fellow fast bowlers Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc are also heading home from India along with all-rounders Cameron Green and Mitchell Marsh.

Matthew Wade will captain the squad for the five-match series which starts tomorrow at Vishakhapatnam. Fast bowler Kane Richardson has been called up as a replacement for the injured Spencer Johnson.

Just seven of Australia's World Cup-winning squad will play the T20s, while head coach Andrew McDonald will also skip the series, handing the reins to stand-in Andre Borovec.

SQUADS

India: Suryakumar Yadav (c), Ruturaj Gaikwad (vc), Ishan Kishan, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Shivam Dubey, Ravi Bishnoi, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, Mukesh Kumar, Shreyas Iyer (last two matches only)

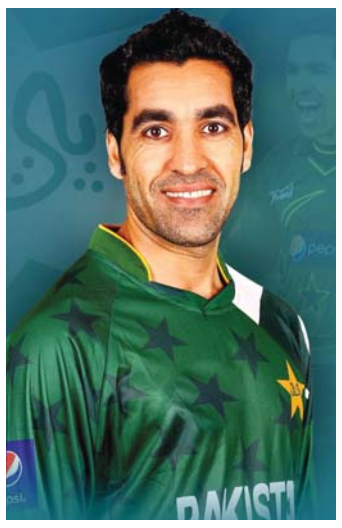
Australia: Matthew Wade (c), Aaron Hardie, Jason Behrendorff, Sean Abbott, Tim David, Nathan Ellis, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Matt Short, Steve Smith, Marcus Stoinis, Kane Richardson, Adam Zampa

Series schedule

1st T20I: Vishakhapatnam - Nov 23, Thursday
2nd T20I: Thiruvananthapuram - Nov 26, Sunday
3rd T20I: Guwahati - Nov 28, Tuesday
4th T20I: Raipur - Dec 01, Friday
5th T20I: Bengaluru - Dec 03, Sunday

FOCUS

Pakistan Cricket Board appoints Gul and Ajmal as bowling coaches


Umar Gul


Saeed Ajmal

Agencies
Islamabad

Pakistan continued the overhaul of their backroom staff after failing to qualify for the knockout stages of the World Cup by appointing former international players Umar Gul and Saeed Ajmal as bowling coaches yesterday.

The Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement Gul would take over as fast bowling coach while Ajmal would be in charge of the spinners, with the duo's first assignment the test series against Australia starting next month.

Gul – who retired in 2020 after playing 237 international matches and claiming 427 wickets – has been involved in several mentoring stints since, including one as the bowling coach of Afghanistan in 2022.

The pacer represented Pakistan in 47 Test matches, 130 ODIs and 60 T20s between 2003 and 2016.

Gul said in a PCB statement yesterday: "I am pleased to join as the bowling coach of Pakistan team and feel honoured to have been given the opportunity to contribute to Pakistan cricket by Chairman PCB Management Committee Zaka Ashraf. Having had previous working experience with the men's side, I will bring my coaching expertise with the aim of elevating Pakistan's bowling prowess to new heights."

Ajmal said yesterday: "I am truly honoured and grateful for the opportunity provided by Chairman PCB Management Committee Zaka Ashraf to serve as the spin bowling coach. I am delighted to contribute to the development of spin bowling talent within the Pakistan national team. I believe my career and coaching experience will help enhance the spin bowling arsenal of the team."

Ajmal also has vast playing experience having represented Pakistan in 212 games and taking 447 wickets.

He has also coached in the Pakistan Super League.

Overall Ajmal played 35 Test matches, 113 ODIs and 64 T20s for Pakistan and was famous for his 'doosra' - an off-spinner's delivery that turns away from righthanded batter.

South African Morne Morkel resigned as Pakistan's bowling coach days after they finished fifth in the World Cup standings with eight points having won four matches and lost five.

Former Pakistan fast bowler Wahab Riaz was named Pakistan's chief selector last week after Inzamam-ul-Haq stepped down and Mohamed Hafeez took over as Team Director in place of Mickey Arthur.

Babar Azam resigned as captain and fellow batter Shan Masood will replace him. Pace bowler Shaheen Afridi will lead the T20 side.

Pakistan will play Australia in the first Test starting at Perth from Dec. 14.

Melbourne will host the Boxing Day Test starting Dec. 26 with Sydney hosting the last test match from Jan. 3-7.

COMMENT

Sri Lanka free to compete internationally but U-19 World Cup moved to South Africa in new move

Reuters
Dubai



Sri Lanka are free to compete internationally but next year's Under-19 Cricket World Cup will now be hosted by South Africa, as the International Cricket Council (ICC) confirmed the terms of suspension of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) yesterday.

Sri Lanka's membership of the ICC was suspended with immediate effect for government interference on Nov. 10, after Sri Lanka's ministry of sport dismissed SLC's board and replaced it with an interim committee.

This followed the country's poor performance at this year's World Cup but the sacking was stayed by Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal.

"After hearing representation from SLC, the ICC Board decided that Sri Lanka can continue to compete internationally both in bilateral cricket and ICC events after being suspended recently for breaching its obligations as a Member in particular the requirement to manage its affairs autonomously and without government interference," the ICC said.

"However, funding to SLC will be controlled by the ICC and the ICC Board confirmed Sri Lanka will no longer host the ICC U-19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2024, which will now be held in South Africa."

The ICC also approved new gender eligibility regulations whereby any male or female participant who have been through any form of male puberty will not be allowed participate in the international women's game.

The Chief Executives' Committed (CEC) agreed to introduce a stop clock on a trial basis in men's ODI and T20I cricket from December 2023 to April 2024, which will be used to regulate the amount of time taken between overs.

If the bowling team is not ready to bowl the next over within 60 seconds of the previous over being completed, a five-run penalty will be imposed the third time it happens in an innings.

Record 1.25mn fans attended World Cup

Bengaluru: A record 1.25 million fans attended matches during the 13th edition of the World Cup, which concluded on Sunday with Australia beating hosts India for their sixth title, global body the International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday.
A total of 1,250,307 fans watched the Oct. 5-Nov. 19 showpiece event from the stands, surpassing the previous mark of 1.016 million set at the 2015 edition in Australia and New Zealand.
While the early matches not involving runners-up India had plenty of empty seats in venues, overall spectator figures had already surpassed the one million mark with six games to go.
ICC Head of Events Chris Tetley said the one-day international (ODI) tournament had been a "great success."
"The staggering attendance demonstrates the enduring appeal of cricket and excitement the ODI format continues to offer," Tetley said in a statement yesterday.
He added that the tournament also broke multiple broadcast and digital viewership records.
"It has been an event that has not only entertained but also united cricket fans globally in a celebration of the sport."

HERE ARE THE SIX TOPS AND FLOPS AT THE 2023 WORLD CUP


Afghanistan's Rashid Khan celebrates taking a wicket during one of his team's matches at the ICC World Cup held in India. Afghanistan finished sixth among 10 teams. *(@ACBofficials)*

Ahmedabad, India: Australia beat India by six wickets to lift their sixth title in the Cricket World Cup in Ahmedabad on Sunday.
AFP Sport takes a look at the tops and flops at the 13th edition of the tournament.

- TOPS -

Afghanistan: The Afghans enjoyed stellar performances starting with their stunning win over defending champions England.
In the first major upset of the tournament, Afghanistan posted 284 and then bowled out England for 215 with spin wizard Rashid Khan taking three wickets.
The performance was no flash in the pan as they kept up their giant-killing act and hammered neighbours Pakistan by eight wickets to trigger wild celebrations.
They finished with four victories including against Sri Lanka and the Netherlands, prompting coach Jonathan Trott to predict a "bright future" for the team.

Glenn Maxwell: Maxwell smashed the tournament's fastest century in 40 balls in a match-winning 106 against the Netherlands in New Delhi.
But Maxwell had only just got started as he then defied cramp and back spasms in a knock for the ages when he lifted Australia from 91-7 to victory with an unbeaten 201 against Afghanistan in Mumbai.
Known as "The Big Show" for his swashbuckling batting, Maxwell destroyed the Afghan bowling attack with 21 fours and 10 sixes in his 128-ball blitz.
He was the dominant partner in a 202-run stand with skipper Pat Cummins, who called Maxwell's knock a "freak show" and the "greatest ODI innings".

Virat Kohli-- Virat Kohli lived up to his billing as one of the modern-day greats, recording a 50th ODI century to go past compatriot Sachin Tendulkar's 49 tons.
He achieved the feat in India's semi-final against New Zealand at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, the home ground of Tendulkar.
Kohli, 35, amassed 765 runs including three hundreds in 11 matches to end up as the leading batsman in the tournament.
Teammate and fast bowler Mohamed Shami also played his role in getting the team to the final. He sat out the first four games but made a huge impact on his return with 24 wickets including a 7-57 in the semi-final.

— FLOPS —

Pakistan: Babar Azam's team came in with huge expectations and started with two victories before their campaign hit a wall in the shadow of right security which director of cricket Mickey Arthur branded as "stifling".
A loss to India and then Australia hit them hard, but it was their defeat to Afghanistan that hurt as pace ace Shaheen Shah Afridi looked out of sorts with 58 runs from his 10 overs and one wicket.
They slipped to their fourth loss in a heartbreaking one-wicket defeat to South Africa, a defeat Azam believed dented their semi-final hopes.
Fakhar Zaman's match-winning 126 not out against New Zealand was a rare highlight before the 1992 champions crashed out and Azam resigned as captain from all formats.

Buttler and England: Jos Buttler came into the tournament as captain of one of the fancied teams out to defend their title but their campaign fizzled out early after just one win in the first seven matches.
Buttler failed to provide any inspiration as he flopped with the bat, managing just 138 runs from nine matches. It was a rare failure for Buttler, who scored 269 in six matches when he led the team to their maiden T20 World Cup victory in 2021.

Spirit of cricket: Sri Lanka batsman Angelo Mathews became the first batsman in 146 years of international cricket to be given "timed out" in an ill-tempered match against Bangladesh.
Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan appealed after Mathews failed to take strike within the two-minute time limit when he came out to bat in New Delhi and was adjudged out.
Mathews branded Shakib "disgraceful" and the episode left the cricket world divided and the "spirit of cricket" debate reignited.
Ex-india batsman Gautam Gambhir called the act "absolutely pathetic".
India coach Rahul Dravid said "we won't do it" but "you can go and debate both the situations".

TENNIS

Raonic quick off the blocks but Finland hit back

BIG-SERVING CANADIAN WINS THE OPENER IN STRAIGHT SETS

Agencies
Malaga, Spain


Canada's Milos Raonic in action during his Davis Cup quarter-final match against Finland's Patrick Kaukovalta at Palacio de deportes Martin Carpena, Malaga, Spain, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Canada's Milos Raonic returned to Davis Cup action for the first time in five years to give the reigning champions a fast start in their Final Eight clash against Finland yesterday.

The big-serving Raonic banged down 18 aces in a 6-3 7-5 defeat of lowly-ranked Finn Patrick Kaukovalta to put Canada 1-0 ahead in the best of three tie.

But in the day's second match, Canada's Gabriel Diallo lost to Otto Virtanen in straight sets. Virtanen won 6-4, 7-5.

Raonic began the match with a game of aces and ended it with another one after little more than an hour.

Both teams were hit by injuries with Canada's top-ranked player Felix Auger-Aliassime unable to take to court while Finland's number one Emil Ruusuvuori was also ruled out.

Former world number three and Wimbledon runner-up Raonic has played only a handful of matches this year but had too much firepower for 782nd-ranked Kaukovalta who put up a good fight in his first ever Davis Cup singles rubber.

Canada are looking to retain the title they won against Australia last year in Malaga and also make it a sweep for the country after the women won the Billie Jean King Cup.

Djokovic arrives in Malaga

Fresh from a record seventh ATP Finals title, Novak Djokovic arrived In Malaga on Monday ahead of Serbia's quarter-final tie against Great Britain tomorrow.

Entering a record-extending 400th week as world No.1, Djokovic joins his teammates, including Laslo Djere and Dusan Lajovic, to prepare for what is shaping up to be a thrilling showdown between the Serbians and Leon Smith's Great Britain, led by world No.18 Cameron Norrie.

The tie is scheduled for the afternoon tomorrow (not before 16:00 CET) and is the last of the four quarter-finals in the 2023 Davis Cup Final 8.

Meanwhile 2023 Davis Cup Finals Tournament Director Feliciano Lopez brought tennis to the streets of Malaga with a festival for all ages and abilities ahead of the competition's first clash yesterday.

Supported by Malaga Mayor Francisco de la Torre, Lopez added to the buzz around the city of Malaga thanks to the start of the Final 8 at the Martin Carpena arena yesterday.

Those in attendance at the mini tennis festival took part in activities designed for the very youngest to the very oldest. Activities included roulette wheels to win exclusive prizes and aiming games as well as mini tennis courts.

The ITF remains committed to promoting tennis and bringing the sport closer to everyone. Events like the one held in Malaga show that tennis can be enjoyed by everyone, contributing to more active and healthy communities. The 2023 Davis Cup Finals got underway yesterday with a clash between defending champions Canada against Finland.

City of Stockholm on board for 2030 Winter Olympics bid

Stockholm: The city of Stockholm said yesterday it supported Sweden's bid to host the 2030 Winter Olympics, with the capital region tipped to host some of the main events.

"The city council is favourable to the initiative to organise the Olympic Games and Paralympics in 2030," the city said in a statement.

The Swedish government announced earlier this month that it backed the Swedish Olympic Committee's bid and said it was ready to begin the process of looking into state guarantees.

Under the bid proposal, events would be held in Stockholm as well as several other smaller Swedish towns including Falun, Are and Ostersund.

"By giving our municipal guarantee, our message is that this event can be carried out in a manner that is sustainable for the climate, economy and social aspects," mayor Karin Wanngard said in the statement.

Sweden's Olympic Committee (SOK) hailed the support.

"The sporting community stands united behind the bid. As we plan to use existing arenas and organiser experience, the conditions are better than ever before," the interim head of the Swedish Sports Confederation, Anna Iwarsson, said in a SOK statement yesterday.

Stockholm hosted the Summer Games in 1912, but has never hosted a Winter Olympics despite numerous attempts over the years.


An ice hockey team in Sweden reacts following a league game in this file photo. *(@swehockeyse)*

France and Switzerland have both announced bids for the 2030 Games.

The International Olympic Committee is expected to make its decision in 2024.

"All national Olympic committees with a current interest in hosting the Olympic Winter Games have been offered the opportunity for their project leaders to give a virtual update," the IOC said yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Tiger and McIlroy's tech-golf series delays start to 2025

AFP
Miami

Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy's tech-golf series TGL will postpone a debut season from next year to 2025 after damage to a specially built arena proved too much to overcome.

TGL announced the delay in a statement yesterday, saying damage at the South Florida venue following a power failure last Tuesday forced the postponement of an inaugural campaign that was set to launch in January.

"Although the events of last week will force us to make adjustments to our timelines, I'm fully confident that this concept will be brought to life by our great committed players," said 15-time major winner Woods, part-owner of TGL's Jupiter Links team.

Failures of a temporary power system and backup system caused the arena dome to deflate, causing damage to the dome but no injuries and no damage to most of the technology.

"The postponement brings mixed feelings of disappointment and excitement," McIlroy said. "Above all, we are happy that no one was injured.

"We're looking forward to the launch of TGL. Given the circumstances, while the delay is disappointing, the postponement will allow us to regroup, refocus and return stronger."

TGL was set to offer Monday night events between six teams of four players each, avoiding conflicts with PGA Tour events with players competing on simulators and custom-built green areas in the Florida arena.

The choice to postpone came after TGL consulted with players, six team ownership groups, sponsors, telecasters and PGA Tour officials.

"This decision came after reviewing short-term solutions, potential construction timelines, player schedules and the prime-time sports television calendar," the statement said.

"Despite this new timeline for the venue, TGL remains excited about the future of TGL. TGL has begun to update plans and timelines and is confident that the extension will only improve delivery."

Other teams that will now open in 2025 include Atlanta, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York with players including McIlroy, Woods, Justin Thomas, Rickie Fowler, Collin Morikawa, Matt Fitzpatrick, Adam Scott and Justin Rose.

GOLF

Australia's Smith eyeing Paris Olympics amid rankings doubt

Reuters
Melbourne

Australian number one **Cameron Smith** hopes to earn enough ranking points on his home tour and in next year's majors to qualify for another Olympics at Paris next year.

The former world number two has slipped to 18th since joining the breakaway LIV Golf circuit where players are unable to earn ranking points.

Only the top 60 are eligible to qualify for Paris, while Smith also faces competition for spots on Australia's team from compatriots including major winners Jason Day and Adam Scott.

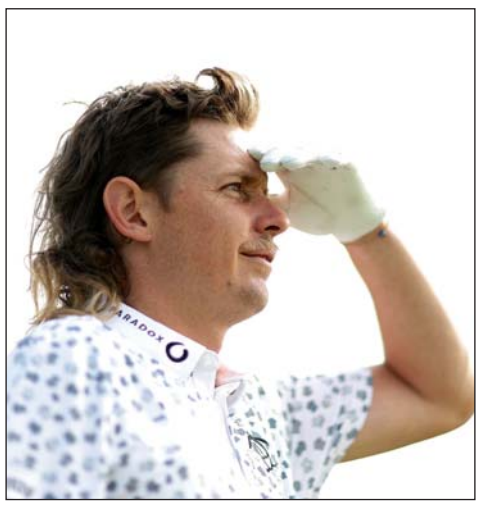
That has put the onus on Smith to mount a strong defence of his Australian PGA Championship title this week at the Royal Queenscland Golf Club to shore up his ranking.

"Yeah I definitely want to be there, 100%," the former British Open winner told reporters of the Olympics yesterday.

"I know the criteria, don't know if that can change."

Smith, who finished in a tie for 10th at the Tokyo Olympics, will also be able to earn points at the Australian Open in Sydney next week.

"I've got these couple of events and four more looks again in the majors, so hopefully I can keep that ranking up," added Smith. "To wear the coat of arms on the chest again would be pretty special." LIV's bid to have its players earn ranking points was unanimously rejected last month by the Official World Golf Ranking (OWGR) due to concerns about the Saudi Arabia-backed circuit's format.



While the four majors have allowed LIV players to compete, those who earned exemptions into them due to past results could one day be left out as they are not earning ranking points.

NBA

Hornets work overtime to snap Celtics' streak as Heat beat Bulls with ease

Reuters
New York

Miles Bridges, recently reinstated from an NBA suspension, drilled a tiebreaking 3-pointer with 6.1 seconds left in overtime as the Charlotte Hornets pulled out a 121-118 victory against the visiting Boston Celtics on Monday.

Charlotte delivered a startling fourth-quarter comeback, scoring the last nine points in regulation over the final two minutes, en route to snapping a four-game losing streak. LaMelo Ball contributed 36 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Hornets. Ex-Celtic Gordon Hayward had 20 points.

Bridges finished with 14 points and 15 rebounds.

Jayson Tatum scored 31 of his 45 points in the first half for the Celtics, whose six-game winning streak ended. He also had team-high totals in rebounds (13) and assists (six). Boston's Payton Pritchard added 21 points.

Nuggets 107, Pistons 103

Reggie Jackson had 21 points and six assists as visiting Denver overcame the ejection of Nikola Jokic to beat Detroit, handing the Pistons their 12th straight loss.

Nuggets coach Michael Malone was ejected with 1:21 remaining in the first quarter for arguing with the officials. Jokic was tossed with 1:22 left in the first half after picking up his second technical.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope supplied 20 points for the Nuggets, who snapped a four-game road losing streak. Cade Cunningham led the Pistons with 27 points and nine assists, while Marvin Bagley III had 18 points and eight rebounds.

Bucks 142, Wizards 129

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 42 points, leading Milwaukee to its best offensive performance of the season in a win over host Washington.

Antetokounmpo also grabbed 13 boards and dished eight assists. Damian Lillard chipped in 22 points and seven assists while Khris Middleton added 18 for the Bucks, who won their fifth game in a row.

Jordan Poole turned in his best performance as a Wizard, scoring 30 points. Kyle Kuzma added 22 while dishing a game-high 13 assists for Washington, which has lost six consecutive games.


Charlotte Hornets guard Ish Smith and Boston Celtics guard Payton Pritchard wrestle for a loose ball during the second half of their NBA game at the Spectrum Centre. *(USA TODAY Sports)*

Heat 118, Bulls 100

Bam Adebayo had 23 points and 11 rebounds and Duncan Robinson added 22 points to lift visiting Miami to a victory against Chicago.

Robinson shot 6-for-9 from long range as Miami drilled 17 3-pointers en route to its eighth win in nine games. Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 19 points and Jimmy Butler had 16 for the Heat, who led by as many as 24 points. Coby White paced the Bulls with a season-high 20 points, while Nikola Vucevic put up 18 as Chicago lost for the fourth time in five games.

Pelicans 129, Kings 93

Brandon Ingram scored 31 points, Zion Williamson added 26 and host New Orleans ended Sacramento's six-game winning streak.

Williamson scored 18 points in the second quarter to help the Pelicans take a 13-point halftime lead, and Ingram scored 18 third-quarter points as the lead expanded to 31 at the end of the period.

Harrison Barnes scored 16 points, De'Aaron Fox had 14 and Domantas Sabonis added 10 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for the Kings, who trailed by as many as 41 in the fourth quarter.

Timberwolves 117, Knicks 100

Anthony Edwards scored 23 points and grabbed 10 rebounds, helping Minnesota pull away from New York in Minneapolis.

Karl-Anthony Towns added 20 points for Minnesota, which won for the ninth time in its past 10 games. Rudy Gobert had 16 points and made all seven of his field-goal attempts as the Timberwolves won for the ninth time in 10 games.

Jalen Brunson led New York with 25 points to go along with a team-high six assists. Julius Randle tallied 21 points and 14 rebounds, Immanuel Quickley scored 15 off the bench and Mitchell Robinson amassed 10 points and 11 boards for the Knicks, who had won six of their previous seven games.

Clippers 124, Spurs 99

Paul George poured in 28 points and Kawhi Leonard added 21 as visiting Los Angeles turned it on in the fourth quarter to roll past San Antonio.

Norman Powell and Daniel Theis hit for 19 points apiece off the bench for the Clippers, with Harden scoring 13 and dishing out 10 assists and Russell Westbrook hitting for 10 points.

Keldon Johnson led the Spurs with 22 points while Cedi Osman had 17. Rookie phenom Victor Wembanyama had nine points on 4-of-12 shooting for San Antonio.

FOOTBALL

Italy promise to 'repeat something fantastic' at Euro

'We were under pressure, but overall it was a good performance'



Italy players celebrate qualifying for Euro 2024 after Group C match against Ukraine in Leverkusen. *(Reuters)*

AFP
Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

A relieved Italy midfielder Davide Frattesi said the European champions will try and "repeat something fantastic" in Germany next year after Monday's 0-0 draw with Ukraine in Leverkusen secured qualification for Euro 2024.

The result means Italy, who failed to qualify for both the 2018 and 2022 World Cups either side of their Euro 2020 triumph, avoid another embarrassing tournament miss. "We knew if we were unable to break the deadlock in the first hour, it would become really tough. Ukraine then made it a more physical match," Frattesi told RAI Sport.

"We were under pressure, but overall it was a good performance. What mattered was that we qualified...

"We suffered, but it was important to get through. Now we'll try to repeat something fantastic."

The final score belied the true nature of the match, with Italy's high-octane attack and Ukraine's counter-attacking threat creating several chances for both teams.

Ukraine had a late penalty appeal turned down, despite Italy midfielder Bryan Cristante looking to have made contact with Mykhailo Mudryk's foot in injury time. "From my point of view that was a penalty, but again I was not there and it's only about my emotions," Ukraine coach Serhiy Rebrov told a post-match press conference.

Italy travelled to Leverkusen knowing they would progress by avoiding defeat, while Ukraine knew only a win would suffice.

New Italy coach Luciano Spalletti has only been in charge for three months after Roberto Mancini surprisingly left for the Saudi Arabia national team job. "We had to keep attacking - but Ukraine proved they are a very good team who gave us a lot of problems," Spalletti, who led Napoli to their first Serie A title since 1990 last season, said. Italy will go into either pot three or four for the tournament draw, which will take place on December 2 in Hamburg. Spalletti added his team would "have a moment to pat ourselves on the back" before turning their focus to the finals in Germany, the site of their 2006 World Cup triumph.

"Now, the level will step up. Now, the fun begins."

Midfielder Nicolo Zaniolo said his side's nervy qualification campaign, which included two losses to England and a draw with North Macedonia, would not dampen their hopes of defending the title.

"We had the right motivation. Italy must go to the Euros not just to take part, but to compete as reigning champions."

Ukraine head into play-offs

Ukraine, forced to take the fixture to Germany due to the ongoing conflict with Russia, can still qualify, but will need to navigate the play-offs in March 2024.

Mudryk was lively down the left for Ukraine and crafted a number of half-chances early, with his side denied by poor finishing.

Italy's dominance of possession started to tell after half an hour, Federico Chiesa sliding a smooth pass across the face of goal which eluded a desperate Davide Frattesi.

Italy continued to attack early in the second half but as the game wore on the increasingly nervous Italians sat back, allowing Ukraine more space up front.

Mudryk was always a threat and appeared to have been brought down in the box after contact from Cristante, but the referee waved his team's desperate pleas for a spot-kick away.

FOCUS

Son scores twice as South Korea outclass China 3-0

AFP
Hong Kong

Skipper Son Heung-min scored a brace and set up the other as South Korea made it two victories from two in 2026 World Cup qualifying with a 3-0 win in China yesterday.

Son silenced a sell-out crowd of more than 40,000 in Shenzhen with two goals in the first half, the first a penalty and the second a clever header from a corner just before half-time.

South Korea wrapped the game up in the dying minutes through a bullet header by Jung Seung-hyun - from a Son free-kick - and they top Group C with a perfect six points.

Jurgen Klinsmann's side thumped Singapore 5-0 last week to begin their qualifying campaign in style and they were in much the same mood against an outclassed China.

With attacker Son looking in the groove, the Koreans dominated and were ahead after 11 minutes.

Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang Hee-chan was brought down in the box and Tottenham Hotspur's Son duly stroked home the penalty.

It was all South Korea. Forward Cho Gue-sung headed just over the bar when unmarked from a corner and Son stung the palms of overworked goalkeeper Yan Junling.

Hwang In-beom's direct free-kick fizzed just past Yan's post midway through the half but China should have been level three minutes before the break with their first real chance.

South Korean full-back Lee Ki-je was dispossessed and Liu Binbin crossed for Tan Long, but the Chinese forward's first-time snap shot went narrowly wide.

They were to regret it on the stroke of half-time.

Son, who had been denied moments earlier by the legs of Yan, leapt unmarked from a corner to direct his deft header back across the China goal and into the far corner.

South Korea, who reached the last 16 of the 2022 World Cup, should have gone 3-0 ahead soon after the restart but China defender Zhu Chenjie cleared off the line, before Jung put the game to bed late on.

Thailand are level on three points with China after winning 3-1 away at Singapore.

The top two from each of the nine groups in Asian qualifying for the World Cup in North America will progress through to the final qualifying stage.

In other qualifiers in the region, substitute Mohanad Ali scored in the 97th minute for Iraq as they won 1-0 at Vietnam and top Group F with six points.

Iran surrendered a two-goal lead and had to settle for a point with a 2-2 draw at Uzbekistan.

North Korea thrashed Myanmar 6-1 away and Tajikistan won in Pakistan by the same scoreline.



South Korea's Son Heung-min (left) celebrates with teammate Hwang Hee-chan after scoring their first goal yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Advani wins IBSF World Billiards Championship for record 26th time

DOHA: India cueist **Pankaj Advani** won the IBSF World Billiards Championship title at the La Maison Hotel in Doha yesterday for a staggering 26th time, beating fellow Indian cueist Sourav Kothari in the final.
Advani defeated Kothari 1000-416 in a rematch of last year's title clash in Kuala Lumpur. He had won his first world title in this competition way back in 2005.
While Advani has won the 'long format' for the ninth time, he triumphed in the 'point format' championship on eight occasions, besides winning the World Team Billiards Championship once. In this tournament, Advani defeated fellow Indian cueist Rupesh Shah 900-273 in the semi-finals. It saw breaks of 259 and 176 from the defending champion, while Shah managed a 62 break only in the 900-up format. In the other half of the draw, Kothari pulled off a close win against Dhruv Sitwala, prevailing 900-756 in his semi-final match. Kothari had breaks of 223 and 82, while Sitwala scored 199 and 188.
Meanwhile, the Women's World Snooker Championship was claimed by China's Bai Yulu. She beat Ng On-Yee of Hong Kong 4-0 in the final match. The third place medals went to the India's Amy Kamani and Vidya Pillai.
In the World Masters Snooker Championship, Bahraini Habib Sabah was crowned the champion. He defeated Emirati Mohamed Shehab 5-4, while Indians Komal Chawla and Manan Chandra won third place medals.



ISSF WORLD CUP

Walter and Xue claim 10m air pistol titles

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Germany's Robin Walter and China's Li Xue won 10m air pistol titles on the opening day of the International Sport Shooting Federation (ISSF) World Cup final at the Lusail Shooting Range yesterday.

Walter, who added European Championship silver this year to the gold he won in 2022, secured his place atop another podium after a qualifying competition from which all three of this year's World Championship medallists failed to emerge.

Silver went to Italy's 25-year-old world No 3, the highest-ranked shooter in the final, with Latvia's Emils Vasermanis earning bronze.

Later in the day, Xue earned a dramatic victory to lead a Chinese clean sweep in the women's 10m air pistol event. Li, 23, trailed her 19-year-old compatriot Zhao Nan by 0.2 points before the pair fired their two concluding shots – and she moved ahead by 0.4 points after her opening 10.3 had been swiftly followed by a relatively disappointing 9.7 from her younger rival.

Li, who won world bronze in Baku earlier this year shooting marginally earlier than her opponent and scoring 10.8, just 0.1 short of perfection. Zhao improved with a final 10.1, but gold was comfortably for Li with a total of 244.7 as the teenager finished with 243.6.

In the penultimate round of shooting China's world champion and world No 2 Jiang Ranxin had to settle for bronze, 0.2 points adrift of the leading pair.

Earlier on Monday, the event began with a grand opening ceremony held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Speaking on the occasion, ISSF President Luciano Rossi hinted that Qatar may also host the event next year.

"I am confident, inshallah, that Qatar will even host the 2024 World Cup final again in the year of the Olympics, where we can celebrate all together the Olympic medallists."

He added the next year Qatar was set to host "the most important competition before Paris 2024 – the shotgun qualification tournament where the last quota places will be claimed."

A total of 179 athletes from 42 nations are in the Qatari capital to contest the 12 individual events that will be part of next year's Olympic programme, with the additional excitement of Super Finals for selected disciplines.

Among the audience was three-times Olympic champion and six-times Olympian Kimberly Rhode.

Also in attendance were Croatia's London 2012 trap gold medallist and current world and European Games champion Giovanni Cernogoraz, and Italy's London 2012 women's trap gold medallist and three-times world champion Jessica Rossi.

"It is a great honour for me to be with you today for the opening of the ISSF World Cup Final 2023 – a hugely welcome addition to our calendar that we strongly re-establish after a four-years absence," the ISSF president said.

The ISSF president thanked Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani for his support of this event.

"And a special thanks to the President of the Qatar Shooting and Archery Federation Mishaal Al Nasr. He has worked hard and his federation," he added.



First-placed Germany's Robin Walter (centre), second-placed Italy's Paolo Monna (left) and third-placed Latvia's Emils Vasermanis celebrate on the podium of the ISSF World Cup final 10m air pistol event at the Lusail Shooting Range in Doha yesterday.



First-placed China's Li Xue (centre), second-placed Zhao Nan (left) and third-placed Jiang Ranxin celebrate on the 10m air pistol podium.