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Tanzid, Rishad power Bangladesh to series win against Sri Lanka



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Mbappe hat-trick propels PSG to 6-2 win at Montpellier

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**FOOTBALL**

# Lopez names Qatar squad for Kuwait double header

Al Shamal defender Mahdi al-Muajba and Al Ahli defender Mohamed Ayyash are the new faces

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Head coach Marquez Lopez announced the 25-man Qatar squad that will face Kuwait twice this month in the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 joint qualifiers.

It's Lopez's first squad after being confirmed as coach until 2026. The Spaniard had led Qatar to second successive Asian Cup title at home last month.

Al Shamal defender Mahdi al-Muajba and Al Ahli defender Mohamed Ayyash are the new faces in the squad, while Khoukhi Boualem has been left out.

The squad will also miss the services of Hassan al-Haydos, who retired on Saturday after appearing in a record 183 matches for Qatar.

The first match against Kuwait is on March 21 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, with Qatar travelling to Kuwait for reverse fixture, which is scheduled to be held on March 26.

Qatar have taken an early grip on Group A with wins over India (3-0) and Afghanistan (8-1). Kuwait and India are tied on three points while Afghanistan lost both their matches and need to get on the winning trail if they are to remain in the race.

Having successfully defended their AFC Asian Cup title, Qatar will be confident of navigating through their remaining matches.

The nine group winners and the respective runners-up will advance to the third



Marquez Lopez was confirmed as Qatar coach until 2026 after he led Al Annabi to second successive Asian Cup title last month.

round of FIFA World Cup qualifiers, and at the same time seal their places at the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. The other 18 teams from Round 2 will proceed directly to the third and final round of AFC Asian Cup qualifying.

**SQUAD**  
**Goalkeeper:** Meshaal Barsham (Al Sadd), Salah Zakaria (Al Duhail), Saud al-Khater (Al Wakrah)  
**Defenders:** Al Mahdi Ali and Lucas Mendez (Al Wakrah), Tariq Salman (Al Sadd),

Hommam al-Amin (Al Gharafa), Bassam al-Rawi (Al Rayyan), Sultan al-Breik (Al Duhail), Mohamed Ayyash (Al Ahli).  
**Midfielders:** Ahmed Fathi, Jassim Jaber, Abdullah al-Maaraifi (Al Arabi), Abdulaziz Hatem (Al Rayyan), Mohamed Waad and

Mustafa Meshaal (Al Sadd), Mahdi al-Muajba (Al Shamal), Abdullah Abdulsalam al-Ahraq (Qatar SC).  
**Forwards:** Ahmed al-Janhi and Ahmed Alaa (Al Gharafa), Akram Afif and Youssef Abdul Razzaq (Al Sadd), Almoez Ali (Al Duhail), Ahmed al-Rawi (Al Rayyan) Ismail Mohamed (Al Duhail).

**U-23 SQUAD FOR FRIENDLIES**  
Qatar under-23 head coach Ildio Vale yesterday also named 28-player squad for four upcoming friendly games ahead of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024, which is starting next month.

The squad will meet Uzbekistan twice on March 23 and 26 before taking on their China counterparts on March 31. They will also play against Malaysia on April 7, wrapping up their preparations for the U-23 Asian Cup to be played in Qatar from April 15 to May 3.

Hosts Qatar are in Group A of the 16-team continental event along with Australia, Jordan and Indonesia.

**U-23 SQUAD**  
Ali Nader, Amir Hassan, Youssef Abdullah (goalkeepers), Abdullah al-Ali, Abdullah al-Yazidi, Abdulaziz Mohamed, Abdulla Youssef, Ahmed al-Saeed, Ahmed Riyadh, Ayaub al-Ouwai, Eissa Al Nagar, Faisal Mohamed, Fares Saeed, Hassan al-Ghareeb, Hashemi al-Hussain, Jassem al-Sharshani, Khaled Ali, Latif Majer, Mostafa al-Sayed, Mohamed Jouda, Mohamed Khaled, Mohamed Mannai, Mubarak Shannan, Naif al-Hadrami, Nabil Erfan, Saif Al Din Hassan, Tameem Mansour, Youssef Ali.

**ATHLETICS**

# Barshim and Kerr to face off in Suzhou Diamond League

Two of the world's finest high jumpers are set to do battle at the second Diamond League meeting of the season in Suzhou next month. Three-time Diamond League champion Mutaz Barshim of Qatar will face off against newly crowned World Indoor Champion Hamish Kerr, in what promises to be a battle of the highest quality.

New Zealander Kerr is the world leader for 2024 having cleared 2.36m to take his maiden global title in Glasgow and will have high hopes of backing it up against perhaps the greatest of his generation in Barshim.

Reigning Olympic champion Barshim, meanwhile, has prioritised training in the build-up to his Olympic defence later this year, not competing since winning his third Asian Games title in October 2023 and skipping the championships where Kerr beat a high-class field.

For Barshim it will be one of the key indicators of his form as he aims to become the first to ever win two men's Olympic high jump titles. No man in history has won more world outdoor titles than the three Barshim won in succession between 2017 and 2022, as well as a bronze in the most recent championships in Budapest.

"I'm happy to be back in China to start my new season. Last year I finished my season in China at the Asian games and it was fantastic atmosphere and support. I have never been in Suzhou but looking forward to visit and compete there, and looking forward for a great competition," said the Qatari.

While Barshim has three Diamond League titles and 23 individual wins in athletics' premier one-day series, Kerr only picked



Mutaz Barshim has prioritised training in the build-up to his Olympic defence later this year, not competing since winning his third Asian Games title last October.

up his first Diamond League win last season in Stockholm.

Yet the Oceania record holder is quickly amassing an impressive title collection of his own. In 2022 the 27-year-old backed up World indoor bronze with Commonwealth Games gold that summer and World Indoor gold in March.

"I'm looking forward to making my first ever trip to China a successful one. After jumping 2.36 at World Indoors, I know I am in great shape leading into the meeting. I can't wait to compete against some of the other best jumpers in the world, in front of what will be an amazing crowd," said Kerr.

**PREMIER LEAGUE**

# Nottingham Forest docked four points for breaching rules

**AFP**  
London

Nottingham Forest were docked four points for breaching Premier League financial rules yesterday, dumping them in the relegation zone. The Premier League said in a statement that Forest had admitted breaching the profitability and sustainability rules (PSR) threshold of £61mn (\$77.5mn) by £34.5mn.

However, Forest said they were "extremely disappointed" by the ruling and "dismayed by the tone" of the Premier League's argument. "We believe that the high levels of cooperation the club has shown during this process, and which are confirmed and recorded in the commission's decision, were not reciprocated by the Premier League," Forest said in a statement.

The two-time European champions are the second top-flight team to be penalised for PSR breaches this season after Everton were hit with a 10-point penalty in November, which was reduced to six on appeal. Everton are still waiting to discover if they will be hit with another points penalty relating to a second charge.

Forest's punishment means they drop into the bottom three, one point behind Luton and four adrift of Everton. Premier League clubs are usually allowed maximum losses of £105mn over a three-year assessment period but this is reduced by £22mn per season for any seasons within the period spent in the Championship.

Forest were promoted to the Premier League in

May 2022, meaning two seasons of their three-year assessment period were as a Championship club. They had been absent from the English top-flight for the previous 23 years.

But the decision to sign a remarkable 29 players last season, with a reported spend of more than £150mn, has backfired. Forest's defence centred around the fact they sold Brennan Johnson to Tottenham for a reported £47.5mn just over two months after the end of the accounting period in June 2023.

The club argued they achieved a higher fee for the Welsh international by not selling before June 30. However, an independent commission found that Forest had to be punished to "maintain the integrity" of the league.

The commission said that Forest had ignored a warning from its finance director ahead of the 2023 January transfer window about breaching PSR and pressed ahead with adding more players to their squad rather than stripping back.

"When a club invests as Forest did to compete in the Premier League, it still needs to comply with the PSR threshold for losses," the commission noted in its written reasons for the decision. "Such risk-taking and 'sailing close to the wind' needs a proportionate sanction to maintain the integrity of the Premier League."

Forest could still appeal the punishment and the Premier League is at risk of an embarrassing situation whereby relegation is decided in the courts after the end of the season. The English top-flight has previously said the process should "conclude no later than and if possible some time before 24 May", which is five days after the final weekend of the season.



Nottingham Forest had admitted breaching the profitability and sustainability rules. (AFP)



CRICKET

# Tanzid, Rishad guide Bangladesh to ODI series win

RISHAD HIT 4 SIXES AND 5 FOURS IN HIS WHIRLWIND INNINGS

AFP  
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Rishad Hossain played an attacking innings of 48 after substitute Tanzid Hasan Tamim hit 84 off 81 balls yesterday, steering Bangladesh to a four-wicket win and a 2-1 ODI series victory over Sri Lanka.

Set a modest target after Janith Liyanage's unbeaten 101 guided Sri Lanka to 235 all out in 50 overs, Bangladesh raced to 237-6 in 40.2 overs.

Rishad remained unbeaten on 48 off just 18 balls.

The hosts were in danger when Wanindu Hasaranga forced Mehdi Hasan Miraz, the last recognised batsman, to give a catch to Pramod Madushan for 25, with Bangladesh still 58 runs away from victory.

But Rishad dispatched the first ball he faced over midwicket for six and did not look back.

He hit four sixes and five fours in his whirlwind innings before Mushfiqur Rahim, 37 not out, finished the game with a boundary off Maheesh Theekshana.

Tanzid led the initial charge, replacing Soumya Sarkar in the second innings as a concussion sub, despite Lahiru Kumara wreaking havoc with 4-48.

"Tanzid batted really well at the start. The way Mushi (Mushfiqur) batted, I think it helped Rishad's innings," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said.

"On a wicket like this, the bowlers showed a lot of character."

Liyanage earlier staged a lone battle en route to his maiden century after Bangladesh made regular strikes, with Taskin Ahmed leading the way for the home side with 3-42.

Skipper Kusal Mendis (29) and Charith Asalanka (37) made a good



Bangladesh's Rishad Hossain plays a shot during the third and last one-day international (ODI) against Sri Lanka at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

start but lost their wickets before they could build bigger innings.

"I think we were 40-50 runs short but we bowled well in few overs," Mendis said.

"Janith (Liyanage) batted really well, a couple of wickets fell in the middle overs, and he then batted very well."

Sri Lanka won the toss and elected to bat first, only to lose both openers inside four overs.

Taskin struck early, trapping in-form opener Pathum Nissanka leg-before for one, then dismissing the other opener Avishka Fernando for four in his next over.

Mustafizur Rahman, playing his first match in the series, removed

Sadeera Samarawickrama off his first ball for 14 to leave Sri Lanka reeling at 41-3.

Leg-spinner Rishad made Mendis his first ODI wicket, also off his first ball of the game.

Mustafizur ended Asalanka's counter-attacking innings before Mehidy claimed two back-to-back wickets to expose the tail.

But Liyanage held one end firm to ensure Sri Lanka batted out 50 overs, hitting Taskin over the cover for a four in the final over to reach his century off 101 balls.

Mustafizur and Mehidy claimed 2-39 and 2-38, respectively.

Bangladesh won the opener by six wickets, with Sri Lanka taking

the second by three wickets on Friday.

The two teams will now play a two-match Test series, beginning on Friday in Sylhet.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Sri Lanka 235 all out in 50 overs** (J. Liyanage 101 not out, C. Asalanka 37; Taskin Ahmed 3-42, Mustafizur Rahman 2-39) **vs Bangladesh 237-6 in 40.2 overs** (Tanzid Hasan Tamim 84, Rishad Hossain 48 not out; L. Kumara 4-48, Wanindu Hasaranga 2-64)  
**Toss:** Sri Lanka  
**Result:** Bangladesh win by four wickets  
**Series:** Bangladesh win series 2-1

T20I

## Afghanistan dominate Ireland to bag series



Afghanistan's players celebrate winning the third Twenty20 International against Ireland at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium in Sharjah yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Afghanistan proved too strong with bat and ball against Ireland as they claimed a 57-run victory in Sharjah yesterday to edge the T20I series 2-1.

A superb 72 not out from Ibrahim Zadran, backed up by the bowling of Azmatullah Omarzai, gave the hosts victory in the final match of Ireland's tour against Afghanistan.

"It is a great series win for us," said Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan, going on to praise the performance of his young side.

The Irish were unable to chase down a target of 156, with Omarzai's four wickets for just nine runs helping bowl the tourists out for 98 inside 18 overs.

Ireland won the first T20I of the mini-series last week but consecutive wins on Sunday and yesterday ensured Afghanistan recovered to take the three-game series, after earlier winning the ODI series 2-0.

For the third consecutive time, Khan won the toss against Ireland and as he did in Monday's 10-run win, he elected

to bat first. Batting at three, 22-year-old Zadran anchored Afghanistan's innings with his career-best T20I score of 72, which boosted the hosts to a total Ireland could not match.

Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz rounded off a T20I series he will hope to forget on a personal level, after scores of zero and three in the first two matches, when Harry Tector took a superb diving catch to dismiss him for six at the start of the third over.

Afghanistan were then ticking along nicely with Zadran and Sediqullah Atal at the crease, until Atal chipped a turning ball straight back to Gareth Delany.

In the very next over, Omarzai, on back-to-back golden ducks, was dropped by Delany on one but departed just two deliveries later, after lobbing Curtis Campher to Josh Little.

Mohamed Ishaq's arrival steadied the ship for Afghanistan as he mounted a crucial fourth-wicket stand of 54 with Zadran, until the number five mistimed a lob on 27 and Paul Stirling snafled up the ball.

Despite defeat, Ireland will still view the tour as an historic success after they won their very first Test match on March 1.

### PGA Tour director doubts team model coming to USA

While leadership groups of the PGA Tour and LIV Golf are expected to convene this week, with a cordial tone expected, disagreement in at least one area appears to be ahead, according to Golf Digest. The team play concept that has marked LIV Golf's short tenure, is not a desired concept by the PGA Tour, at least according to one of the PGA Tour's directors Speaking to media, Peter Malnati expressed reservations about team play being implemented beyond what already exists.

"I don't know what they're doing," Malnati said. "But it seems like a very forced team model, to me. When, at the end of the day, are there any fans that care which team won the tournament? I don't know what fans of LIV want or care about, but are there any fans that care about who won it?"

Leadership groups of the two tours are expected to meet following the conclusion of the Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, according to the report.

Malnati wants clarification on what additional team play would look like in a PGA Tour setting, specifically from negotiating partner Yasir al-Rumayyan of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF).

"I mean, that seems so contrived to me," Malnati said. "I feel like we could also create some contrived team golf something, somewhere outside of the FedEx Cup season. But what does he really want is a question that I want to understand better. Because I don't think it's some contrived, fake, add up random guys' scores and call them a team. I don't think that's it. I think what he means is more stuff like the Ryder Cup, I would guess, but I have no clue because I haven't talked to him." Golf Digest reported that team play remains one of several bargaining points in a potential deal.

GOLF

# Scheffler wins Players Championship title

AFP  
Miami

World number one Scottie Scheffler became the first man to win back-to-back Players Championships with a superb eight under-par 64 on Sunday, giving him a one-stroke victory at TPC Sawgrass.

Wyndham Clark, Brian Harman and Xander Schauffele all finished a shot behind Scheffler, with Clark going agonizingly close to forcing a playoff with Scheffler.

All three of the challengers in the all-American battle needed birdies on the 18th and Clark was distraught after his 17-foot birdie putt lipped out.

That left Scheffler, waiting on the range at 20-under, to celebrate his historic achievement of consecutive wins at the Ponte Vedra Beach course as he followed up his victory at Bay Hill last week with another display of his consistency.

Scheffler entered the final round trailing overnight leader Schauffele by five shots but got his charge under way with an eagle on the par-4 fourth, where he holed out from 92 yards, before making three more birdies before the turn.

It was classic Scheffler on the back nine as he kept out of trouble

and added three more birdies for his bogey-free 64.

Then it was over to the trio chasing him to make up the gap and while Clark made birdies on 16 and 17, he fell just short on the last.

"We had a great finish yesterday and then got off to a slow start today but then the hole out on four kind of propelled us a little bit," said Scheffler.

"I hit a lot of good shots, did a lot good things this week and it's nice to come out on top.

"It's tough enough to win one Players and so to have it back-to-back is extremely special."

The chasing trio paid the price for crucial bogeys.

Schauffele made bogeys on 14 and 15 and reigning US Open winner Clark's bid looked to have faded after bogeys on 10 and 14.

#### 'Gutted'

Clark, who won this season at Pebble Beach, had his worst putting round of the week but found his touch with birdies on 16 and 17 before the 18th ended in frustration.

"I don't know how that putt doesn't go in," he said.

"It was kind of right centre with like a foot to go, and I knew it was going to keep breaking, but it had speed and I thought it was going to good inside left, and even when it kind of lipped, I thought it would lip in.



Scottie Scheffler poses with the trophy after winning The Players Championship. (USA TODAY Sports)

"I'm pretty gutted it didn't go in."

"You finish second, you get a bunch of points and money and

all that stuff, but it just sucks. I've always wanted and dreamed about making a putt that really mattered to either force a playoff or win a

tournament, and I have yet to do it in my professional career, so I was pretty bummed that I didn't have one of those really awesome

moments. "I'm still a little beside myself.

"I'm still shocked that putt didn't go in."

Harman was able to be more philosophical about his loss after recovering from a bogey on the sixth to make four birdies in the next five holes, his 68 not quite enough to catch Scheffler.

"He's the best player in the world, and this is a championship golf course, and so - as far as if you look at it on paper, the best player this week won?" Harman said.

"That's kind of what you want in a golf tournament. We all had our chances, and he just performed - he out - executed two or three more times than the rest of us."

Schauffele, who saw his overnight lead vanish, had chances down the stretch and he was left to rue a missed seven-foot birdie putt on the 17th as he shot 70.

"If I made that, it could have been a different story. I hung tough but no surprise to see Scottie's name up there," he said.

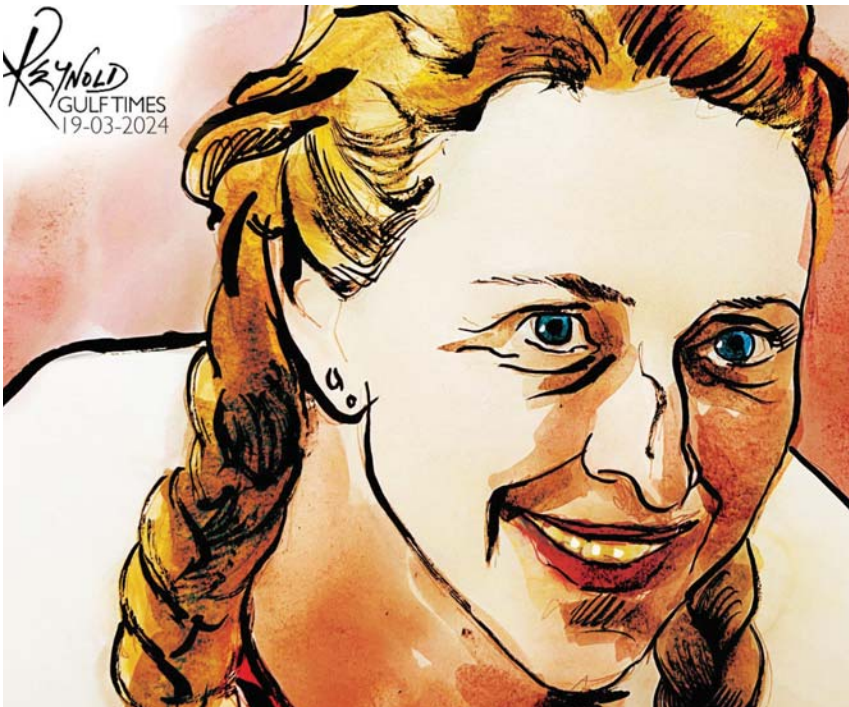
England's Matt Fitzpatrick was fifth, four shots off the lead, after ending his round of 69 with four straight birdies.

South Korea's Kim Si-woo, the youngest Players winner from 2017, shared sixth, five strokes adrift alongside Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, the 2021 Masters winner.



FOCUS

# History-making British cyclist Laura retires



AFP  
London

**B**ritain's Laura Kenny, the most successful female cyclist in Olympic history, announced yesterday it was time to "hang that bike up", giving up on her dream of competing at the Paris Games.

The five-time Olympic track gold medalist, who gave birth to a second child in July, had been targeting a fourth Olympic Games later this year. "I always knew deep down I would know when the right time was," the 31-year-old told the BBC. "I have had an absolute blast but now is the time for me to hang that bike up."

Kenny, who is married to Britain's most successful Olympic cyclist, Jason Kenny, won gold medals at the London 2012 Games in omnium and team pursuit, defending her titles in Rio de Janeiro.

In 2021, at the delayed 2020 Tokyo Olympics, she became the first winner of the women's madison, with Katie Archibald, and also won a silver medal in the team pursuit.

Kenny, who is a seven-time world

champion and 14-time European champion, said she was struggling to balance family and sporting commitments.

"It's been in my head a little while," she said.

"The sacrifices of leaving the children and your family at home is really quite big and it really is a big decision to make.

"More and more, I was struggling to do that. More people asking me what races was I doing, what training camps was I going on - I didn't want to go ultimately and that's what it came down to.

"I knew the minute I was getting those feelings. Once I said to Jase, 'I don't think I want to ride a bike anymore', I started to feel relief."

Kenny gave birth to her first son, Albie, in 2017, after which she returned successfully to the sport.

After a miscarriage late in 2021 and an ectopic pregnancy soon afterwards she had a second son, Monty, in 2023.

Earlier this month, British Cycling performance director Stephen Park said Kenny had only a "slim chance" of competing in Paris.

"Going on to win another gold medal, as much as I would love to do that, it wasn't

giving me the energy I wanted anymore, it just wasn't," Kenny said.

"I wasn't thinking, 'I really want to go on and win one! I was thinking, 'I really want to stay at home with the children!'"

Kenny said the "absolute highlight" of her career was the 2012 Games in London, during which her relationship with Jason became public.

"I never thought I would go to a home games, let alone go on to win two gold medals," she said.

"When I look back, I'm like 'Wow, those two weeks did really change my life!'"

Kenny, whose surname was Trott before her marriage to Jason Kenny, hopes to be at the Paris Olympics, starting in late July, "in some capacity" and wants to stay involved with the British cycling team.

Park paid a warm tribute to Kenny yesterday. "Laura hangs up her wheels as not just one of the sport's greatest riders, but as one of the greatest sporting talents our country has ever produced," he said.

"Just as impressive, however, is the impact which Laura has had on her fellow riders on the GB cycling team and the next generation of Olympic hopefuls. She has been a beacon of inspiration!"

TENNIS

# Desert star dust: Alcaraz clinches Indian Wells title

The Spaniard proves too wily for seasoned rival Daniil Medvedev

AFP  
Indian Wells, United States

**W**orld number two Carlos Alcaraz cruised home in a 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 victory over Daniil Medvedev to win a second straight Indian Wells ATP title, both coming at the Russian's expense.

Alcaraz captured his first title since Wimbledon last July and became the first repeat winner at Indian Wells since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-16.

For the 20-year-old Spaniard, 12 days in the California desert proved just what he needed after a stuttering start to the season, which included a quarter-final exit at the Australian Open and an ankle injury that forced him out of his opening match at Rio de Janeiro in February.

"A lot of doubts for me," he said of his mindset coming in amidst his longest title drought since he burst through for his first Grand Slam title at the 2022 US Open.

For Alcaraz, however, it wasn't just about ending the drought, it was about rediscovering his joy in the game.

"It means a lot to me, lifting this trophy, winning this tournament, because I overcome a lot of problems in my head, a lot of problems physically," he said. "Not that I didn't win a tournament since Wimbledon. For me, it doesn't matter, it's about the feelings ... It's about enjoying playing tennis, once I step on the court, putting my game. It's what only matters. That's why I'm really, really happy to lift this trophy, because I found myself at this tournament."

As he did last year, Alcaraz denied Medvedev's bid to capture the only one of the ATP's six hardcourt Masters 1000 titles he has yet to win.

More importantly, after a week in which he ended Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner's 19-match winning streak, Alcaraz was looking forward with renewed confidence to next week's hardcourt tournament in Miami and beyond.

"Obviously winning tournaments helps



Alcaraz with the winner's trophy. (AFP)

a lot coming to the next ones," said Alcaraz, whose tournament included not only a semi-final victory over red-hot Sinner but also a brush with a swarm of bees in his quarter-final win over Alexander Zverev - the man who ousted him in Melbourne.

"Obviously winning a Masters 1000 again - it is a really difficult tournament to win - gives you extra motivation to keep going, extra, extra confidence for Miami right now and for what's next," said Alcaraz, who joined compatriot Rafael Nadal as the only players to win five Masters 1000 titles before turning 21. World number

four Medvedev, who was hindered by an ankle injury in their 2023 title clash, got off to a hot start in this one, parlaying a service break into a 3-0 first-set lead.

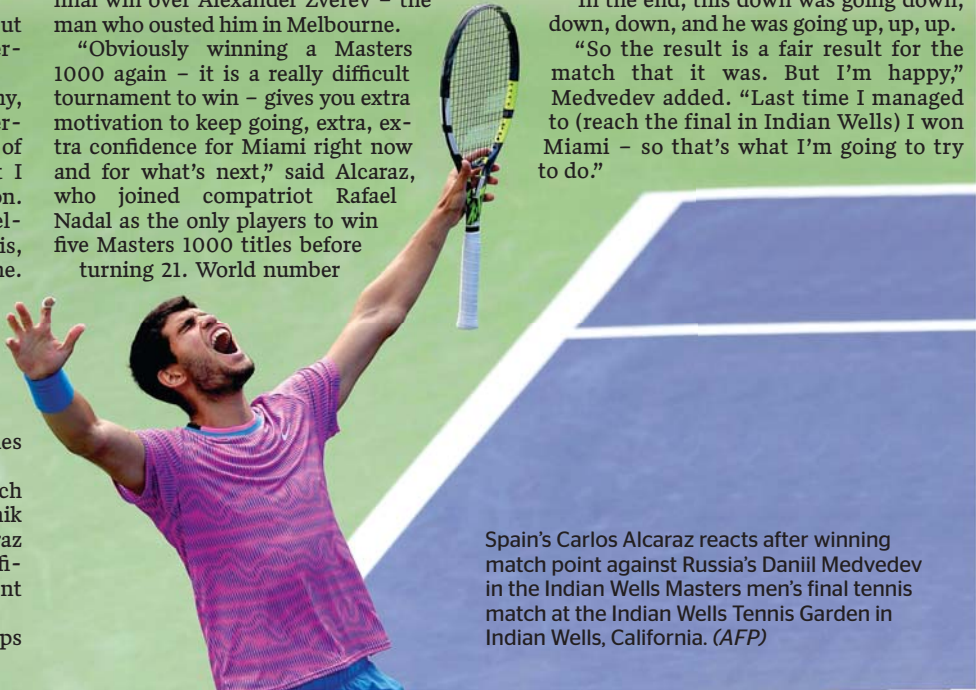
But Alcaraz produced a blazing forehand passing shot to break Medvedev in the fifth game and from there they duelled to the tie-breaker with entertaining rallies spiced by drop shots, volleys and lobs.

Alcaraz had fans out of their seats in one rally, when he started to let a lob go by but, seeing it was heading in, managed to reach it and salvage the point. "I'm trying to do that kind of points," Alcaraz said. "It gives me extra motivation." Trailing 5-2 in the tie-breaker, Australian Open runner-up Medvedev battled back to 5-5, but Alcaraz claimed the set when the Russian sent a forehand wide and from there he was in complete control.

"He managed in the first set at one moment to raise his level," Medvedev said. "I kind of managed to be there and to try to catch his level, but I was just a little bit down.

"In the end, this down was going down, down, down, and he was going up, up, up.

"So the result is a fair result for the match that it was. But I'm happy," Medvedev added. "Last time I managed to (reach the final in Indian Wells) I won Miami - so that's what I'm going to try to do."



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts after winning match point against Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the Indian Wells Masters men's final tennis match at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

## HAMAD TO JOIN SELECT GROUP OF 12 PLAYERS FOR PORTLAND EVENT



The Nike Hoops Basketball of USA have extended an invite to Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) for the inclusion of their player Hamad Moussa (above) in the global team of 12 players for the 25th edition for face off against the top under-19 players selected by USA Basketball in the Oregon Championship. The competition is set to take place on Saturday, April 13 at the Moda Center in Portland, the home of the Portland Trail Blazers. The event will be broadcast live and streamed online worldwide. Hamad, eldest son of Qatar's legendary basketball player Yassin Moussa, is recognised as one of the most promising talents of his generation.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## Lang Park to host 2032 Brisbane ceremonies

Reuters  
Sydney

**T**he existing Lang Park Stadium will host the opening and closing ceremonies at the 2032 Olympics after the Queensland government yesterday rejected the recommendation of a review that a new A\$3.4bn (\$2.23bn) arena be built in the city.

The Quirk Review was commissioned by the government to look into a plan to rebuild the city's Gabba cricket ground to host the ceremonies and athletics at the Games as part of a A\$2.7bn redevelopment of the Woolloongabba suburb. It reported yesterday, making 30 recommendations including the construction of a 55,000-seat stadium in Victoria Park, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported.

"I don't agree with that recommendation," Queensland Premier Steven Miles told reporters in Brisbane. "When Queenslanders are struggling with housing costs I cannot justify to them, spending A\$3.4bn on a new stadium. I know that I said I'd do what the Quirk



review recommended, but I cannot support the option they have landed on. (Lang Park) will become our Olympic stadium. This option will allow us to upgrade (it) to a standard to host a fantastic opening and closing ceremony."

Lang Park currently holds 52,500 fans and hosts both rugby codes as well as concerts.

Brisbane was granted the right to stage the Olympics in 2021 under the International Olympic Committee's New Norm process, a more targeted procedure aimed at saving hundreds of millions of dollars for host cities and increasing long-term sustainability.

Some 80% of the venues for the 2032 Games are already in place with the main stadium redevelopment and a federal government-funded A\$2.5bn arena to host the swimming the only two major construction projects planned.

## HALEP TO FACE BADOSA IN MIAMI OPENER, SWIATEK SEEKS SUNSHINE DOUBLE

**Miami:** Simona Halep will make her competitive return this week after winning an appeal over a doping suspension when she takes the court at the Miami Open where Indian Wells champion Iga Swiatek will look to pull off the Sunshine Double.

Halep, who accepted a wild card into the Miami Open after her four-year ban was cut to nine months by the top court for global sport, will face Paula Badosa today with the winner getting world number two Aryna Sabalenka in the second round.

For Halep, the clash against world number 80 Badosa of Spain will mark her first match since the 2022 US Open where she was upset in the first round by Ukrainian qualifier Daria Snigur.

Halep, a former Wimbledon and French Open champion, was suspended in October 2022 after testing positive for roxadustat - a banned drug that stimulates the production of red blood cells - at that year's US Open.

Halep vigorously denied the charges against her.

The Romanian former world number one owns a 2-0 record in head-to-head meetings with Badosa, having never lost more than three games in a set.

Top seed Swiatek missed her Miami Open title defence last year due to injury but returns in stellar form and fresh off a dominant 6-4 6-0 win over ninth seed Maria Sakkari in the Indian Wells final.

Now Swiatek will set her sights on capturing the Indian Wells and Miami Open titles back-to-back, a feat known as the Sunshine Double given the tournaments' respective locations in California and Florida, for a second time.

Should Swiatek, who will face either Italy's Camila Giorgi or fellow Pole Magdalena Frech in the second round, claim the Miami title she would join Steffi Graf (1994, 1996) as the only women to complete the Sunshine Double twice.

Florida resident Coco Gauff, who reached the Indian Wells semi-finals, will enjoy plenty of crowd support as she returns to Miami for the first time since her triumph at last year's US Open.

On the men's side, Carlos Alcaraz will also chase the final piece of the Sunshine Double after a successful title defence at Indian Wells where he beat reigning Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev in a rematch of the 2023 California final.

While the Miami men's draw is stacked, one notable absence will be world number one and six-times champion Novak Djokovic, who expressed a desire to limit the number of events he plays at this stage of his decorated career.

The 36-year-old Djokovic is still without a trophy this year having represented Serbia at the United Cup before reaching the Australian Open semi-finals and suffering a shock third round exit at Indian Wells.



Romania's Simona Halep celebrates winning the National Bank Open in Toronto, Canada, in August 2022. (@WTA)



SPOTLIGHT

## Fenerbahce consider withdrawing from Super Lig after players attacked

Reuters  
Istanbul

**F**enerbahce will consider withdrawing from the Turkish top flight after some of their players were attacked by Trabzonspor fans following their weekend away win, the Super Lig club said yesterday.

Trabzonspor supporters stormed the pitch and brawled with security forces and Fenerbahce players after their team lost 3-2 on Sunday in the latest incident in a league that has been marred by controversy this season – including an attack on a referee by a club president and protests against refereeing decisions. Fenerbahce will hold an Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting on April 2, the Board of Directors decided. The agenda points include evaluation of the actions to be taken following the incident “including the withdrawal of our football Team A from the Super Lig”, a club statement read. FIFA President Gianni Infantino condemned the incident, saying violence in the Turkish Super Lig is “unacceptable”.

Turkish police detained 12 fans following the incident, Interior Minister Ali



A Trabzonspor fan invades the pitch and clashes with Fenerbahce players and security staff after the Super Lig match. (Reuters)

Yerlikaya said in a post on X yesterday. Fenerbahce players left Trabzon by private plane on Sunday night, accompanied by extensive security measures. “The vio-

lence witnessed after the Turkish Super Lig match between Trabzonspor and Fenerbahce is absolutely unacceptable – on or off the field, it has no place in our sport or

society,” Infantino said in a statement. “All players have to be safe and secure to play the game which brings such joy to so many people all over the world. I call on the rel-

evant authorities to ensure that this is respected at all levels and for the perpetrators of the shocking events in Trabzon to be held accountable for their actions.”

“We are going through a period that Turkish football is now completely fed by chaos, where tensions are constantly high, and where we cannot use the healing power of football,” Trabzonspor coach Abdullah Avci told reporters on Sunday.

“I don’t understand why this place is so tense. Don’t we have the right to celebrate? We need to overcome these things. We need to be tolerant towards each other and have common sense,” Fenerbahce manager Ismail Kartal told reporters.

“We are in contact with our representatives and state authorities regarding the incidents that took place during and after the match,” The Turkish Football Federation said in a statement. No one should have any doubt that after the investigations are completed, the necessary penal sanctions will be imposed on those responsible (for the violence) to prevent the repetition of such incidents.”

Fenerbahce are second in the standings on 79 points from 30 games, two points behind Galatasaray and 30 clear of third-placed Trabzonspor.

LIGUE 1

# Mbappe bags hat-trick as PSG rout Montpellier

Parisians are 12 points ahead at the summit with only eight games to be played

AFP  
Paris

**A**n unstoppable Kylian Mbappe hit a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain romped to a 6-2 win away to Montpellier on Sunday that allowed them to open up a huge 12-point lead at the top of Ligue 1.

Vitinha put PSG ahead at the Stade de la Mosson and Mbappe doubled their advantage midway through the first half, only for an Arnau Nordin header and a Teji Savanier penalty to bring Montpellier back level at the interval. However, a marvellous Mbappe goal restored PSG’s lead shortly after the break and Lee Kang-in made it 4-2 before the France captain completed his hat-trick.

Nuno Mendes put the seal on the victory late on, as Luis Enrique’s side ended a run of three successive draws in Ligue 1 and extended an unbeaten domestic record stretching back to September. A 1-1 draw for nearest challengers Brest against Lille means the Parisians are 12 points ahead at the Ligue 1 summit with only eight games left, and a 10th title in 12 seasons is an inevitability.

Mbappe completed the whole 90 minutes of a Ligue 1 game for the first time since informing the club in mid-February that he intended to leave at the end of the season when his contract expires. His hat-trick, his third of the campaign, took him to 24 goals in Ligue 1 this season, and 38 in all competitions.

Mbappe’s second of the evening, PSG’s third, was the pick of the bunch, as he found the net with a superb shot from range which went in off the underside of the crossbar. “Mbappe was exceptional. We need to make the most of having him, as much as we can, and when we can no longer enjoy having him we will have to raise our game,” said



Montpellier’s Teji Savanier (left) vies for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain’s Kylian Mbappe during the French Ligue 1 match in Montpellier, southern France, on Sunday. (AFP)

Luis Enrique.

The downside of their performance came with the way in which they surrendered their 2-0 lead in the first half, conceding the penalty when Tanguy Coulibaly pounced on Danilo Pereira’s short back-pass and was then clattered by PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. The defeat for Montpellier leaves them just a point above third-bottom Nantes, who are in the relegation

play-off place and on Sunday sacked coach Jocelyn Gourvennec.

Canadian striker Jonathan David continued his superb form in front of goal by scoring for Lille in their draw away to fellow Champions League contenders Brest. David gave Lille the lead midway through the second half in Brittany with his 22nd goal of the season in all competitions, and his 15th since the turn of the calendar year.

The 24-year-old has netted 10 times in his team’s last nine Ligue 1 outings. His total of 15 in Ligue 1 this season is bettered only by Mbappe. However, that goal was not enough to win the game, as Uruguayan striker Martin Satriano poked in a late equaliser for Brest, who remain second.

Monaco could have climbed above Brest with a win at home to Lorient, but they were held to a 2-2 draw after Tiemoue Bakayoko headed in a 95th-minute equaliser for the struggling away side in the principality. Monaco remain third, three points above Lille who reclaimed fourth from Nice, 3-1 winners at Lens on Saturday.

The top three in Ligue 1 go straight into next season’s Champions League, with fourth entering the competition in the third qualifying round. Rennes boosted their hopes of qualifying for Europe with a 2-0 win at home to Marseille, as Martin Terrier put the hosts ahead in the first half and Benjamin Bourigeaud added a late penalty.

Both sides are now three points adrift of the final European qualifying spot. Japan star Junya Ito fired in a superb 79th-minute strike to give Reims a 2-1 win over Metz which keeps his club in the European picture. Oumar Diakite had put Reims in front early on but Arthur Atta equalised before the decisive goal from Ito, who was left out of the Japan squad to face North Korea in upcoming World Cup qualifiers. Ito left the Asian Cup last month after Japanese police said he was under investigation over an alleged sexual assault in Osaka last year.

The player denies the allegation and is suing his accusers for damages. Reims coach Will Still described the 31-year-old winger as “mentally strong and faithful to himself”.

Bottom side Clermont kept their outside survival hopes alive by beating Le Havre 2-1 with a brace from Mohamed Cham.

### France without Griezmann for first time in over seven years

**Paris:** Antoine Griezmann was yesterday ruled out of France’s friendlies against Germany and Chile with an ankle sprain ending his record run of playing 84 consecutive games for Les Bleus. The Atletico Madrid star will be absent from the French squad for the first time since November 2016 as France play their final friendlies before the Euro 2024 tournament from June 14-July 14.

Lazio’s Matteo Guendouzi has been called up for the first time since the last World Cup in place of 127-cap Griezmann, who has scored 44 goals for France. Coach Didier Deschamps has described Griezmann as “not irreplaceable but essential” for the France set-up, but accepted the recommendations of the team doctor, the French football federation said.

The 32-year-old missed four games for Atletico before returning last week and scoring in the Champions League against Inter Milan with the Spanish side advancing to the quarter-finals on penalties. He also came on at half-time in the 3-0 defeat against Barcelona in La Liga on Sunday.

Guendouzi has played seven times for France, scoring one goal. He last played in the final group match in the Qatar World Cup, a 1-0 defeat against Tunisia.

AC Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan is also an injury doubt while Paris Saint-Germain winger Ousmane Dembele is recovering from a punctured eardrum. Deschamps said he was optimistic for Adrien Rabot, Lucas Hernandez and Ibrahima Konate. Liverpool defender Konate has not played the last three matches for the English club and was also absent for France in September and November due to injury.

France play European hosts Germany on March 23 in Lyon and Chile three days later in Marseille.

PREMIER LEAGUE

## Fernandes urges Man United to use Liverpool win as fuel for late surge

AFP  
London

**Bruno Fernandes** has urged Manchester United to use the “spicy” FA Cup quarter-final win against Liverpool as fuel for a late surge in their troubled season. Erik ten Hag’s side came from 2-1 and 3-2 down to beat bitter rivals Liverpool 4-3 after extra-time at raucous Old Trafford on Sunday.

Amad Diallo’s last-gasp winner eased the pressure on under-fire boss Ten Hag and kept United in contention to salvage silverware from their rocky campaign.

“The game got a little bit spicy, a little more special because it’s an FA Cup game and if you lose, you’re out,” United captain Fernandes said. “We know the rivalry between fans, we know how United fans wanted us to win the game to give us something to celebrate because it’s not been great for us.”

United will face Championship club Coventry in the FA Cup semi-finals at Wembley in April. Before then, Fernandes wants his teammates to take the momentum from the victory over Liverpool and turn it into a sustained winning streak.

After Ten Hag began his United reign with defeats against Brighton and Brentford last season, it was a victory against Liverpool in



the Premier League that kick-started a largely successful debut campaign for the Dutch coach. United won the League Cup to end a six-year trophy drought, reached the FA Cup final and clinched a third-placed league finish. Portugal midfielder Fernandes hopes Sun-

day’s result can be the turning point as they look to snatch a place in next season’s Champions League. “We’ve talked about turnarounds but have never done the next step. I think we have to understand the FA Cup is a thing and the Premier League is another one,” he said.

“In the league now, we have 10 matches to go and we don’t depend on ourselves but as we saw Tottenham losing points to Fulham, Villa losing points to West Ham. But our main goal is to not lose points to Brentford away (after the international break). We need to put our effort into winning that game.”

Meanwhile, Harvey Elliott believes Liverpool’s challenge to win the Premier League and Europa League will benefit from the extra rest afforded by their FA Cup exit. Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp admitted it was the first time he had seen his players struggle physically as they played their 46th game of a hectic season.

And Reds midfielder Elliott, who scored in the loss at Old Trafford, said: “Now we can focus on other things, it frees up a few weeks for us. “Not as many games any more so the lads can be fresh and we can recover properly and focus on the rest of the season.”

The defeat was only Liverpool’s third in domestic competitions this season and Elliott doesn’t expect it to wreck the League Cup winners’ treble bid. “Our confidence is always there, it isn’t going to affect us at all,” he said.

FOCUS

## Inter’s Acerbi leaves Italy camp after racist abuse claims

AFP  
Milan

**F**rancesco Acerbi yesterday left Italy’s training camp ahead of two friendlies in the United States after reports he will be investigated for alleged racial abuse of Napoli defender Juan Jesus. In a statement Italy’s Football Federation (FIGC) said that Inter Milan defender Acerbi had given “his version of events” to his Azzurri teammates and coach Luciano Spalletti “on the alleged racist remark”.

The FIGC continued that Acerbi said that he “had no intention of being defamatory, denigratory or racist” but that he would be dropped from the 28-man squad called up to play Venezuela and Ecuador in the build-up to Italy’s European title defence. Roma’s central defender Gianluca Mancini replaces Acerbi, who is set to be questioned by the FIGC’s disciplinary authorities following Jesus’ claim he used a racist insult dur-

ing Inter’s 1-1 draw with Napoli on Sunday night. Brazilian Jesus was seen protesting to referee Federico La Penna, pointing to the Keep Racism Out badge on his shirt and apparently saying that “(Acerbi) called me a negro”.

After the match Jesus, who scored Napoli’s late equaliser, played down the incident by saying that Acerbi had “crossed a line” while not explaining how his fellow centre-back had insulted him and adding that the two had cleared the air.

“He apologised because he realised that he had gone too far... what happens on the pitch, stays on the pitch,” Jesus said. Yesterday, Jesus again alluded to the incident on Instagram, saying: “I defended my team and my rights in the way I thought was right.”

Acerbi’s agent Federico Pastorello then denied that his client racially abused Jesus in an interview with broadcaster Radio Sportiva. “From what Acerbi tells me there was a disagreement on the field but he didn’t say anything racist,” Pastorello said.