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Tamberi, Jacobs aim to drive Italy to top of Euro medals table



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Palestine create history, reach final round of World Cup qualifiers

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CRICKET

United States beat former champions Pakistan in T20 World Cup Super Over

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FIFA WORLD CUP 2026 AND AFC ASIAN CUP 2027 JOINT QUALIFICATION

Young Qatar side held by resilient Afghanistan

Afghanistan play Kuwait on Tuesday with India facing Qatar in what promises to be an exciting finale to Group A

By Sports Reporter
Al Hasa, Saudi Arabia

A compact Afghanistan put up a stubborn performance to hold a young Qatar side 0-0 in their joint qualification Round 2 Group A match for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup 2027 at the Prince Abdullah Bin Jalawi Stadium in Al Hasa, Saudi Arabia yesterday.

The result took Afghanistan to five points, level with India and one ahead of Kuwait with Qatar having already earned qualification into round 3 of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers. Afghanistan play Kuwait on Tuesday with India facing Qatar in what promises to be an exciting finale to Group A.

Qatar coach Marquez Lopez picked a squad with an average age of 23 – a mix of senior, U-23 and U-19 players.

Al Duhaill's Tahsin Mohamed was handed a debut as he became the first ever Qatari senior international of Indian origin.

Afghanistan were content to press high, be patient, close in the gaps, sticking together to absorb the pressure, not allowing a new-look Qatari side to break free. Nevertheless, Qatar had their first chance in the 12th minute when Abdullah al-Yazidi unleashed an effort from inside the 18-yard box, but his attempt sailed over.

Afghanistan were forced into a substitution in the 23rd minute as Rahmat Akbari picked up an injury and was substituted by Jamshed Asekzai. Enjoying more ball possession, Qatar were willing to play it around, and all over. They came close in the 40th minute when

Ahmed Alrawi feinted down the left, entered the 18-yard box but a horde of Afghan defenders, desperate and chasing, prevented him from finding Ibrahim al-Hassan.

Three minutes later, Afghan goalkeeper Ovays Azizi stooped down to collect a vicious cross preventing Qatar from making any impact. Azizi was again in the thick of action in added time, diving to his left to palm away Al-rawi's free-kick from outside the box which was awarded after captain Haroon handled the ball.

Immediately after the resumption, Qatar earned a corner but they weren't able to capitalise. The two-time AFC Asian Cup champions by now were attacking with all thrust forcing Afghanistan to defend deep, and as the game progressed, the Central Asian had to rely on counter-attacks to break down the opposition.

Qatar came close to opening the scoring in the 57th minute only to be denied by the woodwork – Tahsin Jamshid's header off Mahdi Salem's cross bouncing off the post. Desperate to break the deadlock, Qatar brought made three substitutions in the 73rd minute – Hazem Shehata coming in for Homam Ahmed, Yusuf Abdurisag replacing Ibrahim al-Hassan and Abdullah Alahrak substituting Naif al-Hadrami.

Afghanistan were not to be deterred. They did have a close shave in added time when Yusuf Abdurisag failed to head it in off a Mohamed Gouda cross, but managed to hold on and will go into their tie against Kuwait knowing victory will take them through to the third round of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers and AFC Asian Cup Finals for the first time.



Qatar's Tahsin Mohamed vying for the ball with Afghanistan's Najim Haider during their FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup 2027 joint qualification Round 2 Group A match in Al Hasa, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. (Reuters)

FRENCH OPEN

Swiatek returns to final, Paolini stops Andreeva

AFP
Paris

Iga Swiatek will play first-time Grand Slam finalist Jasmine Paolini as she goes in search of a third successive French Open title, with 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva's remarkable run ending in tears yesterday.

World number one Swiatek defeated US Open champion Coco Gauff 6-2, 6-4 to extend her winning streak in Paris to 20 matches and continue the Pole's dominance of her American rival.

Swiatek has now won 11 of her 12 matches against Gauff, all in straight sets, and could become only the fourth woman to win four Roland Garros titles in the Open era – after Justine Henin, Chris Evert and Steffi Graf. Her career win-loss record at Roland Garros stands at a staggering 34-2, and she has barely broken sweat since saving a match point against Naomi Osaka in the second round.

"Something changed, I just adjusted better to the court and it's not easy to play the first matches at a Grand Slam because the atmosphere is much different to other tournaments," said Swiatek.

She immediately grabbed the initiative against Gauff with a break in the opening game of the match. Swiatek withstood break points in her first two service games, before striking again to move up a double



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning against Coco Gauff of the US in French Open semi-final in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

ble break at 4-1. She closed out the first set without trouble, but Gauff threatened a fightback when she nosed 3-1 ahead in the second set after wiping away tears following an argument with the chair umpire over a line call.

Swiatek though responded the very next game and won four in a row, eventually clinching victory on her fourth match point.

"I was consistent with my tactics, didn't overthink stuff and just went for it in the end," said Swiatek, who has won all four of her previous Grand Slam finals.

The 23-year-old has now beaten Gauff at each of the past three French Opens, after last year's

quarter-finals and the 2022 final. "She's a tough matchup for me, obviously. I think the numbers answer that question," said Gauff, who will rise to world number two next week.

Paolini will be the unexpected challenger to Swiatek's crown tomorrow after the 28-year-old Italian swept past Andreeva 6-3, 6-1. The 12th seed had never gone beyond the second round of a major before the start of this year, winning a total of four matches in 16 Grand Slams before advancing to the fourth round of the Australian Open in January.

Now she is one win away from an improbable title at Roland Garros as she tries to emulate compatriot

Francesca Schiavone, who won the 2010 French Open. "I learned I think a little bit later than other players, to dream is the most important thing in sport and in life," said Paolini. I'm happy I could dream this moment. I don't know what to say, I'm so emotional."

Andreeva had become the youngest Grand Slam semi-finalist in 27 years with a shock victory over second seed Aryna Sabalenka in the last eight. But her bid to be crowned the youngest major champion since Martina Hingis at the 1997 US Open was cut short as Andreeva appeared overawed by the occasion, leaving the court in tears after an error-strewn display.

Djokovic says knee operation 'went well'

Novak Djokovic confirmed yesterday he had an operation on his right knee that he injured at the French Open and that it "went well".

The 24-time Grand Slam winner Djokovic was forced to withdraw ahead of his Roland Garros quarter-final against Casper Ruud after a scan revealed a torn medial meniscus in his right knee.

"In the past day, I had to make some tough decisions after sustaining a meniscus tear during my last match," he posted on social media.

"I'm still processing it all but I am happy to update you that the surgery went well.

"I am so appreciative of the team of doctors who have been by my side as well as the overwhelming support I have received from my fans."

The 37-year-old made no mention of whether he would be fit to take part at Wimbledon which begins on July 1 but added that he was going to "do my best to be healthy and fit to return to the court as soon as possible".

Djokovic withdrew from the French Open after winning a five-set match against Francisco Cerundolo and went on to blame the "slippery" Roland Garros courts for aggravating the problem.

"For the last couple weeks I have had, I would say, slight discomfort, I would call it that way, in the right knee, but I haven't had an injury that would be concerning me at all," Djokovic said after his record 370th win at a Grand Slam.

"I was playing a few tournaments with it, and no issues until today."

The Cerundolo victory was Djokovic's second five-setter in quick succession having come through a gruelling four-hour, 29-minute slog against Lorenzo Musetti in the third round that concluded at 3:07am Sunday morning, the latest finish in French Open history.

Ruud, who lost to Djokovic in last year's final, received a walkover and will now play Alexander Zverev in the semi-finals today.

Djokovic's injury-enforced exit from the tournament means that Jannik Sinner will become Italy's first number one in the sport next week.

For the first time since 2004, the men's final in Paris will not feature Djokovic, Rafael Nadal or Roger Federer.

MATCH REPORT

A day of drama as USA stun Pakistan in Super Over

THE WORLD CUP CO-HOSTS EXHIBIT COURAGE IN A TENSE FINISH FOR SECOND SUCCESSIVE WIN

AFP
Dallas, Texas

The United States enjoyed arguably the greatest day in their cricket history as they beat Pakistan in a stunning Super Over upset at the T20 World Cup yesterday.

Both teams made 159 in their regulation 20 overs, with non-Test nation the United States then setting Pakistan 19 to win in the Super Over of this Group A match at Grand Prairie, near Dallas, Texas.

India-born paceman Saurabh Netravalkar held his nerve as Pakistan, runners-up at the 2022 T20 World Cup and champions in 2009, only managed 13-1 in reply.

Pakistan were earlier restricted to 159-7, with left-arm quick Netravalkar taking a miserly 2-18, after being sent into bat in their first match of the tournament.

The United States innings ended in dramatic fashion when Nitish Kumar hit a four off a last-ball full toss from Haris Rauf as the tournament co-hosts, who beat Canada in their opening Group A match, finished on 159-3.

Pakistan's Mohamed Amir was entrusted with the Super Over but the veteran left-arm paceman bowled several wides with panic fielding, that led to wild overthrows, also helping the United States score 18 runs.

Netravalkar had Iftikhar Ahmed brilliantly caught low down in the deep by Kumar, although it needed a lengthy check by third umpire Paul Reiffel, the former Australia fast bowler, to confirm the dismissal.

And with seven needed off the last ball, Shadab Khan was unable to manage the six that would have forced a second Super Over, sparking wild celebrations among the USA team and their home fans.

Even allowing for the United States 2-1 one-day international series win over Bangladesh last month - and Pakistan's infamous reputation for making bad starts to tournaments - this was the land-



USA's players celebrate after winning the game in a Super Over during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup match against Pakistan at the Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium in Dallas, Texas yesterday. **Right:** USA's captain Monank Patel hits for four against Pakistan yesterday. (AFP)



mark result in modern American cricket.

Pakistan must now regroup quickly ahead of their next match against arch-rivals India in New York on Sunday - the showpiece match of the group stage.

The United States were well on course for a sensational win at 104-1 in the 14th over.

But they were 111-3 when India-born captain Monank Patel was caught behind off Amir for exactly 50.

Earlier, United States left-arm spinner Nosthush Kenjige, who opened the bowling, took 3-30 - including two wickets in two balls - from his maximum four overs.

Pakistan were in dire straits at 26-3 before a partnership of 72 between skipper Babar Azam (44) and Shadab Khan (40) bolstered their total.

Mohamed Rizwan was superbly caught one-handed at slip by Steven Taylor off Netravalkar before Usman Khan holed out off Kenjige to leave Pakistan 14-2.

Shadab and Azam Khan fell in successive balls to Kenjige before tailender Shaheen Shah Afridi made 23 not out to give Pakistan fresh hope.

'Big achievement'

"It's a big achievement beating Pakistan and playing for the first time," US captain and player of the match Monank Patel said.

"The way we played today I'm really proud of the boys and it was a complete team effort from ball one to the last ball."

Pakistan captain Babar Azam bemoaned his side's batting performance.

"We didn't capitalise with the

bat and they took a lot of momentum. We lost back-to-back wickets in the middle overs. As a batting unit you need to step up, you need to create partnerships and we didn't do that," Babar said.

"Credit to USA, they performed so well today. They were better than us in all aspects of the game."

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 159-7, 20 overs (Babar Azam 44, Shadab Khan 40, Shaheen Shah Afridi 23 not out; Nosthush Kenjige 3-30, Saurabh Netravalkar 2-18) **v United States 159-3, 20 overs** (Monank Patel 50, Aaron Jones 36 no, Andries Gous 35)

Super Over: United States 18-1 v Pakistan 13-1

Toss: United States
Result: Match tied, United States win the Super Over

ICC admits New York pitches at T20 World Cup not up to the mark

New York: The pitches used in the T20 World Cup matches played in New York have not been up to standard and ground staff are working on remedying them for the rest of the tournament, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday. The temporary Nassau County International Cricket Stadium has hosted two games so far, both of which were low-scoring encounters due to the nature of the drop-in pitch which has made batting extremely difficult due to the movement and bounce. Fans expecting a run-fest were left disappointed when Sri Lanka

were bowled out for 77 - their lowest ever score - against South Africa while India bowled out Ireland for 96 in Wednesday's one-sided contest.

"T20 Inc and the ICC recognise that the pitches used so far at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium have not played as consistently as we would have all wanted," the ICC said in a statement. "The world-class grounds team have been working hard since the conclusion of yesterday's game to remedy the situation and deliver the best possible surfaces for the remaining matches."

Uganda claim maiden World Cup victory in low-scoring tie

Georgetown, Guyana: Uganda claimed their first ever T20 World Cup win with a three-wicket victory over Papua New Guinea at Providence Stadium yesterday in a low-scoring but tense encounter.

The African side bowled out PNG for 77 and after struggling at 26-5 in reply reached the target in 18.2 overs with Riazat Ali Shah top-scoring with 33. Riazat put on a crucial sixth wicket partnership of 35 with Juma Miyagi (13) which effectively won the game for the tournament debutants. But PNG will rue the moment that Riazat, on eight, was dropped by Charles Amini, who misjudged a relatively simple catch.

The Pacific Islanders had their work cut out trying to defend such a low total but were also undone in part by some loose bowling, conceding 15 wides. After that let-off, Riazat played a disciplined and focused innings until, with just three needed to win, he skied a catch to John Kariko at third man. The Ugandans celebrated their victory with dancing on the edge of the field as the team, which beat out more established cricketing nation Zimbabwe to reach the tournament, picked up their first points. "That's a pretty special win for us. You know, first win at the World Cup," said Uganda skipper Brian Masaba.

"It doesn't get more special than this. I'm super proud of this group of guys. I mean, they've put in the work, they've put in such a shift. And to get a win for their country at the World Cup is very, very special," he added. Masaba had won the toss and put Papua New Guinea in to bat and was rewarded when Alpeh Ramjani removed PNG captain Assad Vala with the second ball of the innings, trapping him lbw in what was a wicket-maiden opening over.



Frank Nsubuga

Sese Bau tried to drive Juma Miyagi but was snaffled up by Roger Mukasa who did well to get back and make the catch from mid-off. Tony Ura went in similar fashion as his attempted drive off Cosmas Kyewuta became a simple catch for Mukasa at mid-on to leave his side struggling at 19-3 in the fourth over. Lega Siaka looked confident making 12 off 17 balls before an ill-advised attempt to make a second run ended in a run-out and when Charles Amini was bowled by Frank Nsubuga it was damage limitation time. But only Hiri Hiri (15) and Kiplin Doriga (12) were able to make double figures as the Pacific Islanders were bowled out with five balls left of their allotted 20 overs.

BRIEF SCORES

Papua New Guinea 77 all out (Hiri Hiri 15; Alpeh Ramjani 2-17, Cosmas Kyewuta 2-17, Juma Miyagi 2-10, Frank Nsubuga 2-4)

Uganda 78-7 (Riazat Ali Shah 33; Alei Nao 2-16, Norman Vanua 2-19).

Toss: Uganda

Result: Uganda won by three wickets.

FOCUS

Stoinis shines as Australia ease past Oman in opener

AFP
Bridgetown, Barbados

Marcus Stoinis shone with bat and ball as Australia launched their bid for a grand slam of major cricket titles with a 39-run victory over Oman at the T20 World Cup in Barbados on Wednesday.

Stoinis smashed a game-changing 67 not out off just 36 balls to power Australia to 164-5 and then took three wickets for 19 runs as Oman were restricted to 125-9 in reply at Kensington Oval.

"It was a nice start," player of the match Stoinis said afterwards. "Maybe a few cobwebs for us but we're better for it, and nice that we got the win."

"And nice that I got to spend some time in the middle and have a bit of a bowl!"

Stoinis hammered six sixes and two fours during a swashbuckling batting performance that led Australia's recovery after they had slumped to 50-3 earlier in the innings.

David Warner helped provide some stability with a half century as Australia eventually got going after captain Mitchell Marsh and Glenn Maxwell fell off successive balls to seamer Mehran Khan in the 11th over.

After a steady couple of overs, Stoinis went on the attack, dominating a 102-run fourth-wicket partnership which effectively wrestled the initiative away from the Omanis.

Warner, in his final tournament before international retirement, compiled 56 off 51 balls, including six fours and one six, before falling in the penultimate over.

Warner's innings propelled



Australia's Marcus Stoinis hits a 6 as Oman's Naseem Khushi (left) watches during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup match at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, yesterday. (AFP)

him beyond former captain Aaron Finch as Australia's top run-getter in T20 Internationals with a tally of 3,155.

Four of Stoinis' six sixes meanwhile came in the 15th over of the

innings, bowled by Mehran, and triggered such a pace of acceleration that the 2021 champions were able to more than double their total over the last six overs of the innings. "Davey (Warner) and I

talked about (tactics) before that over," Stoinis added in explaining the sudden batting onslaught. "And then you know how it is when you get the first couple balls away for boundaries, you just think you might as well try to turn it into a big over."

Beaten by Namibia in a thrilling super over finale in their opening game on Sunday, Oman had seemed in the mood for a fight with the early dismissal of Travis Head followed by the Marsh-Maxwell double-blow. However Australia's competitive know-how saw them through that tricky period as they made a winning start to their campaign to become the first nation to hold all three global cricket titles - Test, One-Day and T20 - simultaneously.

Mitchell Starc, who left the field before the end of his spell with cramp, made his trademark early strike in defence of Australia's total and finished with two wickets, as did fellow pacer Nathan Ellis and leg-spinner Adam Zampa.

Oman captain Aqib Ilyas meanwhile took encouragement from the performance of Oman's bowlers after a solid start.

"Playing against a top side today was a great experience, especially following on from the Super Over last game," Ilyas said. "They played really well, but credit goes to our bowlers. Our bowlers can do really well on turning tracks."

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 164-5 off 20 overs (Marcus Stoinis 67 not out, David Warner 56; Mehran Khan 2-38, Kaleemullah 1-30) **vs Oman 125-9 off 20 overs** (Ayaan Khan 36, Mehran Khan 27; Marcus Stoinis 3-19, Mitchell Starc 2-20)

Toss: Oman

Result: Australia won by 39 runs

EUROPEAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Tamberi, Jacobs aim to drive Italy to top of medals table

AFP
Rome

Italy's world high jump champion Gianmarco Tamberi and sprint star Marcell Jacobs headline a strong Italian team they say should aim to top the medals table when the European Athletics Championships starts Friday at Rome's Stadio Olimpico.

"My team is really well-prepared to do some crazy things at these championships," said squad skipper Tamberi, who famously shared Olympic gold in Tokyo with Qatari friend and rival Mutaz Barshim. Italy finished seventh at the last Euros in Munich in 2022, with three golds, two silvers and six bronzes in an 11-medal haul.

Tamberi, however, has not had the ideal run-in to the championships on home soil, a knee problem forcing him to miss what would have been his planned season opener at the Oslo Diamond League. In fact, the champion-

ships will be the Italian's first competitive outing of the season.

"There's a lot of pressure," Tamberi admitted.

"My focus is on the performance, to start the season with good confidence. The main goal for me is to jump high," he added, describing his knee problem combined with some mental fatigue in May as a "total disaster".

Tamberi said he felt "much better and there are positive vibes again".

Alongside the high jumper, key to the Italian team's lofty goal of topping the medals table will be Jacobs, who stunned the world when he scorched to 100m gold at the Covid-delayed Tokyo Olympics. The Italian set an European record of 9.80sec to seal victory, quickly bagging a second gold as part of the 4x100m relay.

He followed that success up by winning the 2022 world indoor 60m title in Belgrade and the European 100m gold later the same year in Munich.



Italy's high jump champion Gianmarco Tamberi (left) and sprint star Marcell Jacobs.

A series of injuries ensued, but Jacobs has shown his resolve and tellingly changed coach in Olympic year, moving to the United States to work under Rana Reider.

The question is whether Jacobs, like Tamberi, is fit enough to deliver in Rome, with both athletes



eyeing the July 26-August 11 Paris Olympics. The last time Jacobs ran a sub-10sec time was winning European gold last time out in Munich, in 9.95sec.

His fastest time this season is 10.03sec, set last week when finishing fourth at the Oslo Diamond

League meet. "You have to understand how important it is competing in this city," Jacobs said. "Rome is where I learned everything, it's where it started for me."

"I want to give back something this weekend."

His decision to change from

Paolo Camossi to Reider as coach, he said, had had implications.

"When you change everything in training it's difficult, I've had to open my eyes on many things."

"I learned I had to change many things and start from scratch, but I'm sure this weekend we can do great things."

"I can't wait to compete in front of all my people. There's a lot of pressure here, to be competing as Olympic and European champion."

Jacobs' prospects of emerging victorious in the 100m final on Saturday have been bolstered in recent days by the withdrawals of the British duo of Zharnel Hughes and Jeremiah Azu, the 100m silver and bronze medallists respectively in Munich. "Our goal is to arrive at top of rankings," said Jacobs, with an onlooking Tamberi nodding enthusiastically.

"Then there a couple of months to go before Paris and the Olympics, there is time to fine-tune things."

FORMULA 1

Ferrari's Leclerc confident but avoiding title talk

'Monaco is such a specific track and I think we had a really good car there'

AFP
Montreal

Charles Leclerc will seek to build on his flawless, if emotional, triumph for Ferrari at the Monaco Grand Prix with another valuable victory in this weekend's Canadian Grand Prix.

But the 26-year-old Monegasque driver, who dominated in Monte Carlo by taking pole position and then controlling a processional race, has been quick to keep expectations under control and avoided talk of a title bid after only eight rounds of this year's record 24-race season. "We shouldn't get carried away," he said, retaining his measured approach.

"Obviously, Monaco is such a specific track and I think we had a really good car there."

"It doesn't mean it will stay that way until the end of the year, but looking back I think we have done a good job maximising the races we have done."

"For now, 31 points is ok, but I don't think about the championship. It's too early in the season. We have more to improve and little by little we can get there."

Leclerc's Monaco win was Ferrari's second this year, following Carlos Sainz's success in Australia, and delighted the 'tifosi' who are desperate to see the Italian outfit enjoy sustained success again and end Max Verstappen and Red Bull's run of supremacy.

The three-time world champion struggled again in Monaco, particularly over the kerbs, and may face similar challenges at the fast and demanding Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, which mixes street track characteristics with high-speed open circuit sections.

"I have been with the team and in the simulator preparing for this race," said Verstappen.

"It is unique, has old-school kerbs and there are plenty of op-



Charles Leclerc of Monaco and Ferrari looks on in the Paddock yesterday, ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Canada at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in Montreal. (AFP)

portunities for overtaking. It is very important to have a good set-up and find a balance between straight-line speed and stability under braking."

He added that he welcomed Sergio Perez's contract to 2026. "We had a record-breaking season last year and the team is strong," he said. "It's a successful partnership."

As Ferrari seek to beat Red Bull again, as McLaren did when Lando Norris won in Miami, Mercedes will continue their pursuit of the pace-setters with more upgrades in a bid to turn promise into results. Both George Russell and Lewis Hamilton will have the new front wing that only Russell had in Monaco.

For Aston Martin, owned by Lawrence Stroll, whose son Lance drives alongside two-time world champion Fernando Alonso, the race on the man-made island of Notre Dame in the middle of the St Lawrence river is a 'home' event.

They will hope for an upturn in form and no scrapes with the 'wall of champions' at the final corner where many drivers have crashed. The forecast for changeable and possibly wet weather will ensure an unpredictable and closely-contested race is in prospect.

It could also throw up an unexpected result as out-of-favour Esteban Ocon, who is set to leave Alpine at the end of the year following his collision with teammate Pierre Gasly in Monaco, be-

ing replaced in opening practice by reserve Jack Doohan, 21, son of former motorcycle world champion Mick Doohan.

History shows that the tricky track is enjoyed by champion drivers with seven-time champions Lewis Hamilton and Michael Schumacher sharing the circuit records of seven wins apiece and six poles, but with Mercedes winless since the 2022 Brazilian Grand Prix. Verstappen may remain the man to beat.

He won from pole last year to claim his second Montreal victory and like his troubled Red Bull team needs to regain form and consistency if he is to stay clear of Leclerc and Norris in what in prospect appears to be a close fight for the drivers' title this year.

Giant crash at Criterium du Dauphine

A large swathe of the peloton at the Criterium du Dauphine fell in a giant pile-up yesterday, with several ambulances attending the injured and race organisers cancelling the day's racing. The eight-day race is a warm-up for the Tour de France in three weeks time, and top riders Remco Evenepoel and Primoz Roglic both fell but appeared not to be badly hurt. Race leader Evenepoel was left clutching the shoulder he injured in the Basque Country in April before clambering back on to his bike. Organisers said they had cancelled the stage because all the ambulances at their disposal were taking riders to hospitals.

"Due to the fact there are no ambulances to take care of the riders, because they are all busy going to different hospitals, the race will be neutralised," race organisers said. The announcement means no times from yesterday's stage will be counted. Two riders from the Visma team that won the previous two editions of the Tour de France lost key riders Dylan van Baarle and Steven Kruijswijk in yesterday's fall. Both Evenepoel and Roglic fell at the Tour of the Basque Country two months ago and this is their first race back. The pair are expected to challenge for overall victory in the Tour de France. The peloton remounted and rode the remaining 20km to the finish line at Saint-Priest where team buses and medics awaited them.

FOCUS

Warner keen to compete in full Paris stadium

Reuters
Manchester

Damian Warner is excited about the party atmosphere that undoubtedly awaits him at Paris 2024 three years after he captured Olympic decathlon gold in a Tokyo stadium eerily absent of fans amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Canadian's Olympic journey played out like a Hollywood movie. Pandemic lockdowns forced him to train in the months leading up to Tokyo in a run-down ice hockey arena.

His team brought in space heaters, built a jumping pit and throwing circle and laid down a 60-metre track, but many days were so cold he lost feeling in his fingers.

His preparation for Paris has been a breeze in comparison.

"Yeah, that was an interesting year. There was so much stuff that was going to be different, like no fans in the stands, the whole isolation stuff and (COVID) tests every day," Warner told Reuters.

"I think the energy in the (Paris) stadium is going to be the best of my career. People are excited to get back out there, and with it in Paris, which is already such a travel destination, it's going to be very high energy," he added. "I'm looking forward to getting into an environment like that again, and having some fun and competing."

Paris will be the 34-year-old's fourth Olympics - he won bronze in 2016 and was fifth in 2012 - and he has competed at numerous world championships, capturing four world outdoor medals.

"Scheduling causes a lot of problems for people, but I've been able to deal with that," Warner said of the benefits of experience.

"Adverse weather is a big issue and I've been able to deal with that. But then also the pressure, dealing with the media, dealing with the Athletes' Village and

how not to get burnt out, I've been able to go through those situations so I can handle those things really well."

"Even little things like 'oh, the buses are late' -- I've been there, done that, so it's just a matter of leaning on my experience and trusting my technique."

Warner, silver medallist at last season's world championships behind compatriot Pierce LePage, captured an historic eighth title at the Gotzis Hypo-Meeting - considered an unofficial multi-events world championships - in May, setting him up nicely for the Olympics.

Despite already achieving gold on sport's grandest stage, motivation is never tough to summon, nor goals difficult to set for an Olympics.

"The goal is to win. There's just that natural excitement that's always there because it's the Olympics," said Warner.

"When you're younger, that's what you dreamed about, so whenever it's an Olympic year, everything's always a little bit easier, motivation is always a little bit easier. So naturally, it just comes easier to just go out there and fight for it."

"And it's not going to be easy because the competition level is so high. But I think that we're in a good place."

He plans to compete at the 2025 Tokyo world championships because he would like to experience that stadium full of fans, but is not sure of what his career holds beyond that.

"Will take it year by year, and ask myself the question: Are you enjoying it? Are you healthy? Do you still have something to give back to the sport? If all those answers are yes, I'll keep going."

Warner spoke to media as part of the "Feed the Dream" campaign with Empire Company Limited, the Canadian team's official grocer. The campaign gives fans a chance to leave good-luck notes in the virtual "lunch boxes" of Canadian athletes.

The Olympic decathlon is scheduled for Aug. 2 and 3 at the Stade de France.



Formula One cars to get greener and nimbler from 2026

A greater onus will be placed on drivers' skill when Formula One launches a new era of smaller, more nimble and greener cars in 2026.

The FIA yesterday presented a set of new regulations aimed at creating closer racing, more excitement and greater sustainability.

The cars will be smaller and lighter by 30 kilos, leading to greater efficiency and improved handling and the simpler hybrid engines - with a 50-50 split between internal combustion and electric engines - will have nearly 300 percent more battery power.

So-called "active aerodynamics" will be used to maximise the benefit of the new engines - the front

and rear wings of cars will open on the straights to reduce drag and increase speed, but then close to increase downforce on corners.

A manual over-ride system will generate more electrical power and assist overtaking.

"The regulations have been designed to provide closer racing among drivers, increase the competition between teams and improve the spectacle," said the FIA's single-seater technical delegate Nikolas Tombazis.

"We have opted for a higher electrical component of the power unit, a more efficient car overall and fully sustainable fuels as part of our drive towards a more sustainable future for our sport."

Formula One chief Stefano Domenicali said F1 was entering "this new regulatory cycle with the sport in the strongest position it has ever been".

"The new sustainably-fuelled hybrid power unit presents a huge opportunity for the global automotive industry, the drop in fuel has the potential to be used by cars around the world and dramatically cut emissions."

He said it explained why F1 will have a record number of six engine suppliers in 2026 when Audi enter and Ford return.

Audi and Ford have been attracted into Formula One by the new hybrid engines and the move to the new technology has persuaded

Honda to reverse its decision to walk away from the sport.

There will be a total of six engine manufacturers in F1 in 2026, with Mercedes, Ferrari, Renault and the new Red Bull Powertrains company with which Ford is joining forces, plus Audi and Honda.

FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem said: "The key features of the 2026 regulations are advanced, sustainable technology and safety."

"Our aim, together with F1, was to produce a car that was right for the future of the sport's elite category. We believe we have achieved that goal."

(AFP)

FOOTBALL

Palestine create history, reach final round of World Cup qualifiers

Draw against Jordan also confirmed Palestine's spot at the Asian Cup 2027

Agencies

Doha

Victory eluded them but that didn't matter to Palestine as their goalless draw with Lebanon in Group I of the joint qualification Round 2 match for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup 2027 in Doha yesterday saw them create history.

The point at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium was enough for Palestine to seal their passage to the third round of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers for the first time as well as book their spot in the AFC Asian Cup for the fourth consecutive edition.

Palestine were quicker to settle with Ataa Jaber firing a shot from close range that had to be cleared with his feet by Lebanon goalkeeper Mostafar Matar. Then Wessam Abouli saw his header go wide as Palestine continued to knock on Lebanon's door in search of the opening goal.

Lebanon did produce a chance of their own midway through the first half when Hassan Maatouk was presented with a shooting opportunity on the edge of the box but Rami Hamada was in the right place to deny the Lebanese captain.

In the fourth minute of first half added time, Palestine should have gone ahead when an unmarked Abouli powered a header from 12 yards out, only to see the ball clip the top of the crossbar. Palestine had their first sight on goal in the second half when substitute Zeid Qunbar twisted and turned before unleashing a shot that hit a defender before Oday Dabbagh blasted over from the ensuing corner kick.

Although the match was played at a frantic pace, neither side was able to fashion clear cut opportunities as both defences stood firm. In the 81st minute, one final chance fell the way of Palestine midfielder Oday Kharoub but he flashed his shot just wide of the post but the stalemate at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium was celebrated as much as win would have been.

SOUTH KOREA ROUT SINGAPORE 7-0

PSG's Lee Kang-in and Tottenham's Son Heung-min both scored twice as South Korea trounced Singapore 7-0 in World Cup qualifying yesterday. South Korea secured the top spot in Asia Group C and passage to



Palestine players celebrate after their World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers match against Lebanon at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)

the final qualifying stage in latest interim coach Kim Do-hoon's first match in charge.

Jurgen Klinsmann left in February after failing to win the Asian Cup and Under-23 coach Hwang Sun-hong oversaw a draw and a victory against Thailand in March. Joo Min-kyu, Bae Jun-ho and Hwang Hee-chan were also on the scoresheet. Next up for Son's side on June 11 is a home game in Seoul against China, who need a point to clinch the second qualifying place after Branko Ivankovic's side drew 1-1 at home to Thailand in Shenyang.

Indonesia would have guaranteed their progress from Group F with a win against already qualified Iraq. But they slumped to a 2-0 defeat in Jakarta, finishing the game

with 10 men after Jordi Amat was red carded as Iraq made it five wins out of five.

Vietnam lie one point behind Indonesia in the fight for the second qualifying spot after a thrilling 3-2 win over the Philippines. Kevin Ingreso thought he had rescued a draw for the Philippines when he made it 2-2 in the 89th minute in Hanoi.

But in the fifth minute of added time Pham Tuan Hai bagged the winner to keep his side's hopes alive of making the final round of qualifying. Vietnam travel to Iraq while Indonesia host the Philippines in their final group games on Tuesday.

Bayern Munich-bound teenager Nestory Irankunda made his debut for Australia in Group I as the Socceroos also made it five

wins from five matches with a 2-0 win against Bangladesh in Dhaka. Irankunda was born in a refugee camp in Tanzania after his parents escaped fighting in their native Burundi and will move to Germany next season.

The 18-year-old winger had a hand in the first goal in the 29th minute when his short pass found Ajdin Hrustic to lash home from long range. Kusini Yengi headed the second after half-time.

Already qualified Japan cruised past Myanmar 5-0 in Yangon. Keito Nakamura and Ritsu Doan scored in the first half for Hajime Moriyasu's side, before Koki Ogawa grabbed a double and Nakamura added another after the break.

Southgate wants England to focus after Euros selection drama

London: Gareth Southgate has urged his England players to refocus after he dropped Jack Grealish, James Maddison and Harry Maguire from his Euro 2024 squad.

Southgate showed a rarely seen ruthless edge as he axed Manchester City winger Grealish and Tottenham playmaker Maddison following their poor form at the end of the domestic season. The England boss also showed no sentiment by leaving out Manchester United defender Maguire, who has been a mainstay of his reign but was unable to recover from a calf injury in time for the tournament in Germany.

Everton defender Jarrad Branthwaite, Liverpool midfielder Curtis Jones, Burnley goalkeeper James Trafford and Liverpool defender Jarell Quansah were the other omissions.

Southgate had been due to submit his final 26-man squad today evening before it was revealed to the nation tomorrow.

But news of his decisions to leave out Grealish, Maguire, Maddison, Curtis Jones, James Trafford, Jarrad Branthwaite and Jarell Quansah leaked early, prompting the Football Association to announce the squad yesterday instead.

Southgate believes his group now need to come together after an emotional day as they start to focus on their bid to win a first major trophy since the 1966 World Cup. "I didn't want to keep the players waiting until Friday. I think that would have been a mess, really," Southgate said.

"It wouldn't have been fair on the players that we've released, wouldn't have been fair on the players that were waiting to have confirmation that they were in. Inevitably, we knew when we named a 33 there would be a period of a nice prep camp, and then there was going to be a couple of days where there would be a lot of anxiety and a difficult couple of days for us all. But we'll close that down later tonight and now tomorrow everybody's heads are clear."

England play Iceland at Wembley on Friday in their last warm-up before the Euros. Southgate's men, one of the leading contenders for the trophy, open their Group C fixtures against Serbia on June 16 before facing Denmark and Slovenia. "When they come back in on Sunday they can really start looking forward to the tournament," Southgate said.

Qatar reach AVC Challenge Cup semis



Qatar qualified for the semi-finals of the Asian Men's Challenge Cup after defeating China 25-19, 25-19, 25-19 at Isa Sports City Hall in Bahrain yesterday. Meanwhile, in the other quarter-finals, Kazakhstan beat Australia 3-1 (21-25, 25-23, 25-18, 25-21) while Pakistan prevailed over Vietnam 3-2 (19-25, 27-25, 25-23, 21-25, 15-12). South Korea defeated hosts and last year's runners-up Bahrain 3-2 (26-24, 32-20, 22-25, 22-25, 15-12).

SPOTLIGHT

Emotional Indian legend Chhetri bows out with Kuwait draw

AFP

Kolkata

Thousands cheered a tearful Sunil Chhetri off the pitch after his last match for India yesterday, bringing to a close an international career which put him among the world's all-time leading scorers. Nearly 59,000 fans came to watch the captain's swan song in Kolkata – a 0-0 draw against Kuwait in a World Cup qualifier – a remarkable turnout in a country where football comes a distant second to cricket in popularity.

The 39-year-old forward scored 94 goals for India over a career spanning nearly two decades, behind only Cristiano Ronaldo, Iran's retired Ali Daei and Lionel Messi in the all-time international scorers' list. "Thanks to everyone who came to the game, and everyone who watched for the last 19 years," he said at the end. "I genuinely mean it."

Fans flocked to the stadium hours before gates opened to chant, sound bullhorns and dance in the baking afternoon heat. They roared during Chhetri's fleeting opportunities on the ball but otherwise the atmosphere in the stands was subdued. "Referee don't blow the whistle, otherwise Sunil Chhetri will leave us," said one banner hanging from the stands.

Another showed a stooped Chhetri carrying a giant football daubed with the saffron, white and green of India's flag. But his 151st and final appearance failed to help India to victory over Kuwait in the Asian World Cup qualifier.

Chhetri's best chance in the 55th minute came to nothing when a pass from Brandon Fernandes was intercepted by the Kuwait keeper.

An emotional Chhetri waved to crowds and pressed his palms together in thanks as he departed the field. He wiped away tears as he walked through an honour guard formed by his teammates to see him off the pitch.

Chhetri is a sporting icon in cricket-mad India. The diminutive striker, who is 1.7 metres tall (5ft 7in), made his debut against fierce rivals Pakistan in 2005 and scored India's only goal. He hit a hat-trick against Tajikistan to help India qualify for the Asian Cup for the first time in 27 years in 2011.

"He had his debut, started scoring goals and never stopped," India coach Igor Stimac said after yesterday's match. "Pushing others when it's difficult, lifting them up – these are the things that you can't replace. Really sad for Sunil. He didn't go with a win but we don't have time to feel sorry for ourselves



India's captain Sunil Chhetri waves to the fans at the end of the FIFA World Cup 2026 and Asian Cup 2027 qualifying match against Kuwait at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

because we are still alive. I need to do everything to make us believe and create an environment which can take us towards the challenge of playing against Qatar in the next match," Stimac added.

Chhetri had two brief but unsuccessful spells in Portugal and the United States, but has spent most of his career in India. He currently plays for Bengaluru. In 2009 he was offered a contract by London club Queens Park Rangers, in England's second tier, but he could not get a work permit.

India are second in Group A, behind already qualified Qatar and a point ahead of Afghanistan and Kuwait, with the top two advancing. India play Qatar in Doha on Tuesday while Kuwait host Afghanistan in the final round of group games.

Al-Attiyah takes lead at Desafio Ruta 40

Nasser al-Attiyah stormed into overall lead at the Desafio Ruta 40 in Argentina yesterday after winning the fourth and penultimate stage. The Qatari rally ace and his co-driver Edouard Boulanger hold a slender 47 seconds lead over Saudi driver Yazeed al-Rajhi going into the final stage of the fourth round of the FIA World Rally-Raid Championship. Al-Attiyah has a 12-point lead in the driver's championship over closest rival Carlos Sainz, who is not participating in Argentina. After winning yesterday's 391-kilometre stage between San Juan and La Rioja, al-Attiyah is well positioned to win the Desafio Ruta 40 and extend his championship lead.

