

To subscribe  
**GULF TIMES**  
Newspaper  
Please call  
**444 666 35**



CRICKET | Page 2

Root equals England record of 33 Test centuries, goes joint 10th in all-time list



FOOTBALL | Page 4

New season of QSL Cup to kick off with Rayyan, Shahania clash

To advertise here,  
PLEASE CALL  
**444 666 21**

Friday, August 30, 2024  
Safar 26, 1446 AH

**GULF TIMES**

**SPORT**



TENNIS

Sinner claims 50th win of year at US Open as Swiatek advances

Page 3

**QOC First Vice-President meets Qatar delegation at the Paris Paralympics**



Mohamed bin Yousef al-Mana, First Vice-President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) visited the Qatari delegation at the Paralympic Village in Paris yesterday. He met Ali Arshad and Sara Masoud and encouraged them to give their best. Dr Hassan al-Ansari, Secretary-General of the Qatar Federation for People with Special Needs and Head of the delegation was also present on the occasion. Arshad will compete in the 100m wheelchair race on September 1, while Sara will be in action in the women's shot put on September 5.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# holders Real to face Dortmund and Liverpool

Every team will play eight games against eight different opponents

AFP  
Monaco

The draw for the league stage of the new-look UEFA Champions League took place yesterday, throwing up a series of heavyweight fixtures including a trip for holders Real Madrid to Liverpool and a repeat of last season's final between the Spanish giants and Borussia Dortmund.

Every team will play eight games against eight different opponents in the new format of Europe's elite club competition, with all 36 clubs now pooled together into one league rather than split into groups. Madrid, who have signed France superstar Kylian Mbappe since winning a record-extending 15th European Cup, will also notably play AC Milan at home and will go to Atalanta.

Real beat last season's Europa League winners Atalanta in the UEFA Super Cup in Warsaw earlier this month. Liverpool, who are back in the Champions League after a one-season absence, will also notably meet Milan and take on tournament debutants Girona. However, supporters of the Anfield club will perhaps be most excited about the prospect of hosting German champions Bayer Leverkusen, coached by former Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso.

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, winners of the competition in 2023, will play at home to Italian champions Inter Milan and go to both Paris Saint-Germain and Juventus. However, they were also handed more comfortable opponents including Club Brugge, Sparta Prague and Slovan Bratislava, who have never played in the modern Champions League proper.

Other standout head-to-heads will include Bayern Munich against both PSG and Barcelona, and Arsenal against Inter and Paris. "It is the best competition in the world with the best clubs in the world. With the new format it will be harder but that is what we like," said PSG's Qatari president, Nasser al-Khelaifi.

The number of clubs in the Champions League has increased from 32 in the past, with the 36 participants split into four seeded pots of nine for the draw. While in the past the draw was entirely conducted by hand, this time had to be different to avoid the process lasting several hours. Each team was drawn out by former Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon on the stage in Monaco, before Cristiano Ronaldo pressed a button to activate the computer which revealed all eight of their opponents.



Portugal's star forward Cristiano Ronaldo (left) shares a laugh with Italy's former goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon after he was awarded the All-Time Goalscorer trophy in the UEFA Champions League during the draw ceremony in Monaco yesterday. (AFP)

Every team will face two clubs from each of the four pots, one at home and one away. The first matches will be played on September 17, 18 and 19. Aston Villa were handed plum ties at home to Bayern Munich and Juventus as they enter the modern Champions League for the first time.

Villa beat Bayern in the final when they won the European Cup in 1982, and then lost to Juve in the following season's quarter-finals. The English side will also host Celtic, while the Scottish champions can also look forward to trips to Dortmund and Atalanta.

Among the new faces are French club Brest, who have never played in any European competition before and were handed games against both Madrid and Barcelona. Girona's first foray into the competition will see them host Liverpool and Arsenal, and go to PSG and AC Milan.

UEFA have said the specific dates for fixtures will be revealed tomorrow. The two extra

matchdays in the new league phase will take place in January, at the end of which the top eight clubs in the 36-team classification will advance directly to the last 16.

Those ranked between ninth and 24th place will go through to play a play-off round from which will emerge the remaining eight sides advancing to the last 16. The bottom 12 in the league phase will be eliminated altogether, with no clubs parachuting down into the Europa League as in the past.

The financial rewards in the Champions League are greater than before with the total pot rising by about 25 percent to almost 2.5bn euros (\$2.79bn). The winners of the competition can pocket over 86m euros just in prize money.

The Europa League and third-tier Conference League, the draws for which take place today, will also now feature 36 clubs, although the latter competition will involve only six matchdays in the league phase.

PARIS PARALYMPICS

# Swimmer Didier wins France's first gold medal

AFP  
Paris

The first medals were won at the Paris Paralympics yesterday, with swimmer Ugo Didier collecting the host nation's first gold in euphoric scenes at La Defense Arena.

Didier, who was born with clubbed feet and reduced use of his legs, won the 400m freestyle event in the S9 category and was roared home by French supporters in a manner that brought to mind the scenes when Leon Marchand took quadruple Olympic gold. Didier, 22, timed 4min 12.55sec to finish a second and a half ahead of Simone Barlaam of Italy. Medals were also on offer in track cycling, swimming, table tennis and taekwondo. The action started too in archery, sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, badminton, goalball - a form of football for the visually impaired but played with hands - and boccia, a version of bowls.

In the pool, Brazilian star Gabrielzinho also won gold. The 22-year-old, who has no arms or hands and his legs are atrophied, claimed the men's 100m backstroke S2 title. In men's wheelchair basketball, reigning champions USA and the pretenders to their title, Great Britain, were quick to get their first wins.

The Americans had a hard-fought 66-56 victory against Spain while Britain, the bronze medalists three years ago in Tokyo, beat Germany 76-55. Britain,

who finished second in the medals table behind China at the 2020 Paralympics, made a winning start to the defence of their men's wheelchair rugby title, beating world champions Australia 58-55.

Paralympic powerhouses China dominated the last Paralympics in Tokyo with 96 golds and have again sent a strong team. Chinese riders Zhangyu Li and Xiaomei Wang won golds in track cycling in early action in Paris. French President Emmanuel Macron declared the Games open on Wednesday during a ceremony which took place in balmy weather - a far cry from the heavy rain which fell when the Olympics opened with a parade on the River Seine on July 26.

The 4,400 competitors from 168 delegations paraded into the arena as the sun set with host nation France entering last to a standing ovation from 30,000 spectators. International Paralympic Committee (IPC) president Andrew Parsons said in a speech he hoped for an "inclusion revolution".

Five French Paralympians, including 2020 gold medalists Alexis Hanquinquant and Nantenin Keita, then lit the already-iconic cauldron in the Tuileries Gardens before it rose into the sky. Of the 35 venues for the highly successful Olympics, 18 will be used for the Paralympics including the ornate Grand Palais and the Stade de France. Riding the wave of their Olympic team's success, host nation France are aiming for a far stronger showing than the 11 golds they won in 2021, which placed them 14th in the medals table.



France's Ugo Didier celebrates after winning gold in the men's S9 400m freestyle swimming event during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games in Nanterre, west of Paris, yesterday. (AFP)



## NEWSMAKER

# Shakib: Bangladesh's unruly champion

AFP  
Dhaka

Bangladesh cricketer **Shakib Al Hasan** is the leading all-rounder of his era, whose laundry list of achievements is rivalled only by his disciplinary infractions and his brief political career under his country's loathed ex-leader.

Shakib has been the driving force of his team's rise to become serious international contenders, enthralled fans through both star turns and scandals. He remains the only player to have topped the International Cricket Council all-rounder rankings in all three formats simultaneously.

Now 37, Shakib is still performing – he took three second-innings wickets as Bangladesh beat Pakistan for the first time in Tests on Sunday. Selectors have tolerated his transgressions and occasional defiance as the price of sporting glories that in 2022 saw him named his



country's greatest athlete by eminent Bangladeshi sports journalists.

"Cricket in Bangladesh is divided into two eras: before and after Shakib Al Hasan," veteran sports reporter Montu Kayser told AFP last year.

Of the many controversies in Shakib's career, none have dogged him like his decision to contest sham elections in January under autocratic ex-premier Sheikh Hasina. A student-led uprising ousted Hasina this month, with the leader fleeing the country for neighbouring India.

The cricketer was in Canada playing in a T20 league as he lost his lawmaker job during the revolution. He has not returned home since. Along with dozens more members of Hasina's Awami League, a murder case has been filed against Shakib that accuses him of culpability in the police killing of protesters.

Shakib has not spoken publicly about the case, but his teammates have rallied

around him. "As a teammate and a brother, I will be there during his tough times," veteran batsman Mushfiqur Rahim said on Facebook this week. "I do not support the false allegations made against him."

Shakib made his international debut aged just 19 in 2006, as a batting all-rounder against Zimbabwe. He had already become a star by the time he hit a fifty against India in the following year's World Cup in a David-and-Goliath victory still spoken of reverentially by Bangladesh fans.

His remarkable 7-36 in a losing effort against New Zealand sealed his Test spot in 2008.

Two years later he led Bangladesh to their first ODI series win over a leading cricket nation, with a 4-0 home sweep of New Zealand.

Shakib struggled under the pressure of the captaincy so early in his career, and was sacked after a disappointing tour of Zimbabwe in 2011. By 2014, his relationship with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) reached its lowest ebb. Shakib's ill discipline had seen him threaten a spectator with a bat. He then made a lewd gesture to a television crew and was banned by the BCB for three ODIs.

A running dispute with coach Chandika Hathurusinghe and a decision to compete in the Caribbean Premier League without BCB clearance led to a six-month suspension.

Shakib's sanction was lifted early after apologies and pledging to "behave in a more mature way".

"Nothing can be more painful than staying away from cricket," he said.

Shakib scored a century and took 10 wickets in his comeback Test against Zimbabwe, becoming only the third cricketer to achieve the all-round feat after Imran Khan and Ian Botham.

In 2017, he scored a century to bail out Bangladesh from a precarious 33-4 to a remarkable five-wicket win over New Zealand in Cardiff.

Shakib reached his pinnacle at the 2019 World Cup in England, where he made 606 runs and claimed 11 wickets, an all-rounder record for the tournament.

But he also continued to court controversy. While Shakib was leading a players' strike for better pay in 2019, the ICC slapped him with a two-year ban for failing to report corrupt approaches by bookmakers.

Soon after his return he was again named Test and Twenty20 skipper, but in 2022 the BCB forced him to abandon a partnership with an offshore betting site.

The following year he was a guest at the opening of a boutique jeweller in Dubai, despite Bangladeshi police informing him the store's proprietor was a fugitive accused of murder.

Kayser likened Shakib to a "king with many thorns in his crown".

"But," he added, "the thorns cannot stop him from ruling his world".

## SECOND TEST

# Root marches on for England with stroke-filled 143

The stylish batsman equals century record of Alastair Cook

AFP  
London

Joe Root scored a record-equalling 33rd Test hundred as England established a strong position against Sri Lanka on the first day of the second Test at Lord's yesterday.

England, 42-2 when Root came in to bat, reached stumps on 358-7, with the star batsman having made 143 – his sixth Test century at the 'Home of Cricket'.

No other England top-order batsman made more than Ben Duckett's 40.

But fast bowler Gus Atkinson was 74 not out at the close – his maiden Test fifty in just five matches at this level – after providing Root with excellent support in a seventh-wicket stand of 92 in 19 overs.

Earlier, Ollie Pope was out in single figures for his third successive innings as England's stand-in captain, with Sri Lanka taking three wickets before lunch after winning the toss.

Despite the sunny conditions, Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva decided to field first, with his side looking to level this three-match series at 1-1 following England's five-wicket win in the first Test at Old Trafford last week. It looked a questionable move when left-handed opener Duckett scored three fours in an over off Asitha Fernando.

But makeshift opener Dan Lawrence fell for nine when caught behind off Lahiru Kumara, recalled in place of Vishwa Fernando.

Pope, twice out for six at Old Trafford in his debut match as England skipper in place of the still-injured Ben Stokes, had made just one when he top-edged a pull off paceman Fernando and De Silva held a well-judged catch as he ran back from square leg.

Not for the first time in his long England career, the 33-year-old Root came in with the innings in the balance.

He was on 11 when rapped on the pad by a full-length Kumara delivery to spark a raucous lbw appeal. Paul Reiffel ruled not out, with Sri Lanka's review seeing the decision upheld on umpire's call.

But no reviews were needed when left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya struck with just his fourth ball, Duckett top-edging a reverse scoop to Kumara on the point boundary as his 47-ball 40 came to a disappointing end.

Former captain Root took guard fresh from his match-clinching 62 not out at Old Trafford, with England faltering at 97-3 come lunch at Lord's.

Root shared stands of 48 and 62 with Har-



England's Joe Root celebrates his century on the opening day of the second Test against Sri Lanka at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (AFP)

ry Brook (33) and wicketkeeper Jamie Smith (21), who scored his maiden Test century at Old Trafford. Chris Woakes, however, carelessly pulled Fernando straight to long leg on six to leave England 216-6.

Root, 81 not out at tea, spent 12 balls on 99 and the 33-year-old almost played onto Kumara when one run shy of a century.

But Root, who made his Test debut in 2012, is the only active cricketer in this elite group, with all the others now retired from international duty. Having batted in largely classical fashion, Root was out when he skyed an unorthodox ramp off fast bowler Milan Rathnayake to Pathum Nissanka at point, with England

then 308-7. But Atkinson, who drove Jayasuriya for two superb straight sixes, went to fifty in just 61 balls when he cover-drove Rathnayake for a textbook four. And the 26-year-old took a toll of the new ball too, pulling Kumara for six over midwicket.

## SCOREBOARD

## England 1st Innings

B. Duckett c Kumara b Jayasuriya	40
D. Lawrence c Madushka b Kumara	9
O. Pope c De Silva b A Fernando	1
J. Root c Nissanka b Rathnayake	143
H. Brook lbw b A Fernando	33
J. Smith c Madushka b Rathnayake	21
C. Woakes c A Fernando b Kumara	6
G. Atkinson not out	74
M. Potts not out	20
<b>Extras (b8, lb3)</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total (7 wks, 88 overs, 392 mins)</b>	<b>358</b>
<b>To bat:</b> O Stone, S Bashir	
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-39 (Lawrence), 2-42 (Pope), 3-82 (Duckett), 4-130 (Brook), 5-192 (Smith), 6-216 (Woakes), 7-308 (Root)	
<b>Bowling:</b> A Fernando 19-1-84-2; Rathnayake 21-2-80-2; Kumara 20-2-75-2; Jayasuriya 25-2-81-1; Ka Mendis 3-0-27-0	
<b>Toss:</b> Sri Lanka	

## PREVIEW

# Bangladesh eye maiden Test series win against Afridi-less Pakistan

AFP  
Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Bangladesh are hoping to secure a first Test-series victory over Pakistan, who have left out star pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi for the second match starting in Rawalpindi today.

The visitors upset a normally formidable home team with a clinical ten-wicket display in the first Test – Bangladesh's first win in over 14 encounters against Pakistan.

But the hosts have been struggling through a lean spell of late, bowing out early in this year's T20 World Cup. Their last Test series was a whitewash in a three-match tour to Australia.

Star pacer Afridi struggled to find his rhythm through much of the innings, with Pakistan's head coach Jason Gillespie saying he will be rested to allow him to spend time with his new-born son and family.

"Shaheen will miss out on this game. We had a good conversation with him and he fully understands and appreciates the thinking behind it. We are just looking at what our best combination is for this game," Gillespie said.

The home team have recalled spinner Abrar Ahmed after going with an all-pace attack in the first Test.

Former Australian pacer Gillespie admitted it will be a challenge to square the series.

"We want to go out there and play positive," said Gillespie, who is in his first series with Pakistan. "It's about scoring lots of singles and with our bowling we want to be ruthless and challenging the opposition batters."

But he backed under-pressure skipper Shan Masood who failed with the bat with six and 14 in the first match, and has lost all four of his Tests as captain.

"Shan is a very positive captain," said Gillespie. "He wants to play and win games .... We showed that with our intent in the first game but it didn't quite work out and that's credit to our opposition."

"That game is gone, but what we can do is focus on the game starting tomorrow.

Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusinghe was confident his side could recreate their heroics from the first Test.

"The morale of the players is very, very good," said former Sri Lankan batsman Hathurusinghe. "Obviously beating Pakistan in



Pakistan's cricket head coach Jason Gillespie attends a press conference in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

Pakistan is not an easy task," Pakistan was rattled by the Bangladesh response to their first-innings total of 448-6, crumbling for a paltry 146 in their second outing.

A brilliant 191 by veteran batter Mushfiqur Rahim on a flat Rawalpindi pitch helped the visitors rack up their highest-ever total against Pakistan of 565 to take a crucial 117-run first-innings lead.

Spinners Mehidy Hasan Miraz (4-21) and Shakib Al Hasan (3-44) then rocked the hosts and made them rue not playing a frontline spinner.

But Hathurusinghe said the second game would be a big challenge. "They are a very strong team and we expect a very good fight in the second Test as well but we will not be different from the first game and know our strength as well as that of Pakistan's."

Since gaining Test status in 2000, Bangladesh have only won two of their 32 overseas series with wins in the West Indies (2009) and Zimbabwe (2021), drawing three and losing 27.

Bangladesh's pace attack will be boosted by the return of experienced Taskin Ahmed who recovered from a shoulder injury but will have a tie with Nahid Rana for a place in the eleven.

Intermittent rain and bad weather in Rawalpindi prevented both teams from having a practice session.



Groundmen prepare nets for training sessions of the Pakistan and Bangladesh teams at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

## NEW ZEALAND APPOINT ORAM AS BOWLING COACH

**AUCKLAND:** Former allrounder Jacob Oram will take over as New Zealand's bowling coach from Oct. 7, governing body New Zealand Cricket said yesterday. Oram, 46, represented New Zealand as a player for 11 years and previously served as the bowling coach of the country's A team and the women's team. "I'm really excited to have the opportunity to be involved with the Blackcaps again," Oram said in a statement.

"To be back involved with a team that means so much to me and

has been a big part of my life is a real honour. "The recent opportunities I've had have been a great insight into where this team is going and I'm excited to continue that work in the coming seasons. "There's a fresh new wave of talent coming through in the Blackcaps bowling ranks and I hope that I can share my knowledge and experience to help best prepare them for the challenges of international cricket."

Oram will work with a New Zealand attack that includes some

newer faces, including exciting pace duo Ben Sears and Will O'Rourke. He began his coaching career in 2014 with New Zealand A then worked with New Zealand Women as bowling coach from 2018. He was named head coach of Central Hinds last summer with the team reaching the Super Smash final. Oram has also been an assistant coach in the Abu Dhabi T10 and bowling coach of MI Cape Town in the SA20. "Jake's a great operator," said

head coach Gary Stead said yesterday. "His career as a player and his experiences as a coach speak for themselves. He brings a deep understanding of the international game, but also experience in franchise cricket which will be worthwhile in understanding the modern player and the changing landscape of the modern game." Oram will begin his role on October 7, shortly before the start of New Zealand's three-Test series in India.

TENNIS / US OPEN

# Sinner, Swiatek in a hurry, Djokovic fails to impress

Djokovic notches his 90th US Open victory becoming the first man to win 90 matches at all 4 Grand Slams

AFP/Reuters  
New York

**W**orld number one Jannik Sinner, vying to add the US Open title to the Australian Open crown he won in January, breezed into the third round yesterday with a 6-4, 6-0, 6-2 victory over Alex Michelsen.

World number one Iga Swiatek charged into the US Open third round yesterday, routing 217th-ranked Ena Shibahara of Japan 6-0, 6-1.

Earlier defending champion Novak Djokovic reached the third round of the US Open as Laslo Djere retired in the third set, but said he'll have to do better to win a fifth title on the hard courts of New York. Djokovic was up 6-4, 6-4, 2-0 when Djere pulled the plug on a gritty encounter that saw both men summon the physio to Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"It's not what we want to see," Djokovic said. "He's such a good player in these conditions and the second set should have been his, he was 4-2 up. I don't know if (my) winning the second set probably put more burden on him."

Djokovic notched his 90th US Open match victory, becoming the first man to win 90 at all four Grand Slams. But it was a battle until the minute Djere called it quits.

**An hour and 39 minutes**  
Italy's Sinner yesterday needed just an hour and 39 minutes to get past the 49th-ranked Michelsen,



Italy's Jannik Sinner in action during his second round match against American player Alex Michelsen at the US Open in New York yesterday. **Right:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his second-round match against Serbia's Laslo Djere. (AFP/Reuters)

giving himself a match point with a crisp forehand winner down the line and polishing it off with a crosscourt forehand volley. It was his 50th win of the year.

He'll next play Australian wild card Christopher O'Connell as he aims to stay on course for a semi-final showdown with Carlos Alcaraz, the 2022 US Open champion who won both the French Open and Wimbledon this year.

O'Connell advanced with a 6-3, 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 victory over Italian qualifier Mattia Bellucci. "Very happy," said Sinner, who beat Michelsen in the second round of the Cincinnati Masters this month. "He's a very tough opponent. We played each other in Cincinnati

a week ago. I knew what to expect, he knew what to expect a little."

Sinner went on to claim his fifth title of the season in Cincinnati.

A day later it was revealed that Sinner had escaped a ban despite twice testing positive for an anabolic agent in March, authorities accepting his explanation that the result was the result of inadvertent contamination.

**Match lasted 65 minutes**  
Poland's Swiatek, the 2022 US Open winner who is seeking to add a second title in New York to her four French Open triumphs, overwhelmed the 26-year-old qualifier, who was in the main draw of a Grand Slam for the first time. She

needed just 65 minutes to advance to play either 25th seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova or Elisabetta Cocciaretto for a place in the last 16.

**First break of the match**  
Djokovic grabbed the first break of the match to take the first set 6-4 after a tense hour then sought treatment for trouble on his right side. Djere, the only player to take a set off Djokovic at last year's US Open, gained the first break of the second set and with a 4-2 lead had two more break points that he couldn't convert.

But Djokovic won the next six games, Djere receiving treatment on his abdomen before Djokovic closed out the second.

"Overall it was a big fight - over two hours for two sets," Djokovic said. "I served awful. So playing without the serve, you have to grind, you have to run. I had to rely on my baseline game."

The Serbian superstar, coming off an emotional Paris Olympics triumph, next faces Australian Alexei Popyrin, who he beat at the Australian Open and Wimbledon this year.

Women's defending champion Coco Gauff overcame her own struggles on serve to beat 37-year-old Tatjana Maria 6-4, 6-0.

It was an uneven performance from 20-year-old Gauff, who has endured an erratic season since capturing her maiden major in

New York. She put just 44 percent of her first serves in play and had nine double faults, but the 99th-ranked Maria couldn't capitalise and Gauff won the last seven games to seal the win.

"I think I played well overall," Gauff said. "I think if I could have served better that first set would have been a lot easier."

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, runner-up to Gauff last year, didn't have to take advantage, polishing off Italian Lucia Bronzetti 6-3, 6-1 in an hour.

Fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev of Germany advanced with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 victory over France's Alexandre Muller.

Zverev next faces Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry, whose efforts to stay hydrated backfired during his 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 1-6, 6-3 win over compatriot Francisco Cerundolo.

**Rublev posts five-set win**  
Sixth-seeded Russian Andrey Rublev and Czech Jiri Lehecka both battled through five sets to line up a third-round meeting.

Rublev, a four-time US Open quarter-finalist, beat France's Arthur Rinderknech 4-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 while Lehecka outlasted American Mitchell Krueger 6-7 (5/7), 0-6, 6-4, 6-4, 7-5. Rublev also called medical staff after drinking so much water he felt like he had "a baby" in his stomach.

Seventh-seeded Paris Olympics gold medalist Zheng Qinwen yesterday had to go the distance, rallying from a set down for the second straight match to beat Russian Erika Andreeva 6-7 (3/7), 6-1, 6-2.

CYCLING

# Castrillo claims stage, O'Connor retains lead

AFP  
Manzaneda, Spain

**P**ablo Castrillo escaped from a breakaway and held off his pursuers on the climb to the line for an emotional Vuelta a Espana stage win yesterday as Ben O'Connor protected his overall lead.

Castrillo, a Spaniard who rides for Kern Pharma, attacked at just before the 10-kilometre climb to the finish of stage 12. The 23-year-old celebrated his first World Tour victory, and the first by a Spaniard on this year's Vuelta, by crossing the line pointing skywards.

He dedicated his success to his team's founder and former president Manolo Azcona, who died during the night at the age of 71. "I thought about Manolo the whole stage. I had his strength by my side in those last few kilometres," said Castrillo.

"I suffered a lot but to be able to win a stage in the Vuelta is just crazy. I don't have any words. I've gone to the end of my strength."

Castrillo finished eight seconds ahead of Max Poole after the other members of the elite escape group stopped chasing to



Pablo Castrillo Zapater celebrates crossing first at the finish line during stage 12 of the Vuelta a Espana, a 137.5km race between Ourense Termal and Estacion de montana de Manzaneda, yesterday. (AFP)

avoid helping each other. Poole, a 21-year-old Briton, had been part of the breakaway the previous day when he finished third.

O'Connor, an Australian who rides for AG2R-Deceathlon maintained his 3min 16sec lead over the Slovenian from Red Bull as the pack finished 6min 29sec behind Castrillo on a hilly 125.7 kilometre meander through Galicia from Ourense to the Manzaneda ski resort. With a string of tough stages coming up, Primoz Roglic, who

had chipped away at O'Connor's lead over the previous two days, did not attempt another late attack. "We just controlled the race, made some pace on the final climb," said O'Connor.

"I felt pretty good today. I never lost confidence! I was annoyed but it doesn't mean I don't believe in myself."

**Yellow cards**  
The day started with potentially bad news for his team as they

were punished for the way they had attempted to control the race the day before. Four members of AG2R received yellow cards under a system being tried out by cycling's governing body, the UCI.

Riders Victor Lafay, Geoffrey Bouchard and Bruno Armirail were punished after AG2R formed a line across the road at the head of the peloton on Wednesday to prevent attacks.

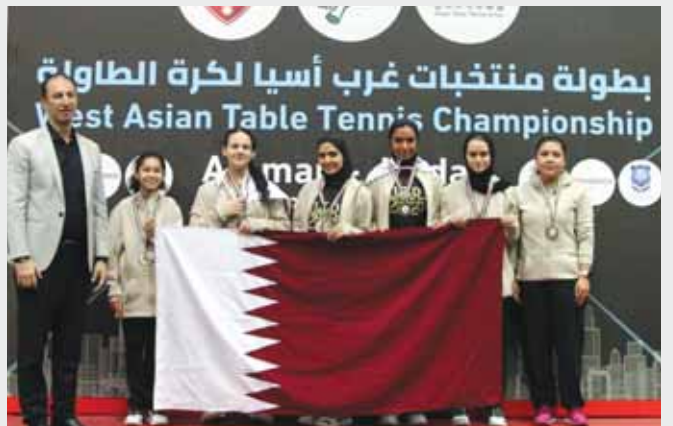
When Richard Carapaz, who sits fourth overall, attempted to slip past, Armirail appeared to move across to block and Carapaz ended up crashing into the ditch.

The UCI picked on Lafay. They fined the Frenchman 500 Swiss Francs (\$590) and deducted a point in the King of the Mountains classification, six points in the points classification, and 10 seconds overall.

Since Lafay had collected no mountain points and only four overall points, the deductions left him with minus totals in both categories.

Overall, he is almost 2 hours behind the man he is defending, O'Connor, in the overall. The fourth yellow card went to team sport direct Cyril Dessel who was also fined 1,000 Swiss Francs.

# Qatar table tennis players shine



Qatar table tennis players celebrate winning medals in team competitions at the West Asian Championship being played in Amman, Jordan. Qatar have won 6 (2 gold, 3 silver and a bronze) medals so far. The event concludes tomorrow.



# Somkiat to become first Thai MotoGP rider in 2025

**PARIS:** Somkiat Chantara will become the first Thai rider to race full-time in MotoGP next season with Honda-LCR, the team announced yesterday.

The 25-year-old will replace Japan's Takaaki Nakagami, who will become a test rider, at the Honda satellite team. "Stepping into MotoGP has always been my dream, and I will finally make it true," Somkiat said in a statement. "I'm committed to learning, giving my maximum, and enjoying this new adventure. It will be difficult, but I will give my best."

**Czech MotoGP to return in 2025 after four-year absence**  
The Czech MotoGP at the iconic Brno circuit will return to the calendar in 2025 after a four-year

absence, organisers announced yesterday. The city has staged more than 50 races since its debut in motorcycling's top category in 1965. Brno last held a Grand Prix in 2020. Local councillors at the time said the city could not afford needed track repairs because of financial difficulties stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Events initially took place on a street circuit before the Brno track debuted in 1987. A five-year contract will keep the race on the MotoGP calendar until at least 2029. "Motorcycle racing has a tradition at the Brno Masaryk Circuit dating back to the 1950s," Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said in a statement. "MotoGP is a prestigious global event that brings tens of thousands of visitors to the Czech Republic." "I am very pleased that we have managed to continue this tradition and that the MotoGP race will return to Brno after five years."

MOTORSPORT

# Edgy Verstappen heads to Monza with doubts

AFP  
Milan, Italy

**M**ax Verstappen heads to the Italian Grand Prix with his unbeatable aura fading and a fourth straight world championship looking far less certain than before Formula One's summer break.

Dutchman Verstappen hasn't won since claiming the honours at the Spanish GP back in June, a five-race drought which has put the brakes on his title charge and Red Bull's dominance of F1.

Failing to win at his home GP for the first time in four years last weekend was further sign of the 26-year-old's slipping grip on the driver's crown.

And the manner in which he finished behind Lando Norris highlighted the problems with his car which led to an expletive-filled during qualifying.

Verstappen finished nearly 23 seconds behind Norris as McLaren showed that they had the best set-up on the grid and forced a previously unstoppable driver to accept a humbling defeat after being overtaken on lap 18.

"There was nothing that I could do, so once he passed, I just focused on doing my race,



Max Verstappen of Red Bull Racing in action during the Italian Grand Prix.

tried to bring it to the end in second," said Verstappen after the race. "The last few races already haven't really been fantastic. So that, I think in a sense, was already a bit alarming. But we know that we don't need to panic."

McLaren's improved car has every chance at Monza too, where Verstappen has bullied the opposition and in particular home team Ferrari the past two years.

However Verstappen still has a 70-point lead in the driver's championship and his closest challenger Norris called the idea of pipping him to the world title "stupid" as the reigning champion has finished on the podium in 10

of this season's 15 races, winning seven. And even though he is no longer blowing away the opposition Verstappen at least didn't blow his top during the race at Zandvoort, instead using his considerable talent at the wheel to ensure second place.

"You've got to drive with the championship in mind," said team principle Christian Horner. "There have been seven different race winners this year. So, if you can't win, then you've got to be scoring the points."

Horner was also referring to the constructors' championship which is even tighter due to the continued struggles of Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez, who is 156 points back in seventh and whose position at Red Bull is subject to constant speculation.

McLaren are just 30 points behind Red Bull while Ferrari, 64 points back in third, will be hoping to put recent Monza disappointments behind them as the Scuderia have an outside chance of their first constructor's title since 2008. Ferrari have had a driver on pole position at each of the last two Monza GPs only to lose out both times to Verstappen on home soil. Charles Leclerc, whose second place behind Verstappen two years ago was particularly bitter as the Dutchman started the race seventh on the grid, won a brilliant battle with Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri for third at Zandvoort.

## NASSER BIN KHALED AND SONS AUTOMOBILES HONOURS BARSHIM



Nasser Bin Khaled and Sons Automobiles, the authorised general distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Qatar, hosted Qatar's high jump legend Mutaz Barshim to celebrate his outstanding achievements, the latest of which was a bronze medal in the Paris 2024 Olympics. The event was attended by Sheikh Nasser Nawaf al-Thani, General Manager of NBK Automobiles Gary Pike, Group Marketing & Communications Manager Ahmed Azmy. Barshim signed a collection of Mercedes-Benz branded accessories to the attendees.

### FOOTBALL

# QSL Cup to kick off with Rayyan, Shahania clash

In other Group A matches today, Duhail will take on Qatar SC, while Arabi face Ahli



Al Rayyan players train yesterday, on the eve of their QSL Cup match against Al Shahania.

**Doha**  
By Sports Reporter

**A**l Rayyan and Al Shahania will kick off the new season of the QSL Cup with a Group A clash at the Grand Hamad Stadium today at 6:30pm. Later, at 8:30pm, Al Duhail will take on Qatar SC at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, while Al Arabi will face Al Ahli at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium in other Group A matches.

The tournament is being held during the international break with Ooredoo Stars League in pause as many senior stars are on

national team duty. It will provide a wonderful opportunity for the coaches to blood in fringe players.

Al Rayyan's coach Poya Asbaghi will experiment with various tactical and technical strategies, potentially giving opportunities to players who have had limited participation in previous matches. Al Rayyan currently sits eighth in the league standings, having accumulated three points from one victory and two defeats.

Meanwhile, Al Shahania, under coach Alvaro Mejia, will use the tournament as a platform to assess players and address mistakes made in league matches. The team is currently placed 11th with two points from



Al Shahania players at a training session yesterday.

two draws and one loss. This tournament offers a fresh opportunity for the team to rebuild confidence, refocus, and work towards eliminating recent errors.

Al Duhail and Qatar SC enter the tournament with the aim of competing for the title. Both coaches will seek to develop technical and tactical plans to maximise their teams' performance. Al Duhail, who lead the Ooredoo Stars League standings with nine points from three wins, will look to continue their winning form. Qatar SC, currently ninth with three points from one win and two losses, will also be seeking a positive result. The two teams last met in Week 1 of the league championship, where Al Duhail won 6-1.

Al Duhail coach Christopher Galtier will use the QSL Cup to prepare all of his players, including those returning from injuries or who have been on the bench. The Frenchman will be hoping for a repeat of their previous performance against Qatar SC. Qatar SC coach Yousef al-Noubi will focus on restoring the team's strength, ironing out flaws, and building on positives in preparation for upcoming matches.

Al Arabi, who finished as runners-up last season after losing to Umm Salal in the final, aim to use this tournament under coach Younes Ali to realign the team's trajectory

and adequately prepare the players before returning from the international break. This season, The Dream Team has yet to secure a victory in the league, recording two draws and one loss, resulting in a total of two points. They managed to draw against Shahania in the opening round, followed by another draw with Al Wakrah, and suffered a defeat against Al Sadd in the third round. Al Arabi has bolstered their squad by signing Jordanian forward Yazan al-Naimat, though he will be unavailable for this match as he is representing his national team. Several other international players have also joined their national teams during this period in preparation for upcoming international competitions.

Ahli, coached by Igor Biscan, has been delivering impressive performances since the season's outset in the league. This strong showing has enabled them to secure second place in the standings with seven points, trailing leaders Al Duhail by two points, having won two matches and drawn one. The team relies on striker Oumar Sekou, who has been outstanding in attack, alongside German midfielder Julian Draxler. The Brigadiers aim to demonstrate their preparedness through the QSL Cup and secure their inaugural victory in the tournament against Al Arabi.

### Fresh faces key to Carsley's 'stamp' on new-look England

**London:** England interim coach Lee Carsley said he wanted to put his stamp on the Three Lions after naming uncapped quartet Noni Madueke, Morgan Gibbs-White, Tino Livramento and Angel Gomes in his first squad yesterday.

Carsley has been appointed on a temporary basis for Nations League fixtures against Ireland and Finland next month. Gareth Southgate stepped down in July after England lost the Euro 2024 final to Spain. Chelsea winger Madueke, Lille midfielder Gomes and Nottingham Forest's Gibbs-White were all part of the England under-21 side that Carsley led to European Championship glory in 2023.

Newcastle full-back Livramento is included after his club teammate Kieran Trippier announced his retirement from international football. Real Madrid star Jude Bellingham is missing due to injury. Manchester City's Kyle Walker was left out, alongside other Euro 2024 squad members Ivan Toney, Aaron Ramsdale, Joe Gomez, Lewis Dunk and Adam Wharton. Under Southgate England reached two Euros finals, a World Cup semi-final and quarter-final. However, they have still not won a major tournament since the 1966 World Cup.

### LUKAKU SIGNS FOR NAPOLI FROM CHELSEA

Napoli have signed Romelu Lukaku from Chelsea, the Serie A club announced, ending the Belgian striker's extended period in limbo with the Blues. Owner Aurelio De Laurentiis confirmed the deal, worth a reported 30m euros, on social media with a photo of him signing his three-year contract.

Lukaku's move to Napoli keeps him in Italy, at his third club in as many years after loan spells at Inter Milan and Roma. The 31-year-old was the idol of Inter fans when he fired their team to the Serie A title in 2021 under new Napoli coach Antonio Conte before being sold for well over 100m euros to Chelsea that summer. But Lukaku flopped on his return to Stamford Bridge, and that massive fee left him in limbo as clubs refused to meet the Premier League club's valuations for a sale.

### SALAH OUT TO 'ENJOY' FINAL YEAR OF LIVERPOOL CONTRACT

Mohamed Salah said he is not focused on his future beyond this season, with less than a year to run on his contract at Liverpool. The Egyptian has written himself into the record books of the English giants, scoring 213 goals since joining in 2017.

Salah is just one of three huge players for Liverpool out of contract at the end of the season, along with captain Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold. "Before the season, I was just like 'I've got one year left, let's just enjoy it and don't think about the contract'," Salah said.

"I don't want to think about next year or the future, I just want to enjoy the last year and let's see. The most important thing is to take one day at a time and just be grateful to be here."

Salah has been consistently linked with a lucrative move to the Saudi Pro League. A year ago Liverpool reportedly rejected a bid of £150m from Al Ittihad. Salah signed a three-year deal in 2022 that reportedly made him the highest paid player in the club's history, worth more than £18m a year.

## Qatar finish with 23 medals at Arab Aquatic Championships

Qatar's swimming team won an impressive total of 23 medals at the 3rd Arab Aquatic Championships in Cairo. On Wednesday, the final day of the competition, the team secured eight additional medals, including 1 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze. Adam Abdullah clinched the gold medal in the 200m breaststroke for the 13-14 age group. The silver medals were earned by Mohamed Aziz in the 100m butterfly (15-16 age group), Tamim Mohamed in the 100m butterfly (17-18 age group), Abdullah al-Khalidi in the 200m breaststroke (17-18 age group), and the relay team of Abdullah al-Khalidi, Ahmed Mohamed, Abdullah Ahmed, and Tamim Mohamed in the 4x100m medley (17-18 age group). The bronze medals were won by Hamza Mahmoud in the 200m breaststroke (15-16 age group), Marwan Ahmed in the 100m backstroke (15-16 age group), and the relay team of Mohamed Aziz, Marwan Ahmed, Hamza Mahmoud, and Ziad Abdullah in the 4x100m medley (15-16 age group). Overall, Qatar's swimming team won 1 gold, 11 silver, and 11 bronze medals throughout the championship.

