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GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

Gauff rallies to keep US Open repeat bid alive; Alcaraz and Osaka crash out

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FOOTBALL

Rayyan, Duhail and Arabi register narrow wins in QSL Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Rayyan, Al Duhail and Al Arabi began their QSL Cup campaign with a victory yesterday.

Captain Rodrigo Tabata scored a crucial penalty as Rayyan edged past Al Shahania 1-0 in their Group A match at the Grand Hamad Stadium. In the later matches, Al Duhail got past Qatar SC 2-1, while Al Arabi beat Al Ahli 1-0.

At the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, Ibrahim Diallo put Duhail's ahead in the 21st minute, before Sebastian Soria scored the equaliser for Qatar SC at the end of the first half. In the second half, Mubarak Shanan scored in the 67th minute which turned out to be the winner for Duhail.

Meanwhile, Luis Martin scored the only goal of the match at the Suheim Bin Hamad Stadium as Arabi narrowly beat Ahli.

Earlier, Rayyan's Tabata scored from the spot in the 15th minute after he was fouled by Al Shahania's Naif al-Adhrami inside the box and the referee called for a penalty. Later in the 29th minute, Tabata had another chance at the rival goal but this time his diagonal kick just went past the left post. The Lions continued to hold sway and just before half time, Mohamed Surag broke through and provided Abdulrahman al-Harazi with a fine pass but the latter's



Al Rayyan captain Rodrigo Tabata (third right) is congratulated by teammates after scoring against Al Shahania in the QSL Cup at the Grand Hamad Stadium yesterday.

kick missed the target on the right.

Al Shahania came close to equalizing mid-way through the second half in the 70th minute but much to their bad luck

Abdulrahman al-Rayashi's firm strike hit the bottom of the left post.

Eight minutes later, Al Rayyan substitute Gabriel Pereira aimed at doubling the



Al Arabi's Luiz Martin (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Al Ahli.

lead but his shot was brilliantly staved off by Al Shahania goalkeeper Ebrahim Mordou. Al Shahania kept trying hard till late but their efforts could bore no fruits. A

free kick just outside the box, in dying moments of stoppage time, was also held well by Al Rayyan custodian Sami Dauleh to ensure victory for his side.

PREVIEW

Asia's hopefuls primed for final stretch of WC qualifiers

Qatar head into their Group A opener against UAE on the back of a 13-match unbeaten streak

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The finishing line is in sight for 18 of the Asian teams as they prepare to resume their qualifying journey for the FIFA World Cup 2026 on Thursday, September 5, 2024.

Scheduled to run until June 2025, the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 features three groups of six teams and guarantees qualification to the 23rd FIFA World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States for the top two finishers of each group. Two more berths are available via the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 Playoff, with an additional opportunity up for grabs at an Inter-Continental Playoff.

Having emerged from the second qualifying round that concluded in June, the 18-strong cast will now turn their attention to claiming one of the six slots on offer in this third round.

Three sides have reached this stage for the first time since the current format, which starting in 2015 combines qualification for both the AFC Asian Cup and FIFA World Cup in the first two rounds: Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan and Palestine. Along with four other teams, namely Bahrain, Jordan, Oman and Uzbekistan, they will aim to secure a FIFA World Cup appearance for the first time. Meanwhile, all of AFC's six representatives at the most recent edition in Qatar in 2022 - Australia, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia - are in contention to make an immediate return.

A taste of their first ever World Cup in the last edition will have whetted Qatar's appetite for more and the reigning Asian champions, who retained the crown in February after first winning it in 2019, head into their Group A opener off the back of a 13-match unbeaten streak (11 wins) in competitive internationals.

Their opponents at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan are the United Arab Emirates, whose sole qualification for the World Cup was in 1990. They will be looking for their first victory against Qatar since 2015 in what will be the 34th international meeting between the duo, which will kick off at 7pm.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan have the opportunity now to banish the ghosts of 2014 qualifying where they missed out on a direct berth on goal difference. The White



Qatar players train yesterday, ahead of their World Cup qualifier against United Arab Emirates on Thursday, September 5.

Wolves' Group A journey begins at 7pm at the Bunyodkor Stadium in Tashkent, where they will entertain North Korea in search of an eighth win in 11 international meetings. The Chollima, on the other hand, are seeking to add a third World Cup outing to their 1966 and 2010 participations.

Since June 2013, Iran have won 16 of 19 World Cup qualifiers on home soil and will aim to extend the Continent's current longest unbeaten home run when they square off against the Kyrgyzstan at 7:30pm in the second fixture of Group A.

Team Melli are targeting a fourth consecutive World Cup appearance and seventh overall, while the White Falcons have reached the third qualifying round at the fifth time of asking. The visitors are seeking a first ever international win against Iran, with all four previous meetings ending in defeat, when they travel to the Foolad Shahr Stadium in Fuladshahr for this match.

The very first match of this round takes place Down Under as Australia welcome Bahrain to the Robina Stadium to kick off Group C at 8:10pm. Set to play in the Gold Coast for the first time, the Socceroos are targeting a sixth consecutive qualification. They cruised through Round 2 with a perfect record, scoring 22 goals and conceding none, and will hope to seal a seventh World Cup appearance in a more straightforward fashion having taken the long route via the Inter-continental Playoffs for the last two editions.

On the contrary, the Bahrainis have



Qatar's forward Akram Afif trains at the Khalifa International Stadium.

twice fallen at the Playoff stage (2006, 2010) and will be eyeing their first international win against Australia, having lost all previous six meetings.

The only other team to progress from the previous round without conceding once, Japan are next to take to the pitch in Group C with a home fixture against China at the Saitama Stadium 2002. The 2002 World Cup co-hosts are aiming for an eighth qualification - which would be in

consecutive fashion - and are unbeaten in their last 13 qualifiers, winning 12 of those.

The visitors, whose sole appearance at the global showpiece was in 2002, came through the second round via a superior goal difference at the expense of Thailand. They will meet the Samurai Blue for the 40th time, with their last win against the four-time Asian Cup champions dating back to March 1998 - 16 matches ago - and kick-off is at 7:35pm local time.

Having appeared at the last two editions, Saudi Arabia are aiming to make it three on the trot and seven qualifications overall as they begin their Group C campaign at the King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah at 9pm against Indonesia. The Green Falcons have won 12 of 15 encounters to date, with the other three ending as draws.

The only Southeast Asian side still left standing, Indonesia are also the sole team from the first round to have made it this far. The Garuda have already chalked up five wins, their most ever in a single qualifying campaign, and are dreaming of a World Cup debut - their participation in 1938, as the Dutch East Indies, was pre-independence.

With 11 World Cup involvements to date, South Korea are unmatched in Asia and will be expected to extend their streak. The Taeguk Warriors, who last suffered a home defeat in qualifying in 2013, will face Palestine for the first time in Seoul at 8pm for their Group B opener.

Four appearances in the second round were the furthest that the away side had ever progressed prior to this edition and the Lions of Canaan, who enjoyed a breakthrough Asian Cup Qatar 2023 with their first ever win and Knockout Stage qualification, are hoping to make more history.

The second Group B fixture takes place at the Basra International Stadium, where Iraq will continue their hunt for a second World Cup qualification since their 1986 debut. The Lions of Mesopotamia emerged from the second-round with a perfect record - the first time they had won six qualifying matches in a row since 1993 - and will welcome Oman at 7pm for a 30th international meeting. Each of their last five meetings have ended in draws; the visitors have never won in Iraq, losing on six out of seven previous occasions.

Targeting a historic World Cup qualification, Jordan go head to head with Kuwait in the third Group B tie at 9pm at the Amman International Stadium. Buoyed by a stunning run to their first Asian Cup final at Qatar 2023, the home side will aim to erase the hurt of falling at the Inter-continental Playoff hurdle in 2014 as they face the Kuwaitis for a 29th time. The latter, whose sole World Cup appearance came in 1982, will have to beat Jordan for the first time since 2014 if they are to make a winning start.

CRICKET

Atkinson's maiden ton puts England in control

England lead by 256 runs after second day as Sri Lanka bundled out for 196

AFP
London

Gus Atkinson scored a dashing maiden century before England strengthened their grip on the second Test against Sri Lanka at Lord's yesterday.

Atkinson's sparkling 118 helped take England to 427 all out in their first innings after Joe Root had made a masterful 143 on Thursday to equal the England record of 33 Test hundreds held by Alastair Cook. Sri Lanka then collapsed to 87-6 on the second day. But Kamindu Mendis, fresh from a fine 113 in Sri Lanka's five-wicket loss in the first Test at Old Trafford, made an admirable 74 to prevent complete humiliation before he was last man out in a total of 196.

All of England's pace attack took two wickets each, Matthew Potts returning figures of 2-19 in 11 overs and Chris Woakes 2-21 in 13.

Sri Lanka were 231 runs behind but stand-in England captain Ollie Pope did not enforce the follow-on, with the hosts 25-1 in their second innings at stumps - an overall lead of 256 as they looked to go 2-0 up in a three-match series.

Ben Duckett was 15 not out with Pope, having managed just three single-figure scores since replacing the injured Ben Stokes as skipper, two not out after deciding against shielding himself from the new ball with a nightwatchman.

But the day belonged to Atkinson as he cemented his love affair with Lord's.

The 26-year-old, whose previous highest first-class score was 91 for Surrey against a Sri Lanka Development XI in 2022, only made his Test debut against the West Indies, also at Lord's, last month.

Atkinson marked that occasion with 12 wickets (7-45 and 5-61) to etch his name on the famed Lord's dressing room honours boards reserved for bowlers who take five or more wickets in a Test innings and 10 or more in a match.

Few would have backed Atkinson to get on the equivalent honours board recognising those who score Test hundreds at the 'Home of Cricket' - a feat that proved beyond such star batsmen as India's Sachin Tendulkar, West Indies' Brian Lara and Australia's Ricky Ponting. Atkinson was 74 not out overnight in a Thursday stumps total of 358-7.

No 8 Atkinson carried on from where he



England's Guy Atkinson celebrates after dismissing Sri Lanka's Dinesh Chandimal on day two of the second Test at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)

left off, hitting two fours off yesterday's first two balls, as he leg-glanced and cover-drove paceman Lahiru Kumara leg-glanced for a pair of textbook boundaries.

But to the third he was given out lbw, only for Australian umpire Paul Reiffel's decision to be reversed by a review indicating the ball would have missed leg stump.

Atkinson went to his century in storybook fashion, driving Kumara down the ground into the pavilion for another four - his 11th in a century completed in just 103 balls and also featuring four sixes.

A spectacular innings came to a spectacular end when Atkinson mistimed a pull off

an Asitha Fernando bouncer and was brilliantly caught by a diving Milan Rathnayake as he launched himself towards the rope.

Atkinson walked off to a rousing reception, having faced just 115 balls.

Fernando ended the innings by dismissing Olly Stone to secure his place on the honours boards with a return of 5-102 in 21 overs. Sri Lanka openers Nishan Madushka and Dimuth Karunaratne then both played on for seven before wickets continued to tumble. But in-form left-hander Mendis, again batting curiously low in the order at No 7, hooked three sixes off recalled quick Stone.

SCOREBOARD

England 1st Innings (overnight 358-7)

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 c Rathnayake b A Fernando	118
M. Potts c Madushka b A Fernando	21
O. Stone c Ka Mendis b A Fernando	15
S. Bashir not out	7
Extras (b8, lb4, nb1)	13
Total (all out, 102 overs, 460 mins)	427

Fall of wickets: 1-33 (Lawrence), 2-42 (Pope), 3-82 (Duckett), 4-130 (Brook), 5-192 (Smith), 6-216 (Woakes), 7-308 (Root), 8-393 (Potts), 9-420 (Atkinson), 10-427 (Stone)

Bowling: A Fernando 24-2-102-5; Rathnayake 23-2-89-2 (1nb); Kumara 23-2-101-2; Jayasuriya 29-2-96-1; Ka Mendis 3-0-27-0

Sri Lanka 1st Innings

N. Madushka b Woakes	7
D. Karunaratne b Stone	7
P. Nissanka c Potts b Stone	12
A. Mathews b Potts	22
D. Chandimal c Lawrence b Atkinson	23
D. de Silva c Brook b Potts	0
Ka Mendis c Woakes b Atkinson	74
M. Rathnayake c Smith b Woakes	19
P. Jayasuriya b Bashir	8
L. Kumara run out (Pope)	0
A. Fernando not out	1
Extras (b8, lb13, nb1, w1)	23
Total (all out, 55.3 overs, 269 mins)	196

Fall of wickets: 1-18 (Madushka), 2-32 (Karunaratne), 3-35 (Nissanka), 4-83 (Mathews), 5-83 (De Silva), 6-87 (Chandimal), 7-118 (Rathnayake), 8-153 (Jayasuriya), 9-195 (Kumara), 10-196 (Ka Mendis)

Bowling: Woakes 13-4-21-2 (1w); Atkinson 8-3-2-40-2; Stone 13-0-70-2 (1nb); Potts 11-4-19-2; Bashir 7-1-21-1; Root 3-0-4-0

England 2nd Innings

B. Duckett not out	15
D. Lawrence c Madushka b Kumara	7
O. Pope not out	2
Extras (lb1)	1
Total (1 wkt, 7 overs, 36 mins)	25

To bat: J Root, H Brook, J Smith, C Woakes, G Atkinson, M Potts, O Stone, S Bashir

Fall of wickets: 1-22 (Lawrence)
Bowling: A Fernando 3-0-12-0; Kumara 3-0-10-1; Rathnayake 1-0-2-0

Match position: England lead by 256 runs after day two

Heavy rains wash out first day's action in Rawalpindi Test

Rawalpindi: The opening day's action in Pakistan's second Test against Bangladesh was washed out yesterday following incessant rain and a wet outfield at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

The toss could not take place and the umpires inspected conditions around noon before calling off the day's play.

Smarting from a 10-wicket loss in the series opener at the same venue, Pakistan are keen to level the two-Test series but the inclement weather kept the teams off the field with more rain forecast for later in the day.

After their all-pace play backfired in the opening test, Pakistan included leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed in their playing XI and dropped speedster Shaheen Afridi.

Pakistan will also be looking at Babar Azam's recent slump. His low scores recently has coincided with Pakistan's declining Test form, causing growing concern. While Pakistan is accustomed to player slumps, it's perplexing why their best batter is struggling to replicate his past success. Despite being relieved of captaincy duties, Babar's issues persist. His recent dismissals in the first Test were due to basic errors, such as a squeeze down leg side and a drive without footwork.



English umpires Richard Kettleborough (right) and Michael Gough inspect the pitch as it rains on the first day of the second Test between Pakistan and Bangladesh at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

PARALYMPICS

British swimmers take spoils to stay on China tails in overall medal table

AFP
Paris

British swimmers Tully Kearney and Maisie Summers-Newton stormed to gold medals on the second day of competition at the Paralympics in Paris yesterday.

Kearney and Summers-Newton's efforts briefly brought Britain level with Paralympic heavyweights China in the overall medals table on six golds, but the Chinese then moved back ahead at the top of the standings. Kearney, 27, who was born with cerebral palsy, defended her title in the 100m freestyle S5, less than 24 hours after also winning the 200m freestyle.

"To retain my title feels incredible," she said. "It was such a late night and early start and not long to rest in between. "It was really hard for all of us who swam last night to keep the energy up," she added.

Summers-Newton, who was born with achondroplasia, a condition that affects the development of bones, also held on to her title from the Tokyo Paralympics three years ago but in the women's 200m individual medley SM6. "I was really nervous, it's something that's come from Tokyo," she told reporters. "There's a lot of pressure being Paralympic champion," the qualified primary teacher added.

In other events in the La Defense Arena pool, Belarusian Ihar Boki, forced to compete as a neutral Paralympic athlete because of his country's role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, clinched an 18th gold medal in the 100m backstroke S13 final. "It's a little sad that you can't see your own flag," he told reporters. "But everyone knows us, everyone supports us," he added.

Elsewhere, Hong Yang added a third swimming medal for China as he won the 200m individual medley SM6. Ami Omer Dadoan followed up his Paralympic record time in the heats of the 100m freestyle S4 with gold in the final.

The biggest cheers of session came for home favourites Hector Denayer and Alex Portal however. The deafening crowd was at full voice as Denayer, who is missing his left hand, secured silver in the men's 100m breaststroke S9 final and Portal finished third behind Boki.

"I've got a problem with my sight, I'm short-sighted so I can't see my time on the big screen," Denayer said. "I didn't know what I'd done, to be honest, I just knew I was on the podium because I heard the fans."



Women's 200m Individual Medley SM6 Gold medalist Maisie Summers-Newton (centre) of Britain celebrates with silver medalist Ellie Marks (left) of United States and bronze medalist Daomin Liu of China at the Paris 2024 Paralympics in Nanterre, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

The raucous encouragement from the French crowd resembled the scenes at the same venue during the Olympics each time Leon Marchand swam, on his way to four gold medals. China ended the night on a high with victory in the mixed 4x50m freestyle relay.

Giant Iranian sitting volleyball legend Morteza Mehrzad, who stands 8ft 1in (2.46m) tall, helped his country to a comfortable 3-0 win against Ukraine as they aim for a fourth Paralympic title out of the last five Games.

In front of an enthusiastic Stade de France crowd of around 45,000, Brazil's Petrucio Ferreira dos Santos, known as the fastest Paralympian in the world, won a third consecutive 100m title in the T47 class in a time of 10.68sec despite a track dotted with puddles after heavy rain. Ferreira, who at the age of two lost his left arm below the elbow in an accident with a grinding machine, won gold medals in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 and smashed the para-world record in 2022 when he posted a time of 10.29sec. His gold medal was Brazil's fourth of these Games.



Brazil's Petrucio Ferreira dos Santos, known as the fastest Paralympian in the world, won a third consecutive 100m title in the T47 class in a time of 10.68sec despite a track dotted with puddles after heavy rain. (Reuters)

CYCLING / VUELTA A ESPANA

Woods takes stage 13 as O'Connor's lead slashed

AFP
Madrid

Veteran Canadian climber Michael Woods powered to victory on stage 13 of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday as Primoz Roglic slashed nearly two minutes off Ben O'Connor's overall lead.

Israel-Premier Tech rider Woods cut loose from the break-away with 4.5 kilometres to go of a testing 176km route from Lugo to Puerto de Ancares, which included four categorised climbs.

The 37-year-old made his move on the last of the climbs, with some stretches at a punishing 15 percent, and rolled across the line 45 seconds ahead of Swiss rider Mauro Schmid with Spaniard Marc Soler completing the day's podium.

It marked a fourth grand tour stage victory for Woods, his third in the Vuelta. The other victory came during last year's Tour de France. "I'm over the moon," a thrilled Woods told *Eurosport* at the finish yesterday. "I've had a difficult season. I've been unlucky, I've had mechanical problems, I've crashed at the wrong times. It's a great achievement to win today. It was a very long four kilometres on my own."

O'Connor, who rides for AG2R-Decathlon, started the stage with a 3min 16sec lead over the Slovenian Roglic from Red Bull-Bora-hansgrohe.

But, on Wednesday, the Australian struggled in the latter stages as Roglic turned the screw. Then he dropped 37sec to Roglic but yesterday the damage was even greater as he dropped almost two minutes.

"I was pretty cooked," said O'Connor. "I wasn't going anywhere in a hurry today, so sad



Michael Woods celebrates after winning the stage 13 of the Vuelta a Espana, a 176km race between Lugo and Puerto de Ancares in Spain. (AFP)

times. But I guess I'm still in red so at least that's a good thing."

O'Connor will head into today's 14th stage - the longest of the race at 200km between Villafraanca del Bierzo and Villablino - with a lead of 1min 21sec which is now looking very vulnerable.

"Who knows what will happen the next days," he said.

"Tomorrow I'll do my best to recover, try to have another day in the red jersey and see how Sunday goes."

With every passing stage it seems inconceivable that Roglic will not chalk up a fourth Vuelta victory when the race ends in Madrid on September 8.

But with another eight stages to come, the Slovenian is taking nothing for granted. "It's nice to gain something," said Roglic.

"It's nice when it goes good but these hard efforts, I still feel it. Still have to go day by day."

"I don't feel completely confident yet so we (Red Bull) were a bit conservative. Just have to take it day by day and see how it goes."

TENNIS / US OPEN

Gauff rallies to keep title bid alive, Osaka goes out

'I knew today was going to be a tough match - she's a fighter'

AFP
New York

Coco Gauff survived late-match drama to keep her US Open title defence alive with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory over Elina Svitolina yesterday.

Gauff's third-set surge had carried her to a 5-2 lead and triple match point, but she delivered a pair of double faults and Svitolina saved another with a blazing backhand on the way to a break.

But Gauff broke Svitolina at love in the next game to lock up the win.

In a tense, physical encounter on Arthur Ashe Stadium, Gauff regrouped after a rocky end to the first set saw Svitolina break at love for a 5-3 lead and pocket the opener with a love game.

Gauff gained her first break of the match on her fourth opportunity for a 4-2 lead in the second and held on to force the third.

"I knew today was going to be a tough match - she's a fighter," Gauff said, saying more aggression on her forehand and fewer backhand errors helped her turn things around.

Spain's Paula Badosa had to fight back for a 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (10/8) victory over Romanian qualifier Elena-Gabriela Ruse, who had toppled Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejčíková in the second round.

In another clash, China's Zheng Qinwen shook off slow starts in the opening two rounds of the US Open and took down unseeded German Jule Niemeier 6-2 6-1 at the US Open yesterday.

The Olympic gold medalist and 7th seed fired off eight aces and seized five break points on the



Coco Gauff of the US celebrates after beating Elina Svitolina of Ukraine on day five of the 2024 US Open at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. (USA TODAY Sports)

Grandstand hard court in her first straight-sets victory of the year's final major.

Niemeier, nursing a foot injury, committed five double faults and held serve in just three games of the match that wrapped up quickly in an hour and 21 minutes.

Zheng was sharp from the start, blasting two aces to open the second game and breaking Niemeier's serve in the fifth to seize control of the match and energize scores of Chinese chanting "jiayou" from the stands.

A cross-court forehand blast captured a second service break for the 2024 Australian Open runner-up as Niemeier's forehand return

found the net. Zheng grabbed seven straight points to open the second set and cruised to the win, avenging a third-round loss to the German at her first US Open in 2022 and setting up a fourth-round clash with either Donna Vekic or Peyton Stearns, who play later on Friday.

"Finally, it's the first match I won in two sets... It's not (been) easy for me to play after Olympic Games," said Zheng, who has noted previous struggles with focus after deep tournament runs.

"I'm starting to find my tennis and I start to play better and better."

The enthusiastic support from

Chinese fans also helped. "Jiayou, means 'come on' in English... In Chinese, saying jiayou to me, I feel a lot of energy and I feel it really brings me up."

Meanwhile Naomi Osaka's return to the US Open ended in the second round, but the two time champion said she felt "grateful" as she departed in the wake of a straight-sets loss to Karolina Muchova.

"It was really fun," Osaka said after falling 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) to the 52nd-ranked Czech under the lights on Arthur Ashe Stadium. "I felt very grateful that there were so many people cheering. I missed it a lot."

Alcaraz dumped out of US Open by Van de Zandschulp



Botic van de Zandschulp (right) from the Netherlands shakes hands with Carlos Alcaraz of Spain. (Reuters)

NEW YORK: Former champion Carlos Alcaraz's Grand Slam winning streak came to a screeching halt at the US Open on Thursday as the Spanish third seed was thumped 6-1 7-5 6-4 by unseeded Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp in the second round.

An off-colour Alcaraz never recovered from a shaky start and made unforced errors throughout at a stunned Arthur Ashe Stadium as the inspired Van de Zandschulp snapped the French Open and Wimbledon champion's 15-match winning run at the majors.

It was the Paris Olympics silver medalist's earliest exit at a Grand Slam since Wimbledon in 2021. "I don't know what to say right now. First of all, I think he played great," Alcaraz said. "He didn't make a lot of mistakes that I thought he was going to do so I was confused a little bit. I didn't know how to manage that."

The 21-year-old was on the back foot early on as Van de Zandschulp claimed the opening

three games with some resolute defending from the back of the court, and the Dutchman broke again in the sixth game en route to taking the first set.

Alcaraz produced a stunning forehand pass to hold serve in the first game of the next set but the four-times major winner's struggles to close out points resurfaced as Van de Zandschulp broke for a 2-1 lead.

A tactical tweak to return serve from deeper helped Alcaraz break back immediately but the 2022 champion gifted his opponent another break with a double fault and Van de Zandschulp went on to comfortably double his advantage in the match.

After briefly leaving the court before the third set, Alcaraz found himself in deeper trouble after a wayward forehand handed Van de Zandschulp a break.

He hit back immediately and found his smile again, but world number 74 Van de Zandschulp got his nose in front and completed a stunning upset on serve.

MOTORSPORT

Hamilton leads Norris in second practice



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton drives during first practice session, ahead of the Italian Grand Prix at Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, in Monza, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Monza, Italy

Lewis Hamilton was fastest in Formula One practice for the Italian Grand Prix yesterday after his likely successor at Mercedes, 18-year-old Italian Kimi Antonelli, crashed heavily in the opening session.

The seven times world champion ended the day at Monza with a best lap of one minute 20.738 seconds, 0.003 faster than McLaren's Lando Norris who won by a hefty margin in the Netherlands last Sunday.

Carlos Sainz was third in an upgraded Ferrari at the team's home track, suggesting another tight battle at the front.

Norris is the closest rival to Red Bull's championship leader Max Verstappen, albeit 70 points behind going into the weekend at the "Temple of Speed" near Milan.

Verstappen had led practice one with a lap of one minute 21.676 seconds, nearly a second faster than his benchmark at the same stage last year, but dropped to 14th in the later session without completing a qualifying simulation.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was second fastest in the first session.

Practice two was temporarily red-flagged when Haas's Kevin Magnussen hit the barriers.

Antonelli, who turned 18 last Sunday, brought the first session to a halt after 10 minutes when the rear of the Mercedes snapped out of line at high-speed Parabolica and the car spun off into the barriers.

Replacing race regular George Russell for the session on a track completely resurfaced from last year, he had made an encouraging start with a clean first lap as the early pacesetter.

"Sorry," he said over the radio before getting out and walking away.

'Kimi, all good'

"Kimi, all good," replied team boss Toto Wolff, who later assured the media that the accident would have no bearing on the team's driver decision.

Antonelli went to the medical centre for checks and the team got the car ready for the second session, with Russell sixth fastest after a delayed start.

"It's unfortunate it ended the way it did. But

he (Antonelli) was on the limit, pushing the limit from lap one, that's always good to see and it's all part of the learning curve," team spokesman Bradley Lord told Sky Sports television.

Antonelli is expected to be confirmed by Mercedes imminently as the replacement for Hamilton, a five times winner at Monza who is moving to Ferrari at the end of the season.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri ended the day fourth fastest, after the Australian was sixth in session one, with Leclerc fifth.

"For us, it is no different to always," said McLaren principal Andrea Stella after first practice. "There will be four teams in contention to win the race and practice one has shown some outliers as well. It could be some midfield cars join the party at the top."

Argentine Franco Colapinto made his debut as a Williams race driver, after the team dropped under-performing American Logan Sargeant, and was 17th in both sessions.

Colapinto also lost control at Parabolica late in the first session and went into the gravel, but kept the car going and returned to the pits.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez was ninth and 15th in the sessions.

MOTOGP

Marquez sets record time in Aragon practice

AFP
Alcañiz, Spain

Marc Marquez ruled practice yesterday at the Aragon MotoGP, the six-time champion lowering the track record to raise hopes of ending a three-year losing streak.

The Spaniard, already a five-time winner at the circuit in the top category, led the way with a fastest lap of 1min 45.801sec.

Marquez has enjoyed an upturn in form since recovering from a series of injury-marred seasons and switching from Honda to ride this year for Ducati's satellite Gresini team.

The 31-year-old topped the times for this 12th round of 2024 by 0.272s from Aprilia's Aleix Espargaro.

Marquez is moving up to the factory Ducati team next season to race alongside double world champion Francesco Bagnaia.

Bagnaia, who leads this year's championship by five points from Jorge Martin, made up ground towards the end of the day to be



Ducati Spanish rider Alex Marquez in action during the MotoGP afternoon practice session of the Grand Prix of Aragon at the Motorland circuit in Alcañiz yesterday. (AFP)

placed sixth. The resurfaced track proved tricky with a number of riders hitting the deck including former champion Fabio Quartararo, who parted company with his Yamaha.

The 10 quickest riders go straight

through to today's qualifying session which shapes the first four rows of the grid for the sprint race and Sunday's main event.

This group are joined by the fastest two in today's first qualifying stint.

ARAGON MOTOGP PRACTICE RESULTS

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 1min 45.801sec.
2. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) at 0.272sec.
3. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 0.316.
4. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 0.578.
5. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 0.605.
6. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 0.790.
7. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) 0.904.
8. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 0.931.
9. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 1.039.
10. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 1.054.
11. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 1.083.
12. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 1.131.
13. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 1.145.
14. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 1.228.
15. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 1.230.
16. Jack Miller (AUS/KTM) 1.468.
17. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 1.479.
18. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 1.501.
19. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 1.599.
20. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 1.600.
21. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 2.042.
22. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR) 2.640.

FOCUS

QVA chief al-Kuwari retains AVC position

QNA
Bangkok

Ali Ghanem al-Kuwari, President of the Qatar, and West Asian Volleyball Federations, retained his position as Executive Vice-President of the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC), and won membership of the International Volleyball Federation after the elections held during the 25th General Assembly of AVC.

The elections, which took place in the Thai capital, resulted in victory of Ramon Suzara of the Philippines, as president of the AVC, during the vote in which 63 Asian federations out of 65 participated.

Only two AVC federations were absent from attendance.

During the AVC General Assembly, it was announced that Princess Ayah Bint Faisa, President of the Jordanian Volleyball Federation, is set to join the Board



Ali Ghanem al-Kuwari

of Directors of the Asian and International Volleyball Federations after winning membership for West Asia region.

Engineer Ibrahim al-Muqbali, Chairman of the Oman Volleyball Federation, was also appointed as a member of AVC Board of Directors and was approved as a first reserve for membership in the International Volleyball Federation.

PREMIER LEAGUE

City have taken risk over Alvarez exit, says Guardiola

Alvarez moved to Atletico in an £81mn deal earlier this month

AFP
London

Pep Guardiola admits Manchester City have risked making a "mistake" by letting Julian Alvarez join Atletico Madrid without replacing the Argentine striker. Alvarez moved to Atletico in an £81mn deal earlier in August after Guardiola accepted his wish to leave in search of more regular playing time. Erling Haaland is well established as City's first-choice striker but Guardiola had initially hoped to replace Alvarez to ensure there was sufficient depth behind the Norway star.

The Premier League champions were linked with FC Copenhagen's Orri Oskarsson and Celtic's Kyogo Furuhashi, but neither deal had come to fruition in the final hours before the transfer window.

"I'm happy with the squad. We didn't expect Julian to leave, although he had conversations a long time ago with other clubs and his agent, so it could happen and in the end it happened," Guardiola said. "We saw what we have, if we have many injuries it will be a problem, but in a few months Oscar Bobb will be back (from injury) and Phil (Foden) is in that position, McAtee can play in that position, Gundogan can play in that position. They are different players to Erling of course. Maybe it is a mistake, I don't know but I don't like leaving players without playing for a long time."

In keeping with Guardiola's preference for a small squad, German midfielder Ilkay Gundogan's return to the club from Barcelona and the signing of Brazilian forward Savinho from Troyes have been City's only close-season deals. James McAtee has also rejoined City after spending the last two seasons on loan at Sheffield United.

Savinho has made an immediate impact for City, providing his first assist for Kevin De Bruyne's goal in the win over Ipswich last weekend, while Gundogan came off the bench to make his second City debut. After one season at Barcelona, Guardiola said the 33-year-old has slotted in as though he had never been away from Manchester.

Guardiola is hoping for reinforcements for today's Premier League trip to West Ham, with Rodri back in training and Mateo Kovacic recovering from a knee injury.

England forward Foden is expected to miss out again through illness. Foden was included in Lee Carsley's first England squad on Thursday along with Rico Lewis, John Stones and Jack Grealish, but there was no place for Kyle Walker, who is yet to feature for City this season.

ARSENAL HIT BY MERINO INJURY BLOW
Arsenal's new signing Mikel Merino has been ruled out for several weeks with a shoulder



Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne is all smiles during a training session yesterday.

injury that will force the Spain midfielder to wait for his debut. Gunners boss Mikel Arteta revealed Merino suffered the injury setback in his first training session with the club when team-mate Gabriel Magalhaes accidentally fell on him. Merino only joined Arsenal from Real Sociedad earlier this week and was in contention to make his first appearance in today's Premier League clash with Brighton. Instead Merino, who came off the bench to help Spain win the Euro 2024 final against England, will spend his first few weeks in north London on the treatment table.

"It's very unfortunate. Yesterday (Thursday) he had a collision and he's got a shoulder injury and it looks like he'll be out for a few weeks," Arteta said. "It was in his first session with us. It's really bad luck, we were all excited, everything was looking good. He landed on the floor, Gabriel fell on top of him and it looks like he has a small fracture. He was in so much pain, we have to see. He'll do more tests which will have more conclusive answers."

Meanwhile, Arsenal agreed a loan deal for Bournemouth's goalkeeper Neto to serve as David Raya's back-up. England keeper Aaron

Ramsdale left Arsenal to join Southampton on Friday after losing his place to Raya last season. Arsenal have won their opening two games of the season as they look to finally end Manchester City's reign as champions after finishing second for the last two years. But Brighton could pose a tricky test for Arteta's men, with the Seagulls' new manager Fabian Hurler masterminding a pair of victories including last weekend's surprise success against Manchester United.

"We try to prepare like every manager and team. We have to do the same against a team tomorrow who are doing really well against a coach who brings a new regime in what will be a tough match," Arteta said.

FIXTURES (ALL TIMES GMT)
Today: Arsenal v Brighton (1130), Brentford v Southampton, Everton v Bournemouth, Ipswich v Fulham, Leicester v Aston Villa, Nottingham Forest v Wolves (all 1400), West Ham v Man City (1630)
Tomorrow: Chelsea v Crystal Palace, Newcastle v Tottenham (both 1230), Man Utd v Liverpool (1500)

LA LIGA

No excuse for Real's slow start to the season: Ancelotti

Reuters
Madrid

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday there was no excuse for his side's slow start to the La Liga season after the team fought back to rescue a 1-1 draw at lowly Las Palmas on Thursday thanks to a Vinicius Jr goal late in the second half.

Ancelotti said he expected his team to play better together and blamed himself, saying that he needs to work harder and do a better job. "It is clear that we are struggling to find the soundness of last season. But we must not look for excuses. The schedule is tight and we have to recover quickly, because on Sunday we have another game," Ancelotti told a news conference. "I need to have a clearer strategy, to give the players more clarity in what I want. It's costing us more than we thought. We have to work and concentrate on the path we want to take."

After only one win in three matches to start the season, last year's La Liga and Champions League winners Real are fifth in the standings with five points, four behind leaders Barcelona. Ancelotti was asked about Kylian Mbappe, who joined Madrid in July from Paris St Germain but has yet to score in La Liga, but the coach refused to criticise individual players.

"Our game has been slow. There is not much mobility and the strikers are receiving the ball with the opposing teams already close. When we don't have the ball, we leave too many spaces between the lines," Ancelotti said. "I don't think it's a mental problem, because the team trains well. It's just that sometimes you don't find the best way to play... Things are not going well and we have to fix it soon."

FLICK SEES ROOM FOR BARCELONA IMPROVEMENT
Barcelona can still improve, despite starting the La Liga season with three wins out of three, new manager Hansi Flick said. Barca have opened up a lead at the top of the league standings on nine points, two ahead of second-placed Villarreal and three from Celta Vigo in third. A revamped Atletico Madrid and Real are fourth and fifth on five points.

"It's going to be a long season and I'm not focused on the opponents. I'm focused on Barca, we've done well in the first three games and hopefully tomorrow we'll be victorious," Flick said ahead of today's home game against Real Valladolid.

"The players are fit and rested, they are training really well and I'm pleased. We believe in our strength and in our idea of the game. Of course, there are many things we need to improve, like being focused from the start of the matches and not wait 10 minutes to get going. To be confident from minute one, that's what I expect from the players. It sounds like something basic but it's part of the hard core of our idea of the game. The quality of this team is sky high, fantastic."

Barcelona had to fight back to win after conceding first-half goals at Valencia and at Rayo Vallecano and needed a late Robert Lewandowski winner to break the deadlock at home against Athletic Bilbao.

FIXTURES (ALL TIMES GMT)
Today: Barcelona v Valladolid (1500), Athletic Bilbao v Atletico Madrid (1700), Espanyol v Rayo Vallecano (1715), Valencia v Villarreal, Leganes v Mallorca (1930)
Tomorrow: Alaves v Palmas, Osasuna v Celta Vigo (1500), Sevilla v Girona (1700), Getafe v Real Sociedad (1715), Real Madrid v Real Betis (1930)



Real Madrid's French forward Kylian Mbappe (left) vies for the ball with Las Palmas' Scott McKenna during the La Liga match at the Gran Canaria stadium in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, on Thursday. (AFP)

United to face Mourinho's Fenerbahce in new-look Europa League

Monaco: Manchester United will travel to Turkish giants Fenerbahce, now coached by Jose Mourinho, among their eight games in the league phase of the new-look Europa League, the draw for which took place in Monaco yesterday.

The Old Trafford club won the Europa League with Mourinho as coach in 2017. He recently became coach of Fenerbahce, who were knocked out of the Champions League in the third qualifying round. United will also notably play at home to 2022 Europa League runners-up Rangers and go to Portugal to play Porto, another of Mourinho's old sides.

Tottenham Hotspur, the other English

representative in the competition, will also take on Rangers, in their case away from home. In addition, Ange Postecoglou's side will play at home to Roma and go to Istanbul to face Turkish champions Galatasaray.

The format of the Europa League has changed for this season, along the same lines of the new-look Champions League. The number of clubs in the competition proper is now 36, all of whom are placed into one league but split into four pots of seeds. Each participant plays eight games, facing two clubs from each pot, one at home and one away.

For Rangers, other opponents will

include Lyon at home, Olympiakos away, and Nice away in France. Other clubs involved in the competition include former European champions in Ajax as well as FCSB of Romania, who won the 1986 European Cup as Steaua Bucharest.

Eintracht Frankfurt, who beat Rangers in the final two years ago, are present along with Athletic Bilbao, whose stadium will host this season's final. The top eight at the end of the league phase - which runs until the end of January - will advance to the last 16, while the teams finishing from ninth to 24th will advance to a play-off round to decide the remaining last-16 spots.

The bottom 12 in the league phase will be eliminated, with no clubs dropping down into the Conference League ahead of the knockouts, and no teams parachuting down from the Champions League as in the past. UEFA have said that dates for all fixtures will be announced today.

The first group games will be played on September 25 and 26, a week after the opening matchday of the Champions League. This season's Europa League final will be played in Bilbao on May 21 next year. Atalanta won the trophy last season, beating Bayer Leverkusen in the final in Dublin.

Tough Leipzig clash will test Leverkusen's nerves: Alonso

Munich: Bayer Leverkusen are not in their best form and will need to improve to get a win in their Bundesliga clash with fellow Champions League side RB Leipzig, manager Xabi Alonso said yesterday.

After a 3-2 league win at Borussia Moenchengladbach, Leverkusen had a narrow 1-0 victory at fourth tier FC Carl Zeiss Jena in the first round of the DFB Pokal on Tuesday, and Alonso said his double-winning side are far from their best selves. "We know that we can play better and have not yet reached our top level yet. We need to work on that," Alonso told reporters ahead of today's home game. "That's why we want to carry on working. It's a process to achieve that level but it's our aim and we're focused on that. And I'm confident we can do it too. The players know exactly what they have to do. We have a good flow in our game and we have to maintain that so that we can work both with and without the ball."

Leverkusen and Leipzig will both play Liverpool, Inter Milan and Atletico Madrid in the revamped Champions League, and Alonso conceded that Saturday's match could be a test of his side's potential in that competition. Leverkusen captain Lukas Hradecky has been ruled out due to illness and will be replaced Matej Kovar in goal, Alonso confirmed.

Intisar De Monlau wins French Arabian Breeders' Challenge



Winner of the Group 3 (PA) Sheikh Mansoor Festival - Prix Razzia III on debut, the Purebred Arabian is trained by Mme Jean-François Bernard and remains unbeaten. Ridden by Maxime Guyon, the three-year-old made all at a slow pace. Entering the final straight, the superb filly kicked clear to win by a length and three quarters. Wala'a ran on for second while the favourite Lady De Faust held on in third. With this victory under her belt, Intisar De Monlau will be one of the favourites for the Qatar Arabian Trophy des Pouliches (Group 1 PA) in a few weeks.

