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Navarro into US Open semi-final after Badosa collapse



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Al Khor's goal this season is to achieve a better position: Rhaili

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CRICKET

Bangladesh beat Pakistan for historic Test series win

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QPC President Sheikh Abdulrahman visits Qatari delegation at Paris Paralympic Games



President of the Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC) Sheikh Abdulrahman bin Saud al-Thani met Qatar delegation at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games at the Paralympic Village yesterday. The president was briefed about the work carried out by administrative delegation to facilitate Team Qatar during their participation in the Games. He also met athletes Ali Arshad and Sara Masoud ensuring them QPC's full support as they seek medals. Sara will start her medal hunt in the women's shot put starting tomorrow, while wheelchair racer Ali, who finished sixth in men's 100m T34 on Monday, is gearing up for the 800m T34 event which will start on Friday.



FOOTBALL

Qatar take on UAE to resume World Cup campaign

Group A also includes Iran, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and North Korea

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Asian champions Qatar will host neighbouring United Arab Emirates (UAE) in their AFC World Cup 2026 qualifiers at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium tomorrow. Qatar, coached by Marquez Lopez, topped Group A in the previous phase of qualifiers and will now look to extend their unbeaten streak of 11 matches when they face the UAE, a regional powerhouse in football.

With feared strikers Akram Afif and Almoz Ali ready to lead the challenge, Qatar will be eager to extend their dominance of their rivals since 2015. Qatar famously beat the UAE 4-1 in their semi-final win during their glorious Asian Cup title win in 2019.

Qatar are in Group A alongside Iran, Uzbekistan, the UAE, Kyrgyzstan and North Korea. In their last 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying clash before heading for the summer break, Qatar beat India 2-1 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha in June.

Prior to that win, Qatar posted wins over Lebanon, Tajikistan, China, Palestine, Uzbekistan, Iran Jordan (all Asian Cup matches in Jan and Feb) followed by a couple of wins over Kuwait (home and away) in March and a goalless draw against Afghanistan in June.

Coached by Paulo Bento, the UAE will be looking for a positive result after naming a squad of players who ply their trade in the English and French football leagues.

Junior Ndiaye (Montpellier), goalkeeper Adli Mohamed (Southampton) and Mackenzie Hunt (Fleetwood Town) are part of the squad set to fly in today. The UAE will host Iran at Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain on September 10 in their second clash of this phase.

Qatar, ranked 34 on the FIFA computer, will be confident going into tomorrow's clash as the national team players have already appeared in three rounds of fiercely-contested Qatar Stars League games that began last month.

Lopez, who joined Qatar in December last year before leading them to Asian Cup title glory in Feb this year, will have a full roster for the Group A clash set to kick off at 7:00pm tomorrow.



Qatar players train at the Khalifa International Stadium.

The Qatar Football Association (QFA) yesterday announced more than seventy percent of tickets at the 45,032-capacity venue have been grabbed by the fans.

In the following games, Qatar will face North Korea on September 10 at the New Laos National Stadium in Laos. After a break of two months, Qatar will start the second leg by facing hosts UAE on November 19 before hosting North Korean on March 20, 2025. Qatar will take on Kyrgyzstan on March 25. The tie against Iran is on June 5, 2025. In the last match of the third stage, Qatar will battle Uzbekistan in Tashkent on June 10.

The 48-team 2026 FIFA World Cup will be played in the United States, Mexico, Canada.

KEY POINTS IN GROUP A CLASHES

- ▶ Group A features a solid team in Iran, often overlooked but capable of dominating the race to the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the US, Canada and Mexico.
- ▶ Qatar, despite their recent Asian Cup success, will look for a positive start against the UAE tomorrow.
- ▶ Uzbekistan, known for their heartbreaking near-misses, are eager to break through with a talented young side.
- ▶ Unpredictable teams like Kyrgyzstan and North Korea could pose challenges to Group A rivals.
- ▶ North Korea's isolation and limited exposure make them an intriguing squad.

SPOTLIGHT

China reign supreme in Paralympic pool with two clean sweeps

AFF
Paris

Paralympic heavyweights China dominated the swimming events yesterday by winning four golds and claiming two podium clean sweeps to extend their advantage on the overall medal table.

China's first one-two-three came in the men's 50m backstroke S5 as Yuan Weiyi took gold, Guo Jincheng silver and Wang Lichao bronze. The real highlight came in the women's race of the classification as world record holder Lu Dong defended her crown in emphatic fashion with He Shenggao in second place and Liu Yu third.

"When there is another strong swimmer behind you, you will be more motivated," Lu said. "Because you're all in China, and you will race every year, and then we will train together. It becomes even more advantageous," she added.

In total China secured four of the 15 golds on offer in Wednesday's late session at the La Defense Arena. Britain almost claimed a podium sweep of their own as Faye Rogers clinched gold and Callie-Ann Warrington silver in the women's 100m butterfly S10 to stay atop the swimming table.

Victory for Rogers came three

years after a car accident which left her with limited movement in her elbow. "It's a big full circle moment and I couldn't be prouder of how far I've come," she said. "Coming into para sport has been the best thing, I couldn't be more grateful for this journey and I have learned so much about myself. There are so many people who could benefit from para sport, it's just amazing," she added.

The biggest cheers of proceedings from a packed crowd came for home hopes Ugo Didier, Laurent Chardard and especially favourite Alex Portal. Portal was second to Ihar Boki who claimed his 21st Paralympic gold of a remarkable career in the men's 200m individual medley SM13. The 22-year-old added a third silver as well as a bronze to his account in the pool, located just to the north of his hometown of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. "21 medals for him, he's a monster," Portal told France Television. "So, I'm really proud to be close to his standard," he added.

US swimmer Leanne Smith went one better than in Tokyo by winning the women's 100m freestyle S3 and Italy's much-fancied squad claimed two golds with in-form Carlotta Gilli in the women's 200m individual medley SM13 and Stefano Raimondo in the men's 100m butterfly S10.



FROM LEFT: Silver medalist Guo Jincheng, gold medalist Yuan Weiyi and bronze medalist Wang Lichao of China celebrate during the victory ceremony for the men's S5 50m backstroke final during the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games in Nanterre, west of Paris, yesterday. (AFP)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Test coach McCullum to take charge of England white-ball teams



AFP
London

England Test coach **Brendon McCullum** will take charge of the nation's teams in all three formats in a bid to revitalise the fortunes of the struggling white-ball sides, cricket chiefs said yesterday.

The New Zealander has reinvigorated England's Test set-up alongside captain Ben Stokes since 2022 and will seek to bring his attacking "Bazball" approach to the limited-overs teams.

The 42-year-old has extended his contract until the end of 2027, officially taking over the one-day international and Twenty20 sides in January to coincide with a tour

of India and the Champions Trophy in Pakistan. The England and Wales Cricket Board said the broadened role for McCullum was part of a "strategic restructure" of the men's set-up.

"I believe we are incredibly fortunate that a coach of his quality is prepared to commit wholeheartedly to English cricket," said Rob Key, managing director of England men's cricket. "Being able to align all teams now is particularly exciting and we look forward to taking on all challenges that come our way."

"For the last two years, constant clashes between formats have made it challenging for the white-ball environment - fortunately, these are easing starting from January."

McCullum, a former New Zealand

captain known for his attacking batting, said he was excited to extend his role with England.

"This new challenge is something I'm ready to embrace, and I'm eager to work closely with (captain) Jos (Buttler) and the team to build on the strong foundations that are already in place," he said yesterday. He added: "The talent within English cricket is immense, and I'm looking forward to helping these players reach their full potential."

'Energised by the prospect'

McCullum inherits a white-ball outfit that have surrendered titles in both limited-overs World Cups in the past 12 months, which led to the departure of former white-ball coach Matthew Mott in July.

England are currently ranked seventh in ODI (50-over) cricket and fourth in the world T20 standings. McCullum will be at the helm as England try to win the trophies back, with the next T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka in 2026 and the 50-over equivalent in southern Africa in 2027.

Former England batter Marcus Trescothick will serve as interim head coach for the upcoming white-ball series against Australia at home and the tour of the Caribbean. When McCullum took charge of England's Test side in May 2022 they were at a low ebb, with just one in 17 games.

But under his leadership they have won 19 of their 28 Tests since and score at a remarkably rapid rate. The biggest disappointment

during his tenure has been a crushing 4-1 defeat in India.

Schedule easing next year

Chris Silverwood's sacking after the 2021/22 Ashes was followed by an acceptance that the unrelenting timetable of international cricket, with some Test and white-ball assignments overlapping, was too much for one head coach.

But with England's fixture programme looking more manageable for the next couple of years, McCullum, who still lives in New Zealand, has agreed to extend his role.

"The idea of a unified coaching structure, especially with the schedule easing next year, made perfect sense," he said. "I'm energised by the prospect of guiding both teams."

FOCUS

Bangladesh beat Pakistan for historic Test series win

Despite being 26 for 6 in the first innings, Bangladesh turned things around in dramatic fashion

AFP
Rawalpindi

Bangladesh celebrated a historic first-ever Test series win over Pakistan and a 2-0 clean sweep with a tense six-wicket victory in Rawalpindi yesterday.

Shakib Al Hasan hit the winning boundary 25 minutes before tea on the fifth and final day of the second Test to spark jubilation in the away dressing room.

A handful of Bangladesh supporters waving the nation's flag were also there to see their country win only a third away series in 33 attempts.

Shakib was unbeaten on 21 and Mushfiqur Rahim was on 22 as the visitors painstakingly overhauled the 185-run target.

Openers Zakir Hasan (40) and Shadman Islam (24), plus skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto (38) and Mominul Haque (34), all put runs on the board to help Bangladesh to a famous win.

Pakistan scored 274 and 172 while Bangladesh recovered from 26-6 to make 262 in their first innings.

Litton Das's 138 rescued Bangladesh with the bat before fast bowlers Hasan Mahmud (5-43) and Nahid Rana (4-44) wrecked Pakistan on Monday with career-best figures.

Bangladesh won the first Test by 10 wickets - also in Rawalpindi - for their first victory over Pakistan in 14 matches.

Skipper Najmul described the series win as momentous moment for a country



Bangladesh's players celebrate with the trophy after winning the second and last Test against Pakistan at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

recently wracked by protests and the overthrow of former premier Sheikh Hasina.

"It means a lot to Bangladesh cricket and to all the players," said the captain. "I cannot express the feelings."

"When we came here everybody was determined to do something special and we

wanted to win. I am happy that everyone did his job to the best and we have won a historic series."

Najmul heaped particular praise on his bowlers, especially allrounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who finished with 10 wickets off his spin bowling.

"I think the way he bowled in the first innings on this kind of condition, taking five wickets, was great," he said.

Mehidy also made 78 in a stand of 165 with Litton that lifted Bangladesh when they were in serious trouble in their first innings.

Apart from that, Bangladesh outplayed the home team in both Tests and were the better bowling side, despite having an inexperienced pace attack.

Before this, Bangladesh's only away Test series wins came in the West Indies in 2009 and Zimbabwe three years ago.

In contrast, Pakistan have now lost six of their last 10 home Tests, drawing the other four.

"It is extremely disappointing to lose when you start a busy season," said skipper Shan Masood, whose team faces England in a daunting three-match home series starting next month.

"In both the Tests we let them back in the game and in this one from 26-6, so it is something we need to address before our next series. We are not finishing games and not learning from our mistakes," added Masood, who has now lost all five Tests since being appointed last year, including 3-0 against Australia earlier this year.

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 274 (Saim Ayub 58, Shan Masood 57, Salman Agha 54; Mehidy Hasan Miraz 5-61, Taskin Ahmed 3-57) and 172 (Salman Agha 47 not out, Mohamed Rizwan 43; Hasan Mahmud 5-43, Nahid Rana 4-44)

Bangladesh 262 (Litton Das 138, Mehidy Hasan Miraz 78; Khurram Shahzad 6-90, Salman Agha 2-13, Mir Hamza 2-50) and 185-4 (Zakir Hasan 40, Najmul Hossain Shanto 38)

Result: Bangladesh won by six wickets, take series 2-0.

COMMENT

Bangladesh captain lost for words after series win

AFP
Rawalpindi

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was lost for words after Bangladesh sealed a landmark first-ever Test series win over Pakistan yesterday in Rawalpindi.

The visitors won the second and final Test by six wickets on the fifth day, chasing down a 185-run target for a 2-0 series victory.

Bangladesh were reeling on the third day of the rain-hit second Test on 26-6 but middle-order batsmen Litton Das (138) and Mehidy Hasan Miraz (78) hauled them back into the match.

Rookie pacers Hasan Mahmud (5-43) and Nahid Rana (4-44) then demolished Pakistan for 172 on Monday to set Bangladesh on course for a stunning victory.

Bangladesh won the first Test - also in Rawalpindi - by 10 wickets, their first victory in 14 matches against Pakistan.

"We can't express feelings with words, we are really happy," said Najmul. "I think before we came here we're looking to win, and the way everyone did their job made me really happy."

Najmul gave his bowlers special praise, saying their recent work had paid off.

"Our bowlers were very impressive," he said.

The spinner Mehidy was player of the series while Hasan and Nahid also played starring roles.

Bangladesh next face India in



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (second right) and Shakib Al Hasan (third right) celebrate after their team's win in the second Test against Pakistan at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

an away two-match Test series starting from September 18.

"I hope they will do the same against India as well, which will be a very challenging series," said Najmul, whose team has never won a Test against India in 13 attempts.

Under-pressure Pakistan captain Shan Masood said his team needed to improve, and fast.

Masood has now lost all five Tests since being appointed skip-

per last year. "We haven't learnt our lessons," he said.

"We could have bowled them, especially after 26-6 down here, but we let them back in the game."

Pakistan next month face a formidable England, who inflicted Pakistan's first-ever 3-0 whitewash in 2022.

Masood-led Pakistan also suffered a 3-0 whitewash against Australia earlier this year.

"I think now it's time where

we've realised that we were playing good cricket in Australia and not finishing games, that's something that we really need to work on," he said. He insisted that "it's never doom and gloom".

"You always keep trying, you always come back," he said.

"You always learn from your mistakes and you try and give people a chance, and in this regards we are in the right direction."

Lord's to stage 2025 World Test Championship final

LONDON: Lord's will host the World Test Championship final for the first time in 2025, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced yesterday. The final between the two highest-placed teams in the World Test Championship rankings will start on June 11 at the 'Home of Cricket'. Australia are the reigning World Test champions after beating India at The Oval in 2023. New Zealand won the tournament's first edition against India in Southampton in 2021. Nine Test playing nations are ranked on their performances in the five-day, red-ball format over a two-year cycle, which started in 2023. India sit top of the current Test rankings ahead of second placed

Australia, while New Zealand are in third place and England lie fourth.

The two Lord's finalists will be confirmed on January 28, the ICC said.

Guy Lavender, Chief Executive and Secretary of the Marylebone Cricket Club - which owns the Lord's stadium in north London - said: "We're delighted to be working with the ICC to bring the World Test Championship Final to Lord's for the first time."

"It is our great privilege to be asked to host a final of any kind but to welcome the two best men's sides in Test cricket, our most cherished format, is a singular honour."

"It will be an experience not to be missed, adding to the storied 140-year history of Lord's Tests."

SPOTLIGHT

Smith earns NZ contract

Un capped all-rounder Nathan Smith is targeting a Test debut in the home summer after being awarded a New Zealand contract on the strength of a stunning domestic season.

The 26-year-old from Oamaru in the South Island province of Otago was named New Zealand's domestic player of the year in March after leading the first class Plunket Shield competition with 33 wickets for Wellington at an average of 17.

New Zealand Cricket rarely offers contracts to players without a single international to their name, and Smith is eager to repay the board's faith in him.

"I love cricket so all formats are great, they have their own little niches," he said yesterday. "But for me, I'm a purist so I love the long format of the game. It's probably a format that I've had the most success in so far. That doesn't mean to say I'm not trying to become an all-format player. I definitely think I can play all three formats."

"For me, it's just about trying to stay on the park, stay fit and hopefully perform for whoever I'm playing for."

New Zealand host England in three Tests from Nov. 28, and Smith will be gunning for the number seven spot in the team last occupied by South Africa-born spin bowling all-rounder Glenn Phillips.

TENNIS / US OPEN

Navarro denies Badosa to book spot in semis

NO ALARM FOR SINNER, SWIATEK AS TOP SEEDS EASE INTO QUARTER-FINALS

Reuters
New York

American Emma Navarro produced a stunning second-set fightback to move into her first Grand Slam semi-final with a 6-2 7-5 win over Spain's Paula Badosa as her breakout season continued at the US Open yesterday.

In a battle of New York-born baseliners, Navarro, who beat defending champion Coco Gauff in the previous round, stunned a suddenly error-prone Badosa by winning 24 of the last 28 points of the match to wrap up victory in 72 minutes.

Navarro admitted that she came into the match having learned plenty from her run at Wimbledon, where she also beat Gauff in the fourth round before suffering a lopsided defeat to Jasmine Paolini in the quarter-finals.

"I think maybe at Wimbledon I talked myself into some emotions I didn't necessarily feel or need to feel, you know, being in the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam," said Navarro. "So, coming out on the court here today I felt much more comfortable and yeah, I was ready to rock and I think I'm at the point in my career where I'm not scared of any result or making a run in any tournament."

Navarro consolidated an early break to go 3-0 up and leaned on her remarkable forehand while turning aside the two break points she faced to secure the first set in convincing fashion.

Badosa, flying the Spanish flag but born in New York, opened up a 4-1 double break lead in the second set and looked poised to force a decider after a routine hold put her ahead 5-1 before enduring a stunning collapse.

The 26th seed, whose US Open lead-up included a title in Washington and run to the semi-finals at Cincinnati, twice failed to serve out the set while Navarro twice held to love to pull ahead before closing out the match with her fifth break. "After I got it back to



Emma Navarro of the United States celebrates after defeating Paula Badosa of Spain in the US Open quarter-final at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center yesterday. (AFP)



Jannik Sinner returns a shot against Tommy Paul during their fourth round match. (AFP)

5-2 I kind of had a little bit of an inkling that it might be two sets and I just wanted to stay really tough and stick in there," said Navarro. "Even if I did lose the second set I wanted to kind of set the tone for the third set. So yeah, just really happy with my performance today and crazy to be moving on to the semi-finals, US Open baby!"

Navarro has found another gear in 2024 after having never

advanced past the second round at a Grand Slam prior to this year.

The American has reached the third round or better at all four Grand Slams, including a fourth-round finish at Roland Garros and a quarter-final showing at Wimbledon.

Earlier, top seeds Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek continued to blaze a trail through the draws, easing into the quarter-finals of

a tournament marked by almost daily upsets with a minimum of fuss. Sinner disappointed a partisan crowd with a 7-6(3) 7-6(5) 6-1 win over Tommy Paul in an entertaining fourth-round tie after Swiatek had beaten Liudmila Samsonova 6-4 6-1 in a more muted atmosphere on the main Arthur Ashe Stadium showcourt.

Italian Sinner barely got a look at Paul's serve until the third set but produced his best tennis when it mattered to subdue the effervescent American and move on to a mouth-watering last-eight meeting with 2021 champion Daniil Medvedev.

"I can be very proud today, it was a tough opponent, so I'm very happy to be in the next round," said Sinner, who beat Medvedev in Melbourne in January to win his only Grand Slam title.

"I didn't start very well (but) I tried to stay there mentally. And for sure, this today was one of the keys to win this match." Russian Medvedev had earlier brushed aside a delay caused by

Federer questions potential inconsistency in Sinner doping case

Swiss tennis great Roger Federer said yesterday that anti-doping authorities have questions to answer about a perceived double standard applied to world number one Jannik Sinner after he dodged a suspension despite two positive tests earlier this year. The 20-time Grand Slam champion called the drama surrounding Italy's Sinner "a tricky situation" and "the nightmare of every athlete", but said he trusts that Sinner did not intentionally use the banned substance clostebol. "It's not something we want to see in our sport. This type of news, regardless of whether he did something or not... It's just noise that we don't want," Federer said in an interview with NBC's *Today show* yesterday. "I understand the frustration about has he been treated the same as others, and I think this is where it comes down to," he said. "I think we all trust pretty much that Jannik didn't do anything, but the inconsistency potentially that he'd have to sit out while they were not 100% sure about what was going on, I think that's the question here that needs to be answered." "But it is what it is. We have to trust the process as well of everyone involved." Federer is in New York to promote his book and said he will be attending the evening US Open session today, his first return to Arthur Ashe Stadium since his retirement two years ago.

impressive stride in a comfortable win over Samsonova before warning she was only going to improve.

BOXING

'Monster' Inoue set for Vegas after stopping injured Doheny

AFP
Tokyo

Japan's undisputed super-bantamweight world champion Naoya Inoue opened the door for a fight in Las Vegas next year after retaining his titles against Ireland's TJ Doheny in Tokyo yesterday.

The undefeated "Monster" won by technical knockout in the seventh round at Ariake Arena when Doheny started hobbling and was unable to continue after injuring his hip. The 31-year-old Inoue, who took his record to 28-0 with 25 wins by knockout, was making his second defence since becoming the undisputed super-bantamweight world champion last December.

Legendary American promoter Bob Arum said in an interview in the ring that Inoue would defend his titles once more in Tokyo in December before fighting in a "big celebration" in Las Vegas next year. Inoue said nothing had been decided but he declined to rule out the possibility of a first bout in the United States since June 2021.

"This fight is just finished so I don't have anything to say," Inoue said when asked about Arum's comments. "We also have talks about December and I'd like to speak to my promoter about that and decide."

Inoue is just the second man to become undisputed world champion at two different weights since the four-belt era began in 2004. American Terence Crawford was the first. Inoue was fighting for the first time since he beat Mexico's Luis Nery in front of 55,000 fans at the Tokyo Dome in May.

That bout saw the Japanese fighter knocked down for the first time in his career but he never looked in serious danger against the 37-year-old Doheny on Tuesday. Inoue had to be patient against his cautious opponent but he began to land some big body blows as the fight progressed.

The fight came to an abrupt halt when Doheny suddenly began limping about 20 seconds into the seventh round. He was unable to walk and had to be helped from the ring by his team. Doheny's trainer Hector Bermudez said his fighter had injured a sciatic nerve in the sixth round and "tried his best" to carry on. "I know Inoue did a little flurry, a three-punch combination, but that wasn't what injured him," said Bermudez.

CYCLING

Soler climbs to Vuelta 16th stage honours, O'Connor hangs on to lead

AFP
Lakes of Covadonga, Spain

Marc Soler emerged from the mountain gloom to claim yesterday's Vuelta a Espana 16th stage summit finish, with Ben O'Connor narrowly holding on to the leader's red jersey.

After Monday's rest day it was back to work with a vengeance for the peloton, the day's ride culminating with a daunting 12.8km climb up Lagos de Covadonga at 1,100m altitude.

Spain's Soler (UAE Team Emirates) got the measure of Filippo Zana and Briton Max Poole for the stage honours.

"This is very special. I haven't won a lot with this team and so after three years, to win at the Vuelta is special," said Soler, finally hitting the mark after three third-place finishes in the last week.

O'Connor held on to the red jersey - for at least another day. But three-time Vuelta winner Primoz Roglic, 11th on the day, sliced almost one minute off his lead.

The Slovenian goes into today's 17th stage now just five seconds adrift of the Australian who crossed the line 20th.

Roglic will inevitably be ruing the 20sec penalty he picked up on Sunday for using his team car's slipstream to help join the pack after a change of bike.

While Soler, O'Connor and Roglic all had reason to celebrate in their own right, yesterday's stage proved disastrous for Wout van Aert.

The Belgian, leading the sprinters' points classification after three stage wins in this year's race, crashed heavily with around 50km to go.

Despite getting back on his bike he pulled up shortly after, nursing his knee sitting on the bonnet of his Visma team car.



Team UAE's Marc Soler celebrates on the podium after winning stage 16 of the Vuelta a Espana, a 181.5km race between Luanco and Lagos de Covadonga, yesterday. (AFP)

Magnier wins Tour of Britain's opening stage

France's Paul Magnier held off a late challenge from Ethan Vernon to win the Tour of Britain's opening stage in Kelsso yesterday.

Riding for Soudal-QuickStep, Magnier produced a scintillating sprint to beat Israel-Premier Tech's Vernon, who finished one place ahead of fellow Briton Bob Donaldson. Tom Pidcock, who claimed Olympic gold in the mountain bike cross-country race in Paris last month, finished fourth for Ineos Grenadiers. Ineos tried to control the peloton in the final 10 kilometres, but Remco Evenepoel and Julian Alaphilippe took over at the front for QuickStep. That paved the way for Magnier to build on the momentum of his second place finish in the recent Bretagne Classic-Ouest-France.

The 20-year-old Magnier's sixth stage win of the year earned him the leader's jersey. "It's incredible, we did a really amazing team performance," Magnier said. "Remco and Julian tried to go on the climb but it was really hard to get away, so then they worked for me for the sprint. They did it very well. I was in perfect position and I'm really happy to take the victory for the team."

The second stage today will take place over 152.1 kilometres from Darlington to Redcar.

Stage one: 1. Paul Magnier (FRA/SOQ) 4hr 11min 45sec. 2. Ethan Vernon (GBR/IPT) same time. 3. Robert Donaldson (GBR/TRI) s.t., 4. Tom Pidcock (GBR/IGD) s.t., 5. Casper van Uden (NED/DFP) s.t.

Van Aert has endured a tough 2024, suffering multiple fractures after a bone-crunching high speed fall in March in the Tour of Flanders which forced him to miss the remaining Spring one-day classics.

Roglic meanwhile has put himself in a strong position to claim a record-equalling fourth Vuelta which finishes with a time-trial in Madrid on Sunday.

Today's 17th stage is a 143km ride from Arnuero to Santander.

MOTORSPORT

Baku and Singapore could be good for Ferrari, says Leclerc

Reuters
Monza, Italy

Ferrari are still behind McLaren on pace but Charles Leclerc believes the next two races in Azerbaijan and Singapore could be good for the team after Sunday's Italian Grand Prix victory.

The Monegasque won at Monza with a bold one-stop tyre strategy after McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris pitted twice. That was the Italian team's first win since Leclerc triumphed at home in Monaco in May, and third of the season.

Ferrari took the most points, 37 compared to McLaren's 34 and Mercedes' 16, and are now only 39 behind fading leaders Red Bull, who are eight ahead of McLaren.

"I still think McLaren are the favourites but we have done a step forward that's for sure and Baku is a pretty nice track for me," Leclerc told reporters.

"I quite like this track and I've been quite competitive in the past, so who knows maybe we can achieve something special again there."

Ferrari brought a special wing to super-fast Monza as well as an upgrade package, which also helped close the gap. But Leclerc was only fourth on the starting grid, with teammate Carlos Sainz fifth.

Sainz triumphed in Singapore last year, the only race champions Red Bull failed to win, and finished



fourth at Monza. He won in Australia in March. "I don't think it's enough to be the car to beat for the rest of the season on other tracks," said Leclerc of the upgrade.

"Before this race, I don't think I was seeing myself challenging for wins anywhere else. Maybe Singapore. Singapore maybe could be a strong track for us. On the other tracks, I still feel like we are a step behind McLaren and Red Bull.

"But today we've seen that we can be very on a par with McLaren if we do everything perfect.

"Have we done a step forward? Yes. Is it enough to go and win races until the end of the season? I don't think so yet, but we did a good step in the right direction.

McLaren, Mercedes front wings prompt F1 statement

The FIA issued a statement yesterday declaring that all the front wings on 2024 Formula 1 cars currently are legal and compliant with the governing body's testing.

The statement came after Ferrari and Red Bull reportedly requested an investigation into the front wings used by McLaren and Mercedes. Onboard footage during last weekend's Italian Grand Prix showed a greater degree of motion in the wing designs for the McLaren and Mercedes teams, according to Motorsport.com.

"The FIA is examining front wings at every event with numerous checks (conformity of surfaces, conformity of deflections) with respect to the relevant F1 Technical Regulation. All front wings are currently compliant with the 2024 regulations," read the FIA statement.

"Since the Belgium Grand Prix, the FIA has

acquired additional data during FP1 and FP2 sessions to assess dynamic behaviours through an FIA-mandated video camera which captures areas of the front wing which are not visible through the official FOM cameras.

"This exercise will continue at least up until Singapore to ensure every team will have been running the mandated FIA camera on different types of tracks (low, medium, high and very high downforce).

"This will ensure a large database allowing the FIA to draw the most objective picture of the situation and quantify differences between the various dynamic patterns observed on track."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc won Sunday's Italian GP in Monza, Italy, followed by McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris. Carlos Sainz (Ferrari) and Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) rounded out the top five.

OOREDOO STARS LEAGUE

Our goal is to achieve a better position: Al Khor's Rhaili

Al Khor's **Adil Rhaili** is one of the prominent defenders in terms of consistency in level and performance. The Moroccan moved to Al Khor at the beginning of last season and helped The Knights win the Second Division league championship and earn promotion to Ooredoo Stars League this season. He previously had a distinguished stint with Umm Salal and a number of clubs during his long career.

Al Khor started their Ooredoo Stars League campaign with two draws before losing in the third round, to get two points, and Rhaili opens up about his ambitions and goals with them. In an interview with *Qatar Stars League website qsl.qa*, Rhaili started off by touching on Al Khor's return to Ooredoo Stars League.

"Last season (2023-2024) was very difficult as it witnessed huge excitement and tough competition among clubs to get promotion to the First Division league, but thank God and with the co-operation of everyone, management, technical staff and players, we achieved what was required - returning to the place where we belonged. We hope to live up to everyone's

expectations this season, which will also be difficult, and we aim to obtain a better position in the league.

He talked about playing in the Second Division and First Division, "In the Second Division, there's no room for wasting opportunities or lose points, whereas in the First Division, the spotlight to a greater extent is on stadiums and other matters such as media limelight. I would like to emphasise that we look forward to providing the best for the club and its fans."

Asked whether Al Khor would achieve their goals this season and stay in Ooredoo Stars League in view of the contracts with a number of players, most notably Iraqi striker Ayman Hussein, Ivorian striker Yohan Boli, Portuguese defender Ruben Semedo, Rhaili said: "As I mentioned, Al Khor will strive for the best in terms of level and performance and achieving the best results and positions, and the team lacks nothing in order to reach its targets. In the league's first and second rounds, we presented a distinctive performance and came out with a clean sheet, and we're able to achieve our goals this season."

Al Khor had drawn with Al Gharafa in

Week 1 and Al Shahania in Week 2, both goalless, before losing 1-2 to Al Ahli. And Al Khor lost 1-5 to Al Wakrah in their opener in the QSL Cup. Rhaili said all members of the team, be they players or technical and administrative staff, are doing everything in their capacity for the team and that they would be able to overcome the difficulties and challenges.

He also praised the team's Qatari coach Abdullah Mubarak, who guided them back into Ooredoo Stars League: "Captain Abdullah Mubarak is one of the best coaches I've worked with at the tactical level, and he is distinguished by being decisive and strict. We all respect him and appreciate his work and effort, and we'll strive hard to continue the success together after we achieved what was required last season, and we hope to sustain the momentum."

Regarding his goals with Al Khor, he said: "We look forward to representing the team in a better way and achieving a better position in the standings. We'll work and strive harder in the next stage and, God-willing, Al Khor, with everyone's solidarity and co-operation, would achieve their goals."



FOOTBALL

Van Dijk commits to Netherlands after Koeman talks

Coach says door is shut on Bergwijn following his move to Saudi



Netherlands' coach Ronald Koeman (centre) looks on as defender Virgil van Dijk (left) and forward Joshua Zirkzee train yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Amsterdam

Captain Virgil van Dijk has committed his future to the Netherlands until the 2026 World Cup at least, but the door is shut on Steven Bergwijn following the striker's transfer to Saudi Arabia, coach Ronald Koeman confirmed yesterday.

Koeman, who led the Dutch to the Euro 2024 semi-finals before a loss to England, is preparing for a Nations League clash with Bosnia & Herzegovina in Eindhoven on Saturday and revealed he flew to Liverpool to have face-to-face talks with Van Dijk.

"I thought it was so important to go to him to see and feel with him: are you going to give it your all for another two years at the highest level and do you still see a future for yourself? And he does. And I do the same with him. All doubt is gone, he just goes on," Koeman told reporters. "He admitted he did not reach the level you

would expect from him as a player at the European Championship. As captain, I think he did a great job. But perhaps as a result, he put too much energy into others rather than into himself."

Koeman confirmed he had not considered Bergwijn for selection after a poor start to the season at Ajax Amsterdam and his move to Al Ittihad in Saudi Arabia.

"The book is basically close to him. He knows what I think about this," Koeman said. "When you are 26 (years old), your main ambition should be sporting, not financial. These are choices that players make. I have never been in that situation, because I could go to Barcelona. He could have stayed at Ajax, that's not bad, is it? You have to respect that choice, but personally I wouldn't (have moved)."

Bergwijn will play under Laurent Blanc in Saudi Arabia in a team that includes N'Golo Kanté, Karim Benzema, Fabinho, Houssem Aouar, Predrag Rajkovic and Moussa Diaby. The move looks to have hurt Bergwijn's chances of adding to his 35 caps for the Netherlands.

Koeman also confirmed that it was unlikely midfielders Marten de Roon and Georginio Wijnaldum will have a place in his squads in the future as he looks at other options. Daley Blind has already announced his retirement from the national team.

Wijnaldum, 33, was in the Dutch squad at Euro 2024 despite playing for Saudi Arabian club Al Ettifaq. But Koeman added: "He had problems at Paris Saint-Germain and this was the only opportunity for him to play. In addition, there is a difference in age."

Koeman also failed to call up lead forward Memphis Depay, who is currently without a club after leaving Atletico Madrid, though it has been reported he is in talks with Sevilla.

"It's primarily because he doesn't have a club. That means you don't play football and you can't be with the national team. Memphis is 30, let's hope he gets a club and gets fit. Then he is still an option for me."

The Dutch will also host Germany in Amsterdam next Tuesday.

ATHLETICS

Sprint banter sees Duplantis vs Warholm in 100m exhibition

AFP
Zurich

As head-to-head exhibition 100 metres races go, it is certainly one that catches the eye: pole vault king Armand Duplantis up against 400m hurdles master Karsten Warholm in Zurich today.

The two track stars will clash at the Letzigrund Stadium ahead of tomorrow's Diamond League meet proper to make good on some training ground banter that has escalated all the way to a sprint-off. Norway's Warholm is the reigning 400m hurdles world record holder, an Olympic gold and silver medallist and three-time world champion.

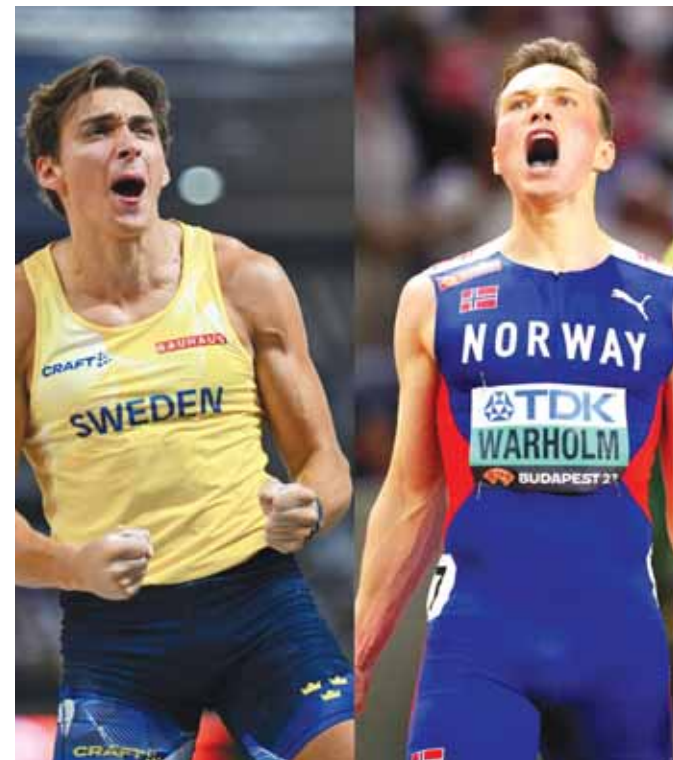
US-born Swede Duplantis is the newly-crowned double Olympic champion and has broken the pole vault world record an incredible 10 times, the last time coming at the Silesia Diamond League meet last week. Duplantis has long insisted that one of his principal strengths in vaulting was his speed on the runway, albeit it is just 40 metres long.

He has a best of 10.57 seconds over 100m, wind-aided and set back in 2018. Warholm, known for his aggressive starts in the hurdles, has a best of 10.49sec set in 2017. The rivalry commenced after a joint training session between Warholm and Duplantis in the run-up to last year's Monaco Diamond League meet.

"He was saying that I looked fast, and I was like, 'Let's race,'" Duplantis said.

Warholm accepted the challenge after Duplantis claimed he could win. "With my ego and how highly I think of myself, I needed to accept," the Norwegian explained. "My expectations are to win," Duplantis said of the showdown. "I am just trying to get to that line before he does, that's the only thing that matters. I think he's probably just underestimating my speed in general."

Duplantis added: "I did win the Olympics this year and he got second!"



Armand Duplantis (left) has a best of 10.57 seconds over 100m, wind-aided and set back in 2018, while Karsten Warholm, known for his aggressive starts in the hurdles, has a best of 10.49sec set in 2017.

SPOTLIGHT

Suarez retires from Uruguay national team duty

AFP
Montevideo

Uruguay icon **Luis Suarez** announced his retirement from international football on Monday, confirming that he will hang up his boots following Friday's 2026 World Cup qualifier against Paraguay in Montevideo. "Friday will be my last match for my country," an emotional Suarez, 37, said. "It was not an easy decision to make, but I do it with the peace of mind that I will give my maximum until the very last game of my (Uruguay) career."

The former Barcelona and Liverpool striker is widely regarded as one of the greatest players of his generation and will retire from international football as Uruguay's top scorer with 69 goals from 142 appearances. Suarez, who was



infamously kicked out of the 2014 World Cup after being handed a four-month ban for biting Italy's Giorgio Chiellini, made his debut for Uruguay in 2007.

The Inter Miami forward helped Uruguay capture the 2011 Copa America, where he was named player of the tournament, and would eventually represent the South American country in nine major tournaments. Suarez said on Monday that inspiring Uruguay to that Copa crown had been the high point of his career. "I

wouldn't trade the Copa America title for anything," he said. "It was the best moment of my career. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

A dynamic, skilful attacker with a lethal eye for goal, Suarez was also never far from controversy. As well as the biting incident that ended his involvement in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, he was also one of the villains of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, when his cynical handball on the goal-line denied Ghana what would have been a late winner in the quarter-finals.

Suarez was sent off for that offence and Ghana subsequently missed the ensuing penalty, allowing Uruguay to sneak into the semi-finals after a penalty shoot-out. Controversy also dogged Suarez throughout his club career, notably in 2011 when he was handed an eight-game ban by authorities in England for allegedly racially abusing Manchester United's France star Patrice Evra.