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FOOTBALL

Qatar begin quest to qualify for AFC U-20 Asian Cup

'We are playing on home turf but all teams have equal chances'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Under-20 coach Felix Angel said the team is looking ahead to the Qualifiers for the AFC U-20 Asian Cup China 2025 with great enthusiasm and that the team is fully prepared aiming to make it to the continental finals.

Speaking on eve of Qatar's opening match against Singapore in Group J, to be played today at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium at 8pm, Angel further said, "We are excited to enter this tournament with high spirits. This competition presents a big challenge for us and the first match is a tough one. We are playing on home turf but all teams have equal chances. Our focus is on our opening match which is a difficult one."

Qatar, who emerged triumphant in 2014, have qualified for each of the past five editions. Singapore's head coach Fadzuhassy Juraimi, said, "We are well prepared and we will face strong competition with the rest of the group's teams." The visitors have 19 appearances, three more than the home side, although the latest occasion being in 1978. Doha is playing host to the matches of Group J of the Qualifiers (from today until Sept 29) in which Qatar are joined Singapore, Jordan and Hong Kong. All matches will be held at the same time (8pm) at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

Today, Jordan will meet Hong Kong. The simultaneous kick-off at the Grand Hamad Stadium has Jordan aiming for a third consecutive qualification and ninth overall, battling Hong Kong, China, whose last appearance - their 16th - came in 1977.

Qatar will meet Hong Kong in the second match while Jordan will play Singapore on the 27th. The group qualifiers will conclude with Qatar meeting Jordan, and Singapore playing Hong Kong. It is worth noting that the competition journey to qualify for the 2025 AFC U-20 Asian Cup in China has the participation of 45 teams for the 42nd edition of the tournament.

The Qualifiers will continue until September 29 with the matches of the 10 groups (five of four teams and five of five teams) being held in a league system. The 10 teams that finish first in each group qualify for the finals along with the five best second - placed teams to be joined by host China, the 1985 champions.

China will be hosting the tournament for the second time since 2010.

The qualifying stage was first introduced for the 1980 edition of the tournament, and this edition includes 14 of the 16 teams that have won the title to date. On the other hand, nine teams are hoping to qualify for the first time: Bhutan, Guam, Macau, Maldives, Mongolia,



Qatar's Under-20 coach Felix Angel and his Singapore counterpart Fadzuhassy Juraimi (below) speak at a press conference on the eve of their AFC U-20 Asian Cup Qualifiers in Doha.



Northern Mariana Islands, Palestine, East Timor and Turkmenistan.

Qatar squad: Abu Bakr Mohammed, Jalal Amir and Mohammed Fawzy; Ibrahim al-Hassan, Awab Fadhel, Jassim al-Hamad, Bassam Adel, Moaz Ibrahim, Nawaf al-Yahri,

Younis Mohammed, Youssef Mohammed, Abdullah Mujib, Mohammed Khaled, Othman Mohammed, Jameel Riyaz, Tahseen Mohammed, Salem Reda, Abdul Aziz al-Bakri, Mohammed Hani, Youssef Marai, Ali Mohammed, Fayeze Marwan and Ayoub al-Alawi.

SPOTLIGHT

Younes replaces sacked Asbaghi at Al Rayyan

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Stars League side Al Rayyan have appointed Younes Ali as their new coach to replace Poya Asbaghi, who was sacked earlier yesterday. Rayyan have had a torrid start to the season, winning just two of the five matches so far as the Lions languish at the eighth spot. They were also well beaten by Saudi giants Al Hilal in their AFC Champions League Elite opener.

There were rumours swirling around on Monday that Rayyan had approached Frenchman Herve Renard to become their next head coach. But they ultimately went with someone closer home in former Qatar midfielder Younes Ali, who in fact had lost his job at Al Arabi just five days ago.

Younes has been given a just one year contract, which suggests Rayyan has opted for a wait and watch policy. Sweden's Asbaghi too joined Rayyan earlier this summer on a one-year contract from Al Shamal. But two recent losses to Al Hilal and in the QSL against Al Wakrah has put an end to the 39-year-old's reign.

"Al Rayyan Club announces the termination of its contract with Swedish coach Poya Asbaghi by mutual consent between the two parties. The Swedish coach will



In his playing career, Younes Ali represented Al Rayyan in 118 games from 2007 to 2013.

leave the team after five rounds of the Ooredoo Stars League (OSL)," the club said in a statement before announcing Younes's appointment yesterday.

Younes famously led Arabi to the prestigious Amir Cup title in 2023 - their first in the prestigious tournament in 30 years. However, Arabi struggled under the 41-year-old this season losing all four matches under him as the club swiftly replaced him with former US coach Anthony Hudson.

In his playing career, Younes represented Al Rayyan in 118 games from 2007 to 2013. His first match as Rayyan coach would be against his former club Arabi at the Al Thumama Stadium tomorrow.

Rayyan sign Uruguayan midfielder Ginella



Al Rayyan yesterday announced the signing of midfielder Francisco Ginella on a one-year contract. The 25-year-old Uruguayan was a free agent having mutually agreed to terminate his contract at Major League Soccer Los Angeles FC (LAFC) last month. Ginella had joined LAFC from Uruguay's Montevideo Wanderers in 2019. He went on to make 54 MLS appearances, scoring one goal and tallying six assists.

EQUESTRIAN

Stage set for 8th edition of Hathab

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 8th edition of Longines-Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour 2024-25 will get underway tomorrow at the Qatar Equestrian & Modern Pentathlon Federation's indoor arena - in partnership with Al Shaqab. The mandatory veterinary check for the opening three-day leg will be held today.

The highly popular annual domestic equestrian series which includes showjumping and dressage will have 14 rounds and conclude on May 10, 2025. The organising committee for the 8th edition of the Longines-Hathab has completed the arrangements for the launch of the first round.

According to the announced schedule, the competitions of the second round will be held on October 10, 11 and 12, and the rounds will continue until the 14th final round, which will be held on May 8, 9 and 10, 2025. The first round will see Future Riders, Small Tour, Amateur Class, Medium Tour, Open



Class and Big Tour action for various heights from 60cm to 145cm.

This year, the championship in showjumping teams' competition will see the participation of 9 teams for the first time, including an all-women team called Al Salam besides Famaganis, Wathnan, Lekhwia, and the Doha Bank teams. The Longines-Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour is one of the most

prominent local championships held in Qatar in the field of equestrianism and aims to support and develop the level of equestrianism in the country by providing a first-class competitive platform that allows participants the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities as well as enhance co-operation and partnerships between local entities concerned with equestrian sports.

LONGINES HATHAB TOUR SCHEDULE (JUMPING & FUTURE RIDERS)

Today: VET Check 9.30-10.30am; Area Familiarization 4-6pm.

Tomorrow: Future Riders Class 6-12 Optimum Time (60cm) 4pm; Future Riders Class 12-16 Optimum Time (80cm) 4.45pm; Small Tour: Accumalator With Joker (110cm) 7pm; Amateur: Table A, Two Phases (100cm) 4pm

On Friday: Medium Tour (Individual & Teams): Table A, Special Two Phases (130cm) 7pm.

On Saturday: Open Class: Table A, One round against the clock (120cm) 4pm; Big Tour: Table A, Special Two Phases (145cm) 7pm.

LONGINES HATHAB TOUR SCHEDULE		
2024		
TOUR 1	Show jumping & Dressage	24th - 28th Sep 2024
TOUR 2	Show jumping & Future Riders	10th - 12th Oct 2024
TOUR 3	Show jumping & Dressage	17th - 19th Oct 2024
TOUR 4	Show jumping & Future Riders	31st Oct - 2nd Nov 2024
TOUR 5	Show jumping & Dressage	14th - 16th Nov 2024
TOUR 6	Show jumping & Future Riders	21st - 23rd Nov 2024
TOUR 7	Show jumping & Dressage	5th - 7th Dec 2024
TOUR 8	Show jumping & Future Riders	19th - 21st Dec 2024
2025		
TOUR 9	Show jumping & Dressage	15th - 16th Mar 2025
TOUR 10	Show jumping & Future Riders	20th - 22nd Mar 2025
TOUR 11	Show jumping & Dressage	10th - 12th Apr 2025
TOUR 12	Show jumping & Future Riders	17th - 19th Apr 2025
TOUR 13	Show jumping & Dressage	1st - 3rd May 2025
TOUR 14	Show jumping & Future Riders (Final)	8th - 10th May 2025

FOCUS

Qatar team wins silver in Category E at FIDE Chess Olympiad in Budapest

The Qatari chess team won the silver medal in Category E at the 45th edition of the FIDE Chess Olympiad, which was held in Budapest, Hungary, with the participation of 190 countries. The Qatari team included five players: Hussein Aziz, Irfan Mohammed, Mohammed al-Qassabi, Hamad al-Kuwari and Turki al-Kuwari. Hamad al-Kuwari also earned the title of Candidate Master (CM).

Teams were divided into five categories: A, B, C, D, and E. India secured an historic double winning both the men's and women's title. In addition to winning the team championships, India also walked away with four individual gold medals as the tournament wrapped up in the Hungarian capital on Sunday.

USA (17) took silver in the men's event, while Uzbekistan won bronze. In the women's, Kazakhstan bagged silver, while USA had to be content with bronze.

Meanwhile, Mohammed al-



Mohammed al-Mudahka, President of the Qatar Chess Association, is seen with the Qatari players delegation at the FIDE Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary. Right: The Qatari chess players pose on the podium.



Mudahka, President of the Qatar Chess Association, participated in the General Assembly meetings of the International Chess Federation (FIDE). Several national administrative figures also attended the

event, including Ju Shen, Treasurer of FIDE and Hamad al-Tamimi, Adviser to the Competitions Committee and Executive Director of the Qatar Chess Federation. International arbiter Hussein al-

Haddad and federation referee Sara al-Mahandi were involved in officiating the Olympiad.

Al-Mudahka was pleased with the results achieved by the Qatari team, praising the efforts of all

players. He mentioned that winning the silver medal would boost the Qatari players' rankings. He also confirmed that the federation will continue its efforts to enhance the skills of all national team play-

ers in preparation for upcoming events. He said the Qatari teams are gearing up to participate in the Arab Age Group Championship, which will be held in Tunisia at the end of October.

CRICKET

Brilliant Brook leads England to win in third ODI

The hosts complete a fighting win via DLS method in Durham

Agencies
Chester-Le-Street, England

A superb maiden ODI century by new captain Harry Brook led England to a dominant, rain-shortened DLS victory over Australia yesterday to keep the five-match series alive with two to play.

Australia, seeking a 15th successive ODI win, overcame difficult early conditions to post 304, with Steve Smith hitting a patient 60 and Aaron Hardie (44) and Alex Carey (77 not out) cutting loose in the final 10 overs.

Leading 2-0 they must have thought a series-clinching third was on the cards when England slumped to 11-2, but Brook and Will Jacks built an excellent partnership of 156 to swing it their way.

After Jacks went for 84, Liam Livingston smashed a quick unbeaten 33 as Brook moved serenely on to 110 but, on 254-4 with 51 needed from 74 balls, the rain began and England were eventually awarded a 46-run victory under a DLS calculation that had produced a revised target of 209 after their 37.4 overs.

Earlier Carey again proved a thorn in England's side, smashing an unbeaten 77 to take Australia to 304-7.

England, in a match they must win to keep the five-game series alive, took two quick wickets to reduce the world champions to 132-4 in the 28th over after home captain Brook won the toss.

But wicketkeeper Carey, fresh from his match-winning 74 in



England's Harry Brook celebrates his century during the third One Day International against Australia at Chester-le-Street in Durham yesterday. (AFP)

the second ODI at Headingley on Saturday, turned the tide during stands of 40 with Steven Smith (60) and 54 with Glenn Maxwell (30).

Carey, only featuring in the series because World Cup-winning gloveman Josh Inglis is injured, then received excellent support from Hardie, whose dashing 44 provided the bulk of a seventh-wicket partnership of 68.

Recalled fast bowler Jofra Archer was the pick of England's attack, with figures of 2-67 in 10 overs but he suffered a late assault.

England enjoyed two early breakthroughs, with Matthew Short hooking Archer to deep square leg and Australia captain

Mitchell Marsh caught behind off a brilliant leg-cutter from Brydon Carse.

But a well-paced partnership of 89 in 16 overs between Smith and Cameron Green kept England at bay before the all-rounder, recalled in place of the injured Travis Head, fell for 42.

And next over Australia's 131-3 became 132-4 when Marnus Labuschagne exited for a duck, after a miscued paddle-sweep off spinner Will Jacks lobbed gently to wicketkeeper Jamie Smith.

Australia's Smith went to fifty when he pulled a short delivery from Jacks for his fifth four in 71 balls faced.

But he was out soon afterwards when a fierce pull off Archer was

brilliantly caught by a diving Carse on the boundary, with Australia now 172-5 in the 35th over.

Carey, however, nailed Carse through midwicket with one of four fours in a 48-ball fifty also featuring a straight six off Jacob Bethell.

Dangerman Maxwell exited when he slapped spinner Livingstone low to the safe hands of Carse at extra cover.

The fourth match of the series is at Lord's on Friday, with the last in Bristol on Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES
England 254 for 4 (Brook 110*, Jaks 84) beat Australia 304 for 7 (Carey 77*, Smith 60, Archer 2-67) by 46 runs (DLS method)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Shafallah Center, PSG Academy Qatar agree to back sports integration



A newly formed partnership between Shafallah Center and Paris Saint-Germain Academy Qatar is offering sports programmes for people with disabilities to promote community sports integration.

The agreement was signed on behalf of Maryam Saif al-Sowaidi - Executive Director of Shafallah Center, and Fabien Dilem, General Manager of the Paris Saint - Germain Regional Office in the Middle and India.

Maryam said: "We are pleased to sign this agreement with one of the most well-established national companies in the sports field."

She expressed her hope that this agreement will contribute to enhancing co-operation between Shafallah Center and private sector companies.

Maryam praised the efforts of Paris Saint-Germain Academy Qatar in supporting and empowering Shafallah Center members in sports activities.

She said that the agreement is a bridge for community integration and will contribute to athletic support for Shafallah Center members through the Academy's providing of free sports training under the supervision and participation of specialised trainers.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for Paris Saint-Germain," said Fabien Dilem.

"Inclusion and cohesion are at the forefront of social integration, and we are delighted to partner with Shafallah Center in this endeavour.

"The club has been supporting children with unique upbringings for over 20 years through the PSG

Foundation in Paris, therefore our collaboration with Shafallah Center harmonizes with our vision of providing the youth with enriching opportunities."

PSG Academy Qatar will provide training for the centre's members in various sports activities, including football and handball.

Maryam confirmed that social, personal and psychological goals will be considered when implementing the program for the centre's members.

She explained that training sessions have been approved for members at a rate of two sessions per week at the centre, with each training session lasting no more than (45-60) minutes.

The Executive Director of Shafallah Center said that one of the priorities in implementing sports activities is to consider the health, security and safety of the centre's members.

She said that the programme will begin to be implemented in September of each year. She also appreciated PSG Academy Qatar's contribution of providing members with complete training kits in the official colours of the Club.

Maryam announced that the centre will launch the evening programme for the centre's members who wish to benefit from sports activities, as free training will be provided to a specific number of the centre's members.

On the other hand, she said that in the framework of developing and enhancing the capabilities of the employees of both parties, the trainers of both parties will cooperate in providing specialised training courses.

BOTTOMLINE

Masood to lead Pakistan in England Tests

AFP
Karachi

Left-handed batsman Shan Masood will continue to lead Pakistan in the upcoming series against England, despite losing his first five Tests as captain.

Masood, a 34-year-old top order batsman, was named captain in the 15-man squad announced yesterday for next month's first Test in Multan.

There had been media that reports Masood faced an axe after Pakistan's shocking 2-0 defeat against Bangladesh last month.

Pakistan had never lost to Bangladesh before the twin defeats took Masood's record to five losses since replacing

Babar Azam as skipper in November last year. He lost his first series 3-0 in Australia. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) stuck with Masood as their Australian head coach Jason Gillespie sought consistency. The first of three Tests start in Multan from October 7, the second will be played in the same city from October 15 and the third in Rawalpindi from October 24. PCB said the squad is for the first Test only.

"The 15-man squad is for the first Test and based on the recommendation of head coach Gillespie, the selected players will attend a training camp in Multan from October 1," said a PCB release. Left-arm spinner Noman Ali has replaced fast bowler Khurram Shahzad who is recovering from a side strain.

Pacer Mohammad Ali, who played

both Bangladesh Tests, and batter Kamran Ghulam, an unused member of the squad, have been dropped.

Allrounder Aamer Jamal returns, after missing the Bangladesh series with a back problem. "We are very much looking forward to the series against England here in Pakistan and cannot wait for it to begin," Gillespie said. "We are excited about playing in front of our wonderful supporters."

Squad (for first Test): Shan Masood (captain), Saud Shakeel, Aamer Jamal, Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Mir Hamza, Muhammad Hurraira, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Noman Ali, Saim Ayub, Salmaan Ali Agha, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Shaheen Shah Afridi

Stokes open to England white-ball return

London: Test captain Ben Stokes indicated yesterday he would be ready to make an England limited-overs comeback.

Stokes ended his one-day international retirement to play in England's woeful defence of their 50-over World Cup title in India last year.

"This white-ball team has gone in a new direction," Stokes told Sky Sports in an interview during the third one-day international between England and Australia at his Durham home ground yesterday. "We've seen some unbelievable talent come through, just to point out one: Jacob Bethell, who I think is going to be a superstar. I've played a lot of white-ball cricket for England, I'm very happy and content with what I've achieved in that form of the game."

Stokes, who has played in 114 ODIs and 43 T20s, has worked well alongside Test coach Brendon McCullum, with the former

New Zealand captain set to take charge of England's limited-overs teams in the new year.

"If I am part of the white-ball teams' plans going forward in any way, shape or form then great," said Stokes. "If I get the call, saying 'do you want to come and play?' It's definitely going to be a 'yes.'" Nevertheless, the 33-year-old added: "But I'm not going to be too disappointed if I don't because it means someone's come in and doing really well. I can just sit back and watch everyone else go out and smack it." Stokes is due to undergo a scan today to assess his recovery ahead of England travelling to Pakistan next week for a three-match Test tour that starts in Multan on October 7.

While saying he feels "really, really good", Stokes was more guarded when asked whether he would be able to bowl and be a fully-fledged all-rounder for the first Test.

TENNIS

Shang second Chinese player to win an ATP title

“Amazing tennis from both of us. I was kind of struggling physically”

Reuters
Chengdu

Teenager Shang Juncheng beat Italy's Olympic bronze medallist Lorenzo Musetti 7-6(4) 6-1 in the Chengdu Open final yesterday to become the second Chinese player to win an ATP title.

It marks a first ATP Tour title for Shang, who is China's number two and ranked 55 in the world.

The 19-year-old former juniors number one is also the youngest ATP winner this season.

“It's really, really special for me,” said Shang. “Especially to do it at home. It's been tough matches this week. I've played really good tennis, kept calm, and overall I'm just very happy to be here in Chengdu.”

“I think the first set was great,” said Shang. “Amazing tennis from both of us. I was kind of struggling physically, to be honest. Really long rallies, and he played some good points. I was serving for the set and got a little bit tight, and he took the chance.”

“In the tie-break, I think I just kept my cool and was really calm, listening to my coach. Trying to fix the serve, fix the forehand a little bit.”

“I'm glad it worked out and the second set was a little bit smoother.”

Li Na remains China's most successful singles player with



China's Shang Juncheng holds the trophy after winning the singles final against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti at the ATP Chengdu Open in Chengdu, in China's southwestern Sichuan province, yesterday. (AFP)

Grand Slam wins at the French Open in 2011 and the Australian Open in 2014, while there are several women hoping to emulate her including Paris Olympics gold medallist Zheng Qinwen.

But success on the men's side has largely eluded the nation, and Wu Yibing became the first Chinese player to capture an ATP trophy when he won the Dallas Open last year.

Shang has also strengthened his push to qualify for the Next

Gen ATP Finals for the first time. The competition, hosted in Saudi Arabia in November-December, will feature the world's top 20-and-under singles players from the ATP Tour season.

In the Hangzhou Open, Croatia wild card Marin Cilic became the lowest-ranked champion in ATP Tour history yesterday with success in his first tour level event since February.

Cilic, who turns 36 on Saturday, won his first title since 2021

with a 7-6(5) 7-6(5) win over China's number one and sixth seed Zhang Zhizhen, who was playing his first tour level final.

The triumph for Cilic, who has been sidelined with a knee injury, lifted the former world number three from 777th at the start of the tournament to 212 in the ATP rankings.

It was the 21st title of Cilic's career, with the Hangzhou Open having replaced the Zhuhai Championships on the calendar.

SABALENKA TARGETS TOP RANKING TO CAP OFF SEASON

Beijing: World number two Aryna Sabalenka will return to action for the first time since her US Open triumph by playing in the China Open and the Belarusian said yesterday her sights were set on reclaiming the top ranking in the final weeks of the season.

The 26-year-old lifted her third Grand Slam title this month after back-to-back Australian Open triumphs and will be the firm favourite for the Beijing crown in the absence of holder Iga Swiatek, who is missing the event due to personal reasons. Sabalenka briefly took the number one spot last season but was overtaken by Poland's Swiatek and said she is focused on a strong showing in the Asian swing to give herself the best chance of reaching her goal.

“Of course, that's one of my goals, to finish the season at world number one,” Sabalenka told reporters.

“I'm not trying to focus on that. I'm trying to focus on my game. There are three tournaments left. I'm trying to bring my best tennis on court.”

“After the season, I'll see if it was enough to finish the year at world number one or I have to improve something else... To be



called as best player in the world, that means a lot.” Sabalenka has already qualified for the season-ending WTA Finals along with Swiatek and is eager to head to the Nov. 2-9 event with plenty of wins under her belt.

“It's important to do well here before the WTA Finals, to have these matches in your pocket before going to the Finals. I think between Wuhan and the Finals is a gap of three weeks,” Sabalenka said. “It means if you're not reaching the last stages of the tournaments here, you have a really big gap in between, which isn't so good before the last tournament of the year.” The Beijing tournament runs from Sept 25-Oct 6.

Injured Raducanu the latest big name to pull out of China Open

Beijing: Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu became the latest high-profile player to withdraw from the China Open after the Briton said she was skipping the WTA 1000 tournament due to a foot injury.

Raducanu has struggled with injuries since capturing the New York title in 2021 and spent most of last season recovering from ankle and wrist surgeries.

The 21-year-old, who has since climbed to 54th in the world, sustained her latest setback in the Korea Open quarter-finals on Saturday while playing Daria Kasatkina.

“I sprained some ligaments in my foot which unfortunately need some more time to heal,”

Raducanu said yesterday. “It means I can't play in Beijing but I hope to be back competing as soon as I can.”

Former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, world number one Iga Swiatek and three-times Grand Slam runner-up Ons Jabeur have decided to skip the Beijing event, which runs from Sept 25-Oct 6.

The men's ATP 500 tournament in Beijing lost one of its top players when organisers said world number two Alexander Zverev had pulled out due to pneumonia. The draw for the China Open, which will feature four of the top six men's players, including world number one Jannik Sinner, takes place today.

SPOTLIGHT

China's Olympic champion Zheng embraces big expectations at home



AFP
Beijing

Paris Olympics champion Zheng Qinwen said yesterday she hopes to use the fervent support of the home crowd to propel her to a first China Open title.

The world number seven is back in Beijing fresh from making history as the first Chinese player to win an Olympic singles tennis gold.

The China Open, which begins today, is a WTA 1000 event and among the most prestigious in the women's tennis calendar.

“People start to get tired at the end of the season. For me it's different,” said the 21-year-old

Zheng, finalist at the Australian Open.

“I'm really motivated to come and play in China, in front of my people. I know they're going to support me.”

With that comes pressure, but Zheng says she is physically fresh, has prepared well and has “big expectations” of herself.

After Beijing, the player dubbed “Queen Wen” will play the Wuhan Open.

“I think I don't consider that like big pressure,” she said of the support she will receive in the coming weeks.

“I will consider it like big support. Especially when I'm feeling down, I see all the people support me.”

She added: “It is quite different to play in China compared to rest of the world. I know basically all of them, going to be 95 percent of the crowd, they are going to support me.”

“It is a big confidence. Is also a big energy there when I'm playing on court.”

Zheng sees a difference now compared to before she was the Olympic champion.

“When I was at the airport, people wouldn't recognise me if they're not interested in tennis. My fame was only within the tennis circle,” she told a packed press conference in the Chinese capital.

“But now when I go to a restaurant, people ask me for autographs. “I feel the impact. I feel a sense

of responsibility now here in China.”

Chief among Zheng's title rivals at the China Open will be the top seed Aryna Sabalenka, who comfortably beat her in the Australian Open final at the start of the year.

Poland's Hurkacz to fund flood victims with each ace he hits World number eight Hubert Hurkacz said yesterday he will donate €100 to Poland flood victims for every ace he hits until the end of the season.

At least 23 people died across central Europe this week due to the worst floods the region has seen in two decades. The areas along the Czech-Polish border have been particularly hard hit since the

weekend. In the 2023 season, the pole became a part of an exclusive club of nine players who have achieved the extraordinary feat of serving 1000 plus aces during an ATP Tour season.

“I will be donating 100 Euros for every ace I hit to support those affected by the devastating floods in Poland. For me, sport is not just a competition, but also a platform to drive impact. #acesforaid,” Hurkacz wrote on X yesterday.

The floods have left trail of destruction from Romania to Poland, spreading mud and debris in towns, destroying bridges, submerging cars and leaving authorities and householders with a bill for damages that will run into billions of dollars.

BOXING

Dubois will next fight Joshua or Usyk, ‘whoever pays me the most’

AFP
London

Daniel Dubois would “love a rematch” with either Anthony Joshua or Oleksandr Usyk – depending on which boxer “pays me the most”.

Dubois retained his IBF world heavyweight title with a brutal fifth-round knockout of British rival Joshua at Wembley on Saturday, flooring the two-time former world champion four times in total.

Joshua has insisted his own boxing career is far from finished, with a potential rematch against Dubois as well as another all-British clash with Tyson Fury possible options for future bouts.

Dubois's promoter Frank Warren, meanwhile, has said while there is no specific clause in his fighter's contract for a swift rematch with Joshua, they could meet again if the right deal was agreed.

Usyk is set to face Fury in their own rematch on December 21 for the WBA, WBO and WBC belts.

Dubois was beaten by Usyk in August 2023, but not before the



Ukrainian was sent to the canvas by Dubois in the fifth round – only for the punch to be ruled a low blow and the champion given additional time to recover.

The 27-year-old Londoner said finance would determine the identity of his next opponent.

“I would love a rematch, but either one really – whoever pays me the most,” Dubois told *talkSPORT* radio yesterday.

Speaking about the possibility of facing Joshua again, Dubois

said: “If that happens next then yeah, I want to go for it.”

“I want to do it even better next time. I know where I need to improve as well, so as a champion and as a fighter I just want to prove people wrong every time and that is what we have been doing.”

“I think I would be a lot better than that (last fight). It was a great show, a Rocky-type fight, but next time I believe I will be more clinical, more sharp, everything better.”

FORMULA ONE

Red Bull building back from Monza low point, says team boss Horner

Reuters
Amsterdam

Formula One champions Red Bull hope to pick up the pace over the last six rounds of the season after Max Verstappen emerged stronger than expected from back-to-back street races in Azerbaijan and Singapore, team boss Christian Horner said.

The triple world champion, who will be 27 next week, had his advantage over McLaren's Lando Norris cut from 62 points after the Italian Grand Prix at Monza on Sept. 1 to a current 52.

The season now has a four-week lull before a US-Mexico-Brazil sequence starting in Austin, Texas, on Oct. 20, followed by another final triple-header of Las Vegas-Qatar-Abu Dhabi.

“I think we've got a vein of development and I think we've understood some of the issues with the car. I think we're starting to address them,” Horner told reporters after Verstappen finished a distant second to Norris in Singapore. “We were better in Baku, we were better here.”

Verstappen finished fifth in Baku after sixth at Monza, a result that equalled Monaco in May as his worst of the season so far but could have



been far worse. The Dutch driver won all six of the remaining races last year, the most dominant season the sport has seen, and Horner felt the team were on the right path despite McLaren taking a 41-point lead in the constructors' standings.

“I think the encouraging thing was the car reacted as we hoped it would and what our tools were telling us,” he said of Singapore.

“I think the team are starting to get a direction and an understanding of where some of the limitations are and some of the causes of limitations. That opens up development paths and veins that hopefully will be productive.”

“I think what Monza really exposed was perhaps some of the root cause, or helped to identify the root

cause of the issue. So I'm taking Monza as the low point and we're starting to build out of that.”

While McLaren believe the drivers' championship is on, the mathematical reality is that Norris still has a mountain to climb.

One retirement could blow the battle wide open, or kill it off, but the Briton will have to increase his scoring rate on current form.

With three sprint races adding to the available tally, there are a maximum 180 points still to be won.

Azerbaijan and Singapore were seen as circuits where Norris and McLaren could make big gains, and Ferrari looked more of a threat, but in the end Verstappen lost only 10 points to his rival.

In real terms, Norris is still almost as far from Verstappen as when he secured his first victory in round six in Miami in May – a race that came after the Red Bull driver had won four of the first five. That win lifted the Briton to 53 points behind.

There have been 12 races since and although Verstappen has not won since June, an eight-race losing streak, his lead has remained stubbornly healthy.

“Pretty pleased, but still a lot of work to do,” he said after Sunday's race.

“We know that. Hopefully now we can really kick-start things.”

SPOTLIGHT

Al Shaqab to host second edition of International Arabian Horse Championship in November

Al Shaqab has announced the launch of the second edition of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Championship, which is set to take place from November 6 to 9, 2024, under the esteemed patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani. This event represents a significant milestone in the world of Arabian horse competitions in Qatar and the entire region.

This year's championship aims to further the growth and enhancement of purebred Arabian horses on both a local and international scale.

Emphasising Qatar's rich equestrian heritage, the event will highlight the deep cultural appreciation and passion for Arabian horses within the Qatari community.

The second edition of the championship, set to take place at the Al Shaqab Indoor Arena, is expected to attract an even larger audience,

with horse enthusiasts, breeders, and dignitaries from around the globe. Attendees can look forward to an unforgettable celebration of Arabian horse excellence, which will contribute significantly to the ongoing development and promotion of purebred Arabian horses.

The inaugural edition was highly successful, with significant participation from horse owners both within and outside Qatar and received substantial attention and support from equestrian enthusiasts in Qatar in terms of audience attendance. The championship is internationally recognised, classified as a (B) category event, and is held under the supervision of the European Conference of Arab Horse Organisations (ECAHO). It is also qualified for higher-ranked international championships.

The International Arabian Horse Championship is excited to announce that registration for its highly anticipated Second Edition

will be open from October 1st to October 10th, 2024. This 10-day registration period invites competitors from around the world to secure their place in one of the most prestigious events in the equestrian calendar.

Al Shaqab's philosophy in horse breeding focuses on preserving the Arabian breed and producing horses that are beautiful, athletic, and strong. Therefore, the management is committed to organising an international championship that includes all categories of horse beauty.

Al Shaqab, a leading equestrian centre, is dedicated to fostering the growth of the Arabian horse industry in Qatar and beyond, and this event is expected to make a lasting impact on the equestrian sports community. With the support of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, this event is poised to become a cornerstone in the world of Arabian horse shows.



Rodri absence would be an ominous blow for Man City



London: Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola is sweating on the next medical bulletin for midfielder Rodri as speculation mounts that the Spaniard faces a lengthy lay-off with a knee injury.

Deep as the quality is within City's squad, some players are simply irreplaceable and silky defensive midfielder Rodri most definitely fits into that category.

Since joining from Atletico Madrid in 2019, Rodri has played 174 Premier League games for City and has finished on the losing side only 19 times in that period, winning 129.

Tellingly, however, City's chances of losing rise dramatically when he is not anchoring their midfield.

City have lost seven of the 21 Premier League games in which he was absent, a 33% loss rate compared to 10.9% when he was playing. Last season, City lost three games in the first half of the season without Rodri - to Wolverhampton Wanderers, Arsenal and Aston Villa - but none after he returned from injury. Few players contribute across all areas of the pitch more than Rodri, according to the statistics.

Since arriving in England, Rodri has completed more passes in the opposition's half than any other player with only Declan Rice above him in terms of winning back possession.

Put simply, he is the master at winning the ball and then using it quickly to telling effect. It is a skillset that has made City the dominant force in England and helped Spain rule Europe again.

Only once have a City or Spain national team including Rodri lost in the past 18 months - City's surprise FA Cup final defeat by Manchester United last season.

No wonder the 28-year-old who scored a healthy 12 goals for club and country last season is being tipped for this year's Ballon d'Or and no wonder why Guardiola looked so fearful when his midfield general limped off in distress early in Sunday's 2-2 draw with title rivals Arsenal.

Rodri had orchestrated a superb opening spell by City in that clash at the Etihad with the hosts dominating and 1-0 ahead when he fell after an innocuous clash with Thomas Partey. No sooner had he left the field than Arsenal equalised and after going behind City needed a John Stones equaliser eight minutes into stoppage time to avoid a damaging defeat by the 10-man Gunners.

Mateo Kovacic is a like-for-like replacement for Rodri but if, as is feared, Rodri has sustained a potentially season-ending ACL knee injury, the odds on City winning a fifth successive Premier League title will lengthen significantly.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal's Arteta stands by defensive tactics in fiery Man City clash

The Spanish coach said his team 'had to play the game that we had to play'

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta stood by Arsenal's defensive tactics in their explosive Premier League clash with Manchester City, saying he would have been "thick" not to learn from previous clashes.

Leandro Trossard was shown a second yellow card for kicking the ball away when Arsenal were 2-1 up at the end of the first half at the Etihad on Sunday. After the break the Gunners sat back and soaked up pressure, ceding almost all the possession to the Premier League champions until John Stones netted a stoppage-time equaliser.

Arsenal, who had led for most of the contest after goals from Riccardo Calafiori and Gabriel Magalhaes, were accused of employing the "dark arts" by City defenders Kyle Walker and Stones.

City forward Bernardo Silva accused them of "time-wasting".

But Arsenal boss Arteta stood by his team's approach on Tuesday, referencing their 5-0 defeat to Manchester City in 2021, when former captain Granit Xhaka was sent off. Speaking ahead of today's third-round League Cup tie against third-tier Bolton, the Spaniard said his team "had to play the game that we had to play".

"Unfortunately we've been in the same situation," he said. "We were in that same situation with Granit and when we lost 5-0. So we'd better learn. If not I would be very thick."

Erling Haaland threw the ball at Arsenal defender Gabriel's head after City's equaliser as tempers frayed but Arteta played down the tensions. "We have already moved on and we are now ready to battle again tomorrow," he said.

He added: "The team, the desire that they have to compete in any context, to win, to adapt to different circumstances, different competitions, different ways of playing and handle that emotionally and physically,



Mikel Arteta (second left) rejected the accusation from Manchester City that Arsenal employed 'the dark arts' in Sunday's 2-2 draw in the Premier League at the Etihad Stadium. (Reuters)

the way we've done it is superb."

Arteta joked that he would tell his players to leave the ball alone after Trossard's second yellow card. Declan Rice was also shown a second yellow for kicking the ball away in the draw against Brighton last month. "Just leave the ball, don't touch the ball," he said. "We'll play without the ball."

Arteta gave an update on injured captain Martin Odegaard, saying he would return from an ankle problem in "a matter of weeks". The 25-year-old has missed the Gunners' past three games after sustaining the injury on international duty with Norway earlier this month. "I think it will

be a matter of weeks, but how long exactly I cannot tell," he said. "We might get a surprise but I think it's unlikely he'll be back before the international break."

The next international window runs from Oct. 7-16 with Arsenal hosting Leicester City and Southampton in the Premier League either side of welcoming Paris St Germain in the Champions League before then.

Several Arsenal players required treatment on the pitch in the second half against with some accusing them of delaying tactics. "I always prefer the facts to words than supposing things," Arteta said. "Let's see

who is available tomorrow and then we can talk about dark arts. Unfortunately, there will be a few players not available. Tomorrow you will find out."

The visit of third-tier Bolton will be an opportunity for some of Arsenal's fringe players to get some playing time with signing Raheem Sterling likely to start. "He had a few minutes already. He played in a few games and Wednesday he has another opportunity," Arteta said of the former Manchester City winger who joined from Chelsea last month. "He is hungry to have more minutes and to impact the team in the way he can."

LA LIGA

Flick backs Pena but will debate new signing

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick backed reserve goalkeeper **Inaki Pena** to replace stricken teammate Marc-Andre ter Stegen yesterday, but also said the club must discuss if they will sign a replacement.

Germany international Ter Stegen was taken off with a ruptured knee tendon against Villarreal on Sunday and is likely to miss the rest of the season after undergoing surgery.

Pena, who stepped in for Ter Stegen last season when he was sidelined with a back injury, is poised to start in goal against Getafe today in La Liga. "First of all Inaki is doing really well, in pre-season and training, he's also a professional goalkeeper, he trained very hard for that," Flick told a news conference.

"For a second goalkeeper it's always difficult to be focussed but from what I can see he's absolutely focussed and he's ready to play. We



have confidence in him but we also have to see what we are doing (about the situation)."

Pena, 25, conceded 32 goals in 17 matches across all competitions last season, keeping only three clean sheets. Besides Pena, Barcelona have goalkeepers Ander Astralaga, 20, and Di-

ego Kochen, 18, who is currently out injured.

Barcelona are able to sign a free agent to replace Ter Stegen, with Spanish media linking former Real Madrid goalkeeper Keylor Navas with the league leaders. "We will talk about (what to do) later, because behind (Pena) we have only really young players and if something will change, we have to be careful about that," continued Flick.

"We have no pressure now, we'll see what happens and we'll speak together, also with (goalkeeping coach Jose Ramon de la Fuente) because this is important for me... He's the first person I will speak to and we will see."

Barcelona have a perfect record in La Liga after six games and 17-year-old starlet Lamine Yamal has been in dazzling form, playing almost every minute of the campaign to date, scoring three goals and setting up five.

"I think he could be the best (player) in the world in the future, 100 percent," said Flick, who argued Spain's Euro 2024 winning star is not in need of a rest.

San Siro loses 2027 Champions League final due to uncertain future

Milan: The 2027 Champions League final will be moved away from the San Siro in Milan due to uncertainties over potential renovations, UEFA said yesterday. European football's governing body said that the San Siro had lost the showpiece fixture as the city of Milan could not guarantee that the ground and the surrounding area "would not be affected by refurbishment works".

"It was decided not to assign the final to Milan and to re-open the bidding process to appoint a suitable venue, with a decision expected in May/June 2025," added UEFA.

Earlier this month AC Milan and Inter Milan, who both play their home matches at the San Siro, rejected a project to modernise and restructure the iconic stadium, which is owned by the city of Milan. Mayor of Milan Giuseppe Sala said both clubs would be ready to relaunch their initial project of a new stadium in the immediate vicinity of San Siro, which had been abandoned last year after political and bureaucratic wrangles.

Earlier this year AC Milan bought land in the suburb of San Donato Milanese, to the south-east of the city, as part of a plan to move outside the official boundaries of the city of Milan in the hope they would more easily gain building approval. Reigning Serie A champions Inter have their sights set on the towns of Rozzano and Assago, just south of Milan, after sounding out the possibility of building on former industrial land in populous northern suburb Sesto San Giovanni.