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AFC U-20 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Qatar beat Singapore to make a flying start



Qatar players celebrate after scoring a goal during the AFC U-20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers Group J match against Singapore at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar and Jordan kicked off their AFC U-20 Asian Cup China 2025 Qualifiers Group J campaigns with impressive wins yesterday. At the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Al Duhail, hosts secured a comfortable 3-0 win over Singapore. Qatar got off to a

dream start, taking the lead as early as the ninth minute through Ibrahim Mohamadali.

Mohamed Khaled Gouda doubled their joy in the 20th minute as Singapore were left with a mountain to climb going into the break. Qatar maintained their high tempo approach in the second half and went 3-0 up in the 54th minute, midfielder Bassam Adel Eid finding the back of the net with the West Asian side then content to

see out the remainder of the match.

Meanwhile, Jordan were even more prolific, thrashing Hong Kong 7-0 in the simultaneous kick-off at the Grand Hamad Stadium. The opening minutes were a cagey affair but Jordan gradually began to exert their grip on the game.

After several half chances, the West Asian side finally found the back of the net through forward Odeh Burhan Fakhoury in the 37th minute. It got worse for Hong

Kong as they were hit again five minutes later with Mahmoud Mohammad Theeb doubling Jordan's advantage.

Any hope Hong Kong had of mounting a comeback in the second half were dashed by Abdelrahman Alkhodour's goal in the 47th minute. Jordan, aware that goal difference could be pivotal, continued to push and were rewarded again through Ibrahim Mohammad Sabra (51st), Omar Khader Joo (60th), Mohammad Ahmed Taha (80th)

and Anas Ashraf Alkhob (90th).

Tomorrow, action will see Jordan playing Singapore while Qatar will face Hong Kong. All 10 group winners, along with the five best-placed runners-up, will progress to the final and be joined by 1985 champions China, who are hosting the U-20 Asian Cup for a second time after their first in 2010. Qatar have emerged triumphant in 2014 and have qualified for each of the past five editions.

FOOTBALL

Rattled Sadd aim to bounce back against Gharafa

Defending champions Al Sadd have lost three of their five matches and are placed in seventh place

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Defending champions Al Sadd would look to get their Ooredoo Stars League campaign back on track when they meet Al Gharafa in the sixth round at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today.

Al Sadd, who have lost their two previous matches to Al Duhail and Umm Salal, are currently in seventh place with six points. They have lost three games and won two so far. Al Gharafa meanwhile are in fourth place with eight points from two wins, two draws and one loss.

Al Sadd would look at this crucial tie as a must-win game and aim to get their act together. Coach Felix Sanchez on the eve of the clash, said, "We have a very difficult match against Al Gharafa, we know that after the last match (Al Sadd lost to Al Duhail 1-5), it is very important to perform well."

"Al Gharafa have many players from last season and their technical staff is also continuing. They are a very organised in defence and the match will be challenging but we are confident in our ability to play well. We got two bad results in the last two matches in the league. We know that this is an opportunity for us to make a comeback and show the fans that the team is ready and that we have the desire to perform much better," said Sanchez.

Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said he expects a tough battle. "We expect Al Sadd to be at their best. They usually do not play two bad matches, so we are waiting for the best from the opponents. We want to win and will fight for that," he said.

About some absences in his team, Martins said, "Rodrigo and Madibo are absent due to injury and there are doubts about



Al Sadd (left) and Al Gharafa players at a training session yesterday, on the eve of their Ooredoo Stars League match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Jang Hyun-Soo's participation."

In another key clash of Week 6, Al Arabi will meet Al Rayyan at the Al Thumama Stadium. The clash presents an opportunity for both teams to push hard for a win and to aim for the three valuable points to advance in the rankings.

Al Arabi are still in search of their first win in the league having drawn four matches and lost one. They have 4 points and are currently 9th in the standings. Al Rayyan, who have scored two wins and suffered three losses so far, have 6 points to their credit and are in 8th place.

Coach Younes Ali, who has just taken over charge of Al Rayyan, said, "This is a new challenge for me at my home, Al Rayyan Club. The Al Arabi match is against a strong competitor. Derby matches are always not subject to previous standards or results, and it is a three-point league match in order to improve the team's position in the league championship."

He added: "The period in which I took over the team is a short one and I saw that the players have keenness and seriousness to appear in the best way, and the team is fully prepared for the upcoming match."



Younes thanked Al Arabi for the previous period he spent with his former team, noting that he moved from a big team to a big team as well, and said: "This is a new challenge at my home, Rayyan club, and I am looking for Rayyan to return to its normal position by winning championships, and our focus now is on the Arabi match, and then we will focus on the Al Nassr match in the AFC Champions League Elite."

Al Arabi coach Anthony Hudson said his team was fully prepared for the match. "We are looking forward to facing Al Rayyan as this is one of the most important matches

in the league. We know that Al Rayyan are a strong team with distinguished players, so we must be at the peak of our focus. The match will be a big challenge and winning it will not just be three points, but it is also what reflects the team spirit. Our goal is to score the three points and please our great fans, and we promise them to provide our best," he said.

In the other games of the week, Al Wakrah will play Al Khor (today), Al Shamal will meet Al Ahli, Umm Salal will take on Qatar SC, and Al Shahania will face Al Duhail (all tomorrow).

SPOTLIGHT

Captain Stokes on track for Pakistan tour



England Test captain Ben Stokes is seen with a young fan during the Pro-Am of the BMW PGA Championship held at Wentworth Golf Club in Virginia Water, Surrey, England, last week. (@benstokes38)

AFP
London

England captain Ben Stokes is "on track" to feature in the Test series in Pakistan after undergoing scans on his hamstring injury yesterday. Stokes was sidelined for England's recent Test series against Sri Lanka due to the hamstring tear he suffered playing for Northern Superchargers in The Hundred on August 11.

Ollie Pope stood in as Test captain as England won the Sri Lanka series 2-1.

But Stokes is likely to resume his role as skipper against Pakistan after the 33-year-old all-rounder's positive scan results.

England fly out to Pakistan next week for a three-match Test tour that gets under way in Multan on October 7.

"England Men's Test captain Ben Stokes today underwent planned scans on the hamstring injury that ruled him out of the Test series against Sri Lanka," the England and Wales Cricket Board said yesterday.

"The results of the scans were positive and confirmed that his recovery, since sustaining the injury six-and-a-half weeks ago, remains on track to participate in the upcoming Test series against Pakistan."

Even if he is ready to lead England in Pakistan, there will be doubts about Stokes' ability to bowl in the early part of the tour.

Speaking to *Sky Sports* on Tuesday, Stokes was asked if he was likely to be able to bowl in the first Test and said: "I think that's you getting ahead of yourself. Obviously I've been six-and-a-half weeks now of just walking and doing stuff in the gym."

"There's a lot more than just my hamstring that I need to get back firing and working up again in terms of bowling."

On Tuesday, Stokes also said he would be willing to return to the white-ball setup under new coach Brendon McCullum if he was asked but added that there had been no conversations about him coming back into the limited overs squads.

McCullum's appointment as head coach across all formats came after a two-year period of having

separate coaches for the white and red-ball teams and followed Matthew Mott's departure as limited-overs coach in July.

Meanwhile Will Jacks says England's new-look one-day side need time to get to grips with a format they rarely play after beating Australia to keep their five-match series alive.

Jacks hit a brilliant 84 as he and centurion Harry Brook led the hosts to a rain-affected win in Durham on Tuesday following victories for the world champions in the two opening games.

Without seasoned campaigners Stokes, Jos Buttler, Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow - all of whom played in England's triumphant 2019 World Cup campaign - the host nation are relying on a new generation in the current series. But Brook and Jacks have had scant exposure to the 50-over game.

Neither has featured in county cricket's One-Day Cup since 2019, with leading white-ball players routinely skipping the tournament following the advent of The Hundred, which added to an already packed calendar.

"With the lack of 50-over crick-

et that we play now, finding that tempo can be difficult," Jacks, 25, said before another must-win clash at Lord's on Friday.

"Of course it is difficult. The schedule only allows what it allows and that's for people above us (to determine).

"We just go where we're told. I think when you're leading up to a major event, you are going to play more but with the way TV is... no, that's out of our control.

"This is our first time together as a squad so it's going to take time to get there but we're progressing every game and hopefully when we come back next time we'll be one step further."

Despite his inexperience - just 32 List A appearances in the six years since his debut - Jacks has impressed in the 50-over game, with four half-centuries in 10 one-day internationals.

Following heavy defeats at Trent Bridge and Headingley, England won the third ODI at the Riverside by 46 runs on the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method for weather-affected matches.

It was Australia's first defeat after 14 straight wins in the format.

PREVIEW

Ace all-rounder Shakib 'available' for Kanpur Test

Media reports suggested Shakib played first Test with finger injury

AFP
Kanpur, India

Star Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has no injury concerns and remains in line to play the second Test against India, coach Chandika Hathurusinghe said yesterday.

Media reports suggested Shakib played the first of two Tests with a finger injury when India handed Bangladesh a 280-run thrashing in Chennai.

Former Sri Lanka all-rounder Hathurusinghe said "there was no doubt" over Shakib's participation in the second Test, which begins tomorrow.

"At the moment I have not heard anything about any sort of injury - neither from the physio nor from anyone else," Hathurusinghe told reporters in Kanpur, where the Test will be played.

"And he is eligible for selection. If there are any changes (in the team) then it's depending on the surface."

The heat has been on Shakib, a 37-year-old former lawmaker who faces a case of alleged murder back home after Bangladesh was plunged into political crisis by student-led protests that led to the ouster of autocratic former leader Sheikh Hasina.

The left-hander, who bats in the middle-order and bowls spin, played a key role in his team's historic Test series sweep in Pakistan.

He then went back to England to play county cricket for Surrey instead of returning home ahead of the India tour.

Shakib made 32 and 25 with the bat in the first Test but went wicketless with the ball.

"I'm not upset about his performance, but our overall per-



India's head coach Gautam Gambhir (left) speaks with Virat Kohli during a practice session at the Green Park Cricket Stadium in Kanpur ahead of their second Test against Bangladesh. (AFP)



Shakib Al Hasan. I am sure he also thinks he can perform better. We all know what he is capable of," Hathurusinghe said.

"I think he batted really well in

the second innings. He couldn't go on, not because of lack of pride but for the sheer quality of the opposition."

Bangladesh were bowled out for 149 and then 234 to lose the match inside four days.

'No pressure'

India, led by Rohit Sharma, will be looking to extend their advantage at the top of the World Test Championship rankings after their emphatic first Test performance.

They will host New Zealand for three Tests starting next month before their high-profile tour of Australia, where they will play five matches.

But Rookie Akash Deep - a new addition to India's fast bowling riches of Jasprit Bumrah and Mo-

hamed Siraj - said he was focused on the task at hand. "As a player, you need to understand yourself and know your strengths," said Deep, who took two wickets in the previous match, which was just his second Test.

"What can we add to the bowling? Just simple stuff and no added pressure about going to Australia and all that."

"It is a huge responsibility to deliver the goods like the bowlers who have contributed for India before you," he said.

The pitch at Kanpur's Green Park stadium is expected to be slow and low, with spin expected to play a part by day three.

Irrespective of the surface, Deep said his job would be to "keep the ball in good areas and get wickets".

ANNOUNCEMENT

Starting salaries for English men's, women's teams equal from 2025

AFP
London

Women's minimum starting salaries in domestic cricket will be the same as men's from next year, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced yesterday.

The women's domestic structure is being overhauled from the 2025 season, with eight counties hosting tier-one teams, increasing to nine the following year and 10 in 2027.

The equalisation of salaries will apply at "rookie" level, typically a player's first professional contract, and at the "senior pro" position, for those who have established themselves in first teams.

The BBC said the minimum salary for a rookie, likely to be a first professional deal, would be £20,000 (\$26,750) rising to £28,000 at senior pro level.

It has also been agreed that each of the eight first-class counties awarded tier-one status must invest at least £500,000 on player salary costs.

A salary cap of £800,000 has been confirmed, with minimum squad sizes of 15 contracted players.

"Equalising starting salaries across our men's and women's professional domestic game is

another positive step forward for women's cricket in England and Wales," said Beth Barrett-Wild, the ECB director of the women's professional game.

Emma Reid, the Professional Cricketers' Association director of player rights and women's cricket, said: "This is a big step towards reaching parity and a journey that the PCA is fully committed to achieving."

Last year, an Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) report said discrimination, including sexism, was "widespread" in English cricket and that women received an "embarrassingly small amount compared to men".

It said match fees for the England women's team were a quarter of those paid to the men's team for white-ball games while the figure was just 15 percent for Tests.

The ECB announced in August 2023 that England's women cricketers would be paid the same match fees as their male counterparts, following similar moves by other nations.

However, the ECB did not agree to all of the report's recommendations, including on equal pay for men and women.

The ICEC report had called for overall equal average pay at international level by 2030 and equal average pay and prize money in domestic cricket by 2029.

FOCUS

Brook 'relieved' as first ODI century sets up win

AFP
Chester-le-Street, United Kingdom

Harry Brook said he felt a sense of relief after his maiden one-day international hundred paved the way for his first win as England captain.

Following heavy defeats by world champions Australia at Trent Bridge and Headingley, England had to win at Chester-le-Street on Tuesday to keep the five-match series alive.

Brook came in to bat with England struggling at 11-2 after Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc had removed both openers.

But the 25-year-old Yorkshireman responded with a superb 110 not out as England won by 46 runs on the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method. Brook was appearing in just his 18th ODI. Brook was simply pleased to be back in the runs.

"I'm relieved, for sure," he told reporters. "It's nice to get that first hundred on the board and hopefully there's plenty more to come."

"I feel like I've been a little bit stop-start this summer. I've had a lot of starts - 30s and 40s - and then not managed to convert, which is frustrating. "To do that today, I feel like I'm back in a good place. Obviously it's nice to score runs against Australia, but scoring runs

is amazing, no matter who it is against." rook came under fire for his post-match comments following England's defeat in the series opener in Nottingham when he tried to explain some loose dismissals by saying: "If you get caught somewhere on the boundary or in the field then who cares?" But Brook was adamant he had been misunderstood.

"I think people took that a little bit the wrong way," he said. "You've got to go out and play fearlessly and almost have that 'who cares?' attitude but that's not a 'who cares if we lose?' attitude. We all want to win, but you don't want to go out and have that fear of getting out."

Spinner Ajaz Patel trains as New Zealand take on SL



New Zealand's Ajaz Patel attends a practice session on the eve of their second Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle yesterday. In the first Test last week at the same venue, Sri Lanka's spinners, led by Prabath Jayasuriya, dominated New Zealand's batsmen. Despite a determined century from Rachin Ravindra, New Zealand's batting lineup succumbed to Sri Lanka's disciplined bowling, resulting in a comfortable victory for the hosts. This win gave Sri Lanka a 1-0 lead in the two-Test series. (AFP)

FOCUS

MotoGP to return to India in 2026: race organisers

Indian GP in 2024 was cancelled after 'operational considerations'

Reuters
New Delhi

The Indian Grand Prix will return to the MotoGP calendar only in 2026, organisers said yesterday, less than two months after confirming it would be held at the Buddh International circuit for the next three seasons.

MotoGP said in July that a new agreement was signed with the government of Uttar Pradesh, the northern state where the Buddh circuit is located.

The race will now be a reserve event for the 2025 season. This year's Indian Grand Prix was cancelled because of operational considerations.

"Operational circumstances have obliged the event to be delayed from its initial slot near the start of the 2025 calendar," MotoGP said in a statement.

"With no available dates towards the end of the season, MotoGP will therefore return to India in the early stages of 2026."

The inaugural Grand Prix at Buddh in 2023 attracted more than 100,000 fans and next year's event was expected to take place in March when weather conditions were more suitable.

Also yesterday, it was announced the Portuguese Grand Prix will feature in the next two seasons of MotoGP and will be held at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao, organisers said yesterday.

The Portuguese GP returned in



A view of the start of a Indian Grand Prix at the Buddh International Circuit in India.

2020 after an eight-year absence and has been held at the Algarve International Circuit since.

However, the death of the circuit's CEO Paulo Pinheiro earlier this year led to speculation that it would be taken off the calendar.

Last month, Portuguese rider Miguel Oliveira, who will race for the Pramac Yamaha MotoGP team from next season, pleaded for the country's government to keep the event alive.

"We are talking about an event that has a unique ability to promote and project Portugal as a tourist destination and as an organiser of major sporting events," Portugal's Secretary of State for

Tourism Pedro Machado said in a statement.

"By supporting the organisation of these initiatives, we are strengthening our country's reputation and attractiveness and this is very important from the point of view of tourism."

"It also has an immediate economic impact on the regional economy, which is equally significant, since this is an event that attracts thousands of people over several days, including spectators and staff from the competing teams."

This year's Portuguese GP took place in March and was won by Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin.

"We're very happy to announce that we will be racing in Portugal for at least another two years," Carmelo Ezpeleta, CEO of Dorna Sports, said.

"Since we first went to the Autodromo Internacional do Algarve, it has become a favourite for many fans and riders, and it's easy to see why."

"Not only is it a beautiful place to race, but the event itself has improved every year, and we are very proud to be able to make such a positive economic, sporting and social impact on the area."

The 2025 season is set to start in March with the Thailand Grand Prix.

MOTORSPORT

Prosecutors charge three in Schumacher blackmail case

AFP
Berlin

German prosecutors said yesterday they were bringing charges against three men arrested this year over a blackmail plot targeting the family of Formula One legend Michael Schumacher.

They said the chief suspect, a 53-year-old man from the western city of Wuppertal, had threatened to release private photos and videos and demanded €15mn (\$16.7mn) from Schumacher's family.

These allegedly included images of the seven-time Formula One champion before and after the 2013 skiing accident in the French Alps which left him with a serious brain injury.

Schumacher, 55, has not been seen in public since.

The images allegedly came from another 53-year-old, from the western town of Wuelfrath, who worked as a security guard for the Schumacher family until 2021.

He is suspected of having sold the material for a "five figure" sum and could face a "considerable" jail term on charges of being an ac-

complice to attempted blackmail and breach of privacy.

Prosecutors say the chief suspect rang an employee of the Schumacher family several times in June this year to demand the money.

He allegedly threatened to leak the images onto the so-called "dark net" if money was not paid.

The chief suspect faces charges of attempted blackmail with a maximum jail sentence of up to 15 years, although prosecutors say the punishment could be reduced as the threat was not followed through.

The Wuppertal man's 30-year-old son has been charged with being an accomplice to blackmail, as his father had asked him to create an untraceable e-mail address.

This was used to send the Schumacher family samples of the blackmail material, prosecutors said.

The family alerted authorities in Switzerland, where Schumacher has been cared for at his family home since the accident.

Swiss investigators traced the plot to Germany through the phone number used to call the family.



A file photo of F1 legend Michael Schumacher before his crippling skiing accident that took place in December 2013. Schumacher, 55, has not been seen in public since.

Qatar team wins three medals in Asian Cup shooting in Kazakhstan

ALMATY, Kazakhstan: The Qatari shooting team won three medals (one silver and two bronze) during its participation in the Asian Cup for Shooting Clay, which is currently being held in the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan, and will continue until September 30, with a large participation of shooters from various Asian countries.

The Qatari team is participating in the tournament with a delegation that includes a significant number of shooters headed by Ahmed Mubarak al-Kuwari, President of the Shotgun Team.

The Qatari team's medals came in the trap competition. In the men's

team category, the Qatari team, consisting of the trio Mohammed al-Rumaihi, Rashid Hamad al-Athba and Nasser al-Humaidi, managed to win the bronze medal after obtaining third place in the competition, while the Kuwaiti team won the gold medal, and the Kazakh team won the silver medal.

In the women's trap team category, Qatari shooters Kholoud Al-Khalaf, Amna al-Abdullah, and Maitha al-Binali won the silver medal, while the Kuwaiti team won the gold medal, and the Kazakhstan team won the bronze medal. In the mixed team category, the Qatari duo Rashid



Hamad al-Athba and Kholoud Hassan al-Khalaf won the bronze

medal, while China won the gold medal, and the Kuwaiti team won

the silver medal. The Qatari team shooters will be looking forward

to winning more medals in the skeet competition.

TENNIS

Osaka eyes long partnership with Mouratoglou

Reuters
Tokyo

Naomi Osaka is hopeful that her stint with new coach Patrick Mouratoglou will develop into a long-term partnership, the four-times Grand Slam champion said yesterday after easing into the second round of the China Open.

The 26-year-old split with coach Wim Fissette earlier this month after four years together across two stints and arrived in Beijing this week with Mouratoglou, who previously guided her idol Serena Williams to 10 of her 23 major titles.

Former world number one Osaka is looking to reignite her career following a patchy run of form having returned to the tour nine months ago after a long maternity break.

"I'm calling him my coach right now. I didn't know there was a lot of interest in my players box. I'd say he's my coach right now," Osaka said after beating Lucia Bronzetti 6-3 6-2 in her first match under Mouratoglou.

"I try not to get into relationships with people for the short-term. I try to think of it as a long-



Japan's Naomi Osaka reacts with new coach Patrick Mouratoglou (inset) watching from the stands as she plays against Italy's Lucia Bronzetti during their singles match at the China Open in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

term commitment. I like the way he coaches. I think it's going to be really interesting."

Osaka said she was initially hesitant to approach Frenchman Mouratoglou, who has also worked with Grigor Dimitrov, Stefanos Tsitsipas, Simona Halep and Holger Rune among others. "The fact that he was Serena's

coach made me want to avoid him just because his persona is so big," she said.

"This isn't rude because I found out it's not true, but I didn't know ... I didn't know if he was a good coach or he coached Serena," Osaka said.

"Then I met him, talked to him, worked with him on the court. He

absolutely is a really good coach. I'm really glad that he's taking this project on, as well."

"I would say I'm still a little nervous around him. I look to the floor when he looks at me. I think I do need a lot more time to spend together with him. I'm getting a little more comfortable day by day."

Alcaraz hopes Davis Cup will not be Nadal's 'last dance'



Carlos Alcaraz (left) of Spain and compatriot Rafael Nadal react during their match against American pair of Austin Krajicek and Rajeev Ram during the Olympic Games doubles match in Paris. (AFP)

Madrid: Carlos Alcaraz welcomed the addition of Rafa Nadal to Spain's Davis Cup team for the quarter-finals in November and hoped the event in Malaga will not mark the end of the 22-times Grand Slam champion's career. Nadal was a surprise choice for the Nov. 19-24 Final 8. The 38-year-old last competed at the Paris Olympics in July and subsequently missed the US Open and the Laver Cup this month over fitness concerns.

Nadal has said he expects to end his injury-plagued career this year after a hip injury that required surgery limited his appearances in 2023, and there has

been speculation the Davis Cup could be his last event.

"It's always great having Rafa around."

"I miss him. I'm not going to lie, I missed him in the Laver Cup. Obviously, as much time as I can spend with him, it's a privilege for me," said Alcaraz, who partnered Nadal in doubles at the Paris Games.

"I don't want to think that it's a potential last dance for him in Malaga. I just want to ... enjoy seeing him on court as much as I can."

"It's great support having him in the team. He can bring a lot of experience to the Davis Cup."

LA LIGA

Mbappe suffers injury before Atletico derby

The French superstar was taken off during the 3-2 win over Alaves on Tuesday

AFP

Madrid

Real Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe has sustained a thigh injury ahead of this weekend's La Liga derby with Atletico, his club said yesterday. The French superstar was taken off during the 3-2 win over Alaves on Tuesday and appeared to be suffering some discomfort. Spanish media suggest Mbappe will miss around three weeks injured.

"Following tests carried out today by Real Madrid's medical services on our player Kylian Mbappe, he has been diagnosed with an injury to the biceps femoris in his left leg," said the Spanish champions in a statement.

Mbappe scored a superb goal in the thriller at the Santiago Bernabeu with Alaves and has netted five times this season in seven league appearances. Asked about Mbappe's condition after the game, Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said: "He's fine, he's fine, a little overloaded, he asked me for the change to avoid problems."

Madrid, a point behind leaders Barcelona ahead of the Catalans' match against Getafe, visit the Metropolitano stadium on Sunday to face rivals Atletico. Los Blancos have not been beaten in La Liga for 39 games, since a defeat at Atletico a year ago.

The striker is also set to miss the visit to Lille in the Champions League next week and potentially October's Nations League matches against Israel and Belgium with France. Mbappe joined Real Madrid this summer at the end of his Paris Saint-Germain contract, fulfilling a long-held dream.

The 25-year-old hit his stride in recent matches after taking a few games to find his footing in the Spanish capital. Mbappe has seven goals in nine appearances for Real across all competitions, scoring in the UEFA Super Cup victory over Atalanta in August and on his Champions League debut.

On Tuesday night, Mbappe struck for the fourth consecutive game as Madrid survived a late scare to beat Alaves 3-2. Madrid dismantled Alaves with goals from Lucas Vazquez, Mbappe and Rodrygo before a late salvo from the visitors rocked Carlo Ancelotti's side.

Carlos Protezioni and Kike Garcia scored two goals in two minutes in the final stages but Madrid held on. "This is football, you can think the game has finished, (then there's) a small slip and you score the first, they get confidence and you lose it, this is what happens," Ancelotti said. "Obviously we don't want this to happen, but it can. We have to highlight that for an hour the team played well and that gives us confidence."

Los Blancos overpowered Alaves from



Real Madrid's French Kylian Mbappe jumps for the ball during the La Liga match against Deportivo Alaves at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Tuesday night. (AFP)

the start in what was a hugely uneven contest for most of the game, despite the Basque side's solid start to the season. Ancelotti brought Vinicius Junior back into the starting line-up and gave Vazquez a rare start and the pair combined inside the first minute. The Brazilian winger surged in from the left flank and cut the ball back for a simple finish from Vazquez.

Ancelotti said Monday he wanted more intensity at the outset of matches after Madrid had scored just one first half goal this season in La Liga or the Champions League, and his demand was swiftly met. Los Blancos dominated with Alaves barely reaching Thibaut Courtois' penalty box.

Despite that Madrid's second goal only came five minutes before the interval, when Mbappe and Jude Bellingham combined beautifully. France captain Mbappe conjured a clever flicked pass to the England international, who completed a one-two by

sending his teammate through on goal.

Mbappe took two deft touches to shake his marker and get a sight of goal, before stroking home clinically for his fifth league goal. Rodrygo expanded Madrid's lead soon after the interval, roaming in with freedom from the right and firing through Alaves goalkeeper Antonio Sivera's legs.

Teenage Brazilian striker Endrick hit the post with a deflected effort and Abde Rebach also struck the woodwork as Alaves made a rare foray forward. Madrid substitute Endrick, 18, was fortunate not to be dismissed when he kicked out at Alaves defender Santiago Mourino.

The visitors pulled one back after 85 minutes when Protezioni curled home a sweet strike from the edge of the box. Protezioni then turned provider with a fine ball over the top which Kike Garcia fired home well. Madrid hung on for the victory, their 39th consecutive league game unbeaten in

Ancelotti's 300th game at the helm across two spells at the club, ahead of Sunday's derby clash with Atletico Madrid at the Metropolitano.

The Rojiblancos' stadium was where they last tasted defeat in the top flight, exactly a year ago. Tempers frayed at full time when Ancelotti confronted the referee, seemingly unhappy with a few of his players being booked while some of Alaves' tough tackling went unpunished. "Fair or unfair, we have to adapt to the new rules," a calmer Ancelotti said later, as several of his players were carded for protesting decisions.

Alaves coach Luis Garcia Plaza was also angry at full-time after Endrick got away with lashing out. "The Endrick incident should have been a red card, we should have played the last 10 minutes with an extra player," said the coach. "It's red, there's nothing more to it, I won't speak more about this topic."

Nkunku hits Chelsea hat-trick, Man City edge into League Cup last 16

Manchester: Christopher Nkunku scored a hat-trick as Chelsea thrashed fourth tier Barrow 5-0 to reach the last 16 of the League Cup on Tuesday as a much-changed Manchester City edged out Watford 2-1.

Nkunku now has six goals in seven appearances this season, but the Frenchman has still been unable to nail down a regular place in Enzo Maresca's side. Maresca made 11 changes from the team that beat West Ham 3-0 on Saturday but could still start around £400m worth of talent.

Joao Felix was another of the Blues' big money signings to shine. His scooped pass set up Nkunku for opener.

Nkunku then flicked home a second before Felix's free-kick hit the post and rebounded in off Barrow goalkeeper Paul Farman. Pedro Neto tapped in Mykhailo Mudryk's cross for his first Chelsea goal. Nkunku sealed his first hat-trick for the club when he dispossessed Farman and rolled into an empty net.

City began what is likely to be many months without key midfielder Rodri after he suffered suspected knee ligament damage in a fiery 2-2 draw against Arsenal in the Premier League on Sunday. Little over 48 hours on from that top-of-the-table clash, City were in action again and Pep Guardiola made nine changes, including a debut for 16-year-old Kaden Braithwaite.

Jeremy Doku, one of the two to retain his place, fired in the opening goal from Jack Grealish's pass after five minutes. Rodri's absence could mean a more prominent role for Matheus Nunes and the Portugal international blasted in his first goal since joining City for £53 million a year ago.

Tom Ince, son of former Manchester United midfielder Paul Ince, pulled a late goal back for Watford, but it was too little, too late for the Championship side.

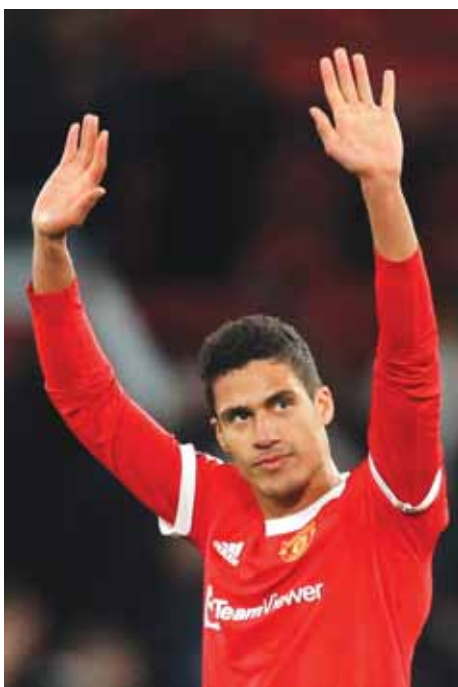
Aston Villa's second string were also pushed by lower-league opposition but Emi Buendia's header and Jhon Duran's penalty were enough to win 2-1 at Wycombe.

Fourth-tier Walsall came closest to an upset as they forced Leicester to penalties after a 0-0 draw. However, the Premier League side won the shoot-out 3-0.

Newcastle's trip to AFC Wimbledon was postponed after a sinkhole appeared on the League Two side's pitch following heavy flooding in London this week. The match has been switched to Newcastle's St. James Park on October 1.

SPOTLIGHT

Ex-Real Madrid defender Varane retires



AFP

Paris

France World Cup winner Raphael Varane yesterday announced his retirement from football at the age of 31, adding that he will remain at Como in a non-playing capacity. Former Real Madrid and Manchester United centre-back Varane had joined the Italian club for this season but was then excluded from their Serie A squad having suffered a knee injury in August. "A new life begins off the pitch," Varane said on social media. "I will remain with Como. Just without using my boots and shin pads. Something I am looking forward to sharing more about soon."

Varane came through the academy at French club Lens before joining Madrid as an 18-year-old in 2011. He claimed the first of his three La Liga titles in his maiden season in the Spanish capital. In 2014 he secured the first of his four Champions League crowns, winning a league and European double three years later.

Varane joined United in 2021, lifting the League Cup and FA Cup with the English club, but his time at Old Trafford was disrupted by injuries. He left United at the end of last sea-

son to move to Cesc Fabregas' newly-promoted Como, playing just one Coppa Italia match, when he sustained a knee injury.

"From Lens to Madrid to Manchester, and playing for our national team," Varane said. "I have defended every badge with everything I have, and loved every minute of the journey."

Varane made his France debut in 2013 with the pinnacle of his international career coming at the 2018 World Cup, where Les Bleus beat Croatia 4-2 in the final. He finished his France career with 93 caps, making his last appearance in the 2022 World Cup final defeat by Argentina on penalties. "I have won more than I could have even dreamed of," Varane said. "But beyond the accolades and trophies, I am proud that no matter what, I have stuck to my principles of being sincere and have tried to leave everywhere better than I found it."

Various former teammates paid tribute to Varane, including United's Portugal midfielder Bruno Fernandes. "It was a pleasure for all of us," Fernandes said on Instagram. After retiring from international football at just 29, Varane cited the extreme physical and mental pressures put upon top players. He has also spoken out about concerns regarding the impact concussions suffered by players could have in later life.

SERIE A

Como claim historic win at Atalanta

AFP

Milan

Como earned their first Serie A win in over two decades on Tuesday night, stunning Atalanta 3-2 in a match which had been pushed back a day following a massive downpour in Bergamo which had made the pitch unplayable.

Cesc Fabregas' Como came back from Davide Zappacosta's 18th-minute volley to claim all the points in the Italian top flight for the first time since beating Torino on the final day of the 2002/03 season.

Como levelled through Gabriel Strefezza's fine effort right after half-time and were ahead in the 54th minute when the unfortunate Sead Kolasinac deflected

Nico Paz's strike into his own goal. Aliu Fadera completed a historic victory for Como against fellow Lombardy club Atalanta with a brilliant individual strike which stunned the home fans.

Como, owned by tobacco giant Djarum, left out of the relegation zone and up to 15th place on five points following Tuesday's win, a point behind Europa League holders Atalanta who sit 12th after a strange start to the season.

Gian Piero Gasperini's Atalanta have lost three of their opening five Serie A fixtures and were unlucky to only draw 0-0 with Arsenal in the Champions League on Thursday.

Ademola Lookman pulled one back from the penalty spot in the ninth minute of stoppage time, too late for the hosts to mount a comeback.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City confirm knee ligament injury to Rodri

AFP

London

Manchester City confirmed yesterday that Rodri suffered ligament damage to his right knee during their weekend clash against Arsenal, although the full extent of the injury remains unclear. The midfielder has been in Spain this week consulting specialists after limping off midway through the first half of the match at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday after a collision with Thomas Partey.

City said added in a statement: "Assessment remains ongoing to ascertain the full extent of the injury and expected prognosis."

There is no timescale on his recovery but, speaking after his team's 2-1 League Cup win against Watford on Tuesday, City boss Pep Guardiola said Rodri would be out "for a long time". Reports earlier this week said the influential 28-year-old Spain international could miss the rest of the season.

Rodri's loss will be a huge blow to City's hopes of winning a fifth consecutive Premier League title and ambitions of reclaiming the Cham-

pions League crown. The 28-year-old defensive midfielder played a key role as City held off Arsenal to win a fourth straight Premier League title last season and was named player of the tournament at Euro 2024 as Spain emerged triumphant.

The former Atletico Madrid man has lost just one match for club or country in 18 months - the FA Cup final to Manchester United - and has been touted as a potential Ballon d'Or winner. City's Premier League win rate with their midfield lynchpin in the team is 74.1 percent but without him it drops to 61.9 percent.

Guardiola said he had the respon-

sibility to find a way of coping without Rodri, who joined City in 2019. "Rodri is irreplaceable," he said.

"When a team doesn't play with the best midfielder in the world for a long, long time of course it is a big blow but my duty is to find a solution so that we remain competitive as we have been for many years. When one player is irreplaceable you have to do it as a team and this is going to happen."

Rodri had already had a frustrating start to the season, missing City's first four games, including the Community Shield, after suffering a hamstring injury.



Rodri could miss the rest of the season.