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Sabalenka advances to last four as Zheng ousts Rybakina



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Slot braced to face 'special' Alonso in Anfield homecoming



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AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Sadd, Gharafa frustrated with 1-1 stalemates in Dubai

Sadd remain unbeaten with eight points from four games as the league phase reaches halfway point

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Al Sadd and Al Gharafa both were held to a draw in the AFC Champions League Elite yesterday. At Dubai's Zabeel Stadium, ten-man Al Wasl of the United Arab Emirates held on to claim a point as Milos Milojevic's side frustrated Al Sadd in a 1-1 draw. Few kilometres away at the Al Maktoum Stadium in Dubai, Al Gharafa missed a string of late chances as they also shared a 1-1 draw with Iran side Persepolis.

Al Wasl's Soufiane Bouftini was sent off with seven minutes remaining of regulation time to leave his side to hang on after Al Sadd's Romain Saiss had cancelled out Alexis Perez's 29th minute opener for the home side.

The result means Al Sadd remain unbeaten as the league phase reaches the halfway point with Felix Sanchez's side moving onto eight points from four games while Al Wasl are a further point behind.

Sanchez said happy with the draw but felt his side was better the team. "We deserved to win and get the three points but I am happy with my team's performance. We played against a good and organised team and got an important point in our journey in the Champions League," he said.

"We are on the right track towards qualification [for knockout stage], and this is the most important thing for us at the moment," Sanchez added.

Yusuf Abdurisag squandered an early chance to put Al Sadd in front when he was played in by Akram Afif, the newly crowned AFC Player of the Year sliding the ball across the face of goal in the eighth minute but the striker sliced his close-range effort woefully wide.

Moments later Afif's effort at the end of an Al Sadd counter was deflected into the side-netting by Bouftini as the visitors significant exerted early pressure without gaining a tangible reward.

Khaled al-Senani then parried Abdurisag's effort from outside the area to safety in the 19th minute but, for all the visitors' dominance, it was Al Wasl who should have taken the lead two minutes later.

Srdan Mijailovic's cross on the run from the left was deftly controlled by Haris Seferovic with his first touch, the Swiss forward then rolling the ball across the face of goal to the unmarked Jonatas Santos, who somehow managed to shoot high over the bar.



Al Sadd's Romain Saiss celebrates with teammates after scoring against Al Wasl at the Zabeel Stadium in Dubai yesterday.

Al Wasl did not have to wait much longer, however, to go in front. Al Sadd midfielder Mohamed Camara gave the ball away cheaply in his own half to Perez and he strode forward to hit a right-foot shot from 30 yards that took a huge deflection off Boualem Khoukhi to beat wrongfooted goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham.

Camara shot over the bar and Saiss sent his free kick well off target as Al Sadd sought an equaliser before the interval, with the leveller eventually coming 16 minutes into the second half.

The Al Wasl defence had only managed to half-clear an in-swinging Afif free kick from the left and the ball was eventually sent back into the penalty area by Khoukhi, who whipped his cross from the right onto the head of Saiss inside the six yard box.

Cristo Perez's shot almost caught out al-Senani with a little over 10 minutes remaining as Al Sadd sought the winner, the Al Wasl goalkeeper readjusting to punch clear, and soon after Bouftini was dismissed. Referee Muhammad Nazmi Nasaruddin reviewed the Moroccan's robust tackle on Mostafa Meshaal and deemed it dangerous enough to show the red card, but Al Wasl clung on despite being a man down to claim a point.

Meanwhile, Gharafa's Ahmed al-Ganehi scored an equaliser just three minutes after Farshad Faraji had put Persepolis in front in the 53rd minute but the Qatari side squandered a series of opportunities to take all three points.

The result moves Al Gharafa onto four points from their first four games in the league phase while Persepolis continue to look for their first win with Juan Carlos Fernandez's side on two points at the halfway stage. Persepolis' Faraji sent as flying volley over the bar in the fifth minute and Florinel Coman smashed his right-foot shot wide of the Iranian side's goal in a lively opening from both sides.



Al Gharafa's Ahmed al-Ganehi (centre) scored an equaliser just three minutes after Farshad Faraji had put Persepolis in front at the Dubai's Al Maktoum Stadium.

The tempo soon dropped and, while Joselu's spectacular overhead kick was kept out by the Persepolis defence in the 20th minute, neither side was able to make much attacking headway.

That changed in the 38th minute, when Oston Urunov's low drive looked destined for the bottom corner of the Al Gharafa goal until Sergio Rico threw himself to his left to make a sprawling save to deny the Uzbekistan international.

Rico was called upon again four minutes later, this time shovelling Faraji's close range header clear after the Persepolis defender had found space behind the Al Gharafa backline to meet Omid Alishah's lofted free kick into the box.

The Iranians continued to look the more likely to score following the interval, with Soroush Rafiei curling his 51st minute attempt over the bar before Faraji finally found the back of the net.

Vahid Amiri's long throw looped deep into the Al Gharafa penalty area and, after the ball took a single bounce in the six yard box, Faraji slammed his shot past an exposed Rico.

Persepolis' lead was to last less than three minutes, the ball falling at the feet of al-Ganehi and his first-time strike seared past Alexis Guendouz to pull the visitors level mere moments after the forward had been introduced from the Al Gharafa bench.

Yacine Brahimi then went close to putting Al Gharafa in front, just missing the top corner with a curling free kick and Coman shot over the bar as Persepolis' grip on the game looked increasingly tenuous.

Coman squandered another opening when he was played in on the Persepolis goal and Al Gharafa captain Ferjani Sassi had a long-range attempt deflected wide before Joselu's weak effort was gathered by Guendouz, dropping to his left.

Brahimi was denied four minutes from time by Guendouz while Rico was called upon to make a reflex save deep into injury time from Persepolis substitute Lucas Joao in a frantic but fruitless finish.

PREVIEW

Coach Younes urges Rayyan to bounce back against Pakhtakor in must-win tie

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Coach Younes Ali has said Al Rayyan must register their first victory to make a comeback in the AFC Champions League Elite when they face Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor at Stadion Majmuasi at 5pm in Tashkent today.

Straight defeats in their three opening games against Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal, FC Al Nassr and Al Ahli Saudi saw Al Rayyan languishing in the bottom of 12-team West Zone with eight sides to progress to the knockout stage.

Younes said Al Rayyan must work hard to overcome the challenge of Pakhtakor, who have two points. "I have watched Pakhtakor's matches and they are a tough side. But we must give our best effort to win the match and make a comeback in the competition," the Al Rayyan coach said.

"We had a difficult start with three losses but we played against formidable Saudi sides. Our preparations are good for the match and I am confident the team will show improvement," he said.

Al Rayyan's Abdulaziz Hatem echoed his coach views. "We have no choice but to win this match. We performed well in the last three matches but ended up losing. Now, we know a victory is a must for us to keep out chances alive for the knockout stage," he said.

While it will be the first meeting between the two sides, Al Rayyan will draw confidence from the fact three of four encounters with teams from Uzbekistan have ended in victories for them.

Pakhtakor have carried their inconsistent domestic form onto the continental stage with the reigning Uzbekistan champions struggling to make their mark in what is proving to be a tough campaign.

Stretching back to last season, Pakhtakor are on a four-match winless run and adding to their challenge is the fact that they have not won in their last six meetings with teams from Qatar.



Al Rayyan players train in Tashkent yesterday.

GULF CLUB CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Al Arabi face Rifaa in Bahrain today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Al Arabi will meet Al Rifaa of Bahrain in the Group B clash of the Gulf Club Champions League at the Khalifa Sports City Stadium in Bahrain today. Al Arabi will go into the clash aiming for a win to shore up their position from currently being third with one point, following a 1-1 draw against Qadsia in the opening match. Al Riffa are fourth with no points after they lost 1-3 to Al Ettifaq, who lead the group with three points.

Al Arabi coach Anthony Hudson will be looking for his side to iron out flaws and strike with full force against Rifaa, after his team suffered 1-3 loss to Al Gharafa in the Qatar Stars League last week.

Hudson said yesterday: "We are very excited to play this match and it is a big challenge for us. We have some players absent players but I have great confidence in the group to do the best and achieve victory."



Al Arabi coach Anthony Hudson.

He added: "Riffa is a strong team and we have sufficient information about it. We will do our best to achieve victory despite the difficulty of the match."

The tournament returns after a gap of nine years since the last edition in 2015 when the UAE's Al Shabab were the champions. This time, eight teams, divided into two groups, are competing on a home-and-away basis. The top two sides from each group will qualify for the semi-finals.

CRICKET

SPOTLIGHT

Rohit, Kohli under fire after 3-0 drubbing

AFP
Mumbai

Virat Kohli and **Rohit Sharma** came under fire yesterday as India chewed over a 3-0 Test series home defeat to New Zealand, with critics calling the team ageing and low on confidence.

The cricket superpower went down by 25 runs on Sunday in the third Test inside three days at Mumbai for only their second series whitewash at home.

It sealed New Zealand's historic first-ever Test series triumph on Indian soil.

For India there is little time to fix things - they travel to Australia for a five-match Test series starting on November 22.

"Losing 3-0 at home is a tough pill to swallow and it calls for introspection," former skipper Sachin Tendulkar wrote on social media.

"Was it lack of preparation, was it poor shot selection or was it lack of match practice?"

India went into the series against the Black Caps second in the ICC Test rankings, behind Australia, and as clear favourites. But repeated batting collapses - they were 46 all out in their first innings in the opening Test - set alarm bells ringing.

It hardly got much better from there.

"I accept the fact that we were not good enough with the bat in the entire series," said skipper Rohit. It particularly showed up the Indian batsmen's surprising inability to handle spinners on turning pitches in their own back yard. Mitchell Santner took 13 wickets in the second match while Mumbai-born New Zealander Ajaz Patel took 11 in the third Test to condemn India.

With Australia looming large, the form of 37-year-old Rohit and superstar batsman Kohli, 35, is of particular concern to Indian cricket fans. Rohit made 91 runs in three matches. Kohli just 93.

"The cold fact is that this is now a team in transition with key figures ageing, out of form and low on confidence," the *Times of India* newspaper wrote.

"Two of their stalwarts, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, seem to be in a state of terminal batting decline with a strange reluctance to acknowledge it and take corrective action like polishing their game by playing in domestic cricket," it added.



Indian media reported that all senior players, including Rohit and Kohli, had been advised to play the domestic Duleep Trophy four-day matches, but the players refused due to a "lack of motivation".

"They should have had some practice, definitely," former India captain Sunil Gavaskar told the *Indian Express*. "I know we beat Bangladesh and therefore it looked as if it was going to be a cakewalk against New Zealand," Gavaskar added. "But New Zealand, obviously, had a better attack, with cricketers who have played in India and in the IPL, who have a sense of what Indian pitches do."

Rohit and Kohli retired from T20 cricket after the team's World Cup triumph in June.

Spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, 38, and Ravindra Jadeja, 35, also suddenly look like age is catching up with them, critics said.

MATCH REPORT

Crisis manager Cummins shines as Australia win

'Really happy with how the guys bowled, everyone really'

Reuters
Melbourne

Pat Cummins proved once more he is the man for a batting crisis as he guided world champions Australia to a tense two-wicket win in their series-opening one day international against Pakistan at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday.

Playing his first ODI since last year's World Cup in India, Cummins produced a nerveless knock of 32 from 31 balls to push the hosts past Pakistan's modest total of 203 with 16.3 overs to spare.

Cummins, who also took two wickets, burnished his record of guiding Australia to victory from positions of peril, having scored the winning runs during the Ashes test at Edgbaston last year and twice hung tough with the bat at the World Cup.

"Tonight we got it done. I always much prefer sitting in the change-room but a wonderful match," Cummins said.

"It got a bit tighter than we would have liked in the end.

"Really happy with how the guys bowled, everyone really."

The hosts were in trouble at 155 for seven when Cummins came to the crease, with Pakistan sniffing their first win in Australia in nearly eight years and energised by a three-wicket burst by paceman Haris Rauf.

Tailender Sean Abbott was run out for 13 to leave Australia needing 19 runs with two wickets in hand but Cummins and Mitchell Starc (two not out) held on.

Cummins smashed a four straight past Pakistan quick Mohammad Hasnain to level the score then punched a single square to seal the win.



Australia's Pat Cummins (right) is congratulated by teammate Mitchell Starc after hitting the winning run during the first one-day international against Pakistan at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday. *(AFP)*

Pace spearhead Starc was named man-of-the-match with three wickets, including dismissing both Pakistan's openers.

In Pakistan's first ODI since missing the World Cup semi-finals, the team's top batter Babar Azam returned to the lineup after being stunningly dropped for the second and third tests against England.

The former captain made 37 off 44 balls before being bowled by legspinner Adam Zampa with an ill-judged push at a straight delivery.

Saim Ayub made his ODI debut for Mohammad Rizwan-captained Pakistan, reprising his opening partnership in tests with Abdullah Shafique, despite the pair's terrible record batting together. Both were dismissed cheaply by Starc; Ayub for one after chopping onto his stumps and Shafique caught behind for 12.

Rizwan top-scored for Pakistan with 44 and ODI debutant Irfan Khan made 22 batting at seven before being run out.

But it took tail-end slogging from Naseem Shah (40) and Afridi (24) to push Pakistan past 200.

Australia were missing four from the team that thrashed India in the World Cup final, with David Warner having retired, paceman Josh Hazlewood rested and both Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh on paternity leave.

Openers Matt Short and Jake Fraser-McGurk both botched their auditions to succeed Warner as Australia's ODI opener for the long-term, with Short caught for one and Fraser-McGurk out for a streaky 16.

Steve Smith (44) and Josh Inglis (49) put on 85 runs for the third wicket before falling to Pakistan's pacemen.

The ground was only a quarter full with a crowd of 25,800 but Rauf had Pakistan fans jumping in the terraces with a sizzling spell that included dismissing Marnus Labuschagne (16) and Glenn Maxwell (0) in successive deliveries.

BRIEF SCORES
Australia 204 for 8 (Inglis 49, Smith 44, Cummins 32*, Rauf 3-67) **beat Pakistan 203** (Rizwan 44, Naseem 40, Starc 3-33, Cummins 2-39) **by two wickets**

ANNOUNCEMENT

Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Saoud re-elected president of QCA



The General Assembly of the Qatar Cricket Association (QCA) has re-elected Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Saoud al-Thani as President for the term 2024-2028.

During the meeting which was held yesterday at the Qatar Olympic Committee headquarters, Khalid Saleh al-Rumaihi was elected as Secretary-General, and Mohamed Abdullah al-Meer, Abdullah Hussain al-Marri and Ms Sara Abdulaziz al-Sheeb were elected as members of the Association's Board of Directors.

The Assembly agenda also covered the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting, endorsing the financial statements for 2023 and reviewing of achievements from the past year.

The members also discussed strategic goals for the next phase, reinforcing the QCA's commitment to organizational excellence and development. Upon his re-election as President of QCA, Sheikh Abdulaziz stressed that the Association would continue its dedicated efforts to take the sport to a new level and provide more international exposure to the national teams.

Series win over India eclipses my perfect 10, says spinner Patel

Mumbai: Ajaz Patel said helping New Zealand wrap up a 3-0 series sweep in India on Sunday was even more special than his spectacular outing at the Wankhede Stadium three years ago when the Mumbai-born spinner picked up 10 wickets in one innings.

Patel took 5-103 in the first innings of the third and final Tests and 6-57 in the second as the Black Caps sealed a 25-run win on Sunday to become the first team to blank India in a home series featuring three or more Tests.

The 36-year-old said his incredible figures in the 2021 Test were tarnished by the fact New Zealand lost the match heavily.

"It's certainly sweeter. I can say that for sure," Patel told New Zealand media. "Coming here last time and having that achievement, but at the same time getting a hiding, didn't make it feel that special.

"This time around, bowling the team to a special Test win and a 3-0 sweep in India is pretty epic and pretty crazy."

Patel's 11-wicket haul made him the most successful visiting bowler at a single Indian ground with 25 wickets. He had claimed 10-119 and 4-106 in New Zealand's 372-run defeat against the hosts in 2021. "Every time I come back to Mumbai, it just feels like home," added Patel. "You get that vibe from a place. It's the same when I get back to New Zealand and to Auckland for the first time after a while. You get that special feeling and feel more comfortable."

"It was about challenging some of the best players in the world in their home conditions. I don't think any of us took a backward step," Patel said. "That's the biggest thing about this series. It's been a collective effort with different guys stepping up at different times, especially in clutch moments when the team needed it."

COMMENT

'Bunch of Kiwis' sealed historic Test whitewash in India, says proud Mitchell



New Zealand players celebrate their team's win against India at the end of their third and final Test at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Mumbai

New Zealand batsman Daryl Mitchell hailed his side as "a bunch of Kiwis taking on the world" after their historic 3-0 Test series triumph in India.

The tourists won the third match by 25 runs on Sunday inside three days in Mumbai to hand a stunned India only their second Test whitewash at home.

With 1.4 billion people - many of them mad about cricket - India were humbled by a nation with a population 270 times smaller.

"We are a bunch of Kiwis taking on the world and representing the country," Mitchell said, adding that he was "mighty proud of the group".

"We know how good India are," he said.

New Zealand repeatedly upset the odds and defied history in India.

The Black Caps' win in the opening match in Bengaluru was only their third Test victory in India and the first since 1988.

Victory in the second Test sealed a first-ever Test series win in the country for the New Zealanders, who did it without prolific batsman Kane Williamson.

He missed all three Tests for treatment on his groin in a bid to get fit for the visit of England later this month.

'One of the best'

Will Young took Williamson's batting spot at number three and played a key part, hitting 71 and 51 in the final Test. Young called the victory "massive", saying he would never forget the "memories with the boys that we have just created".

"That's why we play the game," said Young, who was named player of the series for his 244 runs in six innings.

"We do it for the bloke next to us, and that's a great feeling."

New Zealand won their first Test series when they beat hosts Pakistan 1-0 in three matches in 1969 under Graham Dowling.

But it was only in the 1980s and 1990s that Kiwi cricket took off, and they beat the visiting West Indies and India between 1979 and 1981.

The India triumph tops it all, especially considering they were beaten 2-0 in Sri Lanka in the build-up.

They consigned the mighty India to their first Test series defeat at home in 12 years.

"It will sink in a little bit more when we get home, once the dust settles a little bit," said Tom Latham, who took over as full-time Test captain after Tim Southee stepped down following the Sri Lanka defeat.

"It's been a fantastic achievement. I'd say it's one of the best."

New Zealand host England for three Tests starting November 28 in Christchurch, followed by matches in Wellington and Hamilton.

TENNIS / WTA FINALS

Sabalenka enters last four as Zheng ousts Rybakina

'I'M REALLY HAPPY I WAS ABLE TO WIN IN STRAIGHT SETS'

AFP
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Aryna Sabalenka has secured qualification for the semi-finals stage of the WTA Finals with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over Jasmine Paolini, as Zheng Qinwen ended Elena Rybakina's chances of moving on in Riyadh yesterday.

With two round-robin wins in as many matches this week in Saudi Arabia, Sabalenka guaranteed herself passage to the final four as the winner of the Purple Group.

The Belarusian top seed is also just one victory away from locking down the year-end number one ranking, which she is in a direct battle with Iga Swiatek.

Sabalenka bounced back from 0-2 down in the second set, and saved two set points at 4-5 to overcome Italian fourth seed Paolini and has now won 22 of her last 23 matches on tour.

"The second set was quite tricky. Honestly, I just tried to stay aggressive and show her that I'm going to fight for this set no matter what and I'm really happy I was able to win in straight sets," said Sabalenka.

"Halfway through the second set I was already thinking about the third set. But I was like, wait, wait, it's not the third set until it's the third set. I'm happy all those shots on set points went in."

Earlier at King Saud University Indoor Arena, Zheng improved her chances of advancing to the semi-finals with a 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 6-1 victory over world number five Rybakina.

The seventh-seeded Zheng rebounded from her opening round-robin defeat to Sabalenka by claiming her first win from three meetings with Rybakina.

Meanwhile, Rybakina suffered her second defeat of the week in Saudi Arabia, and has no chance of reaching the semi-finals, with one more round-robin clash to go against Sabalenka tomorrow.



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates winning her singles group stage match against Italy's Jasmine Paolini at King Saud University Indoor Arena, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Zheng apologised to the crowd during her on-court interview for yelling, 'Don't shout more', at some of her supporters at a crucial moment in the final set.

She thanked them for their support and later acknowledged she could have handled the moment better.

"I felt today in such an important moment, when they shout so hard my name, my heart rate goes up. So I hold and hold, until one moment I can't hold more," Zheng said during her post-match press conference.

"After I'm feeling a bit bad because if I can control my emotions a bit better, I was supposed not to say that to my crowd."

Zheng arrived in Riyadh on the back of an impressive second half of the season that saw her win titles in Palermo and Tokyo, and an Olympic gold medal in singles in Paris.

No woman has won more matches than her within that span.

The first Chinese player to qualify for the WTA Finals since Li Na in 2013, Zheng amassed a 12-2 win-loss record during the Asian swing last month and is the tour leader in most aces struck and percentage of first-serve points won.

Zheng made the first move, breaking Rybakina en route to a 4-1 advantage but her lead was erased as Rybakina attacked her second set to draw level.

The set fittingly went to a tie-break which Zheng sealed on a long forehand from Rybakina on the 58-minute mark.

In a pattern similar to the opening set, Zheng carved out a lead in the second frame, only for Rybakina to strike back and even the score.

This time though, the 2023 Wimbledon champion took four games in a row, to claim the second set and force a decider.

Zheng shook off early trouble on her serve in the final set before surging ahead 4-1.

It was the boost she desperately needed to wrap up the win - the ninth of her career against a top-10 opponent.

The Chinese Olympic champion now owns a tour-leading 20 three-set wins in 2024 - the highest tally by a WTA player in a single season since 2016, truly a remarkable achievement.

SPOTLIGHT

Croatia and Argentina grab United Cup spots

Reuters
Sydney

Croatia and Argentina have taken the last two spots in the field for the third edition of the United Cup mixed team tournament to be played in Sydney and Perth at the start of next season, organisers said yesterday.

Donna Vekic and Borna Coric will lead Croatia for the third straight year at the $10mn event as they battle it out with the United States and Canada in Group A, while Argentina will take on hosts Australia and Britain in Group F.

"It's honestly my favourite tournament of the year," Vekic, who won a singles silver medal at the Paris Olympics this year, said in a news release.

"We have great energy in the team. Borna has been my friend for more than 20 years. It feels like a little family. We are not a team, we are a family."

Argentina, who missed out on last year's United Cup after taking part in the inaugural edition, boast Tomas Martin Etcheverry and Nadia Podoroska as their top-ranked players.

The tournament starts on December 27 with the final to be played in Sydney on January 5.

DRAW
Group A - US, Canada, Croatia
Group B - Poland, Czech Republic, Norway
Group C - Greece, Kazakhstan, Spain
Group D - Italy, France, Switzerland
Group E - China, Germany, Brazil
Group F - Britain, Australia, Argentina

Miller 'lucky to walk away' from Malaysian MotoGP crash

Sepang, Malaysia: Jack Miller admitted yesterday he was lucky to walk away from a nasty crash at the Malaysian MotoGP, with his team saying it was a stark reminder of the dangers riders face.

The Australian KTM star was involved in a dramatic incident involving teammate Brad Binder and Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo on turn two of the opening lap at Sepang on Sunday.

All three riders came off with Miller's head appearing to hit the back of Quartararo's bike.

The 29-year-old needed treatment on the track before being taken to the medical centre, but was cleared of serious injury.

"Lucky to walk away from that one...thank you to everyone for the kind messages," the Australian said on Instagram.

The race was red-flagged and when it restarted Binder attempted a return, but pulled out with pain in his left shoulder. Quartararo rode on and finished sixth.

"Today was a stark reminder of the risks our riders face every time they line up on the grid," KTM said in a statement.

The team's racing manager Francesco Guidotti said it was "very bad to see".



French rider Fabio Quartararo (right) and Australian rider Jack Miller (second left) fall after a collision during the Malaysian Grand Prix at the Sepang International Circuit on Sunday. *(AFP)*

COMMENT

Williams are hurting after three big crashes in Brazil

Reuters
Sao Paulo

Williams boss James Vowles said he was 'hurting' after the Formula One team suffered three costly crashes in Brazil on Sunday and dropped a place in the constructors' world championship.

Franco Colapinto and Alex Albon both crashed in qualifying at Interlagos, postponed from Saturday, with the latter driver unable to take part in the race because the mechanics were unable to rebuild his car in time.

Argentine rookie Colapinto then crashed again in the race, triggering red flags.

With Renault-owned Alpine finishing second and third with Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly in a rain-hit Grand Prix, Williams fell to ninth in the standings with three rounds remaining and 27 points between them and eighth-placed RB.

"The nature of Formula One is that you can have some of the most incredible feelings and results, as well as some of the lowest moments that you can feel within a sport. I think it's fair to say this weekend is the second of those two," said Vowles.

"We've had three incredibly large crashes in just a few hours from one another and have a tremendous amount of work to get ourselves back on top of our spares situation before we go to Las Vegas in just a few weeks' time."

Vowles said he had watched the race through to the end, despite Colapinto crashing before the half-distance, because he wanted "to make sure I remember today because this isn't what I want us to be feeling in the future."

Albon said it had been a tough few weeks with the team now in a challenging position.

"I really didn't expect the incident in Turn One to happen, so we need to take a proper look to figure out what happened," he added.

"It's disappointing as it would've been a great opportunity to score points, as we knew coming to Brazil there is always a chance for crazy races, however it's our competitors who've been able to capitalise on this."

FOCUS

Lyles fails to make cut for world track athlete of year

AFP
Paris

Olympic 100m champion **Noah Lyles** is not one of the two finalists for male track athlete of the year, World Athletics revealed yesterday. Lyles won one of the closest Olympic finals in history to take gold in Paris in August by five thousandths of a second from Kishane Thompson of Jamaica.

But Lyles misses out as 200m Olympic champion Letsile Tebogo of Namibia and Norway's 5,000m gold medallist Jakob Ingebrigtsen were the two male track athletes to make the final.

The American was aiming for an Olympic sprint double but had to settle for the 200m bronze medal behind Tebogo and his US teammate Kenny Bednarek.

Lyles later revealed that he had raced in the 200m despite testing positive for Covid-19.

In contrast, the winner of the Olympic women's 100m final, Julien Alfred of St Lucia, is one of the two women's track finalists.



She will be up against Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone, the American who broke her own world record to win the Olympic 400m hurdles title for a second time in a row.

World Athletics said the top two in each category - track, field and out of stadium - were chosen from a first round of voting, which comprised votes from the World Athletics Council, officials and dignitaries connected to the sport known as the "World Athletics Family", and a public vote on social media.

In a new addition to this year's awards, a final round of votes cast by fans of the sport from yesterday until November 10 will decide the overall World Athlete of the Year. In the field events, Olympic men's pole vault champion and world record holder Mondo Duplantis will be hot favourite to take the men's award.

The Swede is up against Miltiadis Tentoglou of Greece, who won the men's long jump gold in Paris. Ukrainian high jumper Yaroslava Mahuchikh, who broke the 37-year-old women's world record with a clearance of 2.10m four weeks before taking Olympic gold, will go head-to-head with three-time Olympic heptathlon champion Nafissatou Thiam of Belgium.

The women's out-of-stadium award pits world marathon record holder Ruth Chepngetich of Kenya against Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands, who won the Olympic marathon in Paris. In the men's category Brian Pintado, the Ecuadorean gold medallist in the 20km race walk at the Paris Games, will compete against Olympic men's marathon champion Tamirat Tola from Ethiopia.



The cars of Aston Martin's Canadian driver Lance Stroll (front) and Williams' Argentine driver Franco Colapinto are removed from the track after their accidents during the qualifying session for the Sao Paulo Grand Prix on Sunday. *(AFP)*

Sydney 7th world marathon major

Sydney was elevated yesterday to the World Marathon Majors, joining the likes of London, New York and Boston at the pinnacle of global distance racing.

Its confirmation as the seventh member of the series, which also includes Tokyo, Berlin and Chicago, culminated a three-year programme to better the event.

World Marathon Majors chief Dawna Stone said the improvement in the Sydney race's operations and event experience had been "deeply impressive".

"We cannot wait to see our community embrace this race as a Major and start planning their visits to run the streets of one of the finest cities in the world," she added in a statement. "Runners, your Sydney star awaits."

The Sydney Marathon is a legacy of the 2000 Olympics held in the city. It first took place as a test event five months before the Games, with just 1,200 finishers. Since then the race has boomed, attracting 25,000 participants in 2024.

NY Marathon winners celebrate



Men's division winner Abdi Nageeye (left) of the Netherlands and women's class winner Sheila Chepkirui of Kenya pose after the New York Marathon. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

Ancelotti a reminder of Milan's glorious past and uncertain present

AFP
Milan

AC Milan's diminished status in European football will be put starkly on view today when they travel to Spain to face icon Carlo Ancelotti and the continent's pre-eminent force Real Madrid.

Crowned kings of Europe seven times, only Madrid have won the Champions League more times than Milan, whose last triumph came under Ancelotti way back in 2007 when a star-studded line-up comfortably beat Liverpool.

That team featured the likes of Paolo Maldini, Kaka and Filippo Inzaghi and was of a completely different league to the one that currently turns out at the San Siro.

And Ancelotti, 65, is also adored as the man who led Milan to the 2003 triumph, which came after a gruelling penalty shootout win against fierce rivals Juventus.

"It will be a special match given my past," Ancelotti said to Sky in Italy yesterday.

"I think it will be a good match. Milan haven't started well but they've got a good squad with a lot of talent."

Since Milan's triumph in Athens 17 years ago Madrid have won the Champions League six times, three of those victories coming with Ancelotti in the dugout. Meanwhile Milan's best run in the competition since was to the 2023 semi-finals, an impressive campaign which was soured by being comprehensively beaten in the last four by local rivals Inter Milan.

Ancelotti is a Milan icon not just for the two Champions League triumphs won during his eight years as coach but also for his exploits as a player in red and black.

A classy midfielder, Ancelotti was the lynchpin of the Milan team which under Arrigo Sacchi revolutionised Italian football and won the old European Cup in 1989 and 1990. Probably his most memorable moment in a Milan shirt came in the 1989 semi-finals when the Italians destroyed Madrid 5-0 in the second leg at the San Siro.

Ancelotti put Milan ahead in the tie with a rocket of a shot and from there Frank Rijkaard, Marco Van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Roberto Donadoni contributed to a crushing victory still spoken about today as the club's best ever performance.


Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti attends a training session yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League match against AC Milan in Madrid. *(AFP)*

Back then Milan were football's bleeding edge and supplied with mountains of cash by Silvio Berlusconi, but today the sport's European capital is Madrid. Milan will step out at a completely refurbished Bernabeu while their own stadium projects remain little more than artists' renderings and face the sort of players who once upon a time would have turned out at the San Siro.

Madrid are not having their best campaign, as highlighted by the fearful hammering dished out to them by Barcelona less than a week ago, but they're operating on another level to Milan whose hopes of reaching the Champions League knockouts are still in the balance. Just three points collected from three fixtures have left Milan in 25th place, one of 11 teams in the new league phase who currently wouldn't even reach the play-offs for the last 16. And Paulo Fonseca's side will walk out at the Bernabeu out of sorts and expected to leave Spain with the same number of points with which they arrived.

Milan have failed to come to life in the early part of Fonseca's reign and already trail Serie A leaders Napoli by eight points, albeit with a game in hand.

It has been a campaign filled with rancour and rumours of dressing room bust-ups, in particular with his countryman and star winger Rafael Leao who is set to start in Madrid. Leao has been benched for Milan's last three Serie A fixtures, a move which Fonseca has insisted on more than one occasion is not punishment for poor attitude and sub-par performances.

"It's not a player's status that goes out on the pitch, I choose my team on the basis of what the team needs," said Fonseca after Milan's 1-0 win at Monza on Saturday.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Slot braced to face 'special' Alonso in Anfield homecoming

'I think this season they are just as good but a bit more unlucky when it comes to results'

AFP
Liverpool

Liverpool boss Arne Slot lauded Xabi Alonso's record at Bayer Leverkusen ahead of the Spaniard's return to Anfield in the Champions League today with the German champions.

Alonso, who scored as Liverpool won the 2005 Champions League final, was reportedly the Reds' top target to replace Jurgen Klopp as manager at the end of last season.

The 42-year-old instead opted to remain in Germany, having led Leverkusen to their first ever Bundesliga title and the German Cup without losing a game, as well as reaching the Europa League final. Slot was handed the daunting task of succeeding Klopp, but has made a remarkable start with 13 wins and one draw from his opening 15 games in all competitions.

Liverpool sit top of the Premier League, have reached the League Cup quarter-finals and are off to a perfect start in the Champions League thanks to victories over AC Milan, Bologna and RB Leipzig. "It is a big European game," said Slot at his pre-match press conference.

"Also for what Xabi Alonso did for this club, especially in Europe as well. Maybe more for how he manages Leverkusen, how he manages them domestically. In Europe last season they were incredible as well. I think this season they are just as good but a bit more unlucky when it comes to results."

Leverkusen have struggled to match their standards from last season as they sit fourth in the Bundesliga, seven points behind leaders Bayern Munich. But they are also well on course for the knockout stages of the Champions League after taking seven points from their opening three games. "It's difficult to say what makes him a special manager if you don't work with him on a daily basis but he is, that is clear," added Slot on Alonso.

"Bottom of the league when he took over, didn't spend much, mainly the same players and they only lost in the final of the Europa League.

"He worked with incredible managers in the past and played at the highest levels. So he also knows and understands what players feel at certain moments."

Liverpool needed a much-improved second-half performance to beat Brighton 2-1 on Saturday to go top of the Premier League

Mohamed Salah scored the winner with a stunning strike, but provoked further speculation over his future afterwards with a social media post. "No matter what happens, I will never forget what scoring at Anfield feels like," said the Egyptian, who is out of contract at the end of the season.

Salah is one of three key Liverpool stars whose deals expire come June. Captain Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold are also yet to agree new terms. Slot, though, is hoping they can maintain the form they have shown so far this season despite the uncertainty.

"I don't look at Instagram posts of the players, I talk to them. Mo is in a very good place at the moment. He always has been at Liverpool but at the moment as well," added Slot. "This will continue for as long as their futures are not clear but in the meantime let's hope they bring the performances."


Liverpool manager Arne Slot leads a training session yesterday, on the eve of their Champions League match against Bayer Leverkusen in Liverpool. *(AFP)*

MINUTE'S SILENCE FOR SPAIN BEFORE UEFA MATCHES

A minute's silence will be observed before this week's European club matches "in memory of the victims" of devastating floods in the Spanish region of Valencia, UEFA announced yesterday.
"UEFA will hold a moment of silence at all club competition matches this week in memory of the victims of the deadly floods in Valencia and all those impacted in the region and beyond," European football's governing body said.
Champions League matches, including holders Real Madrid versus AC Milan in Spain, will take place today and tomorrow, with Europa League and the Conference League fixtures on Thursday.
Deadly flash floods in eastern Spain which have killed at least 217, had already impacted La Liga fixtures last weekend. Madrid's La Liga match at Valencia was postponed as was the league game between Villarreal and Rayo Vallecano. At the opening of the Catalan derby, Barcelona and Espanyol players observed a minute's silence.
Barcelona announced they will auction players' jerseys to raise funds for the victims.

Guardiola best coach in the world, says Amorim before United move

Sporting Lisbon coach Ruben Amorim, who will take over at Manchester United next week, hailed Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola as the best in the world yesterday. The Portuguese title holders face City in the Champions League today in Amorim's penultimate match in charge of Sporting.
"(City have) the best team in the world and the best coach in the world," Amorim told Sport TV yesterday.
Manchester City beat Sporting 5-0 on aggregate in the last 16 of the competition in 2022 and Amorim said despite improving as a coach since then, there is still a gap between him and Guardiola.
"I feel like I'm a better coach (now), unfortunately what I feel is that Pep Guardiola has also become an even better coach, so the gap remains," Amorim told a news conference.
"Pep Guardiola was an inspiration to many of us coaches, as well as others."
City have won the Premier League four seasons running and record 20-time English champions Manchester United last won it in 2013, when managerial great Alex Ferguson was at the helm.
Guardiola lifted the Champions League with City in 2023 and has led United's rivals to six league triumphs.
Manchester United paid Sporting 11mn euros ($12mn) to secure "one of the most exciting and highly rated young coaches in European football," they said after announcing Amorim's future arrival. The Red Devils, currently 13th in the Premier League table, sacked Erik ten Hag a week ago before appointing the 39-year-old to try and bring the club back to their glory days. Amorim led Sporting to their first league title in 19 years in 2021 and then won it again last season. He said a defeat against City might even help reduce the inevitable pressure on him when he arrives at Old Trafford. "If the result is very negative, expectations will drop and I don't think that's a bad starting point, when you begin at Manchester United," explained Amorim. "If we win tomorrow, they'll think the new Alex Ferguson has arrived, which is very difficult to maintain. "What matters to me is winning the game, having a good farewell in Alvalade (stadium), winning in Braga and then starting a new life in Manchester."
He said the Champions League clash in Lisbon will be heavily scrutinised because of his move to the north of England. "I'm fully aware that I'm going to be judged as a manager on this game, and only on this game, and I realise what (people) can take from this depending on the result," added Amorim.

Edu resigns as Arsenal sporting director

Arsenal's sporting director Edu Gaspar resigned yesterday, citing his desire to "pursue a different challenge" after spearheading the Gunners' revival in recent years.
The former midfielder, who was part of the Arsenal side that last won the Premier League in 2003/04, was installed as the club's first technical director in 2019. The 46-year-old played a key role in the appointment of Mikel Arteta as manager later that year. Reports suggest the Brazilian could be set for a role working for Greek businessman Evangelos Marinakis, who owns Nottingham Forest and Olympiakos.
"This was an incredibly hard decision to make," Edu said in a statement on Arsenal's website. "I've loved working with so many great colleagues across our men's, women's and academy teams, especially Mikel, who has become a great friend.
"Now it is time to pursue a different challenge. Arsenal will always remain in my heart. I wish the club and its supporters only good things and all the very best."
Edu arrived back in London five years ago after spells as sporting director at Corinthians and a similar role with the Brazilian national team.

PREVIEW

'Dortmund in a race against time with injuries'

AFP
Dortmund

Injury-ravaged Borussia Dortmund are stretched thin and running out of time as they prepare for today's Champions League home game against Austrian side Sturm Graz, manager **Nuri Sahin** said.

Last season finalists Dortmund are without wingers Karim Adeyemi and Julien Duranville, midfielder Gio Reyna as well as defenders Niklas Suele, Julian Ryerson and Yan Couto among others. Despite having nine players injured, Dortmund secured a 2-1 comeback victory against second-placed RB Leipzig in the Bundesliga on Saturday, ending their three-game losing streak in all competitions. Midfielder Marcel Sabitzer, who went off injured in the 67th minute against Leipzig, is fit to play against Sturm Graz, while winger Jamie Gittens remains uncertain for the match.

Goalkeeper Gregor Kobel and central defender Waldemar Anton, are still doubtful, leaving backup goalkeeper Alexander Meyer likely to stand between the posts once again and 18-year-old defender Almugera Kabar could make his Champions League debut. "The known absentees remain. I don't think anyone will come back, apart from Almugera Kabar," Sahin told reporters yesterday.

"We will have to see about 'Waldi' (Anton). It will be a race against time. We did not get the green light on Greg (Kobel) yet.

"Meyer has an extraordinary character. He is very popular in the squad and his qualities were on display at the weekend. To have a number two like that at this level is amazing."

