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FOOTBALL

Qatar players gear up for pivotal World Cup qualifiers

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar players began training at the Aspire Academy yesterday under the watchful eyes of coach Marquez Lopez as the Asian Champions prepare for their crucial 2026 World Cup qualifying matches against Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates. Qatar's qualifying campaign so far has been rocky. With only four points from four games, they find themselves six points behind Group A leaders Iran and Uzbekistan, who have 10 points each and currently occupy the automatic qualifying spots. Qatar's last qualifier ended in a disappointing 1-4 loss to Iran, and Lopez's side is under pressure to deliver strong performances if they hope to stay in contention.

The upcoming clash against Uzbekistan on Thursday (November 14) at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium can prove to be decisive. Uzbekistan are in fine form and will pose a significant threat and Qatar can't afford another loss. Following the Uzbekistan game, Qatar will travel to Abu Dhabi to face the United Arab Emirate on November 19. Qatar previously lost to the UAE at home, so this match is also an opportunity for redemption.

For Qatar, reaching the World Cup first time on merit remains a monumental goal. While they qualified as hosts in 2022, the team has never advanced through the qualification stages.

Lopez has called up forward Mohammed



Qatar coach Marquez Lopez talks to his players during a training session at the Aspire Academy yesterday.

Muntari, who makes return to the squad after a prolonged recovery from a serious knee injury. The lanky forward, a key figure in Qatar's attacking setup, sustained his injury in a friendly against Cambodia on December 31, just before the AFC Asian Cup. In addition to Muntari, Lopez has included Al Sadd midfielder Mustafa Tariq and Al Duhail left-back Homam al-Amin,

while Mohammed Ayash (Al Duhail), Naif al-Hadhrami (Al Shahania), and Ahmed Alaa (Al Arabi) have been left out.

QATAR SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Marwan Sherif (Al Ahli), Meshaal Barsham (Al Sadd), Saad al-Sheeb (Al Sadd), Salah Zakaria (Al Duhail)
Defenders: Abdelrahman Moustafa



(Al Ahli), Abdullah al-Yazidi, (Al Sadd), Abdelkarim Hassan (Al Wakrah), Ahmed Fathy (Al Arabi), Ahmed al-Ganehi (Al Gharafa), Bassam al-Rawi (Al Duhail), Boualem Khoukhi (Al Duhail), Homam al-Amin (Al Gharafa), Ibrahim al-Hassan (Cultural Leonesa - Spain), Tarek Salman (Al Sadd), Sultan al-Brake (Al Duhail), Lucas Mendez (Al Wakrah)

Midfielders: Almahdi Ali (Al Wakrah), Ismaeel Mohammad (Al Duhail), Jassim Jaber (Al Arabi), Mohammed Waad (Al Sadd), Mostafa Tarek (Al Sadd), Yousef Abdulrazaq (Al Gharafa), Abdulaziz Hatem (Al Rayyan)

Forwards: Akram Afif (Al Sadd), Almoez Ali (Al Duhail), Edmilson Junior (Al Duhail), Mohammed Muntari (Al Gharafa)

LA LIGA

Mbappe 'down but not out', says Ancelotti

Forward was left out of France squad for next round of Nations League matches

AFP
Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said his troubled French striker Kylian Mbappe was as down as the rest of the team over recent setbacks but remained motivated ahead of today's La Liga clash with Osasuna.

Mired in a sexual assault investigation in Sweden and struggling to find his feet in the ultra demanding Real Madrid spotlight, Mbappe this week left out of France coach Didier Deschamps' squad for the next round of Nations League matches. "Mbappe is down but not out," Ancelotti said of his club form, adding that the 25-year-old remained "motivated".

The European champions were hammered 4-0 by rivals Barcelona at the end of October and are now nine points behind their great rivals in La Liga. On top of that, they slumped to a second consecutive home defeat on Tuesday, with AC Milan triumphing 3-1 at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Mbappe has been some way off his best but the Italian coach refused to lay the blame at his door.

"The problem he's having is everyone's problem. We haven't hit our stride yet. But I'm convinced Mbappe is going to get through this difficult moment," he said. "You could point at Vinicius (Junior), Rodrygo or (Jude) Bellingham. It is a difficult moment for everyone. You can't let your head drop, you have to hold it high."

Ancelotti, however, declined to speculate on Mbappe's second consecutive omission from the World Cup finalists' squad.

"It is a decision of the national team coach and I do not have the right to judge it. I do not allow myself to do so," said Ancelotti. France are due to play Israel at the Stade de France on November 14 and Italy in Milan three days later.

Ancelotti said wants a positive reaction from his side when they face against Osasuna. "Osasuna are doing very well, playing brave football and well positioned in the table," Ancelotti said. "We see tomorrow as a great opportunity to get back to doing things right...at this moment in



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe (centre) and Eduardo Camavinga look at coach Carlo Ancelotti during a training session yesterday. (AFP)

time, which is obviously difficult. We have a chance to get back to our best. We have analysed the situation. We think we have found the solution, but it has to be seen in practice. We want to see a different version tomorrow. I see the team united, motivated and aware. But we have to wait until tomorrow to see if we act in the right way."

Leaders Barcelona have been in sensational goalscoring form this season and visit Real Sociedad tomorrow on confidence. The Catalans have netted 55 times in 16 matches across all competitions and have scored three times or more in each of their last seven outings.

Basque side La Real have historically proven difficult for Barcelona to overcome in San Sebastian but Hansi Flick's side have swept aside any team to cross their path since September.

Barcelona suffered their only league defeat six weeks ago at Osasuna and since then have thrashed Spanish and European champions Real Madrid 4-0, as well as beating Bayern Munich 4-1 in Europe. "The results speak their own language and it's really good to see that," said Flick.

One of the key factors in Barcelona's form has been the resurgence of veteran Polish striker Robert Lewandowski under his

former Bayern Munich coach Flick. After struggling for form at times last season the 36-year-old has been nigh-on unstoppable this season.

Lewandowski reached 19 goals in 16 games for the season with a brace on Wednesday as Barcelona strolled to a 5-2 Champions League win over Red Star Belgrade. "Since the beginning of this season we have a goal - we have to play very attacking football...we score a lot of goals," said Lewandowski afterwards. "The defensive line also plays very well, everything works so far almost perfectly..."

"We have many games until the end of the season, no matter if it's La Liga or Champions League, we have to always look at what we can do better and what we improve too, no matter how many goals we have scored today. The next game is a new game and a new chance to win."

Lewandowski has found the net 14 times in La Liga and is the division's top scorer, with double the tally of any other player. The forward has superb support from Raphinha and teenage Spain star Lamine Yamal, with the trio shredding opponents on a regular basis.

Barcelona's summer signing Dani Olmo is also likely to start as he continues his comeback from injury. The playmaker netted twice in the derby win over Espanyol last weekend and has five goals in five La Liga games since his arrival.

Real Sociedad are down in 11th in La Liga but Imanol Alguacil's side are improving as the weeks tick by after a slow start. The coach suggested his team's results would improve after some poor finishing cost them points earlier in the campaign. Real Sociedad have scored 10 league goals, in stark contrast to Barcelona's 40.

Fixtures: (all times GMT)

Today: Real Madrid v Osasuna (1300), Villarreal v Alaves (1515), Leganes v Sevilla (2000)

Tomorrow: Real Betis v Celta Vigo (1300), Mallorca v Atletico Madrid (1515), Getafe v Girona (1730), Valladolid v Athletic Bilbao (1730), Real Sociedad v Barcelona (2000)

Note: Espanyol v Valencia postponed after heavy flooding in eastern Spain

Enrique to rotate PSG squad for Angers trip

Paris: Paris St Germain manager Luis Enrique yesterday said he needs all his players prepared as he intends to shuffle his squad for today's Ligue 1 match at Angers to find a way through a packed fixture schedule.

PSG's disappointing Champions League campaign continued on Wednesday when they slumped to a last-gasp 2-1 defeat by LaLiga's Atletico Madrid at the Parc des Princes, leaving the Parisian side in the elimination zone.

However, they are still top of the Ligue 1 standings with 26 points from 10 matches, six points ahead of second-placed Olympique de Marseille. Angers, sit in 15th place with 10 points. "The most important match is tomorrow..." Enrique said.

"Tomorrow, we'll rotate. I feel that with so little rest I need players. Angers are a highly motivated opponent who play at home...they can defend well and create problems in transition thanks to their wingers. I need all the players ready."

PSG will be without Ecuadorian centre back William Pacheco. The 23-year-old travelled to Ecuador on Thursday to re-join his national team and did not participate in yesterday's training session, the club said. Luis Enrique said while there has been a "blockage in finishing", he was relishing the challenge as they seek to bounce back from the Atletico loss.

PSG have scored three goals in four matches in the Champions League, but they top the scoring charts in Ligue 1 with 29 goals this season. "After a match like Wednesday's, and I've been through others in my career, it's difficult. Emotions are going to absorb everything. The result will make you see everything in a negative light," the Spanish coach said.

"How am I feeling? Perfectly. The more difficult it is, the better. We're aware that there's a blockage in the finishing. There's no denying it, it's a general problem. We need to overcome that, through confidence, by trying to create clearer chances, and collectively. "I know it's a medium to long term project, and there will be ups and downs."

T20I

Samson ton lifts India to easy win over South Africa

Reuters
Durban

India opener Sanju Samson scored a sparkling century as the tourists beat South Africa by 61 runs in the first match of a four-game Twenty20 series in Durban yesterday.

South Africa asked India to bat and the visitors posted 202 for eight in their 20 overs, before restricting their hosts to 141 all out in 17.5 overs for a comprehensive victory.

India's total was boosted by a brilliant 107 from 50 balls by Samson but the innings did stall towards the end. Samson smashed 10 sixes and seven fours as he tore into the bowling at the small Kingsmead ground. He rattled along at a strike rate of 214, providing more than half his team's total.

"The amount of hard work he (Samson) has put in over the last few years, doing those boring things again and again, he is reaping the fruits (now)," India captain Suryakumar Yadav said.

"He is putting the team first, even when he was in the 90s he was looking to hit fours and sixes. That's what separates him."

At 167-2 in the 15th over, India looked

on course for a score well in excess of 200, but managed only another 35 runs in 32 balls for the loss of six wickets after Tilak Varma was dismissed for 33. Seamers Marco Jansen (1-24 in four overs) and Gerald Coetzee (3-37) were the pick of the home attack.

India's legbreak bowlers stifled the South African reply as their innings never managed to gain momentum. Varun Chakravarthy took 3-25 as he picked up the key wickets of Heinrich Klaasen (25) and David Miller (18), while Ravi Bishnoi recorded figures of 3-28.

"We wanted to get off to a better start (with the bat) and that's where we lost the game," South Africa captain Aiden Markram said. "Sanju played incredibly well, put our bowlers under pressure. When a guy is striking like that, it is pretty hard to stop him and you have to take your hat off."

The second match of the series will be played in Gqeberha tomorrow.

BRIEF SCORES
India 202/8 in 20 overs (Sanju Samson 107, Tilak Varma 33; Gerald Coetzee 3-37) **beat South Africa 141 in 17.5 overs** (Heinrich Klaasen 25; Varun CV 3-25, Ravi Bishnoi 3-28, Avesh Khan 2-28) by 61 runs



India's Sanju Samson (centre) celebrates reaching his century during the first T20 international against South Africa at the Kingsmead Stadium in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Ayub, Rauf shine in Pakistan's win over Australia

THE SERIES DECIDER WILL BE PLAYED IN PERTH TOMORROW

AFP
Adelaide

Saim Ayub slammed a swashbuckling 82 and Abdullah Shafique an unbeaten 64 as Pakistan demolished Australia by nine wickets to level their one-day series yesterday at the Adelaide Oval.

Replying to the hosts' modest 163 all out, thanks to pace spearhead Haris Rauf's 5-29, Pakistan reached 169-1 with a huge 141 balls to spare. It set up a series decider tomorrow at Perth Stadium after Australia won a tense first match in Melbourne by two wickets.

Openers Ayub and Shafique started the chase slowly, pinned down by Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, with just 47 coming from the first 10 overs.

But they began swinging the bat after that with Ayub smacking a big six from Cummins then crunching another off Mitchell Starc. The 22-year-old was dropped by Adam Zampa on 47 and capitalised by bringing up his maiden ODI half-century in only his second match, with Shafique joining the fun with some giant sixes of his own.

Ayub finally succumbed to the spin of Zampa going for another big hit, caught by Hazlewood, ending a 71-ball stay that included five fours and six sixes. Babar Azam (15 not out) joined Shafique to see Pakistan home, ending the match with the 10th six of their innings.

"The most important thing is the team won," said Ayub.

"We planned to be positive and not to think about the result but the most important thing is how we play as a team.

"Credit goes to Haris Rauf, but the other bowlers also supported him well"



Pakistan's Saim Ayub hits a four as Australia's wicket-keeper Josh Inglis looks on during the second ODI at Adelaide Oval yesterday. (AFP)

Rauf's pace caused big problems after Pakistan skipper Mohammad Rizwan won the toss and sent Australia in, with Steve Smith's 35 the top score as they were dismissed in the 35th over.

Wicketkeeper Rizwan took six catches.

"It wasn't one of our best days," said Australia skipper Cummins.

"You hope you get more than 160. They bowled well but we wanted to get a bigger score.

"We got some catchers in, tried to attack, but it wasn't to be," he added of their bowling.

In the absence of Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head, who are on paternity leave, Jake Fraser-

McGurk and Matt Short again opened, keen to make their mark after falling cheaply in the opening match.

The aggressive Fraser-McGurk slammed three boundaries from Naseem Shah's first over, but was then out lbw for 13 to Shaheen Shah Afridi. Short had a huge left-off on eight, with Afridi dropping a sitter by the ropes.

But the veteran paceman made amends, tempting Short into a cover drive shortly after on 19 that Azam did well to hold.

Josh Inglis hit a breezy 18 before he gloved to Rizwan off Rauf, with the same pair accounting for Marcus Labuschagne (6) to leave Aus-

tralia on 87-4. At the other end, Smith ground to 35 before finally falling to an edge from Mohammad Hasnain, and when Rauf and Rizwan again combined to remove Aaron Hardie the hosts were 121-6.

Rauf struck again to bowl dangerous Glenn Maxwell for 16 and collected only his second ODI five-wicket haul by once more teaming up with Rizwan to remove Cummins (13).

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 169 for 1 (Ayub 82, Shafique 64*, Zampa 1-44) **beat Australia 163** (Smith 35, Rauf 5-29, Afridi 3-26) **by nine wickets.**

PREVIEW

Sri Lanka prepare for rain-soaked T20 showdown with NZ

AFP
Dambulla, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka hope to maintain their purple patch at home with a two-match Twenty20 series against New Zealand starting today - but rains may force the hosts to keep their formidable spin attack on standby. Charith Asalanka's men are riding high with victories in 11 of their 14 bilateral series this year - including nine out of the last 10 on home soil.

This year's home success has hinged on Sri Lanka's spinners, but Asalanka said forecast rains in Dambulla could force a strategic rethink. "The rain will likely come into play," Asalanka told reporters yesterday. "Our strength has always been spin, but if this weather sticks around, we might have to bring in an extra seamer instead."

Sri Lanka has seen ferocious rains in recent weeks, bringing floods that forced school closures in the capital Colombo and also disrupting all three one-day matches against the West Indies last month in Palallekele. Relentless downpours washed out Sri Lanka's training session on Friday and New Zealand's evening practice also looked in doubt, with the ground completely under covers.

Dambulla will host two T20 matches on Saturday and Sunday before a three-match ODI series beginning in the same city next Wednesday. New Zealand were routed 2-0 in the Test leg of their Sri Lankan tour last

month. But they bounced back in style, making history by sweeping a three-match Test series in India that gave the hosts their first series loss at home in more than a decade.

Several key players from that series including Tom Blundell, Tom Latham, Rachin Ravindra and Tim Southee have returned home to rest ahead of their upcoming three-match Test series against England. Also missing is former captain Kane Williamson, who skipped the India Tests due to injury. Mitchell Santner will captain a refreshed New Zealand side in their absence. "With the packed schedule, some of the boys felt it was best to head home and prepare for the England series," Santner said. "We have plenty of white-ball cricket ahead, and it's a chance to give some fresh faces a go."

SQUADS: Sri Lanka: Charith Asalanka (capt), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Mendis (wk), Kusal Perera, Kamindu Mendis, Dinesh Chandimal, Avishka Fernando, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Wanindu Hasaranga, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunieth Wellalage, Jeffrey Vandersay, Chamindu Wickramasinghe, Nuwan Thushara, Matheesha Pathirana, Binura Fernando, Asitha Fernando. **New Zealand:** Mitchell Santner (capt), Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Zak Foulkes, Dean Foxcroft, Mitch Hay (wk), Henry Nicholls, Glenn Phillips, Tim Robinson, Nathan Smith, Ish Sodhi, Will Young.



Sri Lanka's captain Charith Asalanka (left) and his New Zealand's counterpart Mitchell Santner pose with the Twenty20 series trophy in Dambulla yesterday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

Harris thrusts himself into pole position in Australia 'bat-off'

AFP
Melbourne

Marcus Harris hit a patient and timely 74 against India A yesterday to thrust himself into prime contention to open for Australia in the first of five Tests against the tourists this month.

The diminutive 32-year-old steered Australia A to 223 in reply to India A's 161 on day two of their four-day match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground - seen as a bat-

off for the Test spot left vacant by David Warner's retirement. "Externally, obviously this game was getting built up a lot, which is fair enough," Harris said. "I feel like I've been batting well, but so have lots of people. If I get called upon, I feel like I'm ready to go - and if I don't, then so be it."

At the close India A led by just 11 runs with five wickets remaining in their second innings. Since Warner quit this year, no firm contender has emerged to replace him as Usman Khawaja's opening partner for the blockbuster series starting in Perth on No-

vember 22. While Steve Smith initially stepped up, he failed to shine and will revert to his usual number four, behind Marnus Labuschagne. Four players were given a chance to state their case in two Australia A vs India A red-ball clashes - Harris, Nathan McSweeney, Cameron Bancroft and Sam Konstas.

The 19-year-old Konstas put himself in the picture with back-to-back Sheffield Shield centuries for New South Wales this season which saw him hailed as Australia's next big thing. But the teenager has flopped in both

Australia A matches, denting his chances.

He managed just 16 and then nought when opening in the first match at Mackay in northern Queensland last week, then scored three in the first innings at Melbourne. The hopes of Bancroft, who played the last of his 10 Tests against England in 2019, also appear to be on thin ice after an equally dismal performance with scores of 0, 16 and 3.

McSweeney's 39 and an unbeaten 88 coming in at number four in Mackay rocketed him into the reckoning, but he fell softly

for 14 when promoted to opener in Melbourne. That opened the door for Harris, who added to the 17 and 36 he made in Mackay with a 138-ball knock that included five boundaries before impressive quick Prasidh Krishna found an outside edge.

Left-hander Harris made his Test debut in 2018 and has won 14 caps, but struggled to translate his stellar first-class form to the Test arena. He averages just 25.29 with a high score of 79. Australia are set to name their Test squad next week, with the starting XI settled apart from Khawaja's partner.

Windies' Joseph suspended after storming off field

West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph was hit with a two-match suspension on Thursday after storming off the field during the series-clinching ODI win over England. Cricket West Indies (CWI) said Joseph had been sanctioned for "conduct falling short of CWI's standards of professionalism." Joseph marched off the pitch during Wednesday's game at Kensington Oval in Barbados shortly after taking the wicket of Jordan Cox in the fourth over, in an apparent protest at the field set by West Indies skipper Shai Hope.

TENNIS

Gauff sets up title clash with Zheng at WTA Finals

Gauff knocks out World No 1 Sabalenka, while Zheng beats Krejcikova

AFP
Riyadh

World number three Coco Gauff and number seven Zheng Qinwen will square off in the championship match of the WTA Finals in Riyadh after claiming impressive victories in the semis yesterday.

The 20-year-old Gauff knocked out world number one Aryna Sabalenka 7-6(7/4), 6-3 to become the youngest player to reach the final at the season-ending championships since Caroline Wozniacki in 2010. Zheng, a gold medalist in singles at the Olympic Games this year, reached the final on her debut appearance at the season-ending showpiece with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejcikova.

Gauff improved to 5-4 head-to-head against Sabalenka, and was the more stable player in their semi-final, as she saved nine of 13 break points throughout the match. "I'm happy with the way I played. I know against Aryna, she's always going to be a tough match. She's world number one for a reason," the 2023 US Open champion said.

Gauff beat Zheng in their sole previous meeting, on clay in Rome earlier this season, and the American used to be coached by Pere Riba, who currently works with the Chinese player. "She's playing great tennis," Gauff said of Zheng. "Just playing confident tennis will help me and give me the best shot at winning. I'm not really nervous. Year-end to me has always been a bonus and being here is already a privilege."

With a combined age of 42 years and 271 days, the match-up between Zheng and Gauff today will feature the youngest combined age for the two finalists at the event since Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams in 2004. In front of a buoyant crowd at King Saud University Indoor Arena, Sabalenka was under pressure in her first service game, needing eight-and-a-half minutes to hold for 1-all, after saving two break points.

Four forehand errors from Gauff cost her the next game as Sabalenka broke for a 2-1 advantage but the Belarusian's lead was short-lived, as she immediately got broken at love. The pair were neck and neck until Sabalenka broke through in game 11, drawing the error from Gauff to give herself a chance to serve for the opening set.

A clever short ball from Gauff resulted in a Sabalenka mistake and the set fittingly went to a tiebreak. The American raced to a 6-1 lead in the breaker and finally clinched the 59-minute set on her fourth opportunity.

The second set was a different story, with Gauff taking the helm and breaking twice to build a 4-1 gap. In a marathon sixth game,



China's Zheng Qinwen is all smiles after winning against Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova in the semi-finals of the WTA Finals Championship in Riyadh yesterday. (AFP)



United States' Coco Gauff reacts after her win over Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka. (AFP)

Sabalenka needed eight break points to get one of the breaks back but her effort was nullified by Gauff, who took four points in a row on her opponent's serve to surge ahead 5-2.

The Floridian couldn't serve out the win but kept up the pressure on Sabalenka's serve to

reach the final after one hour and 49 minutes of sheer battle. Earlier in the day, 22-year-old Zheng needed one hour and 40 minutes to overcome Krejcikova in their semi-final encounter, firing nine aces along the way.

Zheng led 6-3, 3-0 before the eighth-seeded Krejcikova launched a comeback attempt but the Chinese star regained control of the match to make it two wins from two clashes with the Czech. "It feels so special because this is my first WTA Finals and right now I'm in the final, which is unbelievable. She's a really good player, today we gave a good match," said Zheng, who is bidding to become the first player to win the WTA Finals on her maiden appearance since Ashleigh Barty in 2019.

"It was tricky because at 3-0 I think I dropped my performance, suddenly my performance went down and she played more free and I was suddenly 3-4 down. I gave so much control to myself to not panic too much. It shows I was mentally strong in that moment."

Since the event's inauguration in 1972, Zheng is only the second Asian player to reach the decider at the WTA Finals after Li Na pulled off that feat in 2013.

FORMULA 1

Verstappen's title bid supported by eight billion laps of Las Vegas

Reuters
London

When Max Verstappen goes to Las Vegas chasing a fourth successive Formula One title, he will be racing around a floodlit track his Red Bull team have simulated some eight billion times already.

The Saturday night race on a street circuit that runs along the Nevada City's famed Strip is on Nov 23, and a win would clinch the championship for Verstappen with two rounds remaining.

"We run four billion simulations before we arrive at the track," Jack Harington, Red Bull's partnerships group lead who works with software giant and title sponsor Oracle, told Reuters.

"And then we take the data from FP1 and FP2 (first and second practice) and introduce those into the simulations and run those four billion again."

Billion, he emphasised, not million - although not many guesses are needed on who will win the title this year, given Verstappen is 62 points clear of McLaren's Lando Norris.

"There's always that saying that you have to sometimes just stick your hand out to see if it's raining in the pitlane but there's always variables that are going to catch you by surprise," said Harington.

"The more simulations you run, the more things you see and the more chance you will have of being able to react to them efficiently."

Red Bull use Oracle's cloud infrastructure to run the simulations to hone strategy and be prepared for every eventuality.

Red Bull are also building their own engine for 2026 and Oracle's senior director of product management Taylor Newill said high-performance computing

was playing a big role in development simulation there too.

Race simulations are run through the year but particularly when there is a major decision coming up, such as when might be the best to take an engine penalty - as Verstappen did last weekend in Brazil when he raced from 17th to first. That wet race was further complicated by crashes, red flags and safety cars.

Red Bull's strategy was risky, Verstappen staying out during a safety car period after McLaren title rival Lando Norris had pitted, but paid off when worsening conditions led to the race being halted.

"For the more detailed planning of the in-event strategy, we will start around two weeks in advance," said Red Bull's senior race strategy engineer Stephen Knowles.

"The preliminary simulations sweep a wide range of possible outcomes in terms of tyre and car performance, plus a wide range of potential incidents and timing thereof."

"This allows us to plan our weekend, and particularly tyre usage ahead of time, with the goal of scoring the highest number of points possible but with enough contingency in place to cope with the unexpected."

Harington said using Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) also had cost and sustainability benefits with teams operating under a strict cost cap.

"We can switch on the cloud ahead of a race weekend...run these huge amounts of simulations, turn off the cloud and then switch it on again when we need to do it again," he explained.

"Whereas before we had to invest in physical stuff to be able to run these, so it's much more cost efficient for us as well. Every race-winning strategy call we've made since 2021 has been made on OCI."



GOLF

Englishman Waring's record 61 opens huge lead in Abu Dhabi

Reuters
Abu Dhabi

Englishman Paul Waring carded a course-record 61 yesterday to open a five-shot lead midway through the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship in the United Arab Emirates.

Waring's tap-in birdie at the 18th hole at Yas Links moved him to 19-under-par, the lowest 36-hole score to par in the history of the European tour.

Denmark's Niklas Norgaard (65 on Friday) and Thorbjorn Olesen (67), American Johannes Veerman (67) and first-round leader Tommy Fleetwood (68) of England are tied for second at 14 under.

Waring, who opened the tour's first playoff event with a 64 on Thursday, posted nine birdies and an eagle at the par-4 sixth hole during a bogey-free performance.

Waring delivered his best shot of the day and secured the lowest round of his career at the par-5 18th. Following a wayward drive and a free drop, he chopped his second shot back to the fairway before launching a 250-yard blast to within 4 feet of the cup.

"That was the best shot I've ever hit in my life, to be honest," Waring said of his fairway wood at No. 18.

Waring, 39, is ranked No. 229 in the world and has just one win on the European tour at the 2018

Nordea Masters.

"Obviously feel great, swinging it great. Putter is behaving," Waring said.

"That's I'd say a weak spot for me now and again, but I've done a lot of work on it, and since moving over to Dubai I'm very used to this style of greens as well."

"I've got a nice lead at the moment but even before I tee off tomorrow, someone might have caught me. So, if I'm going to be involved on Sunday afternoon I've still got to keep going the way I am."

Olesen's eventful round Friday included two eagles, four birdies, a double bogey and a bogey. He pitched in at the 18th for his second eagle.

"It was a bit of a battle there on the back nine," Olesen said. "I probably got what I deserved, and that's what golf does. You get some good breaks but then you know you're probably going to get some bad breaks, also."

Race to Dubai leader Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland is nine shots behind Waring after a second straight 67 that included a triple-bogey at the par-3 17th.

"I played quite nice up to that point and I feel like I hit a nice shot into 17, just trundled into the bunker," McIlroy said.

"There wasn't a lot of sand where the ball was and I just sort of made a mess of it from there, but bounced back well to birdie the last."

SPOTLIGHT

Sinner ATP Finals favourite after brilliant and controversial year

AFP
Turin, Italy

Jannik Sinner is trying to end an eventful season in the perfect fashion as he returns to home soil as favourite for his first ATP Finals title.

Italian Sinner arrives in Turin at the end of a sensational season in which he was victorious at the Australian and US Opens - his first Grand Slam triumphs - and won five more ATP titles.

The 23-year-old is seeking a first ever title at the season-ending tournament in Turin and has come a long way since losing last year's final to Novak Djokovic, pushing on to become world number one and a national hero.

Sinner is the first ever Italian to top the men's world rankings and ended his country's 48-year men's Slam title drought, and he finished the "Race To Turin" with more than 10,330 points. That total is more than 3,000 points more than his closest rival Alexander Zverev, highlighting just how dominant Sinner has been in 2024.

Sinner has however been dogged by controversy after twice testing positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March but being allowed to continue playing.

He was initially cleared by the International Tennis Integrity Agency in August but at the end of September the World Anti-Doping Agency appealed, seeking a ban of up to two years.

"We don't know anything yet



Italy's Jannik Sinner attends the ATP Finals blue carpet event at Piazza Carlo Alberto in Turin. (AFP)

(about the appeal)," Sinner, who has denied any wrongdoing, told reporters on Thursday.

"It's not a pleasurable situation to be in but we remain optimists."

Fans in Turin will be hoping for another helping of Sinner's burgeoning rivalry with flamboyant Carlos Alcaraz, also a two-time Slam winner this year after he successfully defended his Wimbledon title and won at Roland Garros for the first time.

"It's difficult to talk about a rivalry when you're so young. We're two players who like to do battle," Sinner said.

"Being considered favourite is definitely different compared to last year but I'm going to have

the same approach to the tournament."

With Djokovic pulling out of the Finals injured there will be no representative of tennis' "big four" of the 24-time Slam winner, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray for the first time since 2001.

Djokovic, 37, withdrew due to an "ongoing injury" which meant he would end a season without an ATP title for the first time in 18 years - although he did win gold at the Paris Olympics - and his absence feels like the latest step in a dragged out changing of the guard.

That ensured places for Casper Ruud, Andrey Rublev and Finals

debutant Alex de Minaur, who will be Sinner's first opponent on Sunday night in the Ilie Nastase Group. Sinner and Alcaraz look like being tennis' new dominant forces but it is Alcaraz who has had the better of their most recent meetings, winning all three matches between the pair in 2024 including in the French Open semi-finals.

Supporters hoping for a blockbuster clash between tennis' two biggest stars will have to hope they meet in the knockout stages as they were drawn in separate groups on Thursday. Alcaraz begins his bid for a first Finals crown against Casper Ruud on Monday in the John Newcombe Group.

Qatar win bronze, as Brazil men and women emerge champions at Beach Handball Global Tour



Qatar men's team defeated Germany 2-1 (18-20, 18-16, 6-0) to win the bronze medal at the 2024 IHF Beach Handball Global Tour held at the Al Gharafa Beach Venue in Doha. Brazil's men and women emerged champions after they won against Croatia 2-0 (24-14, 23-14) and Spain 2-0 (17-12, 21-20) in their respective finals.



PREMIER LEAGUE

Guardiola will 'solve' Man City's malaise

Champions have been beset by injury problems, most notably the loss of Rodri

AFP
Manchester

Pep Guardiola is confident he can remedy Manchester City's issues after losing three consecutive games for the first time since 2018. Defeat at Brighton today would see the City boss lose four straight matches for the first time in his trophy-laden managerial career.

The Premier League champions have been beset by injury problems, most notably the loss of Ballon d'Or winner Rodri for the rest of the season.

Guardiola will not be able to welcome back any of his injured stars this weekend, but the Spaniard hopes for a cleaner bill of health after the imminent international break.

"It's football, it has happened. We know the reason why we struggled," Guardiola said. "Looking forward to the game and, after the international break, a few players will come back better and recover. For all the problems that we have, little problems that every player has, we will solve it."

City's three defeats have all come in different competitions. After exiting the League Cup to Tottenham and suffering a first Premier League loss since December at Bournemouth, City were thrashed 4-1 by Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League in midweek.

However, Guardiola dismissed the suggestion he could learn more about his players from their tough run compared to winning four consecutive Premier League titles. "They proved many times what they are capable of," added Guardiola.



Defeat at Brighton today would see the Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola lose four straight matches for the first time in his trophy-laden managerial career. (Reuters)

Oscar Bobb, Ruben Dias, Jack Grealish and John Stones are set to miss the trip to the Amex Stadium. But Kevin De Bruyne could make his first Premier League appearance for two months, while Jeremy Doku, Savinho, Manuel Akanji and Kyle Walker are expected to make the squad.

SLOT NOT SURPRISED BY FLYING START AT LIVERPOOL

Arne Slot said he is not shocked by a stunning start to life in charge of Liverpool as

the Reds have stormed to the top of the Premier League and Champions League. The Dutch coach has won 14 and drawn one of his 16 matches in charge in all competitions as the holders have also progressed to the League Cup quarter-finals.

Slot appeared to have a tough ask to follow Jurgen Klopp.

But he has built on the solid foundations left by the German after Liverpool finished third in the Premier League behind City and Arsenal last season.

"Surprise isn't the right word I'd use because I knew the quality of our team. But quality is one thing, to be consistent is a second thing," said Slot ahead of hosting Aston Villa today. "From the moment I started working with them I saw how much energy they put in on a daily basis and that is I think the reason you can be consistent."

Liverpool were inspired by the power of the Anfield crowd to come from behind to beat Brighton 2-1 last weekend to move two points ahead of City at the top of the Premier League. A similar atmosphere helped blow Bundesliga champions Bayer Leverkusen away 4-0 in the Champions League on Tuesday.

Slot is keen to keep his players' feet on the ground but is happy for the fans to get excited about the possibility of just a second league title in 35 years.

"If the end result of them being excited is to bring the atmosphere of the second half against Brighton and the whole game against Leverkusen, I am hoping they will keep being excited because that atmosphere helped us a lot," added the former Feyenoord boss. Diogo Jota remains sidelined but should return after November's international break.

FIXTURES

Today (1500 GMT unless stated):

Brentford v Bournemouth, Crystal Palace v Fulham, West Ham v Everton, Wolves v Southampton, Brighton v Manchester City (1730), Liverpool v Aston Villa (2000)

Tomorrow (1400 GMT unless stated):

Manchester Utd v Leicester, Nottingham Forest v Newcastle, Tottenham v Ipswich, Chelsea v Arsenal (1630)

Alonso demands Leverkusen improve focus over 90 minutes against Bochum

Berlin: Champions Bayer Leverkusen must show they can remain focused over the entire game when they travel to VfL Bochum today as they look to secure only their second win in the Bundesliga since September.

Last year's domestic double winners have been struggling in the league in recent weeks with just one victory in their last five matches that has seen them drop to fourth place on 16 points, seven off leaders Bayern Munich.

"We have to become consistent in the game with our concentration and mental-

ity," coach Xabi Alonso told a press conference. "That's what we need to improve most. We want to be consistent in our way of playing but also our mentality and our focus. Every moment is important. It is not enough to play well over 80 minutes. We need it over the entire time with 100% presence on the pitch. If not then we make mistakes and mistakes at this high level are costly."

Leverkusen largely neutralised Liverpool for an hour in their Champions League match on Tuesday but then conceded four goals in a 4-0 defeat. In the Bundesliga

they have managed only four draws and one win in their last five games.

"We want to be consistent. We can do it better and tomorrow it is important to play well. We are prepared for all situations," Alonso said. Bochum, in last place with one point from nine matches, will be managed by new coach Dieter Hecking, who took over on Monday and is hoping to kick start their season. "We know what to expect," Alonso said. "The intensity in Bochum, a new coach. They want to change the mood and mindset. But we are prepared. We know what to expect."

"We have to know it is very important for us. Tomorrow there are no excuses for not playing well. We face a good opponent but we have to be prepared."

Fixtures (1430 GMT unless stated)

Today: Werder Bremen v Holstein Kiel, Bochum v Bayer Leverkusen, Mainz v Borussia Dortmund, St Pauli v Bayern Munich, RB Leipzig v Borussia Moenchengladbach (1730)

Tomorrow: Augsburg v Hoffenheim, Stuttgart v Eintracht Frankfurt (1630), Heidenheim v Wolfsburg (1830)

Napoli are not going to San Siro to wave the white flag, says Conte

Milan: Napoli boss Antonio Conte has fond memories of his time at Inter Milan but the Italian said that his side will give no quarter when his league leaders face the reigning champions in a top-of-the-table clash in Serie A.

Conte revived Inter and helped them break Juventus's nine-year stranglehold on the Scudetto, stopping their run in the 2020-21 season to win the title for the first time since their treble-winning campaign in 2009-10.

Now at Napoli, a club that is looking to return to the heights of their 2022-23 title win, Conte's side are top of Serie A with 25 points after 11 games - a point above Inter ahead of tomorrow's clash at the San Siro.

"It's definitely nice to return to where I worked and won. Yes, two happy years," Conte told reporters. "It was a wonderful experience that I carry within me, like all the past ones that I lived to the fullest."

Napoli's winning run in Serie A came to a grinding halt against Atalanta last weekend when Conte's side were beaten 3-0 and the Italian said he is in no mood to drop three points again against Simone Inzaghi's team.

"The three points is always important, it is inevitable that we face a team that today, for everything they have shown, is the strongest team," Conte said.

"We are not going to San Siro to wave the white flag before starting, but convinced to play our cards. Then we will see what happens. We are preparing in a major way, as we always do. It will be an important test, we will measure ourselves against the best and it will be important to understand our progress. Do not forget that we arrive at the top of the table...and the objective is to remain at the top."

Napoli striker Romelu Lukaku has scored only one goal in his last four games but when asked about his form, Conte said he was tired of questions about the Belgian striker. "At every blessed conference there is always the question about Lukaku. It becomes a bit, not annoying, but we are talking about the team. Lukaku's growth depends on the growth of the team," Conte said.

"But I am confident because I see them every day, they want to work and improve. I see a lot of commitment."

FOCUS

Al Shaqab Arabian Horse Beauty Championship qualifiers conclude

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The qualifying rounds for the second edition of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Beauty Championship concluded yesterday. The four-day event, held at the Longines Outdoor Arena at Al Shaqab, will wrap up today.

Supported by the Social and Sport Activities Support Fund (Daam), the championship features the participation of 285 horses, including 63 from the Gulf countries, with an esteemed panel of international judges, underscoring the importance of this championship.

In the mares' category for ages 4-6, Qamrat RJ, owned by Hamad bin Mohammed al-Rajhi, claimed first place. In second was Francesca HVP, owned by Ali Abdullah al-Kuwari, while Falah Hussein al-Ajmi's Mayaar Al Omariya came third. In the mares' category for ages 7-10, Al

Salem Stud secured first and third places with D Shatha and D Fala, respectively. Mayar Al Rabia, owned by Sultan bin Mohammed bin Abdullah Ghoshan, took second place.

In the 11 years and older mares category, AV Dalia, owned by Al Saigal Stud, achieved first place, while DA Magic Moment and Parona, both owned by Misfer Mohammed al-Hajri, took second and third places, respectively.

The championship finals will take place today, with awards for all categories, including fillies and colts (newborns), yearlings, and two- and three-year-olds, as well as mares and stallions. The organising committee has allocated valuable prizes for the horses winning gold, silver and bronze medals. The finals will feature horses that placed first to third in the qualifiers for each category.

This year, for the first time, the event includes a new class: the Newborns Class, and it serves as a qualifying event for prestigious championships, including the



Connections of Qamrat RJ celebrate after the mare won in the ages 4-6 category during the qualifiers for the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Beauty Championship yesterday.

World Arabian Horse Beauty Championship, Katara Festival and Global Champions Tour.

The championship is classified as a 'B' category under the supervision of the

European Conference of Arab Horse Organisations (ECAHO), enabling winning horses to qualify for higher-ranked international championships.

Through this championship, Al Shaqab

aims to preserve the rich cultural heritage that fosters an appreciation for Arabian horses, while promoting the growth and status of the Arabian horse both locally and internationally.