

To subscribe  
**GULF TIMES**  
Newspaper  
Please call  
**444 666 35**



TENNIS | Page 3

Spain's Alcaraz  
chases third  
straight Indian  
Wells title



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Arsenal rout of  
PSV a confidence  
boost, says  
boss Arteta

To advertise here,  
PLEASE CALL  
**444 666 21**

Thursday, March 6, 2025  
Ramadan 6, 1446 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

New Zealand beat  
South Africa to  
reach Champions  
Trophy final

Page 2

SPOTLIGHT

## Qatar to host final round of World Aquabike Championship

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar will host a round of the UIM-ABP Aquabike Circuit Pro World Championship for the first time in 10 years on October 30th to November 1st.

The final round of the 2025 World Championship will be hosted by the Doha Marine Sports Club (DMSC), under the presidency of Khalifa bin Mohammed al-Suwaidi, and Aquabike Promotion and will see the sport returning to one of its most popular venues.

The agreement to host the final round was signed by Salah bin Ibrahim al-Mannai, Vice-President of the Doha Marine Sports Club, and Aquabike Promotion's CEO Raimondo di San Germano.

Speaking at the signing al-Mannai said: "We are very excited to be hosting the final round of the World Championship in Qatar from October 30th to November 1st. Aquabike Promotion has a long and prestigious history in organising events of this nature and we are looking forward to hosting competitors from across the planet."

San Germano added: "We are delighted to be returning to Qatar after a 10-year absence to what was one of the most popular rounds of the World Championship. We enjoyed terrific racing and a warm welcome every time we hosted a Grand Prix in



Salah bin Ibrahim al-Mannai, Vice-President of the Doha Marine Sports Club, and Aquabike Promotion's CEO Raimondo di San Germano.

Qatar and we are sure that this will continue now we have agreed this exciting new association with the Doha Marine Sports Club. We thank Khalifa bin Mohammed al-Suwaidi, President of the Doha Marine

Sports Club, and Salah bin Ibrahim al-Mannai for their support in making this exciting venture happen."

The former Qatar Marine Sports Federation (QMSF) hosted a round of the aqua-



The former Qatar Marine Sports Federation (QMSF) hosted a round of the aquabike series on Doha Bay between March 2011 and its closure in March 2015.

bike series on Doha Bay between March 2011 and its closure in March 2015. The QMSF and H2O Racing also hosted rounds of the UIM F1H2O World Championship between 2005 and 2015.

Qatar's Thamer al-Darwish managed to secure a dramatic victory in the Runabout GP1 category at the last Grand Prix of Qatar in 2015. Nacho Armillas of Spain prevailed over the French duo of Jeremy Poret and

Alex Barret in Ski Division GP1 and fellow Spaniard Sandra Fernandez Hernandez topped the standings in Ski Ladies GP1.

Qatar's hosting of a Grand Prix in 2015 came in the era when the Slovenian Florjancic brothers were dominating the Freestyle category. Nac pipped his brother Rok to the Grand Prix win at what was then the opening round of the World Championship.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## Inter Milan beat Feyenoord 2-0 for first-leg advantage

Thuram and Martinez score a goal each for the Italian side



Inter Milan's Marcus Thuram (centre) scores against Feyenoord during the Champions League last 16 first leg match in Rotterdam. (Reuters)

AFP  
Rotterdam, Netherlands

Inter Milan's powerful strike duo of Marcus Thuram and Lautaro Martinez combined to give the Italians a handy 2-0 advantage over Dutch side Feyenoord after an absorbing Champions League last-16 first leg yesterday.

Quality finishes either side of half-time from the French and Argentinian strikers proved the difference between the two teams, who meet again in Milan for Tuesday's second leg, with the winner of the Bayern Munich-Bayer Leverkusen showdown lying in wait.

"Their quality is unbelievable," admitted Feyenoord defender David Hancko. "Second half you could see that they were controlling the game and it was more difficult for us to be dangerous," added Hancko.

A lively opening quarter in Rotterdam's ever-atmospheric De Kuip saw three-time

European champions Inter enjoy most possession but Feyenoord carve out the clearest opportunities. Ibrahim Osman, the pacy 20-year-old Ghana international winger on loan from Premier League side Brighton and Hove Albion, was the main threat for the hosts, twice forcing Josep Martinez into sharp saves.

For the visitors, Thuram found himself with a clear run at goal but decided to pass square rather than shoot and the danger was snuffed out. It was a moment of quality from the French striker that broke the deadlock with just eight minutes until the half-time whistle, latching onto a curling cross from Nicolo Barella to hook it in with the outside of his boot at the far post.

The goal, slightly against the run of play, galvanised the Serie A side, who suddenly looked much more dangerous going forward. Feyenoord legend and recently installed manager Robin van Persie would have been glad to get his side into the dressing room just 1-0 down after an entertaining first half.

But his side's arrears doubled just five minutes into the second period, as Martinez drilled an unstoppable shot into the top corner, giving the hosts a mountain to climb.

Jakub Moder came close to getting Feyenoord back into the game when his lunging deflection skimmed the bar. Inter had their own chance to put the game - and probably the tie - beyond reach when Jeyland Mitchell brought down Thuram in the box, the referee awarding a penalty after a long VAR check. But Timon Wellenreuther in the Feyenoord goal produced an excellent save from Piotr Zielinski's penalty, moving smartly to his right.

Feyenoord pressed to the end looking for something to take to the San Siro but the Inter defence held firm in a pleasing night for Simone Inzaghi's men.

"Feyenoord came out well a few times, but I think we were solid in defence," said Inter's Dutch international Denzel Dumfries. "We hit them well on the break and we made things difficult for them," he added.

FOCUS

## FIFA to pay \$1bn prize money for Club World Cup

AFP  
Paris

FIFA yesterday announced it will pay total prize money of one billion dollars to participants in the Club World Cup taking place in the United States this year. The figure is significantly more than the prize money offered for either the last men's or women's World Cups.

World football's governing body has given few details about the funding of the first edition of the 32-team tournament that will take place every four years but it has signed up a broadcaster and major sponsors in recent weeks. In a statement confirming the prize money on offer, FIFA said it expected to generate \$2bn in revenues from the expanded Club World Cup. It also confirmed that a women's edition will take place from 2028.

"The FIFA Club World Cup will not only be the pinnacle of club football, but also a vivid demonstration of solidarity that will benefit clubs at large to a scale that no other competition has ever done," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino. "All revenue generated by the tournament will be distributed to the participating clubs and via club solidarity across the world as FIFA will not keep a single dollar."

British streaming service DAZN was awarded the exclusive global rights to the June 14-July 13 tournament in December with a source close to the negotiations saying the contract was worth around one billion euros (\$1.05bn). FIFA has also signed sponsorship contracts with Coca-Cola, Bank of America, Chinese electronics brand Hisense and Belgian brewers AB InBev.

By comparison the total prize money for the 2022 men's World Cup in Qatar was \$440mn, while for the 2023 Women's World Cup in New Zealand and Australia it was \$110mn. This season's UEFA Champions League, with a new 36-club format, will pay a total 2.47bn euros to the clubs involved.

Widespread criticism over player welfare - FIFA's expansion of the tournament has been



met by widespread criticism, especially in Europe, largely due to concerns over player welfare. The global footballers' union FIFPro and the European Leagues association filed a complaint with the European Commission in October against FIFA, accused of abusing its dominant position by packing the calendar.

The Champions League was also expanded by UEFA this season and some players, including Ballon d'Or winner Rodri and Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk, have raised the prospect of a strike. "I think we are close to that. I think if you ask any player he will say the same," said Rodri when asked in September if there was a possibility of players going on strike, shortly before suffering a season-ending knee injury. "It is not the opinion of Rodri or whatever. I think it's the general opinion of the players."

The tournament will feature 12 teams from Europe, six from South America and four each from Asia, Africa and North and Central America. Auckland City and Lionel Messi's Inter Miami complete the line-up.

Not all the reaction has been negative, with Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique insisting "everyone" would want to play. "Once every four years there's this new, extremely exciting competition. Everyone wants to go to the Club World Cup," he said last year.

The tournament will be held at 12 venues across 11 cities in the United States, with the final at the MetLife Stadium, which will also host the 2026 World Cup final, in New Jersey.



CHAMPIONS TROPHY

# New Zealand crush South Africa, to meet India in final

New Zealand post record total after Ravindra and Williamson tons but Miller's super hundred goes in vain

Reuters  
Lahore

New Zealand booked their place in the final of the Champions Trophy against India after sparkling hundreds by Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson helped them earn a 50-run victory over South Africa in the second semi-final yesterday.

Electing to bat, New Zealand racked up a tournament record 362-6 on the back of a 164-run stand between Ravindra and Williamson.

David Miller smashed an unbeaten 100 off 67 balls while Rassie van der Dussen and Temba Bavuma struck half-centuries but South Africa managed 312-9 in reply.

Mitchell Santner, captaining New Zealand in a global tournament for the first time, used seven bowlers and led by example with a match-turning 3-43.

"It's a cool feeling (to make the final). We were challenged by a good side," Santner said after the runoff at the Gaddafi Stadium.

"We were pretty happy with 360 obviously but we know with the power South Africa have, it was going to be a challenge."

New Zealand lost opener Will Young in the eighth over after Santner elected to bat.

Ravindra and Williamson combined in a mammoth second-wicket stand in what looked like the coming together of the present



New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra plays a shot during the ICC Champions Trophy match against South Africa at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore yesterday. **Right:** South Africa's David Miller is congratulated by New Zealand's Kane Williamson for scoring a century yesterday. (AFP)



and future of New Zealand's batting. The curly-haired Ravindra and the cool-as-a-cucumber Williamson scored over a run-a-ball rate to deflate South Africa.

Williamson got a reprieve after completing his fifty when Heinrich Klaassen dived to his right but could not hold on to the catch.

Ravindra was flawless at the other end and raced to a 93-ball hundred before Kagiso Rabada dismissed him for 108, which included 13 fours and a six.

All of Ravindra's five hundreds in

one-day internationals have come in International Cricket Council (ICC) events. Williamson played two ramp shots in Wiaan Mulder's sixth over - the first brought up his 15th ODI hundred and the second his downfall.

Williamson's 102 was studded with 10 fours and two sixes.

Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips chipped in with brisk 49s as New Zealand eclipsed Australia's 356-5 against England last month as the highest team total in the tournament's history.

New Zealand began their defence well as Kyle Jamieson started with a maiden over and Matt Henry got rid of Ryan Rickelton in his third. Bavuma (56) and Van der Dussen (69) revived South Africa with a run-a-ball stand of 105 before Santner hollowed out their middle order.

The spinner removed both the set batters and dismissed Heinrich Klaassen to put New Zealand on top.

Player of the match Ravindra dismissed Aiden Markram (31) but Miller would not go down without

a fight. He smacked four sixes and 10 fours in his blistering knock that proved South Africa could have done better with enough wickets in hand.

"363 was always going to be tough," Bavuma said.

"We needed someone to play well. David did that but we needed someone else."

"Credit to their batters, they put us under pressure."

New Zealand will fly to Dubai for Sunday's final against India, who prevailed when the sides faced

each other in a group match. India have refused to tour Pakistan because of the strained political relations between the Asian neighbours and have played all their matches in Dubai.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**New Zealand 362 for 6** (Ravindra 108, Williamson 102, Mitchell 49, Phillips 49\*, Ngidi 3-72, Rabada 2-70) **beat South Africa 312 for 9** (Miller 100\*, van der Dussen 69, Bavuma 56, Santner 3-43, Phillips 2-27, Henry 2-43) **by 50 runs**

SPOTLIGHT

## Smith, one of Australia's best, ends his ODI career

Reuters  
Sydney

Steve Smith announced his retirement from one-day international cricket yesterday after captaining Australia to a semi-final exit at the Champions Trophy, bringing down the curtain on a career in the format that included two World Cup wins.

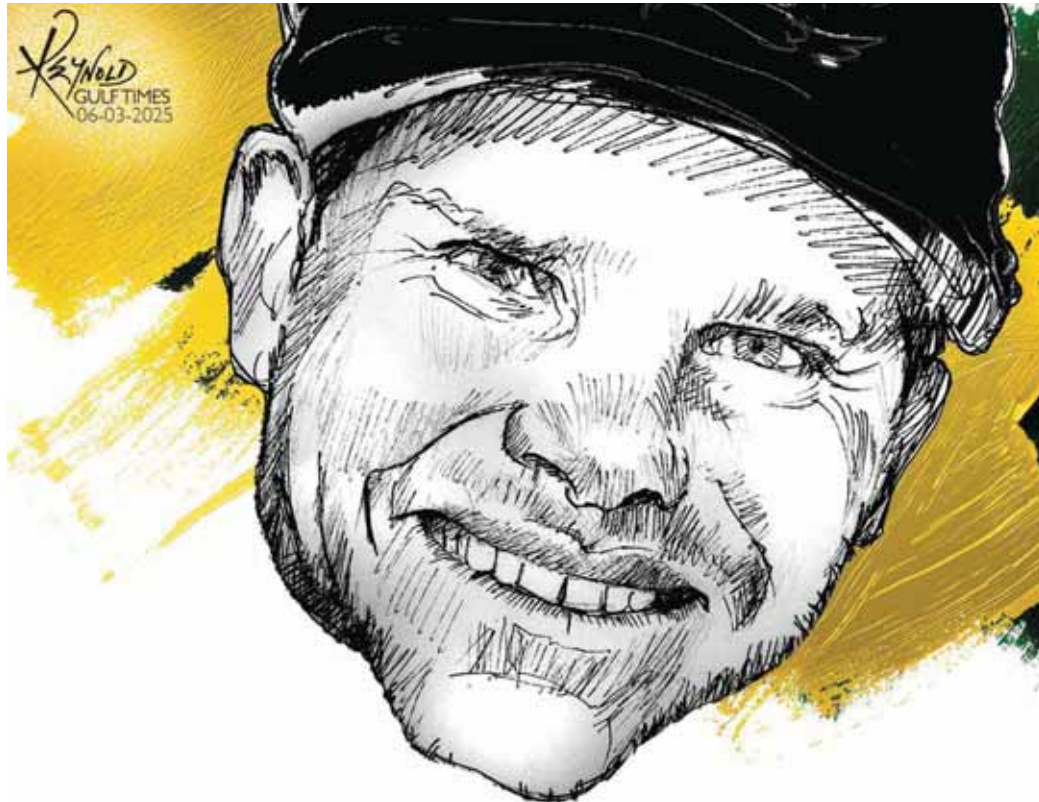
The 35-year-old batsman, who was his team's top scorer with 73 as Australia lost to India by four wickets in Dubai on Tuesday, said he would still be available for selection for Twenty20 internationals and Test matches.

"It has been a great ride and I have loved every minute of it," Smith said in a Cricket Australia statement.

"There have been so many amazing times and wonderful memories. Winning two World Cups was a great highlight along with the many fantastic teammates who shared the journey."

"Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup so it feels like the right time to make way."

Smith scored exactly 5,800 runs at an average of 43.28 with 12 centuries in 170 ODIs since making his debut in the format in early 2010 as a spin-bowling all-rounder. He scored five half-centuries, including an unbeaten 56 in the final, to help Australia to win the 2015 World Cup on home soil, and was part of the team that regained the trophy in India in



2023. Smith also captained the ODI side from 2015 until 2018, when he was sacked as skipper as part of his punishment for his involvement in the Newlands ball-tampering scandal during a test series in South Africa.

After serving a one-year ban from top class cricket, Smith has again been a stalwart presence for his country in all three formats, returning as stand-in captain in

tests for a tour of Sri Lanka earlier this year and in ODIs for the Champions Trophy.

"Test cricket remains a priority and I am really looking forward to the World Test Championship final, the West Indies in the winter and then England at home," Smith added.

"I feel I still have a lot to contribute on that stage."

Australia's chief selector,

George Bailey, said Cricket Australia understood and supported Smith's decision.

"Steve has said on many occasions he is approaching the remainder of his playing career on a series-by-series basis," he said.

"His record as a batter is exemplary and to leave the format as a two-time World Cup winner cements his legacy as one of the great Australian ODI players."

## Shami admits playing at one venue 'definitely helps' India

Dubai: India pace spearhead Mohammed Shami has broken ranks by admitting that playing all their Champions Trophy games at one venue in Dubai has been to their advantage.

Shami returned figures of 3-48 to set up India's four-wicket win over Australia in the semi-finals on Tuesday in Dubai.

India coach Gautam Gambhir afterwards lashed out at critics who have said playing at the same Dubai International Cricket Stadium each time is unfair.

India refused to travel to Champions Trophy hosts Pakistan over political tensions and have won all four of their games at their temporary home.

They will face South Africa or New Zealand in Sunday's final, again in Dubai.

The other seven teams in the ODI competition have meanwhile had to shuttle between three Pakistani cities and the United Arab Emirates.

"It definitely helped us because we know the conditions and the behaviour of the pitch," Shami said after his pivotal role in beating Australia.

"It is a plus point that you are playing all the matches at one venue."

As part of the hybrid arrangement of the tournament, South Africa were forced to travel to Dubai, only to return to Pakistan again less than 24 hours later without playing a game.

India are unbeaten in the 10 ODIs they have played in Dubai, winning nine.

**'World class'**

Shami, 34, claimed a five-wicket haul in India's opening win over Bangladesh and has bowled with pace and accuracy.

But a question on getting reverse



India's Mohammed Shami (right) celebrates with captain Rohit Sharma during their ICC Champions Trophy match against Australia in Dubai, on Tuesday. (Reuters)

swing with the old ball got Shami pleading with cricket authorities to allow the use of saliva to polish the ball in the 50-over format. The International Cricket Council in 2022 made a ban on saliva - brought in during the Covid pandemic - permanent.

"We are trying to reverse, but you are not getting the use of saliva into the game," Shami told reporters. "We are constantly appealing to allow the use of saliva and it will be interesting with the reverse swing."

The use of saliva to shine one side of the old ball and keep the other rough helps fast bowlers get the leather ball to swing late and can be a lethal weapon in the final few overs of an ODI match. They can still use sweat.

After a strong start to the tournament, Shami left the field briefly in the win over Pakistan.

He has now put all fears of any fitness issues to rest with two matches in three days and bowling his full quota of 10 overs against Australia.

BOTTOMLINE

## No Champions Trophy final deals one last blow to edgy hosts Pakistan

AFP  
Lahore

Pakistan cricket fans and former players seethed yesterday after the host country's already disappointing Champions Trophy suffered one last blow: no final.

"It's totally unfair," said Moeed Ali Khan, a private car driver outside Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium to watch the second semi-final between South Africa and New Zealand.

"I am disgusted, neither our team is in the final nor is the final in Pakistan."

Pakistan celebrated on February 19 when the country began staging its first major international cricket tournament in three decades.

But it was all downhill after that. The hosts lost the opening match to New Zealand and their title defence was over with a comprehensive defeat to arch-rivals India. Their dead-rubber final group match, against Bangladesh, was washed out.

This Sunday's final was sched-

uled for Lahore, but with one big caveat: not if India reached the title decider. By defeating Australia in the first semi-final on Tuesday, India did just that.

India have played all their games, including the Australia clash, in Dubai after refusing to visit neighbouring Pakistan because of political tensions.

The final will also be at Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

Pakistan only agreed to the so-called hybrid model of hosting on the condition that they will also not send their team to India for

upcoming ICC events. The arrangement, which saw other teams shuttle in and out of the UAE while India stayed put, underlined India's outsized influence over cricket.

"We accepted this arrangement, so what is the fuss?" asked Abdul Samad, a cricket fan.

"When you do not have power you have to bow down and this is the bargain Pakistan had to do."

"No regrets for me. Our team and our cricket is lagging behind so we had to make a compromise."

Others in Pakistan are not so

pragmatic. "No final in Pakistan after such a heavy investment on the venues is a blow," former captain Rashid Latif told AFP.

"Pakistan is at the lowest level in terms of finances and team-wise as well, which is a double loss."

Pakistan reportedly spent the equivalent of \$16m to upgrade the three venues in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi.

The country will reportedly get \$6m in hosting fees from the ICC.

But finances could be hit with the lack of interest in the 50-over tournament after the home team's

early exit. Three of the matches in Pakistan were hit by bad weather and empty seats at games were noticeable. "I think politics has lowered the cricket a great deal. I think had they come to Pakistan and lifted the trophy in Lahore it would have been great."

Latif says the repercussions of the split hosting will last beyond the Champions Trophy. "This problem of one team not coming to another country and in future Pakistan not going to India will hit world cricket badly," he said. "It needs to be addressed quickly."



TENNIS

# Alcaraz chases third straight Indian Wells title

'I WILL TRY NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT. I WILL TRY JUST TO ENJOY IT'

AFP  
Indian Wells, United States

Carlos Alcaraz will take a softly-softly approach as he vies to become just the third man to win three straight titles at Indian Wells, where he could find a member of that exclusive club, Novak Djokovic, standing in his way in the quarter-finals.

"I will try not to think about it," Alcaraz said of his bid to match the treble feat achieved by Djokovic in 2014, 2015 and 2016 and Roger Federer in 2004, '05 and '06.

"I will try just to enjoy it," Alcaraz told reporters as he prepped for the elite ATP Masters 1000 tournament that starts Wednesday alongside a WTA 1000 tournament. "This tournament, every time that I come here, I enjoy so much practicing, playing. Everything for me here is so easy.

"So I will try not to think about it, just flow and see how it's going to be, the tournament. But it is something that for me would be great to achieve."

Alcaraz, coming off a quarter-final defeat in the Qatar Open, is seeded second behind Germany's Alexander Zverev, who finished runner-up at the Australian Open to Italian world number one Jannik Sinner. Sinner last month accepted a belated three-month ban after testing positive a year ago for traces of banned Clostebol. The case initially saw him exonerated when authorities accepted his ex-



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain fields questions from the media during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

planation that the drug entered his system when a physiotherapist using it to treat a wound gave him a massage. The World Anti-Doping Agency appealed, the case dragging on through Sinner's triumph at the Australian Open this year. Alcaraz said Sinner's absence doesn't change his approach "at all".

"I mean, Jannik's not playing, but there are a lot of the best players in the world (that) are playing here," he said. "I think the draw is really open. I'm just focused on my things, on myself, and I try to play

good tennis here." The Spaniard could face a formidable quarter-final test in Djokovic, who owns five Indian Wells titles overall. Serbian superstar Djokovic leads their career head-to-head 5-3, including a quarter-final triumph in four sets at the Australian Open. All 32 seeded players receive a first-round bye, and Djokovic could face a tricky second-round opener against Nick Kyrgios.

The Australian, who fell to Djokovic in the 2022 Wimbledon final, will open against a qualifier.

Top-seeded Zverev is chasing a first Indian Wells title while third-seeded American Taylor Fritz lifted the trophy in the California desert in 2022. Norway's Casper Ruud is seeded fourth and Russian Daniil Medvedev - runner-up to Alcaraz the past two years - is seeded fifth.

The first-round spotlight will be on wild card Joao Fonseca, the 18-year-old Brazilian who upset Andre Rublev at the Australian Open and lifted his first ATP title in Buenos Aires in February.

SPOTLIGHT

## Raducanu 'couldn't see ball through tears' in Dubai stalker scare

AFP  
Indian Wells, United States

Emma Raducanu revealed Tuesday she "couldn't see the ball through the tears" after being targeted by a stalker during last month's Dubai WTA 1000 tournament.

The British tennis star was left distraught after a man later said to be displaying "fixated behaviour" appeared at a court-side seat during her defeat to Karolina Muchova.

The man was escorted away by security, subsequently given a restraining order and banned from attending WTA Tour events. Former US Open champion Raducanu, 22, is making her first tournament appearance since her troubled Dubai campaign at this week's event in California.

Speaking to reporters, Raducanu said she was determined not to let the incident derail her career.

"There's a part of you that thinks, 'I'm not gonna let a middle-aged creep stop me doing what I love to do,'" Raducanu told The Athletic.

"I'm here because I feel a lot better now. A lot happened obviously after Dubai, so I just needed to kind of take my time after," she said.

"I think the allure of Indian Wells being my favourite tournament, I just couldn't really step away from it."

Recounting the details of her Dubai ordeal, where she briefly took refuge behind the umpire's chair after alerting officials to the man's presence, Raducanu said she had been "obviously very distraught."

"I saw him first game of the match, and I was like: 'I don't know how I'm going to finish,'" Raducanu told reporters.

"I literally couldn't see the ball through the tears, I could barely breathe. I was playing Karolina, who's like top 17 in the



Emma Raducanu of Great Britain plays a backhand during her practice session in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

world or something, and I can't see the ball. The first four games of the match "kind of ran away from me because I was not on the court, to be honest. I'm not really sure how I regrouped," she said.

"It was a very emotional time and after the match I did completely break down in tears."

Tournament organisers are taking no chances with Raducanu during her return at Indian Wells this week, where security staff will be deployed to protect her when she is on site at the event.

Raducanu, who was also targeted by a stalker at her family home in 2022, said the incidents had made her hyper-vigilant.

"The security is very important," Raducanu said. "Even if the player hotels are public information, that's not necessarily the most helpful and anyone can walk in."

"That's obviously a weak spot, but I do my best. I'm always, and now even more so, very aware and very alert and sensitive and I don't really go anywhere on my own."

FOCUS

## Sabalenka swoons over new, faster Indian Wells court surfaces



Aryna Sabalenka addressing the media during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

Reuters  
Indian Wells, California

World number one Aryna Sabalenka is enamoured with the new surfaces at Indian Wells, the Belarusian believing the faster courts will play into her powerful game, while Carlos Alcaraz said he did not understand the reason for the change.

Indian Wells, which has long been known for its gritty, slow hard courts, has been resurfaced this year by Laykold, the company that also provides surfaces for the Miami Open and US Open, to make playing conditions more consistent. "I love them (the courts). They're a little bit faster, which is good for me, right?" Sabalenka told reporters.

"It feels good so far. I'll tell you later after my first match. I hope

I'll still like it," she added with a smile. Another big server, Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, said she had not noticed a huge change when she practiced on them.

"I feel that it's not much faster, but I will say maybe the bounce (is) a little bit lower," said Rybakina, the 2023 champion.

"The past few days were very windy and a lot of sun came, so it's also a bit different, the bounce. But I think the court's still nice."

FOOTBALL

## Al Nusoor beat holders Al Janoubia in Al Thumama Ramadan Championship

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The second edition of the Al Thumama Ramadan Championship kicked off with two matches decided on the opening day at Al Furjan Stadium in Al Thumama on Tuesday night.

In the opening match, Al Nusoor came out on top, securing a 1-0 victory over defending champions Al Janoubia. Youssef Moawad from Al Nusoor was named the Best Player of the Match. The match was closely contested, but Al Nusoor's solid defence and clinical finishing made the difference, giving them a strong start in the tournament.

The second match saw a different turn of events. Al Urduniya was unable to field a full team, with only five players showing up.

According to the tournament regulations, the match was automatically counted as a 3-0 win in favour of Tariq bin Ziyad, as Al Urduniya did not meet the minimum player requirement.

This decision left fans disappointed, but it highlighted the importance of team management



Action from the second edition of the Al Thumama Ramadan Championship.

and punctuality for the tournament's success. In next matches, Tariq bin Ziyad will face Al Adham in what promises to be a competitive game, while Al Nusoor will take on Al Yarmouk in a battle of tactical minds. Finally, Palestine will meet Al Urduniya.

Hassan al-Ishaq, member of the Municipal Council and Chairman of the Organising Committee, shared his thoughts on the tournament's launch.

Expressing his satisfaction, he noted that this edition would be more competitive than ever.

"We allowed each team to register 15 players to provide greater

flexibility in case some players are unavailable. Additionally, the regulation allowing teams to play with seven players in case of absence has added more flexibility, which has been beneficial for the teams," al-Ishaq explained.

He also addressed the issue with Al Urduniya, saying, "We regret the poor management of the Jordanian team, which arrived for their match against Tariq bin Ziyad with only five players. This did not align with the tournament regulations, and we had no choice but to count the result in favour of Tariq bin Ziyad."

## Katara International Ramadan Open Classic Chess Championship from today

The Katara International Ramadan Open Classic Chess Championship, featuring 90 players from 22 countries, starts today in Katara Cultural Village in Building 15. Organised by the Qatar Chess Association (QCA), the tournament runs until March 15, comprising nine Swiss-system rounds. A total of 13 Qatari players are participating. Mohammed al-Mudahka, the QCA president, highlighted the tournament's importance, emphasising its role in providing valuable experience for national team players. He expressed gratitude to Katara Cultural Village for their continued support, noting the tournament's significance on the annual chess calendar, especially during Ramadan, and the participation of internationally ranked players.



## US women aiming to end Indian Wells title drought: Keys

Australian Open champion Madison Keys believes American women are well positioned to end a 24-year title drought at Indian Wells when the tournament's main draw starts on Wednesday in the California desert.

Three American women are in the world's top five - number three Coco Gauff, fourth-ranked Jessica Pegula and number five Keys, who triumphed at Melbourne Park in January for her first Grand Slam title, respectively.

"I think it's probably been a little while since there have been so many American women doing as well as they are," Keys told reporters on Tuesday.

"I'm really excited. I think not only are there the names that everyone obviously knows and are a little bit more established,

but there's also a ton of up-and-comers that are doing really, really well.

"I would not be surprised if you saw some really great results from the U.S. women."

No American woman has lifted the trophy in Indian Wells since Serena Williams in 2001.

New Yorker Emma Navarro comes into the WTA 1000 tournament with a ton of momentum after winning the Merida Open in Mexico, where she crushed Emiliana Arango 6-0 6-0 in the final to claim her first 500-level tournament crown. Amanda Anisimova, who took a break from the sport to prioritise her mental health in 2023 and is now playing some of the best tennis of her life, won February's Qatar Open to crack the top 20 for the first

time. The Americans will all look to stop Poland's Iga Swiatek, the defending champion who is looking to become the first woman to triumph here three times, and big-serving world number one Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus. Keys, a 30-year-old tour veteran who turned professional on her 14th birthday, said the strong sense of camaraderie among the US women players is nothing new. "It's just a really great group of women that I've grown up with that have continued to encourage and push and support each other," she said. "When we see each other do well, we're not only extremely excited for them, but we're all being cheerleaders for each other. I think it just helps push all of us to continue to have some really good success."



## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Arsenal rout of PSV a confidence boost: Arteta

Gunners are in a virtually unassailable position to advance to the quarter-finals

Reuters  
Eindhoven, Netherlands

Arsenal will derive a great deal of confidence from their 7-1 mauling of PSV Eindhoven in the first leg of the Champions League last-16 tie and the Premier League club are determined to keep the momentum rolling, manager Mikel Arteta said.

Arsenal registered their biggest away win in European club competition on Tuesday, putting themselves in a virtually unassailable position to advance to the quarter-finals where they will meet either Atletico Madrid or Real Madrid. The North London side, who had failed to score in their last two league matches, had arrived in Eindhoven with their Premier League title hopes hanging by a thread after falling 13 points behind leaders Liverpool.

"It obviously gives us a lot of joy, confidence and belief, and then in football, it's not what we did three days ago, or today, it's about what we're going to do tomorrow, or at Old Trafford, how we behave and able to win again," Arteta told reporters.

"Enjoy tonight because it was a very impressive performance, an unbelievable score, so we deserve that, and now take that, and keep improving as a team. It's something that hasn't been done so it's great to be a part of that (on achieving their biggest away win in the Champions League), but as a team we want to achieve many other things that are far more important than that."

Arteta also backed Ethan Nwaneri to maintain his performance levels after the 17-year-old winger once again impressed with a fine display and scored Arsenal's second goal. "I don't think that he needs any pushing! You see him every time he has the ball what the intention is, so if he comes, he comes, and it's great and really impressive again the way he behaved, the way he played tonight," Arteta added.

Arsenal next take a trip to 14th-placed Manchester United in the Premier League



Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard (left) celebrates scoring their fourth goal with Leandro Trossard during the Champions League last 16 first leg match at the Philips Stadion in Eindhoven, Netherlands. (Reuters)

on Sunday.

Meanwhile, PSV Eindhoven coach Peter Bosz said he is determined to turn things around for the Dutch champions in spite of a horror week, which culminated in a record thrashing at the hands of Arsenal. PSV's 7-1 hiding at home is the first time the club had ever conceded seven goals and also the first time a Dutch club had let in seven goals in a European cup tie.

The rout followed PSV ceding their 56-match unbeaten home record last Wednesday as they unexpectedly lost to Go Ahead Eagles in the Dutch Cup semi-final. They were then defeated away by the same

club in the league at the weekend, slipping eight points behind Ajax Amsterdam in the domestic title race. "Of course I will get things back on track," Bosz told reporters after Tuesday's thumping at the Philips Stadion. "We have to do it together, together we can get through it again. We have shown that we can do it, against Juventus, against Feyenoord in the cup."

PSV had beaten the Italian giants in the previous round of the Champions League but against Arsenal were swept away. "It was painful. Humiliating. We had no chance. Outplayed. Bad. Against an opponent who is really good and we are in a diffi-

cult phase," Bosz added. "If you analyse the goals we conceded, you can see that straight away that we need to defend better."

He felt the match could have gone differently, however. "There were two moments that could have affected the outcome. At 0-0, we hit the crossbar. The second moment was that they could have received a second yellow card."

Arsenal fullback Myles Lewis-Skelly, who was booked early on, was fortunate not to earn a second yellow card, and a sending off, for a clumsy tackle when Arsenal were 2-0 up. PSV will be home to Heerenveen in the Dutch league on Saturday.

## Arsenal can win the Champions League: Henry

London: Arsenal's Premier League title challenge looks shot and they are still hamstrung by injuries but Champions League glory is within reach, according to former great Thierry Henry.

Arsenal obliterated PSV Eindhoven 7-1 away on Tuesday in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 clash and all but guaranteed a quarter-final meeting with either holders Real Madrid or Atletico Madrid next month.

Jurrien Timber, scorer of Arsenal's opening goal, said before the trip to the Netherlands that it was a chance for Mikel Arteta's side to change the narrative after a disappointing run of form in the Premier League. And the dazzling display at the Philips Stadion certainly did that as Arsenal made a massive statement of intent.

Henry, Arsenal's all-time leading goal scorer who played in the 2006 Champions League final defeat by Barcelona, believes that the title race being virtually over will allow the London club to focus squarely on Europe.

"Yes, they can (win the Champions League)," Henry told CBS Sports Golazo. "I do believe that, this is why I called it. I'm just saying now, show us that you can do that against a good team, with people that are coming back. No disrespect to Eindhoven, I really thought it was going to be difficult, especially away from home but they made it look easy. I think they had an outstanding game."

Arsenal would be at a slight disadvantage in the quarter-final with the home leg first, but Henry said the display against PSV should fill them with confidence. "We all know that the (Premier) League is over. Apart from if something crazy happens but what I'm trying to say is that this game can help maybe to be confident in this competition and the game that you have after, Real Madrid or Atletico," the Frenchman said. "Sometimes I think the path to the final can at times help or not, but if you want to win the competition you have to go through these teams."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Ancelotti happy with Real's effort in win over Atletico



Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz scores against Atletico de Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. (AFP)

Reuters  
Madrid

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was pleased with his side's resilience as they earned a 2-1 win over Atletico Madrid at the Bernabeu in the hard-fought first leg of their Champions League Round of 16 tie on Tuesday.

Brahim Diaz scored the second-half winner after Atletico forward Julian Alvarez had cancelled out Rodrygo's opener. Vinicius Jr and Kylian Mbappe both missed good chances that could have given Real a bigger margin for the second leg but Ancelotti was not in the mood to lament missed opportunities.

He preferred to stick with the positive which is a win against what he considers one of Europe's best teams this season and said his players will need even more effort to make the most of their narrow advantage to advance in their title defence. "These are evenly matched games. It's a Round of 16 in the Champions League as it could be a final or a semi-final. Atletico are a top team in Europe and you can't think about finishing

the tie in the first leg," Ancelotti told a press conference.

"We've gained a small advantage that gives us confidence for the second leg but that's it. It was a difficult match ... as usual. It always is against Atleti. In the first half we lost too many balls, we had unnecessary mistakes that almost cost us, they levelled the game with Julian Alvarez. But in the second half we were better. We were able to take advantage and we did it."

Ancelotti downplayed what seemed to be a disappointing night for Mbappe and Vinicius, praising the work of Atletico's defence in neutralising his pair of world-class attackers. "I think playing against Atletico's defence is not that easy a task," Ancelotti said. "We haven't had many chances throughout the match and the two of them have worked hard, they've fought hard... They haven't had the chance to show the quality we all know they have but they've got the return leg to do it."

The winners of the tie will surely meet Arsenal, who are in a virtually unassailable position to reach the quarter-finals after a 7-1 victory at PSV Eindhoven in Tuesday's first leg.

Meanwhile, Atletico manager Diego Simeone was disappointed that his side failed to capitalise on the control they had for long periods. But Simeone said he was happy with how his team reacted to conceding an early goal, adding that he felt confident they could turn the tie around in the second leg at the Metropolitan stadium next week, as they did against Inter Milan at the same stage last year.

"We should have taken better advantage when we had control of the game," Simeone said. "It's difficult to take risks so that with any counter-attack you end up losing the game. We controlled that situation very well, but we were missing (something) in the final metres."

The Argentine said he was confident that the atmosphere at their home ground would give Atletico "a stimulus" and that while his team go into the second leg behind, it could have been much worse had Real taken a late chance on Tuesday.

Real's Mbappe failed to find Vinicius Jr with a pass in the final moments of the match that could have led to another goal. "Maybe the hope of that no goal opens the door for what's to come," he said.

## World Cup 2026 final to feature halftime show

New York: The 2026 World Cup final will feature its first ever halftime show, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said yesterday. The 48-team World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, will run from June 11 to July 19, 2026. The tournament will feature 104 matches instead of the previous 64 games, including an additional knockout round.

The final will be played at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, home of NFL teams New York Giants and New York Jets.

"I can confirm the first ever halftime show at a FIFA World Cup final in New York, New Jersey, in association with Global Citizen," Infantino said on Instagram.

FIFA will be working with international education and advocacy organisation Global Citizen as well as British band Coldplay for the halftime show.

**NEWCASTLE STRIKER ISAK LOST CAR AND CASH IN HOME RAID, COURT HEARS**  
Newcastle striker Alexander

Isak's home was raided by a "professional group of travelling burglars" who stole his car and jewellery worth £68,000 (\$87,000), a court heard. The Sweden international was not in his house in Northumberland, in northeast England, when the gang broke in through a glass door last April, Newcastle Crown Court was told.

The thieves had already stolen jewellery and clothes worth more than £1m from a businesswoman and designer goods worth £100,000 from another woman in the previous days.

Three members of the same family, living in Italy, have admitted conspiracy to commit burglary, the court heard. A fourth family member, Valentino Nikolov, 32, denies the charge.

The gang arrived in Britain via a ferry from Calais to Dover last March, using a motor-home as their base, the court heard. Nikolov, of Birmingham, is representing himself at the trial and requires an Italian interpreter.

Jurors have been told his brother Giacomo Nikolov, 28, his

sister Jela Jovanovic, 43, and her son Charlie Jovanovic, 23, who all live in Italy, have admitted conspiracy to commit burglary. Isak has enjoyed a standout season for Newcastle, scoring 22 goals in all competitions for Eddie Howe's team, who face Liverpool in the League Cup final at Wembley on March 16.

**YAMAL WILL RENEW CONTRACT WITH BARCELONA, SAYS AGENT MENDES**

Barcelona winger Lamine Yamal will extend his contract with the La Liga club beyond 2026, his agent Jorge Mendes said.

The 17-year-old Spain international, who won the 2024 Golden Boy award to cap off a year in which he helped his country win the European Championship, has scored 11 goals and provided 16 assists in 35 appearances in all competitions this season for Barca.

A product of the Barca academy, Yamal has played 86 times for the Catalan club since making his senior debut in April 2023.

## FOCUS

## Europa League win can change dire United season: Amorim

AFP  
San Sebastian, Spain

Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim said yesterday winning the Europa League could make a "massive difference" to his team's disappointing season, but was not vital in the big picture of the club's future.

The Red Devils face Real Sociedad today in a last 16 clash at the Reale Arena, looking for respite from their poor domestic form. Winning the Europa League would earn them a Champions League qualification spot for next season, which is virtually impossible for them to attain in the Premier League, where they sit 14th.

"I think it's not a crucial thing for the future of the club... (but it would be) a massive difference in our season, especially because we are out of the (other) cups and



in a bad position in the league," Amorim told reporters. "If we win the Europa League that could change a lot of things in the way (people) see the coach," he joked. Amorim, who arrived at Old Trafford in November after Erik ten Hag was sacked, believes top quality players will still be in-

terested in joining United even if they failed to secure European football next season. "Man United can (aim for) all the best players in the future even without Champions League in the future," said Amorim.

"We have to change a lot of things and we'll try to do that. There are more important things than winning cups in this moment, that is my view, but I understand that winning the Europa League can change everything for next season."

Amorim said Sunday after Fulham knocked his team out of the FA Cup that United's long-term goal should be winning the Premier League title. "We have to think of the club as a project not just solve things in this moment," continued the Portuguese coach. "(We can't think) if we win the Europa League we'll be in amazing position in the next year... I'm trying to show the big picture to our supporters."