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SPOTLIGHT

US-Qatar sports co-operation set for boost



The President of Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, passed the ceremonial ball over to the 2026 FIFA World Cup hosts — Canada, USA and Mexico in Doha on December 18, 2022. A delegation of diplomats from the three host nations for 2026 FIFA World Cup were present for the handover ceremony. In presence of FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, the ball was handed to Omar Alghabra, Canadian Minister of Transport; Yon de Luisa, Mexican Football Federation President; and Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the United States ambassador to the UN.



Global sporting powerhouse the United States and Qatar – the 2022 FIFA World Cup hosts – are set to expand sports co-operation on President Donald Trump's two-day visit to Qatar starting today. President Trump, who took office on Jan 20, 2025, is set to arrive in the Qatari capital on his maiden trip with his delegation.

Ambassador of the US to the State of Qatar Timmy Davis in an interview with QNA said President Trump's visit is expected to witness agreements on sports co-operation, as the US will host the 2026 FIFA World Cup and LA Olympic Games in 2028.

Doha, the sports capital of the Middle East, is currently preparing to host the FIBA Basketball World Cup in 2027.

Qatar has been a favourite destination for American sports stars over the last two decades. The US Men's Football Team played at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar under coach Gregg Berhalter. Thousands of American fans also visited Qatar following Berhalter's team.

American rising tennis star Taylor Fritz has appeared at the Qatar ExxonMobil Open while retired Grand Slam star Monica Seles of the US also regaled fans at the iconic Khalifa International Tennis Complex. Late American MotoGP rider Nicky Hayden scorched the surface at Lusail International Circuit. A few years ago, the Washington Spirit Women's Soccer Team played a friendly match with the Qatar Women's National Soccer team in Doha.

Qatar and the US collaborate extensively in sports, encompassing event hosting, security, investments and strategic alliances.

Qatar's prominence in global sports, evidenced by hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup and the upcoming 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup, makes it a key partner for the US as it gears up for its major sporting events.

Qatar-US relationships in the sports field have been diverse.

In June 2024, Qatar and the US signed a Letter of Intent to enhance co-operation in the security of major sporting events.

This agreement aims to utilise the expertise Qatar gained from successfully hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup to support the security efforts for the 2026 World Cup in the US, Canada and Mexico.

Earlier this year, the Government Communications Office (GCO) announced a strategic partnership agreement with Fanatics, a global digital sports platform. The agreement was signed during Web Summit Qatar 2025 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Center.

The five-year partnership includes a sponsorship of Fanatics Fest, a premier global sporting event that gathers elite athletes, business leaders and celebrities. The Fanatics Fest sponsorship will begin with the 2025 edition of the three-day sports festival, which runs June 20-22, 2025, at the Javits Center in New York.

The partnership aligns with Fanatics' expansion strategy to reach more fans in emerging international markets. For Qatar, it creates fresh opportunities to strengthen its presence in the global sports arena through direct involvement in major sporting events, reinforcing its position as a world-class destination for sports, tourism, culture and innovation.

Qatar Airways, as the Official Global Airline Partner of FIFA, will launch travel packages for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the US, Canada, and Mexico, further strengthening the ties between Qatar and the upcoming major sporting event in North America.

The travel packages will include international flights, domestic flights, transfers to various cities, hotel accommodation in four and five-stars hotels, airports and stadium transfers, and match tickets.

At the 2022 FIFA World Cup final, HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, handed over the ceremonial ball to representatives of the FIFA World Cup 2026 hosts – the US, Canada, and Mexico.

The handover ceremony was attended by a delegation of diplomats from the three nations set to co-host the tournament.

In the presence of FIFA President Gianni Infantino, the ball was presented to Omar Alghabra, Canada's Minister of Transport; Yon de Luisa, President of the Mexican Football Federation; and Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US ambassador to the United Nations.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be hosted across 16 cities in the US, Canada and Mexico.

FOOTBALL / AMIR CUP

Umm Salal edge Al Shamal as Al Ahli beat Al Shahania

Gharafa face Sadd at Al Thumama Stadium as Rayyan play Duhail at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today



Umm Salal's Antonio Mance (left) and Sayed Issa are jubilant after beating Al Shamal in their Amir Cup quarter-final yesterday. Umm Salal won 3-2 on penalties after both sides were locked at 1-1 in regulation time.



Al Ahli players celebrate during their Amir Cup quarter-final against Al Shahania at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha yesterday. Al Ahli won 2-1 to reach the semi-finals.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Umm Salal prevailed over a challenging Al Shamal 3-2 in a penalty shootout after a 1-1 draw while Al Ahli edged Al Shahania 2-1 in their clash to secure the Amir Cup football semi-final spots yesterday.

At the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Umm Salal made a fighting comeback to hold Al Shamal to a 1-1 stalemate after Naim Sliti had given the latter the advantage in the 53rd minute. Sliti needed a bursting sprint to reach a cross inside the 'D' and he battled a challenging defender despite a stumble to put the ball into the net.

Antonio Mance made amends for Umm Salal late in the second half (86th min) slamming into the right corner from inside the box.

Early in the first half of extra time, Al Shamal lost Omar Ali, who received a red card, but they, managed to hold on as penalties were enforced. Mohammed Musa, Younes Belhanda and Baghdad Bounedjah missed the target while only Fahad Waad and Jeison Murillo struck for Al Shamal. For Umm Salal, Ahmed Al Saadi, Mance and Victor Lekhal scored from the spot while Ali Al Muhannadi missed. Umm Salal has qualified for the semi-finals for the first time in 15 years.

Earlier, at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Al Ahli rode on a stoppage time goal to overcome Al Shahania 2-1.

In the very 7th minute of play, Hamdi Nagguez put Shahania in the lead as he headed back a ricochet from top of the right post after a long kick from outside the box hit it.

Al Ahli had to rally long before they found the equalizer in the 68th minute as Hamad Mansour dashed in from the left to beat the rival goalkeeper.

The deadlock then continued on before Oumar Sekou produced the winner in the 100th minute latching on to a chance after a mini goal-mouth melee, much to his team and fans' delight.

Today, Al Gharafa will face Al Sadd at the Al Thumama Stadium at 5.15pm, while Al Rayyan play Al Duhail at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium at 8.15pm.

CRICKET

SPOTLIGHT

India eye new era after Kohli, Rohit exits


Virat Kohli

AFP
New Delhi

Indian cricket will enter an uncertain new era next week when selectors name a Test squad without all-time greats Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma for the first time in more than a decade.

Batting great Kohli and captain Rohit both retired from Tests in the past week, leaving Shubman Gill as the front-runner to lead a new-look India in England.

The retirement last year of veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin leaves India without the backbone of the side that was formerly number one in the world Test rankings.

Top-order batsman Gill is favourite to be given the task of starting India's rebuild with the five-Test England series, which begins on June 20 at Headingley.

"Gill looks like the heir apparent but his record overseas hasn't looked too great," veteran cricket journalist Ayaz Memon told AFP.

The 25-year-old Gill has scored 1,893 runs at an average of 35.05 in 32 Tests since his debut in 2020, with five hundreds. But in 13 Tests away from home his average is only 29.50. Gill is likely to move up the order to open alongside the 23-year-old Yashasvi Jaiswal, with big-hitting Shreyas Iyer in the frame to replace Kohli at the fall of the second wicket.

Others who could be charged with the almost impossible task of following in all-time great Kohli's footsteps are Sarfaraz Khan, Rajat Patidar and Dhruv Jurel.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant has also been mentioned as a future captain, but his current poor form and less-than-inspiring leadership of Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL are counting against his immediate elevation.

Leading pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah was Rohit's deputy in Australia and led the team in two Tests, winning one, and was seen as another candidate for captain.

But Bumrah has only recently returned to action after suffering a back injury during the final Test at Sydney in January.

The five Tests in England are crammed into six weeks, meaning India will need to manage the workload of their pace attack by resting bowlers for one or more matches, effectively ruling Bumrah out of the captaincy debate.

Team in transition

Memon, who called Kohli's retirement "a big moment in Indian cricket", said there was enough strength in depth to fill the void left by Kohli, opener Rohit and Ashwin.

"There are senior pros like (Mohammed) Shami, if he is in form and selected, and (Ravindra) Jadeja," said Memon. "The new crop of Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant, maybe Prasidh Krishna, Mohammed Siraj look good. "They could be looking for a young spinner, maybe Washington Sundar because Ashwin is not there."

Off-spinner Ashwin called an abrupt halt to his international career after playing the second Test in Adelaide last year.

He ended his career with 537 wickets in 106 matches, eighth on the all-time list and behind only Anil Kumble for India, who had 619 dismissals.

India's 1983 World Cup-winning all-rounder Sandeep Patil believes the new-look India could come out stronger after a period of transition.

"The two stalwarts, the two pillars of Indian cricket, have gone," Patil, who was chief selector when Kohli became captain in 2015, told *The Times of India*.

"It is time to rebuild. It will be a challenge for the national selectors, but I am sure we will find a solution.


Rohit Sharma

ANNOUNCEMENT

Rabada to lead SA pace attack for the WTC final

Coach Conrad has named a squad which includes six pacers

AFP
Johannesburg


Kagiso Rabada

Kagiso Rabada will lead a South African pace bowling attack weakened by injury in the World Test Championship final against Australia at Lord's in London from June 11 to 15.

Coach Shukri Conrad yesterday named a 15-man squad which includes six pace bowlers.

But three of South Africa's fastest bowlers missed selection.

Anrich Nortje, Gerald Coetzee and Nandre Burger have all been hit by injuries before and during the championship cycle.

Rabada, who recently returned to cricket after serving a ban for recreational drug use, will be backed up by tall left-arm fast bowler Marco Jansen as well as right-arm seamers in Dane Paterson, Lungi Ngidi and all-rounders Wiaan Mulder and Corbin Bosch.

Ngidi missed the home series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan in December and January because of a groin injury but played in the Champions Trophy one-day competition in Pakistan in February and March.

"I'm particularly pleased to welcome Lungi back in the side," said Conrad. "He's put in the work and offers us an experienced option with the ball."

Paterson, 36, is currently playing for English county Middlesex, who are based at Lord's.

There are two spinners in the squad, left-armers Keshav Maharaj and Senuran Muthusamy. Maharaj suffered a recurrence of a groin injury in March, which ruled him out of the rest of the South African domestic season, but has been passed fit to play.

South Africa's batsmen have also had injury problems.

Captain Temba Bavuma missed the domestic four-day final in April because of a recurrence of an elbow injury, while David Bedingham suffered a fractured toe while batting for Durham in an English county championship match in April.

Conrad said playing in the final would be a "special moment" for his players.

"Over the past 18 months, we've worked hard to build a competitive red-ball unit, and this achievement reflects that progress.

"A key part of our success has been consistency in selection, and we've stuck with the core group of players who have been part of this WTC cycle. We've selected a balanced squad for the conditions we expect at Lord's."

South Africa qualified for the final by winning eight of their 12 matches in the championship, including their last seven in a row.

Two of their three defeats were against New Zealand in a series which South Africa effectively forfeited because Cricket South Africa gave priority to the SA20 franchise competition. Seven of the squad are currently involved with the Indian Premier League and three in English county cricket. The players will assemble in England on May 31 ahead of a warm-up match against Zimbabwe in Arundel from June 3 to 6.

SQUAD
Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Dane Paterson, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs, Kyle Verreynne (wkt)

FOCUS

Green, Cummins and Hazlewood return for WTC final

Reuters
Sydney

Australia named all-rounder Cameron Green in their 15-man squad on Tuesday for the World Test Championship (WTC) final where they will face South Africa at Lord's from June 11-15.

Green was diagnosed with a stress fracture in his lower back during the one-day international series in England last year and had surgery in October but returned playing for Gloucestershire in English county cricket last month.

Skipper Pat Cummins, who missed the tour of Sri Lanka due to the birth of his second child in February and was also ruled out of the Champions Trophy campaign with an ankle injury, will take the reins against South Africa.

Fellow pace bowler Josh Hazlewood was also included after a spell out with a hip injury.

"We are fortunate and looking forward to having Pat, Josh and Cam back in the squad," chief selector George Bailey said.

"The team finished the WTC cycle with an impressive series victory in Sri Lanka following an equally strong summer in defeating India for the first time in a decade. "Those series capped a consistent performance across the two-year cycle and now presents us with the incredibly exciting opportunity to defend the WTC.

"It means a lot to the group to reach the final and they're very much looking forward to the challenge South Africa will present at Lord's."

Australia won the World Test Championship in 2023 after beating India in the final at The Oval.

Teenager Sam Konstas was also included in the squad, adding a specialist option for the opener's spot, but media reports in Australia said the team could elevate Marnus Labuschagne from number three. The squad will then embark on a tour of the Caribbean where they will play West Indies in three Tests from June 25. A squad for the five Twenty20 internationals that follow will be named at a later date.

Australia squad
Pat Cummins (captain), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Matt Kuhnemann, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster.
Travelling reserve: Brendan Doggett

NZ's Mike Hesson named Pakistan white-ball coach



Karachi: Pakistan appointed New Zealander **Mike Hesson** as coach of their white-ball team yesterday, their ninth in the last two years.
The 50-year-old takes over from former Pakistan fast bowler Aaqib Javed, who had served on an interim basis since November.
Hesson coached New Zealand from 2012 to 2018, during which they reached the final of the 2015 World Cup and won eight of 11 home Test series.
Hesson had also coached Kenya's national team and been coaching Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League since 2024.
His first assignment will be a five-match Twenty20 home series against Bangladesh starting later this month.
"Mike brings with him a wealth of international experience and a proven track record of developing competitive sides," Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi wrote on social media.
He added: "We look forward to his expertise and leadership in shaping the future of Pakistan's white-ball cricket."
Aaqib declined to continue after Pakistan crashed out in the first round of their home Champions Trophy in February-March, followed by heavy defeats in New Zealand in T20 and ODI series.
Pakistan have a history of sacking or replacing coaches, recent departures including Australian Jason Gillespie and South African Gary Kirsten.

Pakistan's Twenty20 League to resume after India-Pakistan ceasefire

Karachi: Pakistan's Twenty20 League is set to resume from Saturday after it was postponed following a series of attacks by India and Pakistan last week.
The May 8 match between Peshawar Zalmi and Karachi Kings in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) was postponed last Thursday after a drone attack hit a street adjacent to Rawalpindi Stadium.
The PSL was initially going to relocate to the UAE before it was postponed on Friday.
But with both countries agreeing to a ceasefire, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced the PSL will resume from May 17.
"The PSL 2025 will resume on May 17, with the final on May 25.
The League will pick up from where it left off, six teams with zero fear," PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi said in a post on X.
The four remaining group games will take place at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, with the playoffs and final in Lahore, the PSB said in a release. Thirty-seven foreign players were involved in the tenth edition of the PSL, which started in Karachi from April 11.

BOTTOMLINE

Buttler one of five IPL players named in England squad for Windies series despite fixture clash

AFP
London

England have selected five Indian Premier League players in their one-day squad to face the West Indies, including former captain Jos Buttler, but have not ruled out allowing them to skip the series.

A fixture clash looms after the lucrative T20 tournament was suspended last week as a result of deadly military exchanges between India and Pakistan – the worst violence between the two nuclear-armed neighbours since 1999.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided to stage the 17 outstanding matches following a ceasefire agreement, with the tournament due to end on June 3.

England play three ODIs against West Indies, on May 29, June 1 and June 3 – the first series since Harry Brook was appointed as their full-time white ball captain.

England cricket chiefs are keen to show support for the BCCI but also want to put out a full-strength team.

As of yesterday, they had taken no firm decision on how to respond to the latest developments. Buttler's Gujarat Titans are top of the IPL table and the recalled Will Jacks (Mumbai Indians) and Jacob Bethell (Royal Challengers Bengaluru) could also be needed for the play-offs.

The other two IPL players who have been selected to face the West Indies, pacemen Jofra Archer and Jamie Overton, are with teams who cannot reach the finals.

An ECB spokesman said yesterday: "We're keen to support the IPL and the BCCI in getting the schedule up and running, and to facilitate players' return should they choose to go back.

"No objection certificates have been granted based on the original IPL dates, so we'll need to review any potential extensions, particularly in relation to any clash with the final white-ball squad. We'll continue to work closely with the BCCI and the IPL as the situation develops."

Dawson returns for England's T20 squad, Salt dropped

All-rounder Liam Dawson has returned to England's T20 squad for the first time since 2022, while Phil Salt was not selected by the England & Wales Cricket Board for the upcoming white-ball home series against West Indies.

England, who will play three ODIs and three T20 matches against West Indies between May 29 and June 10, have also recalled batting all-rounder Will Jacks to both squads led by Harry Brook, who was named white-ball captain last month.

England will also play a four-day Test with Zimbabwe, starting May 22 at Trent Bridge.

ODI squad
Harry Brook (captain), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson (Surrey), Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell, Jos Buttler, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Saqib Mahmood, Jamie Overton, Matthew Potts, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Jamie Smith.
T20 squad
Harry Brook (captain), Rehan Ahmed, Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell, Jos Buttler, Brydon Carse, Liam Dawson, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Saqib Mahmood, Jamie Overton, Matthew Potts, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Luke Wood.

GIRO D'ITALIA

Van Uden springs surprise to win sprint

AFP
Lecce, Italy

Dutch sprinter Casper van Uden outsmarted the favourites to win stage four of the Giro d'Italia yesterday while Mads Pedersen held the overall race lead finishing fourth.

Olav Kooij of Visma was in second place and Maikel Zijlaard of Tudor was third for an all-Dutch podium after a nervy mass bunch sprint on a winding and relatively narrow home straight in downtown Lecce, in the heel of Italy.

The 23-year-old Van Uden's win comes on his first Grand Tour and he ran around in excitement hugging his teammates as they crowded around him.

"I didn't do it alone. We did it with the whole team, all the boys here and all the staff," he said.

"I didn't have to take any wind until the last 200m and so I just went for it and hoped for the best," the Picnic Post NL rider added. Dressed entirely in pink, Dane Pedersen was slightly boxed in on the home straight and had lost his teammates as he himself tried for the win and still came fourth.

Lidl-Trek's Pedersen tops the overall rankings seven seconds ahead of pre-race favourite Primoz Roglic.

None of the favourites for the overall title lost any time other than the two seconds Roglic gained on all of them in an intermediate sprint.

The team however lost a key rider in a late fall with Soren Kragh Andersen crossing the line holding on with one hand.

"The final was really something special," Pedersen said.

"Wide roads and narrow roads and so on. So a stressful day in the end," the 29-year-old added.

The fourth stage rolled out of tourist town Alberobello, known for its atypical conical roofs, for a largely flat 189km run to Lecce with packed ranks of fans in towns and villages.

Lone escapee Spanish rider Francisco Munoz of Polti Visit Malta broke from the flag and rode the first 130km of the route on his own.

The 23-year-old would later be caught as he spent the day in the spotlight.

A crash at a feed zone brought down Pedersen in the pink jersey, Briton Tom Pidcock and French climber Romain Bardet amongst others as Canadian Nickolas Zukowsky became the third rider to pull out of this year's Giro.

Stage five is a 188km run to the ancient hill town Matera where large parts of the James Bond movie *No Time to Die* were filmed.



Team Picnic PostNL's Dutch rider Casper Van Uden celebrates as he crosses the finish line of the 4th stage of the 108th Giro d'Italia cycling race from Alberobello to Lecce yesterday. *(AFP)*

TENNIS / ITALIAN OPEN

Sinner gathers momentum to reach quarters

Sinner beats Cerundolo in a match which was delayed by rain

AFP
Rome

Jannik Sinner came through the first true test of his comeback from a doping ban with yesterday's straight-sets win over Francisco Cerundolo which took the world number one into the Italian Open quarter-finals.

Italian Sinner bested 17th seed Cerundolo 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 in a match which was delayed by a couple of hours due to a torrential downpour to set up a last-eight clash with either Casper Ruud or Jaume Munar.

Cerundolo knocked out Sinner in the last 16 the last time he played here in 2023, but that was before the 23-year-old had became the tournament-winning machine he is today.

Sinner is finding his feet in Rome, his first tournament since the end of a three-month suspension accepted in February from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) following two positive tests for traces of clostebol in March last year.

His true target is the French Open which follows his home event and he showed some signs of rediscovering the form which has won him three Grand Slams and last year's ATP Finals.

Sinner had to battle through the first set against spirited Cerundolo but once he prevailed in the tie-break he built up an unassailable lead by winning four games in a row in the second.

The packed centre court stands hailed their hero after he took the win at the fourth time of asking and continue his bid for a first Rome title.



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning his match against Argentine's Francisco Cerundolo at the ATP Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. *(AFP)*

Musetti defies Medvedev, rain

The rain which delayed Sinner's match had a much bigger impact on his compatriot Lorenzo Musetti, who reached the last eight after having to wait nearly three hours at match point before he could finish off his victory over Daniil Medvedev.

World number nine Musetti will face either reigning Rome champion Alexander Zverev in the last eight after seeing off Medvedev 7-5, 6-4.

Musetti held his nerve to win on the first point after the long break and made sure that his first week in the top 10 of the world rankings would bring another solid run in a big tournament, after he reached the final in Monte Carlo and the last four in Madrid.

Organisers later said that Musetti would have to pull out of his doubles campaign alongside Lorenzo Sonego due to an injury to his right arm. Fellow Italian Jasmine Paolini was playing on centre court at the same time as the first part of Musetti's match but managed to complete her comeback from a set down to beat Diana Shnaider 6-7 (1/7), 6-4, 6-2 just before the worst of the weather hit. Paolini is the first Italian woman to reach the Rome semi-finals since 2014, when her doubles partner Sara Errani got to the final only to be soundly beaten by Serena Williams.

Alcaraz through

Earlier Carlos Alcaraz beat Karen Khachanov 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 in a hugely entertaining opening match of the day on centre court.

Third seed Alcaraz had never lost a set in his previous four meetings with Khachanov but was forced to fight to get past Russia's Khachanov. The Spaniard took his 12th clay-court win of the year to set up a clash in the last eight with fifth seed Jack Draper, a winner over France's Corentin Moutet.

"It was tiring. You know the match was really tough. I had to run. I had to run a lot," said Alcaraz. "I didn't play well. I just fought and I'm just really happy about it."

Alcaraz needs to get to the Rome semis not just for a chance at his third title of the season but also to secure a top-two seeding at the French Open which begins later this month.

VOWLES VOWS NO MORE TEAM ORDERS CONFUSION AT WILLIAMS

MADRID: Williams have made changes to avoid repeating the situation in Miami where Carlos Sainz mistakenly thought Alex Albon had ignored orders not to pass, team boss James Vowles said yesterday.

Sainz complained after the May 4 Formula One race that he had been made to "feel stupid" after being informed Albon would hold position behind only for the Thai to then overtake.

"That is not how I go racing. I don't care. I've lost a lot of confidence here, on everything," the Spaniard, who joined from Ferrari in January, said over the team radio.

Vowles told reporters at the team factory that the matter had been resolved in about two minutes once he sat down with the drivers after the race.

Albon ended up fifth with Sainz ninth in Williams' best result in six races so far this season.

The team are fifth in the standings going into this weekend's Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix in Imola.

Vowles said Miami was the first time Williams had to do serious team orders since he took charge and it was down to a cooling issue on Albon's car that meant he needed to overtake or fall back by more than a second to get air into the radiator.

The problem triggered a lengthy discussion between engineers about what to do and one of them assured Sainz that "Alex won't attack" while the other was still debating the best course of action.

Sainz, who joined from Ferrari in January, has formed a strong pairing with Albon at the resurgent former champions and the incident was the first apparent flare-up between them.

"I can give you a guarantee it won't happen again with what we've changed," said Vowles.

"Race engineers, actually for a lot of it, are parrots. So if you give them a long winded thing, they have to start thinking through and break it up," he added when asked what had been done.

"If you explain an instruction – 'do not overtake' – I guarantee you that will go to the cars and the cars won't overtake.

"That's not what we did. It was a long discussion of all that was going wrong, what corner it was going wrong and how to mitigate against it with an instruction embedded in there.

"It just needs to be short, concise, to the point with the right person communicating to the right people, in the right moment, that's it."

FOCUS

Murray, Djokovic end coaching partnership

AFP
London

Andy Murray and former rival Novak Djokovic have ended their coaching partnership after six months, the pair announced yesterday.

Djokovic stunned the tennis world in November when he hired the retired Murray, who had no track record as a coach.

But the two 37-year-olds have now parted company after a tough start to the season for the 24-time Grand Slam champion, with the French Open looming.

"Thank you, coach Andy, for all the hard work, fun and support over last six months on and off the court, really enjoyed deepening our friendship together," said Djokovic.

Britain's Murray, born just a week before the Serb, thanked his former adversary for the chance to work with him.

"Thanks to Novak for the unbelievable opportunity to work together and thanks to his team for all their hard work over the past six months," Murray said in a statement. "I wish Novak all the best for the rest of the season."

The partnership between the two former world number ones started well, with Djokovic defeating Carlos Alcaraz at the Australian Open, only to be forced to retire during his semi-final against Alexander Zverev as a result of injury.

But success has since proved elusive for Djokovic, who is stuck on 99 career singles titles.

He has not won a single match on clay this season, losing in the first round at Monte Carlo and Madrid.

Djokovic, who turns 38 next week, pulled out of this week's Italian Open but has taken a wild card into next week's Geneva Open as he searches for form.

His hopes of a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam triumph, which would take him clear of Australia women's great Margaret Court's tally of 24 singles major titles, appear to be fading.

Murray admitted at the Australian Open in January he had not wanted to jump straight into coaching following his retirement last year but Djokovic's offer proved too good to refuse.

Djokovic was glowing in his praise of the impact Murray had had, and it was announced in February that they would continue to work together for the hard-court events in Indian Wells and Miami and some clay-court events.

It was anticipated that would include the French Open, while Murray's success at Wimbledon made that a logical choice too, but they have decided to part ways.

Djokovic is a three-time French Open champion and last year won his first Olympic title on the clay of Roland Garros, beating Alcaraz in a thrilling final. But Djokovic, so used to being the alpha male of the men's game, said after defeat in Madrid last month that he was adjusting to "a new reality".



Serbia's Novak Djokovic with Andy Murray during a practice session ahead of the Australian Open on Jan 9, 2025. *(Reuters)*

Tour de France to go through Paris' historic Montmartre district

The Tour de France will pass through the historic Parisian district of Montmartre on its final stage this year after huge crowds massed there for the 2024 Olympic road races, sources close to the decision told AFP yesterday. The world's most famous bike race will finish with a sprint on the Champs-Elysees as normal, but the climb of the cobbled hill to the domed Sacre-Coeur Basilica adds a picturesque new dimension. At last year's Paris Olympics around 500,000 people lined the streets of Montmartre and the French capital. The men's and women's Olympic road race saw competitors speed through some of the most iconic streets of the capital, including the famous Montmartre hill, and the Moulin Rouge cabaret made famous by 19th century artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The inclusion of Montmartre gives organisers a logistical headache with the Tour peloton double the size of the 90-rider peloton at the Olympics threading its way through the district's narrow cobbled lanes.

At the Olympics, the road race started and finished in front of the Eiffel Tower. Due to preparations for the Olympics, last year's Tour de France finished with a time-trial on the Cote d'Azur in Nice. Traditionally the final day's stage in Paris is a parade with the battle for the coveted yellow jersey having been decided the day before. The concluding 21st day of competition culminates in an eight-lap sprint of the Champs-Elysees, the French capital's most famous boulevard, with the finish in the shadow of the Arc de Triomphe.

FIBA BASKETBALL WORLD CUP 2027 QUALIFIERS DRAW

Hosts Qatar placed in Group D with Lebanon, Saudi and India

QOC chief and Chairman of the Qatar 2027 Local Organising Committee HE Sheikh Joaan attended the ceremony



Qatari high jump legend Mutaz Barshim during the draw ceremony yesterday.



His Excellency Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organizing Committee, and HE Sheikh Saud bin Ali al-Thani, President of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) during the draw ceremony in Doha yesterday.


The Naismith Trophy was brought on to the stage by FIBA Basketball World Cup 2002 MVP, former Germany national team captain and basketball great Dirk Nowitzk.



Agencies
Doha

With attendance of His Excellency Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organising Committee, the draw ceremony for the event's qualifiers was held yesterday at Al Hazm Mall in Doha, marking the official start of the city's journey toward hosting the tournament — the first-ever to be staged in the Middle East.

The draw ceremony was attended by HE Sheikh Saud bin Ali al-Thani, President of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA); Mohammed Saad al-Meghaiseeb, President of the Qatar Basketball Federation and Director General of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organising Committee; and Andreas Zagklis, Secretary-General of FIBA, alongside a number of distinguished guests and dignitaries.

Also present were FIBA Global Ambassador, three-time Olympic champion, and NBA legend Carmelo Anthony, Team Qatar's Olympic champion Mutaz Essa Barshim; Yasseen Ismail, a legend of Qatari and Gulf basketball; and a 3x3 basketball world champion, along with representatives from the national teams participating in the qualifiers.

As host nation, Qatar is already assured of a place in the 32-team competition. The remaining slots will be contested over six qualifying windows, scheduled to take place between November 2025 and March 2027. The windows, each lasting nine days, will offer a thrilling mix of home-and-away games across the globe, with Africa adopting a centralised tournament format for their qualifiers.

The 16 national teams participating in the Asian Qualifiers for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 were divided into four groups. The draw placed host nation Qatar in Group D, alongside Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and India. Group A features Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Guam. Group B includes Japan, China, South Korea, and Chinese Taipei. Group C consists of Iran, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

The top three teams from each group will advance to the Second Round, where they will be divided into two new groups. The top three teams in each of those groups, along with the best fourth-placed team across both groups, will qualify for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 — in addition to Qatar, which qualifies automatically as the host nation.

The African Qualifiers will also include 16 teams divided into four groups. Group A features Cameroon, South Sudan, Libya, and Cape Verde. Group B includes Senegal, DR Congo, Madagascar, and Côte d'Ivoire. Group C is made up of Nigeria, Rwanda, Guinea, and Tunisia, while Group D consists of Mali, Angola, Uganda, and Egypt. The top three teams from each group will move on to the Second Round. Those advancing teams will be divided into two new groups, from which the top two teams in each group — along with the best third-placed team — will qualify for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027.

In the Americas, the 16 teams have also been drawn into four groups. Group A includes the United States, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and one team that will advance from the final round of pre-qualifiers. Group B consists of Puerto Rico, Canada, the Bahamas, and one qualifier. Group C features Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, and a qualifying team. Group D includes Argentina, Uruguay, Panama, and one additional qualifier.

The top three teams from each group will advance to the second round. From there, the three best teams in each group — plus the best fourth-placed team — will earn a spot at the World Cup.

Europe's 32 national teams were drawn into eight groups. Group A includes Georgia, Spain, and two teams from the final round of the pre-qualifiers. Group B features Greece, Montenegro, Portugal, and one qualifier. Group C is made up of Serbia, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a qualifier.

Group D includes Great Britain, Italy, Iceland, and Lithuania. Group E has Germany, Cyprus, and one qualifier. Group F includes Latvia, Poland, and two qualifiers. Group G features France, Belgium, Finland, and one qualifier. Group H consists of Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Sweden, and Estonia.

The top three teams from each group will advance to the Second Round, where they will be regrouped into four new groups. The top three teams in each of those groups will qualify for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027.

Each participating nation will play two games per window, making every match a crucial step on the road to Qatar 2027. The format promises intense action and fierce rivalries as teams compete not only for victory but for national pride and a coveted place at the world's premier basketball event.

A total of 80 national teams will take part in the draw, distributed across FIBA's four continental zones: 32 from Europe, 16 from Africa, 16 from the Americas, and 16 from Asia including Oceania. The final allocation of World Cup berths will see Europe claim 12 spots, the Americas 7, Africa 5, and Asia & Oceania 7 (excluding the host, Qatar).

Speaking at the draw, Mohammed Saad al-Meghaiseeb, President of the Qatar Basketball Federation and Director General of the Local Organizing Committee for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, said: "It is a great honour to welcome you all to Doha, and to the official draw for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 Qualifiers. Today marks the beginning of an exciting journey for 80 national teams from around the world. For us in Qatar, it is a proud moment to be the starting point of this global qualification campaign."

He added: "For the first time in recent history all the games will be played in one city and this will give the opportunity to the participants to enjoy every game, every moment. The fans who will travel to Doha, will live basketball for 17 days, an unforgettable experience for everyone who loves our game. The 2027 edition of the FIBA Basketball World Cup will be more than just a tournament; it will be a celebration of excellence, passion, shared values — competition, respect, and teamwork."

The FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 will take place from August 27-September 12, 2027.

Basketball fans will travel to Qatar from around the world to experience the first tournament in the history of the sport to take place in one city. Residents and visiting fans will be presented with the opportunity to attend more than one match per day, minimising their travel.

Thirty-two teams will participate in the tournament and games will be played in four venues. The final match will be played in Lusail Arena. The National team of Qatar will participate at the World Cup for the second time in its history, after competing in 2006 in Japan.

Qatar was awarded the honour of hosting the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 during the FIBA Central Board meeting held in the Philippines capital, Manila on April 28, 2023. The handover ceremony took place in Manila on September 10, 2023 during the closing ceremony of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 hosted by the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia.

FOOTBALL

Departing Ancelotti has 'no problem' with Real Madrid

AFP
Madrid


Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti heads a training session in Madrid yesterday. *(AFP)*

Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday he "has no problem" with Real Madrid ahead of his departure from the club at the end of the season to take over the Brazil national team.

The veteran Italian will become Selecao boss on May 26, the day after Madrid's last La Liga match of the campaign.

The Spanish giants are yet to name a replacement, although Xabi Alonso is a strong favourite to take over after confirming he will leave Bayer Leverkusen.

The Brazilian football federation (CBF) announced Ancelotti's appointment on Monday, before any official confirmation from Madrid regarding Ancelotti's departure.

"The CBF issued that statement because I'll be the coach of Brazil from the 26th. Madrid will issue a statement whenever they want, there is no problem," Ancelotti told reporters on the eve of his team's match against Real Mallorca. "I will be the coach of Brazil, which is a challenge, but until then, I'm the coach of Real Madrid and I want to finish in the best possible way.

"I'm focused on the final stretch of this spectacular adventure."

Ancelotti, who has won 15 trophies including three Champions League titles across two spells at the Santiago Bernabeu, has endured a difficult final season in charge. Real's La Liga title defence has faltered with Barcelona on the cusp of the title, while they also lost the Copa del Rey final to their arch rivals and were humbled in the Champions League quarter-finals by Arsenal.

"Football, like life, is an adventure that begins and ends," added the 65-year-old, who also lifted the European Cup twice as AC Milan coach.

"I've always kept in mind that this would end. I've had a great time... but in everything in life there comes a time when it ends.

"My seriousness and professionalism demand that I finish well here...

"I've never had a problem with the club and I never will."

Madrid's 4-3 loss to Barcelona on Sunday in El Clasico left them seven points behind Hansi Flick's side with only three matches remaining.

Barca would secure the title if Madrid fail to defeat Mallorca on Wednesday. "I've had a fantastic time here and I want to continue like this for the last two weeks I have left here," said Ancelotti when asked about criticism from the press over his team's performances this season.

"I've gotten the most out of myself and the titles speak for themselves."

Brazilian forward Rodrygo Goes, who has been linked with a possible move away from Real Madrid by Spanish media reports, hobbled out of Tuesday's training session.

"Rodrygo had a fever last week, which prevented him from returning at his best, even though he tried to grit his teeth," Ancelotti said.

"He felt pain in his leg. We need to assess him to see what's wrong."

Spanish sports daily Marca claimed Rodrygo wants to leave and refused to come on as a substitute against Barca.

"The rest is just speculation," Ancelotti insisted. "Everyone here has a special affection for Rodrygo, especially me."