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CRICKET | Page 2

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FOOTBALL | Page 4

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TENNIS

Sabalenka eyes claycourt supremacy with Gauff hoping to be second time lucky

Page 3

FOOTBALL

Lopetegui expects more from Qatar after win over Iran

By Sports Reporter
Doha



Qatar's coach Julen Lopetegui.



Pedro Miguel's first half strike secured victory against Iran in the World Cup qualifiers.

Julen Lopetegui kicked off his tenure as Qatar head coach with victory, with the Spaniard describing the 1-0 win against Iran as a morale booster for the back-to-back AFC Asian Cup champions.

Pedro Miguel's first half strike secured victory against Iran, who were reduced to 10 men following Milad Mohammadi's 35th minute red card, in their Asian World Cup qualifiers Group A tie as Qatar secured their place in the playoffs, where an additional two tickets are available to next year's global showpiece.

"We played against the best team in the group, one that had already qualified for the World Cup," said Lopetegui. "We wanted to win to qualify for the playoffs and that's what we did. We had every incentive to win, and we worked hard to put in a good performance. We won and were able to finish the match in our favour. This was my first match with the Qatari national team and winning is of course an important incentive for everyone."

"The players adhered to the instructions completely, and the victory is a motivation for what's coming. We have another match ahead of us, and we must also focus because it will be an important building block for what's to come," the former Spain and Real Madrid coach added.

Defender Miguel, who was named man of the match, hailed the team's unity and said his teammates were fully focused on securing the crucial victory. "We had no choice but to win. We were confident, we had worked hard for this," he said.

The experienced defender highlighted the role of the supporters in pushing the team over the line. "Our fans were tremendous today—they were one of the main reasons behind this win. I'm very happy to make them proud," he said. "This victory is the result of the efforts of the entire group. Our goal is the same as the fans' — to qualify for the 2026 World Cup. We have to keep going, and we need our fans to continue supporting us in the next phase," Miguel said.

Iran became the first team in nine World Cup qualifiers to fail to score against Qatar — handing Al Annabi their first clean sheet of the campaign. Every opponent had found the net against Qatar, who have conceded 21 goals so far — the most of any of the 18 Asian teams in qualifiers.

Iran had a golden chance to become the top-ranked Asian team in the FIFA standings. A win against Qatar, who were coming off a 3-1 loss to Kyrgyzstan in March, would've allowed Iran to leapfrog Japan and become the top-ranked Asian side.

Despite a first defeat of their campaign, Iran head coach Amir Ghalenoei saw positives in his side's performance. "I think the match was good. Both teams performed well and we started well. There were some moments in the match, especially the second yellow card for our player, which caused us to lose some control at the end of the first half but we improved in the second half," said Ghalenoei.

"The Iranian league ended early, and some players waited 20 days (to play), and our situation was different from Qatar's. Seven of our main players were injured but the young players were good and I am very optimistic about the future," he added.

Qatar face Uzbekistan, who booked their place in the global spectacle following their 0-0 draw against the United Arab Emirates, on Tuesday, while Iran take on North Korea.

TENNIS

Sinner sets up Alcaraz final with victory over Djokovic

ALCARAZ ENTERS FRENCH OPEN FINAL AFTER LORENZO MUSETTI RETIRES HURT

AFP
Paris



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning the French Open semi-final against Serbia's Novak Djokovic in Paris yesterday. *(AFP)*



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts during his semi-final against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in Paris yesterday. *(AFP)*

Jannik Sinner will face Carlos Alcaraz in the French Open final after ending Novak Djokovic's latest tilt at a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title in the last four yesterday.

The world number one held off a battling Djokovic with an impressive 6-4, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) win on Court Philippe Chatrier to reach his first Roland Garros final.

"It was such a special occasion for me playing against Novak in the semi-final," said the three-time Grand Slam champion, who is now on a 20-match winning streak in majors.

"I had to step up and play the best tennis I could. I'm very happy."

Djokovic battled hard in a dramatic contest that lasted three hours and 16 minutes, but three missed set points late in the third set ultimately put paid to his hopes of a comeback.

Sinner, who is yet to drop a set in the tournament, will be hoping to gain revenge on Alcaraz after losing to the Spaniard in five sets in the semi-finals last year.

The Italian will be playing in a maiden Slam final not on hard courts after edging 5-4 ahead in his head-to-head record with Djokovic with his fourth successive victory over the 38-year-old.

Djokovic's exit ensures that a sixth successive major title will be lifted by either Sinner or world number two Alcaraz, in what appears increasingly likely to be a permanent changing of the guard.

It will be the first Grand Slam final to be played between two men born in the 2000s.

Alcaraz has won his last four matches against Sinner, including in the Italian Open final in May when Sinner returned from a three-month doping ban.

"Sunday is going to be very difficult, I know my head-to-head lately doesn't look great against Carlos but let's see what I can do," said the 23-year-old.

Djokovic was bidding to become the first man to win a Slam with victories over all of the world's top three players after beating Alexander Zverev in the quarters.

Instead, he will turn his attentions to his seventh attempt to break out of a tie with Margaret Court on 24 major titles at Wimbledon next month.

The top seed broke in the fifth game as Djokovic followed a netted backhand with an air-shot as a Sinner return skipped off the clay.

Sinner wrapped up an ultimately comfortable opening set with a hold to love, finished off by a backhand winner.

Djokovic was the better player at the start of the second set, but could not find a way through against an opponent who had not dropped serve since his opening-round win over France's Arthur Rinderknech. The Djokovic errors started to rack up in crucial points, although the three-time champion dug deep and broke Sinner when he was serving for a two-set lead. Djokovic could not back up his break, though, despite leading 40-15 in the next game, and then received treatment from the trainer on his right leg.

Sinner closed out the set at the second time of asking courtesy of another battling hold that featured two aces, one from a second serve.

Djokovic called for the physio for lengthier treatment ahead of the third set.

He missed a break point in the fourth game, but refused to give in and eventually edged 5-4 in front on serve to put some pressure on Sinner.

A cacophony of noise greeted a brilliant rally that saw Djokovic bring up two set points.

Sinner fended them both off, and then a third, before Djokovic became incensed by a line call that didn't go his way as the set headed towards a tie-break.

The end appeared nigh when Djokovic dumped the simplest of overheads into the net to gift Sinner a 3-0 edge in the breaker.

Sinner, who like Alcaraz has never lost a Grand Slam final, completed the job on his second match point as Djokovic netted.

Earlier in the day, defending champion Alcaraz composed himself after a slow start before charging into back-to-back French Open finals when eighth seed Lorenzo Musetti retired with a left thigh injury while trailing 4-6 7-6(3) 6-0 2-0.

"It's never great to go through like this," Alcaraz said, before hailing Musetti's achievement of reaching at least the semi-finals of all four elite claycourt events this year.

"He's a great player, he has had an incredible claycourt season... I wish him a speedy recovery and I'm sure we'll be enjoying his tennis pretty soon."

Musetti twice denied Alcaraz the chance to break in the opening nine games before the 23-year-old suddenly dialled up the intensity and snatched the opening set when his Spanish opponent produced errors in a poor service game.

A frustrated Alcaraz kicked his bench during the second set but finally found a way through Musetti's dogged defence to draw level after a tiebreak and then produced a dazzling display of power and precision to dish out a bagel in the third set.

Musetti, who reached the Monte Carlo final before the Madrid and Rome semi-finals, was hampered by the leg problem during the third set and threw in the towel two games into the fourth.

"I felt at the beginning of the third when I was serving, I started losing a little bit of strength on the left leg, and it was getting worse, so I decided to stop," Musetti said.

CRICKET

ANNOUNCEMENT

New Zealand name Walter as new coach in all formats

'It's an amazing opportunity to work with talented group of players'

AFP
Wellington

Former South Africa coach **Rob Walter** has been named as New Zealand's new coach, across all three formats of the game.

The 49-year-old South African takes up the Black Caps job from the middle of June, and will lead the side on their upcoming tour of Zimbabwe. Walter was an early favourite for the job, after he quit his South African post leading their One Day and T20 sides in April.

It was revealed Walter never stopped living in New Zealand during his time with South Africa, commuting from his home in Hawke's Bay, where he lives with wife Heather and their two sons.

"The Black Caps have been a successful and highly-regarded team on the world scene for some time now and it's a real privilege to be given the chance to add to that," Walter said.

"It's an amazing opportunity to work with such a talented group of players and support staff through a period of time in which so many global events, as well as massive bilateral series, will be contested."

Walter's contract means he will lead the Black Caps to the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics, as well as three major ICC tournaments, including the 2027 World Cup.

NZ Cricket chief executive Scott Weenink said Walter was a world class coach with outstanding pedigree.

"His success in New Zealand's domestic game, combined with his recent achievements on the global stage with South Africa, makes him the ideal candidate to lead the Black Caps."

Walter previously coached the Otago Volts in New Zealand's domestic competitions from 2016 until 2021, before moving to Hawke's Bay and briefly coaching the Central Stags.

In January 2023, he took up the job as South Africa's head coach in white ball formats, leading South Africa to the final of the 2024 T20 World Cup, and semifinals of the 2023 World Cup, and the 2025 Champions Trophy.



He replaces Gary Stead, New Zealand's most successful coach, who leaves his role at the end of the month. Stead hoped to stay on as the Black Caps' Test coach, but New Zealand Cricket opted for one coach across all three formats.

He won the World Test Championship in 2021, and made three white ball finals during his seven year tenure.

FOCUS

New prospects get Test opportunity as SA name squad to tour Zimbabwe

Reuters
Cape Town

South Africa handed an opportunity for Test debuts to five uncapped players who were named yesterday for the two-Test series in Zimbabwe later this month.

Several senior players are to be rested for the two tests in Bulawayo with coach Shukri Conrad picking a 16-player squad to be led by captain Temba Bavuma.

There is a first call-up for the batting duo Lhuan-dre Pretorius and Lesego Senokwane and fast bowler Codi Yusuf while hard-hitting Dewald Brevis and off-spinner Prenelan Subrayen return to the squad in search of a first cap.

The 19-year-old Pretorius had a breakout domestic season in both first-class and Twenty20. He struck three centuries in five first-class games at an average of 72.66, while Senokwane, 28, was a significant run scorer in the Cricket South Africa 4-day competition.

The 27-year-old Yusuf finished the domestic season with a bowling average of 22.39.

The squad also sees the recall of batsman Zubayr Hamza, who last played a test against New Zealand in early 2024.

Marco Jansen, Aiden Markram, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs will be rested for the Zimbabwe trip while the fast bowling trio of Nandre Burger, Gerald Coetzee and Lizaad Williams were not considered for selection because of fitness issues.

"We've opted to rest some players to manage their workload ahead of a busy season," said Conrad at a virtual press conference, but for the others "this tour provides the ideal platform to expose them to the demands of Test cricket and see how they respond".

South Africa, who meet Australia in the World Test Championship final at Lord's starting on Wednesday, take on Zimbabwe in their first test at the Queens Club from 28 June-2 July with the second at the same venue from July 6-10.

SQUAD: Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Matthew Breetzke, Dewald Brevis, Corbin Bosch, Tony de Zorzi, Zubayr Hamza, Keshav Maharaj, Kwena Maphaka, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Lesego Senokwane, Prenelan Subrayen, Kyle Verreynne, Codi Yusuf.

SPOTLIGHT

Starc comfortable with IPL pullout regardless of repercussion

Reuters
Melbourne

Australian fast bowler **Mitchell Starc** is comfortable with his decision to leave the Indian Premier League (IPL) following the India-Pakistan clashes last month regardless of any repercussions, the 35-year-old said.

The IPL was suspended on May 9 in the wake of hostilities between the two. It resumed on May 17 after the nuclear-armed neighbours agreed to a ceasefire.

While most IPL foreign recruits returned to complete their franchise commitment, the Delhi Capitals duo of Starc and fellow Australian Jake Fraser-McGurk took no further part in the 10-team league.

"I'm comfortable with my decision and how I felt about the whole situation and how it was handled," Starc told the *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday.

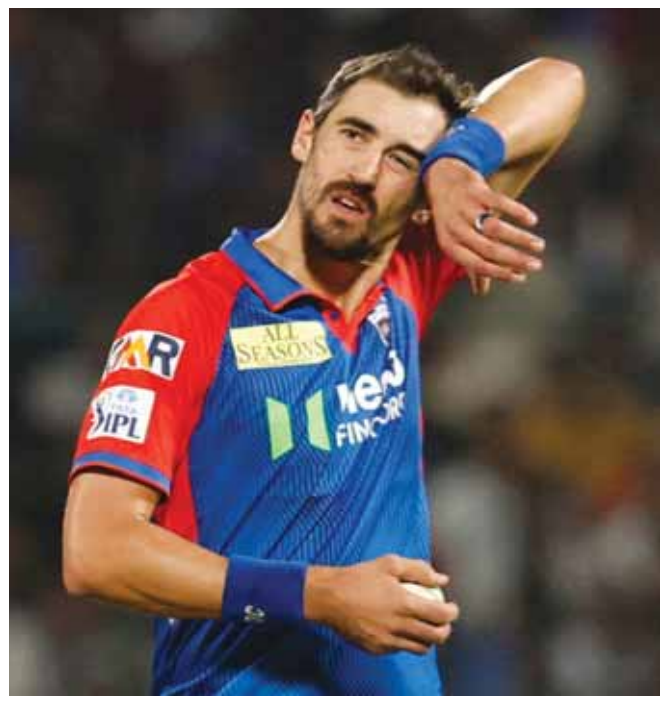
"Time will tell with repercussions or how it looks with guys that didn't return. But I've had my questions and concerns leading into that game, and obviously we saw what happened, which played a part in my decision."

Starc was in Dharamsala, near the Pakistan border, for Delhi's May 9 match against the Punjab Kings. The contest was abandoned midway through, although league organisers blamed it on a floodlights failure.

"Jake and I chose not to (return). So it was a very individual decision, and I'm happy to live with whatever comes of that," Starc said.

He opted out of the Champions Trophy in Pakistan earlier this year citing personal reasons and has skipped the IPL more than once to preserve himself for international cricket. The left-arm quick said he withdrew from the remainder of the IPL because of the extraordinary circumstances. "I'm still heavily committed to the Delhi group, and I'm not someone that's gone into tournaments and pulled out after being picked up in an auction or whatever that looks like," Starc said.

"These are different circumstances... I had a discussion back home then came to a decision, and whatever comes from that I'm comfortable with that and we move forward."



WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

Australia struggle to fill gaping opener hole left by Warner

AFP
Sydney

Filling the giant shoes of David Warner continues to be a headache for Australia 17 months after the bombastic Test opener retired, with Marnus Labuschagne shaping as the latest contender in the World Test Championship final against South Africa.

Warner pulled stumps on the red-ball game in January last year after 112 Tests and 8,786 runs, long accompanied at the top of the order by Usman Khawaja.

Khawaja will open again in the blockbuster clash at Lord's starting on June 11, potentially with a fifth different partner since Warner called it quits. Steve Smith initially plugged the hole, but only lasted four Tests before dropping back down to four and giving Nathan McSweeney a chance.

McSweeney struggled against the Jasprit Bumrah-led India late last year, with gung-ho teenager Sam Konstas then thrust into the limelight in spectacular fashion during the home series.

He scored a blazing 60 with a slew of unorthodox shots on debut, but was less effective in the next Test and was jettisoned in favour of Travis Head for their tour of Sri Lanka this year.

With Head set to revert to five, the chatter is that it's now a toss-up between Konstas, who has been working on technical aspects of his batting, and Labuschagne to open against the Proteas.



Australia's Marnus Labuschagne is the latest contender for the opener's slot for the World Test Championship final against South Africa.

But the experienced Labuschagne has struggled for form at number three and is under threat from Cameron Green, who has been in magnificent touch since returning from back surgery.

Green has plundered three centuries in five county championship matches for Gloucester and is tipped to start at first drop, which could thrust Labuschagne to the top of the Test order for the first time aged 30.

"I have just got a bit of a feeling that Marnus Labuschagne might be pushed up the order to open the batting with Khawaja," Australia great Ricky Ponting said on the ICC Review.

"I think Green will bat at three and Steve Smith will be at four. Then it's Travis Head at five."

Since Ponting commented, Australia skipper Pat Cummins has confirmed that Smith will bat at four, but added: "Everyone else, I'm not willing to (say)."

Josh Inglis has not been discounted to open either with chief selector George Bailey insisting the position does not need to be a specialist role.

"I do think it's a role that more people could do," he said.

Australia could be searching for yet another new opener sooner rather than later with uncertainty over whether 38-year-old Khawaja will continue after the home Ashes series against England beginning later this year.

But fellow veteran Smith, 36, shows few signs of slowing down. He has hit four hundreds in his past five Tests and often excels in English conditions.

He starred in Australia's triumph in the last WTC final in 2023 at the Oval, scoring a first-innings century that helped set the tone for a big win over India.

Smith was also in red-hot form the last time he played a Test at Lord's, smacking a ton against England while making his second-highest Test score of 215 at the ground in 2015.

"We have got some pretty fond memories at Lord's and personally I have got some fond memories as well, so we are looking forward to getting started," Smith told reporters.

"South Africa are a good side, so it should be a belter of a game."

Australia's selectors also face a decision on whether Josh Hazlewood or Scott Boland will be the third member of their seam attack alongside Cummins and Mitchell Starc.

UK VISA ISSUES RULE HOSEIN OUT OF WEST INDIES' T20 OPENER IN ENGLAND

West Indies' left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein has been ruled out of the opening match of their three-match Twenty20 series against England after he and fellow Trinidadian Jyd Goolie were unable to meet visa requirements. The first T20 match took place at the Riverside Ground in Durham yesterday and the players could potentially miss the entire series. West Indies Cricket (CWI) said yesterday that the updated UK visa entry requirements for Trinidad and Tobago citizens, which came into effect on April 23 and May 12 required both players to submit visa applications and attend mandatory in-person appointments. CWI director Miles Bascombe explained that Hosein, who was selected for both the England and Ireland legs of the tour, could not fulfil the new visa requirements in time as he was playing in the Pakistan Super League, which wrapped up late due to the India-Pakistan conflict last month. Goolie, who was a late addition to the squad, "was unable to secure the required visa waiver, as the transition period for Trinidad and Tobago residents had already expired.
"These processes are ultimately governed by UK immigration authorities and remain outside of CWI's control," the board said. "CWI remains optimistic that the matter will be resolved in the coming days, allowing Hosein to join the squad for the remaining matches."

FRENCH OPEN

Sabalenka eyes claycourt supremacy with Gauff hoping to be 2nd time lucky

'THE JOB IS NOT DONE. SO WE DON'T EXPERIENCE THIS KIND OF HIGH, LIKE EMOTIONS RIGHT NOW'

AFP
Paris

The French Open women's singles final takes centre stage at Roland Garros today.

World number one Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus takes on last year's semi-finalist, American Coco Gauff, as she looks to land her first French Open crown to add to her three Grand Slam titles.

Long considered a hardcourt specialist, the 27-year-old top seed Sabalenka, the most powerful player on the tour, will try to establish herself as an all-rounder with her first title in Paris.

She has already won back-to-back titles at the Australian Open in 2023-24 as well as the U.S. Open crown in 2024 but she had never before reached the final in Paris with the slower clay not naturally suited to her heavy-hitting game.

Her three-set semi-final victory on Thursday over four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek, who was looking to become the first woman since tennis turned professional in 1968 to win four editions of the tournament in a row, elevated Sabalenka to a new level.

The Belarusian did not change her power game or adapt it to clay. Instead she used it effectively to forge past her opponent.

Despite the closed roof that made the ball even slower, Sabalenka's serve was still a major weapon as she dished out a third-set bagel against Swiatek, who had been on a 26-match winning streak at the tournament and is nicknamed the 'queen of clay'.

"I wasn't really trying to overhit," Sabalenka said after her semi-final win.

"I didn't really think to overhit and hit harder than I usually do."

It is this power that Gauff, a far more natural claycourt player than Sabalenka, will need to overcome.

A finalist here in 2022, Gauff is also looking for her first singles crown in Paris. She won the women's doubles last year but will be looking to add the Suzanne Lenglen cup to her Grand Slam collection that so far has one major, the 2023 US Open where she beat Sabalenka in the final.

The American does not have anywhere near the punching power from the serve or baseline that her opponent will bring into the encounter but her athleticism, precision and ability to stay in the rallies will be key.

One of the best movers on the tour, Gauff has dropped just one set en route to the final. She also superbly handled the pressure in her semi-final against local wildcard Lois Boisson, coping admirably with home crowd's vocal support for the surprise semi-finalist.

"Obviously she's (Sabalenka) someone who has great big shots, and she's going to come out aggressive," Gauff said.

"She's going to come out swinging. I think I just have to expect that and do my best to kind of counter that."

Gauff lost the 2022 French Open final to Iga Swiatek before beating Sabalenka a year later to capture her first major title at the US Open. She said she is a much more confident player than the teenager beaten in her maiden Grand Slam final.

"My first final here I was super nervous, and I kind of wrote myself off before the match even happened," said Gauff, the world number two behind Sabalenka.

"Obviously here I have a lot more confidence just from playing a Grand Slam final before and doing well in one.

"I think going into Saturday I'll just give it my best shot and try to be as calm and relaxed as possible."

Gauff said the experience of losing to Swiatek three years ago gave her fresh perspective she hopes will serve her well for Saturday's showpiece.

"Everybody is dealing with way bigger things in life than losing a final," she said.

Meanwhile Sabalenka's semi-final victory over Swiatek carried her to her first ever final in Paris but no one from her team is celebrating her big win over the 'queen of clay' just yet.

For her coach Anton Dubrov the key is for the 27-year-old to remain grounded despite the big win over the best female claycourt player in the past two decades.

"It was a great match against Iga, but I don't see it as something like as a huge win right now," Dubrov told a press conference yesterday.

"Maybe in a few weeks, few months I will look back and say it's great, but for now I don't see that it was something special."

Sabalenka has said that for years she was told that she would not succeed on clay as the surface was not necessarily suited to her power game. But it was this game that carried her past Swiatek, with her powerful serve helping dish out a bagel in the last set.

"The job is not done. So we don't experience this kind of high, like emotions right now," Dubrov said. "It's like what's the next step. Great level, good quality, but we need to move on and do something else.

"What we're trying to message to Aryna is we cannot control the result, but we can control how we can do it, and only the result can show us, was this work actually what we need or was it something else."



COCO GAUFF



ARYNA SABALENKA

FOCUS

Walsh swims second-fastest 100m butterfly in history

AFP
Chicago

Gretchen Walsh clocked a stunning 54.76sec to win the 100m butterfly at the US Swimming Championships on Thursday, coming up just shy of her own world record in a comfortable victory over Olympic champion Torri Huske.

Walsh, who settled for silver behind Huske at the Paris Games last year, had lowered her own world record twice at the Fort Lauderdale Pro Swim last month, becoming the first woman to dip below 55 seconds with a world mark of 54.60sec in the finals there.

She was well under world-record pace when she turned in 25.19sec, and even though she couldn't lower the mark, she posted the second-fastest time in history and had plenty to hold off Huske, who finished 1.8sec back in 56.61sec. "I just like pushing myself past boundaries that I never thought possible," Walsh, who now owns the top seven times in history, told NBC Sports.

She lined up a second individual event at the World Championships in Singapore July 11-August 3 after winning the 50m fly with the fourth-fastest time ever on Wednesday.



Gretchen Walsh celebrates from the podium after the women's 100m butterfly final on day three of the National Championships at Indiana University Natatorium in Indianapolis, Indiana. *(AFP)*

Katharine Berkoff also turned up the heat, posting the second-fastest 50m backstroke time in history with her win in 26.97sec. She broke the American record of Regan Smith, who was second in 27.20. Lilly King, a three-time Olympic gold medallist and an 11-time world champion who has announced this will be her last season, won the 50m breaststroke in 29.88sec. Bobby Finke ran down Carson Foster to win the men's 400m individual medley in 4min 07.46sec. He sliced more than two seconds off his personal best to get the better of Paris Olympics bronze medallist Foster, who finished in 4:07.92.

Finke, two-time Olympic gold medallist and world record-holder in the 1,500m freestyle, indicated last month that he wouldn't swim the 400 medley in Singapore even if he qualified because of a scheduling conflict with the events.

"I've got to talk to my coaches about it, but we kind of have a plan in mind," he said.

Emma Weyant, silver medallist at the Tokyo Olympics and bronze medallist at the Paris Games last year, won the women's 400m individual medley in 4:34.81 with Katie Grimes second in 4:37.22.

Shaine Casas led all the way in winning the men's 100m butterfly in 50.51sec. Quintin McCarty won the men's 50m backstroke in 24.34sec with Casas second in 24.44. Campbell McKean, 18, won the men's 50m breaststroke in a personal best 26.90, edging veteran Michael Andrew by two-hundredths of a second.

Guliyev to be stripped of 2012 Olympic medal after CAS dismisses appeal

Ekaterina Guliyev is set to lose the 800m silver medal she won for Russia at the 2012 Olympics after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) dismissed her appeal against a four-year doping ban, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said yesterday. As a result, Kenyan Pamela Jelimo and American Alysia Montano are set to be awarded the silver and bronze medals, respectively. Guliyev, who competed for Russia before switching allegiance to Turkey, was banned for four years in April 2024, reduced to two having already served another two-year ban in 2017. She was banned for the use of prohibited substances in samples from 2012, with the AIU disqualifying her results from July 17, 2012 until October 20, 2014. The 2012 Olympics were held from July 27-August 12. Competing as Ekaterina Poistogova, she finished third in the 2012 Olympic final. But Guliyev was upgraded to silver when Russian winner Mariya Savinova was found guilty of doping offences, before she herself was also banned for doping. "In reaching its judgement, CAS upheld the decision to disqualify the 34-year-old's results from 17 July 2012 to 20 October 2014, confirming the loss of her reallocated Olympic silver medal," the AIU said in a statement. "World Athletics and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) are now proceeding with the next steps."

BADMINTON

Olympic champion Se-young continues her dominant form

Reuters
Jakarta

In the women's draw, defending champion Chen Yufei withdrew due to injury, allowing her fellow Chinese opponent Han Yue to advance to the semi-finals of the Indonesia Open in Jakarta yesterday.

World number two Wang Zhiyi of China took down compatriot Gao Fangjie 21-18 23-21.

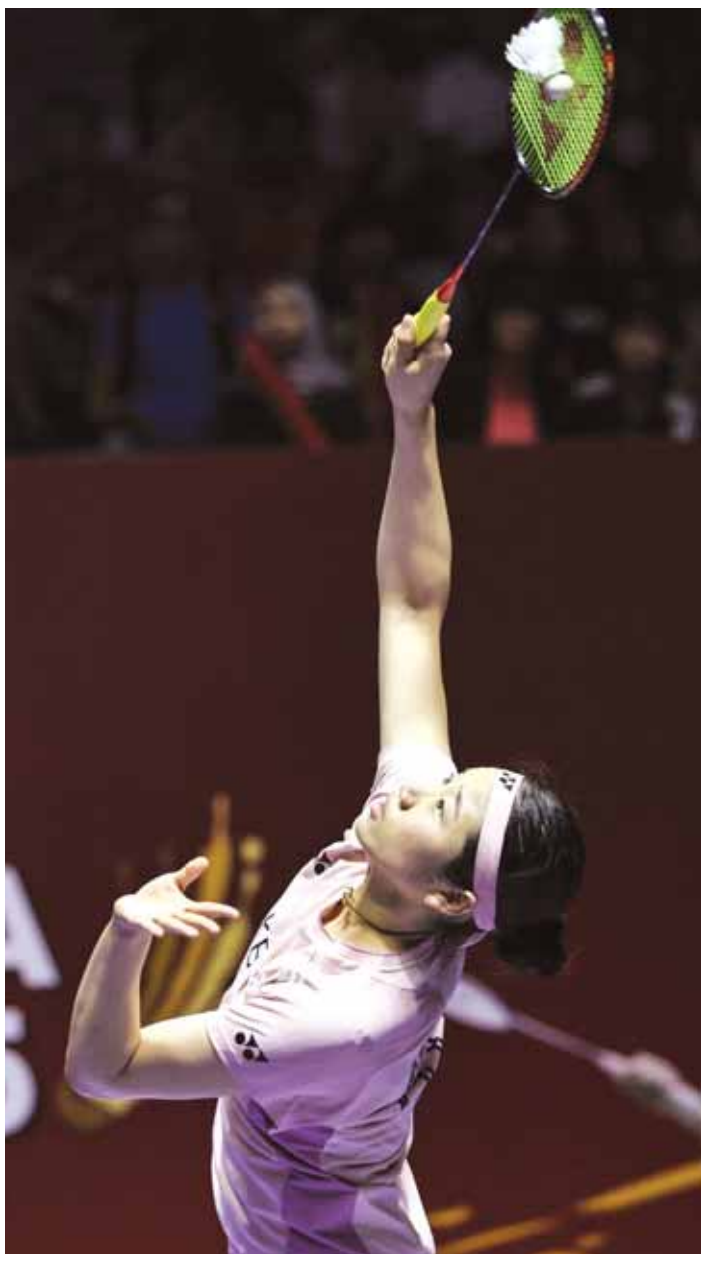
Women's top seed and Olympic Champion An Se-young continued her dominant form, dispatching Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong, seeded sixth, 21-11 21-10 in under 40 minutes to reach semi-finals.

Japanese third seed Akane Yamaguchi crushed home hopes by beating Putri Kusuma Wardani, the last remaining Indonesian in the women's singles draw.

In the men's section, defending champion Shi Yuqi of China powered past compatriot Wang Zhengxing 21-13 21-6 yesterday to set up a semi-final clash with last year's runner-up Anders Antonsen.

Shi, who won the Malaysia and All-England Opens this year, took just half an hour to beat Wang while twice runner-up Antonsen of Denmark defeated Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu 23-21 21-9.

Thailand's world number one Kunlavut Vitidsarn eased past Frenchman Alex Lanier 21-12 21-16 to set up a semi-final clash with the 2019 winner Chou Tien-chen of Taiwan, who took out China's Li Shifeng after losing the first game.



South Korea's An Se-young plays against Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong (not in picture) during their quarter-final at the Indonesia Open 2025 at Istora Senayan in Jakarta yesterday. *(AFP)*

Qatar's al-Harith reaches historic pommel horse final at Asian Championships

Doha: In a breakthrough moment for Qatar gymnastics, Rakan al-Harith has earned a spot in the pommel horse final at the 12th Asian Artistic Gymnastics Championships in Jecheon, South Korea. Competing with confidence and composure, al-Harith delivered a strong performance, scoring 13.733 in the qualification round.

His routine featured a difficulty score of 5.0 and an impressive execution of 8.733, reflecting the technical precision and calm rhythm that caught the judges' attention. What makes this achievement even more meaningful is that it marks al-Harith's first-ever appearance in a final at the Asian Championships. For Qatar, this moment represents more than just numbers on a scoreboard. It's a symbol of growth, hard work, and the rising presence of Qatari gymnasts at the elite level. Al-Harith's milestone is a testament to his dedication and to the support behind the scenes.

Qatar Gymnastics Federation President Ali al-Hitmi, hailed the achievement as a milestone for both the athlete and the sport in Qatar. "Rakan's qualification to the finals at a prestigious continental championship is a proud moment for Qatari gymnastics. It reflects the success of our long-term investment in national talent and infrastructure," he said.

Al-Hitmi added that reaching the top eight in such a fiercely competitive discipline was a collective triumph. "This result is the outcome of years of hard work by the technical team and support staff. It's a win for Qatari sport as a whole, and a clear sign of the growth of gymnastics in the country."



Beckham to be awarded knighthood: reports

London: David Beckham will be awarded a knighthood by King Charles III next week in recognition of his football career and his charity work, reports said. The former England football captain is set to be named in the King's Birthday Honours List, according to the *BBC* and other sources.

Other sporting figures who have been awarded the title include Beckham's former manager at Manchester United, Alex Ferguson, and British tennis great Andy Murray. The *Sun* newspaper said he would take the title of "sir" and his wife Victoria, a former member of the Spice Girls pop group, will be known as Lady Beckham.

Beckham played 115 times for England as well as for a list of high-profile clubs including United and Real Madrid. He is currently the president and co-owner of US team Inter Miami and co-owner of Salford City, who play in the fourth tier of English football.

The 50-year-old, who has long been in the running for a knighthood, was appointed an officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2003 – a lower award in Britain's honours system. Victoria later received the same award for services to the fashion industry.

Beckham is an official ambassador for The King's Foundation, supporting its education programmes and "efforts to ensure young people have a greater understanding of nature" and has been a Unicef goodwill ambassador since 2005. Beckham is understood to have been on the verge of receiving a knighthood after helping London win its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games. But UK authorities placed a red flag on his nomination due to his involvement in an alleged tax avoidance scheme, according to previous reports. He was subsequently cleared. In 2017, British newspapers printed details of leaked emails in which Beckham criticised the honours system and the honours committee, according to the BBC.

ROMA UNVEIL 'RIGHT MAN' GASPERINI AS NEW COACH

Gian Piero Gasperini was unveiled as the new coach of Italian side Roma on Friday after nine hugely successful years at the helm of Atalanta. Gasperini, 67, joins Roma on a three-year deal after turning Atalanta into one of Italy's best teams, winning the Europa League last year.

Gasperini said he chose Roma over Juventus because he believed they had everything in place to grow. He also said his first task would be to win over the fans with an attacking style.

Roma last qualified for the Champions League in 2018.

FOOTBALL

Sacked Postecoglou proud of Spurs reign

Australian pays the price after Tottenham's 17th place finish in the Premier League

AFP
London

Ange Postecoglou insisted he was proud of his turbulent Tottenham reign despite being sacked as the Australian claimed he had defied the odds by ending the club's trophy drought.

Postecoglou led Tottenham to their first silverware for 17 years just 16 days ago when they beat Manchester United 1-0 in the Europa League final in Bilbao. But securing a lucrative place in next season's Champions League by winning Tottenham's first European prize since 1984 wasn't enough to save Postecoglou.

The Australian paid the price for presiding over Tottenham's 17th place finish in the Premier League, which ranked as their worst top-flight season since they were relegated in 1976-77. Despite the numerous problems that rocked Tottenham during his two-season spell, including injuries to a host of key players, Postecoglou was adamant he had relished the battle to finally deliver a trophy in difficult circumstances.

"There were many challenges to overcome and plenty of noise that comes with trying to accomplish what many said was not possible," the 59-year-old said in a statement after his sacking. "When I reflect on my time as manager of Tottenham Hotspur my overriding emotion is one of pride. The opportunity to lead one of England's historic football clubs and bring back the glory it deserves will live with me for a lifetime. Sharing that experience with all those who truly love this club and seeing the impact it had on them is something I will never forget. That night in Bilbao was the culmination of two years of hard work, dedication and unwavering belief in a dream."



Ange Postecoglou led Tottenham to their first silverware for 17 years just 16 days ago when they beat Manchester United 1-0 in the Europa League final in Bilbao, Spain. *(AFP)*

Postecoglou, hired from Celtic exactly two years ago, endured months of speculation over his future as Tottenham spluttered through their dismal domestic campaign. He had hoped Tottenham's first silverware since the 2008 League Cup would spare him from the axe.

But Postecoglou returned from a family holiday in Greece to discover chairman Daniel Levy had made his ruthless move amid reports of the club's interest in Brentford boss Thomas Frank, Fulham manager Marco Silva and Crystal Palace's Oliver Glasner. As his team slumped towards a woeful 22 defeats from 38 league games this term, Postecoglou clashed with Tottenham fans, who criticised his overly-attacking tactics.

The Europa League triumph softened the relationship and he was serenaded on multiple occasions at the trophy parade, with players backing him to stay after a 4-1 home defeat against Brighton in what proved to be his last match. Postecoglou, who delivered on his bold boast that he always wins a trophy in his second year, had jokingly told fans at the parade that the third season is always better than the second in television programmes, a reference to his desire to stay in charge.

He won't get that opportunity, but he believes his successor will benefit from his work in north London. "We have laid foundations that mean this club should not have to wait 17 more years for their next success. I have enormous faith in this group of players and know there is much more potential and growth in them," he said.

"I sincerely want to thank those who are the lifeblood of the club, the supporters. I know there were some difficult times but I always felt that they wanted me to succeed and that gave me all the motivation I needed to push on. I want to thank those who were with me every day for the last two years. A fantastic group of young men who are now legends of this football club and the brilliant coaches who never once doubted we could do something special. We are forever connected."

SOUTH AMERICAN WORLD CUP QUALIFYING

Brazil held by Ecuador in Ancelotti's debut

AFP
Montevideo

Carlo Ancelotti's debut as coach of Brazil ended in a goalless draw in Ecuador in South American World Cup qualifying on Thursday. Argentina, already assured of a place in next year's tournament, beat Chile 1-0 in Santiago with a goal from Julian Alvarez, a result which guarantees Lionel Scaloni's team top spot and leaves bottom placed 'La Roja' with virtually no hope of qualifying.

Ancelotti, the 65-year-old Italian, who left Real Madrid at the end of the European season, has been charged with taking Brazil through the latter stages of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. The former AC Milan and Chelsea manager replaced Dorival Junior, who was sacked at the end of March after the 4-1 thrashing at the hands of reigning champions and bitter rivals Argentina.

Thursday's result leaves the Selecao in fourth place in the qualifying table on 22 points while Ecuador, the surprise package in the campaign, remain in second on 24 points. Argentina lead the standings on 34 points and are the only team to have officially secured their place in the tournament which will be held in the USA, Canada and Mexico.

Paraguay, who enjoyed a 2-0 win over Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay, sit in third place, level on points with Ecuador. Ecuador knew a win would put them on the brink of qualification and there was a packed crowd at the Estadio Monumental in Guayaquil.

But the home side were dealt a blow just before kick-off when goalkeeper Hernan Galindez suffered a muscle strain in the warm-up and replacement Gonzalo Valle was hurriedly sent out to make his debut. If Valle had any nerves they eased when he did well to parry a shot from inside the box from Vinicius Jr who had been set up by Gerson following a turnover.

Chances were limited in a contest where neither side was able to get control of midfield. The pattern continued after the break with Ecuador, missing their injured striker and talisman Enner Valencia, struggling to pose a threat. Real Madrid star Vinicius was quiet for much of the game and with Rodrygo absent, Brazil also lacked potency in attack.



Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti watches on Brazil and Ecuador players vie for the ball during the South American World Cup qualifiers in Guayaquil, Ecuador on Thursday. *(Reuters)*

The best opening came in the 75th minute when Vinicius broke down the left and cut back to Casemiro, but the Manchester United midfielder, recalled to the national side by Ancelotti, saw a tame side-footed effort easily dealt with by Valle.

Atletico Madrid striker Alvarez put Argentina ahead at the Estadio Nacional in the 16th minute with a deft finish after he had been put through by a perfectly weighted pass from Thiago Almada. Lionel Messi came off the bench in the 57th minute but Chile sensed a chance to get something from the game and created more as the game progressed.

Argentina keeper Emiliano Martinez made a series of crucial saves and Lucas Cepeda went closest with a fierce shot which struck the bar. Cepeda then had the best chance of the game when he was found at the back post but he blasted his volley wide. Messi set up Giuliano Simeone with a chance to make it 2-0 but the son of former Argentina captain and Atletico Madrid coach Diego, fired his shot into the side netting.

A header from midfielder Matías Galarza just 13 minutes into the game and a late penalty from Julio Enciso earned Paraguay a crucial victory over a depleted Uruguay. The victory left Paraguay on the verge of securing their return to the World Cup for the first time since qualifying for the 2010 finals in South Africa.

Victory in Sao Paulo on Tuesday against Brazil would secure their place in the tournament. The top six teams in the 10-team qualifying group head directly into the World Cup draw while the seventh placed team must enter the inter-confederation playoffs.

NATIONS LEAGUE

Spain's Yamal primed to 'prove' himself against 'legend' Ronaldo

AFP
Stuttgart, Germany

Spain starlet Lamine Yamal said tomorrow's Nations League final against Portugal would give him the chance to "prove who I am" after helping his side past France in the semis on Thursday.

Yamal scored twice and was named man of the match in a 5-4 win over the French in Stuttgart on Thursday, sealing progress to this weekend's Nations League final against their Iberian rivals. A late French flourish obscured Spain's dominance, with La Roja cruising at 5-1 before dropping their intensity, allowing France to score three late goals.

As they did on their way to winning Euro 2024 in Germany last season, Spain's success was built on the foundation of wingers Yamal and Nico Williams. Williams, who got a goal of his own and set up another, was man of the match in the 2-1 Euro 2024 final win over England.

Thursday's victory puts 2021 Nations League winners against Portugal, who won the competition in 2019.

"It's a special game, a final against a great team gives us extra motivation," Yamal told reporters. "This is the kind of game I want to play, to prove who I am."

Still just 17, Yamal will face off against Portugal veteran Cristiano Ronaldo, who is 23 years his senior. "He's a football legend," Yamal said. "I, like all the players, have huge respect for Cristiano. I will do my job, which is to try to win, and that's it," he added.

