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not Max, says  
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United move

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Friday, June 13, 2025  
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**GULF TIMES**

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Cummins and Carey  
sparkle as Australia  
remain on top in WTC  
final despite collapse

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FOOTBALL

Hosts Qatar to kick off FIFA U-17 World Cup against Italy

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Hosts Qatar will face European powerhouse Italy in the opening match of the FIFA U-17 World Cup 2025. Set to take place in Qatar from November 3 to 27 this year, this will be the first FIFA World Cup to feature 48 teams.

“The tournament will be hosted in its entirety in the world-class Aspire Academy, with the final match to be held at Khalifa International Stadium, one of our historic Qatar 2022 venues,” said Rashid al-Khater, Executive Director of Operations of the Local Organising Committee (LOC).

Al-Khater added: “This will be more than just a football tournament, as fans will be treated to a festival-like atmosphere where they can enjoy a robust fan zone that meets all their needs as they take in some exciting football matches.”

Hosts Qatar have been drawn into group A alongside Italy, South Africa and Bolivia. The young Maroons will look to improve

on Qatar’s best performance in the tournament when they claimed fourth place in 1991.

“Having the under-17 World Cup hosted in Qatar for five consecutive years provides young players with a wonderful opportunity to compete against the best teams in the world. This type of competition will have a great impact on the development of young players and will once again positively reflect Qatar’s ability to host mega sporting events,” said Alvaro Perez, head coach of the Qatar under-17 team.

Drawn alongside Qatar are South Africa. For head coach Vela Khumalo, the tournament has the potential to have global impact. The Amajimbos will be making their second appearance at the FIFA U-17 World Cup after their debut in 2015.

“The tournament is important for the entire world. That is why we were so keen to qualify and participate in competition hosted by Qatar. The World Cup provides us with a platform to interact with teams and players from all around the world, which will undoubtedly have a tremendous impact on the skills and abilities of our players,” said Khumalo.

A total of 48 teams will play 104 matches over a period of 24 days.

They have been divided into 12 groups. For the full match schedule, visit <https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/ul17worldcup/qatar-2025>.

**GROUPS**

**Group A:** Qatar, Italy, South Africa, Bolivia  
**Group B:** Japan, Morocco New Caledonia, Portugal  
**Group C:** Senegal, Croatia Costa Rica, United Arab Emirates  
**Group D:** Argentina, Belgium, Tunisia, Fiji  
**Group E:** England, Venezuela, Haiti, Egypt  
**Group F:** Mexico, South Korea, Ivory Coast, Switzerland  
**Group G:** Germany, Colombia, North Korea, El Salvador  
**Group H:** Brazil, Honduras, Indonesia, Zambia  
**Group I:** USA, Burkina Faso, Tajikistan, Czech Republic  
**Group J:** Paraguay, Uzbekistan, Panama, Ireland  
**Group K:** France, Chile Canada, Uganda  
**Group L:** Mali, New Zealand, Austria, Saudi Arabia



Germany’s Julian Draxler draws hosts Qatar during the FIFA U-17 World Cup draw.

SPOTLIGHT

I’d leave Liverpool only for Real, says Alexander-Arnold

‘It was never a question of where, it was whether to go or not to go’

AFP  
Madrid

New Real Madrid signing Trent Alexander-Arnold said he joined the “only” team he would have considered leaving Liverpool for, at his presentation yesterday.

Reds fans jeered Alexander-Arnold after the academy graduate revealed he would leave this summer, but eventually gave him a warm farewell on the last day of the Premier League season. “It was never a question of where, it was whether to go or not to go,” the 26-year-old defender told a news conference.

“I always knew... if I was to ever leave Liverpool, it would only be to go to Real Madrid, that would be the only club for me... I’m not going to say it was easy because I’d been there so long, been a part of it, but eventually, you have to make a decision. In my mind, I’ve made the right one and it’s one that I’m very excited about.”

The right-back said the record 15-time European Cup winners’ history had to be “respected” and he wanted to add to it. “A big reason why I joined is to be a part of that amazing history that club’s got,” he said. “Be a part of the success going forward, joining an exciting, young team with a lot of potential.”

Alexander-Arnold, who moved for a fee even though his contract was expiring this summer, to speed up his arrival ahead of the Club World Cup, signed a deal until 2031. He joins former Liverpool midfielder and new Madrid coach Xabi Alonso’s project after winning a second Premier League title with Arne Slot’s Reds.

Alonso won the Champions League with Liverpool as a player in 2005 during a remarkable final against AC Milan as the English side fought back from three goals down to triumph in Turkiye. “I grew up as a Liverpool fan, being able to see (that game in) Istanbul with the manager now, doing amazing things there, part of an incredible final,” said Alexander-Arnold. “We’ve spoken a little bit... I told him that he was a big idol of mine growing up.”

England international Alexander-Arnold’s quality on the ball and his passing range is reminiscent of Alonso’s.

“It probably impacted my game a lot growing up, seeing him pass a ball, I explained this to him as well,” continued the defender. “Watching him pass a ball, seeing it influenced me to be able to go and train harder and have a



Real Madrid’s new signing Trent Alexander-Arnold looks on during a press conference in Madrid.

great kind of hunger to be able to do that and set standards.”

Alexander-Arnold said he would try to learn a lot from Alonso and was willing to play wherever the coach saw fit, be it in defence or midfield. “It’s not just me who’s new here, he’s a new manager, he’s got to get his ideas across to the whole team,” he said. “He’s shown how amazing he is managerial-wise and as a player, so his knowledge of football is there in abundance and I’m excited, I’ll be a sponge around him.”

He could make his Madrid debut against Al Hilal on June 18 in Miami in their Club World Cup opener. Alexander-Arnold will wear the number 12 shirt at Madrid, with ‘Trent’ on the back rather than his surname. “I’ve always found when I travel to Europe, the whole name situation confuses a lot of people,” he

explained. “I just thought let’s make it simple, let’s make it easy. Trent on the back, be known as Trent.”

Madrid, who also signed centre-back Dean Huijsen from Bournemouth, failed to win a major trophy this season under Alonso’s predecessor Carlo Ancelotti, but are looking to triumph in the United States this summer. “We go straight to America for the Club World Cup and our ambition there is to go and win that trophy as well,” said the defender. “I’m looking to have a great start.”

Earlier Alexander-Arnold surprised as he gave a short speech in Spanish at his presentation. “Signing for a club like Real Madrid does not happen every day. It’s a dream come true,” he said. “I’m conscious that playing for Real Madrid is a big responsibility, but I’m ready to give everything.”

**Qatar SC appoint Lopez as new head coach**

**Doha:** Qatar Sports Club has appointed Marquez Lopez as the new head coach, replacing Youssef Safri, whose contract ended after the 2024-25 campaign. Lopez, a former Al Wakrah manager from 2018-2024, notably led Qatar’s national team to their second straight AFC Asian Cup title last year, after taking over from Carlos Queiroz in December 2023.

Qatar SC, who haven’t won the league since the 2002-03 season, are aiming to rebuild after finishing 10th last season. The club recently announced the departure of six foreign players, including: Javi Martinez (Spain); Percy Tau (South Africa);

Carlinhos Vinicius (Brazil); Ben Malango (Congo); Badr Banoun (Morocco) and Ahmed Abdelkader (Egypt). The 2025-26 Qatar Stars League season kicks off August 14.

FOCUS

FIFA appoints Ballan to supervise referees at Club World Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Zurich

FIFA has appointed Hani Taleb Ballan, Chairman of the Referees Committee of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) and Vice-Chairman of the FIFA Referees Committee, to oversee the referees at the upcoming FIFA Club World Cup. The tournament will be hosted by the United States from tomorrow until July 13.

Ballan will serve alongside legendary Italian referee Pierluigi Collina, Chairman of the FIFA Referees Committee, and Massimo Busacca, Director of FIFA’s Refereeing Department, in supervising match officials during the inaugural tournament.

A total of 117 referees have been assigned to officiate at the Club World Cup, including 35 main referees, 58 assistant referees, and 24 video assistant referees (VARs) from 41 national associations. All officials have undergone comprehensive technical, physical, and medical preparations to ensure top-level performance during the competition.

In preparation, the referees participated in an intensive training camp that featured theoretical sessions, practical drills, and a mock football tournament known as the “Referees’ Cup” – designed to simulate real-match conditions.

The tournament will also showcase the use of advanced officiating



technologies, including automated offside detection and goal-line technology. Additionally, a referee head-cam will be trialled for the first time, offering viewers live footage from the perspective of the match official in a bid to enhance the fan experience.

New time-saving regulations will also be tested. Goalkeepers who hold onto the ball for more than eight seconds will now concede a corner kick to the opposing team, following a referee’s clear five-second countdown gesture – replacing the current indirect free-kick sanction after six seconds.

Qatar will be represented by four referees in the tournament: Salman Falahi (main referee), Ramzan al-Naimi and Majed Hedirs al-Shammari (assistant referees), and Khamis al-Marri (VAR).

CRICKET

# Cummins, Carey sparkle as Australia remain on top

Devastating bowling from pacers Pat Cummins, Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi on day two of WTC final

AFP  
London

Australia captain Pat Cummins started with the ball and Alex Carey made valuable runs following a dramatic collapse as the holders retained the advantage in the World Test Championship final against South Africa yesterday.

Fast bowler Cummins produced a sensational spell of four wickets for one run when South Africa were dismissed for 138 on the second day in reply to Australia's first-innings total of 212 at Lord's.

Australia collapsed to 73-7 in their second innings, with Kagiso Rabada (3-44) and Lungi Ngidi (3-35) doing the bulk of the damage.

But Carey (43) and Mitchell Starc (16 not out) shared an eighth-wicket partnership of 61 before the wicketkeeper was lbw to Rabada shortly before the close.

The last over of the day saw Starc dropped on 14 when Marco Jansen shelled a routine catch off Wiaan Mulder.

At stumps Australia were 144-8, a potentially decisive lead of 218 runs.

A remarkable 28 wickets fell in two days on a pitch which, while offering some assistance to the quicks, was by no means unplayable.

Nevertheless, a match scheduled for five days, could now finish before the end of the third.

Rabada, who had taken 5-51 in the first innings, tormented Australia again with two wickets in the 11th over.

He had Usman Khawaja caught behind for six and, two balls later,



Australia's Pat Cummins celebrates after taking the wicket of South Africa's David Bedingham, caught out by Alex Carey, during day two of the 2025 ICC World Test Championship Final at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, yesterday. (Reuters)

removed Cameron Green for a duck.

Green's exit meant the number three had faced just five balls in the match for a total of four runs.

Wickets continued to tumble after tea.

Left-arm quick Jansen had Marcus Labuschagne, in his first Test as an opener, caught behind for 22.

And Australia's 44-3 became transformed 48-4 next over when Beau Webster, who top-scored in Australia's first innings with 72, fell lbw to Ngidi.

Australia were reeling at 73-7 after Cummins was bowled off his pad by an excellent Ngidi yorker.

But Carey and Starc led a defiant response that kept their side on course to retain the title.

**Devastating pace bowling**

Earlier, Cummins finished with figures of 6-28 as he reached 300 career Test wickets and secured a coveted place on the Lord's honours board with a five-wicket haul.

South Africa lost their last five wickets for 12 runs as Cummins

ripped through the order. Only South Africa captain Temba Bavuma (36) and David Bedingham (45) offered meaningful resistance during a fifth-wicket stand of 64.

After lunch, Cummins struck four times in a mere 17 balls of devastating pace bowling.

South Africa had resumed yesterday at 43-4, battling to put enough runs on the board.

Bavuma, who faced 37 balls for his overnight three not out, changed gears with a lofted cover-drive for four off left-arm quick



Australia's Alex Carey in action during the 2025 ICC World Test Championship Final against South Africa at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, yesterday. (Reuters)

Starc for four before he pulled Cummins for six. Cummins had his revenge, however, when Bavuma's checked drive was brilliantly caught at cover by a diving Labuschagne.

He then dismissed Kyle Verreynne lbw for 13 and, three balls later, held a simple return catch as Jansen fell for a duck.

The Australia skipper ended the innings with his 300th Test wicket, Rabada well caught low down at deep square leg by Beau Webster.

Cummins received a standing

ovation as he led his side off the field. That reception was a marked contrast to the boos that echoed round Lord's two years ago after Cummins refused to withdraw an appeal following Carey's controversial stumping of Jonny Bairstow during an Ashes Test.

**BRIEF SCORES (Day 2 at Lord's)**  
**Australia 212 and 144 for 8** (Carey 43, Ngidi 3-35, Rabada 3-44) **lead South Africa 138** (Bedingham 45, Bavuma 36, Cummins 6-28) **by 218 runs**

CYCLING

## Britain's Stewart sprints to Dauphine fifth stage win

AFP  
Macon, France

British rider Jake Stewart won a sprint finish to triumph in the fifth stage of the Criterium du Dauphine yesterday as Belgian Remco Evenepoel held onto the race lead.

Israel Premier Tech rider Stewart claimed his first career victory in a World Tour race, edging the bunched finale ahead of Frenchman Axel Laurance and Norwegian Soren Waerenskjold after the hilly 183km run from Saint-Priest to Macon.

"That one feels good," said the 25-year-old who finished fifth in Sunday's opening stage in Montlucon.

"The boys backed me... and the team backed me, they did an awesome job, so I'm just so happy that I could finish it off for them."

The Israel Premier Tech team managed to win despite the race retirement of its German sprinter Pascal Ackermann, who fell during the stage.

"It's such a shame with Ackermann, he crashed again today, and it was handed over to me there for the final, but it was also a really good day for him, so I'm gutted that he didn't get to contest the finish," added Stewart.

Evenepoel, who took the yellow jersey since Wednesday's time-trial, crashed in the final kilometre but was able to resume without difficulty and lost no time in the overall standings.

"There are no major injuries,



Israel Premier Tech's British rider Thomas Jake Stewart (centre) celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 5th stage of the 77th edition of the Criterium du Dauphine cycling race, 183km between Saint-Priest and Macon, yesterday. (AFP)

just small scratches," said the Belgian.

"I was coming out of the roundabout, I wanted to accelerate, and I slipped. My hands were slippery from the wet weather, so maybe I slipped off the handlebars or started pedalling too early."

Evenepoel is expected to battle with Jonas Vingegaard and Tadej

Pogacar for the overall victory in the Alps.

Jonathan Milan, winner of the second stage in Issoire on Monday, was the favourite in the event of a bunch sprint.

On the Cote des Quatre Vents - the final climb of the stage over 5.4km at a 4.6 percent gradient - the towering Italian resisted the acceleration of Mathieu van

der Poel's Alpecin-Deceuninck teammates.

But he paid for his efforts afterwards, only finishing fifth in the sprint, despite having been ideally placed by his Lidl-Trek teammates.

Today's sixth stage is a hilly 126.7km run from Valserhône to Combloux near the border with Switzerland.

SWIMMING

## McKeown untouchable at Australian trials as Chalmers, Pallister shine

AFP  
Adelaide, Australia

Untouchable Olympic champion Kaylee McKeown completed the backstroke treble at the Australian trials yesterday while "King" Kyle Chalmers blitzed the 100m freestyle and Lani Pallister swam a sizzling 800m freestyle.

McKeown was under her own 200m backstroke world record pace at the halfway mark in Adelaide before easing up to touch in 2mins 04.47secs.

Such was her dominance that she was more than five seconds clear of second-placed Hannah Fredericks, who also qualified for next month's world championships in Singapore.

Like many top swimmers, McKeown did not go to the 2024 worlds in Doha, instead focusing on her Paris Olympic preparations.

But at the 2023 event in Fukuoka she won all three backstroke gold. Despite swimming the world's fastest time this year, McKeown, who had already coasted to the 50m and 100m titles, was still not happy.

"Look, there's a lot of work that I've got to do in the next six weeks to try and pull something together for the world stage," she said.

"Hopefully I can manage that."

Chalmers, who has medalled in the 100m free at three consecutive Olympics, including gold on debut in Rio 2016, surged home in 47.29 with Flynn Southern (47.69) also doing enough to qualify.

"Fastest time in Australia that I've ever done, so super happy with that," said Chalmers, who will

be looking for revenge in Singapore against China's Pan Zhanle, who edged him to gold in Paris last year.

Chalmers, the 2023 world champion, has also qualified for the 50m free.

With Ariarne Titmus taking the season off, Pallister smashed her teammate's Australian record in the 800m and will take the fight to American great Katie Ledecky in Singapore, clocking 8:10.84.

Only Ledecky and Canadian sensation Summer McIntosh have ever been under 8:10.

**Canada's McIntosh breaks 400m medley world record**

Summer McIntosh bagged her third world record in days on Wednesday, clocking 4min 23.65sec to better her own 400 medley record at the Canadian Swimming Trials in Victoria.

The 18-year-old Canadian prodigy, a three-time Olympic gold medallist, laid down another impressive marker ahead of next month's World Championships in Singapore with a dominant performance. McIntosh's blistering time beat her old mark of 4:24.38 set in Toronto in May last year at the Canadian Olympic trials.

McIntosh's assault on her own world record got off to a smooth start, with the teenager completing the opening butterfly leg in world record pace.

She was more than a second ahead of the world record at the halfway stage, and although that margin dropped to one-tenth of a second after the breaststroke, she produced an electrifying freestyle down the stretch to complete a scintillating performance.

## PAKISTAN'S AKRAM PRAISES HIS STATUE AMID SOCIAL MEDIA FLAK

**Karachi:** Legendary Pakistan cricketer Wasim Akram saluted yesterday the "effort" of the artist who created a statue (right) of him that has spawned scorn on social media. The statue of Akram - one of the greatest left-arm fast bowlers to play the game - was installed outside the southwestern city of Hyderabad's Niaz Stadium in April. Akram is shown bowling wearing the kit of the 1999 World Cup team, when Pakistan were runners-up. Nearby is a statue of a tiger.

One fan mocked the statue, saying: "The only thing that looks real is the ball," adding the face looked more like Hollywood hero Sylvester Stallone. The affable Akram, however, took to social media to praise the effort.

"Lots of talk about my sculpture being erected at Niaz Stadium, Hyderabad. Mine is definitely better than the tiger," he posted on X.

"It's the idea that matters. Credit to the creators, full marks for the effort and thanks

to everyone involved," Akram added. A fan called it the "Temu version of Wasim Akram's statue," referencing the low-quality appearance as if it were a cheap knockoff from an online marketplace.

The term "Ubla Huwa Wasim Akram" (boiled Wasim Akram) surfaced, with users joking that the statue's face looked like a distorted or overcooked version of the cricketer. Australia has a history of placing statues of their iconic players outside their stadiums, while India unveiled one of master batter

Sachin Tendulkar outside a stadium in Mumbai in 2023.

Niaz stadium chief Shiraz Leghari told AFP: "The artist did his best effort, but accepts it doesn't resemble (Akram) a hundred percent."

Akram is one of the country's most celebrated cricketers, having represented Pakistan in 104 Tests and 356 ODIs with 414 and 502 wickets respectively. He was the leading wicket-taker in the 1992 World Cup when Pakistan claimed the trophy.



FORMULA 1

# Jos is the boss not Max, says Russell of Verstappen clash

‘I DON’T THINK HE NEEDS TO APOLOGISE TO ME FOR MY SIDE’



George Russell of Great Britain and Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team looks on in the Paddock yesterday in Montreal. (AFP)

Reuters  
Montreal

**G**eorge Russell said Max Verstappen tried to show who was the boss when they collided in Spain two weeks ago, but the scare tactics backfired.

The Mercedes Formula One driver told British reporters ahead of the 10th round of the season in Montreal that he did not think Red Bull’s four-times world champion had tried to deliberately ram him.

“He was just trying to get his elbows out and show who’s boss. He got it wrong. Jos is the boss,” said the Briton, jokingly referring to Verstappen’s father who enjoyed that nickname while racing.

Verstappen collected three penalty points and was also demoted from fifth to 10th in the race. He now stands one point from a mandatory race ban. The incident remained a talking point at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, where the pair lined up together on the front row last year and could be going wheel-to-wheel again on Sunday.

Verstappen recognised after Spain that the move was “not right and shouldn’t have happened” but Russell, who finished fourth in Spain, said he was not looking for an apology.

“I don’t think he needs to apologise to me for my side,” he said. “His actions cost him and they benefited me. So I should be almost thanking him. But it’s good to see that he took accountability, which I was a bit surprised about.”

“I think he wanted to just sort of scare me a bit but he just misjudged it. It wasn’t going to scare me, it was just all a bit surprising.”

Russell recognised he might also be able to turn the situation to his advantage if Verstappen had to be mindful of suspension.

“This weekend if I see him on track, I’m racing the same. I want to win. I’m not going to give him any more space or anything,” he said. Russell said he had spoken briefly with his Dutch rival after they “bumped into each other” at the airport when the Briton was flying to Paris to attend the French Open tennis final.

“He was there with his newborn (daughter) and we were at the se-

curity machine,” he said. “We just had a quick chat and then he was busy pushing the pram down to put it through the machine.”

Russell spoke in Spain of his concern about the effect on young racers of Verstappen’s driving, prompting the Dutchman to tell reporters he would “bring some tissues” next time.

“That was quite funny, to be fair,” said the Briton, grinning. “I did have a giggle there.”

Meanwhile Formula One’s governing body approved statute changes yesterday that critics say will make it harder to challenge FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem’s bid for re-election.

A spokesman for the International Automobile Federation, whose world championships also include rallying and Formula E, said 83.35% voted in favour at the General Assembly in Macau.

The changes have been championed by Ben Sulayem, an Emirati who will be standing for a second four-year term in December and is currently unopposed. The Paris-based FIA also groups national motoring associations and campaigns for road safety.

Austria’s Automobile Association (OAMTC) had earlier urged FIA members to vote against the proposed changes in a letter seen by Reuters ahead of the Canadian Grand Prix in Montreal.

## STANDINGS

### Drivers

1. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 186 pts, 2. Lando Norris (GBR) 176, 3. Max Verstappen (NED) 137, 4. George Russell (GBR) 111, 5. Charles Leclerc (MON) 94, 6. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 71, 7. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 48, 8. Alexander Albon (THA) 42, 9. Isack Hadjar (FRA) 21, 10. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 20, 11. Nico Hulkenberg (GER) 16, 12. Lance Stroll (CAN) 14, 13. Carlos Sainz (ESP) 12, 14. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 11, 15. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN) 10, 16. Oliver Bearman (GBR) 6, 17. Liam Lawson (NZL) 4, 18. Fernando Alonso (ESP) 2, 19. Jack Doohan (AUS) 0, 20. Franco Colapinto (ARG) 0, 21. Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA) 0

### Constructors

1. McLaren 362 pts, 2. Ferrari 165, 3. Mercedes 159, 3. Red Bull 144, 5. Williams 54, 6. RB 28, 7. Haas 26, 8. Sauber 16, 9. Aston Martin 16, 10. Alpine 11

TENNIS

## Raducanu powers into Queen’s Club quarters as last Briton standing

Reuters  
London

**E**mma Raducanu cruised into the quarter-finals at the Queen’s Club Championships with a 6-4 6-1 victory over Rebecca Sramkova yesterday but fellow Britons Katie Boulter and Heather Watson were knocked out.

The stands at the Andy Murray Arena were packed for Raducanu’s victory as she advanced as the lone Briton left in the tournament and she will potentially play top seed and Paris Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen.

Raducanu raced into a 5-0 lead as the 22-year-old looked at ease on the grass but Sramkova saved two set points in the sixth game, finding her range in a comeback that quickly gathered pace.

The Slovakian won four games on the trot as Raducanu’s winners dried up but the Briton then recovered and served to love to seal the opening set, flashing a sheepish smile at her team as she walked back to her seat.

Raducanu took confidence from her first serve and she started the second set as she did the first, racing into a 4-0 lead after she quickly consolidated a double break when Sramkova made a slew of errors.

Raducanu then won the contest by converting a sixth break point, with victory confirming

the former US Open champion’s status as the British number one again, leapfrogging her doubles partner Boulter.

“I don’t think it was my cleanest performance, but I’m really happy to have pushed through in some tight moments that decided the first set,” Raducanu said.

“It was really helpful... to have a big roar of support to get me through that last service game. So I appreciate that.”

Fourth seed Elena Rybakina showcased her power as she fired nine aces to beat Watson 6-4 6-2 after the Briton failed to capitalise on seven break points.

Former Wimbledon champion Rybakina also became the first female player to fire 200 aces this year.

“It was a tough match, she played really well. I am pretty happy with my game, especially in the second set,” Rybakina said.

“Hopefully with every match it will be better and better. I am enjoying my time here.”

Meanwhile, Russian fifth seed Diana Shnaider fought back from a set down to beat Boulter 2-6 6-3 6-2 to set up a quarter-final with Australian Open champion Madison Keys.

“Katie is such a lovely person, I love her with all my heart. To play her and beat her in front of her home crowd, I am so sorry,” Shnaider said.

“I hope you don’t hate me too much and come support me tomorrow!”



Britain’s Emma Raducanu reacts during her round of 16 match against Slovakia’s Rebecca Sramkova yesterday. (Reuters)

FOCUS

## Wimbledon prize pot increases as players push for greater profit share

AFP  
London

**W**imbledon prize money will increase by seven percent to a record pot of £53.5mn (\$72.6mn) for this year’s championships as pressure grows from players for a greater slice of Grand Slam profits.

The winners of the men’s and women’s singles titles will each receive £3mn, an increase of more than 11 per cent on 2024, while a main draw spot is worth a minimum of £66,000, up 10 percent.

The All England Club’s announcement comes after growing player demands for a bigger share of revenue from the four majors.

In April, 20 leading players sent a letter to the heads of the Grand Slams calling for greater contributions and discussions were held during the French Open.

All England Club chairwoman

Debbie Jevans said at Wimbledon’s pre-tournament media briefing yesterday Thursday the club was “absolutely committed to continuing our longstanding commitment to player compensation.”

“We’re immensely proud of the fact that if you look back 10 years, you can see the increase over that period (of 100 percent) and seven per cent this year,” she said.

“We have listened to the players, we have engaged with the players. Of course we will always listen and discuss with them but the focus on just the prize money at four events, the Grand Slams, does not get to the heart of what the challenge is with tennis.

“The challenge with tennis is the fact that the players don’t have an off-season, which they want, they have increasing injuries that they’re speaking about and we’ve always said that we as Wimbledon are willing to engage and talk with the tours to try and find solutions

and that door remains open.

“As yet, there hasn’t been any proposal to us as to how the tour is able to change its structure.

“There’s a bigger picture here but, as a tennis player, they’re always going to, I think, ask for more money.”

In a major change at Wimbledon this year, line judges are being replaced by a live electronic calling system.

The All England club follows the Australian Open and the US Open in implementing the change, though the French Open still uses human officials.

Around 80 former officials will be employed this year as match assistants, with two on each court offering support to the umpire, while they will also provide back-up should the electronic system fail.

Wimbledon runs from June 30 to July 13, with Carlos Alcaraz and Barbora Krejickova the defending champions.

(Reuters)

## Le Mans and F1 in same year? Too much now: Hulkenberg

**Nico Hulkenberg** raced in the 24 Hours of Le Mans a decade ago when the Formula One calendar allowed it, and came away a winner with Porsche. The German could not do that now, with the 93rd edition of the French endurance race clashing with this weekend’s Canadian Grand Prix where Hulkenberg, now 37, will be on the starting grid with Sauber.

There will be another overlap next year but even if there was not Hulkenberg says trying to do both would be too much today. “I think everyone was a lot less busy (in 2015), you know, than now,” the German, who finished fifth in Spain two weekends ago, told Reuters in a recent interview.

“Twenty-four races, all the stuff in between, it’s a full-time job. I can only talk for myself but, personally, I wouldn’t want the extra gig at the moment. I’m fully focused on F1 and for me, I’m happy that way.” Hulkenberg, now one of only two fathers on the F1 grid along with Max Verstappen, was with Force India in 2015 when he got the chance to race Le Mans. The sportscar race chooses its winners, they say, and that weekend he hit the jackpot along with fellow rookie Earl Bamber of New Zealand and Britain’s Nick Tandy. Hulkenberg had raced in Canada the weekend before with F1 and went on to Austria immediately after.

“It definitely took some time to first understand the car and get a grip on it and properly get the lap time out of it,” he recalled. “I was still improving and understanding. I was clicking only really in the night of the race. “To jump back into Formula One I think was not a problem, because there was so much positivity after a race like this. I remember jumping into Austria and I was owning it and I was boss. It was no problem going back.”

The German’s Formula One career has taken him from Williams in 2010 to racing for Aston Martin’s predecessors Force India and Racing Point as well as Sauber, Renault and Haas with some gaps in between.

“Why am I still here?,” asked Formula One’s only current German driver. “Because they still want me.”

Hulkenberg holds the record for most Formula One races without ever standing on the podium but that is also testament to his enduring worth as a driver with engineering and setup skills as well as speed. His 236 starts are way more than the next man on the list without a podium, retired fellow-German Adrian Sutil on 128.

On the plus side, Hulkenberg has two fastest laps and a pole position and next year will be in at the start with the Audi factory team when Sauber is renamed. “I still love what I do. You know, Formula One and racing is my passion. It’s what I do best, it’s what I love. What else should I do?,” he said. “I think it’s the competition, you know, the thrill of qualifying, the buzz of a race, kicking ass but even the bad days – just the racing, everything. I love that.”



FOOTBALL

# Cunha completes ‘dream’ Man United move

AFP

London

**M**atheus Cunha said he had “dreamed of wearing the red shirt” of Manchester United after the club confirmed his signing from Wolves. United effectively sealed the deal, which was subject to the completion of a visa and medical, on June 1 after activating a £62.5mn release clause in the 26-year old’s contract.

“It is hard to put into words my feelings about becoming a Manchester United player,” said the Brazil international, who has signed a five-year deal with the option of another year. “Ever since I was a child in Brazil watching Premier League games on TV at my grandmother’s house,

United was my favourite English team and I dreamed of wearing the red shirt. I want to thank my family and everyone who has helped me make that dream a reality. I can’t wait for the start of pre-season to get to know my teammates and prepare for the season ahead. All my focus is now on working hard to become a valuable part of the team, and helping get this club back to the top.”

Cunha scored 17 goals in all competitions for Wolves last season, winning the Premier League club’s players’ player of the year award. He became Ruben Amorim’s first signing of the summer transfer window as the head coach sets about overhauling his squad after a miserable domestic campaign and a lacklustre Europa League final defeat to Tottenham.

Cunha will add his predatory instincts

and creative guile to a United attack that struggled throughout this season. The striker helped his country qualify for the World Cup on Tuesday when he set up the only goal for Vinicius Junior in a 1-0 win over Paraguay.

United’s director of football Jason Wilcox said: “Bringing in Matheus was one of our main priorities for this summer, so we are delighted to have completed his signing so early in the window. “He has all the qualities we are looking for as we seek to build a strong, dynamic and entertaining team capable of challenging for the biggest honours.”

Brentford forward Bryan Mbeumo has also been linked with a move to United, whose transfer business has been made harder by their failure to qualify for the Champions League.



GOLF

# USA’s Spaun tames Oakmont to grab early US Open lead

‘THIS IS PROBABLY ONE OF MY BETTER PUTTING ROUNDS ALL SEASON’

AFP

Oakmont, United States

**J**J Spaun seized command in yesterday’s first round of the US Open, defying Oakmont’s fearsome reputation by firing a bogey-free, four-under-par 66 for a one-stroke lead.

The 34-year-old American conjured his lowest round in nine major starts and matched the lowest first round of any US Open at Oakmont, the 66 by American Andrew Landry in 2016.

“I’m just overly pleased with how I started,” Spaun said. “I hit a lot of good shots and tried to capitalise on any birdie opportunities, which aren’t very many out here.

“But I scrambled really well, too, which is a huge component to playing well at a US Open, let alone shoot a bogey-free round.”

Spaun started on the back nine, birdied four of his first eight holes, then parred his way to the clubhouse for only the eighth bogey-free US Open round at Oakmont, hosting for a record 10th time.

“This is probably one of my better putting rounds all season,” Spaun said.

South African Thruston Lawrence, third in last year’s European Tour Race to Dubai, was second on 67. He drove the green at 17 and sank a four-foot birdie putt then escaped the right rough to par 18 and stay on Spaun’s heels.

South Korean Kim Si-woo, a back-nine starter, was third on 68, charging within a stroke off birdies at the par-three sixth and par-four seventh before stumbling with a bogey at the par-three eighth.

“No expectation, but I played great today,” Kim said. American Ben Griffin and Belgium’s Thomas Detry were in the clubhouse on 69 with Australian Adam Scott and Scotsman Robert MacIntyre firing 70.

Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler, an afternoon starter, sank a six-foot birdie putt on the second hole, but found the Church Pew bunkers at the third on his way to a bogey. The three-time major winner is trying to become the first man to capture consecutive majors since Jordan Spieth in 2015.

Two-time Masters champion Scheffler, whose nine wins last year included Paris Olympic gold, has won three of his past four starts, including last month’s PGA Championship.

Oakmont, while vulnerable, had danger lurking on every hole. World number two Rory McIlroy, who completed a career Grand Slam by winning the Masters, fired a 74. The back-nine starter birdied 11 and 12 but made four bogeys and a double bogey on his second nine.

Defending champion Bryson DeChambeau shot 73 with five bogeys and two birdies.

Spaun, who won his only PGA Tour title at the 2022 Texas Open, lost a playoff to McIlroy at this year’s Players Championship.

Spaun sank a 20-footer for birdie at 10 to



**JJ Spaun of the United States hits an approach shot on the 10th hole during the first round of the 125th US Open at Oakmont Country Club in Oakmont, Pennsylvania, yesterday. (AFP)**

start and dropped his third shot inside three feet at the par-five 12th to set up a birdie.

He also birdied the par-three 16th and escaped the rough at 17 to sink an 11-foot birdie putt to reach four-under.

Spaun, never in the top 20 in eight prior major starts, parred 18 to shoot 31, the best nine-hole start ever in a US Open at Oakmont.

“I knew it was going to be tough,” Spaun said.

“I just tried to grind it out.” After finding the Church Pew bunkers left of the fairway at the par-five fourth hole, Spaun sank a testing putt to save par.

He also found a bunker at the par-three sixth but sank another lengthy par putt.

“Those are huge, especially at a US Open, to keep your round going and not go the other way,” Spaun said.

ROUND-UP

## De Bruyne signs for Napoli after leaving Manchester City



**Kevin De Bruyne**

Agencies

Milan

**K**evin De Bruyne has signed for Napoli as a free agent after being released by Manchester City, the Serie A champions’ president Aurelio De Laurentiis confirmed.

Film mogul De Laurentiis posted a picture of himself shaking hands with De Bruyne on social media with the message “welcome Kevin!” Belgium midfielder De Bruyne has reportedly signed a two-year deal with an option for a third at Napoli, where he will join up with international teammate Romelu Lukaku and former Manchester United midfielder Scott McTominay.

The 33-year-old left City at the end of this past season after a trophy-packed decade in Manchester, where under Pepe Guardiola he won six Premier League titles and in 2023 the Champions League. He has however suffered from a series of physical problems in recent seasons, with two hamstring injuries causing him to miss significant chunks of the last two campaigns.

Napoli have brought in one of Europe’s top midfielders as the Italians try to bolster a squad which next season will defend the Scudetto while also having the extra fixture pressure of the expanded Champions League. Antonio Conte’s Napoli beat Inter Milan to the Serie A title on the final day of the season, their second league crown in three years. But they had no European football clogging up their calendar, unlike Inter who got to the Champions League final only to be thumped 5-0 by Paris Saint-Germain.

### Sane joins Galatasaray from Bayern on free transfer

Germany winger Leroy Sane has joined Galatasaray on a free transfer from Bayern Munich, the Turkish champions announced. The 29-year-old has signed a three-year deal and will be paid an annual salary of 9-mn euros (\$10.4mn), plus a “loyalty bonus” of three million euros a

season, the club said.

“I’ve played here before. There was an incredible atmosphere,” said Sane after arriving in Istanbul. “Honestly, the fans were very loud. Now that they’re behind me, I’m very happy, and I’m very excited to play my first match here.”

Sane, who has played 70 times for the German national team, won four Bundesliga titles at Bayern after signing from Manchester City, with whom he lifted the Premier League twice. He scored 13 goals in all competitions last season, helping Bayern win back the Bundesliga trophy from Bayer Leverkusen.

### Spurs set to name Brentford boss Frank as new head coach

Tottenham have reached an agreement with Premier League rivals Brentford to make Thomas Frank their head coach following the sacking of Ange Postecoglou, it was widely reported. Spurs set their sights on Frank after dismissing Postecoglou last week, just 16 days after he won the Europa League, and made an official approach to Brentford earlier this week.

Reports said discussions initially centred on Frank’s current terms at Brentford and further talks were required over which backroom staff he would take with him. Frank’s contract with Brentford was set to run until 2027. It is understood he has a release clause of about £10mn.

Frank lead Brentford back to the top flight in 2021 after an absence of 74 years and has established the west London club in the Premier League. Spurs will play in the Champions League next season thanks to their Europa League success in Bilbao, where they beat Manchester United 1-0.

However, Postecoglou paid the price for a miserable Premier League season as Tottenham finished 17th after losing 22 of their 38 games. Frank began his coaching career in the youth set-up of the Danish national team before a three-year stint at Brondby. He initially joined Brentford as an assistant coach before stepping to replace Dean Smith, when he left to join Aston Villa.

## Poland coach quits after Lewandowski boycott and World Cup qualifier loss

Poland coach **Michal Probiez**, who had been feuding with star striker Robert Lewandowski, has resigned for “the good of the national team”, the country’s football federation said. “I have come to the conclusion that in the current situation the best decision for the good of the national team will be my resignation from the position of selector. Performing this function was the fulfilment of my professional dreams and the greatest honour in my life,” Probiez said in a statement from the Polish Football Federation (PZPN). Lewandowski’s announcement on Sunday that he would boycott the team while Probiez remained coach was followed by a 2-1 loss at Finland that knocked Poland off the top of their European World Cup qualifying group. The striker was not part of the Polish squad in



the recent international window. According to reports, the Barcelona player had asked to be excused to rest. Lewandowski was unhappy he had been stripped of the captain’s armband by Probiez. “Taking into account the circumstances and a loss of trust in the coach, I have decided to resign from playing for the Poland national team for as long as he remains in charge,” Lewandowski wrote on social media.

“I hope I will still have another chance to play again for the best fans in the world,” he added. The 36-year-old Lewandowski made his Poland debut in 2008 and had been captain since 2014. He holds the Polish record for caps, with 158, and goals, with 85 – 37 more than the country’s next highest scorer Wlodzimierz Lubanski. Probiez had been coach since September 2023. He led Poland to the Euro 2024 finals where they failed to win a game and were eliminated in the group stage.

In his 21 matches in charge he won nine, drew five and lost seven. “Thank you, of course, to all the footballers I have had the pleasure of meeting along the way,” he wrote in the PZPN post. “I will keep my fingers crossed for all of you, because the national team is our common national asset.”

## Sporting say no gentleman’s agreement, or offers, for Gyokeres transfer

Sporting President Frederico Varandas has shot down reports the club would accept 70mn euros for Viktor Gyokeres and said he had not received an offer for the Sweden striker who has been linked with Manchester United and Arsenal.

Gyokeres, who scored 54 goals last season, has three years left on his contract, which contains a 100mn euros release clause. While Varandas said the club would not seek the full amount of the clause for the 27-year-old, he denied reports there was a “gentleman’s agreement” that would allow him to leave for 70mn euros in the transfer window.

Gyokeres has bagged 97 goals in 102 matches for the Portuguese side since his 2023 move from Coventry City, winning the Primeira Liga title in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons. No player in European leagues had scored more league goals this season than Gyokeres (39 in 33 games).

The striker said in a post on Instagram: “There is a lot of talks at the moment, most of it is false. I will speak when the time is right.”