To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
44466635



CRICKET | Page 2

Archer added to England squad for second Test against India



OLYMPICS | Page 4

US committed 'across the board' to LA 2028 success, says Coventry

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Friday, June 27, 2025
Muharram 2, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES
SPORT



MOTORSPORT

In-form Russell ready to get his elbows out against Verstappen

Page 3

ATHLETICS

Kipyegon misses out on bid for first female sub-4 minute mile

'I've proven it's possible, it's only a matter of time. I think it will come one day, if not me someone else'

AFP
Paris



Kenya's Faith Kipyegon (right) takes part in the "Breaking 4" event, in an attempt to become the first woman to run a mile in under four minutes, at Stade Charlety in Paris. *(AFP)*

Triple Olympic champion Faith Kipyegon of Kenya fell well short in her bid to become the first woman to run a sub-four minute mile yesterday. Aided by wavelight technology and 13 pacers, 11 male and two women, Kipyegon clocked 4min 06.42sec over 1.6km in perfect conditions at Stade Charlety in south Paris, track where she set her 1,500m world record last year.

The time was better than her own world record of 4:07.64 in the non-Olympic event set in Monaco in 2023. But it will not stand as a new world record given the presence of male pacemakers.

"I'm exhausted, I feel tired," said the 31-year-old Kipyegon. "I tried to be the fastest woman under four minutes, I've proven it's possible, it's only a matter of time. I think it will come one day, if not me someone else."

Kipyegon went through the bell for the final lap in 3:01.84, meaning she'd have to lay down an impossibly fast last 400m. No woman has ever attempted the sub-4min feat, which was first achieved in 1954 by Britain Roger Bannister – in 3min 59.4sec – in what has gone down as one of track running's most momentous achievements.

When Bannister ran a sub-four minute mile 71 years ago, racing conditions were very different. The Briton did it after a morning's work at a hospital during a meet on a cinder track in Oxford and wearing heavy spiked shoes. Almost 2,000 male athletes have gone on to run sub-4min times since 1954.

In the unofficial race in Paris organised by Nike, Kipyegon benefitted from the wealth of her sponsor's technological support, sporting a custom-made suit as well as new Victory Elite FK shoes. The "Breaking 4" project follows on six years after Eliud Kipchoge's "Breaking 2" – when the Kenyan became the first man to run a marathon in under two hours.

Dressed in a black one-pieced suit with black arm warmers, the diminutive Kenyan was swamped by her group of pacers, mostly men and all world class athletes themselves.

In a pre-designed plan, a group of five men ran in a line in front of her as "the shield" with American double Olympic bronze medallist Grant Fisher on her shoulder.

She was about on course at halfway but began to slip behind the coloured pacing lights inside the track and drifted on the final lap as she tied up over the last 200 metres.

Those male pacers meant, just as with compatriot Kipchoge's sub-two-hour marathon run with "in and out" pacers in 2019, that the new mark will not be recognised as a world record.

Kipchoge was in place to welcome his training partner across the line as the pacers quickly gathered around to congratulate her on her effort. But the task of trimming nearly eight seconds off her world record time proved beyond the three-time Olympic 1500m gold medallist who is also a four-time world champion (1500m – 2017, 2022, 2023; 5,000m – 2023).

"I'm so grateful for today," Kipyegon said. "I gave everything. It was not easy, as I said when I was preparing for it. But I wanted to prove to the world that everything is possible."

Kipyegon, who is yet to decide whether she will do the 1500/5,000m double at September's world championships in Tokyo, added: "This was the first trial. I've learned many lessons from this race. I will go back to the drawing board to see where I can improve. One time, one day, it will come my way. There's more in the tank."

FOOTBALL

Ronaldo to stay at Nassr until 2027

AFP
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Cristiano Ronaldo inked a two-year extension with Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr, the club announced yesterday, following months of speculation over which team he would sign for next season.

Minutes before the official confirmation, the team posted a teaser video, with the 40-year-old Ronaldo walking along a beachfront and saying: "Al Nassr forever". Ronaldo later posted a message on his Instagram, confirming the extension. "A new chapter begins. Same passion, same dream. Let's make history together," read the post.

The Portuguese superstar arrived in 2023 in the kingdom to play with the club, heralding a rush of players in the latter stages of their careers to the oil-rich country. Last month, Ronaldo posted "This chapter is over" hours after the Saudi Pro League wrapped up with Al Nassr finishing third and trophyless once again.

"Ronaldo's presence is a key factor in developing the Saudi league in the last two years and a half. He opens the door for elite and young players to come to Saudi Arabia," a source from the Public Investment Fund (PIF), a major investor in Saudi football, said last month.

The oil-funded PIF, the sovereign wealth fund behind a number of big-ticket Saudi investments, controls a group of Pro League clubs including Al Nassr, Al Hilal and Al Ahli. Ronaldo's announcement in May came just months after Brazilian star Neymar ended his injury-plagued 18-month stay in January, after playing just seven times for Al Hilal – on a reported salary of around $104 million a year.

Although Ronaldo was the Pro League's top scorer with 25 goals, he has been unable to win a Saudi or continental trophy with Al Nassr, who lost in the Asian Champions League semi-finals last month. Last year, the five-time Ballon d'Or winner said he could end his career with Al Nassr, the Riyadh team favoured by a number of Saudi royals.

Saudi Arabia has shaken up football by spending heavily on stars from Europe, starting with Ronaldo's move in late 2022, and the desert nation will host the World Cup in 2034. For the past two years, Saudi football fans could watch the likes of Ronaldo and Karim Benzema, with six Ballons d'Or between them, on any given weekend during the football season in the kingdom.

However, the oil-fuelled Saudi football project has drawn comparisons with the Chinese Super League, which imported players on exorbitant salaries until team owners went bust as the Chinese economy fizzled.

But with Saudi Arabia set to host the 2034 World Cup, and desperate to re-model itself as a tourism and business magnet before global oil demand falls for good, there is probably more to come from the Pro League. Ronaldo appeared to trade an end-of-career payday for football obscurity when he first moved to Riyadh's Al Nassr two years ago in a deal said to be worth $250mn at the time.

Inter Milan, Monterrey join Dortmund in Club World Cup last 16

Seattle: Inter Milan kept their cool to beat nine-man River Plate 2-0 and reach the Club World Cup last 16 on Wednesday, while Mexican side Monterrey followed them through from Group E.

Borussia Dortmund defeated Ulsan HD 1-0 to claim top spot in Group F and the Germans will face Sergio Ramos' Monterrey, who thrashed Urawa Red Diamonds 4-0. Argentine powerhouses River Plate were eliminated after their defeat by Inter, who will take on more South American opposition on Monday in Charlotte, in the shape of Fluminense.

The Brazilian side could only draw 0-0 against South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns but it was enough to claim second place behind Dortmund. Champions League runners-up Inter faced a battle in Seattle against an aggressive River Plate side who had Lucas Martinez and Gonzalo Montiel sent off in front of 45,000 fans at Lumen Field.

Francesco Esposito scored his first Inter goal to put the Italians ahead and Alessandro Bastoni made the game safe late on for Christian Chivu's side. "In the first half we were surprised by their intensity, aggression and pressure," said Chivu. "Then in the second half we raised our level of intensity... we're strong, confident and have players who can play such a game."

With Monterrey ahead against Urawa, River needed a winner to progress but their job got harder when Martinez was sent off after 66 minutes for hacking down veteran Henrikh Mkhitaryan. Six minutes later teenage striker Esposito steered home the opener to leave River on the brink. Bastoni ensured Inter's progress as he drilled home, before River's Gonzalo Montiel picked up a second yellow and was dismissed.

There were ugly scenes at the end as River fans threw objects at Inter players leaving the pitch. Both Argentine teams at the tournament, River and their rivals Boca Juniors, have been eliminated despite their fans creating vibrant atmospheres.

Three goals in a nine-minute first half spell helped Monterrey defeat Urawa at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena in front of a crowd of only 14,000. Nelson Deossa smashed home a spectacular long-distance effort to open the scoring and German Berterame rolled the second in at the far post. Former Porto winger Jesus Corona walloped home the third with another fine effort from over 30 yards out, and Berterame struck again late on, as the Japanese side departed with three defeats. Monterrey face Dortmund in Atlanta on Tuesday.

A solitary first-half goal by Daniel Svensson earned Dortmund top spot in Group F in sweltering Cincinnati heat. Dortmund's second straight victory by a one-goal margin, following their 4-3 defeat of Mamelodi Sundowns on Saturday, was watched by only just over 8,000 spectators in Cincinnati, among them US Vice President JD Vance and FIFA chief Gianni Infantino.

"We can be satisfied. I think our performance was better than in the first two matches," said Dortmund coach Niko Kovac. He has spoken regularly at the tournament about the difficulties posed by the searing June heat in the United States. "What the boys are doing is incredible. Thirty-six degrees Celsius (96.8 degrees Fahrenheit) and 43 degrees in the stadium," Kovac said.

Ulsan go home with three defeats from three games, while Fluminense are through after their draw against Sundowns, meaning all four Brazilian teams in the competition have progressed to the knockout phase.

Sundowns' exit means none of the four African clubs who came to the tournament will feature in the last 16, but their performances mean they can go home with their heads held high. "We leave and go home with our heads up because we are much stronger than we were when we came here," said the South African champions' coach, Miguel Cardoso.

CRICKET

ANNOUNCEMENT

Archer recalled for Tests after a four-year absence

The premier fast bowler likely to play against India in second Test

AFP
London

Paceman Jofra Archer has been named in England's squad for the second Test against India after an absence of more than four years.

The 30-year old fast bowler, hampered by injuries during his career, has played just 13 Tests and none since February 2021.

His most recent match for England was in March against South Africa in a one-day international at the ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan.

Archer returned to first-class action for his English county team Sussex for the first time in four years on Sunday, taking a single wicket in the drawn match against Durham.

He admitted returning to red-ball cricket was a mental challenge but said he was ready for Test cricket.

"Yeah. I guess so," he told the *BBC*. "I just want to get through the game. I'm glad I've finished a day of four-day cricket."

Ben Stokes's team secured a thrilling five-wicket win on Tuesday in the series opener against India at Headingley.

Archer's addition on Thursday was the only change to the squad for next week's second Test in Birmingham.

The Barbados-born player burst onto the scene in 2019, hailed as a key weapon for England in their search for genuine pace to unsettle opponents.



Rajasthan Royals' Jofra Archer appeals during an IPL match against Chennai Super Kings in Guwahati, India, on March 30, 2025. Archer has been in the England Test squad after four years. *(Reuters)*

He bowled the decisive super over in England's World Cup win over New Zealand at Lord's in 2019 and took 22 wickets in four Tests that followed against Australia in the drawn Ashes series.

But Archer was dogged by an elbow injury first sustained in 2020 that required multiple operations and had to work his way back from a recurring stress fracture in his back, first sustained in 2022. He was ruled out of England's recent ODI series against the West Indies with a thumb injury sustained while playing for Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League.

Archer has taken 42 Test wickets in his 13 Tests at an average of 31.

Warwickshire batter Jacob Bethell and bowlers Sam Cook and Jamie Overton, who did not feature at Headingley, have retained their places in the squad for the second Test, which starts at Edgbaston on July 2.

ENGLAND SQUAD
Ben Stokes (captain), Jofra Archer, Shoaib Bashir, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Sam Cook, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jamie Smith (wicketkeeper), Josh Tongue, Chris Woakes

PREVIEW

South Africa set to test new players against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo

Reuters
Bulawayo

South Africa tasted long-awaited success with victory in the World Test Championship final against Australia earlier this month, but there will be several new faces for the first Test against Zimbabwe that starts in Bulawayo tomorrow.

Captain Temba Bavuma has not recovered from a hamstring injury sustained in the five-wicket win at Lord's, while batters Aiden Markram, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs, and bowlers Kagiso Rabada, Marco Jansen and Lungi Ngidi, are all rested.

The latter will be available for the second Test, but with seven of the XI who started at Lord's missing the series opener at the Queen's Sports Club, it will be a new-look line-up with much to prove.

Matthew Breetzke, Dewald Brevis and 19-year-old Lhuan-dre Pretorius are all young, attacking batters, and it is likely at least two of the three will play. The more experienced Lesego Senokwane could also make his international debut.

The expected slow wicket means stand-in captain Keshav Maharaj and off-spinning all-rounder Prenelan Subrayen will likely both play, but firebrand 19-year-old fast bowler Kwena Maphaka, who debuted against Pakistan earlier this year, could also be given a chance. Uncapped seamer Codi Yusuf is also in the squad.

"I think there's a lot of guys who want to prove a point, why they're here, and how well they've played over the last couple of domestic seasons to get here," all-rounder Wiaan Mulder told reporters.

"We look at ourselves as world champions. That's the standard we set for ourselves. Everybody has that in the back of their mind. We are not trying to become something new.

"The guys that are going to fill a spot or take someone like Ricks' (Rickelton) or Marco's (Jansen) place are going to put them under pressure when they come back."

Zimbabwe will also be missing several of their regular players, including the injured pair of batter Ben Curran and new-ball bowler Richard Ngarava. Experienced middle-order batter and spin option Sikandar Raza has opted to play in Major League Cricket over this period. "There's a real buzz around the squad. I think they're very excited," Zimbabwe's South African-born coach Justin Sammons said.

South Africa have won eight of their previous nine tests against Zimbabwe, with a single draw in 2001, which was also their only previous fixture in Bulawayo.


Stand-in South Africa Test captain Keshav Maharaj.

SPOTLIGHT

Van der Dussen to lead new-look SA in T20s

Reuters
Cape Town

Top-order batter **Rassie van der Dussen** will lead South Africa during next month's Twenty20 tri-series with New Zealand and hosts Zimbabwe, with four uncapped players in the squad, Cricket South Africa said yesterday.

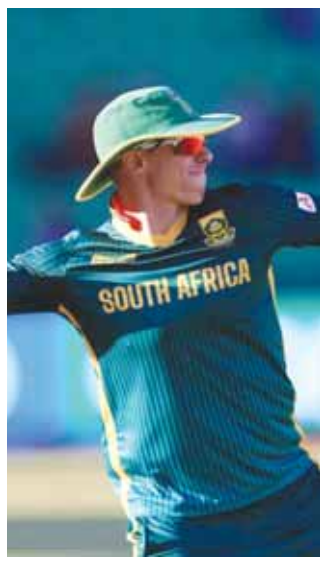
Regular captain Aiden Markram and several key players have been rested for the series to help manage their workload, coach Shukri Conrad said in a statement shared by the CSA.

Conrad said it would be the start of South Africa's preparations for next year's T20 World Cup in February-March.

World Test Championship winners South Africa will also try out new players in the two-match red-ball series against Zimbabwe, starting Saturday, all-rounder Wiaan Mulder said.

Keshav Maharaj, who will lead the Test team against Zimbabwe with Temba Bavuma absent due to injury, will also miss the T20 series along with Kagiso Rabada, David Miller, Marco Jansen, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs.

Uncapped batter and wicketkeeper Lhuan-dre Pretorius, who is in the squad for the Zimbabwe test series, has also been called up for the tri-series, while Corbin Bosch, Rubin Hermann and Senuran Muthusamy have got their first international call-ups.



"With several senior players rested as part of their workload management, it creates space for these players to step in and show what they can offer, and bring them into contention for World Cup selection," Conrad added.

The T20 tournament, hosted at the Harare Sports Club, will kick off with a match between Zimbabwe and South Africa on July 14, with the final set for July 26.

South Africa squad:
Rassie van der Dussen (captain), Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Nandre Burger, Gerald Coetzee, Reeza Hendricks, Rubin Hermann, George Linde, Kwena Maphaka, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Nqaba Peter, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Andile Simelane

FOCUS

Nissanka unbeaten century puts Sri Lanka on top in second Test

AFP
Colombo

In-form opener Pathum Nissanka scored an unbeaten 146 as Sri Lanka tightened their grip on the second Test against Bangladesh on day two in Colombo yesterday.

The hosts were 290-2 at stumps, a lead of 43 on the back of Nissanka's sparkling innings off 238 balls.

It follows his career-best score of 187 in the first Test in Galle, which ended in a draw.

Nissanka found an able partner in former skipper Dinesh Chandimal, who scored a fluent 93 before a lapse in judgement saw him lose his wicket minutes before stumps.

The two put on 194 runs together.

"We are in a very good position, tomorrow we have to bat the whole day. We will try to get a lead of 150 to 200," said wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis. "Shame he missed out on a double hundred in Galle. I hope he does it here," he said of Nissanka.

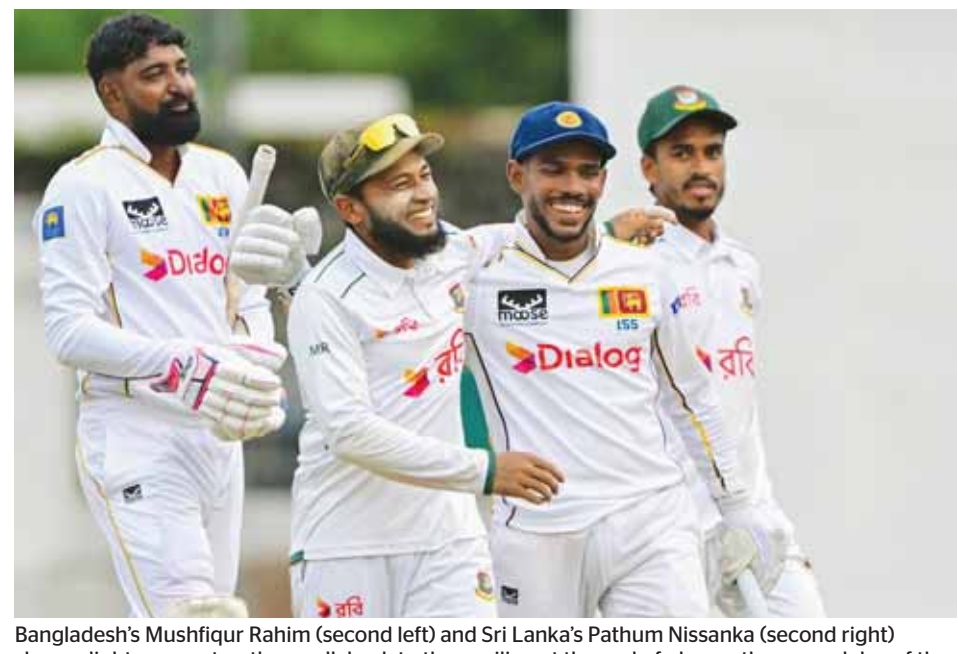
Frustrated by their inability to break through, Bangladesh resorted to negative lines and spread fields but Chandimal and Nissanka answered with a flurry of reverse sweeps.

Nissanka's opening partner Lahiru Udara was undone for 40 by a Taijul Islam delivery that held its line.

Originally given not out, the decision was overturned after a review.

Earlier, debutant Sonal Dinusha took 3-22 as Sri Lanka bowled out the visitors for 247.

Bangladesh resumed the day on 220-8 and lasted 8.3 overs with overnight batsman Taijul the last man out for 33, caught off Dinusha's left-arm spin. All-rounder Dinusha, who came in for the retired Angelo Mathews, had made an instant impact by dismissing Mushfiqur Rahim and Litton Das on the opening day. Fast bowler Asitha Fernando also finished with three wickets after he struck the first blow yesterday. Taijul offered some resistance and survived a reprieve on 20 when Kamindu Mendis shelled a tough chance at wide mid-off, denying Fernando his fourth wicket.



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (second left) and Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka (second right) share a light moment as they walk back to the pavilion at the end of play on the second day of the second Test at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) Ground in Colombo yesterday. *(AFP)*

The left-hander frustrated the hosts with a gutsy knock during which he copped a few blows to the helmet. Bangladesh eked out 33 runs for the last two wickets.

Play began 15 minutes early to compensate for overs lost to rain on day one when only 71 of the scheduled 90 overs were possible.

The winner at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club ground will clinch the series after last week's draw. "Sri Lanka are ahead in the game at the moment, but we know the new ball is due," said Bangladesh coach Phil Simmons.

"We will try to make an impact with the new ball. We know things can happen quickly if we are able to get a couple of wickets with the new ball."

BRIEF SCORES (Day 2, second Test)
Bangladesh: 247 (Shadman Islam 46, Mushfiqur Rahim 35, Sonal Dinusha 3-22, Asitha Fernando 3-51)
Sri Lanka: 290-2 (Pathum Nissanka 146 not out, Dinesh Chandimal 93)

FIRST TEST

West Indies take slender 10-run lead against Australia

AFP
Bridgetown, Barbados

Two contentious television umpiring decisions contributed to the West Indies dismissal for 190 at tea on the second day of the first Test against Australia in Barbados yesterday.

Australia will start their second innings after the break, trailing by just 10 runs after they were bundled out for 180 on day one.

Captain Roston Chase and wicketkeeper Shai Hope held the home side's innings together with a 67-run stand after they had slipped to 72 for five early on the second morning when debutant Brandon King was bowled for 26 offering no shot to seamer Josh Hazlewood.

However Chase, in his 50th Test and playing his first match in the traditional format for more than two years, was ruled leg-before to Australian counterpart Pat Cummins for 44 just after lunch by television official Adrian Holdstock even though the available television replays suggested the tall right-hander had edged the ball onto his pads.

Holdstock was again the focus of attention when Hope, on 48, appeared have been cleanly caught down the leg-side by a diving wicketkeeper Alex Carey to give medium-pacer Beau Webster his second wicket.


Shai Hope (right) of West Indies hits six as Alex Carey of Australia looks on during the second day of the 1st Test at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, yesterday. *(AFP)*

MOTORSPORT

Russell ready to get his elbows out against Verstappen

'I'm not going to comment on that – I can't risk getting a penalty point'

AFP
Spielberg, Austria

In-form George Russell dismissed talk of a special spiky rivalry with four-time champion Max Verstappen as fictional yesterday as he began preparations for this weekend's Austrian Grand Prix.

The 27-year-old Briton, who won last year's race and the Canadian Grand Prix two weeks ago, arrived at the Red Bull Ring insisting that he is only concerned with his own performance.

He described their summoning by the stewards in Montreal, after the race, because Red Bull had filed a protest alleging that Russell had deliberately braked when leading for Mercedes behind a safety car to try and cause Verstappen to pass him and be penalised as "pfaff".

The incident at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve led to more focus on their rivalry and revived stories of their spats in 2024 notably at the Qatar Grand Prix and in Spain this year when Verstappen drove into Russell's car.

"I think when you're racing against the best and you're racing against the most aggressive, you need to stand tall and make sure you have your elbows out and give as much as the opponent will give.

"That is sort of my approach when racing somebody of his calibre, but ultimately, I'm going about my own business.

"I am fighting for myself, my team, and if Max and I have come together a few times over the last six months, that's just the way it's panned out," he said.

Russell added that Red Bull's post-race protest against him in Canada was unjustified.



Mercedes' British driver George Russell arrives at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, yesterday. *(AFP)*

"It was nothing and it all came from Red Bull, as opposed to Max," he said. "I don't think he was even aware of the protests.

"It was pretty clear that there was not going to be any penalty and my personal view is that they wanted to go and be offensive to protect Max, in case he got a penalty for going ahead of me during the Safety Car incident. "My personal view is that it was just a bit of a pfaff and not really necessary."

Verstappen meanwhile was in feisty form at the pre-weekend press conference.

When it came to the tricky subject of his disciplinary record and his position, just a single penalty point away from a race ban, he was ultra-cautious. Asked to say if he felt racing in Formula One had become less natural due to the stringent execution of regulations, Verstappen declined to answer.

"I'm not going to comment on that – I can't risk getting a penalty point," he said.

The question was asked again, in various forms.

"You're joking, right? Is this a trap?" said Verstappen. "I'm getting this question every single time, every weekend."

Finally, he said: "I have nothing to add."

Verstappen had been put in this position when he drove into Russell's Mercedes at the Spanish Grand Prix, collecting a time penalty and three points on his racing drivers' 'superlicence'.

Ahead of Sunday's race, Verstappen has 11 points on his licence knowing 12 would trigger an automatic ban but also that he will see two points removed after the weekend.

He also said he had no intention of changing his normally aggressive driving style.

Given a chance to speak about his prospects this weekend, Verstappen insisted that he and Red Bull were not favourites, despite winning five times at the Red Bull Ring.

"I'm here to do the best I can. And, of course, I hope to be on the podium."

MCLAREN TELL PIASTRI AND NORRIS TO CARRY ON RACING

McLaren drivers Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris are free to continue racing each other as hard as always despite their crash at the Canadian Grand Prix, world championship leader Piastri said yesterday. The 24-year-old Australian said the pair had cleared the air and were ready to continue competing under the team's 'papaya rules'.

"Obviously what happened in Canada wasn't ideal," Piastri told media ahead of this weekend's Austrian Grand Prix. "But we're still free to race, still fighting for a championship each, so we'll keep going racing and make sure that, obviously, we don't come into contact again."

He added that they had "spoken about it honestly before we even got back to the team" in Montreal. "Lando put his hands up and apologised so it's all good and I'm looking forward to going racing again."

He said he felt that McLaren's 'let them race, but responsibly' guidance was the "correct approach" with two drivers competing for the world title.

"It's obviously a difficult one to navigate, but that's a good problem to have in some ways," he said. "The biggest and most important thing was just that things remain fair from as many aspects as you can.

"Obviously there's certain situations that are not always going to be completely fair, whether it's strategy because there's only one pit box or some other things, but I think that's the biggest thing for both of us.

"And, obviously, the first rule, regardless of whether it is written down or not, is that the two cars from the same team don't crash, so that's the big thing. "What we've done well this year before Canada is acknowledging that it's a possibility. I think we dealt with it very well in Canada and since Canada."

Piastri heads into Sunday's 11th race in a 24-race season with a lead of 22 points ahead of Norris and an additional 24 ahead of third-placed four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull.

He said he did not feel that his advantage was big enough to begin consideration of introducing team orders to support his title bid.

"I just want – and we all want – to have a fair opportunity, as we are trying to win both championships, but, especially in the drivers' championship, because ultimately it can only be one of us.

"And I think the situation has to change dramatically to start having those conversations. They're a very long way away, at the moment. All I can ask for is a fair chance to try and win the championship and that's what I want as well. "So no, I'm not willing to enter those talks at all."

The pair clashed in Canada while fighting for fourth place when Norris misjudged an attempted passing move and hit his team-mate's car. Piastri continued to finish fourth while Norris was forced to retire.

Norris was involved in a collision with Verstappen while attempting to pass him during the Austrian Grand Prix last year and arrives in Spielberg needing a trouble-free weekend and a confidence-boosting result.

SPOTLIGHT

Preparations underway for World Rapid, Blitz Chess Championships

QNA
Doha


QCA Executive Director Hamad al-Tamimi

Qatar Chess Association (QCA) Executive Director Hamad al-Tamimi affirmed that preparations are on to host the FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships set to take place in Doha from December 25 to 31.

Al-Tamimi said that the tournament is expected to feature the participation of approximately 350 top-ranked players from around the world. The total prize pool stands at one million euros, 700,000 euros allocated to the open category (equally divided between the rapid and blitz formats), and 300,000 euros for the women's category, also equally divided.

He stressed the association's commitment to delivering an outstanding edition of the championship across all levels, building on its previous successful hosting of the event in 2016.

Speaking about the QCA's strategic plans and tournament calendar, al-Tamimi stated: "We have set several objectives and plans aimed at expanding the base of chess participation across the country. To that end, we organised 50 local tournaments in co-operation with various national entities and institutions. Additionally, the second edition of the 'Naqla' school chess initiative saw the participation of 300 students from public schools, in collaboration with the Ministry of Sports and Youth and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education."

He said: "We have also made it a priority to organise specialised tournaments in youth centres and clubs, alongside a series of local competitions held at the QCA's training centre."

Al-Tamimi highlighted the ongoing collaboration with Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, noting that the 2025 Pre-University Education Chess Championship was recently held with the participation of 72 players representing six schools.

This tournament is part of the agreement between the Qatar Chess Association and Qatar Foundation, which aims to introduce chess into schools and academies under the Foundation's umbrella, broaden the base of youth participants in local tournaments, and increase the number of registered and FIDE-rated players.

The Executive Director of QCA emphasised that the partnership with Qatar Foundation seeks to achieve several goals, foremost among them promoting chess culture within the Foundation's schools. This aligns with the Association's broader strategy to develop chess in Qatar, establish a strong player base, and employ chess as an educational tool to enhance students' cognitive and mathematical skills, boost self-confidence, and support intellectual development through a scientifically grounded educational initiative.

Al-Tamimi also praised the QCA efforts in supporting three Qatari referees, Youssef Khalil al-Muhasnah, Hussein al-Haddad, and Sara al-Mohannadi, who recently obtained their international refereeing licenses.

Swiatek weathers rain break with puzzles to reach semis, Pegula also advances

Fourth seed Iga Swiatek solved crossword puzzles during an hour-long rain interruption yesterday but kept her focus to earn a 6-4 7-6(5) victory over Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova and reach the Bad Homburg Open semi-finals. The Pole, who is playing her only grasscourt tournament in the run-up to Wimbledon which starts next week, struggled at times and had 37 unforced errors against Alexandrova before setting up a semi-final against second-seed Jasmine Paolini. "I think today was all about adjusting to the conditions because it was super windy," Swiatek said. "On one hand to be intense on the other hand being safe."

She won the first set after breaking Alexandrova twice but the match was interrupted midway through the second set with rain starting to fall. Swiatek said she kept focused by solving crossword puzzles during the break and it seemed to work as she held serve throughout the second set to clinch the tiebreak and face Paolini next. Swiatek currently leads Paolini in their head-to-head 4-0.

The Italian, a Wimbledon finalist last year, recorded her fourth win over Beatriz Haddad Maia in as many meetings with a 7-5 7-5 victory.

It was also her first win over the Brazilian in straight sets as the Italian reached her fourth semi-final of the season. Top-seed Jessica Pegula joined her in the last four after needing three sets to edge past fellow American and fifth-seed Emma Navarro 6-4 1-6 6-3.

Pegula will face the winner of the last quarter-final between Russian third seed Mirra Andreeva and Czech Linda Noskova.

FOCUS

Wimbledon champ Krejcikova out of Eastbourne with injury

Reuters
Eastbourne



Wimbledon champion **Barbora Krejcikova** has suffered an injury scare after being forced to withdraw from the Eastbourne tournament yesterday because of a thigh issue.

The Czech player had reached the quarter-finals at Devonshire Park after saving match points in victories over British players Harriet Dart and Jodie Burrage. "I'm very sorry to have to withdraw from my QF today in Eastbourne as I'm having some soreness in my right thigh," the 29-year-old Krejcikova said on social media.

"I've truly enjoyed my time down here the past week and loved being back on the grass."

Krejcikova looked to be moving okay against Burrage but with the defence of her Wimbledon crown beginning on Tuesday she has taken the decision to fully recover.

"I think it's better with Wimbledon in the next couple of days just to rest it and to see what's going on and to resolve that," added Krejcikova whose season has been blighted by a back injury which has limited her to a handful of matches.

Her withdrawal means French qualifier Varvara Gracheva is in the semi-finals where she will face fellow qualifier Alexandra Eala who beat Dayana Yastremska 6-1 6-2 to become the first Filipino woman to reach a Tour-level semi-final on grass.

Maya Joint became the first Australian woman to reach an Eastbourne semi-final in 14 years after she backed up her impressive win over Emma Raducanu by beating Anna Blinkova 6-4 7-5.

She will face either Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova or Kamilla Rakhimova next. In the men's ATP event, French fourth seed Ugo Humbert beat Britain's Billy Harris 7-6(4) 6-1 to set up a semi-final clash against American Jenson Brooksby who ended home interest in the event by beating Dan Evans 6-2 6-3.

Moutet reaches first grasscourt semi-final after win over Tien

France's Corentin Moutet defeated American Learner Tien 6-2 7-5 in a tense encounter at the Mallorca Open yesterday, while Dutch fourth seed Tallon Griekspoor cruised past Canadian sixth seed Gabriel Diallo 6-4 6-4 to reach the semi-finals.

Moutet charged through the first set against Tien, winning 6-2, but the start of the second set saw a heated exchange between the Frenchman and the chair umpire over a disputed point awarded to the American. Tien was given the point after Moutet fell into the net before the ball's second bounce, which Moutet contested. He initially refused to restart the match before returning visibly frustrated, smashing rackets and expressing his anger. Despite the setback, he regained composure to seal his first ever grasscourt semi-final berth. "I was trying to stay aggressive. He's very good, he's not missing a lot, very solid player," said Moutet, who will next face American third seed Alex Michelsen.

"I lost earlier this year against him, so I knew that I had to be more aggressive today, serve better, and I managed to do it."

Griekspoor, who withdrew from the French Open in the fourth round due to an abdominal injury, controlled the match against the in-form Diallo and secured an early break in the second set before wrapping up victory. He will next meet Canadian second seed Felix Auger-Aliassime. Auger-Aliassime was outplayed in the opening set against Serbian Hamad Medjedovic but staged a comeback and secured a 3-6 6-1 6-4 win to reach the last four. Spanish hopes were dashed as home favourite and seventh seed Roberto Bautista Agut fell 6-4 7-6(4) to Michelsen in a tight quarter-final.

SPOTLIGHT

US committed 'across the board' to LA 2028 success, says Coventry

'There is so much goodwill from all levels of government from state to the federal'

Reuters
Lausanne, Switzerland

The United States and all its levels of government are fully committed to making the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympics a success, new International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry said yesterday.

Zimbabwe's former Olympic swimming champion Coventry officially took over the presidency from Thomas Bach this week following Monday's ceremony in Lausanne. "There is so much goodwill from all levels of government from the state to the federal," Coventry told a press conference after her first executive board meeting.

"There's an incredible willingness to see that the Olympic Games are a huge success. So the reason I mentioned that is because that gives us faith... that our values will also be heard and that we will be able to ensure successful Games for our athletes."

There have been concerns among international federations regarding travel and visas for the LA Olympics, with the Olympics bringing together 206 national Olympic Committees. US President Donald Trump issued a directive this month, banning citizens from 12 countries from entering the US as part of an immigration crackdown he said was needed to protect against "foreign terrorists" and other security threats.

Athletes, their coaches and families are exempt from the travel ban, according to US Olympic Committee officials. "It's our duty to ensure that we work towards that and as of right now, we see that full commitment coming across the board," said Coventry, the first woman and first African to be IOC president.

Los Angeles has been hit by protests against immigration raids in recent weeks, and relations between state and city officials, and the US government, have been tense. Trump deployed the California National Guard troops to Los Angeles this month, against the wishes of Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, to quell protests triggered by immigration raids on workplaces by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.



Kirsty Coventry officially took over the International Olympic Committee presidency from Thomas Bach this week following Monday's ceremony in Lausanne.

IOC TO TAKE LEAD IN GENDER ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA: COVENTRY

Coventry said IOC will spearhead discussions on gender eligibility criteria in sports, four years after the ruling body had urged federations to handle the issue independently. Coventry said she now wanted the IOC to "protect the female category".

She announced the formation of a working group made up of experts and international federations," Coventry told a press conference following the first executive board meeting of her presidency. She had also held a two-day workshop for IOC members this week to discuss key issues with them.

"It was agreed by the members that the IOC should take a leading role in this and that we should be the ones to bring together the experts, bring together the international federations and ensure that we find consensus," Coventry said. "We understand that there will be differences depending on the sports. We should make the effort to place emphasis on the protection of the female category and that we should ensure that this is done in consensus with all the stakeholders."

Transgender athletes are currently eligible to compete at the Olympics. Some international federations have rules in place but others have not yet reached that stage. US President Donald Trump has banned transgender athletes from competing in sports in schools in the United States, which civil society groups say infringes on the rights of trans people. Trump has said he would not allow transgender athletes to compete at the 2028 Los Angeles Summer Olympics.

Coventry said IOC members also wanted to be more involved in the selection process for future Olympic host cities. Under her predecessor, the IOC executive board presented one preferred candidate to IOC members, who then rubber-stamped that choice.

"There was overwhelming support from the IOC members for a pause to be done, and a review of the future host election process," Coventry said. "Members want to be engaged more in the process and secondly there was a very big discussion in and around when should the next host be awarded."

The next Summer Olympics will be held in Los Angeles in 2028, followed by Brisbane in 2032. The IOC has reported "double-digit" interest for the 2036 Games from countries including India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Germany, Indonesia and Turkey. No date for a decision on those Games has been set.

The 2026 Winter Olympics will take place in Italy's Milano-Cortina, with the French Alps hosting the 2030 edition and Salt Lake City organising the 2034 Winter Games.

Brazil coach tells Neymar to prepare well for World Cup

Sao Paulo: New Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti considers Neymar "a very important player" and has urged the injury-prone star "to prepare well" for the 2026 World Cup.

"He must prepare well and he has the time to do that," the Italian said in an interview with the South American football federation. "He's a very important player for us regarding the World Cup," Ancelotti added.

Neymar, 33, extended his contract with Brazilian side Santos to the end of the year this week. Neymar's career has been dogged by injury, and he has only played 12 matches in five months for Santos, scoring three goals. Brazil's top scorer with 79 goals was missing from Ancelotti's first squad at the end of May. With Neymar absent five-time world champions Brazil qualified for next year's World Cup with a 1-0 win over Paraguay this month.

LIVERPOOL SIGN KERKEZ FROM BOURNEMOUTH

Liverpool announced they had completed the £40mn signing of Bournemouth defender Milos Kerkez. The 21-year-old, who has penned a five-year deal, is the third major signing of the transfer window for the Premier League champions following the arrival of Jeremie Frimpong and Florian Wirtz.

Germany midfielder Wirtz was signed for a club-record fee that could reportedly rise to £116mn. With Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili joining next month in a deal done 12 months ago there will be more than £200mn of new talent present when pre-season training starts.

Left-back Kerkez is viewed as the long-term successor to 31-year-old Andy Robertson, who is a target for Atletico Madrid. "I'm really happy," said the Hungary international. "It's a real honour for me, a privilege to come to play for one of the biggest clubs in the world, the biggest club in England. I'm just really, really happy and excited. After this, I'll go home and in my hometown enjoy a few days, and then I can't really wait to come back start to train and prepare for the season."

Kerkez made 74 appearances for Bournemouth after joining from AZ Alkmaar two years ago, scoring twice.

WREXHAM TO FACE SOUTHAMPTON IN THEIR FIRST SECOND-TIER GAME FOR 43 YEARS

Wrexham's quest to reach the Premier League next year will begin with an away trip to Southampton on August 9 after the English Football League fixtures were released. The North Wales club, co-owned by Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds and fellow Hollywood A-lister American Rob McElhenney, will play their first English second-tier game for 43 years.

Reynolds said it had felt like an "impossible dream" to get the club to the Premier League, but after three successive promotions they are now just one league away.

FOOTBALL

Man City keeper Ederson dismisses exit rumours



Reuters
Orlando, Florida

Manchester City goalkeeper **Ederson** has said any reports of his impending departure from the club in the close season are fake news as he enters the final year of his contract.

Ederson has been City's number one since he joined the club from Benfica for 40mn euros ($46.90mn) in 2017. The 31-year-old has won six Premier League titles and the Champions League with City while he has also claimed the Premier League Golden Glove three times for the most clean sheets. The Brazilian was heavily linked with a move to the Saudi Pro League, mentioning he had received an "unusual proposal" in October, but said at the Club World Cup that his head is with City.

"No, my future is here," Ederson told reporters. "Some friends send me a lot of news but 99% is fake news. I understand you guys (media), you need the news to put a like on social media or rant for the news. I understand, but there's a lot of fake news around my name. My head is here, it stays with City. It gives me everything to go back to the Premier League again and try to win the Champions League as well. My mind is staying in the club."

City boss Pep Guardiola said he did not know anything about Ederson's contract. The keeper will leave as a free agent next year if the club do not extend his contract. Guardiola said: "What I can say, I'm so pleased and delighted with what I'm seeing in the training sessions and delighted that Eddie is still with us. We cannot define what we have done in this incredible, spectacular decade without him."

FOCUS

Esports World Cup takes centre stage in the Mena region

The Esports World Cup 2025 isn't just bigger, it's bolder and more exciting, and is set to redefine competitive gaming once again. Whether you're a hardcore gamer, fan or want a glimpse into the future of entertainment, here's why the Esports World Cup is the must-visit event of the summer in Mena region.

WITNESS HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The Esports World Cup 2025 (EWC2025) is not just a tournament, it's the biggest gaming event in history and a celebration of gaming and gaming culture. With a staggering prize pool of $70mn, the largest in esports history, the tournament features the world's best players and clubs from more than 100 countries.

Elite athletes will compete across 25 tournaments in 24 different game titles, from fan favourites like DOTA 2, League of Legends, and Call of Duty: Warzone, to exciting new additions like Chess and Valorant. The cross-game format is an unparalleled platform for clubs to prove their dominance across various genres, culminating in the crowning of the Esports World Cup Club Champion.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE SUMMER'S BIGGEST FESTIVAL

Virtual reality experiences, epic challenges, drone shows and unique food pop-ups? The Esports World Cup extends far beyond the tournaments. Boulevard Riyadh City transforms into a season of celebration, fun and cultural exchange with the Esports World Cup Festival, a hub of immersive experiences for families, fans and travellers.



The Esports World Cup 2025 will take place from July 7-August 24 in Boulevard City, Riyadh. The tournament will be held at the brand-new SEF Arena, a purpose-built venue.

Experience:

Community esports tournaments: Test your skills in tournaments, support your friends or enjoy some casual gaming with some of the world's most popular games and consoles.

Live music and entertainment: Experience the electric atmosphere with live performances and shows to capture your imagination.

Retro arcades, anime and pop culture: Indulge in nostalgia and explore vibrant pop culture activities and activations featuring some of the most loved icons of the past and present day.

Cosplay and creator studios: Connect with your favourite personalities and content creators, and check out the incredible cosplays created by fans.

Interactive experiences and art installations: Dive deeper into the world of esports and gaming including immersive gaming experiences and state-of-the-art simulators.

EXPERIENCE STATE-OF-THE-ART VENUES AND TECHNOLOGY

You've never experienced anything quite like the Esports World Cup. As the leading global gaming and esports hub, Riyadh is home to a world-class esports infrastructure with state-of-the-art specialised venues designed with cutting-edge technology and immersive environments to transform the fan experience and bring you closer to the action. Every detail is crafted to elevate esports and showcase the excitement and thrill of competitive gaming, offering an unforgettable spectacle, from hotly contested finals to the festival's immersive gaming activations, as elite teams battle to be crowned the best in the world.

BE PART OF A GLOBAL GATHERING

Want to upgrade your squad? With more than 2,000 esports athletes representing more than 100 countries, the Esports World Cup is a global gathering, as cultures from across the world converge in Riyadh. Offering a unique opportunity for cultural exchange, you can connect with fans and players from different backgrounds and share your passion for gaming and pop culture. Swap the voice chat and lobbies for in-person meet-ups and you can transcend the globe to recruit your next clan.

WITNESS SAUDI ARABIA'S VISION FOR ESPORTS

Want a glimpse into the future? Saudi Arabia is transforming gaming and esports, emerging as the fastest-growing hub for the industry. Powered by Vision 2030 and the National Gaming and Esports Strategy, the first strategy of its kind in the world, Saudi Arabia is leading the way in elevating esports and has established a world-class infrastructure and unmatched gaming ecosystem. Gaming and esports are at the forefront of Saudi Arabia's digital transformation and vision for a future, built on innovation and ambition.

In Riyadh, this vision is a reality. Setting a new benchmark for scale, excellence and engagement, the Esports World Cup showcases Mena's emergence on the global gaming map and offers an unrivalled experience for fans and travellers.

ENJOY RIYADH'S HOSPITALITY AND ATTRACTIONS

As a global tourist hub and host of some of the biggest events in sports and entertainment, Riyadh is a rapidly evolving city with a wealth of attractions to explore for visitors. Blending modernity with tradition, the city offers a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in culture and experience Saudi hospitality. From historical sites to modern architectural marvels, vibrant local cuisine and luxury shopping experiences, there's so much to explore.