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MOTOGP

Alex Marquez dismisses helping brother Marc's title bid

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CLUB WORLD CUP

Past meets present as PSG face Messi's Inter Miami

Enrique comes face to face with four players he once led at Barca

Reuters
Miami

When Paris St Germain meet Inter Miami in the Club World Cup last 16, it will mark a rare reunion of European football greats, all layered with old loyalties, recent regrets and the chance for Lionel Messi to settle a score.

Tomorrow's game features a compelling contrast of eras - a PSG side powered by youth and energy fresh off their maiden Champions League title, and an Inter Miami team built around ageing but iconic former Barcelona stars. On the PSG touchline, Luis Enrique comes face to face with four players he once led at Barcelona - Messi, Luis Suarez, Jordi Alba and Sergio Busquets.

They are all now reunited under Miami coach Javier Mascherano, another figure from Luis Enrique's treble-winning era at Camp Nou. "Luis Enrique is a phenomenon," Alba said this week. "I'm excited to see him and will give him a hug, but when the ref blows the opening whistle, we'll try to beat him."

Suarez, now 38, reflected on his former manager's impact: "I already had a competitive DNA, but he injected even more into me," he said.

In another layer of intrigue, Miami's contingent of former Barcelona players were all part of 2017's "Remontada" against PSG. That was PSG's darkest night, when Barca thrashed them 6-1 in Spain after losing 4-0 in Paris in their last-16 Champions League tie.

That was when Miami's veterans were at their peak. Now they rely on memory and rhythm, while PSG's core has been reshaped by a rising generation: Bradley Barcola, Desire Doue and Vitinha have helped inject fresh energy into Luis Enrique's system, culminating in a Champions League triumph just weeks ago.

But the Parisian side arrive in Atlanta after a 1-0 loss to Brazil's Botafogo in the group stage raised questions about fatigue following a long European season. Though PSG remain heavy favourites on paper, that defeat showed cracks in a squad that has played more high-stakes matches than most of their rivals. "It will be an honour for me facing a great coach - one of the greatest I've had in my career," said Mascherano of Luis Enrique.

Now in his first major club coaching role, Mascherano brings an emotional edge and tactical sharpness to a Miami side that, while physically limited by age, can still threaten, especially with Messi in form. The Argentina great endured a turbulent two-year stint at PSG after leaving Barcelona in 2021. Though he won domestic silverware, Messi never found peace in Paris and after his World Cup win in 2022, some fans turned on him. "I didn't enjoy myself at PSG," Messi told reporters earlier this year. "It was a tough period."

Mascherano believes that memory still drives him. "When something's stuck in his mind, Messi gives a little extra," he said this week.



Inter Miami's Lionel Messi during a training session in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. *(Reuters)*

LAST 16 LINE-UP (TIMES IN GMT)
Today, June 28: In Philadelphia (1600): Palmeiras (BRA) v Botafogo (BRA); In Charlotte (2000): Benfica (POR) v Chelsea (ENG)
Tomorrow, June 29: In Atlanta (1600): Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) v Inter Miami (USA); In Miami (2000): Flamengo (BRA) v Bayern Munich (GER)
Monday, June 30: In Charlotte (1900): Inter Milan (ITA) v Fluminense (BRA); In Orlando (0100 Tuesday, July 1): Manchester City (ENG) v Al-Hilal (KSA)
Tuesday, July 1: In Miami (1900): Real Madrid (ESP) v Juventus (ITA); In Atlanta (0100 Wednesday, July 2): Borussia Dortmund (GER) v Monterrey (MEX)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Qatar to host final stage of FIFA Intercontinental Cup for second year running

QNA
Zurich

FIFA announced yesterday that Qatar will once again host the final three matches of the FIFA Club World Cup, set to take place this December, continuing its role as host of the tournament's climax for the second consecutive year.

According to a statement by FIFA, the 2025 edition of the tournament will kick off on September 14, with African champions Pyramids of Egypt taking on Oceania champions Auckland City of New Zealand in Cairo.

The winner will face Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli on September 23 at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, with the victor advancing to the final stage in Qatar.

The action in Qatar begins on December 10 with the Americas Cup match between Mexico's Cruz Azul, the CONCACAF champion, and the yet-to-be-determined South American champion.

The semi-final, branded the Challenge Cup, will be held on December 13. It will feature the winner of the Americas Cup clash facing the team that emerges from the Pyramids/Auckland City vs Al Ahly bracket.



The tournament will conclude on December 17 with the Confederations Cup final, where European champions Paris Saint-Germain will take on the winner of the semi-final.

Qatar previously hosted the final stage of the 2024 FIFA Intercontinental Cup under FIFA's revamped format. That edition saw Real Madrid lift the trophy with a 3-0 win over Mexico's Pachuca at Lusail Stadium.

Inzaghi proud as Al Hilal join 'the best' in knockout stage

Miami: Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal became the only Asian side to reach the Club World Cup's knockout stages with a 2-0 win over Pachuca on Thursday, finishing their Group H campaign unbeaten and setting up a round-of-16 meeting with Manchester City.

Salem al-Dawsari opened the scoring in the 22nd minute and Marcos Leonardo added the second in stoppage time. "It was a hard game but I think we did a great game," said midfielder Ruben Neves. "We scored first off, we had control and we defended very well. A clean sheet and a win and we are through. That's the most important thing."

Al Hilal showed they could compete with the best teams in the world when they held Real Madrid and Red Bull Salzburg to draws in their first two games under new coach Simone Inzaghi. They have conceded just one goal in their three matches, sharing the best defensive record of the group stage with Paris St Germain and Monterrey. Al Hilal, majority owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, have signed a string of world-class players over the last two years including Neymar, Malcom, Ruben Neves, Marcos Leonardo and Aleksandar Mitrovic. Although Neymar has left the club and Mitrovic remains sidelined with a calf injury, the depth of the squad has allowed Al Hilal to weather the pressure of the big stage.

Inzaghi said: "Our goal was to achieve (being in) the group of the best teams in the world. It was not an easy task, but the team was well united. It fought during the three games for a great objective... we were not coming here just to have fun, we were coming here to play a World Cup and we wanted to reach this stage. Now we'll have to play against Manchester City... it's one of the greatest teams in the world. These are the games where you can improve and you can mature as a team, so I'm very proud."

SPOTLIGHT

Man City crush Juventus, Real Madrid reach Club World Cup last 16

AFP
Orlando, United States

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City demonstrated their Club World Cup credentials with a 5-2 victory over Juventus on Thursday while Vinicius Junior starred as Real Madrid beat Salzburg 3-0 to secure a spot in the last 16. Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia beat Pachuca of Mexico 2-0 to pip Salzburg to the last berth in the knockout phase, as Al Ain battled to a 2-1 win over Wydad Casablanca in the day's other game.

City became the only side at the tournament to win all three of their group matches as they put Juventus to the sword in front of 54,320 at the Camping World Stadium in Orlando.

City now face Al Hilal, the only Asian representative in the next round after goals from Salem al-Dawsari and Brazilian Marcos Leonardo against Pachuca. "We played well and I'm happy with the victory," said City winger Jeremy Doku, who opened the scoring.

Doku pounced for the early opener after new arrival Rayan Ait-Nouri set him up with a clever ball. However City stopper Ederson passed the ball straight to Teun Koopmeiners who levelled for Juventus, in one of the few moments in which Guardiola's team let their focus slip. Pierre Kalulu bundled into his own net from Matheus Nunes' cross to restore City's lead.

The Premier League side, hoping to make up for a poor season by their standards in which they finished without a major trophy, stepped up a level after the break with Erling Haaland's introduction. The Norwegian striker tapped home the third and then helped create the fourth for Phil Foden, before Savinho smashed home from distance for the fifth.

Dusan Vlahovic netted late on for Juve but it did not take the shine off an impressive triumph for City, who were able to give holding midfielder Rodri a first start after his long injury lay-off. "Manchester City have a lot better (quality of) players than us, that's the truth, that needs to be acknowledged," said Juventus coach Igor Tudor as his side finished second in Group G. "The stars didn't align for us to play better tonight."

Al Ain got the better of Wydad in Washington, DC in a meeting of two teams who were already eliminated but were hoping to sign off with a victory. South African striker Cassius Mailula blasted the Moroccans into an early lead but Togo international Kodjo Fo-Doh Laba levelled from the spot just before the break for Al Ain.



Manchester City's Jeremy Doku celebrates with teammates after scoring against Juventus during the FIFA Club World Cup in Orlando, Florida. *(Reuters)*

That was their first goal of the tournament after 5-0 and 6-0 thrashings by Juve and City respectively, and Paraguayan international Alejandro Romero curled home from the edge of the box to earn the team from the United Arab Emirates victory.

Vinicius scored one goal and made another with a touch of class as Madrid saw off Salzburg in Philadelphia to clinch top spot in Group H. Real play Juventus in the last 16 in Miami on Tuesday. The Brazil star Vinicius opened the scoring after a superb defence-splitting pass by Jude Bellingham on 40 minutes, to the delight of the vast majority of the 64,811 crowd on a rainy night at Lincoln Financial Field.

Vinicius then set up Federico Valverde with a clever backheel to make it 2-0 in first-half stoppage time. Young striker Gonzalo Garcia ran through to wrap up the win late on with his second goal of the tournament, as Xabi Alonso's team end the first round of FIFA's new tournament unbeaten.

"I am pleased with the boys, and now the interesting phase begins," Alonso said. Real were once again without top scorer Kylian Mbappe, who has yet to play at the tournament as he recovers from illness. "We thought Kylian would make it and it wasn't to be. Now we have four days and I want to be optimistic but cautious at the same time," Alonso said.

SPORT

SPOTLIGHT

England chief confident Archer will fire



AFP
London

England supremo Rob Key expects **Jofra Archer** to slot back into an old routine should "one of the best bowlers in the world" make his long-awaited return to Test cricket next week.

The 30-year-old express quick has been included in England's squad for the second Test against India at Edgbaston after an absence from red-ball internationals of more than four years.

Archer, hampered by injuries during his career, has played just 13 Tests - with 42 wickets at an average of 31 - and none since February 2021.

But one of the most talented cricketers of his generation has now been recalled to the Test squad on the back of just one County Championship match this season, away to Durham last week, where Archer took 1-32 in 18 overs.

"He's a pretty pure talent, there's not a lot of moving parts to his action in terms of complications, and he's 30-years-old now," Key told reporters in London yesterday.

"He knows exactly what he's doing and what he's about. So it's more of a question of him just getting back into red-ball cricket."

Key, speaking at a media event staged by series sponsors Rothesay, added: "The whole Jofra plan has been a long time in the making... We had Neil Killeen up there (at Durham), one of our (England) bowling coaches.

"Jofra was such a talent. He was straight on the money. Bowling on a slow pitch, with good pace. We can track every single ball, He ain't going to forget how to bowl, Jofra."

And Key insisted England were not taking a risk with Archer's fitness as they decide whether to play him at Edgbaston or at Lord's for the third Test.

"When he finally comes back either next week or the week after, touch wood, then that will be brilliant," said Key.

"He will be fit and available for both (Tests). Whether he could play both, we'll find that out afterwards, if he did play at Edgbaston.

"He isn't going to forget how to bowl. He's an unbelievable talent. I think Jof is one of the best bowlers in the world."

Archer, however, could struggle to get back into an England side that chalked up a stunning five-wicket victory over India in the first of a five-Test series at Headingley last week. But if he is overlooked in Birmingham, he could return to Sussex to play the last two days of their County Championship match against Warwickshire next week.

"We've picked him in the squad and we'll see how the conditions are," said former England batsman Key.

"We've got decisions to make because these next two Tests are very close together and you want to be able to sustain that pressure throughout these back-to-back Test matches.

"The guys (who played at Headingley) got better the more they bowled. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. (Anyone who is not selected) can go back and play the last two days of the championship."

SECOND TEST

Sri Lanka spinners leave Bangladesh on verge of defeat

'WE WILL LOOK TO WRAP UP THIS TEST MATCH QUICKLY'

AFP
Colombo



Sri Lanka's captain Dhananjaya de Silva (second right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto during the third day of the second Test at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) Ground in Colombo yesterday. *(AFP)*

Spinners Dhananjaya de Silva and Prabath Jayasuriya rounded off another dominant day for Sri Lanka yesterday, taking two wickets each to leave them on the brink of a crushing innings victory over Bangladesh in the second Test.

By close of play on the third day at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo, the visitors had slumped to 115-6 in their second innings, still 96 runs away from making Sri Lanka bat again.

Bangladesh started their second innings with a daunting deficit of 211 after Kusal Mendis's forthright 84 had taken the Sri Lanka first innings to 458 all out earlier in the day.

All seven batters so far in the Bangladesh second innings made it into double figures but only Mushfiqur Rahim made it beyond 20, making 26 before being beaten all ends up by Jayasuriya.

With only four wickets in hand, it will be a tough ask of the Bangladesh lower order to see off the Sri Lanka spinners, who have been gaining plenty of turn, from wrapping up the Test and the two-match series. The first Test ended in a draw.

Sri Lanka batter Kamindu Mendis said that the "wicket is spinning now from both ends and its not easy for the batters".

"We will look to wrap up this Test match quickly," he said after the day's play.

Earlier, leading from the front, skipper De Silva dealt twin blows with his off-spin in the evening session yesterday.

He had Mominul Haque (15) caught at first slip before trapping his opposite number Najmul Hossain Shanto (19) leg before. Left-arm spinner Jayasuriya, under pressure to keep his spot after a lean patch, also responded in style with a probing spell.

He struck with the new ball, removing Shadman Islam (12) caught behind, and then bowled Mushfiqur.

The early part of the day belonged to Kusal Mendis who hammered a rapid 84 off 87 balls, with eight fours and two sixes, when it looked as though the Sri Lanka first innings was faltering.

Replying to Bangladesh's first innings of 247, Sri Lanka resumed on a strong overnight platform of 290-2 but lost four wickets in the morning session, three of them to the second new ball.

First to go was overnight century-maker Pathum Nissanka who added 12 before chipping left-arm spinner Taijul Islam to short cover. It was a soft end for the in-form opener whose 158 came after career-best 187 in the first Test in Galle.

But Kusal Mendis dug in his heels steering Sri Lanka past the 450-run mark before running himself out, ninth wicket down, going for an unlikely second run.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam wrapped up the innings four balls later to finish with 5-131, his 17th five-wicket haul in Test cricket.

Islam said that bowling with the new ball "when there is nothing much on the wicket" is an "advantage".

"There was a bit of zip this morning when the second new ball was available," he said after play.

"I know that I need ten more wickets to overtake Shakib Al Hasan as the leading wicket taker for Bangladesh" in Tests, Islam added. "But I am not overly bothered about it. It will come when it comes. What I am concentrating on is to bowl well and help my team do well".

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh: 247 (Shadman Islam 46, Mushfiqur Rahim 35; Sonal Dinusha 3-22, Asitha Fernando 3-51)
Sri Lanka: 458 (Pathum Nissanka 158, Dinesh Chandimal 93, Kusal Mendis 84; Taijul Islam 5-131, Nayeem Hasan 3-87)
Bangladesh second innings: 115-6 in 38.4 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 26, Dhananjaya de Silva 2-13, Prabath Jayasuriya 2-47)

DAY THREE

West Indies chase 301 to win first Test against Australia in Bridgetown

AFP
Bridgetown, Barbados

West Indies have been set a daunting victory target of 301 after Australia were dismissed for 310 on the stroke of tea on the third day of the first Test at Kensington Oval yesterday.

Shamar Joseph led the home side's bowling effort with five wickets for the cost of 87 runs to finish with match figures of 9-133.

Australia's recovery from the perilous position of 65-4 late on day two was engineered by half-centuries from Travis Head, Beau Webster and Alex Carey.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Carey did the bulk of the scoring in a productive afternoon session for the visitors before he was ninth out for a top score of 65.

With a clear intent on aggression on a pitch becoming increasingly two-paced, the Australians progressed at almost a run-a-minute after lunch despite wickets falling at regular intervals.

Carey, whose innings occupied 75 balls, built on the platform laid by Head and Webster, who batted through most of the morning in a 102-run fifth-wicket partnership - the first century stand of the match.

Head was trapped lbw for 61 by Shamar Joseph 20 minutes before lunch. However, the course of the first session could have been very different had Justin Greaves held on to another straightforward catch at second slip off Alzarri Joseph when Head was on 22.

This was the seventh chance put down by the West Indies slip cordon in the match - a poor display in one of the fundamental aspects of the game which began on day one when four catches were shelled.

That error within the first half-hour of the day's play seemed to deflate the Caribbean side, and Webster, then partnered by Carey, was able to turn the screw by putting on 41 for the sixth wicket before falling for 63, caught behind off Shamar Joseph.

The right-armer also accounted for Mitchell Starc and wrapped up the innings when last man Josh Hazlewood was bowled off the inside edge to give the Guyanese pacer his fourth five-wicket haul and third against Australia.

Putting his faith almost entirely in his pacemen, skipper Roston Chase only introduced the West Indies' lone specialist spinner, Jomel Warrican, for his first bowl of the match when Head and Webster were within sight of the 100-run mark in their partnership during a frustrating morning for the home side.



Alex Carey of Australia celebrates his half century during the third day of the first Test against the West Indies at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, yesterday. *(AFP)*

ATHLETICS

Fraser-Pryce eases through in Jamaica trials farewell

AFP
Kingston, Jamaica

Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce launched her final appearance at Jamaica's National Trials with a comfortable victory in opening heats of the women's 100m on Thursday.

The 38-year-old Jamaican sprinting legend blasted through her heat in 11.33sec, the fifth-fastest time of qualifying ahead of the semi-finals and finals.

Fraser-Pryce, a three-time Olympic gold medallist and 10-time gold medallist at the World Championships, has said this week's meeting will be her final appearance at Jamaican trials before she hangs up her spikes.

The veteran sprinter is reportedly planning to bring the curtain down on her glittering career at the end of the 2025 season and is bidding to make the Jamaican team for the the World Championships in Tokyo in September.

"In the next two days, it will be my final time gracing the National Stadium," Fraser-Pryce said at an event organised by her shoe sponsor Nike in Kingston on Monday.

"Honestly, it's one of those moments that I'm looking forward to... because I have absolutely nothing to lose and all to gain," Fraser-Pryce added.

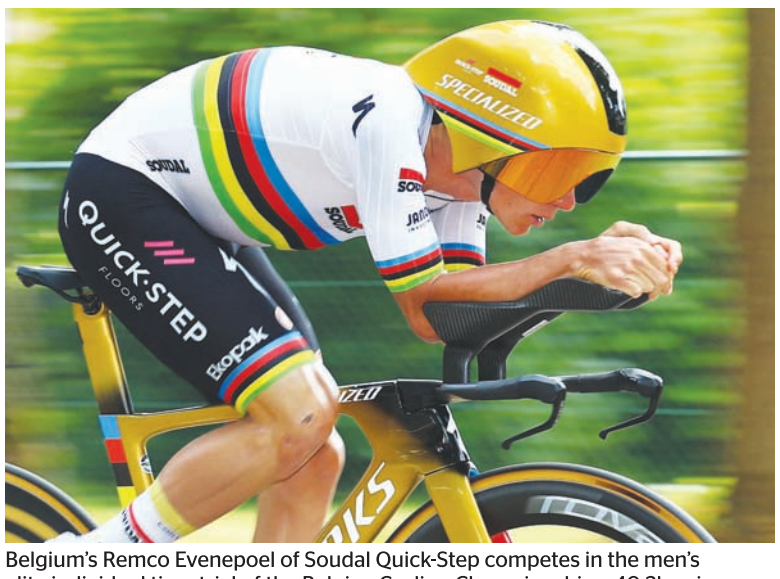
On Thursday, Fraser-Pryce easily came through her opening heat ahead of Carleta Bernard and Kemba Nelson.

Shericka Jackson, the reigning 200m world champion, posted the quickest qualifying time in 11.2sec, just ahead of Tia Clayton (11.21sec), who was fractionally quicker than twin sister Tina Clayton (11.27sec).

Jodean Williams was fourth fastest in 11.31sec.

CYCLING

Evenepoel wins second Belgian time-trial



Belgium's Remco Evenepoel of Soudal Quick-Step competes in the men's elite individual time trial of the Belgian Cycling Championships, 40.2km, in Brasschaat, yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Brasschaat, Belgium

Remco Evenepoel said his "feelings are good" ahead of the Tour de France as he warmed up by winning the Belgian national time-trial title for the second time yesterday.

Over a 40.2km course, a distance comparable to the fifth-stage time-trial of the upcoming Tour on July 9 in Caen, the Olympic and world champion outclassed his competitors, finishing one minute and 11sec ahead of Florian Vermeersch. Alec Segaert was third at 1:31 in the race at Brasschaat, near Antwerp.

This is Quick-Step rider Evenepoel's 20th victory in time-trials.

In 2025, he had already triumphed in time-trials on the Tour de Romandie and Criterium du Dauphine.

Evenepoel returned to Belgium on Thursday after a high-altitude training camp at Tignes in the French Alps where he "trained a little less than planned due to the heat".

MOTORSPORT

Alex dismisses talk of helping his brother

AFP
Assen, Netherlands

Runaway championship leader Marc Marquez can draw level with motorcycling legend Giacomo Agostini's 68 elite wins at the Dutch MotoGP this weekend.

That will leave the rejuvenated six-time MotoGP champion 21 Grands Prix wins shy of all-time record-holder Valentino Rossi. The way the Spaniard has been riding since joining the Ducati factory team this term, catching his retired arch rival's tally is by no means beyond the bounds of possibility.

Marquez arrives at Assen's 'Cathedral of speed' circuit fresh from his exploits at Mugello, where he claimed the sprint and the race from pole for the fifth weekend this year.

His fifth win from nine Grands Prix lifted him 40 points clear of his younger sibling Alex, riding for Ducati's satellite Gresini team.

Alex Marquez has finished second to Marc in eight of the nine sprints, and four times in the main event, leading some conspiracy theorists to speculate over a form of collusion and sharing of strategies between the siblings.

Alex though was quick to knock that notion on the head ahead of this 10th round of the championship.

"I think, from outside, some people are trying to create a war or a battle between me and Marc," Alex told *crash.net*.

"It's what the people want to push, to see some competition. We have that already - we are brothers.

"So, we've fought all of our lives. You want to beat your brother and you want to be in front and you want to be better in life than your brother.

"But it will not change. At the moment, he is faster than us. For that reason, many times people say 'Alex doesn't attack him'. "I don't attack him because I don't arrive (in a position to take him on)."

BAGNAIA AIMS FOR ASSEN FOUR-TIMER

The Marquez brothers have left former two-time champion Francesco Bagnaia toiling in their wake this season. The occupant of the other half of the Ducati factory garage is a yawning 110 points off the lead.

But 'Pecco' has form at Assen, winning the last three Dutch grands prix, and looked back to his best, hustling for the lead early on in Mugello last Sunday before settling for third.

Bagnaia is having similar problems with his bike as McLaren Formula One title contender Lando Norris has been complaining of with his car this season as he battles his teammate Oscar Piastri for the F1 drivers' crown.

"I was quite confident in the first part of the race, I was feeling good, and then after six laps, the front started to drop. I had to slow down because I was risking a crash. The problem is that this season is always like this. I cannot do what I want on the bike," he said after Mugello.

"It's a shame, it is what it is. From the first race, it's like this," he continued.

"Maybe I start well, then I spend the race watching the brothers, what they are doing, hoping for a mistake from them to maybe have a chance to overtake. But like this, it's not possible."

In yesterday's opening practice sessions Fabio Quartararo posted the quickest time as Marc Marquez was one of a number of riders to hit the deck.

The 2021 champion Quartararo led the timesheets on his Yamaha with a lap of 1min 31.150sec ahead of Alex Marquez and Pedro Acosta (KTM).



Alex Marquez (left) and brother Marc.

TENNIS / WIMBLEDON

Alcaraz to take on Fognini as treble bid starts

Aryna Sabalenka will open her campaign versus Canadian qualifier

Reuters
London


Spain's Carlos Alcaraz during practice at Wimbledon yesterday. *(AFP)*

Carlos Alcaraz will begin his quest for a third successive Wimbledon title against dangerous Italian Fabio Fognini and women's top seed Aryna Sabalenka will open her campaign versus Canadian qualifier Carson Branstine.

Yesterday's draw conducted at the All England Club produced its usual intrigue with some eye-catching first-round clashes.

Men's top seed Jannik Sinner, beaten by Alcaraz in the French Open final this month, meets fellow Italian Luca Nardi, while sixth seed Novak Djokovic, seeking to tie Roger Federer's record of eight Wimbledon singles titles, has a tricky opener against France's world number 40 Alexandre Muller.

Women's defending champion Barbora Krejcikova, the 17th seed who pulled out of the Eastbourne tournament on Thursday with a thigh strain, faces Alexandra Eala of the Philippines.

Women's second seed Coco Gauff's first-round opponent is Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska, while third seed Jessica Pegula, Gauff's likely semi-final opponent, plays Italian qualifier Elisabetta Cocciaretto.

Fourth seed Jasmine Paolini, runner-up last year, faces Anastasija Sevastova of Latvia. Belarusian Sabalenka is seeded to meet Paolini in the semi-finals.

Britain has 23 players in the singles events, the most for the home nation since 1984, with men's fourth seed Jack Draper carrying the weight of expectation on his shoulders after a rapid rise. Draper faces a tough path though if he is to emulate twice champion Andy Murray.

The 23-year-old has a tricky opener against Argentina's 38th ranked Sebastian Baez and could face former runner-up Marin Cilic of Croatia in round two and Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik, who he lost to at Roland Garros, in the third round.

To win the title, Draper could have to beat Djokovic in the quarter-finals, Sinner in the semis and Alcaraz in the final.

BANANA SKIN

Britain's women's number one Emma Raducanu faces a potential first-round banana skin against compatriot Mingge (Mimi) Xu, one of three British teenaged wildcards in the women's draw. Should 2021 US Open champion Raducanu win that she could play 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova or 32nd seed McCartney Kessler in the second round.

Sabalenka, whose opponent Branstine beat former US Open winner Bianca Andreescu in qualifying, could face Raducanu or Vondrousova in the third round.

One potential standout second round match could feature Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen, seeded five, against Japan's four-times Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka.

Spaniard Alcaraz, who warmed up for Wimbledon by winning the Queen's Club title, will be wary of the threat posed by the enigmatic Fognini although the 38-year-old Italian is not the force he was when he reached ninth in the rankings in 2019. Alcaraz could then face British qualifier Oliver Tarvet, the world number 719 whose reward for reaching the main draw is a first-round match against Swiss qualifier Leandro Riedi. His potential semi-final opponent is Germany's third seed Alexander Zverev, who plays France's Arthur Rinderknech in his opening match.

As defending men's champion, Alcaraz will open play on Centre Court on Monday which will feature the bottom half of the men's draw and the top half of the women's draw. Czech Krejcikova will begin play on Centre Court on Tuesday.

GOLF

Potgieter and Roy share PGA lead in Detroit with course record 62s


Aldrich Potgieter of South Africa plays his shot from the ninth tee during the second round of the Rocket Classic 2025 at Detroit Golf Club in Detroit, Michigan. *(AFP)*

AFP
Washington

Aldrich Potgieter and Kevin Roy fired course-record 62s at Detroit Golf Club on Thursday to share the first-round lead in the US PGA Tour Rocket Classic.

Roy, a 35-year-old American chasing a first PGA Tour title, followed his eagle at the 17th with his eighth birdie of the day to be the first in the clubhouse on 10-under.

Less than 10 minutes later South Africa's Potgieter put the finishing touches on a round that also included an eagle and eight birdies.

Potgieter and Roy both broke the previous course record of 63 - matched Thursday by Australian Min Woo Lee and Americans Max Greyserman and Mark Hubbard.

"Just one of those days everything was clicking," said Roy, who had seven birdies in the first 14 holes then chipped in from off the green for eagle at 17 after his five-wood second shot from the fairway rolled off the putting surface.

"I was shocked my five-wood went that far," Roy said. "I had 279 (to) pin. I don't a five-wood that far, but maybe a little adrenaline or something going on.

"Luckily just trickled off the back, it was a fine lie and just had to kind of plop it up and it rolled in like a two-footer. Certainly a bonus," added Roy, who rolled in a five-footer at the last. That caught the attention of Potgieter, who had teed off on 10 and surged up the leaderboard when he picked up five strokes in a four-hole span, starting with his fourth birdie of the day at 16.

He followed that with a 10-foot eagle at 17, a 10-foot birdie at the 18th and a tap-in birdie at the first.

He reached 10-under with back-to-back birdies at seven and eight, and was finishing his round at the ninth when he saw Roy's score.

"I was standing on the last hole and I looked at the leaderboard and saw someone else at 10, so I was real eager to make that putt at the last," said Potgieter, who had a 12-foot birdie attempt but settled for a tap-in par.

Long-hitting 20-year-old Potgieter is also seeking a first PGA Tour title, having come close in February only to fall to Brian Campbell in a playoff at the Mexico Open. Australia's Lee, who claimed his first US tour title at the Houston Open in March, had set an early target. He teed off on 10 and opened birdie-bogey. He made nine birdies the rest of the way, including three in a row to cap his round.

"Everything was pretty solid," said Lee. "I think the putter was working quite nicely."

After the grind of the US Open and the PGA Championship, Lee was pleased to be on a course that was "quite gettable" - especially after rain earlier this week. "It's quite nice to kind of play from the rough," he said. "Not that I was doing it on purpose, I would rather be on the fairway, but, yeah, it's gettable."

FOCUS

Swiatek cruises past Paolini to reach first grass final, to face Pegula today


Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning her semi-final against Italy's Jasmine Paolini at Bad Homburg Open in Bad Homburg, Germany, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Reuters
Bad Homburg, Germany

Five-times Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek crushed second seed Jasmine Paolini 6-1 6-3 yesterday to reach the Bad Homburg Open final and stay in the hunt for her first career title on grass.

She will face American top seed Jessica Pegula, who had to dig deep to beat Czech Linda Noskova 6-7(2) 7-5 6-1 in just over two hours.

With Wimbledon starting next week, Swiatek, the former world number one, showed she was on the right track on the surface, outclassing the Italian, last year's Wimbledon finalist.

"I am super happy and I was not expecting this. I just did my job and I knew what I wanted to play and I went for it," Swiatek said in a post-match interview.

"I'm happy I kept the momentum going until the end of the match. Jasmine, you can't let her get back in the game because she's a fighter. I just wanted to go for it, and go for my shots." Swiatek has a 5-0 lead in their head-to-head matches.

The Pole, who has won the French Open four times along with one US Open, did not play any other grass tournaments this season ahead of next week's Wimbledon start, instead opting for a week of training in Mallorca before competing in Bad Homburg. She was never troubled by the Italian in the first set as she raced through it in 29 minutes courtesy of three breaks. The pair traded breaks at the start of the second set but Paolini continued to struggle to hold serve and contain the aggressive Pole who went 4-2 up.

Swiatek sealed victory with a forehand winner on her third match point to book a final spot against Pegula, who had to work much harder to come from a set down and oust the talented 20-year-old Czech.

Noskova had Pegula on the ropes, having won the first set and leading 5-4 in the second before the American pulled herself together, started returning better and completed her comeback on her third match point.

EALA MAKES HISTORY FOR PHILIPPINES

Alexandra Eala became the first player from the Philippines to reach a WTA Tour final as she beat fellow qualifier Varvara Gracheva 7-5 2-6 6-3 on the Eastbourne grass yesterday.

The 20-year-old left-hander, ranked 74th in the world, edged a tight first set before losing five games in a row in the second as the match appeared to be slipping away. But she regrouped in the decider and survived a tough seventh game before breaking her French opponent's serve to lead 5-3. She then enjoyed a love service game hold to seal victory.

In today's final she will face 19-year-old Australian Maya Joint who beat Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 7-5 6-3. It will be the youngest Eastbourne final since 1981 when Tracy Austin faced fellow American Andrea Jaeger.

FORMULA 1

Norris leads McLaren 1-2 in Austrian practice

Four-time champion Max Verstappen third fastest for Red Bull



McLaren's Lando Norris drives during a practice session for Austrian Grand Prix in Spielberg, Austria, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

AFP
Spielberg bei Knittelfeld, Austria

Lando Norris bounced back from his Canadian catastrophe to top the times ahead of teammate and championship leader Oscar Piastri as McLaren reeled off a commanding 1-2 in second practice yesterday at the Austrian Grand Prix.

Norris, who sat out the first session at the Red Bull Ring, clocked a best lap in one minute and 4.580 seconds to beat Piastri by 0.157 seconds with four-time champion Max Verstappen third fastest for Red Bull, adrift by 0.318 seconds. For Norris, it was a relief to move on from his collision with team-mate Piastri in Montreal where he retired pointless, admitting he had "made a fool of myself".

Lance Stroll was fourth for Aston Martin ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, George Russell of Mercedes, who won last year and two weeks ago in Canada, and Yuki Tsunoda in the second Red Bull.

Gabriel Bortoleto was eighth for Sauber ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, struggling in his updated Ferrari.

After much paddock speculation linking Verstappen with a move to Mercedes, the session began with Colapinto and Ocon leading the way in near-perfect conditions at the picturesque, and historic, circuit set in the Styrian Alps. Russell, fastest in the morning, was soon on top again, but it was the McLarens of Piastri and Norris that proved they had found more pace amid the rising temperatures, with the air at 26 degrees Celsius and track at 34.

Having missed the morning session, when Irish reserve driver Alex Dunne proved his huge potential by finishing fourth, Norris swept to the top after 10 minutes shortly before Leclerc, also back after sitting out the first practice, ran off at Turn Six and his Ferrari teammate Hamilton reported he had "no pace" in his updated car.

Norris stayed on top, trimming his time, before switching to softs with 'papaya' teammate Piastri slotting in second. Stroll was third, four-tenths adrift ahead of the chasing pack including 'man of the moment' Russell. "He has been part of our programme for 10 years," said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff of Russell.

"He's always performed to expectations and continues to do so. These kind of contract discussions end up accelerated in the media, but it's normal business. Contracts discussions are not held in Town Halls. All is going to plan."

Wolff confirmed he was in contact with Verstappen, but suggested it was not in his mind to replace Russell and stressed that he was also very happy also with Antonelli. Thus most seasoned observers regarded the speculation as merely exploratory.

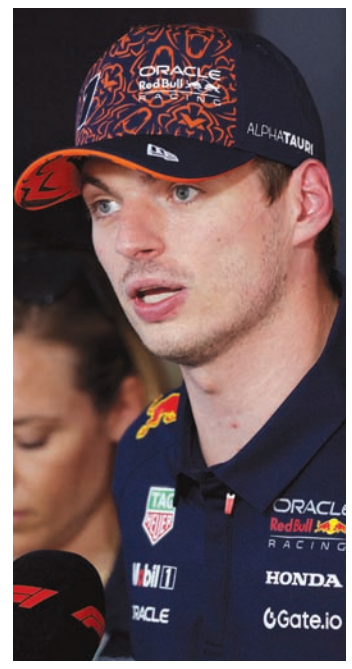
The Dutchman is contracted to Red Bull until 2028, but with release clauses - that may relate to a possible exit by adviser Helmut Marko amid claims that he could be replaced by four-time champion Sebastian Vettel. On track, Verstappen delayed his entry by 12 minutes and worked his way into contention, but with 15 minutes remaining he was adrift of the two McLarens by three-tenths with Mercedes and Ferrari struggling to keep pace.

It was another session of few incidents with Tsunoda and Oliver Bearman having brushes with gravel traps and Nico Hulkeberg ran off at Turn One, but few dramas although Hamilton was called to see the stewards for accidentally impeding Antonelli.

SPOTLIGHT

Mercedes' Wolff admits interest in Verstappen

AFP
Spielberg bei Knittelfeld, Austria



Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff yesterday suggested he was interested in signing **Max Verstappen** to partner George Russell in a potentially explosive driver line-up for the 2026 season.

During a series of interviews, it emerged that he had made contract with the four-time world champion and that this had affected contract talks with Russell who has been in outstanding form this year.

Russell said that it was entirely "normal that conversations with the likes of Verstappen are ongoing", adding that a team that aims to win the championship has to go for the best drivers, engineers and pit-crews to succeed. "But from my side, if I'm performing as I'm doing, what have I got to be concerned about? There are two seats in every Formula 1 team."

Wolff has flirted with the idea of recruiting Verstappen for some time, but also expressed satisfaction with the current partnership of Russell and teenage rookie Kimi Antonelli – a precocious talent, but not yet an experienced or metronomic points-scorer. It may be, as many seasoned observers believe, that Wolff feels he can manage the testy rivalry between Russell and Verstappen, who have clashed several times in the last year both on and off the track.

But, he conceded, it remains much more likely that Russell will stay at Mercedes next year – his contract ends this season – than that Verstappen, who is contracted to Red Bull until 2028, will arrive. "He has been part of our programme for 10 years," Wolff said. "He's always performed to the expectations and he's continuing to do so. These are normal business contract discussions as I have been doing for 30 years... And contract discussions are not held in Town Halls."

He added in a separate interview: "At the moment, clearly you need to explore what's happening in the future, but it doesn't change anything of what I said before about George, about Kimi, about the line-up that I'm extremely happy having".

Verstappen declined to comment on the speculation when asked in a news conference on Thursday, but he is known to be frustrated with his Red Bull car this year. "I don't think we need to talk about that," the 27-year-old said. "It's not really on my mind. Just driving well, trying to push the performance and then we focus on next year."

Much may depend on events at Red Bull where long-serving team consultant Helmut Marko is a key part of Verstappen's inner circle, but may be considering his own future amid reports that four-time champion Sebastian Vettel has been approached to replace him.

In the wake of the departures of F1's most successful designer Adrian Newey to Aston Martin and sporting director Jonathan Wheatley to Sauber-Audi, it could be that Verstappen is also ready to leave. Next year will see F1 move into a new era with major rule changes requiring new engines and new cars – an opportunity that may favour a Mercedes revival.

Hamilton given formal warning as difficult Ferrari start continues

Spielberg bei Knittelfeld, Austria: Lewis Hamilton's difficult start to life at Ferrari continued yesterday as he was handed a warning by the race stewards after winding up 10th in second practice for the Austrian Grand Prix.

The seven-time champion was alleged to have impeded his successor at Mercedes, Italian teenage rookie Kimi Antonelli, at turn four of the fast and technical Red Bull Ring circuit in the Styrian Alps.

Hamilton apologised immediately and explained that he had not seen Antonelli approaching behind him as he descended over the crest of a hill on a slow lap and drifted into the racing line.

Hamilton raised his hand to signal his apology to Antonelli as he passed him. After speaking to Hamilton, the stewards decided to give the Briton a formal warning – the usual sanction for such a misdemeanour in practice.

It is the third time this season that Hamilton has been warned. "The driver of car 44 (Hamilton), although constantly checking his mirrors after being informed by the team about car 12 (Antonelli) closing in, slowly moved on to the racing line on the approach to turn four and thereby unnecessarily impeded car 12 which had to take evasive action," said the stewards in a statement.

Hamilton was given a three-place grid drop at the Monaco Grand Prix where he impeded four-time champion Max Verstappen in qualifying when his race engineer Riccardo Adami wrongly informed him that the Dutchman was not on a flying lap.

Hamilton struggled with gearbox problems yesterday as he evaluated a new floor design on his Ferrari car. His team-mate Charles Leclerc was fifth, six-tenths off the pace of McLaren's Lando Norris.



FOOTBALL

Brentford appoint former set-piece coach Andrews as new manager

AFP
London



Brentford yesterday confirmed the appointment of former set-piece coach Keith Andrews as their new manager to replace Thomas Frank. Frank left the Bees to take charge of Tottenham earlier this month after guiding Brentford to a 10th-place finish in the Premier League last season.

Andrews was the surprise choice to succeed Frank, with Brentford reportedly picking him ahead of Ipswich boss Kieran McKenna and former Ajax manager Francesco Farioli. Owner Matthew Benham's decision to hand Andrews his first managerial role is a significant gamble.

Andrews, a former Irish international, joined Brentford's backroom staff in 2024 to work as their set-piece expert. The 44-year-old has previously held coaching roles with Sheffield United, MK Dons and Ireland. Andrews is confident he can rise to the challenge of maintaining the impressive work done by Frank in his seven-year reign in west London.

"Pretty humbled would be the overriding feeling, honoured that I'm the person that's been chosen to take the club into the next chapter," Andrews said. "I'm very appreciative of the owner, the board and the staff that have supported this decision. It's an opportunity I feel I'm very capable of doing and ready to do."

Frank led Brentford back to the top-flight in 2021 after an absence of 74 years and established the Bees in the Premier League. Like Andrews, Frank was also promoted from the backroom staff to take over as Brentford boss when Dean Smith left in 2018.

Andrews established Brentford as one of the Premier League's most effective sides at set-pieces last season and was also hailed for his impact on their habit of scoring early in games. "I love being on the grass, I love developing young players, I love seeing the growth in young players as players and as human beings. There's clear alignment between myself and the football club on that," he said.

However, Andrews takes over facing a potential rebuilding job at Gtech Community Stadium. Goalkeeper Mark Flekken has joined Bayer Leverkusen, winger Bryan Mbeumo is the subject of a second bid from Manchester United and midfielder Christian Norgaard is reportedly set to move to Arsenal.

"Keith is a very, very good person," said director of football Phil Giles. "He has good values and fits our culture well. He gets on with everyone, he's very open and he's a learner. He's got very clear ideas about how he wants the team to improve.... He's a perfect fit for what we were looking for."

Andrews' first league game in charge will be at Nottingham Forest on August 17.

LYON SAYS IT CAN COMPETE IN EUROPE IF THEY OVERTURN RELEGATION

Lyon, France: Lyon will be able to play in Europe next season if they win their appeal against relegation to the French second division, the club said. On Tuesday, French football's financial watchdog (DNCG) demoted the club.

Lyon, who finished sixth in Ligue 1 last season and qualified for the Europa League, said at once they would appeal. yesterday, they said that UEFA – the governing body of European football – was prepared to accept them into continental competition.

"Olympique Lyonnais completed the financial sustainability procedure and signed an agreement with the UEFA Club Financial Control Body," the club said on their web site. "The club could therefore participate in next season's Europa League, subject to a favourable outcome of the appeal of the DNCG decision."

After the DNCG initially ruled in November that Lyon would be relegated at the the end of the season, UEFA began monitoring the club. On May 5, UEFA fined Lyon 200,000 euros ($234,400) for unpaid bills to other clubs, to employees, and to the tax and social security authorities. After the DNCG ruling confirmed its initial decision, the club said they had met "all of its demands".

While they were unable to convince the French watchdog, UEFA has ruled Lyon could play in Europe. Lyon will have seven days to appeal from the date they are officially notified of the DNCG's ruling. The club said Friday they had not yet received the notification.

CHINA SACKS COACH IVANKOVIC AFTER WORLD CUP FLOP

China's football association said it has sacked national coach Branko Ivankovic after the country failed to qualify for the 2026 World Cup. The decision followed a series of setbacks in qualifying for China, who have only ever played once in a World Cup.

China lost 1-0 to Indonesia in early June, a result that effectively dashed the national team's hopes of qualifying. They ultimately finished second-to-last in their Asian group, with seven defeats in 10 matches. The Serbian coach of the Chinese U-19 men's national team, Dejan Djurdjevic, has been appointed interim national coach, the CFA said.

The Chinese team are ranked 94th in the world by FIFA, continuing a downward slide that began several years ago. The side have long been the target of ridicule by Chinese fans due to their poor results and the multiple corruption scandals plaguing the sport.

MANAGER VAN NISTELROOY LEAVES RELEGATED LEICESTER

Ruud van Nistelrooy has left Leicester nearly 10 weeks after they were relegated from the Premier League, the club announced. Leicester said in a statement they had "mutually agreed" with the Dutchman that his contract would be terminated with immediate effect.

Van Nistelrooy, 48, joined the struggling Foxes in late November after a brief spell as Manchester United's caretaker boss. But he was unable to stop their slide and they returned to the second-tier Championship after just one season back in the top division.