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CRICKET | Page 2

Captain Gill hits another hundred against England in second Test



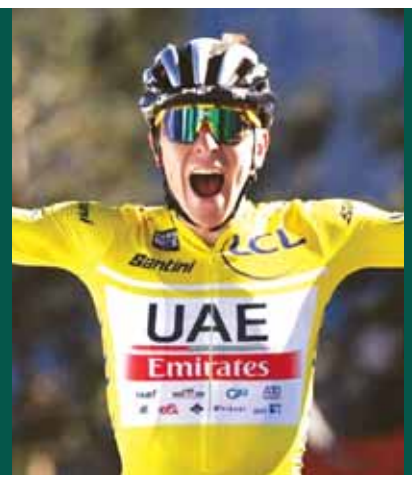
FOOTBALL | Page 4

Real Madrid oust Juventus as Dortmund reach quarter-finals

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CYCLING

Pogacar eyes fourth Tour de France crown as rivals scramble to keep pace

Page 3

WIMBLEDON

Ruthless Alcaraz ends Tarvet's adventure

Paolini crashes out as Sabalenka to meet Raducanu in third round

AFP
London

Carlos Alcaraz spoiled Oliver Tarvet's Wimbledon adventure as the defending champion moved into the third round with a 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 win over the British amateur, while last year's runner-up Jasmine Paolini became the latest star to crash out yesterday.

A record-breaking number of seeds crashed out at the All England Club in the first round, but Alcaraz and women's world number one Aryna Sabalenka avoided seismic shocks on Centre Court.

Second-seeded Alcaraz needed two hours and 17 minutes to subdue world number 733 Tarvet, who produced flashes of his emerging talent to delight the partisan crowd.

"First of all I have to give big praise to Oliver. In his second match on the tour, I just loved his game to be honest," Alcaraz said.

"I knew I had to play my best tennis. I was really happy with my performance but big praise to him as well."

Alcaraz has won his past 20 matches since losing to Holger Rune in the Barcelona final in April, a blistering streak that has brought him titles at the Rome Masters, the French Open and Queen's Club.

The 22-year-old Spaniard, who fought back from two sets down to beat Jannik Sinner on clay in an epic final at Roland Garros last month, has won 31 of his 34 Tour-level matches on grass.

His last defeat at Wimbledon came against Sinner in the fourth round in 2022.

Having vanquished Novak Djokovic in the past two Wimbledon finals, the world number two hopes to become the fifth man in the Open Era to win at least three consecutive Wimbledon titles after seven-time champion Djokovic, Bjorn Borg, Roger Federer and Pete Sampras.

In stark contrast to Alcaraz's fame and fortune, the unheralded Tarvet is just starting his tennis career and cannot even collect all of his Wimbledon prize money. As a student of the University of San Diego, the 21-year-old has to maintain amateur status and will have to give up most of his earnings.

While Alcaraz is a five-time Grand Slam champion, Tarvet was playing just his second major main draw match after coming through three qualifiers and beating Leandro Riedi in the opening round.

"It was just really special. It's not every day that you get to play against maybe the best player in the world. I did a pretty good job of enjoying the moment and trying to play some good tennis, Tarvet said.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (left) with Britain's Oliver Tarvet at the end of their second round match on the third day of the Wimbledon Championships yesterday. Alcaraz won 6-1, 6-4, 6-4. *(AFP)*

In the first two days, nine of the top 10 seeded players across the men's and women's singles draws were eliminated, a Grand Slam record in the Open era.

Second seed Coco Gauff, third seed Jessica Pegula and fifth seed Zheng Qinwen all lost in the first round. And Italian fourth seed Paolini was next to stumble in the second round.

Paolini, beaten by Barbora Krejcikova in the 2024 Wimbledon title match, slumped to a 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 defeat against Russian world number 62 Kamilla Rakhimova.

Sabalenka bucked the trend, out-duelling 48th-ranked Marie Bouzkova 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in a heavy-hitting contest.

The Belarusian, who suffered painful defeats in the finals of both the Australian Open and the French Open this year, lashed an impressive 41 winners in a match lasting one hour and 35 minutes. "Honestly it's very sad to see so many top players losing but you better focus on yourself," said the three-time Grand Slam winner.

"I hope it's no upsets anymore in this tournament, if you know what I mean!"

Sabalenka's next opponent is Britain's Emma Raducanu, the former US Open champion beating 2023 Wimbledon winner Marketa Vondrousova 6-3, 6-3.

Sixth seed and Australian Open champion Madison Keys also advanced, making short work of Serbia's Olga Danilovic in a 6-4, 6-2 win.

On the men's side, 13 seeded players lost in the first round, breaking the previous tournament record of 11 and tying the 2004 Australian Open for the most at a Grand Slam.

American 12th seed Frances Tiafoe was the latest leading man to endure a surprise defeat, losing to British world number 61 Cameron Norrie 4-6, 6-4, 6-3, 7-5 in the second round.



Aryna Sabalenka celebrates after winning a point against Marie Bouzkova during their second round match yesterday. *(AFP)*

FOOTBALL

Lopetegui announces Qatar squad for Austria training camp

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Spanish coach Julen Lopetegui has announced the Qatar national football team's squad for the upcoming training camp in Austria, scheduled from July 11-27.

The camp is held as part of preparations for the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers play off, which will be co-hosted by Qatar and Saudi Arabia and will be held in a centralised format from October 8-14, 2025.

Al Sadd midfielder Guilherme Torres has received his first call-up to Qatar, while as announced on Monday veteran forward Hassan al-Haydos makes a surprise return following his retirement from international football earlier this year. The 33-year-old, Qatar's most capped player with 183 appearances and 41 goals, was included at the request of Lopetegui.

Al-Haydos, a two-time AFC Asian Cup winner (2019 and 2023), recently renewed his contract with Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd and has continued to contribute at club level. Several changes were made from the squad that faced Iran and Uzbekistan in May. Goalkeeper Saad al-Sheeb was omitted, while Marwan Sharif and Shehab al-Laithi were brought in. Al Duhail defender Youssef Ayman and Al Sadd's Abdullah al-Yazidi were also included in the defensive ranks.

As part of the camp, Al Annabi will play two international friendly matches. Qatar missed out on direct qualification for World Cup after finishing fourth in Group A during the third round of the Asian qualifiers, but managed to secure a spot in the play-offs.

A total of six teams — Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE, Oman, and Indonesia — will compete in the play-off.

These teams will be divided into two groups of three, with each group playing in a round-robin format. The group winners will qualify directly for the World Cup. The second-placed teams from each group will face off in a two-legged playoff on November 13 and 18, 2025.

The winner will then advance to the intercontinental play-off. The official draw for the Asian play-off will be held on July 17 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



Qatar to host next year's boys' U-17 volleyball World Championship

Doha: Qatar was named as the host country for the 2026 FIVB Volleyball Boys' U-17 World Championship, which will be held in Doha from August 19-29, 2026. The FIVB Board of Administration also approved Chile as the host country for the Girls' U-17 World Championship from August 5-15, 2026.

These host nominations are historic for both nations, since neither Qatar nor Chile have ever hosted a volleyball world championship in any age/gender category. The FIVB Volleyball U-17 World Championships were first held in 2024, with Lima, Peru and Sofia, Bulgaria welcoming the inaugural editions for girls and for boys, respectively. The U-17 girls of China and the U-17 boys of Italy claimed the historic titles.

QATAR'S B TEAM TO PLAY AT WILLIAM JONES BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Qatar B team will take part in the 44th edition of the William Jones International Men's Basketball Championship, which will be hosted by the Chinese Taipei Basketball Association from July 12-20. A diverse array of teams from different continents will participate, including the Qatar B team, which will play 8 matches over a span of 9 consecutive days. The teams taking part will include Qatar, Bahrain, Japan, Malaysia, the UAE, the Philippine team Strong Group, and Australia. Chinese Taipei will enter the competition with two teams, A and B, in what is anticipated to be one of the most intense and competitive tournaments regarding both participation and scheduling.

Qatar B team will kick off their tournament on July 12 against the UAE, followed by a match against Japan on July 13, and then Australia on July 14. The next day, they will compete against the Philippine team. Their matches will continue on July 16 against Chinese Taipei B, followed by a game against Bahrain on July 17, then a match against Chinese Taipei A on July 19, and they will wrap up their participation with a game against Malaysia on July 20.

CRICKET

SECOND TEST

Captain Gill leads from front as India reach 310-5 on day 1

Second century in as many Tests for the Indian skipper as visitors stabilise after early wobble





India's captain Shubman Gill (centre) and Ravindra Jadeja leave the field at the end of play on the opening day of the second Test against England at Edgbaston cricket ground in Birmingham, central England, yesterday. **Right:** India's Yashasvi Jaiswal in action. *(AFP/Reuters)*

Reuters
Birmingham

India's Shubman Gill played a masterful captain's knock to rescue India with his second century of the series on the opening day of the second Test against England as the tourists finished on 310-5 at stumps at Edgbaston yesterday.

Gill was under pressure due to his team selection after pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was rested, but the skipper played a dogged knock and barely put a foot wrong as he wore down the England bowlers while playing confident strokes.

Gill had taken 199 balls to bring up his seventh Test hundred, the slowest of his career but authoritative in the circumstances as he ended the day unbeaten on 114 while he had Ravindra Jadeja (41 not out) for company at stumps.

After Ben Stokes won the toss and put India in to bat, opener Yashasvi Jaiswal looked well set for a big score but fell in the second session to the England skipper when he was on 87 to miss out on his second ton in the series.

India have never won a Test at Edgbaston in eight attempts and when they were reeling at 211-5, England threatened to reopen wounds from the first Test at Headingley, where the tourists' lower order collapsed in both innings.

But Jadeja walked in to steady the ship and consolidated the innings with a 99-run partnership with Gill as the all-rounder rotated strike without taking any undue risks, propelling his skipper towards triple figures.

As England eagerly waited for the new ball, Joe Root bowled the 80th over in a bid to surprise the set batters but after four dot balls, Gill executed two fine sweeps to bring up a second century in the five-match series.

RAHUL FALLS

Earlier, India lost opener K L Rahul cheaply when he played on a rising delivery from Chris Woakes while Karun Nair, who was promoted up the order, fell for 31, caught in the slips just before lunch after playing some exquisite drives.

Jaiswal saw off the new ball early on in cloudy conditions but once the lush green outfield was bathed in sunshine he got into his groove and scored at nearly a run a ball, with Josh Tongue bearing the brunt of his onslaught.

Gill took the majority of the strike in the second session while Jaiswal watched on and that was when Stokes made the breakthrough. Having scored a century in the opening test, Jaiswal was on 87 when he sliced at a wide delivery and was caught behind by an ecstatic Jamie Smith to leave India on 161-3. That brought Rishabh Pant to the crease and the wicketkeeper-batter, who smashed two centuries in the first Test, launched spinner Shoaib Bashir over the deep mid-wicket boundary for the first six of the match.

But Bashir had the last laugh as Pant (25) lived dangerously and the batter made another attempt to clear the ropes, only to find Zak Crawley in the deep, opening the door to the lower order.

Nitish Kumar Reddy came in and lasted six balls when Woakes struck again, tempting the India batter to leave a superb delivery that nipped back in and hit the top of off stump to send the bails flying.

England had named the same team and India made three changes, resting Bumrah as they manage his back issues through the series - a decision that baffled former players and coaches.

Sai Sudharsan and Shardul Thakur were dropped, with Reddy, Washington Sundar and Akash Deep coming into the side to strengthen the lower order.

SCOREBOARD

India 1st Innings

Y. Jaiswal *c Smith b Stokes*	87
KL Rahul *b Woakes*	2
K. Nair *c Brook b Carse*	31
S. Gill *not out*	114
R. Pant *c Crawley b Bashir*	25
N. Kumar Reddy *b Woakes*	1
R. Jadeja *not out*	41
Extras *(b1, lb4, nb4)*	**9**
Total *(5 wkts, 85 overs, 392 mins)*	**310**

Fall of wickets: 1-15 (Rahul), 2-95 (Nair), 3-161 (Jaiswal), 4-208 (Pant), 5-211 (Kumar Reddy)

Bowling: Woakes 21-6-59-2 (1nb); Carse 16-2-49-1; Tongue 13-0-66-0; Stokes 15-0-58-1 (3nb); Bashir 19-0-65-1; Root 1-0-8-0.

MATCH REPORT

Bangladesh collapse to hand Sri Lanka big win

AFP
Colombo

Bangladesh suffered a stunning batting collapse under lights as Sri Lanka snatched a 77-run victory in the first one-day international in Colombo yesterday.

Chasing a modest 245, the visitors looked to be cruising at 100 for one, before the wheels came off spectacularly - losing seven wickets for just five runs in the space of 26 balls to be eventually shot out for 167.

It was a catastrophic implosion that saw the visitors go from cruise control to crisis mode in the blink of an eye.

The turning point came with the run out of the set Najmul Hossain Shanto, who had been looking in ominous touch during a fluent 71-run stand with Tanzid Hasan.

Shanto, fresh off twin tons in the recent drawn Galle Test, was beginning to assert himself when he called for a risky second run, only to be caught short by a bullet throw from debutant Milan Rathnayake from deep mid-wicket. That moment turned the tide - and Sri Lanka pounced.



Sri Lanka's captain Charith Asalanka celebrates after scoring a century during the first ODI against Bangladesh at the R Premadasa International Cricket Stadium in Colombo yesterday. *(AFP)*

Enter spin twins Wanindu Hasaranga and Kamindu Mendis, who spun a web around the bewildered Bangladesh middle order. The pair shared seven wickets between them as Bangladesh cracked under pressure.

Hasaranga struck twice in his opening over - trapping Litton Das plumb in front for a duck and then watching Janith Liyanage pull off a blinder at mid-off to send Tanzid back to the pavilion for a top score of 62.

Mendis, the ambidextrous spinner who bowls both right-arm off-spin and left-arm orthodox, then joined the act. His variation proved too much for the shell-shocked tourists.

It was a night to remember for Hasaranga, who brought up a personal milestone as he claimed his 100th ODI wicket - becoming the second fastest Sri Lankan to the mark in 64 games, just one behind Ajantha Mendis. He finished with four for 10.

Sri Lanka were penalised with five penalty runs added to the extras for starting the 36th over of Bangladesh's innings late after being warned twice earlier in the evening.

Skipper Charith Asalanka's fighting century held Sri Lanka's innings together after they were rocked early at 29 for three. The left-hander mixed caution with aggression to compile his fifth ODI hundred.

Asalanka found handy allies in the lower middle order to steer Sri Lanka to 244 before being bowled out with four deliveries to spare. His knock proved to be the difference on a day when composure under pressure separated the two sides.

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 244 (Asalanka 106, Mendis 45, Taskin 4-47, Tanzim 3-46) **beat Bangladesh 167** (Tanzid 62, Jaker 51, Hasaranga 4-10, Kamindu 3-19) **by 77 runs**

India's omission of Bumrah causes widespread bafflement

Birmingham: As India went into the second Test against England yesterday without pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, former players and coaches questioned the thinking behind resting the world's best bowler when they trail 1-0 in the series.

Bumrah took five wickets in the opening game at Headingley as England struggled to handle his pace and movement but the 31-year-old was rested with an eye on the third Test at Lord's starting four days after the match at Edgbaston.

Bumrah has been trying to manage his workload due to back problems, the primary reason why he did not want to be considered for the Test captaincy, while coach Gautam Gambhir said he would play only three out of the five tests.

"This is an important match for us but the third match at Lord's - there may be something more in the wicket and we thought we'll play him (Bumrah) there," India captain Shubman Gill said at the toss where England put India in to bat.

But dropping Bumrah, who is ranked number one among Test bowlers, left former India coach Ravi Shastri fuming.

"If you look at the run India has had, this becomes a very, very important Test match," Shastri said on *Sky Sports*.

"You've lost three (in a row) against New Zealand, you've lost three against Australia, you've lost the first Test match here, and you want to get back to winning ways.

"You have the best fast bowler in the world and you make him sit out after seven days of rest? It's something very hard to believe."

Former Australian cricketer and coach Tom Moody said the decision to rest Bumrah was "baffling" and that picking several all-rounders to add batting depth after the tail collapsed in Headingley could backfire.

India dropped Sai Sudharsan and Shardul Thakur from the lineup, with Nitish Kumar Reddy, Washington Sundar and Akash Deep coming in.

"No Bumrah is one thing, but to only have five specialist batsmen is a gamble," Moody said on X.

"The fixation on all-rounders who are there to offer depth with bat and ball has never worked. Specialists are always going to offer more over a Test."

Former England skipper Nasser Hussain said India may have panicked despite playing well at Headingley where they scored five centuries but were let down by poor catching.

"At times, Bumrah was unplayable. It was the catching and the collapses. They were the two areas of concern," he said.

PREVIEW

Australia's fit-again Smith set to play second Test against the West Indies

Reuters
Grenada, West Indies

Australia are set to be reinforced by Steve Smith's return to their top order but may miss his reassuring presence in the slip cordon in the second Test against West Indies in Grenada this week.

Smith missed Australia's victory in the series opener in Bridgetown with a dislocated finger in his right hand, an injury suffered during the World Test Championship final against South Africa last month.

The 36-year-old has reunited with the squad at the National Cricket Stadium and is likely to replace Josh Inglis, who managed five and 12 batting at number four in Bridgetown, in the second Test beginning today.

"Anytime you add 10,000 runs back into the line-up, you're going to be pretty happy with it," Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey said of Smith's impending return after their training yesterday.

"He seems pretty confident, so he's excited to get back in.

"It's been tough at the top of the order, so to add a little bit more experience is good for the group, but I think they've (been) doing a pretty good job as well."

Australia were all out for 180 in the first innings in the opening test and were 65-4 in the second before fifties by Travis Head, Beau Webster and Carey propped them up.

Smith did some catching practice but *ESPNcricinfo* reported he would not take his usual position in the slip cordon. West Indies have a bigger headache with their slip cordon having spilled seven catches in the opening match to let Australia off the hook.

"I think the biggest thing is we shot ourselves in the foot," West Indies head coach Daren Sammy said.

"You cannot drop seven catches against the world's number one team and expect to compete."

MAHARAJ SIDELINED, MULDER TO LEAD SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa will be further depleted for the second Test against Zimbabwe starting in Bulawayo on Sunday after stand-in skipper Keshav Maharaj was ruled out with a left groin strain.

That will be down to three with Senuran Muthusamy to replace Maharaj. All-rounder Wiaan Mulder will skipper the side as they search for a 2-0 series win.

Seamer Lungi Ngidi, who played in the WTC final, missed the first Test and was expected to join the team in Zimbabwe ahead of the second match but Cricket South Africa has cancelled that plan.

India tour to Bangladesh could be rescheduled

Dhaka: India's white-ball tour of Bangladesh in August could be rescheduled because it needs clearance from the Indian government, a senior Bangladesh cricket official told AFP yesterday.

The series, including three one day and three T20 matches, is due to start on August 17 in Dhaka.

However, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) media committee chairman Iftikhar Rahman told AFP that its Indian counterpart, the BCCI, has informed them the tour might be delayed. The BCCI has not made any comment on the tour. "The tour is part of the FTP (International Cricket Council's Future Tours Programme), so cancellation is not an option. But it may be rescheduled to a mutually convenient time," Rahman said, without giving further details. The uncertainty follows recent diplomatic tension between Dhaka and New Delhi after Bangladesh's mass uprising toppled then prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

TENNIS

Zverev considers therapy after shock Wimbledon exit

AFP
London

Alexander Zverev is considering therapy to talk through his mental health issues after admitting he feels "alone" and "empty" following his earliest Grand Slam exit since 2019.

The German third seed was stunned by France's Arthur Rinderknech in the Wimbledon first round on Tuesday.

Zverev, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, slipped to a shock 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (8/10), 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4 defeat against the world number 72 in a marathon clash lasting four hours and 40 minutes on Centre Court.

The 28-year-old is the highest-ranked seed to fall so far in this year's men's singles at the All England Club. In a remarkably open and honest press conference, Zverev said he was struggling to cope with life on the gruelling tennis circuit.

"It's funny, I feel very alone out there at times. I struggle mentally. I've been saying that since after the Australian Open," he said.

"I'm trying to find ways, trying to find ways to kind of get out of this hole. I keep kind of finding myself back in it in a way.

"I feel, generally speaking, quite alone in life at the moment, which is a feeling that is not very nice."

Asked if he would consider therapy to cure his issues, Zverev said: "Maybe for the first time in my life I'll probably need it.

"I've been through a lot of difficulties. I've been through a lot of difficulties in the media. I've been through a lot of difficulties in life generally.

"I've never felt this empty before. Just lacking joy, just lacking joy in everything that I do. It's not necessarily about tennis. Just lacking joy outside of tennis, as well.

"Even when I'm winning, even when I'm winning like in Stuttgart or Halle, it's not necessarily, like, a feeling that I used to get where I was happy, over the moon, I felt motivated to keep going.

"It's just not there right now for me, which, again, is the first time in my life which I'm feeling it."

Zverev, who reached the Australian Open final in January, endured his latest Wimbledon flop in a tie that initially started on Monday evening. When play was halted due to Wimbledon's 2200 GMT curfew, the match was level at one-set all. But Rinderknech seized his chance once play resumed in the blazing London heat on Tuesday afternoon.

Rinderknech hit 25 aces and although Zverev replied with 31 of his own, it was not enough to stave off an embarrassing defeat. Zverev has failed to make it past the fourth round at Wimbledon in nine visits to the grass-court major.

He had reached at least the second round in his previous 20 Grand Slam appearances.

Last year a German court dropped a case against Zverev concerning allegations he assaulted his ex-girlfriend Brenda Patea after a settlement was agreed.

In January 2023, the ATP, which runs the men's tennis tour, closed an investigation into allegations of domestic abuse against Zverev involving a female tennis player after finding insufficient evidence.

The ATP had opened the probe in 2021 following allegations made by his former girlfriend, Olya Sharypova.



Germany's Alexander Zverev plays a forehand return to France's Arthur Rinderknech during their first round match of the Wimbledon. *(AFP)*

CYCLING

Champ Pogacar eyes 4th Tour de France crown

SLOVENIAN SEEKS FOURTH TOUR TITLE TO MATCH FROOME



Reuters
Paris

Reigning champion **Tadej Pogacar** begins his bid for a fourth Tour de France title on Saturday, seeking to cement his status among cycling's greatest all-rounders, with rivals Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel hoping to find a weakness in his armour.

The race's 112th edition begins in Lille, with Slovenia's Pogacar, who previously triumphed in 2020, 2021, and 2024, aiming to join Britain's Chris Froome in the elite club of four-time winners.

That would edge him closer to the record five titles held by Bernard Hinault, Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx and Miguel Indurain.

The 26-year-old world champion's scintillating spring classics campaign, featuring victories at the Tour of Flanders and Liege-Bastogne-Liege plus podiums at Milan-Sanremo and Paris-Roubaix, showcased his versatility and drew comparisons to Merckx and Hinault.

Pogacar's dominance continued at last month's Criterium du Dauphine, where he claimed three stages and overall victory by 59 seconds over two-time Tour winner Vingegaard.

"For sure, this helps the morale and motivation for the Tour because it is the biggest goal of the season. I think it is a mental boost for all the team," he said after his commanding performance.

His sole vulnerability emerged during the Dauphine's 17.4km time trial, where he conceded 48 seconds to Evenepoel and 28 to Vingegaard – a potential weakness with two time trials totalling 43.9km awaiting in this year's Tour. Denmark's Vingegaard, enjoying smoother preparation than last year when he was recovering from a serious injury, aims to reclaim the crown after finishing over six minutes behind Pogacar in 2024.

The 28-year-old, who won the Tour in 2022 and 2023, suffered a concussion during March's Paris-Nice but rebounded to take second at the Dauphine. Vingegaard will be backed by a strong Visma-Lease a Bike team featuring Giro d'Italia winner Simon Yates, 2023 Vuelta a Espana champion Sepp Kuss, two-time Paris-Nice winner Matteo Jorgenson and the versatile Wout van Aert.

"With these eight very strong riders, we believe in the plan we made for the Tour de France. From day one we will have to be there as a team to optimally assist Jonas in the general classification," said Grischa Niermann, Visma's head of racing. "We have an optimal preparation behind us and with that, we think we can get the best possible result."

Belgium's Evenepoel, who claimed third on his Tour debut last year, underwent surgery after crashing during December training.

The double Olympic champion made a remarkable comeback, winning April's Brabantse Pijl before the Soudal Quick-Step rider finished fourth at the Dauphine, over four minutes behind Pogacar.

Germany's Florian Lipowitz emerges as a potential dark horse after his Paris-Nice runner-up finish and third place at the Dauphine. The Tour's 3,338.8km route features 52,500 metres of climbing across 21 stages of cycling's ultimate test.

Hinault backs 'complete rider' Pogacar for Tour glory

With the Tour de France set to get underway in Lille on Saturday, French cycling legend Bernard Hinault has thrown his voice firmly behind Tadaj Pogacar, saying the Slovenian can go on to break his record for Tour victories.

Hinault is one of four riders, along with Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx and Miguel Indurain to have won the Tour five times but he believes Pogacar can close on that group by adding to his victories in 2020, 2021 and 2024.

"For me, yes, he is the favourite, unless he has a major breakdown but I don't believe that at all," Hinault told AFP.

"When you see what he was able to do in the Dauphine, he was in control, he did what he wanted, when he wanted. "Pogacar, when he sees that he has the chance to pull the trigger he pulls the trigger – a bit like Eddy (Merckx).

"When he attacks, as he did at the world championships, with 100 kilometres to go, everyone says: 'what a stupid thing to do'. At the end, he won. And that's fabulous to see."

The Team UAE rider started the season by taking his 'home' UAE Tour, then won four one-day races, including Liege-Bastogne-Liege, finishing on the podium in three others.

He ended his Tour preparation with a brilliantly controlled performance in the eight-day Criterium du Dauphine when he beat Jonas Vingegaard – his main rival for the Tour and himself looking for a third title – by 59 seconds.

The 26-year-old Slovenian goes into this year's Tour, his sixth, with an extraordinary record in his previous five, having clocked two second-places behind Vingegaard in 2022 and 2023 to go with his three victories. Hinault, 70, sees him as a genuine challenger for the record of Tour wins.

"I think that Pogacar will really leave his mark on cycling for a few years to come," says Hinault.

"He is perhaps the only one who will be able to beat the record.

"He is only 26 years old. When you look at the list of victories he's already won, he's well on schedule.

"He's already won three Tours de France, the Giro d'Italia, the world championship title, the classics... He's a complete rider."

Hinault – known as 'The Badger' during his career – was less hopeful that this year's race might yield the first French winner since his last victory 40 years ago in 1985.

"We're a bit sad that we haven't had a Frenchman win the Tour," he said.

"We're still a cycling country, we still have some of the best races in the world, and then all of a sudden, nothing.

"That's life, that's the way it is. We don't have super champions with extraordinary physical abilities, like some nations.

"When you look at it, everyone else would have to fail (for a Frenchman to win)."

FORMULA 1

Three Britons can win British GP but Piastri has his own script

Reuters
London

Three British winners have their sights on a home grand prix victory this weekend but Oscar Piastri could rain on that particular parade as Formula One returns to where the championship started 75 years ago.

Australia's championship leader can still count on plenty of support as a McLaren driver but much of the crowd, and certainly the 10,000 in Silverstone's sold-out 'Landostand', will be cheering more for British teammate Lando Norris.

Norris won Piastri's home grand prix in Melbourne in March, an added incentive for the Australian at Silverstone, and the pair are turning the season into a two-horse race as the campaign reaches the halfway point. Piastri is chasing a sixth win in 12 races while Norris arrives from Austria on a high after dominating every practice session he took part in, taking pole by a huge margin and holding off his teammate to win.

The two are 15 points apart, with Red Bull's reigning four-times world champion Max Verstappen third overall but now a hefty 61 points off the lead after a first retirement of the season at his team's home track at Spielberg. "My favourite weekend of the year," said Norris, who has yet to take back-to-back wins. "It's already a special circuit but to also have my family, friends, home fans and so many of the team there supporting us takes it to another level. I'll try to make sure I give the fans a wave as I drive past."

Piastri recalled he had fans chanting his name at Silverstone not so long ago.

"I am not sure I will get that again but they have always been very accepting of me. I race for a British team. I am expecting that there will be more Lando fans than there are for me but that's fair enough," he said.

If Norris's support is strong, then Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton will always be the big sentimental favourite. The last two races have been won by British drivers – George Russell for Mercedes in Canada and then Norris last weekend. Could Hamilton make it three and send the crowd crazy?

The 40-year-old won with Mercedes last year for a record ninth time and taking that tally into double figures, in what will be his first home appearance in the Italian team's red colours, would be something else.

Ferrari are the only top-four team without a win this season, other than Hamilton's Shanghai sprint success, and the seven-times world champion has yet to stand on the podium for his new employers. He has also gone 13 races without a top-three finish, a career low.

On the plus side, Ferrari were second fastest in Austria with Charles Leclerc third and Hamilton fourth and a new floor seems to be doing what it was supposed to do.

Hamilton usually manages to produce something special at Silverstone, set to welcome a record half-million fans this time over the four days. Last year he turned up after 52 races without a win and seized one of the most emotional triumphs of his extraordinary career.

Russell, on pole as Hamilton's teammate last year, also has a strong chance – particularly if temperatures cool – and will be eager to bounce back from a tough weekend in Austria.

Italian rookie teammate Kimi Antonelli meanwhile carries over a three-place grid drop from Austria. Britain's fourth driver, Oliver Bearman at Haas, will be targeting points while the same applies to British-born Thai Alex Albon at Williams.



McLaren's Oscar Piastri waves at spectators at the McLaren event in Trafalgar Square in London yesterday. *(Reuters)*

MCLAREN BOSS OFFERS PITT SECOND CHANCE TO HIT 200MPH

Brad Pitt's F1 movie is topping the box office charts worldwide but the Hollywood A-lister is not done with Formula One, or racing.

Like his fictional big screen character Sonny Hayes, Pitt has been offered a second chance to don race overalls and lap at 200mph.

McLaren F1 chief executive Zak Brown told Reuters yesterday that Pitt had a standing offer to "come out and play" – and expected the 61-year-old not only to take him up on it but also take his passion for racing further.

Pitt drove a Formula One car for the first time with McLaren at Austin's Circuit of the Americas last month, after driving F2 cars disguised as F1 cars for the movie, and has been raving about the experience ever since. He did have one regret, however.

"Ask me how fast I went. Three mph short of 200mph," Pitt said at the New York premiere. "I want to go back. I want to hit 200."

Brown indicated that it could be arranged.

"He did a great job, he can drive a race car," he said at a McLaren event for the team's army of fans in London's Trafalgar Square, with title-chasing drivers Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris.

"I've traded notes with him, it was the time of his life. I feel like he's a racer now, so anytime he wants to come out and play he's more than welcome to. And that's a standing offer."

CLUB WORLD CUP

Real oust Juventus to set up Dortmund clash

Garcia headed home his third goal of the tournament in Spanish giants victory

AFP
Atlanta

Spanish giants Real Madrid beat Juventus 1-0 on Tuesday to set up a Club World Cup quarter-final clash against Borussia Dortmund, who edged Mexican side Monterrey.

Serhou Guirassy struck twice for the German outfit as they scraped past Sergio Ramos's side 2-1 in a tight last-16 clash in Atlanta and denied the former Real Madrid skipper a match-up against his former team. Youngster Gonzalo Garcia headed home his third goal of the tournament to help Madrid edge Italian side Juventus at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami earlier.

It was an impressive display from Xabi Alonso's Madrid side, unbeaten under the new coach, and they were further boosted by Kylian Mbappe's return from illness as a substitute.

"We had a lot of chances in the second half, but their goalkeeper was really good," said Madrid shot-stopper Thibaut Courtois. The first half was a finely-balanced contest with Igor Tudor's Juventus starting brightly before Real ended it on top.

Los Blancos kept turning the screw and found their goal when Trent Alexander-Arnold crossed for Gonzalo to head home after 54 minutes. Alonso decided to introduce Mbappe to the delight of the 62,149 crowd but the striker did not find any clear openings as Juve pushed for an equaliser.

Madrid's coach was pleased with his team's performance, including that of Gonzalo – who he had compared to former Real great Raul– but also suggested that Mbappe might be ready for a bigger contribution in the next game. "We will keep watching him... I think he will be much better for the quarters," Alonso said.

Alonso added that he was satisfied to see Real produce the necessary grit to grind out the result in the second half. "We had to be patient, we had to mature into the game," said the coach. "With the players and myself, you know you have to grit your teeth and do what you have to do. And in the end, we had to hold on a bit, and I'm happy about that too."

Juve boss Tudor said his team became exhausted as the game developed. "In the end there were 10 of them asking to be substituted. Obviously you can't do that but there was an incredible tiredness," he said, offering his reasons.


Real Madrid's Spanish forward Gonzalo Garcia celebrates after scoring against Juventus during the FIFA Club World Cup last 16 match at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami on Tuesday. *(AFP)*

"There is the tension of the game which burns energy but then there is the heat and humidity," explained Tudor, also noting they were at the end of a long season.

In Atlanta, Guirassy's brace was enough to help Dortmund past Monterrey in a hard-fought clash, setting them up to play a Madrid side who beat them in the 2024 Champions League final. "Real has a great team, they have many good individual players," Dortmund coach Niko Kovac told reporters. "If we put everything on the pitch, (giving) the same performance as we saw today, I think that we will have a good chance."

Guirassy netted a first-half double but German Berterame pulled one back for the Mexican side who came close to an equaliser when a late Ramos header span just wide. "I think I could have scored at least three goals but I am happy to have helped the team win," Guirassy told broadcaster said. After grinding through several games in the blazing afternoon sun during the group stage, Dortmund were grateful to be at the air-conditioned Mercedes-Benz Stadium and played at a faster pace in Atlanta.

Karim Adeyemi set up both of Guirassy's goals as the Guinea international reached 37 for the season across all competitions. A booking for Jobe Bellingham means he will be suspended for the clash against his brother Jude's Real Madrid side.

However Dortmund almost missed out entirely as Monterrey hit back in the second half, but after Berterame headed home to reduce the gap, goalkeeper Gregor Kobel made several good saves to keep them at bay. Ramos, sent up front for the final stages, put a header agonisingly wide in stoppage time as he tried to deliver on his penchant for late, decisive moments, like in Madrid's 2014 Champions League final triumph. "The crowd and our fans and the people who understand about football, they saw that the team gave everything," Ramos said, proud of his side's efforts.

FOCUS

Underdogs and heat dominate debate at Club World Cup

Reuters
Philadelphia

The inaugural expanded Club World Cup has delivered a spectacle on the pitch, with underdog triumphs and captivating support from South American and Arabic fans. However, concerns over player welfare and lukewarm attendances in the United States have sparked debate as the tournament approaches its final stages.

What many expected to be a European-dominated affair has instead seen shock eliminations of UEFA Champions League heavyweights. Brazilian sides Flamengo, Botafogo, and Fluminense, alongside Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal, have scripted some of the tournament's most thrilling stories.

Fluminense stunned Inter Milan with a 2-0 win in the Round of 16, while Al Hilal delivered a seismic upset by knocking out Pep Guardiola's Manchester City. Lionel Messi's Inter Miami also played their part earlier in the tournament, defeating Porto 2-1 in the group stage – ending a 13-year unbeaten run for European teams against clubs from other continents in the competition.

Meanwhile, Botafogo and Flamengo claimed memorable group-stage victories over Paris St Germain and Chelsea respectively, while Palmeiras secured their quarter-final berth with a dramatic extra-time win over Botafogo in an all-Brazilian clash.


Al Hilal delivered a seismic upset by knocking out Pep Guardiola's Manchester City. *(AFP)*

While the on-field action has enthralled the fans, challenges off the pitch have raised eyebrows. The American summer's extreme weather – scorching heat and unexpected thunderstorms – has disrupted matches and raised serious concerns ahead of the 2026 World Cup, which will also be held in North America.

The soaring temperatures and oppressive humidity have fuelled major complaints from players and coaches and have global players' union FIFPRO exploring whether extending halftime to 20 minutes and introducing more frequent cooling breaks could better protect players from extreme heat.

Nine of the 16 host cities for the 2026 World Cup face conditions considered 'extreme risk' for heat-related illness, posing player safety concerns and fuelling calls for more mandatory cooling aids during matches or schedule changes. "Heat conditions are a serious topic that affect football globally," world football's governing body FIFA said. "Discussions on how to deal with heat conditions need to take place collectively ... The protection of players must be at the centre."

With the semi-finals and final scheduled for 3pm local time at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium, where temperatures could reach 32 degrees Celsius, the heat debate is set to intensify. Suggestions for 2026 include scheduling midday games in covered stadiums to combat heat stress.

Thunderstorms have also caused disruptions, with matches suspended as players left the pitch and fans sought shelter. Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca criticised having the United States as hosts after a two-hour weather delay marred his team's last-16 win over Benfica in Charlotte.

Their knockout match in a half-empty stadium of under 26,000 at the start showed how attendances have also been underwhelming for matches involving European clubs, with South American and Arabic fans providing much of the tournament's vibrancy.

Despite the excitement on the pitch, FIFA's website still lists plenty of tickets available for remaining games, including next-week's semi-finals and the July 13 final, raising questions about the tournament's broader appeal in the US As FIFA reflects on the Club World Cup's successes and challenges, the lessons learned will be critical in shaping the path to the 2026 World Cup where similar issues may loom large.

Liverpool defender Quansah signs for Bayer Leverkusen

Munich: Centre-half Jarell Quansah has joined Bayer Leverkusen from Premier League champions Liverpool for a reported club record fee, the Bundesliga side announced. According to British and German press, the transfer fee for the 22-year-old could go up to 40mn euros, including 10mn euros in add-ons.

Reports said there is also a inclusion of a 60mn euros buy-back clause in the contract, which Liverpool could activate from summer 2027 to re-sign Quansah. He becomes the most expensive signing in Leverkusen's history, following on from the previous record arrival of midfielder Kerem Demirbay for 32mn euros in 2019.

The 2025 European under-21 champion with England joined Liverpool's academy as a five-year-old, and rose through the ranks before making his first-team debut in 2023. He went on to appear 58 times for the Merseysiders, winning the League Cup in 2022 and 2024, as well as the Premier League title last season.

After playing second fiddle to first-choice defensive duo Virgil van Dijk and Ibrahima Konate for much of the 2024/25 campaign, Quansah arrives at Leverkusen to replace departed former captain Jonathan Tah at the heart of the Bundesliga club's defence.

After creating league history by winning the Bundesliga undefeated in 2024, Leverkusen endured a difficult title defence last term, finishing 13 points adrift of winners Bayern Munich. Stars of their league-and-cup double from two seasons years ago, Florian Wirtz and Jeremie Frimpong, have recently gone in the opposite direction from Quansah, joining Liverpool from Leverkusen this close-season.

BAENA JOINS ATLETICO MADRID

Spanish international Alex Baena has signed for Atletico Madrid on a five-year deal, the La Liga club announced. The 23-year-old arrives from Villarreal for an unspecified fee, although Spanish media report the deal could amount to nearly 50mn euros.

"Atletico de Madrid and Villarreal have reached an agreement for the transfer of Alex Baena. The 23-year-old midfielder has signed for our club until June 30, 2030," the Rojiblancos said in a statement.

Baena came through the youth academy at Villarreal and made 148 appearances for the Yellow Submarine, scoring 26 goals and laying on 40 assists. He spent the 2021/22 season on loan at Girona, before returning to his parent club and cementing his place as the key attacking component at the 2021 Europa League champions. Baena has 10 Spain caps and was part of La Roja's European Championship-winning squad last summer.

BRANTHWAITE COMMITS LONG-TERM FUTURE TO EVERTON

Everton defender Jarrad Branthwaite has signed a new long-term deal that will keep him on Merseyside until 2030, the club said, after media reports that the Englishman had drawn interest from some of the Premier League's heavyweight sides.

Branthwaite has formed a strong partnership with James Tarkowski in the heart of the Toffees' defence, making 86 appearances in all competitions for the club since his 2020 move from English fifth-tier side Carlisle United. The 23-year-old England international, who has been capped once, had been linked to top clubs including Manchester United, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur. His previous deal was set to expire in 2027.

Younousse and Tijan make winning start at Gstaad Elite



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan beat Portuguese duo Hugo Campos and João Pedrosa 2-1 (21-18, 23-25, 15-11) in their opening match of the Gstaad Elite Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour in Switzerland yesterday. Younousse and Tijan are in Group C, where they will also face Norway's Henrik Nicolai Mol and Matthias Berntsen tomorrow, and Austrian duo Christoph Dressler and Philipp Waller.

TRANSFER

Chelsea sign Pedro from Brighton

AFP
London



Chelsea signed Brazil striker **Joao Pedro** from Brighton in a deal worth a reported £60mn yesterday. Pedro jetted to the United States, where Chelsea are playing in the Club World Cup, on Sunday after the terms of his eight-year contract were agreed.

With the transfer now confirmed following a medical, Pedro is available to play for Enzo Maresca's side in their Club World Cup quarter-final against Palmeiras in Philadelphia. FIFA has given clubs involved in the Club World Cup knockout phase until July 3 to register new players for the tournament.

Pedro, who joined Brighton for £30 million from Watford two years ago, scored 30 goals in 70 appearances for the Seagulls and has been capped three times by Brazil. The 23-year-old missed Brighton's final two matches of the season after being dropped due to a training ground altercation with teammate Jan Paul van Hecke.

Chelsea, who qualified for next season's Champions League, have already splashed out on striker Liam Delap, midfielder Dario Essugo and defender Mamadou Sarr since the end of last term.