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Tuesday, July 15, 2025
Muhamarram 20, 1447 AH

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SPOTLIGHT

Qatar continue training in Austria ahead of World Cup play-offs

By Sports Reporter

Doha

The Qatari national football team are continuing their overseas training camp in Austria, which began on July 11 and runs through July 27, as part of preparations for the World Cup play-offs this October.

Coach Julien Lopetegui is using the camp to fine-tune the squad's tactical and physical readiness in hopes of guiding Qatar to a second consecutive FIFA World Cup appearance – and their first earned through qualification, following their automatic berth as 2022 hosts.

Lopetegui announced a 30-man roster featuring several notable changes. Al Sadd midfielder Guilherme Torres earned his first national team call-up, while former captain Hassan al-Haydos, who had taken retirement after leading Qatar to second successive Asian Cup title last year, has returned to the fold at coach's request. Veteran goalkeeper Saad al-Sheeb was left out, with Marwan Sharif and Shehab al-Laithi brought in. The list also includes two fresh defensive additions: Yousef Ayman (Al Duhail) and Abdullah al-Yazidi (Al Sadd). The four goalkeepers selected are Meshal Barsham, Salab Zakaria, Marwan Sharif, and Shehab al-Laithi. Other key players include Akram Afif, Almoez Ali, Boualem Khoukhi, Karim Boudiaf, and Pedro Miguel.

Last month, the Asian Football Confederation confirmed that Qatar and Saudi Arabia will co-host the fourth round of Asian World Cup qualifiers – the continental play-offs – from October 8-14. The official draw will take place this Thursday in Kuala Lumpur.

Qatar will compete alongside Iraq,



Coach Julien Lopetegui looks on as Qatar players train in Austria yesterday.



Oman, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – the six teams that finished third and fourth in their respective groups during the third qualifying round. The teams will be split into two groups of three, with group winners earning direct qualification to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The group runners-up will face off in two-legged matches on November 13 and 18 for a spot in the intercontinental play-off.

Qatar, currently ranked 53rd in the FIFA World Rankings, booked their place in the continental play-off after finishing fourth in Group A of the third round with 13 points from 10 matches. Iran (23 points), Uzbekistan (21), and the UAE (15) finished ahead of them, while Kyrgyzstan and North Korea rounded out the group.



FOOTBALL

Maresca hails Palmer after Club World Cup triumph

These are the games we expect Palmer to appear and once again he showed what he is made of'

Reuters
East Rutherford, New Jersey

Chelsea coach Enzo Maresca praised Cole Palmer's ability to rise to the occasion after the English attacking midfielder was named Club World Cup player of the tournament following their commanding 3-0 victory over Paris St Germain in Sunday's final.

"These are the games we expect Cole Palmer to appear and once again he showed what he is made of," Maresca told a press conference after Palmer scored twice and provided an assist to Joao Pedro in their title-winning performance against the Champions League winners.

Temperatures soared above 85 degrees Fahrenheit (29.4 degrees Celsius) in East Rutherford, New Jersey, but the Chelsea talisman had ice in his veins as he bagged two goals in eight minutes in the first half.

He earned the Golden Ball as the best player of the tournament.

The man of the match in their 4-1 Conference League final win over Real Betis in May, Palmer showed again that he does his best work under the biggest spotlight, as he also recorded an assist to Joao Pedro in the 43rd minute. "I like finals. It's happened again," he said. "It's a great feeling," he added. "Even better because everyone doubted us before the game, we knew that. To put a fight on like we did, it's good."

A product of the Manchester City academy, Palmer made his senior debut with the team in September 2020 but never received the minutes on the pitch he believed he deserved, going to Chelsea three years later with the promise of more playing time.

Maresca revealed his tactical masterplan had worked to perfection, with Chelsea pressing PSG high and exploiting direct plays behind their rivals' defence to devastating effect. "The idea was go man-to-man because if you leave spaces to PSG



Chelsea's Cole Palmer earned the Golden Ball as the best player of the FIFA Club World Cup. (Reuters)

they will kill you, so we tried to be very aggressive and suffocate them early on and that intensity was crucial in the first 10 minutes due to the scorching heat, that was really difficult conditions to play as the game progresses," Maresca explained.

The Italian coach highlighted his team had successfully targeted PSG's vulnerable flank, adding: "We had a lot of success exploring the left side of their defence, things worked perfectly for us due to the effort the players put."

Maresca praised his players for deploy-

ing perfectly the gameplan he had in mind, with their high-intensity approach proving decisive in the scorching New Jersey conditions, saying that he is delighted to win a Club World Cup he thinks will be seen much differently in the future. "I feel that this competition [the Club World Cup] will be as important as or even more important than the Champions League," Maresca said.

"I was lucky enough to be part of a coaching staff [at Manchester City] that won the Champions League three years

ago, but this competition [the Club World Cup] features the best clubs in the world. That's why we value it as much as the Champions League, or perhaps even more. For us, it was a great triumph. Allowing Chelsea fans to wear that world champion patch on their shirts is a source of pride for us."

PSG'S ENRIQUE SAYS HE REGRETS POST-MATCH SCUFFLE AT FINAL

Paris St Germain manager Luis Enrique tried to play down shoving Chelsea for-

ward Joao Pedro in a near brawl between players and coaching staff following Chelsea's dominating 3-0 win in the Club World Cup final on Sunday. The incident erupted when PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma was arguing with Joao Pedro, before Luis Enrique appeared to raise his hands to the Brazilian's face.

Joao Pedro hit the deck and the PSG manager was quietly escorted away in remarkable scenes that saw players from both sides clash. "At the end of the match, there was a situation that I believe could have been avoided by everyone," Enrique said at a press conference after the match. "My objective and my intention, as always, is to try to win over the players so that there are no more problems. Internally, there is a lot of tension, a lot of pressure."

The Spanish coach acknowledged the severity of the incident, adding: "And from there, there is a series of shoves from a lot of people, which I think we should all avoid and which should not happen again."

When it came to the match, however, he was left without answers after a brutal thrashing by Chelsea in a clash of European football's most powerful and richest clubs. It was a surprise lopsided affair as Chelsea midfielder Cole Palmer poured in two goals in eight minutes in the first half and assisted striker Joao Pedro in another score before the break.

Fans expected much more from the European Cup and French league champions that had once appeared unstoppable, cruising past Real Madrid 4-0 in the semi-final stage of the expanded, 32-team tournament. They finished the match with 10 men after Joao Pedro was shown a red card in the 85th minute for violent conduct.

"Football - that's the way it is. Can't explain everything," said Luis Enrique. "I believe they actually started the game really, really well with a lot of pressure and we gave them a hard time. And then after that I believe they had opportunities to score but it didn't happen."



SPOTLIGHT

England take 2-1 lead over India with feisty Lord's win

A DAY OF DRAMA AS ENGLAND PREVAIL IN A TENSE FINISH ON THE FIFTH DAY OF THE THIRD TEST



England's Jamie Smith (left), England's Harry Brook (right) and England's Zak Crawley (second right) run past India's Mohammed Siraj as England win the Test on the fifth day of the third Test at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (AFP)



England's captain Ben Stokes and India's Ravindra Jadeja focus on the ball on the fifth day of the third Test at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
London

A thrilling series produced a gripping finale as England beat India by 22 runs in a nail-biting third Test at Lord's yesterday to go 2-1 up with two Tests to play.

India were on the brink of defeat at 147-9, still needing a further 46 runs to reach a victory target of 193, when last man Mohammed Siraj joined Ravindra Jadeja in the middle.

Nevertheless, the pair batted on until after tea on the final day to give India hope of an improbable victory. But with India eyeing a stunning success, off-spinner Shoab Bashir, who had been off the field for much of the match with a finger injury, had the final say.

As Siraj played defensively, the ball spun back past him to dislodge the leg bail with the faintest of touches to leave India 170 all out.

As the England fielders celebrated, the fiery Siraj was crestfallen as was his partner Jadeja who was left stranded on 61 not out - his fourth consecutive fifty this series - after batting for nearly four-and-a-half hours.

England captain Ben Stokes bowled two lengthy spells yesterday on his way to in-

nings figures of 3-48 in 24 overs, with fast bowler Jofra Archer - in his first Test after more than four years of injury-induced exile - taking 3-55 in 16.

'DARK PLACES'

Lively medium-pacer Stokes, whose career has been blighted by knee injuries, again proved his worth to England as a fully-fledged all-rounder.

"I thought I had taken myself to some pretty dark places before but today was... If bowling to win a Test for your country doesn't get you up, get you excited, then I don't know what does," Stokes told Sky Sports.

"The game was on the line and nothing was going to stop me bowling."

Victory came exactly six years to the day since Stokes and Archer both starred in England's dramatic 2019 50-over World Cup final win over New Zealand at Lord's.

Both bowlers made early breakthroughs yesterday, with player-of-the-match Stokes saying the anniversary was behind his decision to open the bowling with Archer.

"Jof played a big role in that and I just had one of those feelings he would do something special," said Stokes.

The 30-year-old Archer added: "It was pretty hectic for the first game back. I probably bowled a few more overs than I

thought I would have but every single one mattered today so I'm not too fussed about it."

India were all out beaten at 112-8 when tailender Jasprit Bumrah came out to bat immediately after lunch.

But Jadeja and Bumrah kept England at bay with a stubborn stand of 35 in 22 overs.

"I think the position in the morning, to make a comeback like this was tremendous from Ravindra Jadeja and the lower order," said India captain Shubman Gill.

Bumrah, defying a run of four successive noughts in Test cricket, defended gamely while making five in 54 balls only for his innings to end when he top-edged a pull off Stokes to substitute fielder Sam Cook at mid-on.

India were now 147-9 - a position that meant tea was delayed by 30 minutes.

But Jadeja, who overturned an lbw decision given against him on 26, went to fifty when a flashing cut off Stokes flew over the slips for the left-hander's fourth four in 10 balls faced.

Shortly after tea, Archer struck Siraj a painful blow on the shoulder and it was not long before he fell to Bashir.

This match became a second-innings shoot-out after both teams made 387 in their first innings.

England then posted 192 before India slumped to 58-4 when Stokes bowled

nightwatchman Akash Deep with what became the last ball of Sunday's play.

From 71-4 yesterday, the match swung England's way once more as India lost three wickets for 11 runs in collapsing to 82-7.

Rishabh Pant - who only came into bat yesterday following Deep's departure - charged down the pitch to drive Archer for a typically aggressive four.

But two balls later Archer, repeatedly topping the 90 mph mark, bowled the dangerman for nine with a superb full-length delivery that clipped the top of off stump.

India were looking to K L Rahul to anchor their chase after the opener's first-innings hundred.

But he had added just six runs to his overnight 33 when he was lbw on review to Stokes.

Archer, who made his Test debut at Lord's in 2019, then reduced India to 82-7 when he held a sharp one-handed catch and bowled chance to dismiss Washington Sundar for a duck.

Archer struck Siraj a painful blow on the shoulder and it was not long before he fell to Bashir.

This match became a second-innings shoot-out after both teams made 387 in their first innings.

England then posted 192 before India slumped to 58-4 when Stokes bowled

KL Rahul lbw b Stokes 39
K. Nair lbw b Carse 14
S. Gill lbw b Carse 6

A. Deep b Stokes 1
R. Pant b Archer 9
R. Jadeja not out 61
W. Sundar c and b Archer 0

N. Reddy c Smith b Woakes 13
J. Bumrah c sub (Sam Cook) b Stokes 5
M. Siraj b Bashir 4

Extras (lb9, nb3, w6) 18

Total (all out, 74.5 overs, 384 mins) 170

Fall of wickets: 1- (Jaiswal), 2-41 (Nair), 3-53 (Gill), 4-58 (Deep), 5-71 (Pant), 6-81 (Rahul), 7-82 (Sundar), 8-112 (Reddy), 9-147 (Bumrah), 10-170 (Siraj)

Bowling: Woakes 12-5-21-1; Archer 16-1-55-3 (1w); Stokes 24-4-48-3 (2nb); Carse 16-2-30-2 (1nb, 1w); Root 1-0-1-0; Bashir 5.5-1-6-1

Result: England won by 22 runs

Player-of-the-match: Ben Stokes (ENG)

Toss: England

Series: England lead five-match series 2-1

Previous Results:

1st Test, Headingly, Leeds:

England won by five wickets

2nd Test, Edgbaston, Birmingham: India

won by 33 runs

Remaining Fixtures:

Jul 23-27: England v India, 4th Test, Old Trafford, Manchester

Jul 31-Aug 04: England v India, 5th Test, The Oval, London

FOCUS

Boland strikes as West Indies trail Australia by 82 runs in third Test

AFP
Kingston, Jamaica

West Indies' fragile batting line-up was again exploited by Australia with the hosts routed for 143 in their first innings in an eventful middle session on the second day of the day/night third Test at Sabina Park in Jamaica on Sunday.

A day after the visitors lost their last seven wickets for 68 runs to be dismissed for 225, the Caribbean side were marginally worse, their last seven wickets tumbling for 61 as Australia's array of seamers ran riot against players ill-equipped for such a challenge.

Australia will start their second innings under lights, when the pink ball tends to be even more of a challenge for batsmen, with a lead of 82 runs.

Scott Boland, selected at the expense of veteran off-spinner Nathan Lyon, led the demolition with three for 34.

Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins claimed two wickets each in a performance that was nevertheless far from flawless as wicketkeeper Alex Carey missed two chances that could have worsened the West Indies' plight.

However, such was the discomfort of the home batsmen that they were incapable of making the most of those lapses.

Indeed, some of their wounds were self-inflicted via poor shot selection and then Justin Greaves, one of the beneficiaries of Carey's error-strewn late afternoon, ran himself out going for a third run to



Pat Cummins (left) and Scott Boland (right) of Australia celebrate the dismissal of Justin Greaves of West Indies during the 2nd day of the 3rd Test at Sabina Park, Kingston, Jamaica, on Sunday. (AFP)

Sam Konstas' throw from the cover boundary.

Having bowled without success in the day's first session when two wickets fell, Boland triggered the final slide when he had John Campbell leg-before offering no shot for a top-score of 36. He also bowled Shai Hope, who had the next best effort of 23 and then rounded off the innings with the wicket of Shamar Joseph.

At the start of the day, the West Indies found free scoring almost impossible on a seamer-friendly surface against an attack offering very few scoring opportunities.

Just 57 runs came off 23 overs for the loss of two wickets.

Hazlewood and captain Cummins were the successful bowlers on a humid afternoon, accounting

for the overnight pair of Brandon King and Roston Chase.

King was trapped lbw by a full delivery from Hazlewood while Australian captain Cummins removed his West Indian counterpart via an edge to Usman Khawaja at first slip as Chase failed to effectively negotiate a ball which lifted sharply off a good length.

Australia are seeking a clean sweep of the series after victories in the first two Tests in Barbados and Grenada.

West Indies' last Test match victory over Australia in the Caribbean was in 2003 when they set a new record for successful run-chases in Test cricket in reaching 418 for seven in Antigua to deny Ricky Ponting's team of a whitewash of the four-match series.

MATCH REPORT

South Africa cruise to opening T20 tri-series win over Zimbabwe

AFP
Harare

South Africa continued their dominance over Zimbabwe by beating their neighbouring country by five wickets in the opening match of a Twenty20 international tri-series at Harare Sports Club yesterday.

New Zealand will play their first match of the tournament when they meet South Africa at the same venue tomorrow.

Zimbabwe were restricted to 141 for six after being sent in, with captain Sikandar Raza top-scoring with 54 not out.

Both teams showed multiple changes following a two-match Test series in Bulawayo, which South Africa won comfortably.

Opening bowler Lungi Ngidi took a wicket and conceded only seven runs in a three-over opening spell.

Left-arm spinner George Linde took three for 10, including two wickets for four runs in the last over.

South Africa lost three wickets in the six-over power play against aggressive left-arm fast bowler

Richard Ngarava and seamer Trevor Gwandu. But new cap Rubin Hermann (45) and hard-hitting player of the match Dewald Brevis, who thrashed 41 off 17 balls, put on 72 for the fourth wicket to ensure a comfortable win.

South African captain Rassie van der Dussen praised the two young batsmen.

"There was a little bit of pressure up front," he said. "Losing three wickets in the power play was not ideal but their partnership was brilliant."

Brevis hit five sixes and a four in his innings, including three successive sixes off leg-spinner Ryan Burl.

Raza said Ngarava, who took three for 35, and Gwandu (two for 15) were outstanding.

"It was the first game of the winter (in Harare) and we weren't sure of the wicket," said Raza of his team's batting performance.

"At least we know these are going to be high-scoring games."

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 142 for 5 (Hermann 45, Brevis 41, Ngarava 3-35) **beat Zimbabwe 141 for 6** (Raza 54*, Bennett 30, Linde 3-10) **by five wickets**

ANNOUNCEMENT

England's Bashir out of last 2 Tests

AFP
London

Shoaib Bashir was ruled out of the remainder of England's series against India less than an hour after taking the match-clinching wicket in the third Test at Lord's yesterday.

The 21-year-old off-spinner spent much of the match off the field with a fracture to his little

left finger - on his non-bowling hand - after dropping a hard-hit return catch from Ravindra Jadeja during India's first innings.

But he returned to dismiss Mohammed Siraj after tea yesterday's final day when India's last man played a defensive shot only for the ball to trickle back onto his leg stump as England won a thrilling encounter by 22 runs.

Victory left England 2-1 up in this five-match series but they are now set to call-up a new spe-

cialist spinner for the fourth Test at Old Trafford starting on July 23, with the likes of Liam Dawson and Jack Leach vying to take Bashir's place.

"England spinner Shoaib Bashir has sustained a fracture to his left finger and has been ruled out of the remainder of the Rothesay Test series against India," said an England and Wales Cricket Board statement.

"He is scheduled to undergo surgery later this week."

TENNIS

Sinner, 23, eyes golden era after Wimbledon title glory

'THE RIVALRY IS REAL. HOPEFULLY IT'S GOING TO BE THERE FOR THE NEXT 10 OR 12 YEARS'

AFP
London

Jannik Sinner has warned Carlos Alcaraz that he will get even stronger after beating his arch-rival to win his first Wimbledon title on Sunday.

Sinner avenged an agonising French Open final loss against Alcaraz as he battered the Spaniard into submission with a dynamic display of power hitting on Centre Court.

The Italian's 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 victory ended Alcaraz's two-year reign as Wimbledon champion and gave Sinner his fourth Grand Slam crown.

Sinner has reached the last four Grand Slam finals, winning three of them, and the world number one has no intention of resting on his laurels.

"I don't think I'm at my best because at 23 I don't think you can be in your best shape ever. So hopefully I can keep improving," he said.

"I keep looking up to Carlos because even today I felt like he was doing couple of things better than I did."

"That's something we will work on and prepare ourselves because he's going to come for us again."

"We have a big target on us, so we have to be prepared."

It was a cathartic triumph for Sinner after he squandered a two-set lead and blew three championship points against Alcaraz at Roland Garros in June.

Alcaraz had won five successive encounters against the 23-year-old, including finals in Paris, Rome and Beijing, prior to their showdown at the All England Club.

Sinner admitted it was vital to finally beat the world number two for the first time since 2023.

"It is important, for sure, because you know, when you lose several times against someone, it's not easy. But in the same time in the past I felt that I was very close," he said.

"I never pushed myself down. I felt like I did something great because it has been not easy. Coming here and winning Wimbledon, it has been amazing."

While Sinner had spent the last five weeks publicly insisting he would not let his French Open collapse affect him, he revealed he had to work hard to move on from the loss before launching his Wimbledon challenge.

"This is the part where I'm the proudest because it really has not been easy. I always tried to be honest with myself and had the self-



talk. You know, what if, what if? I tried to accept it, in a way," said Sinner, who returned from a three-month doping ban in May.

"Even if I don't cry, it feels emotional because only me and the people who are close to me know exactly what we have been through

on and off the court, and it has been everything except easy."

"We've tried to push, you know, every practice session, even I

was struggling at times mentally. "That's why I also said after Roland Garros that it's not the time to put me down, no, because another Grand Slam is coming up, and I did great here."

Sinner and Alcaraz have won the past seven majors between them, establishing themselves in a class of their own.

Battle for supremacy

Sinner's coach Darren Cahill expects the pair to battle for supremacy for years to come, but he stopped short of comparing it to the dynastic era of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"It's difficult to compare this rivalry to what we've just had. It's been a golden age in tennis with Novak and Roger and Rafa. They dominated for 20 years," Cahill said.

"To win a Grand Slam back in those days, you had to beat one of them in the quarters, the other one in the semis, and another one in the final."

"These guys still have a ways to go, but they've started incredibly well. Carlos is a big focus, and both of those guys are pushing each other."

"The rivalry is real. Hopefully it's going to be there for the next 10 or 12 years."

ALCARAZ SAYS SINNER RIVALRY IS A CLASS APART

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz said he could hold his head high despite being unseated from his Wimbledon throne by Jannik Sinner on Sunday and the Spaniard praised their hot rivalry for being several notches higher than the others on the men's tour. Alcaraz's bid for a third straight title at the All England Club ended with a 4-6 6-4 6-4 6-4 loss on Centre Court, leaving him to digest his first Grand Slam final defeat. "It's always a bad feeling losing matches. It's a little bit worse when you lose in a final," said Alcaraz, who narrowly beat Sinner in a five-set humdinger at the French Open last month.

"I'm just proud about everything I've done in the last four weeks on grass at London. I leave Wimbledon, the court, with my head held really high because I did everything that I could."

"I played against someone who played an unbelievable game. So I'm just a little bit sad about losing, but with my head held

really high." Alcaraz said his rivalry with Sinner was great for the pair and also for tennis, which has had to endure the retirements of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Andy Murray in recent years with fellow great Novak Djokovic in the twilight of a glorious career. The young duo have now shared eight of the last nine Grand Slam titles, with each winning four. "Every time we play each other, I think our level is really high. We don't see a level like this ... I don't see any player playing against each other, having the level that we're playing when we face each other," Alcaraz added.

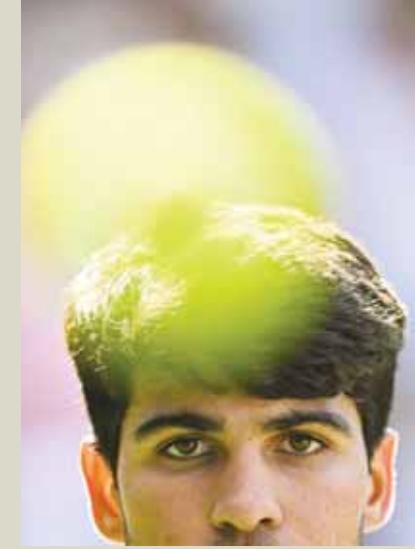
"This rivalry, it's becoming better and better ... we're playing in the finals of Grand Slams, finals of Masters and the best tournaments in the world. It's going to get better. "I'm just really grateful for that because it gives me the opportunity to just give my 100% every practice, every day, just to be better. The level that I have

to maintain and I have to raise if I want to beat Jannik is really high." Sinner's coach Darren Cahill admitted that while the Italian did not take any of his rivals for granted, he does pay extra attention to Alcaraz. "Jannik watches more Carlos matches than he does anybody else because he's fascinated with the improvements that are coming in his game, and he's pushing us as coaches to make sure that he's improving as a tennis player," Cahill said. Sinner, who ended Alcaraz's 24-match winning run across all events and 20-match streak at Wimbledon, was most pleased with ending his own run of five successive defeats against the Spaniard.

"When you lose several times against someone, it's not easy," said Sinner, who narrowed his win-loss record against Alcaraz to 5-8. "At the same time in the past, I felt I was close ... I never pushed myself down. I

keep looking up to Carlos because even today I felt like he was doing a couple of things better than I did. "So that's something we'll work on and prepare ourselves because he's going to come for us again. "There's not only Carlos, but everyone. We have a big target on us so we have to be prepared. Then we'll see what's happening in the future." Alcaraz said he had no doubt that Sinner would learn from his near 5-1/2-hour loss at Roland Garros, where the Italian squandered three championship points, and hit back.

"I know he's a really nice player and a huge champion. Champions learn from their losses," Alcaraz said. "I knew from the beginning he was going to learn from that final and not make the same mistakes. "The way he played today, it was really high. "I wasn't surprised at all."



CYCLING

Healy first Irish in 38 years to lead the Tour de France

AFP
Puy de Sancy, France

Ben Healy became the first Irishman since Stephen Roche in 1987 to take the overall lead on the Tour de France yesterday with a relentless attack across eight gruelling hills in the Massif Central.

The 24-year-old Etixx rider had already won stage six in Normandy, but here the smiley Healy confirmed his promise with a career-defining ride claiming the fabled yellow jersey.

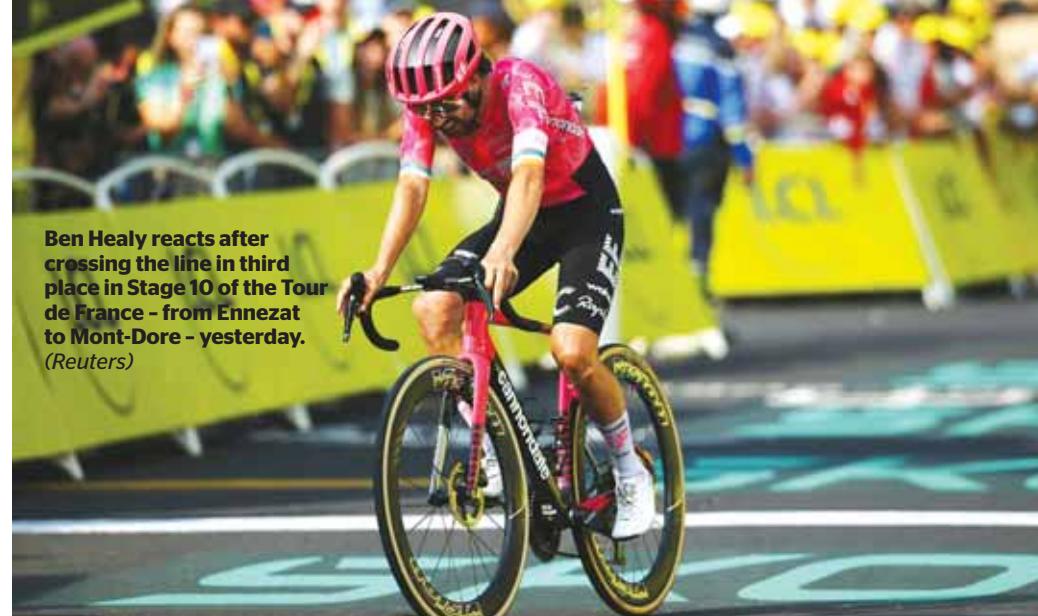
He becomes just the fourth Irishman to wear it following Shay Elliott, back in 1963, Sean Kelly in 1983 and Roche who went on to win an epic race 38 years ago.

Healy's performance even overshadowed that of stage winner Simon Yates, who sat on his wheel all afternoon as they crossed the ancient volcanoes that mark the region.

Such was the Irishman's effort as the escapees rushed through the grey-black volcanic rock villages that he was also awarded the combativity award for the most attacking rider of the day.

"Hats off to him, he's the one that dropped everyone," Yates said of Healy as the escape group was gradually whittled down from 30 to five.

The 2025 Giro d'Italia winner Yates attacked on the last of the day's climbs, with Thymen Arensman of Ineos second and Healy coming third at the line 31sec adrift and having never re-



lented on a punishing day. Healy was born in Birmingham but chose to represent Ireland in his youth. He is also in the white jersey for the best young rider.

"The stage win I got and the yellow today both mean a lot to me," said Healy, who had a tense wait at the line for Pogacar to cross 4min 51sec adrift and ceding the overall lead, likely for several days. "This yellow is more for the team who worked so hard to put me here but the stage win possibly means more as it came first," he said.

Race favourites Tadej Pogacar and Jonas Vingegaard crossed the line together after eight climbs

in the Massif Central where they were rarely a wheel's length from each other.

Healy leads the Tour itself by 29sec from defending champion Pogacar, with Belgian Remco Evenepoel in third at 1min 29sec. Denmark's double Tour de France champion Vingegaard is fourth overall at 1min 46sec, and his Vismara teammate Matteo Jorgenson sits fifth. Third placed overnight, promising young French rider Kevin Vauquelin dropped a minute to finish the day in sixth place overall.

Recompense for the home nation on the national Bastille Day holiday came in the form of Lenny

Martinez as he earned the King of the Mountains polka dot jersey with 27 points garnered on the day's stage.

His grandfather Mariano Martinez won the polka dot jersey outright on the 1978 Tour. Successive escape bids ensued from the off yesterday as the 164 remaining riders raced out of Ennezat with top guns Pogacar and Evenepoel finally allowing one to get away over the ever-rolling terrain. Once they did, a gap over five minutes was established by a motivated group that rode so hard over the cattle dotted hills the sprinters were dropped to over 30 minutes at the finish line.

GOLF

McIlroy embracing return to Northern Ireland for the Open

Reuters
Dublin

As a 16-year-old at the 2005 North of Ireland Amateur Championship at Royal Portrush, Rory McIlroy shot a course record 61. That was the old course, before redesign. It's a course he recognises only parts of now.

And as the Northern Irishman returns to Royal Portrush and The Open Championship this week, he's a changed man, too. He's ready to accept and embrace the pressure that comes from being the favourite son, something that he admitted got the best of him the last time the Open was played at Royal Portrush six years ago.

"It's a major championship, everything that comes along with it, and I just think that that feeling, the walk to the first tee and then that ovation, I was still a little surprised and a little taken aback, like geez, these people really want me to win," he told reporters yesterday about the experience in 2019. "I think that brought its own sort of pressure and more internally from myself and not really wanting to let people down. I guess it's just something I didn't mentally prepare for that day or that week. But I learned pretty quickly that one of my challenges, especially in a week like this, is controlling myself and controlling that battle."

He missed the cut that week. Now, at age 36 and with the Masters championship to his name this year, he is ready to take it all in.

"I think in '19 I probably tried to isolate, and I think it's better for

everyone if I embrace it. I think it's better for me because I can – it's nice to be able to accept adulation, even though I struggle with it at times," he said. "But it's also nice for the person that is seeing you for the first time in a few years. It just makes for a better interaction and not trying to hide away from it."

"I think it's more of an embrace everything that's going to come my way this week and not try to shy away from it or hide away from it, and I think that'll make for a better experience for everyone involved."

He is coming off a good experience, shooting four rounds in the 60s and finishing tied for second at the Genesis Scottish Open on Sunday.

"I'm certainly encouraged by how I've played the last two starts, especially last week in Scotland," he said. "I think the two weeks off after the Travellers just to reset, to get over here, a bit of a change of scenery has been really nice."

"When I was looking at the calendar for 2025, this was the tournament that was probably, I don't know, circled, even more so than the Masters for different reasons. It's lovely to be coming in here already with a major and everything else that's happened this year."

"I'm excited with where my game is. I felt like I showed some really good signs last week. I feel like I'm in a good spot and had – not that last week was a pure preparation week, but I definitely feel like it put me in a good spot heading into here."

With his Masters victory this year, McIlroy owns a career Grand Slam. He won The Open at Royal Liverpool in 2014.

FOOTBALL

Club World Cup serves as 2026 dry run for the US

Organisers faced criticism for pitch conditions to scheduling



Chelsea captain Reece James lifts the FIFA Club World Cup trophy as US President Donald Trump reacts in East Rutherford, New Jersey. (AFP)

Reuters
New York

The inaugural 32-team Club World Cup wrapped up on Sunday with plenty of lessons learned for organisers FIFA, with the tournament in the United States, won by Chelsea, acting as a preview of the 2026 World Cup. A record 48 teams will descend on co-hosts United States, Canada and Mexico next year for the quadrennial spectacle, with 104 matches on the schedule, up from just 64 the last time the tournament was held in 2022 in Qatar.

In anticipation, FIFA expanded the Club World Cup this year to more than four times its original size with 32 teams, in a format that mimicked what fans can expect next year.

"It's a dry run for FIFA," said Alan Rothenberg, the former president of US Soccer who was responsible for overseeing the World Cup the last time it was held in the US, in 1994.

"There were some mistakes early on and some issues early on but presumably they have now learned their lesson on how to stage a tournament in multiple cities in this vast country of ours. So I think it's going to make it a lot smoother from here on out for '26 because they now have experience."

Organisers faced criticism from players, fans and coaches for a range of issues from pitch conditions to scheduling to heat, with some games played to packed stands and others to sparse crowds baking in temperatures of

85 degrees Fahrenheit (29°C) and higher. Global players' union FIFPRO said the heat, in particular, should "serve as a wake-up call", with organisers pressured to schedule matches earlier in the day to accommodate the extraordinary scale of the tournament. Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez described the temperatures as "very dangerous" to play in.

"Every criticism that we receive is a source for us to study, to analyse, to see what we can do better," FIFA President Gianni Infantino told reporters ahead of the final. "Of course, the heat is definitely an issue. It's an issue all over the world."

Infantino said that the tournament in 2026 would use stadiums with roofs and climate control to accommodate more of the daytime games. Of the 16 World Cup stadiums, Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Vancouver have roofs.

"We need to look at what we can do better. We introduced cooling breaks. It's obviously very important we water the pitch. We can see how we can do things better in America as well as in Canada for next year, in Vancouver," said Infantino.

FIFA is taking greater operational control over the 2026 tournament compared to previous editions, said Rothenberg, who is now chairman of Premier Partnerships, a division of PlayFut Sports. "I don't think they did (Club World Cup) as an experiment but it turns out to be a great experience for FIFA going forward," said Rothenberg, whose forthcoming book "The Big Bounce" explores soccer's popularity in the US

Global football's governing body has put boots on the ground in the US in preparation for the World Cup, setting up field offices in Miami and at New York's Trump Tower.

US President Donald Trump was on hand to deliver the trophy at MetLife Stadium on Sunday to Chelsea, after the Premier League side thrashed Paris St Germain 3-0 in front of an enthusiastic crowd.

From January until the end of next year's tournament, FIFA will maintain a 485,000 square-foot broadcast centre in Dallas. A smaller version was used in the parking lot at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey for the Club World Cup.

"This is not a test run - we're going to have a lot of learnings from '25 but this is a historic event for us," Oscar Sanchez, head of host broadcast production, told reporters. "It's massive - but 2026 is humongous."

MetLife Stadium, which hosted Sunday's final, is set to host the 2026 World Cup's showpiece, with ongoing research to optimise pitch conditions in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Despite efforts, including transporting Bermuda grass overnight in refrigerated trucks, Club World Cup venues received criticism from coaches and players for pitch quality.

"We'll report post this tournament and take lessons forward to 2026," said Blair Christensen, pitch venue manager.

"These guys here that work on the pitch with me they are far sharper and better than they were 35 days ago and we'll take that forward to next year as well."

Club World Cup will be bigger than Champions League, says Chelsea's Colwill

New Jersey: Chelsea defender Levi Colwill said the Club World Cup will be bigger than the Champions League after his side beat European champions Paris St Germain 3-0 in the final in New Jersey on Sunday. The quadrennial competition will return in 2029, which will be the second edition under the expanded format with 32 teams.

"This is the biggest trophy I've ever won. I think the Club World Cup will be bigger than the Champions League and we were the first team to win it," the 22-year-old Colwill said.

"I've really enjoyed it, playing games every four or five days. Playing to sold-out stadiums, playing against different teams who you would never normally get a chance to play."

The England international said Chelsea would carry the momentum forward having beaten a phenomenal PSG side who had conceded only one goal in the tournament before the final. Chelsea have won the Champions League twice, in 2012 and 2021.

OSIMHEN CLOSE TO JOINING GALATASARAY ON PERMANENT BASIS FROM NAPOLI

Victor Osimhen was absent as Serie A champions Napoli resumed training, with the Nigerian striker in negotiations to join Turkish club Galatasaray on a permanent basis. The players "met at the training centre for medical examinations and physical tests. Victor Osimhen was absent and provided a medical certificate," said Napoli in a brief statement.

A key figure in Napoli's 2023 title triumph, Osimhen spent last season on loan at Galatasaray, scoring 26 goals in 30 league games as the Istanbul club claimed their 25th Super Lig crown. Napoli coach Antonio Conte seemingly does not have the 26-year-old in his plans for his side's Scudetto

defence next term, but Napoli will not part with Osimhen for less than EUR75mn (\$87.5mn). Negotiations with Galatasaray, which have been ongoing for several weeks, are still stalling over the terms of payment for the transfer.

Napoli recently recruited Kevin De Bruyne from Premier League club Manchester City, but the 34-year-old Belgian was not among the players who reported to training.

JESUS RETURNS TO SAUDI AS AL NASSR COACH

Al Nassr appointed Portuguese Jorge Jesus as coach, two months after he left their bitter Saudi Pro-League rivals Al Hilal. The 70-year-old won the domestic treble in his second stint with Riyadh-based Hilal in the 2023-2024 season, but left the club in May after they lost in the AFC Champions League elite semi-finals to Saudi Arabian side Al Ahli. The former Copa Libertadores winner with Brazil's Flamengo, who replaces Italian Stefano Pioli, has signed a one-year contract with Al Nassr. Nine-times Saudi champions Al Nassr have extended the contract of 40-year-old five-times Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo until 2027.

BURNLEY OWNERS ACQUIRE ESPANYOL

Premier League side Burnley's owners Velocity Sport Limited (VSL) agreed a deal to acquire La Liga team Espanyol. Chinese group Rastar and owner Chen Yansheng have grown unpopular with Espanyol fans since taking over in 2015, with the club twice relegated from the top flight. Earlier in July Premier League side Crystal Palace were demoted from the Europa League to the Conference League because of a multi-club ownership issue also involving French side Lyon.

SPOTLIGHT

Modric joins Milan in 1-year deal

Reuters
Milan

Croatia captain Luka Modric, who left Real Madrid after 13 years at the La Liga club, has completed his move to AC Milan on a one-year deal with an option to extend until June 2027, the Serie A side said yesterday.

The midfielder's arrival was confirmed by newly-appointed Milan coach Massimiliano Allegri earlier this month. "Very happy to be here to start a new chapter in my career," said Modric, who turns 40 in September, in an Instagram video shared by Milan.

Modric said Modric will wear the number 14 shirt, which he previously wore during his four years at English side Tottenham Hotspur to honour Dutch great Johan Cruyff. "It's an immense honour for them to compare me to (Cruyff)... I wore the No 14 at Tottenham in honour of him, and because the No 10 wasn't available," Modric had said after winning the Ballon d'Or award in 2018.

Modric, regarded as one of the greatest midfielders of all time, announced in May that he would leave Real after the Club World Cup. He has made 597 appearances for the Spanish club, winning 28 trophies including four La Liga and six Champions League titles. He played his last game for Real on Wednesday, coming on as a second-half substitute during a 4-0 loss to Paris St Germain in the Club World Cup semi-finals.

"It's a bitter end... he's a legend of world football and of Real Madrid. He'll be remembered for many more good things than for the 25 minutes he played today," Real Madrid manager Xabi Alonso said after the match. Modric, considered Croatia's greatest player of all time, has represented the country a record 188 times, scoring 28 goals. He won the Golden Ball at



World Cup 2018, where he led Croatia to the final for the first time.

He won the Ballon d'Or in December that year, becoming the first player other than Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo to win the prestigious annual award since 2007. Modric's arrival reinforces a Milan midfield that also features Youssouf Fofana, Yunus Musah and Ruben Loftus-Cheek, with Samuele Ricci joining from Torino earlier this month.

Milan, who failed to qualify for a European competition after finishing eighth in the Italian top-flight league last season, begin their Serie A campaign against newly-promoted Cremonese on August 23.

LA28 unveils Olympic competition schedule, marks PlayLA milestone

Los Angeles: Organisers of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics yesterday released the first look at the Olympic competition schedule, highlighting a historic reshuffling of key events and the most ambitious sports lineup in Games history.

The announcement comes as the city marks three years to go until the Opening Ceremony and celebrates a major legacy milestone: more than one million enrolments in the PlayLA youth sports programme.

For the first time in nearly three decades, the Summer Olympics will return to the United States, with Los Angeles hosting for the third time after 1932 and 1984. The 2028 Games are set to feature 844 ticketed events designed to maximise both domestic and international viewership.

Organisers revealed that the Opening Ceremony will take place on July 14, 2028, at 8 pm, split between the LA Memorial Coliseum and SoFi Stadium in Inglewood. The Closing Ceremony is scheduled for July 30 at the Coliseum.

In a notable departure from tradition, the LA28 schedule swaps the usual order of athletics and swimming competitions. Track and field events will open the Games in the first week, with swimming moving to the second week, culminating in its finale on the penultimate day at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood.

The first Olympic champion of LA28 will be crowned at Venice Beach in the triathlon event, while the marathon will close out athletics on the final weekend. Day 15 is expected to be the busiest for medal events, with 16 team sport finals and 19 individual sport finals taking place.

"The Olympic competition schedule has been meticulously developed to ensure the world's best athletes can compete in LA," LA28 CEO Reynold Hoover said in a statement. "We are energised by today's milestones and remain focused on the work ahead as the Road to 2028 continues."

Organisers said the schedule will continue to be refined, with a more detailed breakdown to be released later this year. "When the world comes here for these Games, we will highlight every neighbourhood as we host a Games for all and work to ensure it leaves a monumental legacy," LA Mayor Karen Bass said.

Meanwhile, Hoover joined city officials on Monday at an event at the Coliseum to celebrate PlayLA surpassing one million programme enrolments.

The initiative, backed by up to \$160mn in investment from LA28, the city's Recreation and Parks Department, and the IOC, provides affordable and inclusive sports programming for children aged 3-17 across more than 40 Olympic and adaptive sports.

TRANSFER

Real sign their former youth player Carreras

AFP
Madrid

Real Madrid signed Alvaro Carreras from Benfica on a six-year deal, the Spanish giants said. The 22-year-old Spanish left-back, who played for Madrid's youth academy before joining Manchester United in 2020, is reported to have cost close to 50mn euros. The defender played 62 times for Benfica, scoring five goals for the club, including an initial loan spell before they signed him for six million euros from United in 2024. Carreras becomes Madrid's fourth signing of a significant summer rebuild after Trent Alexander-Arnold, Dean Huijsen and Franco Mastantuono, at an estimated cost of around 170 million euros in transfer fees.

After finishing last season without a major trophy coach Carlo Ancelotti departed and was replaced by Xabi Alonso. The Spaniard steered Madrid to the Club World Cup semi-finals but they were hammered 4-0 by runners-up Paris Saint-Germain.

BARCA SNAP UP COPENHAGEN'S BARDGHJI, SELL TORRE TO MALLORCA
Barcelona signed right winger Roony Bardghji from FC Copenhagen and sold midfielder Pablo Torre to Mallorca, the La Liga champions said. The 19-year-old Sweden Under-21 international joined for

around 2.5mn euros according to reports in Spanish media. Bardghji scored 15 goals in 84 games for Copenhagen after reaching the first team in the 2021/2022 season.

He suffered a severe knee injury in May 2024, which kept him out of action for nearly a year, with the youngster making his return in March 2025. Bardghji becomes Barcelona's second signing of the summer after they brought in goalkeeper Joan Garcia from local rivals Espanyol.

The Catalan giants also announced the sale of 22-year-old playmaker Torre to Mallorca for an undisclosed fee, estimated to be 5mn euros according to Spanish media, as well as a percentage of the profit on any future sale. The midfielder played a total of 27 times for Barcelona's first team, scoring five goals.