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FOOTBALL

Arsenal finalise divisive move for young Madueke

Madueke to join his new Arsenal teammates in early August

AFP
London

Arsenal sealed their controversial signing of Chelsea forward Noni Madueke in a deal worth a reported £48mn (\$65mn) yesterday.

Madueke agreed a five-year contract with the Gunners as he moved to the Emirates Stadium despite complaints from Arsenal fans.

The 23-year-old will provide competition for Bukayo Saka and Gabriel Martinelli on the flanks in Mikel Arteta's side.

Madueke's switch across London, which could eventually exceed £52mn with performance-related add-ons, has sparked stinging criticism from supporters who believe he is not worth the price tag.

A petition labelled 'No to Madueke' has attracted more than 5,000 signatures from Arsenal fans, while murals outside the Emirates were vandalised with 'Arteta out' slogans.

Madueke left Chelsea's Club World Cup winning campaign in the United States last Friday to undergo his medical at Arsenal and put the finishing touches to the deal.

"Noni is an exciting and powerful young player, with his performances and numbers in recent seasons being of consistently high quality. He is one of the most talented wide forward players in the Premier League," Arteta said.

"At just 23, Noni already brings experience of club and international football, and he knows the Premier League very well. Having seen the quality of Noni's performances up close in recent seasons, we're really excited he is joining us.



Chelsea's English midfielder Noni Madueke celebrates on the pitch after the English Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur at Stamford Bridge in London on May 2, 2024. (AFP)

"Noni joins our group with familiar England teammates and other players he knows. He will be made to feel at home straight away. His arrival will really improve our squad. We're all thrilled to have him here."

Madueke, who raised in north London added: "I'm really happy and really proud, so it's a great moment for me. It's great to go back home, be with my mum, my dad. I know my mum misses me in the house!"

"It's already a great team with a clear identity and I can't wait to bring my style to the team and

try and help the boys as much as possible to take that next step.

"I want to win all the competitions we're in. I feel like we're definitely capable of doing that."

Madueke scored 11 times for Chelsea in all competitions last season, taking his overall tally to 20 in 90 appearances in all competitions for the Blues.

He helped Chelsea qualify for the Champions League and win the UEFA Conference League last term, as well as making his first England appearances.

Madueke, who joined Chelsea from PSV Eindhoven for £30mn

in 2023, is the latest close-season signing by Arsenal after the arrivals of midfielders Martin Zubimendi and Christian Norgaard and goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga. He takes Arsenal's spending so far to around £120mn, with Valencia defender Cristhian Mosquera's £13mn move expected to be finalised shortly.

Arsenal also remain hopeful of signing Sporting Lisbon striker Viktor Gyokeres. Madueke will join up with his new Arsenal teammates in early August after their pre-season tour of Singapore and Hong Kong.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Gunnarsson extends Al Gharafa contract

QNA
Doha

Al Gharafa announced the renewal of Icelandic midfielder Aron Gunnarsson's contract for an additional year, keeping him with the club's first football team until the end of the 2025-26 season.

The club published a tweet on its official X (formerly Twitter) account, accompanied by a video, confirming the player's continued presence with the team to face the challenge of the new season.

Gunnarsson joined Al Gharafa at the beginning of the last 2024-25 season, coming from Al Arabi SC. He did not participate in the local league, but rather limited his appearances at the beginning of the season to participating in the AFC Champions League, appearing in six of eight matches.

He then participated in the 2025 Amir Cup at the end of the season, appearing in four matches, helping the team win the title, which secured Al Gharafa a direct berth

in the next edition of the AFC Champions League 2025-26.

Gunnarsson is the third professional to have his contract renewed, following the extension of contracts for Algerian Yacine Brahimi and Tunisian Ferjani Sassi, both of whom will play for the team until the end of the 2025-26 season.

Relatedly, Al Gharafa signed Jamaican defender Mason Holgate for two seasons from Everton, in a significant deal that will bolster the team's defensive line for the new season.

Al Gharafa, who finished third in the last season's Qatar League, began a training camp in Slovakia yesterday, which will continue until August 4.

During the camp, Al Gharafa will play four friendly matches against Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia, Sharjah of the UAE, Crystal Palace of England, and a local Slovakian club.

The technical staff hopes to reach full readiness before facing Umm Salal on August 15, the start of the new season.



Al Gharafa's Algerian player Yacine Brahimi is seen with his teammates during a training session in Slovakia yesterday. Al Gharafa are in Slovakia for a pre-season training camp. (@ALGHARAFACLUB)

BOXING

Pacquiao, 46, eyes win in comeback bout

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

Thirty years after clambering through the ropes for his first professional fight as a skinny 16-year-old, **Manny Pacquiao** returns to the ring once more today for the latest round of his protracted battle with Father Time.

The 46-year-old Filipino icon takes on World Boxing Council welterweight champion Mario Barrios at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas chasing another milestone to crown his glittering 30-year professional career.

Pacquiao stunned the boxing world in May when he announced that he planned to end his four-year exile from the sport to challenge Barrios, taking advantage of a WBC rule that allows former champions to request an immediate title fight when coming out of retirement.

Pacquiao, who is reportedly set to receive between \$5-10mn for today's fight, says his comeback is motivated by his passion for the sport and the adrenaline rush of headlining a Sin City fight night.

"I'm returning because I miss my box-

ing," Pacquiao said during a recent publicity tour. "Especially these situations - being interviewed, press conference, training camp, everything like that.

"I missed that. But it has been good for me - I've rested my body for four years. And now I come back."

Sceptics though have voiced concern that Pacquiao, whose last professional win came in 2019, may have bitten off more than he can chew by exercising his right for a title shot against a defending champion Barrios who is 16 years his junior and in the prime of his career.

Even Freddie Roach, Pacquiao's long-time trainer who will be in the Filipino's corner once again today, admitted to initially harbouring reservations about the match-up.

"I really don't want to see him make a comeback, because I think he's already been great. He's already done everything he can do," Roach said in May before Pacquiao's return was made official.

Odds makers have echoed the scepticism, with Barrios installed as 4/11 favourite to dish out a ninth defeat in what will be Pacquiao's 73rd career fight. "I'm okay being the underdog," an unfazed Pacquiao said in Las Vegas this week. "I've



been the underdog many times. I'm always bringing surprises."

Pacquiao's supporters meanwhile point to the Filipino's chiselled physique and glimpses of impressive hand speed as reasons to believe that the veteran can produce another memorable Vegas win.

Yet boxing history is littered with veteran fighters who looked sharp in training camp only to be dismantled by much

younger opponents when fight night rolled around.

Many in the sport have wondered if Pacquiao might be heading for the same kind of pummelling that he dished out to an ageing Oscar De La Hoya in 2008.

De la Hoya, who had been favoured to win that contest, was soundly beaten over eight one-sided rounds in what would be the final fight of the American's career.

"I wanted to die in that ring," De La Hoya revealed years later. Pacquiao insists the fears surrounding his comeback are overblown, noting that his family were squarely behind his decision to lace up the gloves again.

"I'm thankful for their concern," Pacquiao told AFP. "But the people who really concern me, is my family. My family saw how I move, saw how I train, saw my my body condition."

"They support me because they can see the old Pacquiao style."

A win for Pacquiao today would see him make history as the first active fighter to win a major world title after being inducted to boxing's Hall of Fame.

Standing in his way though is Barrios, who says Pacquiao's status as one of the most beloved fighters of his era will not distract him from the task in hand.

"He's a hard guy to dislike. But at the end of the day, you know it's kill or be killed," Barrios said.

"Hats off to Pacquiao for daring to be great. But it's my time now and I'm gonna show that come Saturday."

"I'm going in there with bad intentions and power in both hands. I won't hesitate to pull the trigger"

CYCLING / TOUR DE FRANCE

Pogacar claims fourth stage win to extend lead

‘I WANTED EVERYTHING TO BE PERFECT, AND THE TEAM DELIVERED - EVERYTHING WAS ON POINT’

Reuters
Loudenvielle, France

Tadej Pogacar continued his charge towards an anticipated fourth Tour de France title when he stretched his overall lead to over four minutes by winning the 13th stage, a lung-busting 10.9km up-hill time trial yesterday.

The defending champion yesterday dominated the eight-kilometre climb at 7.9% to clock 23 minutes and beat Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard by a massive 36 seconds, a day after dealing a significant blow to his closest rival in the first major mountain stage in the Pyrenees.

Fellow Slovenian Primož Roglič took third place, 1:40 off the pace, while Belgian Remco Evenepoel hung on to third place overall by the skin of his teeth following a disappointing effort that saw him finish 2:39 behind Pogacar.

After his fourth stage win in this year's race, UAE Team Emirates-XRG rider Pogacar leads Vingegaard by 4:07 and Evenepoel by 7:24.

German Florian Lipowitz showed great form again and trails Evenepoel by six seconds.

Pogacar picked a regular road bike for the solo effort against the clock while Evenepoel and Vingegaard opted for a time trial bike



UAE Team Emirates-XRG team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar (also inset) wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey cycles during the 13th stage of the 112th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 10.9km individual time trial between Loudenvielle and Peyragudes, in the Pyrenees mountains of southwestern France, yesterday. (AFP)

- heavier but with better aerodynamics. It was quickly clear that regardless of those calculations,

Pogacar was again the strongest rider as he posted the best time on the brief flat portion ahead of

the main ascent before further extending his advantage. "I'm super happy. This time trial was a

question mark for me back in December. I wanted everything to be perfect, and the team delivered -

everything was on point," he told reporters. "I was targeting to go all out from start to finish. I almost blew up at the end, but when I saw I was going to win at the finish, it gave me an extra push."

The 26-year-old said it had been a close call between the road and the TT bike, but in the end he chose the most comfortable ride.

"The biggest decision was which bike to ride today. Obviously, we ride road bikes all year round, but we did the calculations and the time ended up about the same. So I decided to go with what I felt more confident on."

Pogacar went full gas from the start. "My tactic was simple: go all out from the bottom to the top," he said. "At the first time check, I saw I was five seconds ahead - that gave me confidence. The second split was even better," he explained.

"Basically, I was trying not to blow up in the first part. I almost did in the end - maybe in the last kilometre.

"From 3 to 2 km to go, I reset a bit because that last kick is super steep."

Pogacar will now go for a hat-trick of stage wins today, when the 14th stage will take the peloton from Pau to Luchon-Superbagnères with the awe-inspiring climbs of the Col d'Aspin, Col du Tourmalet, Col de Peyresourde before the final ascent, a 12.4km effort at 7.3%.

CRICKET

India consider Bumrah gamble in Manchester

Reuters
London

Jasprit Bumrah is a weapon India must use sparingly but with the five-Test series against England on the line, the tourists are considering playing their pace spearhead in the fourth Test in Manchester next week.

The team management has decided that Bumrah, whose workload has been carefully managed since he returned from a back surgery earlier this year, will play three of the five Tests in England.

A victory in Manchester would give England an unassailable 3-1 lead. To prevent that, India are considering playing Bumrah, who skipped the second Test in Birmingham, in the next match rather than preserving him for the final test at the Oval.

"We know we have got him for one of the last two Tests," assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate told reporters after a training session yesterday.

"It's pretty obvious that the series is on the line now in Manchester, so there will be a leaning towards playing him."

"But again, we have got to look at all the factors: how many days



India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates a wicket during the third Test against England at Lord's Cricket Ground in London last week. (@BCCI)

of cricket are we going to get up there, what do we feel is our best chance of winning that game, and then how that fits in together with the Oval."

Arguably the best all-format bowler of his era, Bumrah registered five-wicket hauls in both the Tests he played on this tour of

England, though India lost both in Leeds and Lord's.

India wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant, who suffered a finger injury at Lord's, did not bat in Thursday's practice. Ten Doeschate was confident Pant will reprise his usual roles in front of the stumps with the bat and behind

them with the keeper's gloves in Manchester. "Look, I don't think you're going to keep Rishabh out of the Test no matter what," former Dutch international ten Doeschate said. "He batted with quite a lot of pain in the third test and it's only going to get easier and easier on his finger."

FOCUS

Henry, Conway take New Zealand to easy win over Zimbabwe

AFP
Harare

Matt Henry took three wickets and Devon Conway hit an unbeaten half-century as New Zealand outclassed hosts Zimbabwe by eight wickets in their tri-series match at Harare Sports Club yesterday.

Zimbabwe made a promising start but could only score 120-7 after being sent in. Fast bowler Henry took 3-26.

New Zealand needed only 13.5 overs to secure the win, with left-handed opening batsman Conway making 59 not out off 40 balls.

New Zealand's fast bowlers, led by Henry, made good use of short-pitched deliveries while left-arm spinners Mitchell Santner and Rachin Ravindra gained bounce and turn from a dry pitch.

Wessly Madhevere and Brian Bennett put on 37 for the first wicket before Bennett (21) topped a short ball from Henry to square leg in the sixth over.

Madhevere took 11 runs off Henry's first over but struggled for fluency in making 36 runs off 32 balls, while none of the batsmen were able to master New Zealand's spin bowlers.

"They came out quite aggressive in the power play but we adapted

well with the ball," said New Zealand captain Santner.

Player of the match Conway was dropped on one at backward point off Richard Ngarava in the first over of New Zealand's reply and opening partner Tim Seifert was caught at cover for three off Blessing Muzarabani in the next over.

But Conway and Ravindra put on 59 for the second wicket before Daryl Mitchell joined Conway to take the Black Caps to a victory which virtually ensures them a place in the final on July 26.

"I got a bit lucky early on," admitted Conway. He said Ngarava and Muzarabani bowled well on a "challenging" surface. "It was nice to get through that period," he said. Zimbabwe will have to win their remaining matches against South Africa and New Zealand by big margins to have any chance of reaching the final.

BRIEF SCORES

Zimbabwe 120-7 in 20 overs (M. Henry 3-26) **v New Zealand 122-2 in 13.5 overs** (D. Conway 59 not out)

Result: New Zealand won by eight wickets **Toss:** New Zealand

Remaining fixtures (all in Harare): **July 20:** Zimbabwe v South Africa

July 22: New Zealand v South Africa

July 24: Zimbabwe v New Zealand **July 26:** Final

FROM PROMISE TO GREATNESS: PONTING LAUDS STARC'S LEGACY

DUBAI: Mitchell Starc delivered a dream performance in his 100th Test against the West Indies, and Australia great Ricky Ponting couldn't have been prouder of his remarkable achievements. Few cricketers play 100 Tests for their country, fewer fast bowlers stay fit long enough to reach that milestone. And even fewer mark the occasion as memorably, and perhaps destructively, as Starc did. In Jamaica last week Starc made the pink ball talk and had the West Indies batting in disarray, claiming a five-wicket haul in just 15 balls, ending with career-best figures of 6/9 as West Indies were skittled for 27, the second-lowest total in Test history.

Former Australia captain Ponting, who has witnessed Starc's journey from the early days, heaped praise on his longevity and legacy, something he believed the left-arm pacer was always destined to

achieve. "He's really now stacking up an amazing career - over 400 Test match wickets," Ponting said in an interview published in *The ICC Review*. "I think everyone who laid eyes on him as a youngster understood that there was every possibility that he could be a 100-Test match, 400 or 500-wicket fast bowler for Australia. "He's got to be 6'5". He's always had pace on his side. He's always been sort of that high 140s and sometimes pushing that sort of 150 barrier. He's had the ability to swing the new ball back into the right-handers."

Starc made his first-class debut for New South Wales in 2009 at just 19, and within two years, he had earned his Test cap. Sixteen years and 292 international matches later, the 35-year-old remains close to his physical peak, a testament to his commitment to putting national duty above all



else. "A lot of that physical stuff has never been questioned with him. It's been spoken about a fair bit this week," Ponting added. "He's made a lot of decisions to give him the best opportunity to have a long-term international career. When I say decisions, I mean by standing out of different IPL tournaments at different times when he's had bigger international commitments coming up."

Ponting was part of the dressing room during Starc's early days in Test cricket, watching the young quick find his feet at the highest level. He vividly recalled the game against India in Perth, which was just the third Test of Starc's career, where he unsettled none other than Sachin Tendulkar with pace and movement. Ponting knew then and there during that spell that Starc had something special in him. "I remember, he was bowling a spell to Sachin Tendulkar and was able to sort of bowl a short one, get up under Sachin's armpit and Sachin just sort of knocked one into short leg on the leg side," Ponting recalled. "And when you could see that sort of pace and bounce and have someone like Sachin not be able to cope with it, I think that was the reassurance for all of us that there was probably something extra

special there for Mitchell Starc." Starc's resume in international cricket is enviable. A two-time 50-over World Cup winner, T20 World Cup champion, World Test Championship winner and with 725 international wickets to his name, a bona fide modern-day great. And yet, as Ponting keenly observed, there remains an insatiable hunger in Starc to evolve, improve and keep adding new weapons to his already formidable arsenal. "He's got better and better. Like skill-wise and mentally, I think he understands his body, understands his game probably better than ever, especially the last couple of years," Ponting noted. "He's added a couple of different skills maybe the last two or three years that don't seem like massive things, but he's sort of incorporated that three-quarters seam, that

wobble seam delivery that's just made his in-swing of that little bit more potent as well and has given him a little bit more variation." Speaking on the mental side of Starc's game, Ponting noted the small but meaningful routines the left-arm quick has developed over the years to keep himself focused and in the right mindset on the field. "When I talk about working out his own game, you've probably seen it and heard about it in the past, but he wears a bit of tape on his, I think it's his right wrist, his non-bowling hand. "And he's just got a couple of words, which is just a reminder for him of what he has to do and how he has to think about it mentally. So those little things, I think, are things you learn along the way with the more experience that you have. He's physically going along as well as ever."

www.icc-cricket.com

GOLF

Li and Harman lead British Open as McIlroy hangs on

‘I feel like my game’s definitely good enough to make a run. I’m excited for the weekend’



China's Haotong Li during the second round of the 153rd Open Championship at Royal Portrush Golf Club, Portrush, Northern Ireland, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
Portrush, Northern Ireland

China's Li Haotong and American Brian Harman led the British Open second round on eight under par as home favourite Rory McIlroy's rollercoaster ride continued at Royal Portrush yesterday.

Li picked up five birdies in his first 12 holes in changeable weather conditions to lead the tournament on his own, but the world number 111 bogeyed the 14th hole, his first dropped shot of the tournament, to slip back.

Harman lifted the Claret Jug at a soggy Royal Liverpool two years ago but arrived

on the Northern Ireland coast under the radar after enjoying little success since his first major triumph.

The world number 26 birdied the first two holes, however, and picked up four more shots, sinking an eight-foot putt at the last to complete a flawless round of 65 and move to eight under par.

"I love the golf over here," Harman said. "It suits me. Distance, of course, matters over here, but it doesn't matter as much as maybe some other tournaments because the ground is so firm that the ball rolls."

MCILROY ROLLERCOASTER

Northern Ireland's McIlroy, again attracting huge galleries, scrambled to an opening one-under 70 and it was a similar story

early in his second round as he mixed mistakes with brilliance.

The 36-year-old, bidding to win his second Open 11 years after his first, had the crowds roaring with a birdie on the first and did brilliantly to salvage a par five at the second after slicing his drive into deep rough and taking a penalty drop.

He wasted several opportunities with careless putts before birdies at the 12th and 14th completed a round of 69 to finish at three under par.

"I didn't have this opportunity six years ago, so to play an extra two days in this atmosphere in front of these crowds, I'm very excited for that," McIlroy said, referring to the 2019 Open at Portrush when he missed the cut.



Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy lines up a putt on the 12th green during the second round of the 153rd Open Championship. (Reuters)

"I feel like my game's definitely good enough to make a run. I'm excited for the weekend."

World number one Scottie Scheffler moved to six under par with three early birdies to boost his bid for a first Open title, level with England's Matt Fitzpatrick.

Denmark's Rasmus Hojgaard finished on five under alongside Scotland's Robert MacIntyre, England's Tyrrell Hatton and American Harris English.

After Thursday's heavy rain showers and stiff breezes, bright conditions and light winds greeted the early groups yesterday and with receptive greens several players profited.

With his trademark accuracy and hot putter again in evidence, the 38-year-old

Harman birdied the par-four opening hole after a superb approach shot left him a tap-in.

Harman capitalised on the two par-fives on the outward nine, with birdies on both, and reached six under after another laser-like approach left him a tap-in on the 10th.

Among the big names likely to miss the cut yesterday were former Open champions Zach Johnson, Stewart Cink, Louis Oosthuizen, Padraig Harrington and Cameron Smith.

Joint overnight leader Jacob Skov Olesen began his second round in horrible fashion with a quadruple bogey eight on the first after driving out of bounds twice off the tee. In one hole, the Dane dropped from the top of the leaderboard to 36th.

FOCUS

Marc Marquez tops Czech MotoGP practice as fit-again Martin returns

AFP
Brno, Czech Republic

Marc Marquez came within a whisker of lowering his own lap record in yesterday's practice at the Czech MotoGP as reigning world champion Jorge Martin made his return from injury.

Martin, now riding for Aprilia, sat out the first three races of the year following two pre-season crashes and missed another seven after crashing at Qatar in April.

As Martin got to grips with re-summing his day job it was Marquez who set the fastest time before a downpour marred the afternoon session.

Marquez overcame technical issues and a cancelled lap on a rainy Friday morning to clock 1min

54.606sec, getting within one hundredth of a second of his 2016 lap record.

The 32-year-old Spaniard on a factory Ducati leads the world championship standings with 344 points after 11 of the season's 22 races.

His younger brother Alex on Ducati's satellite Gresini bike is second with 261 points, ahead of Marc Marquez's Italian teammate Francesco Bagnaia with 197.

A huge downpour at the end of Moto2 Practice caused a delay to MotoGP Practice proceedings in Brno.

Thankfully, the lull wasn't too long and once it was safe enough, Practice began at a rain-soaked Czech GP as the field got down to business in the pursuit of a top 10. Recurrent rain prevented riders from capitalising on the freshly resurfaced tarmac of the circuit in

the second Czech city of Brno, to which MotoGP is returning for the first time since 2020.

Marc Marquez was the only rider to squeeze under 2min 04sec in the afternoon practice which the downpour had delayed by 20 minutes.

France's Johann Zarco on a Honda came second ahead of compatriot Fabio Quartararo on a Yamaha.

Martin set the 17th quickest time in the morning, trailing Marquez by over 2.5 seconds, before improving to fifth in the afternoon.

Japan's Ai Ogura had a nasty spinning crash in the morning practice but was able to walk away from the gravel safety run-off area.

So were Italian Aprilia rider Marco Bezzecchi and Alex Marquez, who both took a tumble after losing traction in a puddle in the afternoon session.

BASKETBALL

Qatar B team takes on Taipei B at William Jones Cup today

Qatar's reserve basketball team is set to compete in its seventh match of the 44th William Jones Cup, held in Taipei, Taiwan, today.

The team will take on Chinese Taipei B, aiming to secure its second victory in the tournament before concluding its campaign against Malaysia on July 20.

In their sixth match, Qatar faced Bahrain and suffered a 47-81 defeat, with the quarters ending 17-17, 4-22, 11-22, and 15-20 in Bahrain's favour. Bahrain currently leads the standings with a perfect 12 points.

Qatar's reserve team holds fifth place with 7 points, having secured one win against the UAE but falling to Japan, Australia, the Philippines' Strong Group, Chinese Taipei A, and Bahrain.

The William Jones Cup serves as a critical opportunity for Qatar's coaching staff to assess player readiness and refine team tactics and cohesion.

The diverse playing styles encountered in the tournament provide valuable preparation for the upcoming 26th Arab Men's Basketball Championship, hosted by Bahrain from July 25-August 2, 2025, featuring teams from Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Saudi



Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, and Palestine. The Qatari delegation in Taipei is led by Mishal Abdullah al-Malki, a member of the Qatar Basketball Federation's board.

The team's 13-player roster includes: Abdulah Yassin, Owen Ikena Amah, Raslan Rashid al-Abdullah, Mubarak Rashid Jama, Mohammed Saeed Badri, Osama Abdelnasser, Tamim Abu Issa, Azzam Mohammed, Mohammed Ahmed, Mahmoud Deeb, Issa Alert, Hamza al-Attar, and Dejan Janjic.

Kovacevic sets up Rublev clash in Mexico



Aleksandar Kovacevic of the United States returns a shot to Juan Pablo Ficovich of Argentina during the Mifel Tennis Open quarter-final at the Cabo Sports Complex in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico. Kovacevic won 6-3, 6-1 to set up a clash against Russia's Andrey Rublev in the next round. Rublev yesterday beat Emilio Nava of the United States 5-7, 6-4 6-3. (AFP)

TENNIS

Cerundolo's six-game streak stuns Ruud in Gstaad

www.atptour.com
Gstaad

Juan Manuel Cerundolo engineered a remarkable late momentum swing to pull off a milestone victory yesterday at the EFG Swiss Open Gstaad.

The No. 109 in the PIF ATP Rankings recovered from 0-3 in the third set against Casper Ruud to prevail 6-2, 1-6, 6-3 in a topsy-turvy quarter-final at the Swiss ATP 250.

After a confident start, Cerundolo appeared to have lost control of his maiden Lexus ATP head2Head meeting with Ruud, but he stunned the world No 13 with a six-game burst to notch the biggest win of his career by PIF ATP Ranking.

"It was pretty tough. He was being much more aggressive than me and he was leading me easily then," reflected Cerundolo in his on-court interview.

"I think I stuck there mentally, didn't let the match go and I came out at 0-3 with the wind in my favour.

"With the help of the wind and maybe some mistakes from him, it was 1-3.

"Then suddenly it was 2-3, and when I was only one break down, I started to feel confident again and battled again more. I was more confident, more aggressive, and started hitting harder.

"I think that was the key to my comeback in the final set." Cerundolo converted six of nine break points he earned, according to Infosys ATP Stats, en route to ending 2022-23 champion Ruud's perfect record in Gstaad after 10 matches.

The 23-year-old, who won his only previous ATP Tour title in Cordoba in 2021, is now guaranteed on Monday to return to the Top 100 of the PIF ATP Rankings for the first time since October 2023. Cerundolo is currently up 20 spots to No 89 in the PIF ATP Live Rankings.

ALL-SOUTH AMERICAN CLASH

Today's semi-final schedule in Gstaad will feature an all-South American clash between Cerundolo and Ignacio Buse.

The Peruvian qualifier Buse overcame Roman Andres Burruchaga 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 to reach the last four in just his second ATP Tour event.

Second seed Alexander Bublik hit a personal clay-court milestone in his Gstaad quarter-final against Francisco Comesana. The Kazakhstani earned a 6-4, 6-3 victory to post 10 tour-level wins on clay in a season for the first time in his career.

The Roland Garros quarter-finalist Bublik saved both break points he faced in his 72-minute triumph against Comesana. Standing between him and his first ATP Tour final appearance on clay will be Arthur Cazaux or home wild card Jerome Kym.



ATHLETICS

Olympic champ Lyles set to make 100m season debut at London Diamond League

A sell-out crowd of 60,000 is expected at the London Stadium, home to Premier League club West Ham

AFP
London

Olympic champion Noah Lyles reignites competition with Let'sile Tebogo over 100m at today's Diamond League meet in London, a week after the American marked his return to action with victory in the 200m over the Botswanan in Monaco.

Lyles runs his first 100m of 2025, headlining an afternoon featuring the cream of track and field athletes, winners of 75 medals between them from the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest and the 2024 Paris Olympics, across both individual and relay disciplines.

A sell-out crowd of 60,000 is expected at the London Stadium, home to Premier League club West Ham and the venue for a memorable athletics programme at the 2012 London Olympics.

AFP Sport looks at five stand-out events at the 11th leg of the 15-meet Diamond League circuit:

Men's 100m: Tebogo admitted in Monaco that Lyles was the crowd pleaser and that when his face appears on posters, people want to come and see him.

The Botswanan, who won the 200m gold at last year's Paris Olympics as Lyles came third, was edged out in Monaco by the American, who clocked an impressive 19.88sec in his return to the track from a tendon injury.

Lyles said it had been tough watching early-season competition from home, but his comeback was timely with the World

Championships in Tokyo on the horizon in September.

"I have a bye for the US Trials which makes it less stressful because it gives us the time to work on the races," Lyles said. "It gives us time to see what works and what doesn't and to be able to make moves from there."

The home nation will be represented by Louie Hinchliffe, world indoor champion Jeremiah Azu and world 100m bronze medalist Zharnel Hughes.

The Jamaican duo of Oblique Seville and Ackeem Blake, and South African Akani Simbine fill out the field in what should be a top-notch race.

Women's 200m: Julien Alfred was in dominant form when she scorched to victory in the 100m in Monaco in 10.79sec.

It looked to be perfect preparation as athletes finetune their bodies, both mentally and physically, ahead of the world championships.

"The last week was not the best for me but it also showed me that I am not where I should be and that there are things that I still need to work on," Alfred said after winning in Monaco.

"The season is long but I don't have any trials so I will have time to work on the details. I took a step back and realise that I won't put any pressure on myself this year. I was listening to all that outside noise but I focus on just Julien right now."

Britain's Dina Asher-Smith, Daryll Neita and Amy Hunt will provide the competition, along with the sole American in the field, Brittany Brown.

Men's 1,500m: The men's 1,500m fea-



Noah Lyles of the US during the press conference at the Diamond League round in London yesterday. (Reuters)

tures a stellar cast of homegrown athletes, notably the last two world champions Jake Wightman and Josh Kerr. That pair each outsprinted Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen for victory in Eugene in 2022 and Budapest a year later, respectively.

Ingebrigtsen was a late withdrawal from London, his team saying he "still needs a little more time to heal the injury he has been struggling with lately... he does not want to risk anything".

Further British hopes ride on the shoulders

of Neil Gourley, George Mills and Elliot Giles, while it is Kenya's Phaniel Kipkosgei Koech who owns the fastest time of the season in 3:27.72.

Women's 800m: There may be no local hero Keely Hodgkinson on the cards as the Olympic champion is still bidding to recover from injury, but the two-lap race is another loaded one.

Laura Muir, Gemma Reekie and Georgia Hunter Bell form a strong home trio.

The presence of Uganda's Hallmah Na-

kaayi and Jamaican Natoya Goule-Toppin will ensure a rapid race.

Men's 800m: All eyes will be on Kenya's world champion Emmanuel Wanyonyi, who heads a pack of runners hunting down David Rudisha's world record of 1:40.91.

Rudisha set that mark when he won gold at the London Olympics, but for the first time in more than a decade, there are a handful of middle distance stars seemingly capable of pushing their limits to the max.

FOOTBALL

England's goalkeeping hero Hampton continues to prove people wrong

Reuters
Zurich

As a bloodied Hannah Hampton saved two penalties to send England into the Euro 2025 semi-finals, it was all the more impressive given she was advised at a young age against pursuing football because of an eye condition that affects her depth perception.

The 24-year-old, who had gauze stuffed up one nostril throughout Thursday night's wild shootout against Sweden after an earlier collision, was born with strabismus, a condition that prevents the eyes from properly aligning.

She underwent three surgeries before the age of three.

She has broken fingers and suffered bloody noses from misjudging the ball's trajectory. Even pouring a soft drink, she has said, is problematic.

But Hampton is not easily deterred, and enjoys proving people wrong.

"I'm here right now. You can't let all the scrutiny win," Hampton told reporters recently.

"I think if you do that it just adds fuel to the fire and I wasn't willing to accept that."

Hampton was thrust into the spotlight after the experienced



England's goalkeeper Hannah Hampton stretches for the ball during a penalty shootout during the UEFA Women's Euro 2025 quarter-final against Sweden at Letzigrund Stadium in Zurich, on Thursday. England won on penalties. (AFP)

Mary Earps announced her international retirement just weeks before the tournament.

She has shone at the Euros in Switzerland, making a couple of diving saves in normal time on Thursday before her shootout heroics, made more remarkable by the fact she had taken an elbow to the face minutes earlier.

"I said to her, you only need one nostril," teammate Chloe Kelly said.

The Chelsea keeper also made headlines last week when her

brilliant long ball led to a goal in their 4-0 thrashing of the Netherlands in the group stage. "She made a massive contribution to a very good team performance," coach Sarina Wiegman said.

"The outcome was really good and how the team stuck together, but she had a big contribution to that."

Hampton was a backup to Earps when England won the 2022 European title, but was dropped from the squad soon after amid media reports about her

attitude and behaviour. She said the negative commentary almost made her quit.

Hampton was all smiles on Thursday, even taking a Facetime call with family and friends during her post-game press conference.

"I'm in a presser!" Hampton yelled to a family member, before turning the phone screen so they could see the packed media conference.

Her family and friends cheered. The Birmingham-born keeper spent much of her childhood in Spain, attending the British School of Villa-real where her parents worked as teachers.

She played as a striker for Villarreal's academy team.

Sweden's goalkeeper Jennifer Falk saved four of England's shots in Thursday's shootout before stepping up to boldly take one of her own.

A goal would have clinched victory for Sweden, but Falk fired her shot over the crossbar.

Asked if she had considered taking a penalty herself, Hampton laughed.

"They told me to focus on the saving part first and then when it comes to it I would've taken one," Hampton said.

"I get a bit excited - my striker instincts come out."

England face Italy in the semi-finals on Tuesday in Geneva.

SPOTLIGHT

Inter Kashi crowned champions of India's second division

Reuters
Bengaluru

Inter Kashi have been named champions of India's I-League after the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled in favour of the club in their dispute with the All India Football Federation.

In May, the AIFF named Churchill Brothers winners of the country's second division, after the governing body's appeals committee ruled against Inter Kashi for fielding an 'ineligible player' in Mario Barco.

According to reports in Indian media, Inter Kashi registered Barco twice, signing the Spaniard before the season and then replacing him when he suffered an injury, only to bring him back into their squad two months later.

The AIFF's appeals committee said all matches played by Barco since his return from injury would be forfeited by Inter Kashi, leaving Churchill Brothers at the top of the standings.

Inter Kashi, which was established in 2023 in collaboration with Spanish giants Atletico Madrid and Andorran club Inter Escaldes, filed an appeal with CAS last month.

"I still don't understand what is the mistake we have made," Inter Kashi president Prithijit Das said. "A player got injured, the club spent money, looked after his rehabilitation, he became fit and then his right to play football (was) not being allowed... what is his fault? We are all grateful that truth has won."

In its statement yesterday,



sport's highest court CAS said it had "ruled that the AIFF shall declare Inter Kashi FC as winner of the I-League 2024-25."

Following the ruling, the AIFF congratulated Inter Kashi on becoming champions. Churchill Brothers did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Das said he was hopeful that as the I-League champions, Inter Kashi would meet the necessary criteria to play in the top division.

The top-tier Indian Super League (ISL), however, is on hold after contract renewal talks between the federation and their commercial partners, Reliance-led Football Sports Development Limited, stalled over a case to implement a new constitution for the AIFF ongoing at the Indian Supreme Court. "It's a very worrying situation, because there are so many people involved in the ISL. So many players, livelihoods," Das said. Inter Kashi are also in talks with the Uttar Pradesh state government to upgrade a stadium at their home city of Varanasi, 900 kilometres east of the capital New Delhi, and play there as soon as 2026, he added.

'BEAUTIFUL CRAZINESS', BRITISH MEDIA HAILS ENGLAND VICTORY IN CRAZY SHOOTOUT

London: British media has hailed England's great escape in the quarter-finals of Women's Euro 2025 after the Lionesses battled from two goals down to beat Sweden in a surreal penalty shootout and keep their title defence alive. The Zurich shootout featured 14 penalties before England prevailed 3-2 with Lionesses goalkeeper Hannah Hampton emerging as the unlikely hero having been thrust into the spotlight in her first major tournament.

"Beautiful craziness!" trumpeted the *Daily Mail*, while *The Sun* led with "Cats With Nine Lives" and *The Times* declared "Hannah Hampton the England hero in ridiculous penalty shoot-out". "If this team was a cat, seven of nine lives would have been used up on this rollercoaster ride, but here they were: still standing, still fighting," Dominic King wrote in the *Daily Mail*. *The Times* said it had looked like England were on their way out when they trailed

2-0 after 25 minutes before goals from Lucy Bronze and teenager Michelle Agyemang sent the game to extra time. "Yes, England were abysmal for 70 minutes, but who cares?" Kit Shepard wrote yesterday. "Once Sarina Wiegman finally made some substitutions in this epic quarter-final, they recovered from 2-0 down, held on heroically in extra time and prevailed in a ridiculous penalty shoot-out. The Lionesses' Euro 2025 hopes are, somehow,

still alive." England's valiant effort also drew praise in *The Guardian*. "Even as an utterly shambolic England trail Sweden 2-0 and the obituaries for their Euro 2025 campaign are being scribbled, there is a little knot of refusal there, a team with an entirely unwarranted calmness at its core, a team that against all the available visual evidence still trusts that everything is going to work out eventually," Jonathan Liew wrote.

The Telegraph said Bronze's winning penalty would go down in English football folklore. "It was a penalty hit with fury, a strike of pure mental and physical strength," Luke Edwards wrote in her match report in *The Telegraph*. "Bronze roared, a scream into the night air, a scream that said England will not surrender, they will not go down without a fight while she had oxygen left in her lungs."