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HORSE RACING

Al Ghadeer defends Qatar International Stakes at Goodwood

By Sports Reporter
Goodwood, UK

Al Shaqab Racing's legendary Al Ghadeer clinched a historic victory in the Group 1 Purebred Arabian Qatar International Stakes contest landing the prestigious race for the third year in a row yesterday, on day two of the Qatar Goodwood Festival.

With this triumph Al Ghadeer confirmed his status as the standard-setter of Purebred Arabian racing with another brilliant performance. HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, and HE Sheikh Hamad bin Joaan al-Thani received the Qatar International Stakes trophy from HE Saad bin Ali bin Saad al-Kharji, Chairman of Qatar Tourism.

Now a ten-time Group 1 (PA) winner, the six-year-old followed the same path as last two seasons, winning the Group 1 (PA) HH The Amir Sword in February before heading straight to Goodwood for this target, and once again, he delivered in style for Al Shaqab Racing, trainer Francois Rohaut and jockey Christophe Soumillon.

With another commanding performance and a tenth Group 1 (PA) victory under his belt, Al Ghadeer continues to cement his reputation as one of the greatest Purebred Arabians of his generation.

Held up at the back of the field behind Ch'Ezza, Al Ghadeer travelled with ease while others came under pressure entering the final straight.

When he moved up to challenge, Ch'Ezza kicked again and briefly looked away, drifting right in the process. Soumillon, however, stayed composed, allowing Al Ghadeer to rebalance before launching his run.

Once asked, the favourite cruised past and asserted comfortably to win by a length. Ch'Ezza, owned by Abdullah bin Fahad al-Attiyah and ridden by Lukas Delozier, stayed on gamely to claim second place while Djafar, representing owner Abubaker Sideek Abdullah Kadoura and partnered by Silvestre De Sousa, took third, finishing further five lengths behind.

Both the second and the third are trained by Rohaut as well, making it a remarkable one-two-three for winning trainer, who dominated the podium in this prestigious Group 1.

Rohaut said: "Not as easy as usual. Al Ghadeer is six now, but he's still the best and he showed it today. He'll have a race, probably run the Dragon before the Arc. He was so happy going down to the post. It's better to run him than to train him. He may have three weeks holidays, but no more. Then the Amir Sword. And after, we'll see. Probably it's time for him to retire, maybe. And all the breeders want to see him, and he'll be happy to change, to have a new job."

Bred by Mohammed Al Najafi, Al Ghadeer is out of Gharraa (Matador 12), a dual Group 2 (PA) winner over 1,900m and 2,100m at six, and third in a Group 1 (PA) over 2,000m at the same age. He is a half-brother to Ghurat Al Zaman (Hilal Al Zaman), a Group 2 (PA) winner over 2,000m at five and Group 3 (PA) winner over 1,600m at five.



Jockey Christophe Soumillon guided Al Shaqab Racing's Al Ghadeer to Qatar International Stakes win at Qatar Goodwood Festival yesterday.

SWIMMING

Marchand shatters record as US, Australia win more world gold

Frenchman wipes more than a second off the previous record set by Lochte

AFP
Singapore

Leon Marchand smashed the 200m individual medley world record in Singapore yesterday with another breathtaking swim while Australia and the United States celebrated more gold. Racing in the semi-finals at the world championships, the Frenchman clocked 1min 52.69sec to wipe more than a second off the previous record of 1:54.00 set by Ryan Lochte in 2011.

Marchand beat Michael Phelps's long-standing 400m medley record at the world championships in Japan two years ago. "Actually I can't believe it right now," said Marchand, who won four individual golds in front of his home fans at the Paris Olympics a year ago and was the face of the Games. "I knew I was going to be close to my PB (personal best) because I felt really good today and preparation has been pretty good. But 1:52 is unbelievable for me."

Marchand, 23, took an extended break from swimming after Paris and only returned to competition in May. He is focusing on the individual medley events in Singapore and had said he was gunning for Lochte's record. Marchand got his world championships campaign under way on Wednesday morning, clocking a time of 1:57.63 in the heats. He said he would go all-out for the record in the semi-finals rather than conserve his energy for today's final.

In yesterday's finals, Tunisia's Ahmed Jaouadi won the 800m freestyle thanks to a perfectly timed attack. Jaouadi made his move midway through the race and eased away to touch the wall in 7min 36.88sec, ahead of German pair Sven Schwarz (7:39.96) and 400m champion Lukas Maertens (7:40.19). Jaouadi, who finished fourth at last year's Paris Olympics, clocked the third-fastest time ever. "At some point I saw that the rhythm wasn't that fast so I decided to just go and make the move," said the 20-year-old. Ireland's Olympic champion Daniel Wiffen finished last.

Australia's Olympic champion Mollie O'Callaghan was just as emphatic in romping to victory in the women's 200m freestyle in 1:53.48. Second was China's Li Bingjie (1:54.52) and third Claire Weinstein of the United States (1:54.67).

O'Callaghan said it had been a "whirlwind". Since winning gold at the Paris Games, O'Callaghan has been injured and had some badly needed time to recharge. She has spoken about struggling to live up to the hype since Paris. "I know it's been hard for a lot of people to come back after the Olympics but very grateful to have a good support team behind me to get me through this mentally and physically," said the 21-year-old.

Luca Urlando of the United States celebrated the biggest title of his career with gold in the 200m butterfly in 1:51.87. Italy's Simone Cerasuolo pipped Russian Kirill Prigoda to 50m breaststroke gold, touching home in 26.54sec.

A "neutral athletes" team made up of Russian swimmers won the mixed 4x100m medley relay, finishing ahead of China and Canada. After four days of the championships, Australia lead the medals table with four golds, with the United States on three and Germany and Canada two.

Summer McIntosh of Canada will be looking to make it three golds for herself in as many races today when she goes in the 200m butterfly. Also in the final is China's 12-year-old schoolgirl Yu Zidi, as she attempts to bag a historic medal on her debut competition on the world stage.



France's Leon Marchand competes in 200m individual medley semi-final at the World Aquatics Championships in Singapore. *(AFP)*



Tunisia's Ahmed Jaouadi celebrates after winning the final of the men's 800m freestyle at the World Aquatics Championships in Singapore. (AFP)

FIFA World Cup draw in Vegas on December 5: reports

Los Angeles: Las Vegas will play host to the 2026 World Cup draw on December 5, according to multiple reports on Tuesday. *ESPN* and *TUDN'Mexico* said Vegas had been picked for the draw of the expanded 48-team event, which will be hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. FIFA officials have not confirmed the date or site.

In all, 12 groups of four nations will be drawn. For the first time, the competition will take place in three countries and will feature 48 nations, as opposed to the traditional 32.

When the United States played host to the 1994 World Cup, the draw ceremony was also conducted in Las Vegas.

ESPN's original report said that The Sphere, a 17,500-seat venue which opened in 2023, was seen as the front-runner for the draw site. With its massive LED screen, it is the perfect venue for FIFA's new love affair with theatrical spectacle.

But Sphere sources confirmed to *AFP* the World Cup draw would not take place there, and *ESPN* later reported Sphere sources told the sports network it would not be held there. In 1994, the draw was staged in Las Vegas even though it was not a host city for any matches, a situation that is also the case for next year's event.

That year's ceremony was staged at the Las Vegas Convention Center, a venue that is unavailable this time around. Allegiant Stadium, home to the NFL's Raiders, was also passed over as a World Cup match site during the host city selection process. Pedro Cedillo, a Pachuca executive involved in World Cup preparations, told ESPN: "I understand it will be in Las Vegas, and that's where we need to be present."

Next year eleven United States cities/venues were selected, along with three in Mexico (Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey) and two in Canada (Toronto and Vancouver).

The US sites are divided into three regions. New York/New Jersey, Philadelphia, Boston, Miami and Atlanta are a part of the Eastern region, Kansas City, Dallas and Houston comprise a part of the Central Region, while Los Angeles, Seattle and the San Francisco Bay area make up three of the four cities in the Western Region.

The draw will reveal the dozen groups with four nations per group. Mexico (Group A), Canada (Group B) and the United States (Group D) have already been selected for their groups.

MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, will host the final match on July 19, 2026.

CRICKET

FOCUS

Stokes out of India series decider with shoulder injury

POPE TO LEAD ENGLAND, ARCHER IS RESTED

AFP
London

England captain Ben Stokes has been ruled out of the fifth and deciding Test against India with a shoulder injury in a devastating blow for the home side.

The England and Wales Cricket Board said vice-captain Ollie Pope would lead the team in the match at the Oval starting Thursday, with England 2-1 up in the series.

All-rounder Stokes has struggled with various fitness issues in the four Tests against India so far, during which he has sent down 140 overs - the most he has bowled in any series. The 34-year-old, who is the leading wicket-taker on either side with 17 scalps, has injured his right shoulder - his bowling arm - and it is understood he could need up to 10 weeks to recover.

"I am obviously disappointed to not be able to finish the series," an emotional Stokes told reporters on Wednesday.

He added: "I have got a decent tear of one of the (shoulder) muscles I can't pronounce. A bit of emotion goes into this kind of stuff when you find out what you have done - bowling was ruled out as soon as we got the scan results."

The drawn fourth match of the series at Old Trafford, which ended on Sunday, was a personal triumph for Stokes, who became just the fourth England cricketer to score a hundred and take five wickets in the same Test.

But that came at a cost as the talismanic all-rounder, whose career has been blighted by hamstring trouble, struggled with a number of fitness issues.

India lost just four wickets in their second innings as they batted out a marathon 143 overs to keep the series alive. Stokes, asked if he could have done any more to manage his workload, replied: "No, not at all. When I'm out on the field I play to win and give everything I possibly can.

"If I feel there's a moment in a game where I need to put everything I'm feeling aside I'll do that because it's how much this team means to me, how much playing for England means to me, how much winning means to me.


England's Ben Stokes during the practice session at the Oval stadium in London yesterday, on the eve of the fifth and final Test. *(Reuters)*

"There's absolutely nothing I could have done before. Being a professional sportsman, injuries are part of this game and I can't do anything about that."

India captain Shubman Gill, who has already scored four hundreds in his debut series as skipper, has no doubt about the impact of Stokes' absence. "A big miss definitely for England," he said. "Whenever he comes on to bowl or in to bat, he always makes things interesting. He always makes something happen."

England do not play Test cricket again until they face Australia in the first match of the Ashes tour in late November, with Stokes considered central to their hopes of regaining the urn.

He said his decision to miss the India finale in London had been based on a simple calculation. "It was more of 'What's the risk here?' he explained. "What's the worst possible thing that could happen with where this injury is at to where it could head to? Hearing where it could head to was not something that was worth taking a risk on."

England have made four changes to their team at the Oval as they attempt to wrap up the series.

Spin-bowling all-rounder Jacob Bethell makes his first Test appearance of 2025, effectively as a replacement for Stokes.

Fast bowlers Josh Tongue, Gus Atkinson and Jamie Overton all come into the side, with Jofra Archer and Brydon Carse rested.

Liam Dawson has been dropped after just one match, with England opting to play without a specialist spinner, entrusting slow-bowling duties to Bethell and Joe Root.

Stokes braced for 'emotional' tribute to late Thorpe

Ben Stokes is preparing himself for an "emotional" tribute to Graham Thorpe when the late former England batsman is honoured during this week's fifth and deciding Test against India at the Oval.

Thorpe took his own life on August 4, 2024, having batted depression and anxiety for several years, with police confirming he had died following an incident on a railway line near his home.

The left-handed batsman, who spent his entire professional career in south London with Oval-based Surrey, scored 6,744 Test runs at an average of 44.66 in 100 matches from 1993 to 2005.

He later held various coaching positions, including a role as England's batting chief, where he worked with current players such as Test captain Stokes and Joe Root. A Day for Thorpey will be held on Friday, August 1 in support of mental health charity Mind on what would have been his 56th birthday.

"Thorpey's been a very influential character as a player and a coach in English cricket," Stokes told reporters at the Oval yesterday. "A few of us in that dressing room spent a lot of time with him coming through the ranks and, as we got into the main (England) team Thorpey spent a lot of years around us."

The all-rounder, who will miss the Oval finale because of a shoulder injury, added: "It's going to be a special day for all English fans, a special day for his family to see how much he meant to English cricket and how much he means to the current England dressing room."

Coroner Jonathan Stevens recorded an official verdict of suicide at an inquest last week but said there had been "shortcomings in the care" provided to the retired cricketer in his final months.

The fifth Test at the Oval starts today, with England 2-1 up in the series.

Bumrah not ruled out of fifth Test: Gill

London: India captain Shubman Gill has refused to rule pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah out of contention for the fifth Test against England starting at the Oval today. Bumrah, who is the joint-leading wicket taker in the series with 14, was expected to miss the decisive clash as India's medical staff want to manage his workload. But Gill said any decision would be left late.

"We will take a decision (on Bumrah) tomorrow; the wicket looks very green. So we will see how it turns out," Gill told a press conference at the Oval yesterday. Bumrah was scheduled to play only three of the five Tests and has already featured in the opener at Headingley and the back-to-back tests at Lord's and Old Trafford.

India need to win the final Test to level the series 2-2. "2-2 will be very significant for this team," Gill said. "Every match we have played, it was difficult to decide the winner after the first four days."

Should Bumrah miss out, India would likely select Akash Deep or even hand a debut to Arshdeep Singh.

"He has been asked to get ready but we will take a call on the playing eleven after looking at the pitch by this evening," Gill said.

"England haven't gone with a frontline spinner. We have Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar, who have done such a good job with the ball and the bat. On that front, it's a no-brainer for us."

India are without wicket keeper Rishabh Pant, ruled out by a foot injury in the fourth Test which ended in a draw on Sunday. Dhruv Jurel is set to stand in. The build-up to the series finale has been overshadowed by a spat on Tuesday between India head coach Gautam Gambhir and the ground staff at the Oval after Gambhir tried to take a close look at the square.

Gambhir shared terse words on Tuesday with pitch curator Lee Fortis. Former India batsman Gambhir was caught on camera wagging his finger as Fortis towered over him, repeatedly stating: "You can't tell us what to do."

Gambhir was also heard adding: "You're just the groundsman, nothing beyond."

Gill yesterday said the incident was "absolutely unnecessary". "It's not the first time that we were having a look at the wicket, we have been there for almost two months," he said. "A coach has every right to be able to go close quarters and have a look at the wicket and I didn't think there was anything wrong with that. I actually don't know why the curator would not allow us to go have a look at the wicket. "All of us have played so much cricket, we have gone to the pitches so many times, including the coaches and captain, I don't know what the fuss was about."

Surrey groundsman Fortis is understood to have been keeping a protective eye on the playing area during India's practice session, with plenty of cricket still to be played on it this season.


India's star pacer Jasprit Bumrah signs autographs for fans at Oval yesterday. *(Reuters)*

But India have insisted they simply wanted to have a look at the pitch and had done nothing to spark any kind of reaction from Fortis.

The skipper, who has scored 722 runs in the four Tests so far, added: "As a captain, I don't know what the fuss was all about."

The series has become increasingly heated, with India refusing to shake hands on a draw early in the fourth Test in Manchester to allow Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja to reach centuries, a decision that angered England.

Gill previously accused England of ignoring the "spirit of cricket" with time-wasting tactics in the third Test at Lord's, where India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj was fined for the aggressive send-off he gave to Ben Duckett.

But he said the incidents were not connected. "I think I have already explained what happened at Lord's and about even the incident that happened on the last day in the previous Test," he said.

"Both the teams have been very competitive. And sometimes when you are competitive, you know, in the heat of the moment, you do or say things that you might not do (otherwise).

"But I think once the match is over, there is mutual respect between both the teams."

Despite India's superb rearguard action to earn a draw in Manchester, Gambhir remains under pressure. Since he took over as head coach, India have won just two and lost eight out of 12 Tests.


India's Shubman Gill inspects the Oval wicket yesterday. *(Reuters)*

SPOTLIGHT

Henry puts New Zealand in control of first Test against Zimbabwe

AFP
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Matt Henry bowled New Zealand into a dominant position on the first day of the first Test against Zimbabwe at Queens Sports Club yesterday.

Fast bowler Henry took six for 39 as Zimbabwe were bowled out for 149 after winning the toss and deciding to bat.

New Zealand were 92 for no wicket at the close, with Devon Conway and Will Young unbeaten on 51 and 41 respectively.

Henry, who was voted best player of a Twenty20 tri-series tournament which ended on Saturday, did not take long to adjust to red ball cricket in New Zealand's first Test since December last year.

Henry dismissed both Zimbabwe opening batsmen, Brian Bennett (6) and Ben Curran (13) inside the first seven overs.

He took two more wickets in an over interrupted by the lunch break, then came back to finish off the innings with his final two victims shortly after tea.

Seamer Nathan Smith took three for 20 in 14 tight overs.

Captain Craig Ervine, who took 23 balls to score his first run, top-scored for Zimbabwe with 39, eked out over 116 deliveries.

Ervine and Nick Welch (27) put on 36 for the fourth wicket after Zimbabwe were reeling at 31 for three.

But Henry returned for the last over before lunch to have Welch caught at second slip. Three balls later, after lunch, he had the experienced Sikandar Raza caught behind for two.

Ervine and wicketkeeper Tafadzwa Tsiga (30) added 54 for the sixth wicket to lift Zimbabwe from 69 for five. Smith trapped both batsmen leg before wicket shortly before tea and Zimbabwe's resistance crumbled.

In reply Conway and Young batted through to the close of play, scoring steadily after a cautious start.

Zimbabwe opening bowler Blessing Muzarabani had an opening spell of eight overs but was unable to make a breakthrough.

Conway reached his fifty in the penultimate over of the day, his first Test half-century since he made 76 against India in Pune last October.

Seven innings since then had yielded a highest score of 22.

Zimbabwe have played eight Tests since New Zealand last played a Test but have lost six, drawn one and had a single victory, against Bangladesh in Sylhet in April.

BRIEF SCORES

Zimbabwe 149 all out (C. Ervine 39, T. Tsiga 30; M. Henry 6-39, N. Smith 3-20), **New Zealand 92-0** (W. Young 41 not out, D. Conway 51 not out)

Match situation: New Zealand trail by 57 runs with ten wickets remaining in the first innings.


New Zealand's Matt Henry celebrates after taking six wickets against Zimbabwe on the first day of the first Test at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday.

TENNIS

Top seed Zverev battles past Walton at Toronto Masters

'Sometimes it's just about winning. It was not the prettiest match, though'

AFP
Toronto, Canada

Alexander Zverev made a storming return after a month away from tennis on Tuesday, with the top seed pounding out a 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 win over Adam Walton to reach the third round of the ATP Toronto Masters.

The German top seed, who lost in the Wimbledon first round, has spent the last weeks dealing with mental burnout and also made a trip to Rafael Nadal's Mallorca academy for consultations and perhaps some career advice during his time away.

The ATP world number three came from 4-1 down in the opening set tiebreaker and did not face a break point until he found himself down 0-40 as he tried to serve out victory leading a set and 5-3.

Though he lost that game, the German immediately broke back, with his Australian opponent double-faulting on a Zverev match point. His victory included a massive 52-shot rally, with the triumph putting Zverev on 499 wins for his career.

"Sometimes it's just about winning," Zverev said. "It was not the prettiest match, though."

The 2017 champion in Canada will now play Italian Matteo Arnaldi, who defeated qualifier Tristan Schoolkate 6-3, 3-6, 6-3.

Third-seeded Lorenzo Musetti and number five Holger Rune both eased into action with comfortable straight set wins.

The pair began after byes and wasted little time in advancing into the third round, with Musetti hammering Australian qualifier James Duckworth 7-5, 6-1.

Rune dispatched big hitter Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 7-6 (9/7), 6-3. Number eight Casper Ruud put out Roman Safiullin 6-3, 6-3 for another seeded win.

The event is missing the absolute cream of the player field, with both number one Jannik Sinner and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz out with injury and fatigue issues.

Musetti, a former semi-finalist at both Wimbledon and Roland Garros, was ruthless with Duckworth, advancing in 82 minutes.

He broke for a set and 5-1 on his opponent's double-fault and finished up a game later with an ace.

The Italian is coming back into form after losing his only grass match of the summer (Wimbledon) and then going down last week in his Washington opening match. His last victory came in early June in the Roland Garros quarters.

Musetti had 17 winners while Duckworth was undone by more than 30 unforced errors.

The Italian next faces American Alex Michelsen, a 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 winner over Chilean qualifier Tomas Barrios Vera.



Alexander Zverev of Germany returns a shot to Adam Walton of Australia during the Toronto Masters in Toronto. *(AFP)*

Rune, who was back in action a month after a first-round Wimbledon defeat, handed French Mpetshi Perricard a fourth career loss against top 10 players.

Denmark's four-time finalist at the Masters level produced his first hardcourt win since last March at Indian Wells.

"It was a very tricky first match for me, he's a big server and (there was) not a lot of rhythm in the match," Rune said after his 75-minute win.

"I had to really take care of my own serve, and then just look for the opportunities. "It was about finding a way to win at the end of the (first set) tiebreak.

"In the second set I was pretty good when it mattered. I think I was serving very well today."

World number nine Rune limited his unforced errors to just 10 – less than half of those struck by his opponent.

Elsewhere, 11th seed Karen Khachanov beat Juan Pablo Ficovich of Argentina 6-4, 6-2.

Last year's winner in Canada, Alexei Popyrin, defeated local wild card Nicolas Arseneault 7-6 (9/7), 6-3.

Canadian Denis Shapovalov continued his unlucky home streak taking a 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 loss to Learner Tien and extending a losing run dating to 2019 at home.

Tenth-seeded former champion Daniil Medvedev got through his opening match and will next face Popyrin after a 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 win against Czech lucky loser Dalibor Svrcina, ended with more than 40 unforced errors.

FOCUS

Gauff outlasts Collins to advance at Montreal

AFP
Montreal

World number two Coco Gauff battled into the third round of the WTA Canadian Open on Tuesday by outlasting US compatriot Danielle Collins 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2).

Gauff won the last six points of the match to capture her opener in her first hardcourt tune-up event on the road to the US Open, which starts on August 24.

Top seed Gauff, the reigning French Open champion who also won the 2023 US Open, advanced to a third-round Montreal match against fifth-ranked Veronika Kudermetova, who eliminated Serbian Olga Danilovic 6-4, 6-2.

"It was a frustrating match for me just because I felt like I was practicing well and then I don't think I transferred it," Gauff said.

"But hopefully I got my bad match of the tournament out of the way and I can come back stronger in the next round."

The 21-year-old Gauff, seeking her 11th career WTA title, fired 23 double faults against three aces, but closed out the match with an ace after two hours and 55 minutes.

"It was a tough battle out there," Gauff said. "Making serves in the court was the toughest challenge. Maybe if I cut that in half it could be a quicker match for me. I thought I was playing well, except for that part of my game."

Gauff converted nine of 16 break chances in her first victory since capturing the title at Roland Garros.

"For me to break her as many times as I did, there are some positives to take from today," Gauff said.

Collins and Gauff exchanged breaks in the first four games before Gauff held and then broke again for a 4-2 lead then held again.

But serving for the set, Gauff swatted a crosscourt forehand wide to surrender a break and Collins held to 5-5, only for Gauff to hold then break at love to take the first set in 53 minutes on the fifth of 13 Collins double faults.

After trading four breaks in the first six games, Collins broke at love to 4-3 and held twice to force a third set.

Collins served for the match leading 6-5 in the final set only for Gauff to break with a backhand crosscourt winner to force a tiebreaker.

Gauff fell behind 2-1 but landed an mis-hit lob winner and never dropped another point, Collins hitting a forehand long, double faulting and netting a backhand to 5-2 before Gauff blasted a service winner and ace to end matters.

Ito ousts Paolini

The day's biggest shocker saw Japanese qualifier Aoi Ito stun Italian seventh seed Jasmine Paolini 2-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/5).

The 21-year-old beat American Katie Volynets in the first round for her first WTA 1000 level triumph then followed with her first victory over a top-10 opponent by rallying from a set and break down to advance after two hours and 27 minutes.

World number 110 Ito saved a match point in the 10th game of the second set and outlasted sixth-ranked Paolini to book a third-round match against Spain's 51st-ranked Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, who defeated American Ashlyn Krueger 6-4, 6-4.

Ito reached the semi-finals last October at Osaka in her WTA debut and claimed a 125-level title at Canberra in January, but until this week had not won a tour-level match this year.

In other matches, DC Open champion Leylah Fernandez dropped her opener on home soil, falling to Australian Maya Joint 6-4, 6-1.

Washington runner-up Anna Kalinskaya advances, the Russian beating American Ann Li 7-6 (8/6), 0-6, 6-3.

Russian fourth seed Mirra Andreeva advanced to the third round in a walkover past Canada's Bianca Andreescu due to a left ankle injury.



Coco Gauff celebrates a point against Danielle Collins during their Canadian Open second round match in Montreal. *(AFP)*

Le Court makes history for Africa at women's Tour

Mauritian Kim Le Court became the first African to win a stage on the women's Tour de France yesterday. It was a case of double celebration for the 29-year-old who took the fifth stage honours in a sprint to reclaim the leader's yellow jersey. Le Court edged Dutch duo Demi Vollering and Anna van der Breggen after a hilly 166km ride, the longest of the Tour, from Chasseneuil-du-Poitou Futuroscope to Gueret. Overnight leader Marianne Vos lost yellow to the AG Insurance-Soudal team leader after finishing eighth, 33 seconds adrift, on the day. Le Court, who had a brief spell already at the top of the general classification after stage two, now leads France's Pauline Ferrand-Prevot by 18 seconds.

Venus gets US Open mixed doubles wild card

Venus Williams, who made a comeback last week after more than a year's hiatus from competitive tennis, will compete alongside Reilly Opelka in mixed doubles at the US Open.
Williams, a seven-time Grand Slam singles champion who turned 45 last month, and US compatriot Opelka were among 14 teams named on Tuesday to the revamped August 19-20 event by the US Tennis Association. Williams won her opening singles and doubles match at the DC Open last week in her first WTA tournament since last year's Miami Open.
She is also set to play as a wild card in next month's Cincinnati Open and could ask for a US Open singles wild card. Those are expected to be announced in about two weeks. The US Open winning mixed doubles team will receive $1mn. Eight teams received direct entry into the field by combined singles rankings, including top-ranked Jannik Sinner of Italy – the reigning US Open, Wimbledon and Australian Open singles champion – with American Emma Navarro.
Other duos making the field on rankings included Britain's fifth-ranked Jack Draper and Spain's Paula Badosa, Germany's third-ranked Alexander Zverev and Swiss Belinda Bencic, fourth-ranked American Taylor Fritz and Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, Dane Holger Rune and American Amanda Anisimova, 2021 US Open winner Daniil Medvedev and fellow Russian Mirra Andreeva, Americans Jessica Pegula and Tommy Paul and Poland's Iga Swiatek and Norway's Casper Ruud. Other wild card entry teams include five-time Grand Slam singles champion and world number two Carlos Alcaraz of Spain with Britain's Emma Raducanu, Americans Madison Keys and Frances Tiafoe, world women's doubles number one Taylor Townsend and fellow American Ben Shelton, Italians Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori and Serbians Olga Danilovic and Novak Djokovic – who has won a record 24 men's Grand Slam singles titles. Two other wild card teams will be announced later.

PREVIEW

Piastri returns as leader to scene of first F1 win

Reuters
Budapest

Oscar Piastri has got used to winning since his first in Hungary last year and returns as Formula One leader looking to take a tidy advantage over McLaren teammate Lando Norris into the August break.

The 24-year-old has won six of 13 grands prix so far this season, already more than any Australian driver has ever managed in a single year, and leads his British rival by 16 points with 11 races remaining. "I'm really excited to go back. It's always a fun weekend. It's a great city, a cool track as well," said Piastri after winning a rain-delayed race in Belgium last Sunday in McLaren's sixth one-two of the season. "I'm sure Thursday will be nice to go back to where I had my first win. But as soon as we get on track, you forget about that immediately."

Hungary – hot and twisty and with a layout more like an overgrown go-kart track that makes overtaking tricky – puts a premium on qualifying.

Norris took pole last time in Hungary but lost out to Piastri at the start, recovered the lead when the Australian suffered a slower pitstop and was then ordered by the team to hand back the place.

The Briton eventually complied but it rankled at the time and he will be looking to win on Sunday without any such controversy.

With McLaren dominant, and historically the most successful team in Hungary, the stage is set for another duel between the teammates.

Who joins them on the podium remains an open question but this could be the moment Lewis Hamilton has been waiting for with Ferrari, while teammate Charles Leclerc has had five podiums already this season. Hamilton has an unrivalled record at the Hungaroring with eight wins and was third last year, admittedly in a



Mercedes, behind the McLarens. He also has nine poles at the circuit outside Budapest.

"In the last few races, we've made progress in terms of competitiveness, and in Belgium, thanks to a lot of hard work back in Maranello, we introduced an upgrade package that further improved our performance," said team boss Fred Vasseur. "It will be interesting to see how the updated SF-25 performs on a completely different track, twisty, with plenty of medium and low-speed corners. Charles and Lewis are both in good form, and the team is also performing well."

George Russell set the fastest lap last year for Mercedes but his team have made some wrong turns in development and have work to do, with Italian rookie Kimi Antonelli also keen to get back in the points.

"After a tough weekend in Belgium, we are looking to put in a more competitive showing," said team boss Toto Wolff. "Our performances in recent races have not been up to our standards, and we have work planned to both understand why that has been and get on top of it this weekend."

Four-times world champion Max Verstappen, winner in Hungary in 2022 and 2023, will be starting his 200th race for Red Bull. The race is the 40th Hungarian Grand Prix and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, who took his first win at the circuit with Renault in 2003, has raced in more than half of them – this being his record 22nd.

TRANSFER

Bayern boost firepower with Diaz signing from Liverpool

AFP
Munich

Bayern Munich yesterday signed forward **Luis Diaz** from Premier League champions Liverpool for a fee that could reportedly rise to 75mn euros ($86.5mn). The Colombian winger, who won the Premier League, FA Cup and two League Cups during his three-and-a-half years at Anfield, has signed a contract with the Bundesliga champions until 2029.

The fee paid for Diaz, which includes add-ons, is the third-highest in Bayern's history. Diaz, 28, said in a statement on the club's website that he was "very happy" to be joining the 34-time German champions. "It means a lot to me to be part of FC Bayern," he said. "They're one of the biggest clubs in the world. I want to help my new team with my way of playing football and my character. My goal is to win every possible title, and that's what we'll work for every day as a team."

Writing on Instagram, Diaz said he would "treasure forever" his time at Liverpool, adding he was "proud of everything we achieved together". He mentioned his late teammate Diogo Jota, who died in a car crash in Spain earlier this month. "I carry everyone with me in my heart, but one of them in particular: Diogo (Jota). I will never forget him. We will never forget him. Thank you for everything."

Portugal forward Jota showed his support for Diaz when the Colombian's father was kidnapped in October 2023, holding up a shirt bearing his teammate's name after scoring a goal. Diaz's father was snatched by rebels in his hometown of Barrancas and held hostage for 12 days, before being released unharmed.

The winger made 50 appearances in all competitions for Liverpool last season, scoring 17 goals and providing eight assists as Arne Slot's team clinched the English league title for a record-equalling 20th time. Diaz, who arrived at Anfield from Porto in January 2022, was the club's second-leading goalscorer in the Premier League behind Mohamed Salah, scoring 13 times.

His arrival gives Bayern a quality replacement for Germany forward Jamal Musiala, who has been ruled out for a "long period" after he suffered a broken leg at the recent Club World Cup. Bayern needed extra firepower after veteran Thomas Mueller left the club and Leroy Sane moved to Galatasaray.

"Luis creates a real goal threat and is a scorer, who at the same time works incredibly hard for his team," said Bayern sporting director Christoph Freund. "He's quick, a versatile footballer and brings an intense style of play to the game. He's also gained a lot of experience at the top level with Liverpool and the Colombian national team. Luis Diaz represents a complete package that will thrill our fans."

The only two bigger transfer fees paid by Bayern were 95mn euros for England captain Harry Kane in 2023 and 80mn for French international Lucas Hernandez in 2019. Diaz will train with his new teammates and coach Vincent Kompany for the first time in Munich on Wednesday and could face French side Lyon in a friendly this weekend.



FRIENDLY

Gyokeres could debut against Tottenham

Arsenal's new striker trained in Hong Kong yesterday ahead of the friendly match

AFP
Hong Kong

Viktor Gyokeres could make his Arsenal debut in the cauldron of a north London derby this week in front of 50,000 Hong Kong fans, manager Mikel Arteta said yesterday.

The $67mn Swedish striker came through an open training session at Kai Tak stadium, where Arsenal will take on Tottenham today in the bitter rivals' first clash outside of the UK. Gyokeres joined up with Arsenal on their Asia tour only three days ago, after signing from Sporting Lisbon, but will get some time on the pitch if the club medical team think he is ready, said Arteta. He is playing fitness catch-up with his new teammates, though, who came through pre-season friendlies in Singapore last week against AC Milan and Newcastle.

"Yes, I understand he's only done today's session and yesterday, very little," Arteta told reporters. "We're going to assess tonight how he is, if the medical staff are happy as well with his condition to participate tomorrow night, it's a possibility. With the rest of the squad, everybody is OK."

The 27-year-old Gyokeres fired Sporting to the Portuguese championship last season with 39 goals and made global headlines when he netted a Champions League hat-trick against Manchester City. The striker, who has chosen to wear the number 14 shirt made famous by Arsenal legend Thierry Henry, scored a remarkable 97 goals in 102 matches for the Portuguese side.

He has joined Arsenal on a five-year deal which could cost the north London club up to $89mn with performance-related add-ons. Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard said he was excited to play with his fellow Scandinavian, Gyokeres, calling him "a very complete" player. "I think you've all seen what he's done in his career so far, especially the last season at Sporting, and the numbers speak for themselves," Norwegian international Odegaard said.

"You know, he's physical, strong, fast, good finisher and intelligent as well. So I think he's a very complete striker," said Odegaard. "Really excited to have him with the team. And he's only trained a few times, but you can already see the quality and the energy and the willingness."



Arsenal forward Viktor Gyokeres takes part in a training session at the Kai Tak Stadium in Hong Kong yesterday, ahead of a friendly match against Tottenham Hotspur. *(AFP)*

Gyokeres' arrival took Arsenal's close-season spending to around $267mn. They have also signed defender Cristhian Mosquera, midfielder Martin Zubimendi, goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, midfielder Christian Norgaard and forward Noni Madueke. Arteta was clearly pleased at the business the club has carried out in the transfer window so far, as he seeks to be the first Arsenal manager to win the Premier League since Arsene Wenger in the 2003/04 season. "I am extremely happy with the way that we have approached the window and how aggressive we've been," said Arteta, who has finished runner-up in the Premier League for the past three seasons.

Yesterday, Jurrien Timber was fit to take part in the session, there were two notable defensive absentees – Riccardo Calafiori and Gabriel Magalhaes. With the rest, everybody's going to be okay apart from big Gabi (Gabriel) who is still out and Riccy (Calafiori) — it's probably going to be a bit too early for him tomorrow," Arteta said.

Defender Gabriel, who is coming back from hamstring surgery, played 45 minutes in a behind-closed-doors friendly against Watford, but picked up an injury in the run-up to Arsenal's friendly against Milan on July 23. In the Brazilian's absence, Calafiori started both friendlies in Singapore as the left-sided centre-back. In the second, against Newcastle, he was substituted and disappeared straight down the tunnel for treatment on an injury. With Gabriel and Calafiori out, Jakub Kiwior is likely to start against Spurs as William Saliba's central defensive partner.

Arsenal fans will be a little concerned that they've yet to catch a glimpse of Gabriel in pre-season. The 27-year-old, who signed a new long-term contract this summer, has become an integral part of the team.

His partnership with Saliba has been the bedrock of Arsenal's defensive structure. In Gabriel's absence, it has been interesting to see Arteta starting Calafiori ahead of Kiwior on tour. The Italian was ostensibly bought to play as a left-back, but has extensive experience as a left-sided centre-back.

Calafiori's issue has been staying fit. While the extent of Gabriel and Calafiori's injuries remains unknown, it could present another opportunity for Kiwior to have a run in the team.

The Poland international stepped in ably when Gabriel was ruled out in April, and barely put a foot wrong in big games such as the two-legged ties against Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain.

FOCUS

Lusail Circuit to host Qatar MotoGP from April 10-12

The calendar for the 2026 MotoGP World Championship was officially unveiled last week, confirming a 22-round season that will span five continents with Qatar's Lusail International Circuit hosting the fourth round of the championship from April 10-12.

The campaign marks the 78th edition of the world's premier motorcycle racing championship and will begin at Chang International Circuit in Buriram, Thailand, before concluding at Circuit Ricardo Tormo in Valencia, Spain with a notable highlight of the new calendar being the return of the Brazilian Grand Prix, with Goiania hosting the second round in what promises to be a landmark event for the South American region.

In the Middle East, Qatar's Lusail International Circuit (LIC) is once again confirmed as a key venue, with the Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2026 marking Lusail's 22nd year hosting a round of the MotoGP World Championship since its debut on the calendar in 2004.

Over two decades, the circuit has become a globally recognised fixture in the sport, known for staging the only full night race of the season and providing a unique backdrop for high-level competition under its iconic lights. In line with the championship's current format, the Grand Prix of Qatar will include a Sprint Race on Saturday, adding a second layer of competitive action to the weekend and contributing critical points to the riders' standings.


Lusail International Circuit will host the MotoGP race for 22nd time, since its debut on the calendar in 2004.

Lusail International Circuit remains a cornerstone of MotoGP's global footprint, consistently upholding Qatar's position at the forefront of international motorsport with the previous edition (2025) of the Grand Prix Of Qatar delivering a memorable night of racing showcasing Marc Marquez's victory for the Ducati Lenovo Team, followed by teammate Francesco Bagnaia and Franco Morbidelli securing third place for the Pertamina Enduro VR46 Racing Team.

Further details regarding tickets, hospitality packages, and fan experiences for the Grand Prix of Qatar 2026 will be announced in due course. For official information and updates, visit lcsc.qa or follow Lusail Circuit on social media.

Sunderland sign Xhaka from Leverkusen

London: Premier League newcomers Sunderland announced the signing of midfielder Granit Xhaka from Bayer Leverkusen for a reported fee of £17.3mn. The 32-year-ols Swiss international, who previously captained Arsenal, has signed a three-year contract at the Stadium of Light.

Xhaka left the Gunners in 2023 and won the Bundesliga and German Cup with Leverkusen during his spell at the club. "I'm very proud to be here," he said. "When I spoke to the club, I was excited and I felt the energy, and the mentality that all the people and players have. It's exactly what I wanted, and I have a very good feeling. We are back to where this club needs to be, and we want to stay here to write our own history."

Xhaka's switch to Sunderland is the latest signing in a busy transfer window for the club, promoted to the Premier League in May via the Championship play-offs. Sunderland open their Premier League campaign on August 16 against West Ham at the Stadium of Light.

PALACE'S APPEAL TO COMPETE IN EUROPA LEAGUE TO BE HEARD NEXT MONTH

A closed-door hearing in the case of Crystal Palace vs UEFA, Nottingham Forest and Olympique Lyonnais will be held on August 8, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) confirmed. Palace were demoted to the third-tier Conference League by UEFA's Club Financial Control Body in a multi-club ownership case, while Olympique Lyonnais will be allowed to play in the Europa League.

The Eagle Football Group are majority owners of Lyon while its chairman John Textor also owns a controlling stake in Palace. Textor later resigned from Lyon's board of directors with Michele Kang appointed chairwoman and president. The London club appealed the decision, with the CAS now confirming it will hear the case next month.

Nottingham Forest, who finished seventh in the Premier League, will replace Palace in the Europa League if their appeal fails. Palace had qualified for the Europa League by winning the FA Cup last season, while Lyon reached the competition by finishing sixth in Ligue 1. However, the French club were allowed to keep their place as they finished higher in their respective league. No ruling is expected on the day, but a decision is anticipated on August 11.

INDIA TO PLAY IN CENTRAL ASIA NATIONS CUP

India have been invited to play in the Central Asian football Nations Cup next month, the regional football federation said, alongside 2026 World Cup qualifiers Iran and Uzbekistan. The second edition of the tournament – Iran won the inaugural edition in 2023 – will run from August 29-September 8. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are the host countries.

The regional tournament illustrates a significant thaw in diplomatic ties between Central Asian countries after decades of tensions and conflicts since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. In addition to India, the six members of CAFA – Afghanistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan – will compete. Oman was also invited and will play in the tournament for the second time.