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Henry takes five as Zimbabwe fall apart against New Zealand



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Osaka books Montreal title clash with Canadian teen Mboko



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SPOTLIGHT

Sadd star Firmino headlines fan-focused QSL launch

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) officially kicked off its promotional campaign for the 2025-2026 season yesterday with a three-day fan engagement event at Place Vendome Mall in Lusail.

The event aims to bring fans closer to the league, encourage match attendance and build anticipation for the upcoming season. Held at the mall's gate 1 from 4pm to 10pm, a number of special programmes and activities are on offer for fans and all attendees.

Among the standout moments was the appearance of Al Sadd's marquee signing Roberto Firmino, who was mobbed by fans eager for photos and autographs. The Brazilian forward has joined the reigning champions from Saudi's Al Ahli on a two-season deal until 2027.

Firmino was joined by his Al Sadd teammate Mustafa Tariq, as well as several other players from other clubs. Al Ahli's Croatian defender Matej Mitrovic and Spanish international Pablo Sarabia, who recently signed with Al Arabi, also made appearances and interacted with fans.

Fans wishing to participate in and enjoy the events, accompanying atmosphere and photo opportunity with the players should be present at the designated area during the designated days.

The 2025/26 season of the Qatar Stars League will start on August 14 with Al Rayyan facing promotion winners Al Sailiya at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. Defending champions Al Sadd will start by facing Qatar SC on August 16 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. Stadiums with full air conditioning facilities will be used until the sixth game week.

Four stadiums used during the FIFA World Cup 2022 — Khalifa International Stadium, Al Bayt Stadium, Al Thumama Stadium and Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium — will stage the matches.

The schedule for the second half of the season will be determined according to the national team schedule.

The Qatar team is set to play the World Cup Qualifiers play-off in October, followed by the FIFA Arab Cup at home in December, in addition to the friendlies during international windows.





Roberto Firmino was joined by his Al Sadd teammate Mustafa Tariq, as well as several other players from other clubs. Al Ahli's Croatian defender Matej Mitrovic and Spanish international Pablo Sarabia, who recently signed with Al Arabi, also made appearances and interacted with fans.





FOOTBALL

PSG players dominate list of men's Ballon D'Or nominees

Dembele, Donnarumma, Doue, Hakimi, Kvaratskhelia, Mendes, Neves, Ruiz and Vitinha are PSG's nominees

AFP
Paris

For the second straight year, the 2025 Ballon d'Or will have a new winner after Rodri failed to make the list of 30 nominees dominated by treble-winning Paris Saint-Germain released yesterday. The Manchester City midfielder had already suffered a knee ligament injury ending his season by the time he won the 2024 award last October.

Lionel Messi, who won the last of his eight awards in 2023, is not on the list, nor is five-time winner Cristiano Ronaldo. PSG, who claimed the Champions League in commanding fashion, have nine nominees. Ousmane Dembele, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Desire Doue, Achraf Hakimi, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Nuno Mendes, Joao Neves, Fabian Ruiz and Vitinha are all on the list of players nominated for the big prize. Dembele scored 35 goals and claimed 16 assists in all competitions as PSG won the Ligue 1 title, French Cup and Champions League and were Club World Cup runners-up to Chelsea.

Barcelona, who won a Spanish league and cup double, are represented by four players including the youngest, Lamine Yamal, who has just turned 18, and the oldest, 36-year-old Robert Lewandowski. Yamal (18 goals, 25 assists) was also nominated for the Kopa Trophy for best Under-21 player, an award he won last year. Other nominees include Barcelona's Raphinha (34 goals, 25 assists), Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (34 goals, 23 assists), who was named Premier League player of the season, and Manchester City striker Erling Haaland (34 goals, five assists).

Real Madrid, who boycotted last year's ceremonies claiming to be outraged that Rodri was prefered to Vinicius, have three nominees, including the Brazilian. Napoli are rewarded for winning Italy's Serie A with one selection, Scott McTominay, who becomes the first Scottish nominee since Ally McCoist in 1987. Should he win he would become the first player from Diego Maradona's former club to win the award and only the second Scot, after Denis Law in 1964.

Along with PSGs Luis Enrique, Enzo Maresca, who guided Chelsea to the Club World Cup title, and Liverpool's Arne Slot, who won the Premier League crown in his first season at the club, were nominated for the men's Coach of the Year award. The winners will be unveiled on September 22 at the Ballon d'Or ceremony.

BALLON D'OR NOMINEES

Men: Jude Bellingham (England, Real Madrid); Ousmane Dembélé (France, Paris Saint-Germain); Gianluigi Donnarumma (Italy, Paris Saint-Germain); Desire Doue (France, Paris Saint-Germain); Denzel Dumfries (Netherlands, Inter); Serhou Guirassy (Guinea, Borussia Dortmund); Viktor Gyökeres (Sweden, Sporting CP/Arsenal); Erling Haaland (Norway, Manchester City); Achraf Hakimi (Morocco, Paris Saint-Germain); Harry Kane (England, Bayern); Khvicha Kvaratskhelia (Georgia, Napoli/Paris Saint-Germain); Robert Lewandowski (Poland, Barcelona); Alexis Mac Allister (Argentina, Liverpool); Lautaro Martínez (Argentina, Inter); Kylian Mbappe (France, Real Madrid); Scott McTominay (Scotland, Napoli); Nuno Mendes (Portugal, Paris Saint-Germain); Joao Neves (Portugal, Paris Saint-Germain); Michael Olise (France, Bayern); Cole Palmer (England, Chelsea); Pedri (Spain, Barcelona); Raphinha (Brazil, Barcelona); Declan Rice (England, Arsenal); Fabián Ruiz (Spain, Paris Saint-Germain); Mohamed Salah (Egypt, Liverpool); Virgil van Dijk (Netherlands, Liverpool); Vinícius Junior (Brazil, Real Madrid); Vitinha (Portugal, Paris Saint-Germain); Florian Wirtz (Germany, Leverkusen/Liverpool); Lamine Yamal (Spain, Barcelona)

Women's: Sandy Baltimore (France, Chelsea); Barbra Banda (Zambia, Orlando Pride); Aitana Bonmatí (Spain, Barcelona); Lucy Bronze (England, Chelsea); Klara Buhl (Germany, Bayern); Mariona Caldentey (Spain, Arsenal); Sofia Cantore (Italy, Juventus/Washington Spirit); Steph Catley (Australia, Arsenal); Temwa Chawinga (Malawi, Kansas City); Melchie Dumornay (Haiti, OL Lyonnes); Emily Fox (United States, Arsenal); Cristiana Girelli (Italy, Juventus); Esther González (Spain, Gotham FC); Caroline Graham Hansen (Norway, Barcelona); Patri Guijarro (Spain, Barcelona); Amanda Gutierres (Brazil, Palmeiras); Hannah Hampton (England, Chelsea); Pernille Harder (Denmark, Bayern); Lindsey Heaps (United States, OL Lyonnes); Chloe Kelly (England, Manchester City/Arsenal); Frida Maanum (Norway, Arsenal); Marta (Brazil, Orlando Pride); Clara Mateo (France, Paris FC); Ewa Pajor (Poland, Barcelona); Clàudia Pina (Spain, Barcelona); Alexia Putellas (Spain, Barcelona); Alessia Russo (England, Arsenal); Johanna Rytting Kaneryd (Sweden, Chelsea); Caroline Weir (Scotland, Real Madrid); Leah Williamson (England, Arsenal)



Paris St Germain players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Champions League on May 31. *(Reuters)*

Men's Kopa Trophy nominees: Ayyoub Bouaddi (France, Lille); Pau Cubarsí (Spain, Barcelona); Desire Doue (France, Paris Saint-Germain); Estevao (Brazil, Palmeiras/Chelsea); Dean Huijsen (Spain, Bournemouth/Real Madrid); Myles Lewis-Skelly (England, Arsenal); Rodrigo Mora (Portugal, Porto); Joao Neves (Portugal, Paris Saint-Germain); Lamine Yamal (Spain, Barcelona); Kenan Yıldız (Türkiye, Juventus)

Women's Kopa Trophy nominees: Michelle Agyemang (England, Brighton/Arsenal); Linda Caicedo (Colombia, Real Madrid); Wieke Kaptein (Netherlands, Chelsea); Vicky López (Spain, Barcelona); Claudia Martínez Ovando (Paraguay, Club Olimpia)

Men's Yashin Trophy nominees: Alisson Becker (Brazil, Liverpol); Yassine Bounou (Morocco, Al Hilal); Lucas Chevalier (France, Lille); Thibaut Courtois (Belgium, Real Madrid); Gianluigi Donnarumma (Italy, Paris Saint-Germain); Emiliano Martínez (Argentina, Aston Villa); Jan Oblak (Slovenia, Atletico de Madrid); David Raya (Spain, Arsenal); Matz Sels (Belgium, Nottingham Forest); Yann Sommer (Switzerland, Inter)

Women's Yashin Trophy nominees: Ann-Katrin Berger (Germany, Gotham FC); Cata Coll (Spain, Barcelona); Hannah Hampton (England, Chelsea); Chiamaka Nnadozie (Nigeria, Paris FC/Brighton); Daphne van Domselaar (Netherlands, Arsenal)

Men's coach of the year nominees: Antonio Conte (Italy, Napoli); Luis Enrique (Spain, Paris Saint-Germain); Hansi Flick (Germany, Barcelona); Enzo Maresca (Italy, Chelsea); Arne Slot (Netherlands, Liverpool)

Women's coach of the year: Sonia Bompastor (France, Chelsea); Arthur Elias (Brazil, Brazil national team); Justine Madugu (Nigeria, Nigeria national team); Renee Slegers (Netherlands, Arsenal); Sarina Wiegman (Netherlands, England national team)

Men's Club of the Year nominees: Barcelona (Spain); Botafogo (Brazil); Chelsea (England); Liverpool (England); Paris Saint-Germain (France)

Women's Club of the Year nominees: Arsenal (England); Barcelona (Spain); Chelsea (England); OL Lyonnes (France); Orlando Pride (United States)

SPORT

CRICKET

Henry takes five as Zimbabwe fall apart against NZ

'We're in a very good position. Hopefully we can build on that tomorrow'

Reuters
Bulawayo

Former Zimbabwe captain Brendan Taylor top-scored in his first Test match after a lengthy ban but could not prevent New Zealand dominating the first day of the second Test yesterday.

Taylor made 44 as Zimbabwe were bundled out for 125 by fast bowlers Matt Henry (five for 40) and debutant Zakary Foulkes (four for 38) at Queens Sports Club.

New Zealand finished the first day 49 runs ahead, reaching 174 for one at the close. Devon Conway (79 not out) and Will Young (74) put on 162 for the first wicket before Young was bowled off an inside edge by Trevor Gwandu shortly before the close.

Taylor, 39, was banned for three-and-a-half years in January 2022 for breaching the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption code as well as a drugs offence.

He had not played Test cricket since captaining Zimbabwe against Bangladesh in Harare in July 2021 in a match in which he scored 81 and 92.

The former captain opened the batting and saw four wickets fall to Henry and Foulkes before he was fifth out, caught at cover off Henry with the total on 83. He faced 107 balls and hit six fours.

Foulkes and fellow fast bowlers Jacob Duffy and Matthew Fisher all made their Test debuts, with Nathan Smith and Will O'Rourke injured and Michael Bracewell released to play in the Hundred competition in England.

"We're in a very good position. Hopefully we can build on that tomorrow," said Foulkes.

Fisher claimed his first Test wicket when he had last man Tanaka Chivanga caught at mid-off.

New Zealand were again captained by Mitch Santner after regular captain Tom Latham failed a fitness test on an injured left shoulder.

Henry continued in the outstanding form in Zimbabwe which earned him player of the series honours in a Twenty20 triangular series and player of the match in the first Test, which New Zealand won by nine wickets at the same venue last week. It was Henry's sixth five-wicket haul in Tests. Foulkes dismissed the experienced duo of Sean Williams and captain Craig Ervine, swinging the ball away from the two left-handers.

In a near-repeat of the first day of the first Test, Conway and Young built on the work of their bowlers and laid the foundation for a big New Zealand lead.



New Zealand's Matt Henry celebrates after taking five wickets on first day of the second Test against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo yesterday.

BRIEF SCORES
Zimbabwe, first innings: 125 (B. Taylor 44, T. Tsiga 33 not out; M. Henry 5-40, Z. Foulkes 4-38)
New Zealand, first innings: 174-1 (D. Conway 79 not out, W. Young 74)

Match situation: New Zealand lead by 49 runs with nine wickets remaining in the first innings.

FOCUS

Time to move on from South Africa's WTC win, says Rabada

Reuters
Johannesburg

South Africa's leading paceman **Kagiso Rabada** says it is time to move on from the euphoria of beating Australia in the World Test Championship final while admitting a belated major trophy success has come as a relief to his team.

Rabada will lead South Africa's attack as they take on Australia in three Twenty20 clashes and three one-day Internationals starting in Darwin on Sunday.

"I think it was special, and I've done so many interviews on that since," Rabada said of South Africa's victory over Australia at Lord's in June.

"I think it's time to move on. I don't think we'll forget about that ever as a team, and South Africa won't ever (forget), but time to move on now." he told a press conference yesterday.

The five-wicket win in the WTC final followed several frustrating near misses for South Africa in limited-overs World Cups.

"It was kind of like a relief. But the show moves on, and moving toward the T20 World Cup, I guess the approach will be a bit different. Now, you know, there's no fear of anything."

Rabada is relishing a reprisal of the rivalry between Australia and South Africa.

"It's always some hard cricket being played, some good cricket," he said. "Whenever we play Australia, I always feel like they get the best out of us, because they're sort of in our faces. And I guess we like that."

Rababa, who turned 30 in May, has not played since the WTC final in London.

"Thankfully, I've had quite a long break, so that's been awesome. Maintenance work consistently has to be done because the volume of cricket is quite a bit."

The Australia tour comes ahead of next year's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, and the 2027 World Cup in Southern Africa, and South Africa hope the experience will benefit the young players in their squad.

"For me that's extremely exciting to see them raring to go. It's just about trying to see where we're at as a team, moving into almost like another generation," Rabada added.



SPOTLIGHT

England's Woakes 'gutted' he could not win single-handedly at Oval

Reuters
London

All-rounder **Chris Woakes** is still processing the shock after England fell agonisingly short of a "fairytale" series victory despite his remarkable act of bravery in the fifth and final test against India.

India levelled the five-test series 2-2 on Monday after prevailing in the cliffhanger at The Oval by six runs amid high drama in a fitting finale to an all-time classic series. Woakes, who dislocated his shoulder while fielding, himself provided some of the drama when he came out to bat with one arm in sling to try to get England across the line.

"I'm still gutted, devastated really, that we couldn't get the fairytale," the 36-year-old told the Guardian newspaper.

"But I never considered not going out there, even if it had been 100 runs still to win or whatever.

"It was nice to have the ovation and some of the Indian players came over to show their respect. But any other player would have done the same."



Woakes looked in pain when running, but did not have to face a ball as Gus Atkinson was bowled by India's Mohammed Siraj at the other end. "It's not just you that you're playing for out there," Woakes said. "It's your team and your teammates, all the hard work and the sacrifices they put in, the people watching at home and in the ground. You just feel a duty to do it for everyone."

He hurt his shoulder on the opening day of the see-saw test when he landed awkwardly trying to save a boundary, but said he has no regrets. "We chase down every run," Woakes said.

"That has always been the way. As a bowler, you really respect guys trying to save every run. It means a lot to you. So you kind of do the same for the team. And a tight game like that one – just six runs the difference – kinda shows how they all add up."

Struggling Test opener Konstas sent on Australia A tour of India

Struggling Test opener Sam Konstas was picked yesterday for Australia A's red-ball tour of India next month, with chief selector George Bailey saying the experience will be invaluable.

The 19-year-old, who had a horror time during Australia's recent senior tour of the West Indies, was the only incumbent Test player selected for two four-day games in Lucknow. Test-capped players Cooper Connolly, Todd Murphy and Nathan McSweeney were also in the 14-man squad. A separate Australia A squad was named for three one-day games.

"The subcontinent provides many unique challenges and the opportunity to utilise different skills with bat and ball," said Bailey.

"We hope repeated experiences in these conditions will assist players in developing an effective method and understanding of their game for future subcontinent tours."

Konstas made headlines in the Melbourne Boxing Day Test last year when he took on Indian fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah to make a blazing debut 60 with a succession of unorthodox shots.

He lasted one more Test before being jettisoned, only to win back his place for the West Indies Test series in June-July.

However, he failed to pass 25 in six innings with his hold on the position increasingly shaky ahead of Australia's home Ashes series against England this year.

Australia A four-day squad:
Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Jack Edwards, Aaron Hardie, Campbell Kellaway, Sam Konstas, Nathan McSweeney, Lance Morris, Todd Murphy, Fergus O'Neill, Oliver Peake, Josh Philippe, Corey Rocchiccioli, Liam Scott

Australia A one-day squad:
Cooper Connolly, Harry Dixon, Jack Edwards, Sam Elliott, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie, Mackenzie Harvey, Todd Murphy, Tanveer Sangha, Liam Scott, Lachie Shaw, Tom Straker, Will Sutherland, Callum Vidler.



INDIAN FOOTBALL CLUBS MEET HOPING TO SALVAGE TOURNAMENT

The Indian Super League clubs met with the governing body yesterday, attempting to revive the country's premier football competition as it teetered on the brink of collapse over a dispute between the federation and its commercial partner. The ISL is usually played between September and April. But a rights agreement between the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL), the company that runs the ISL, ends on December 8 and is yet to be renewed.

Three ISL clubs, including former champions Bengaluru FC, have stopped paying the salaries of players and staff, citing a lack of clarity over the future of the tournament. Pre-season training has also yet to start.

All 13 ISL clubs met with AIFF officials, to discuss a way forward, with federation head Kalyan Chaubey afterwards expressing optimism. "We are hoping to have ISL this season, though it may be a bit late," Chaubey told reporters in New Delhi.

"But we can do it with certain changes – maybe in format or other things." Talks to renew the 2010 agreement ended abruptly after India's Supreme Court asked the AIFF to hold the deal over a separate case involving a new constitution for the federation.

GOLF

Scheffler ready to tackle US PGA Tour playoffs

AFP
Washington

World number one Scottie Scheffler says he's "rested and ready to play" as he prepares to tee it up in the US PGA Tour St. Jude Championship after claiming a fourth major title at the British Open last month.

"I took a little bit of extra time resting," said the American star, whose season has also included a triumph in the PGA Championship. "I think just because playing major championships takes a lot out of you, so it was nice to get home and get a little bit of extra rest."

Scheffler romped to a magnificent four-shot victory to claim the Open Championship at Royal Portrush on July 20.

He's since celebrated with a party at home, where he let friends drink out of the Claret Jug, and he also took the Open trophy to his home course Royal Oaks.

Scheffler also attended the New York premiere of the film "Happy Gilmore 2".

It's been a laid-back build up to the St. Jude in Memphis, where Scheffler will launch his defense of the FedEx Cup playoff crown he captured last year.

"At this point in the year, that extra practice is maybe only going to be draining for me a little bit, and that's something that I've learned to manage as my career has gone on.

"My game is in a good spot, and I feel like some extra practice at this point in the year can almost be detrimental in terms of just physical and mental fatigue."

Scheffler leads the 70-strong field at TPC Southwind. The top 50 in the FedEx Cup standings after Sunday's finish will advance to the BMW Championship in Maryland and the top 30 after the BMW advance to the series-ending Tour Championship in Atlanta.

Masters champion Rory McIlroy, second on the points list behind Scheffler, has opted to skip the opening event knowing he will still comfortably make the field for the BMW Championship despite dropping in the standings.

The move was expected as McIlroy prepares for a busy end to his season. After the Tour Championship he's slated to play the DP World Tour's Irish Open and BMW PGA Championship and the Ryder Cup before events in India and Australia.

SPOTLIGHT

Khachanov topples Zverev to enter final

AFP
Toronto

Karen Khachanov rallied to defeat top seed Alexander Zverev and book an ATP Toronto Masters title clash with Ben Shelton, who beat second seeded Taylor Fritz on Wednesday.

Khachanov fought back from 3-1 down in the final-set tiebreaker to beat Zverev 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/4).

Shelton, seeded fourth, hammered Fritz 6-4, 6-3 in the first All-American Masters 1000 semi-final in 15 years to book the fifth, and most important, ATP final of his career.

Russia's Khachanov, seeded 11th, had lost two previous semi-finals in Canada. But he dug deep to advance, saving a match point as he levelled the deciding set at 6-6, with world number three Zverev hammering a backhand into the top tape of the net.

The German committed 44 unforced errors in the nearly three-hour defeat while Khachanov had 29 winners and 34 unforced errors.

"I had to work out this match, dig deep and try my best," Khachanov said. "It was very demanding physically and mentally.

"We've had a lot of matches and I'm happy to beat him after losing some easy ones," added Khachanov, who fell to Zverev in the Tokyo Olympic singles final. "Today was a tough one – I was match point down.

"I'm just happy things went on my side at the end."

Khachanov said it got tense at the end. "When you reach the final tiebreak, you have to play your best. You can't waste time and energy with negative thoughts or you won't succeed. You never know what will happen but you have to give it a try."

Khachanov will be playing his first final of the season after semi-final defeats in Barcelona and Halle. Shelton and Fritz had to wait out a brief delay when a problem with the electronic line calling system emerged as they took the court. But that was barely a blip for 22-year-old Shelton, the world number seven, who had beaten Alex de Minaur in the quarter-finals and with the win over Fritz notched his first back-to-back victories over top 10 opponents.

US Open finalist Fritz had to save four break points in the third game of the match and was broken in the ninth game to leave Shelton to serve for the set.

Shelton seized a second break for a 3-2 lead in the second, landing a perfect lob over Fritz's head and held at love for a 5-3 lead.

He closed out the masterclass in with another break, Fritz mangling his racquet over his knee after he double faulted on match point.

"I'm happy with my level and how I executed," Shelton said. "I've seen so many big improvements in my game this week. That's what I'm most happy about, how I'm executing, how little I'm hesitating, how I'm returning.

"Beating two top 10 guys back-to-back is huge for me.

"I felt I had the ball on a string," he added. "I'm excited to play like this, hitting the ball and expecting it to go in."


Karen Khachanov returns a shot to Alexander Zverev during the semi-finals in Toronto Masters. *(AFP)*

TENNIS

Osaka to meet Canadian teen Mboko in final

'Unfortunately I fell, but I had everyone supporting and pushing me'

AFP
Montreal

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka and Canadian teen sensation Victoria Mboko booked a championship showdown with gritty semi-final wins on Wednesday in the Canadian Open in Montreal.

Japan's Osaka, chasing her first tour-level title since the 2021 Australian Open, saved a pair of set points in the second-set tiebreak to polish off a 6-2, 7-6 (9/7) victory over Denmark's Clara Tauson – who was coming off victories over Wimbledon champion Iga Swiatek and Australian Open winner Madison Keys.

Mboko saved a match point in a thrilling 1-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) victory over former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina.

The 18-year-old wild card fed off the energy of the crowd, crediting ecstatic supporters with carrying her through after a tumble left her with a sore right wrist in the third set of her first tour-level semi-final.

Mboko, who ousted top-seeded French Open champion Coco Gauff in the fourth round, didn't let it stop her.

After going down an early break in the third set she refused to go quietly, loading up on her forehand and fending off a match point as she broke Rybakina in the 10th game to level the set.

A couple of untimely double faults helped ninth-seeded Rybakina break back for a 6-5 lead, but the ninth seed from Kazakhstan was broken to love in the next game, setting the stage for the tiebreak drama.

"After I had that fall I wasn't in the greatest spirits, but I'm happy that I kept my composure and I was kind of patient in the right moments," said Mboko, who won the last three points of a decider she called "stressful".

"Anything can happen," an exhausted Mboko beamed as the crowd's cheers rained down on her.


Naomi Osaka of Japan celebrates her win against Clara Tauson of Denmark in the semi-finals in Montreal. *(AFP)*

"Unfortunately I fell, but I had everyone supporting me and pushing me."

Mboko started the season ranked outside the top 300 but had worked her way up to 85th coming into the week by grinding away in lower-level tournaments.

She is assured of breaking into the top 40 no matter the result against Osaka, a former world number one who has struggled to find consistency since returning from maternity leave in 2024 after more than a year away.

Osaka has looked re-energised this week after a coaching shake-up and rolled through the first set against Tauson.

But Tauson twice regained a break in the second set as she pushed it to the tiebreaker where she had chances to level the match after taking a 6-4 lead.

Unable to convert her set points, the Dane saved one match point to make it 7-7, but Osaka won the next two to seal the victory and reach her first final in a WTA 1000 level event since Miami in 2022.

"Definitely really happy," said Osaka, who started the week ranked 49th in the world. "(I'm) excited to play my first hard court final back."

Osaka, whose performance so far this week means she's assured of rising high enough in the rankings to be seeded at the US Open later this month, was bracing for a tough match against a player who said in a youthful interview that she idolised the Japanese star.

"I watched her play today because they were the match in front of us. I thought it was really impressive how she stayed calm," said Osaka, adding that Mboko's rebound from match point down was "really impressive for an 18-year-old."

SKI WORLD CHAMPION VENIER QUITS, SAYING HUNGER HAS GONE

Six months after claiming her first major title, Austrian skier Stephanie Venier announced her retirement yesterday, aged 31.
Venier won the woman's Super-G world title in Saalbach in February but said on the Austrian Ski Federation website that "the unwavering will required for elite sport simply hasn't been there in recent months to the extent I expect it to be". In her 13-year World Cup career, the speed specialist scored three wins and 12 other podium finishes.
She shone in World Championships, winning a downhill silver in St Moritz in Switzerland in 2017 and a team-combined bronze as well as the Super-G gold in her native country last season. "I more than fulfilled my greatest dream of winning a medal at the home World Championships in Saalbach with a gold and a bronze," she said.
"Even though the Olympic Games are coming up next year, it feels like the right time for me to draw a line under my racing career."
"As the saying goes: The peak of your career is the best time to retire," she said.

FOCUS

Refreshed Sinner ready for Cincinnati Open title defence

Reuters
Chicago

World number one Jannik Sinner said he had taken the right decision by opting for a long break following his Wimbledon triumph, and the recharged Italian is ready to fire at the Cincinnati Open where he will defend his title.

The 23-year-old lost a marathon French Open final to rival Carlos Alcaraz in June before gaining revenge over the Spaniard at the All England Club last month to secure his fourth Grand Slam title overall and second of a difficult season in which he served a short ban for an inadvertent doping offence.

Sinner opted to prioritise his health following that victory and will return after a near month-long absence from the circuit when he takes to the court over the weekend in Cincinnati after getting a first-round bye.

"The body and mind need to recover and need to understand what happened," Sinner told reporters in Ohio on Wednesday as he explained his scheduling.

"I'm very happy I took some time off, seeing my family and friends and very important people I have around. In the past, I made some mistakes sometimes, starting too early at times.

"I had conversations with the whole team, trying to understand what's best. When you win big titles, they're very special moments and then you have to leave them."

Sinner sported a protective sleeve on his right elbow when he practised with Christopher Eubanks on Wednesday, sparking concerns that he was still feeling the effects of an injury sustained during his title run at Wimbledon.

The Italian said, however, that he was only using it as it gave him more stability.

"The elbow is good. Today was the first time that I put the sleeve on because I liked the feeling of the sleeve," he said.

"The impact with the ball is slightly more stable and I liked it at Wimbledon. I had to see how it is when it's very hot and humid because it's a bit different.

"It's going to be something I take into consideration, but I really love the feeling of pure striking."

The Cincinnati tournament is a tune-up event for the US Open that runs from August 23 to September 7.



Ingebrigtsen set to miss Diamond League meetings in Poland, Belgium

Olympic 5,000m champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen is set to miss this month's Diamond League meetings in Poland and Belgium as he recovers from injury, his spokesperson said on Wednesday.
The 24-year-old Norwegian had been scheduled to run the 1500 metres in Brussels on August 22 and was also listed for the Silesia meeting in Poland on August 16, having been announced for the event as early as December last year.
Ingebrigtsen has struggled with an Achilles injury over the last few months and had to drop out of the Ostrava Golden Spike and Oslo Bislett Games in June.
"He is still working on getting rid of the injury he has sustained to an Achilles. Unfortunately. He would very much have liked to be able to participate," Ingebrigtsen's spokesperson Espen Skoland told Norwegian TV2.
Ingebrigtsen has not competed since claiming double gold in the 1500m and 3,000m at the World Indoor Championships in March.
He has spent recent weeks training in St. Moritz, where his camp say he is making steady progress.
No revised timeline has been given for a return to competition, but Ingebrigtsen has said his goal is to compete at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo in September.

TRANSFER

United agree 85mn euro deal to sign Sesko

AFP
Manchester


Slovenia's Benjamin Sesko had also previously been linked with Arsenal after impressing during his two-year spell in Germany, where he scored 39 times in 87 appearances for Leipzig. *(Reuters)*

Manchester United have agreed a deal worth up to 85mn euros ($99mn, £74mn) to sign striker Benjamin Sesko from RB Leipzig yesterday, according to multiple reports in England.

The *BBC*, *Athletic* and *Sky Sports* reported United will pay an initial 76.5mn euros for the 22-year-old with a further 8.5mn euros due in easy add-ons. Newcastle were also interested in signing the Slovenian, possibly to replace want-away star Alexander Isak, a target for Liverpool.

However, Sesko has been wooed by the enduring stature of the 20-time English champions despite a lack of European football in the coming season. His arrival will complete an overhaul of the Red Devils' blunt attack. Only four other teams scored fewer than United's 44 goals in 38 Premier League games last season as the English giants endured their worst campaign for 51 years, finishing 15th in the table.

Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo were signed earlier in the window, taking United's total spend on forwards in recent months to over £200mn.

Sesko had also previously been linked with Arsenal after impressing during his two-year spell in Germany, where he scored 39 times in 87 appearances for Leipzig, including 21 last season. Standing 1.95 metres (6ft 4ins) tall, Sesko's towering physique, electric pace and eye for goal have earned comparisons with Manchester City's Erling Haaland.

Like Haaland, he also made his name at RB Salzburg before moving to Germany in 2023. United are banking on Sesko realising his abundant potential to fire them back into contention at the top of the Premier League table.

Between them, Sesko, Cunha and Mbeumo combined for 58 goals last season. It will be the first time Sesko has played professionally outside the Red Bull group of clubs. He moved to RB Salzburg as a teenager from his native Slovenia, where was playing for Domzale. An immediate loan to Liefering, Salzburg's reserve team in the second tier, was highly beneficial and he spent two seasons, scoring 22 goals in 44 appearances.

Salzburg gave the imposing Sesko his Austrian Bundesliga debut in January 2021 and two and a half years of impressive goalscoring form resulted in the natural move to Leipzig. Sesko won three titles during in Austria – though he made meaningful contributions only to the second and third – and became a Champions League regular, netting six times in 28 appearances in the competition.

Sesko is aggressive in the air but also offers pace and clinical finishing. He is not the finished article but has shown great potential and Amorim will be eager to mould him into the striker he desires after watching the struggles of Rasmus Højlund and Joshua Zirkzee.

The massive outlay on their arrivals needs to bear fruit quickly with United under pressure to meet financial sustainability rules, especially without the revenue of European football this season.

LA LIGA

Barca strip Ter Stegen of captain's armband

AFP
Barcelona



Barcelona yesterday said they had stripped Marc-Andre ter Stegen of the captain's armband in a continuing dispute over the German goalkeeper's fitness status. "As a consequence of the disciplinary proceedings initiated against player Marc-Andre ter Stegen, and until such proceedings are definitively resolved, the club... has decided to temporarily remove him as captain of the first football team," Barca said in a statement.

They said vice-captain Ronald Araujo, a Uruguayan defender, would take over. According to local media, the dispute centres on 33-year-old Ter Stegen's refusal to co-operate with an attempt to have him classified by La Liga as a long-term injury case, which would allow the club to deduct part of his pay from their official wage bill.

With the new Liga season approaching, Barcelona are again struggling to satisfy Spanish financial fair play rules. If they cannot, they may not be able to register new players.

The club plans to partly reopen its expensively renovated Camp Nou stadium this month.

After two seasons marred by injury, Ter Stegen decided to undergo back surgery at the end of July. He has refused to sign a form releasing his medical data to La Liga, preventing Barcelona's attempt to have him officially declared a long-term absentee.

His place is under threat from one of the summer signings, 24-year-old Joan Garcia, and 35-year-old Wojciech Szczesny, the Polish veteran who has been rewarded with a contract extension for taking over during last season's Liga title-winning campaign. The German goalkeeper, the last remaining member of Luis Enrique's 2015 European champion team, faces heavy penalties under La Liga regulations, including the termination of his contract.

SPOTLIGHT

Son says thrilled to join MLS club Los Angeles

The 33-year-old will reportedly cost a Major League Soccer record $26mn transfer fee

Reuters
Los Angeles

South Korean forward Son Heung-min said he is "here to win" after he joined Los Angeles FC for a record Major League Soccer transfer fee, ending a decade-long stint at Tottenham Hotspur.

Son was introduced at LAFC's BMO Stadium on Wednesday, where he was greeted by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and city officials amid chants and drumming from supporters' group 3252. "What can I say, dream come true. LA, what a city," Son told reporters at his unveiling.

Financial details of the transfer were not disclosed by either club but reports said LAFC paid a fee in the region of $26.5mn for the 33-year-old. Son revealed LAFC was not his initial preference, but credited the club's co-president and general manager John Thorrington with persuading him to make the switch.

"He just changed my mind, heart, he changed my brain. He showed me the destination where I should be and right now I'm here and I'm so, so excited," said Son, who attended LAFC's 2-1 win over Tigres UANL on Tuesday night. "I'm here to win, I will perform and I will definitely show you some exciting football, and we will definitely have success," he said.

The move is expected to resonate with Los Angeles' sizeable Korean community, with LAFC's stadium located just south of Koreatown. Son follows in the footsteps of other international stars who have joined LAFC, including Carlos Vela, Giorgio Chiellini, Olivier Giroud, and former Tottenham teammates Gareth Bale and Hugo Lloris.

Son, who joined Tottenham from Bayer Leverkusen in 2015, led the north London club to their first trophy in 17 years with a 1-0 win over Manchester United in the Europa League final in May. The former Spurs captain made 454 appearances for the team and scored 173 goals, winning the Premier League Golden Boot in the 2021-22 season. Reflecting on his departure from Tottenham, Son described the move as "very emotional."

"I felt like I needed a new chapter, I needed a new challenge and I chose LAFC," he said. "I think you could say I'm old but I still have good physicality, good legs, and still have a good quality. Obviously I'm here to perform but I also want to give some advice to some young players for improvement. I can't wait... Let's do it together and win the trophy."

Son cited the thriving Korean community (around 320,000) in Los Angeles as another factor in his decision. "As a Korean, to know that Koreatown here in Los Angeles has so many Koreans, here in this country, I'm very proud to be a part of the club and the city," he said through the interpreter. "And I'll make them proud with my performance."

He also credited former Tottenham teammate and current LAFC goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, who made a recruiting pitch. "Hugo was helping and advising about how great Los Angeles is," Son said.

It was not immediately clear when Son will make his debut for the Black and Gold, who are currently sixth in the Western Conference and travel to face Chicago Fire tomorrow.

LAFC's Thorrington called signing Son an "historic" day for the club. "Sonny is a world class talent, a global icon of football and we're thrilled that he has chosen to write the next chapter of his remarkable career with us here at LAFC," he said.

Son, capped 134 times by South Korea, joins LAFC after an emotional farewell to Spurs during a friendly against Newcastle United at Seoul World Cup Stadium. "Sonny has given so much to this club, both on and off the pitch, and for that we are forever grateful," Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy said in a club statement. "We wish him all the best for the future, and he will always be welcome back as a beloved and cherished member of our Spurs family."



South Korea's Son Heung-min holds his Los Angeles FC jersey during a press conference after he joined the Major League Soccer club on Wednesday. *(AFP)*

FRIENDLY

Arteta calls Arsenal's defending 'naive' against Villarreal



Reuters
London

Arsenal were naive in their defending and paid a painful price, manager **Mikel Arteta** said after his side's 3-2 friendly defeat against Villarreal left them with back-to-back pre-season losses.

Arsenal, who started their preparations for the new season with victories over AC Milan and Newcastle United before losing to London rivals Tottenham Hotspur, found themselves trailing 2-0 inside 33 minutes against Spanish side Villarreal at the Emirates on Wednesday.

"Today I think the result is painful. I think they were super efficient but we've been naive, especially the way we have defended in open spaces and that's something that, especially the way we play, we have to absolutely nail," Arteta told reporters. "Today we haven't been good at all in that department and that has cost us the game for sure."

Arteta, however, was pleased with what he saw from striker Viktor Gyokeres, who completed his 63.5mn euros ($74.14mn) switch from Sporting last month, after handing the 27-year-old Swede his first start in an Arsenal shirt.

"I think it was very important for him to start a match and start to have the feeling and the connection with the team," Arteta said. "He's been with us only a week or so, but I really saw a lot of things and a lot of purpose, especially the way he was attacking certain spaces."

Arteta also heaped praise on highly rated 15-year-old attacking midfielder Max Dowman, who won a penalty for Arsenal.

"He continues to impress, without a doubt. The impact he had in the game again today, the efficiency that he shows in every attack and action, it's incredible," the Spaniard added.

Kane scores as Bayern thump Spurs in friendly

Munich: Harry Kane scored his first goal against his former side as Bayern Munich romped past Tottenham 4-0 at home in a pre-season friendly. Kane, who is boyhood club Tottenham's all-time top goalscorer with 280 strikes in 435 matches, put Bayern in the lead after 12 minutes with a composed finish.

The England captain then had a chance to double Bayern's lead two minutes later when Joao Palhinha, who joined Spurs from Bayern on a season-long loan on Sunday, gave away a penalty. Kane however slipped, blasting his shot well over the bar. It was the first time Kane failed to convert a spot kick since his miss in the 2022 World Cup quarter-final defeat to France.

Kingsley Coman added the home side's second with a superb curling shot from the edge of the box with 61 minutes gone. Bayern teenagers Lennart Karl and Jonah Kusi-Asare both scored in the dying stages to complete the one-sided victory. Kane joined Bayern in a 100mn euro transfer from Spurs in the summer of 2023.

The match was the Europa League winners' last chance to fine tune before next Wednesday's UEFA Super Cup clash with European champions Paris Saint-Germain. Spurs have had a mixed bag under new coach Thomas Frank this pre-season, beating London rivals Arsenal along with Reading, while being held to draws with Newcastle, Luton Town and Wycombe.

MADDISON SET TO MISS MOST OF SPURS SEASON AFTER KNEE INJURY

Tottenham midfielder James Maddison is expected to miss most of the upcoming Premier league season after rupturing an anterior cruciate ligament. The England international missed the end of the 2024/25 campaign with a knee injury but featured in pre-season under new boss Thomas Frank.

Maddison collapsed in pain during a 1-1 draw with Newcastle in South Korea on Sunday with no one around him and left the pitch on a stretcher late in the game. Spurs' worst fears have now been confirmed, with the player facing surgery.

PARTEY SIGNS FOR VILLARREAL WHILE ON BAIL

Former Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey, facing five rape charges in England, completed a move to Spanish club Villarreal. The 32-year-old Ghana international, who denies the allegations, was granted conditional bail on August 5 after appearing in a London court on five counts of rape against two women and one count of sexual assault against a third woman. The alleged offences took place between 2021 and 2022, when he was an Arsenal player. Partey was charged on July 4, four days after leaving the Gunners when his contract expired at the end of June.