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Swiatek gets walkover win as Sabalenka advances



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Manchester City ready for new era without talisman De Bruyne



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SPORT



CRICKET

Power-packed David slams 83 as Australia beat South Africa in first T20

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FOOTBALL

Palace humble Liverpool to win Community Shield

Substitute Devenny scored the winning spot kick as Salah, Mac Allister and Elliott missed penalties

AFP
London



Crystal Palace's captain Marc Guehi lifts the trophy as he celebrates with team-mates after winning the FA Community Shield at Wembley Stadium in London. *(AFP)*

Crystal Palace twice came from behind to stun a new-look Liverpool and win the Community Shield for the first time on penalties after a 2-2 draw at Wembley yesterday.

New signings Hugo Ekitike and Jeremie Frimpong scored for the Premier League champions, but Palace responded through Jean-Philippe Mateta and Ismaila Sarr before winning an error-strewn shootout 3-2. Mohamed Salah blazed over from the spot, while Alexis Mac Allister and Harvey Elliott were denied by an inspired Dean Henderson as Palace built on winning their first ever major trophy by beating Manchester City in May's FA Cup final.

"We were on the same level as Liverpool and it was a big performance. I'm proud of the team," said Palace boss Oliver Glasner.

The traditional curtain-raiser to the English football season was given extra significance after a summer marked by tragedy for Liverpool. Forward Diogo Jota was killed in a car accident alongside his brother Andre Silva. Reds legend Ian Rush and Palace chairman Steve Parish laid wreaths on the side of the pitch before kick-off, while the Liverpool end was awash with banners and flags paying tribute to the Portuguese international.

A minute's silence, however, had to be cut short due to disturbances in the crowd. Jota's death has dampened the excitement over Liverpool's transfer spending spree to build on a squad that romped to a record-equalling 20th league title last season. All four of their new signings at a cost of £260mn ($350mn) – Ekitike, Florian Wirtz, Frimpong and Milos Kerkez – started.

Ekitike's role this season could depend on whether Liverpool are successful in their pursuit of Newcastle striker Alexander Isak. But the Frenchman – signed from Eintracht Frankfurt last month for an initial £69mn – did his case to be Slot's preferred number nine no harm at all.

Wirtz also bagged his first assist for the Reds when Ekitike spun onto the German's pass and fired into the far corner after just four minutes. Palace were making their first ever appearance in the fixture but the Eagles again showed their ability to match one of the Premier League's giants over 90 minutes.

Mateta missed a glorious chance to level when he failed to beat Alisson Becker when one-on-one. But from the rebound Sarr charged into the box and was tripped by an out-of-sorts Virgil van Dijk. Mateta coolly sent Alisson the wrong way from the penalty spot to equalise.

Liverpool's players were sporting a "Forever 20" emblem, referencing Jota's now-retired shirt number, that they will wear all season.

The Liverpool fans had risen to chant Jota's name as the game entered the 20th minute when their side retook the lead. Frimpong's chipped cross caught out Henderson and flew into the far corner.

Ekitike wasted a great chance for his second early in the second half from another Wirtz pass as this time he fired over.

However, Slot's new-look side are still to find the right balance between attack and defence as has been evidenced during preseason. "The combinations look sometimes sharper now," said Slot on the difference in his side to last season. "We are able to create more but we are conceding at the moment more as well. If you want to compete to win the league, you cannot concede these chances. We conceded too much today to win the game."



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (left) looks dejected after losing the Community Shield match to Crystal Palace. *(Reuters)*

Palace were a constant threat with balls in behind the Reds' defence and levelled again 13 minutes from time. Sarr sped onto Adam Wharton's through ball and calmly slotted past Alisson for his fourth goal in seven games against Liverpool and sent the game to a shootout without extra-time.

Youngster Justin Devenny was the unlikely hero as he blasted the winning spot-kick high past Alisson, showing Salah, Mac Allister and Elliott how it is done.

ASIAN CUP BASKETBALL

Qatar bow out as Australia book quarter-finals spot

By Sports Reporter
Jeddah

Australia turned it up in the second half to beat Qatar 110-82 and sweep their way into the FIBA Asia Cup quarter-finals yesterday at the King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah.

Qatar entered the game following consecutive losses to Lebanon (84-80) and South Korea (97-83), making the clash against Australia crucial for any remaining qualification hopes. With yesterday's loss, Qatar are bottom of the four-team group with 3 points and are out of contention.

The reigning two-time champions Australia got going in the third before breaking away shortly after, foiling their foes' upset bid while they went on to clinch the top spot in Group A by collecting their third win in as many games.

Now, the Boomers will wait for the winner between hosts Saudi Arabia and the Philippines in the qualification to quarter-finals today to determine their opponents in the final eight, which starts Wednesday.

"I didn't think we started very well defensively but finished very well defensively," said head coach Adam Caporn. "Particularly in the second half, in the third quarter, when our starters came back. That turned the game for us," added the seasoned mentor.

Five players finished in double figures in the rout, with winger Jaylin Galloway once again showing the way with 24 points behind an excellent 8-of-10 shooting from the floor, which included a pair of three-pointers.

Will Hickey came through with 15 points, 5 rebounds, and 8 assists. Reyne Smith also tallied 15 points off the bench after going 4-of-6 from beyond the arc, as he was responsible in giving themselves the lead for good. As the Aussies struggled to get into their usual flow, the young guard came in and knocked down a pair of treys late in the second, the last of which gave them the 46-43 advantage entering the intermission.

Galloway would then set the tone for the rout, scoring seven in an 8-0 run to open the third canto for a 54-43 lead. They'd go on to pour a total of 31 points in the said period to build a 77-63 lead, never to let up.

Will Magnay supplied 11 points while Jack McVeigh added 10 in the win that saw Australia shoot 56.5-percent thanks to their 21 assists, and win the rebounding battle with 45 to their tally - 13 more than the opposition's.

Brandon Goodwin, on the other hand, registered 24 points, 7 rebounds, and 5 assists plus 3 steals to lead Qatar, who started out so strongly and even constructed an 18-13 lead but could not sustain as much.

Tyler Harris made 15 points. Babacar Dieng had 14 points, while Zineeddine Bedri and Alen Hadzibegovic added 13 points apiece as they ended the tournament without a win in the three matches they played.



Australia and Qatar players in action during their FIBA Asia Cup quarter-final match at the King Abdullah Sports City in Jeddah yesterday.

SPORT

CRICKET

Power-packed David slams 83 as Australia beat SA in first T20

'CERTAINLY WE WANT GUYS LIKE DAVID TO COME OUT AND BAT THE WAY HE DID, HE WAS THE DIFFERENCE'

AFP
Darwin, Australia

Tim David crunched eight sixes in a blistering 83 from 52 balls to help Australia beat South Africa by 17 runs in their opening Twenty20 clash in Darwin yesterday.

After being sent in, the hosts were all out for 178 on the final delivery of their 20 overs in the first game of international cricket in Australia's tropical north for 17 years. Cameron Green (35 off 13) was the only other batsman to get going, with left-arm quick Kwena Maphaka bagging 4-20 as South Africa bowled out Australia for the first time in a T20.

But David's phenomenal innings proved enough, with the Proteas restricted to 161-9 in reply. That was despite a battling 71 from Ryan Rickelton, who fell to a spectacular Glenn Maxwell catch on the boundary.

Maxwell was on the long-on boundary when Rickelton, who had given South Africa a glimmer despite battling for fl ency, tried to hit Dwarshuis for six but jumped over the rope, parried the ball back in and completed the catch without touching the boundary or breaking a sweat.

"We went pretty hard today but there's not going to be that many occasions when that many of our batters miss out I don't think," player-of-the match David said

Josh Hazlewood took 3-27 and Ben Dwarshuis 3-26.

"Great way to start the series," skipper Mitchell Marsh said after Australia's ninth T20 victory in a row. "Certainly we want guys like David to come out and bat the way he did, he was the difference."

Backing up from a recent 5-0 series sweep against the West Indies, Australia signalled their intent early with Marsh slamming a six off the first ball.

But he lost opening partner Travis Head (two) and Josh Inglis (golden duck) in the space of three deliveries and then skied Kagiso Rabada on 13, with Maphaka taking a tricky catch before Green and David let loose.

They put on a quickfire 40 for the fourth wicket before Green was undone by a slower ball from Lungi Ngidi.

Australia were in trouble on 75-6 when Mitch Owen was out for two and dangerman Maxwell went for one. But David dug in and, with Dwarshuis (17), added 59 for the seventh wicket.

David was dropped by Tristan Stubbs on 56, although Stubbs made amends by holding the catch that finally removed the big Australian after a power-packed knock.

David's six-hitting against the short ball was particularly impressive, from his flat-batted pull off Maphaka in the ninth over to the swivel-pull off Bosch in the 13th, which came two balls before he smoked Bosch through the covers to bring up 50.

Seven of his eight sixes were scored in front of square and four in the 'V'. David added 27 runs after he was put down. He was in sight for a second hundred before he was caught at long-on with 10 balls left in the innings.

South Africa's chase started badly with skipper Aiden Markram out to Hazlewood in the first over, and they had lost three wickets for 48 by the sixth over.

Rickelton and Stubbs (37) knuckled down in a threatening 72-run stand but Hazlewood struck again with two wickets in an over to shatter their momentum.

South Africa's hopes were all but over when Adam Zampa matched Hazlewood's feat in the next over. "It got close, but we were pretty far from our best tonight," Markram said.


Australian batsman Tim David plays a shot during the T20I against South Africa played in Darwin yesterday. *(AFP)*

The second of the three-game series is in Darwin tomorrow.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 178 (David 83, Maphaka 4-20) **beat South Africa 161 for 9** (Rickelton 71, Dwarshuis 3-26, Hazlewood 3-27) **by 17 runs.**

Dropped Australian star Labuschagne plots Ashes return

Dropped Australian Test star Marnus Labuschagne says he is determined to bounce back and prove the doubters wrong, putting his hand up to open in the Ashes series against England. The long-time number three was axed from Australia's Test tour of the West Indies in June and July after a sustained lean spell. In his first comments since, he told *The Australian* newspaper yesterday that it may have been a blessing in disguise.

"It was tough because you never want to be dropped," the 31-year-old said. "But almost as soon as their (selectors) words came out my mind shifted straight away to, 'Okay, how am I playing the Ashes ... how do I make that happen?'.

"This has given me an opportunity to reflect and not having the pressure of the media saying, 'Marnus has got to go'.

"There is a tipping point but it's something I thrive on, proving the doubters wrong and being able to find a way. Missing those West Indies Tests gave me the chance to sit back and think, 'This is where I want to be and this is how I'm going to get there'."

The 58-Test veteran was moved from his regular spot at three to open in the World Test Championship final loss to South Africa in June, where he scored 17 and 22 before being dropped. But with his replacement, the teenager Sam Konstas, struggling at the top of the order, Labuschagne said he was ready to give it another crack.

GOLF

Fleetwood clings to 1-stroke PGA St. Jude lead over Rose

AFP
Washington

Tommy Fleetwood, chasing his first US PGA Tour title, clung to a one-stroke lead over fellow Englishman Justin Rose after Saturday's third round of the PGA St. Jude Championship.

Fleetwood closed with a bogey to fire a one-under par 69 and stand on 14-under 196 after 54 holes at TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tennessee, in the first FedEx Cup playoff event.

"I've been really good off the tee, which is a strong quality around this golf course," Fleetwood said. "At times you would get into a nice flow and feel comfortable with your routine."

Rose, the 2013 US Open champion and 2016 Olympic winner, closed with a birdie to shoot 67 and finish on 197.

Top-ranked Scottie Scheffler fired a 65 to stand third on 198 with fellow Americans J.J. Spaun, the US Open champion, and Andrew Novak sharing fourth on 199.

Fleetwood, a seven-time winner on the DP World Tour making his 162nd PGA Tour start, has six runner-up finishes on the US tour, including a playoff loss to US Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley in June's Travelers Championship.

"I would way rather be there and fail than not be there at all, so either way, it's a good thing," Fleetwood said of his lacking a PGA title.

"Yeah, it hurts when it doesn't happen for you and that sort of streak and people talk about it more and more. Obviously it's not my favourite time.

"It has taken me a long time to win out here and I still haven't done it. The more I put myself there, the more chance there is of it happening and just go out and keep learning from every experience.

"Tomorrow might be my day. It might not. But being there is the most important thing and I'll continue to try and do that." Scheffler, trying to become the first player to defend the playoff crown, is the Cup points leader and has won four of five prior events this year when in the top five after 54 holes.

Fleetwood grabbed the lead by one over Rose with a 14-foot birdie putt at the 12th to reach 14-under and Rose fell two adrift with a bogey after missing the green at the par-three 14th.

Rose and Fleetwood each birdied the par-five 16th, Rose tapping in after reaching the green in two and Fleetwood making a putt from just inside 14 feet.

Rose found the left rough off the 17th tee, punched out shy of the green and made bogey to stumble three back.

But Fleetwood needed three to reach the green at the 18th hole and missed a 29-foot par putt for a bogey while Rose sank a birdie putt from just inside five feet to pull within one.

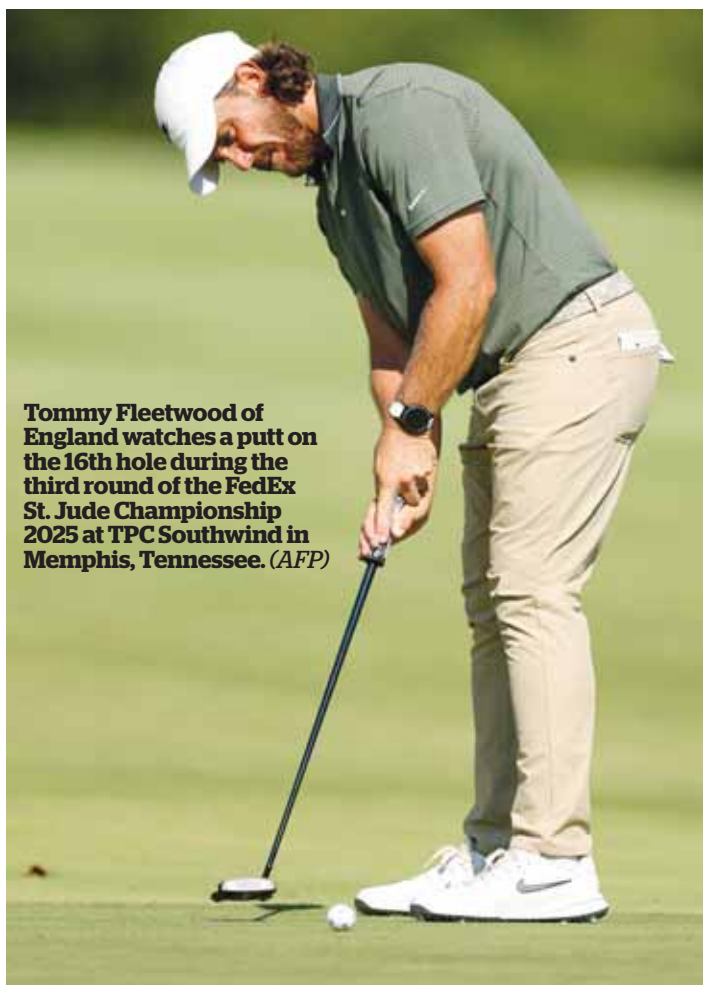
Fleetwood carried a three-stroke lead over Rose into the third round but stumbled early, following a birdie at the second hole with a double bogey at the par-five third, finding water with his second shot and a greenside bunker with his fourth.

Rose was in hot pursuit with a 16-foot birdie putt at the third, a stunning 36-foot birdie putt at the fifth and a tap-in birdie at the sixth after his approach landed inches from the hole.

Fleetwood made a bogey at the seventh to leave Rose alone in the lead and Rose followed with a birdie at the seventh, but Rose found water at the ninth and made bogey while Fleetwood birdied the ninth to share the lead again.

The top 70 on the season points list qualified for this week's tournament with the top 50 advancing to next week's BMW Championship.

The top 30 after the BMW advance to the Tour Championship.


Tommy Fleetwood of England watches a putt on the 16th hole during the third round of the FedEx St. Jude Championship 2025 at TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tennessee. *(AFP)*

Forrest wins Scottish Championship golf

Grant Forrest triumphed on home soil to win the Scottish Championship tournament by four shots in Aberdeen yesterday. It was the second time the 32-year-old Scot had enjoyed a professional title success in front of his own fans, with this victory coming almost four years to the day since he won his maiden DP World (European) Tour title at St Andrews. Forrest held a three-shot lead heading into Sunday's final round and maintained control in windy conditions on the Trump International Golf Links. His advantage was briefly cut to two strokes following Todd Clements' birdie on the opening hole. When Forrest birdied the fourth and Clements carded a triple-bogey eight at the same hole, the Scot led by five shots. Forrest, the world number 294, double-bogeyed the last, but by then he had added two more birdies and a dropped shot in a closing 72 to finish with an eight-under-par total.

FOCUS

Cink takes three-stroke lead at Boeing Classic

Reuters
Snoqualmie, Washington

Stewart Cink shot a bogey-free 8-under-par 64 on Saturday to take a three-shot lead going into the final round of the Boeing Classic in Snoqualmie, Wash.

Cink moved up 10 spots from the first round on Friday with eight birdies at Nos. 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 18 to get to 12 under for the tournament at The Club at Snoqualmie Ridge.

"If you stopped me after about No. 5 and said, 'Hey, what are the chances you're going to shoot 64 today?' I would have probably said you were crazy because nothing was happening at all," Cink, 52, said after the round.

"I made a really good par save on the third hole, which is a tough par 4. I made a sloppy par on the first hole, which is an easy par 5. ... Nothing was happening.

"But then, amazing how your momentum can flip with just one, really one putt, and a good putt on 6 from about 15 feet went in the center. It was kind of just the lid was off."

Cink saved par at No. 17 after his tee shot landed about 80 feet from the pin and he got within 5 feet putting his second shot at the par-3 hole.

"Yeah, that was a really big moment because you don't want to throw away a shot. It wasn't a horrible shot off the tee, just a little bit of a cut that didn't really cut and it just ended up down where it did," Cink said.

"To get that ball close enough where the next putt was really makeable was a good way to just kind of keep the momentum going and keep the mindset in the right place."

Steven Alker of New Zealand and Paul Goydos are tied for second at 9-under 135. Alker shot 4-under 68 on Saturday, while Goydos carded 69.

"I just kind of kept the round going," Alker said.


Stewart Cink watches his drive from the 12th tee during the second round of the Boeing Classic 2025 in Snoqualmie, Washington. *(AFP)*

"I played the par 5s poorly. You've got to get the par 5s out here today. I think I played them 1 over, so you can't do that tomorrow. But otherwise, most of the day just kept my nose clean and hit some good shots. Kind of felt like I left a little bit out there."

Alker was working an unblemished round with birdies at Nos. 5, 6, 12, 14 and 17, then he bogeyed the par-5 No. 18.

"Yeah, just unfortunate about 18," Alker said.

"Going to make dinner taste a little bit not as good. But I'm right there, so I like the golf course, the game's feeling OK, so go get 'em tomorrow."

First-round co-leaders Jerry Kelly and Matt Gogel each fired a 71 to move to 8 under and are tied for fourth with Australian Steve Allan (68). Kelly, 58, is trying to win the Boeing Classic for the second time.

It was the site of his first PGA Tour Champions victory in 2017; now he's searching for his 14th title overall.

Two-time defending champion Stephen Ames of Canada is tied for 19th at 4 under after back-to-back rounds of 70.

TENNIS

Swiatek advances by walkover win, Sabalenka through

'I didn't serve as well as I'd have liked to, but everything else was working'

AFP
Cincinnati

Wimbledon winner Iga Swiatek of Poland advanced to the fourth round of the ATP and WTA Cincinnati Open yesterday as upcoming opponent Marta Kostyuk was forced to withdraw.

The 27th-ranked Ukrainian cited a right wrist injury for the pullout, which came a day after six-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek, seeded third, advanced to the third round with the loss of just five games. Jelena Ostapenko, the 2017 Roland Garros champion, also benefited from a walkover as Camila Osorio withdrew with an abdominal injury.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka also got their title defences off to smooth starts as she powered into the third round of defeating 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova 7-5, 6-1. Sabalenka needed 54 minutes and a service break in the final game to clinch the opening set with a stinging winner.

The second set was more of a grind than the score suggested as she saved five break points for a 4-1 lead and recovered from 0-30 down in the final game before securing the win. "It's always a tough match against her," Sabalenka said of the Czech opponent she has faced nine times.

"She pushed me to the limit. If you lose focus even a little bit it can cost you a set. I had to fight for every point against her," added Sabalenka, who next faces Britain's Emma Raducanu, a 6-3, 6-2 winner over Olga Danilovic.

Australian Open winner Madison Keys needed more than two hours to advance with a 1-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) over German Eva Lys, saving two match points at 5-6 in the deciding set.

In the men's section, Reilly Opelka snapped a five-match losing streak to Alex de Minaur yesterday at the Cincinnati Open, where he upset the Australian 7-6(6), 6-4 to reach the third round in Ohio. The big-serving American had lost his five previous head to head meetings against De Minaur and was trying to avoid falling to the same opponent on six occasions for the first time.

In hot conditions, the 27-year-old did just that, taking large cuts at the ball on return and saving all seven break points he faced to record his ninth Top 10 win after one hour and 41 minutes.



Aryna Sabalenka plays a backhand against Marketa Vondrousova during their Cincinnati Open match in Mason, Ohio. *(AFP)*

Opelka is up nine spots to No. 64 in the ATP Rankings and will next meet Francisco Comesana after the Argentine advanced on Sunday when 29th seed Luciano Darderi retired trailing 4-6, 1-3. Opelka has produced some of his best tennis on the North American hard courts in the past, reaching the final at the ATP Masters 1000 event in Toronto in 2021 and the fourth round at the US Open in the same year.

He clubbed 38 winners, including 14 aces, to De Minaur's six winners, with the Australian frequently returning second serves above shoulder height. "I didn't serve as well as I'd have liked to, but everything else was working," said Opelka, who won 76 per cent of his first-serve points and 69 per cent of his second-serve points.

"My forehand helped me a lot and my backhand, playing with a lot of offence and I was pretty consistent from the baseline the whole match. My serve fluctuated and it was a bit of a surprise that the other things came through well for me today. I think I returned really well too."

World No. 8 De Minaur arrived in Cincinnati having earned a Tour-leading 24 hard-court wins this season, highlighted by his recent title triumph in Washington. However, he was unable to convert his opportunities against Opelka, who struck a huge forehand winner on return at 5/5 in the first-set tie-break en route to claiming the opener.

In other early action, ninth seed Andrey Rublev moved past NextGenATP American Learner Tien 7-6(4), 6-3 to reach the third round. Rublev arrived in Cincinnati off the back of a quarter-final showing in Toronto, his best ATP Masters 1000 result of the year.

The No. 11 in the PIF ATP Rankings will meet Alexei Popyrin or NextGenATP Spaniard Martin Landaluce in the last 32.

There was Czech success for Jakub Mensik and Jiri Lehecka. Miami champion Mensik, 19, defeated American Ethan Quinn 6-4, 6-2 to earn his first win at the hard-court Masters 1000 event. Jiri Lehecka rallied past American Tristan Boyer 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 to reach the third round.

The Czech advanced to the last 16 in Ohio in 2024 and will aim to reach that stage again when he takes on Daniil Medvedev or Adam Walton.

FOCUS

Qatar qualify for FIBA 3x3 U-23 World Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar has qualified for the 2025 FIBA 3x3 U-23 World Cup set to take place in Xiong'an City, China, from September 17 to 21, the Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) announced yesterday.

This historic achievement stems from the team's exceptional performance in the 2025 3x3 Youth Nations League, where Qatar's players earned their berth by finishing in a strong position in the final standings, placing the nation among the world's elite competing teams.

Qatar's 3x3 squad asserted its dominance on the continental stage by claiming titles in the third and sixth stages of the 3x3 Nations League – Asia-Pacific region, both hosted by the Qatar Basketball Federation in Doha from May 28 to June 3, 2025.

The 2025 FIBA 3x3 U-23 World Cup will feature standout international teams alongside Qatar, including Germany, New Zealand, Algeria, Latvia, Lithuania, China, Poland, Italy, Serbia, Argentina, the United States, Croatia, Venezuela, Egypt, and Fiji.

The tournament will include 20 teams divided into four groups for round-robin play, with the top performers advancing to the knockout rounds starting from the quarter-finals and culminating in the final. Group seeding will be determined by the FIBA U-23 rankings as of January 1, 2025.

QBF president Mohammed bin Saad al-Mughaiseeb stated: "We are immensely proud of this accomplishment, which reflects the significant progress in Qatari basketball, particularly in the 3x3 format that has gained increasing global prominence. Our U-23 team's qualification for the World Cup is the result of collective effort, sound planning, and unwavering support from the Qatar Olympic Committee under the leadership of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani."

Yassin Ismail, Director of National Teams for 3x3 Basketball, affirmed: "We have built a robust and cohesive team capable of competing at the highest levels, and this qualification confirms the success of our technical and training strategies developed over time."

"The players have demonstrated exceptional fighting spirit and full commitment. We will continue equipping them with intensive training camps and skill-development programmes," he added.



FIBA 3x3 U-23 World Cup set to take place from September 17 to 21 in Xiong'an, China.

NBA to open season with blockbuster showdowns

Los Angeles: Opening night of the upcoming NBA season will feature the defending champion Oklahoma City Thunder hosting Houston and a star-studded clash between the Los Angeles Lakers and Golden State, ESPN reported.

The season will tip off on October 21 and the opening night games will be aired by NBC, marking the league's return to the broadcaster for the first time in 23 years. The 2025-26 season is the first of an 11-year media rights deal for the NBA worth a reported $76bn.

It includes a new partnership with Amazon, a return to NBC and a continuing partnership with ESPN and ABC, with ABC to carry a blockbuster Christmas day slate. The Cleveland Cavaliers, who had the best record in the Eastern Conference last season, are scheduled to play on Christmas against the New York Knicks at Madison Square Garden. It will be the Cavs' first Christmas appearance since superstar LeBron James played for his hometown team. Another Christmas game will see Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs at Oklahoma City.

Celtic exact revenge on Aberdeen to surge clear of Rangers

Celtic erased the memory of their Scottish Cup final loss to Aberdeen with a comfortable 2-0 victory at Pittodrie yesterday.

Swedish international Benjamin Nygren scored his first goal for the Scottish champions before Reo Hatate's stunning strike maintained a perfect start to the new campaign for Brendan Rodgers' side.

Rangers failure to win either of their first two league games for the first time since 1989 means Celtic already enjoy a four-point lead over their Glasgow rivals.

The Celtic board have been inundated with criticism for a lack of transfer activity and the small budget handed to Rodgers so far this window.

However, two of the Hoops' new signings combined for the opening goal.

Kieran Tierney, in his second spell at the club after returning from Arsenal, crossed for Nygren to fire home at the near post midway through the first half.

Nygren also claimed the assist for the second goal on 66 minutes but Hatate did the hard work as the Japanese midfielder curled the ball in off the underside of the bar from the edge of the area.

"Any time you come to Pittodrie, it's always tough games. To come and play with that authority and personality in the game, that was pleasing," said Rodgers.

Aberdeen fans raised a giant banner of the Scottish Cup replete with red and white ribbons before kick-off in their first home game since beating Celtic on penalties to win the trophy for the first time in 35 years in May.

However, there was no repeat for the Dons, who are the only side in the Scottish Premiership without a point so far this season.

Hearts moved to the top of the table thanks to a dramatic 3-2 win over Dundee United.

Defender Stuart Findlay scored twice, including a 94th minute winner, to maintain Derek McInnes' unblemished start as Hearts boss after six games in all competitions.

Hibs missed the chance to join their Edinburgh rivals and Celtic on six points after blowing a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2 at home to Kilmarnock.

Goals from Rocky Bushiri and Elie Youan put Hibs in command before Liam Polworth and a brilliant strike by Ben Brannan salvaged a point for Killie.

(AFP)

FOOTBALL

Slot seeks Liverpool balance for title defence

AFP
Liverpool

Liverpool boss Arne Slot said his side are conceding too often if they are to defend the Premier League title after losing the Community Shield on penalties to Crystal Palace yesterday.

The new-look Reds, after a £260mn ($350mn) spending spree in the transfer market, looked slick in attack at Wembley with new signings Hugo Ekitike and Jeremie Frimpong on target.

However, the Reds twice failed to hold onto the lead as Palace levelled through Jean-Philippe Mateta's penalty and Ismaila Sarr's strike 13 minutes from time as the match ended 2-2 before the shootout.

Last season Liverpool beat Palace 1-0 at Selhurst Park and drew 1-1 on the final day of the season at Anfield as they romped to the title with four games to spare.

Slot saw flashes of what his star-studded forward line are capable of as the most expensive of his new recruits, Florian Wirtz, teed up Ekitike for the opening goal after just four minutes.

However, in keeping with the pattern of Liverpool's pre-season friendlies, they were cut open with ease on the counter-attack.

AC Milan beat Slot's men 4-2 in Hong Kong, while Liverpool edged out Athletic Bilbao 3-2 in one of two friendlies against the Basques on their return to Anfield on Monday.

"If you look at our attacking play against a team that is so compact, that might be a bit better than last season," said Slot.

"We only could score one goal against Palace (last season). Now we scored two and created more against them.

"But, on the other hand, we conceded two goals, which we did against Bilbao, and we conceded a couple more against Milan, so that is something we need to do better."

Only Arsenal had a better defensive record than Liverpool in the Premier League last season and Slot is keen to rectify his side's issues before they begin their title defence at home to Bournemouth on Friday.

"We are able to create more but we are conceding at the moment more as well. If you want to compete to win the league, you cannot concede these chances. We conceded too much today to win the game."

Liverpool's spending in the transfer market may not be over as they continue to be linked with a move for Newcastle striker Alexander Isak.

However, Slot dismissed the claim that the transfer spending will put his players under more pressure this season.

"Because we are Liverpool the pressure is always on," he said. "That is nothing to do with brining players in."



Liverpool's Dutch manager Arne Slot returns the ball during the English FA Community Shield match against Crystal Palace at Wembley Stadium in London yesterday. *(AFP)*

AL SADD BEAT WYDAD ON PENALTIES TO WIN AL AHRAR CUP



Al Sadd players celebrate with Al Ahrar Cup at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

DOHA: Goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham emerged a hero as Al Sadd edged Morocco's Wydad AC 5-4 on penalties following a 1-1 draw in regular time to lift the Al Ahrar Cup at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

The friendly between the two teams was also a pre-cursor for Al Sadd ahead of the Qatar Stars League (which begins August 14) and the 2025-26 football season.

The absorbing shootout saw the first nine strikes from either side find the net before Barsham cut off Wydad's final kick diving to his right.

Earlier, Al Sadd took the lead through striker and skipper Akram Afif in the 56th minute from a penalty kick, before Hamza al-Wasti equalised for Wydad in the 67th minute.

The match was at a good technical level from both sides, as Al Sadd took the initiative to attack but collided with an organised defence from Wydad.

Al Sadd's new player, Pau Brem, who has come from Barcelona, made a distinguished appearance in terms of possession, as did the movements of Uruguayan midfielder Agustin Soria, in addition to the penetrations of Algerian Youssef Atal in the midfield.

Wydad's defence imposed strict control on Al Sadd's front two, Akram Afif and Spaniard Rafa Mujica, making it difficult for them to penetrate the penalty area.

Moroccan Nordin Amrabat almost scored from the right side, but Al Sadd defender Pedro blocked his shot in the 30th minute. Afif responded with an attempt on the right side, but the Moroccan side's defenders succeeded in clearing the ball in the 37th minute. The score remained goalless until the end of the first half. In the second session, Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez replaced defender Ahmed Suhail with former Wolfsburg player Paulo Otavio in an attempt to activate the flanks. Algerian Youssef Atal tried to score from inside the penalty area, but was obstructed by Wydad defender Mohamed Rabhi resulting in a penalty. Afif scored from the spot beating goalkeeper Mehdi Ben Abid to his left.

Wydad sought to amend the situation, and an opportunity was available to its Burkinabe player Aziz Ki from a direct free kick from outside the area but Al Sadd goalkeeper Barsham brilliantly cleared the ball away.

Wydad's coach made some changes in midfield, bringing in Hamza al-Wasti and Brazilian defender Guilherme Ferreira.

Wydad soon equalised with a header from substitute Hamza al-Wasti, who capitalised on a cross from teammate Nordin Amrabat from the right. The goal was awarded after a VAR in the 67th minute. Al Sadd captain Hassan al-Haydos almost put Al Sadd back in the lead with a powerful shot from outside the striking zone but Wydad goalkeeper Ben Obaid saved the situation in the 90th minute.

FOOTBALL

Revamped City ready for new era without De Bruyne

Guardiola aims to restore City success after last season's third-place finish

Reuters
Manchester



Manchester City will embark on a new era this season in their first in 10 years without talisman Kevin De Bruyne as **Pep Guardiola** looks to make last term's third-place finish a distant memory and restore his revamped outfit to their former glory.

They face a tough task against champions Liverpool, Arsenal and Chelsea – all big spenders in the transfer window – but the anticipated return of Ballon d'Or winner Rodri and scoring machine Erling Haaland to top form give reason for optimism. City were tipped last season to win a record-extending fifth consecutive Premier League title, but a mid-season nose-dive saw them fall well off the pace and miss a top-two spot for the first time since 2016-17.

They finished third behind Liverpool and Arsenal with their worst points total under Guardiola, their nine league losses were more than their two previous seasons combined, they crashed out of the Champions League and League Cup early and their FA Cup final loss to Crystal Palace meant no silverware for the first time in eight years.

Rodri was sidelined for most of the season after suffering a torn anterior cruciate ligament against Arsenal in September. Guardiola's men showed how much the Spaniard was missed when they went on a woeful run of nine defeats in 12 games across all competitions.

After leading the Premier League in scoring for two successive seasons, Haaland's 31 goals across all competitions in 2024-25 remarkably constituted a drop in performance, although he still showed his lethal scoring ability in what was considered an off-year for the Norwegian.

He will be keen to prove a point this season and put himself back in the running for the Golden Boot.

Guardiola began his rebuilding last term, splashing out 180 million pounds ($241.72mn) on Omar Marmoush, Abdukodir Khusanov, Nico Gonzalez and Vitor Reis. Marmoush had an almost immediate impact with a 13-minute hat-trick in a 4-0 win over Newcastle United in February.

City's manager has further galvanised his squad by signing Dutch midfielder Tijjani Reijnders, Wolverhampton Wanderers defender Rayan Ait-Nouri, winger Rayan Cherki and goalkeeper James Trafford in the close season to push City's spending for 2025 past the 300 million pounds mark.

Ait-Nouri was brought in to reinforce the left-back position, while Reijnders and Cherki were signed in the hope that they could replace De Bruyne's creative spark in midfield.

While City boast one of the best strikers in the game in Haaland, the fight to support the 25-year-old runs deep with Marmoush, Phil Foden, Jeremy Doku, Savinho, Oscar Bobb and Cherki all in contention.

Guardiola said that while there is a lot of positivity in the squad, he did not expect this season to be smooth sailing.

"I'm pretty sure it'll be good, but it won't be a red carpet season, there'll always be problems, it's how you overcome those situations," the Spaniard said at a sold-out open training session earlier this week.

"The expectation at the beginning of the season is always, let's go and try to do our best, win the first games, get confidence and move forward. Of course, we want to try and do better than last season, especially with consistency."

The manager, who is under contract until June 2027, is not setting any targets for the season, saying it is difficult to determine what a successful campaign would be.

"When the (players) give good spirit and fight and run and give their best, sometimes you can do your best and the opponents are just better," he said. "It depends on ourselves, this is what we have to try to do. We challenge against ourselves, this is the target for the season."

A cloud continues to hang over the club as they face 115 charges of breaking Premier League financial regulations. City, who have always denied any wrongdoing, were charged with the alleged breaches in February 2023. British media expect a verdict during the October international break.

MLS

Son makes instant impact in LAFC debut

AFP
Chicago

South Korea star Son Heung-min made his Major League Soccer (MLS) debut for Los Angeles FC Saturday, providing a burst of energy as a second-half substitute in a 2-2 draw with the Fire in Chicago.

Son drew a penalty in the 77th minute that new teammate Denis Bouanga converted to clinch the draw in the 81st minute – VAR confirming the spot kick after the referee initially let play continue.

"Obviously it was definitely contact and it was definitely a penalty, I have no doubt about it," said Son, who was sent sprawling in the area by Carlos Teran after getting loose on a breakaway.

"And, yeah, we tied the game, but I think we should have won this game (so) a little bit disappointed."

In addition to drawing the penalty, Son had three shots on goal – all saved with relative ease by Fire keeper Chris Brady.

"This was an exciting time for a whole week joining LAFC, it was huge," Son told reporters. "There was only one thing I wanted to do and today, being on the pitch, I think it was fantastic.

"With the result it's a little bit disappointing, because I think we should have gotten three points here, but generally I think I'm very, very happy and excited.

"I really enjoyed it. You never had this coming from away games. I used to play in the Premier League. When I played at away grounds they were always booing me and always booing the players. But it was nice to see people were celebrating, people were enjoying the football."

Son signed with LAFC on Wednesday for a reported MLS record $26mn transfer fee after a decade with Tottenham in the Premier League – where he became a household name.

The South Korea captain had announced just the previous Saturday in his homeland that he would be leaving Spurs.

He departed as Tottenham's fifth-highest goalscorer of all time with 173 goals in 454 appearances.

Son's first chance to play in front of home fans in Los Angeles will come against Western Conference leaders San Diego on August 31.

But plenty of his jerseys, South Korean flags and signs welcoming him to MLS were dotted around the Fire's SeatGeek Stadium and cheers greeted his entry in place of David Martinez in the 61st minute with the teams level at 1-1.

Jonathan Bamba put Chicago up 2-1 in the 70th minute. Teran had opened the scoring in the 11th with a header off a corner kick. Eight minutes later Ryan Hollingshead nodded in off a corner kick to pull LAFC level at 1-1.

Son had said at his introductory press conference on Wednesday that he felt fighting fit and wanted to get on the pitch "as soon as possible."

His arrival reunites him with former Tottenham teammate Hugo Lloris, the French goalkeeper who said the South Korean will make a "big impact."

"It's great for the league, great for the city, great for the club," Lloris said.


Los Angeles FC forward Son Heung-Min celebrates a draw against the Chicago Fire at SeatGeek Stadium in their MLS match in Bridgeview, Illinois.

LEICESTER ADD TO SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY'S WOES

Leicester launched their quest for an immediate return to the Premier League with a 2-1 win at home to crisis club Sheffield Wednesday yesterday after the visitors' supporters protested against Owls owner Dejphon Chansiri.

Wednesday are under several English Football League embargoes for a range of financial breaches, with payments of wages to players and staff delayed for the past three months.

Owls fans made their feelings towards Thai businessman Chansiri clear by delaying their entry to their seats and the away end was empty as the players came onto the pitch at the King Power Stadium, with a banner that read "SWFC for sale – enough is enough".

Wednesday had just 15 senior players on the books ahead of their opening match of the Championship season but still managed a gritty display against the Foxes, who needed a late winner to secure all three points after their opponents were reduced to 10 men.

Following the opening five minutes, Wednesday fans made their way into the ground and were greeted with applause from Leicester supporters.

Despite all their off-field problems, Nathaniel Chalobah gave Wednesday the lead midway through the first half with a deflected shot from the edge of the box.

Jannik Vestergaard, however, equalised in the 54th minute when a free-kick from Bilal El Khannouss evaded everyone else inside the box before he shot high into the net.

Wednesday's task became that much harder when captain Barry Bannan, already booked for dissent, saw red for a late challenge on Harry Winks with 14 minutes to play.

And with just three minutes of normal time remaining, Leicester made their man advantage count when substitute Wout Faes headed in from a corner.

Nunez leaves Liverpool to join Saudi's Al Hilal

Liverpool sold striker Darwin Nunez to Saudi side Al Hilal, both clubs confirmed, in a move that could allow the Premier League champions to make a fresh bid for Newcastle's Alexander Isak.

Nunez joined the Reds for an initial 75mn euros ($87mn, £65mn) from Benfica three years ago but has failed to live up to that price tag.

The Uruguayan scored 40 goals in 143 appearances but slipped down the pecking order at Anfield under both Jurgen Klopp and Arne Slot.

According to reports in the British media, Al Hilal will pay an initial 53 million euros for the 26-year-old.

"Al Hilal Club Company is pleased to announce the signing of Uruguayan striker Darwin Nunez from Liverpool FC on a three-year contract," Al Hilal said in a statement.

Nunez was likely to play even less this season after Liverpool signed Hugo Ekitike and Florian Wirtz as part of a 300 million euro spending spree that also includes fullbacks Milos Kerkez and Jeremie Frimpong.

However, the club could still break the British transfer record by signing Isak.

Liverpool reportedly had a first bid of £110mn rejected, with Newcastle demanding a fee of up to £150 million for the Swedish striker.

The sale of Nunez would take Liverpool's income for transfer sales this window to nearly 200mn euros after the departures of Luis Diaz, Jarell Quansah, Caoimhin Kelleher, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Tyler Morton.

Nunez is the latest big name to join Al Hilal, who shocked Manchester City to reach the quarter-finals of the recent Club World Cup.

Coached by former Inter Milan boss Simone Inzaghi, the Saudi club's squad includes Portuguese internationals Ruben Neves and Joao Cancelo, Senegal captain Kalidou Koulibaly and former Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic. *(AFP)*