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CRICKET | Page 2

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FOOTBALL | Page 4

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TENNIS

Defending champions Sinner, Sabalenka reach Cincinnati Open quarters

Page 3

FOOTBALL

# Rayyan fight back against Sailiya to make winning start to the QSL season

Striker Roger Guedes struck twice for The Lions, while Julien De Sart also netted one

**By Sports Reporter**
Doha

Al Rayyan fought back to make a winning start to their Qatar Stars League (QSL) season with a 3-1 win against promoted side Al Sailiya at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday.

Roger Guedes struck two goals for The Lions, scoring one from the spot in the 82nd minute before putting the icing on the cake in the 90th minute following a defensive error in a highly-entertaining encounter.

Earlier, Hadi Ali registered the first goal of the season for last season's second division champions Al Sailiya in the 20th minute to set the tone before an unmarked Julien De Sart rifled home a belter, inches from the edge of the 25-yard box in the 68th minute to restore parity for Al Rayyan, who were earlier denied a penalty call via VAR decision in the 25th minute.

The win will doubtlessly serve as a morale booster for Portuguese coach Artur Jorge's men, who had finished the last season in fifth place, while Al Sailiya, who are experiencing a new lease of life in the top division, will be now aiming to bounce back in their next match. Guedes was named Man of the Match.

In the second match of the day, Al Shamal defeated Al Ahli 2-0 at the Khalifa International Stadium. Mohamed al-Mannai struck in the 40th minute whuile Mohamad Rafik Omar scored in the 88th minute. It was a delightful first win of the new season for Al Shamal, who had finished sixth in the previous season while Al Ahli were fourth.




Al Rayyan's Roger Guedes celebrates a goal against Al Sailiya during their QSL season opener at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday.




Al Rayyan Julien De Sart (right) celebrates scoring a goal yesterday.

### Al Arabi will meet Al Wakrah today

Al Arabi and Al Wakrah will face-off at the Al Thumama Stadium at 6.30pm and the match is expected to generate a lot of excitement.

Al Arabi, under Spanish coach Pablo Amo, have strengthened their ranks with significant signings such as Spanish midfielder Pablo Sarabia, Kenyan striker and former Al Duhail player Michael Olunga, Frenchman Jordan Veretout, and Spaniard Javier Hernandez, who have come from Spanish club Leganes.

On the other hand, Al Wakrah, under the leadership of their new Spanish coach Vicente Moreno, will go into the clash with a strong desire to perform at their best for a telling start.

Speaking ahead of the clash, Moreno said, "I am very excited about the start of season. We will face a strong competitor in our first match, Al Arabi, who have signed good players in all positions."

Al Wakrah goalkeeper Saoud al-Khater said, "I am satisfied with the team's preparations for the new football season. We are fully prepared and determined to present a different image than the one we presented last season."

Al Arabi coach Pablo Amo said, "Our team's preparation has been excellent and I praise the support provided by the club management. The team has prepared with great focus during the overseas training camp and the friendly matches."

Al Arabi player Pablo Sarabia said, "The opening match of the season is always difficult, both psychologically and technically but we believe that a strong start will give a great morale boost to the technical staff and the players."

The second match of the day between Al Gharafa and Umm Salal will be played at the Al Bayt Stadium at 8.30pm.

Al Gharafa had finished third in last season, while Umm Salal were 11th and played in the playoff where they beat Al Markhiya.

Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said, "The team has great aspirations and we are ready to face Umm Salal. Given the increasing number of foreign professional players, I believe the competition will be interesting and will require greater effort from the coaches.

"We have great ambitions to perform better than we did last season, and that is our main goal. We have to win another title, so we are required to fight for the league title, and that is our primary goal."

Umm Salal coach Patrice Carteron opined, "We are confident in our strategy. The most important thing is to have a plan and ambition to achieve something this season.

"As for Al Gharafa, they are a strong and organised team and their players are of a high standard. We have nothing to lose and we know who is stronger and who is tougher, but in football, anything is possible. We will play positively and respect our opponents."

## AFC Champions League Elite draws to be held today

Asia's finest clubs will learn their paths to continental glory today when the league stage draw for the AFC Champions League Elite (ACL Elite) 2025-26 takes place at 5:00pm in Kuala Lumpur. Following the resounding success of the rebranded 2024-25 season, the prestigious competition is set to deliver another edition of thrilling matchups.

The draw will feature 24 elite clubs, with the League Stage scheduled to kick off on September 15.

Representing Qatar are Qatar Stars League (QSL) champions Al Sadd, Amir Cup winners Al Gharafa, and Al Duhail, who sealed their place with a decisive victory over Iran's Sepahan SC on Tuesday.

Defending champions Al Ahli Saudi FC, who lifted their maiden ACL Elite trophy in May, will return with sights firmly set on back-to-back titles.

The Saudi giants are among five former champions in the draw, alongside three debutants: Korea Republic's Gangwon FC, Japan's FC Machida Zelvia, and China PR's Chengdu Rongcheng FC.

As Asia's top-tier club tournament returns for its 23rd edition, all eyes are on the draw – the first step on the road to continental supremacy.

Meanwhile, the draw for the AFC Champions League Two (ACL Two) 2025-26 will also take place today in Kuala Lumpur, with 32 teams set to discover their Group Stage opponents.

The competition, which kicks off on September 16 in a home-and-away round-robin format, will spotlight some of Asia's emerging clubs from 22 Member Associations. PFC Andijon (Uzbekistan) and Cong An Ha Noi FC (Vietnam) are set to make their debut appearances in the Group Stage of an AFC competition, while Al Muharraq SC (Bahrain) stand out as the only former champions in the field. Qatar will be represented by Al Ahli, who secured qualification after finishing fourth in the QSL last season.

Meanwhile, FC Goa sealed their spot in the AFC Champions League Two 2025-26 Group Stage after staving off a late fightback from Al Seeb Club of Oman to walk away with a 2-1 win in their Preliminary Stage tie at the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. Dejan Dražić and Javier Siverio scored for FC Goa and the Gaurs will now wait to discover their Group Stage opponents.

FOCUS

# Liverpool bolster defence with Leoni deal

**Reuters**
London

Liverpool manager Arne Slot continued to reinforce his squad on the eve of their Premier League season opener, confirming yesterday that the club had agreed a deal to sign 18-year-old defender Giovanni Leoni from Parma.

While no financial details were disclosed, British media reported the fee for the Serie A player at 26mn euros ($30.34mn).

Slot's men kick off the defence of their title when they host Bournemouth today on what is sure to be an emotional night at Anfield following the death of Portugal forward Diogo Jota and his brother in a car crash in July.

Leoni is expected to have a medical later and will immediately join the first team, with the club ruling out any possibility of a loan move.

The teenager will join Virgil van Dijk, Ibrahima Konate and Joe Gomez – who is a doubt for Friday having recently returned from an Achilles injury – among Slot's centre-back options and shore up a back line that showed frailties during pre-season. "There are reasons for it," Slot said, citing injuries, mixed lineups, and the integration of new players.

"The standard here is 10/10, we are doing everything well but 'well' is not good enough. We have to go a step up. Come (Friday) evening against Bournemouth, there are no excuses."

Slot is cautiously optimistic Liverpool can retain their title.

"The main reason that it's so difficult is because there are so many competitors who can win the league. It's unbelievable if you are able to do it in this league," the Dutchman said.

"This year will be even harder than before. Every season and pre-season has its challenges. We have lost many starters.

"It's not always yourself but the teams you face. We've lost five to six players who played quite a lot of minutes last season, and brought in four, so it's normal there's adaptation."

Liverpool have a tough start to the campaign, with games away to Newcastle United and at home to last season's runners-up Arsenal among their first three fixtures.

"We start with Bournemouth, probably the most intense team in the league last season, in running and playing style," Slot said.

There is plenty of anticipation around Liverpool's new attacking midfielder Florian Wirtz after the Reds shattered their transfer record to sign the 22-year-old German international from Bayer Leverkusen in June.

They paid 100mn pounds ($135.66mn), with a further maximum of 16mn in potential bonuses.

Slot was full of praise for Wirtz, but cautioned he might need time to adjust to the intensity of England's top tier.

"Good players always find a way of playing in a good team – he is a good player and he plays in a good team," Slot said.

"Factually we can see him as a young player, but I don't see him as one. He won the cup and league in Germany (in 2024), and his mentality is his biggest strength.

"That says a lot, because when you see him play he is so creative. He is mentally strong, he doesn't get distracted by a transfer fee or anything else."



Giovanni Leoni

SPORT

FOCUS

# Phelps brands USA swimming leadership weak, demands sweeping reforms

**Reuters**
New York

**Michael Phelps** has launched a scathing attack on USA Swimming's leadership, with the 23-times Olympic gold medallist branding the body weak and demanding sweeping reforms after what he sees as years of organisational decline.

The 40-year-old American, the most decorated Olympian of all time with 28 medals, delivered his broadside while revealing he might not want his four young sons competing in the sport given the current state of swimming in the United States.

Phelps traced his frustrations back through his competitive career, saying he often felt that his voice went unheard, was "told to be grateful for the chance to compete" and that it was more important to stay quiet and to keep the peace.

"First, I must be clear that I have the utmost respect for the US swimmers that competed at the World Championships," Phelps, who retired in 2016, wrote in a lengthy Instagram statement.

"My criticism is in no way directed at them – I know how hard they work and how honoured they are to represent the US National Team. My criticism is about the system, its leadership, and how it's failing.

"There have always been cracks in the system but in the last nine years, I've seen those cracks grow."

Reuters has contacted USA Swimming for comment.

Phelps compared the success of the US swim team at the Rio Olympics in 2016, where they won 33 medals, to the Paris Games last year when they slumped to their lowest medal haul in the pool (28) since the 2004 Games in Athens.

**"POOR LEADERSHIP"**

Phelps also revealed that he sent a letter to USA Swimming earlier this year addressing his "frustrations with the current state of the sport," which was shared with the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee outlining his concerns.

He said he had the support of former Olympic medallists, world record holders, coaches and current and former staff members but added that the letter "seemed to fall on deaf ears".

"I've asked myself what's changed in our sport and the answer is clear ... this isn't on the athletes as they continue to do the best they can with what they've been given. This is on the leadership of USA Swimming," he added.

"Poor leadership trickles down and can impact an organisation at every level.

"Money is a factor. But poor operational controls and weak leadership are a cornerstone of the sport's problems."

Phelps proposed a series of reforms, including an independent review of USA Swimming's Board



of Directors and its organisation, improving athlete services and strengthening grassroots efforts to reverse membership decline and foster growth. "I offer up my service to be a resource in these proposed initial steps and I am hopeful that the USA Swimming community will accept my offer," he added.

**LOCHTE CRITICISM**

Earlier this month, Phelps, along with six-times Olympic champion Ryan Lochte, made their disappointment clear after the US team's performance at the World Championships in Singapore.

Lochte shared an image on social media of a tombstone with the inscription: "In loving memory of United States Swimming. They set the bar high – until they stopped reaching for it."

Lochte added a caption referencing the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028, saying: "Call it a funeral or call it a fresh start. We've got 3 years." Phelps shared Lochte's post and added: "Is this the wake-up call USA swimming needed?"

Despite early struggles in Singapore, the US finished top of the medals table with nine golds and 29 medals overall.

The next Olympics will be held in Los Angeles in 2028.

CRICKET

# Experience the key for Root in Ashes challenge

## Root has yet to win a Test or score a Test century in Australia

**Reuters**
London

England batter Joe Root said his experience of 158 Tests makes him better equipped than ever to end a victory drought in Australia, as he ramps up preparations for the upcoming Ashes series.

Root, who moved to second on the all-time Test run-scorer charts during England's five-match series against India, which was drawn 2-2 earlier this month, has accumulated 13,543 runs in tests, trailing only India great Sachin Tendulkar (15,921).

Despite his prolific record, the 34-year-old Root has yet to win a Test or score a Test century in Australia, where he averages 35.68 from 27 innings with nine half-centuries.

"Having played in Australia a couple of times before, now going with 150-odd Test caps under my belt, I feel I couldn't be more ready for it," Root told British media yesterday.

"The thing that stands out for me is I probably wanted it (a century) way too much the last couple of times. It took me away from what was important."

Australia won both the 2017-18 series and following home series in 2021-22 4-0 before drawing 2-2 in England in 2023 to retain the urn.

England last triumphed in Australia in 2010-11, which is also the last time the tourists won a Test Down Under.

"There were a lot of distractions," Root said of the last two Ashes series in Australia.



England's Joe Root (left) seen with teammate Harry Brook during a training session. *(@root66)*

"I was captain, Covid (in 2021-22), there was the (Ben) Stokes incident the time before that (when Stokes was ruled out of the 2017-18 tour after an incident at a Bristol nightclub), the Jonny (Bairstow) headbutt incident as well.

"This time I want to just go and enjoy the tour for what it is," Root said.

"It is a beautiful country it is a great place to go and play cricket. I know if I put my best performances in then everything else will look after itself."

This year's Ashes begins in Perth on November 21 before a day-night match in Brisbane, the third test in Adelaide and the traditional Melbourne and Sydney Tests in December and January.

Root has brushed aside David Warner's jibe that he will need to "take the surfboard off his front leg" if England are to triumph in Australia in the upcoming Ashes series.

"Josh Hazlewood tends to have his number quite a lot. He (Root) will have to take the surfboard off his front leg," said Warner, who retired from international cricket last year.

Root, asked on a media call if he had laughed off the jibe, replied: "Just that. I can't have any control on how people see the game or talk in interview.

"Nothing new, is it? You know there are going to be storylines and people wanting to hype up a big series. Doesn't really change anything.

"It's sort of irrelevant to me. What can I do about it? Just make sure it's not a talking point in six months or 100 days time," added Root in an event staged by official Hundred team partner KP Snacks.

"When you get out there you've got to try and impact the game and help your team get off to a good start. Business as usual as far as I'm concerned.

"I guess it's all part of the fun. We'll see what happens out there (with Warner at Lord's). It's not really in my nature to get too verbal."

SPOTLIGHT

# 380 La Liga games live and exclusive on beIN




As another engrossing season of La Liga prepares to kick-off, beIN MEDIA GROUP ('beIN'), the global sports, entertainment, and media conglomerate, has revealed its live coverage plans, confirming itself the home of Spanish football across the Middle East and North Africa (Mena).

A continuation of a long-standing partnership between beIN and the Spanish top-flight that dates back more than two decades to 2003, the region's leading broadcaster will show all 380 matches from the upcoming season live and exclusive on its flagship beIN SPORTS channels.

With commentary in Arabic, English, and French and available across all 24 Mena markets, the season-opening game takes viewers to Girona, who face Rayo Vallecano at 20:00 Makkah on beIN SPORTS 3.

Much of the talk ahead of the new season is whether Real Madrid's new coach Xabi Alonso can close the gap on last year's champions Barcelona. Last year, Los Merengues finished just four points behind Hansi Flick's high-flying Barca, whose new campaign gets underway tomorrow at Mallorca.

Live studio coverage, hosted by renowned Saudi presenter Tariq al-Hammad and with analysis from Kuwaiti Tariq al-Jalahma and Morocco's Youssef Chippo, will start at 20:00 Makkah on beIN SPORTS 3, with match commentary available in Arabic and English.

While Madrid are not in action until Tuesday when they host Osasuna from 21:30 Makkah, city rivals Atletico start their season on Sunday away to Espanyol at 22:30 Makkah looking to improve on last year's third-place finish. Coverage of Diego Simeone's new-look side starts at 22.30 Makkah, immediately following Athletic Club's campaign opener at home to Sevilla at 20:30 Makkah. All three matches are live and exclusive on beIN SPORTS 3, with Mohammed Saadon joined in the studio by Chippo and Wael Gomaa.

Last season saw 2.5 billion cumulative viewers tune in to beIN's La Liga coverage across Mena, providing a clear indication of the Spanish top-flight's unmatched popularity in the region and the broadcaster's ability to provide unmissable, unparalleled coverage with the biggest names in the studios and the most in-depth analysis.

With the likes of Barca's Lamine Yamal, Atletico's Julian Alvarez, and Athletic Bilbao's Nico Williams all expected to shine once more, plus a host of new faces in the form of new Madridista Trent Alexander Arnold, Girona's Vitor Reis, and Goncalo Guedes of Real Sociedad, another enthralling season beckons.

Duncan Walkinshaw, Director of Programs at beIN Mena, said: "This time last year, we announced an extension of our exclusive broadcast rights deal with La Liga to see beIN remain the home of Spanish football across the entire Mena region until the end of the 2027-28 season. As committed partners for what is now 23 years, we are very proud to continue to help the league grow globally by way of our world-class broadcasting and significant, dependable investment. We look forward to what promises to be another incredible season featuring some of the best players and most storied teams in world football."

ATHLETICS

# Stage set for Lyles v Thompson in re-run of Olympic 100m final in Silesia today

**AFP**
Chorzow, Poland

Olympic champion Noah Lyles will renew his rivalry with Jamaica's Kishane Thompson when the pair take to the track for what promises to be a 100m race to remember at the Diamond League meet in Chorzow today.

As athletes continue to fine-tune their form ahead of September's world championships in Tokyo, Lyles headlines a raft of stars from track and field on show in southwest Poland.

Here, AFP Sport looks at four talking points at the 12th meeting of the 15-event Diamond League circuit at the Kamila Skolimowska Memorial in Silesia:

**Lyles v Thompson in Paris rematch:** Lyles sealed Olympic gold in the blue ribband event in Paris last year by the closest of margins, pipping Thompson by just five-thousandths of a second for victory.

It remained a remarkable result for the Jamaican, who missed the cut for the 2023 world championships in Budapest.

This year, however, he clocked a world-leading 9.75sec at the Jamaican trials in June, a time which puts him sixth on the all-time list. Lyles will be keen to bounce back after his surprise 100m defeat to another Jamaican, Oblique Seville, at the London Diamond League meet. The American will have to compete not just with Thompson, but also a quartet of tested US teammates in the shape of Kenny Bednarek, Christian Coleman, Lindsey Courtney and Trayvon Bromell, as well as South African Akani Simbine.

**Coleman and Richardson on the card:** While Coleman bids to upset Lyles, also running in the women's 100m is his partner Sha'Carri Richardson, the reigning world champion and Olympic silver medallist. Richardson found herself in the headlines for all the wrong reasons after being arrested for domestic violence after shoving Coleman at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport last month.

Both competed days later at the US championships in Eugene, Oregon, where Coleman, who reportedly did not press charges, said she should not have been arrested. Richardson duly apologised, saying that she held herself "accountable".

**Unstoppable Duplantis:** Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis bettered his pole vault world record by a centimetre on Tuesday, clearing 6.29 metres in Budapest.

It was the US-born Swede's 13th time he had set a world record as he soared over the bar at the second attempt to improve on his 6.28m from Stockholm in June. He first broke the world record in 2020 with 6.17m.

It was also the 25-year-old's third record of 2025 having initially raised the bar to 6.27m in Clermont-Ferrand in February.

His rivals in Poland will be hoping for a rare off-day to get anywhere near topping the podium given that at last year's Diamond League meeting in Silesia, it was none other than Duplantis who stole the headlines with a then-world record of 6.26m.

**Kipyegon eyes WR, Chebet races 1500m:** Kenya's Faith Kipyegon will have a tilt at a world record in the 3,000m, a non-Olympic event. Kipyegon, a three-time Olympic gold medallist over 1,500m, has an incredible track record. Her new 1,500m world record of 3:48.68 in the Eugene Diamond League was her fifth at a Diamond League met in the last three seasons. The Kenyan came up short in her specially arranged attempt in June to become the first woman to smash through the four-minute barrier, clocking 4min 06.42sec in Paris.

TENNIS

# Sabalenka, Sinner advance in rain-hit Cincinnati Open

Sinner extends hardcourt winning streak to 24 matches; Americans Keys, Pegula and Fritz knocked out

**Reuters**
Cincinnati

World number one Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the Cincinnati Open quarter-finals with a 6-1 7-5 victory over Jessica Bouzas Maneiro on Wednesday, while men's top seed Jannik Sinner beat Adrian Mannarino following a lengthy rain delay.

Fresh off a thrilling third-round battle with Emma Raducanu, women's reigning champion Sabalenka had an easier ride against the Spaniard Bouzas Maneiro, earning her tour-leading 50th win in one hour and 20 minutes.

"I was up a break, made a couple of mistakes and she broke me back," Sabalenka said. "I'm glad to win in straight sets. I didn't want to stay for three hours."

The Belarusian will next meet 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina in a final-worthy showdown, as the ninth-seeded Kazakh rallied from a set down to beat Australian Open winner Madison Keys 6-7(3) 6-4 6-2.

Earlier, six-times Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek reached the quarters with a 6-4 6-4 victory over Sorana Cirstea, with the third-seeded Pole extending her perfect record against the Romanian to 5-0.

"We played many tough matches, so I know Sorana can really hit the ball well, especially on faster surfaces," Swiatek said. "Not many of my first serves went in, but I was happy I was solid on my second serves." Fellow Pole Magda Linette secured her second top-10 win of the season by upsetting American fourth seed Jessica Pegula 7-6 (5) 3-6 6-3 in a third-round match that extended over two days after Tuesday's suspension due to rain.



Jannik Sinner of Italy serves during the match against Adrian Mannarino of France during Day 7 of the Cincinnati Open at the Lindner Family Tennis Center in Mason, Ohio. *(AFP)*

**SINNER, ALCARAZ THROUGH**

In the men's draw, defending champion Sinner kept his title defence on track, beating Frenchman Mannarino 6-4 7-6(4) after an almost three-hour rain interruption.

The Italian four-times Grand Slam champion struggled to find his rhythm, failing to serve out at 6-5 but sealing the tiebreak with back-to-back aces for his 24th consecutive hard-court victory.

"He is a very tough opponent. Very different from other opponents, not only because he is a lefty but how he hits the ball. It's very low," Sinner said. "I just tried to serve well and tried to see what I could do in the return games."

Sinner will face Canadian 23rd seed Felix Auger-Aliassime in his fifth quarter-final this year.



Aryna Sabalenka prepares to play a backhand against Jessica Bouzas Maneiro of Spain at the Cincinnati Open in Mason, Ohio. *(AFP)*

Spanish second seed Carlos Alcaraz booked his 18th Masters 1000 quarter-final by beating Italian Luca Nardi 6-1 6-4. The five-times major winner, into the last eight in Cincinnati for the third time, has now won 36 of his last 38 matches.

"This match was the best so far for me in this tournament," Alcaraz said. "I'm really happy with the way I felt the ball today and the way that I moved. I got used to the conditions, the humidity and heat. I'm happy to get through."

Alcaraz will next face Russian ninth seed Andrey Rublev, who beat Argentine Francisco Comesana 6-2 6-3.

Canadian Open champion Ben Shelton, whose match was also halted after the first set, progressed to the last 16 with a 7-6 (3) 6-3 win over Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut. The American fifth seed will face Czech Jiri Lehecka.

German third seed Alexander Zverev, who completed a 6-4 6-4 win over American Brandon Nakashima after the match was suspended overnight when he was leading 5-4 in the second set, progressed to the quarters after Russian Karen Khachanov was forced to retire due to injury while trailing 7-5 3-0.

French qualifier Terence Atmane earned the biggest win of his career by stunning American fourth seed Taylor Fritz 3-6 7-5 6-3, earning his first Masters 1000 quarter-final berth. Atmane will meet Danish seventh seed Holger Rune, who advanced after American 10th seed Frances Tiafoe retired due to a back injury.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## Men's tennis players handed record $18.3mn profit-sharing bonus, says ATP chief Gaudenzi

**Reuters**
London

Men's tennis players will pocket a record $18.3mn in profit-sharing bonuses from the 2024 season, the ATP said yesterday, as the tour stepped up its efforts to forge a more sustainable and financially aligned future for the sport.

The bonus amount, a 177% increase on the previous season's payout, will be distributed to players based on performance at the nine ATP 1000 tournaments, which rank just below the four Grand Slams in prestige. "This is exactly what profit sharing was designed to do: ensure that players and tournaments share equally in the sport's financial upside," ATP Chairman **Andrea Gaudenzi** said.



"The $18.3 million is a huge milestone. For us, it's proof that strengthening the premium product and aligning interests creates value. "We're proud to be strengthening our partnership and building a stronger, more sustainable ATP Tour."

The profit-sharing plan, introduced in 2022, splits profits generated at ATP Masters 1000 events – above onsite base prize money – equally between players and tournaments and is a cornerstone of the tour's OneVision strategic plan.

Profit-sharing helped push ATP player compensation to a record $261mn for the 2024 season for a total of $378mn when combined with Grand Slam prize money.

The men's elite body added that it was on track to deliver more compensation records, including $28.5mn in Challenger Tour prize money and a $3mn ATP 500 bonus pool. The expansion of most of the Masters events to 96-player draws had increased earning opportunities for players, widening the number of those able to make a sustainable living from the sport, the ATP added.

It said there was a "wave of infrastructure investment" as Madrid, Rome, Cincinnati, Shanghai and Paris, among other venues, had upgraded facilities to enhance the experience for players and spectators.

SPOTLIGHT

## Berrettini withdraws from US Open

**Reuters**
London

Former world number six Matteo Berrettini has withdrawn from the US Open, tournament organisers said yesterday.

The Italian, currently ranked 59th, has not competed since a first-round lost at Wimbledon in June after he had recovered from an abdominal injury.

The Italian did not play at Roland Garros earlier this year due to a right oblique injury and has now missed seven majors in the past four years.

Berretini skipped the Swiss Open in Gstaad, and the Masters 1000 events in Toronto and Cincinnati ahead of the Grand Slam at Flushing Meadows, where he reached the semi-finals in 2019. His best result this season came in Miami, where he reached the quarter-finals.

American Brandon Holt will take his place in the main draw of the US Open, where singles action begins on August 24.

Berrettini is the second former Top 10 player to withdraw from the hard-court major this week after Grigor Dimitrov withdrew Tuesday, snapping a 58-major streak.

## India to bid for Commonwealth Games as part of Olympic push

**New Delhi:** India says it will bid for the 2030 Commonwealth Games, seen as part of a wider push by the cricket-mad nation to host the 2036 Olympics.
"Our preparations will go ahead," Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president **PT Usha** said after a meeting on Wednesday, according to local media.
The capital New Delhi – which hosted the 2010 Commonwealth Games, an event marked by construction delays, substandard infrastructure and accusations of corruption – is being considered as host city. Bhubaneswar in the eastern state of Odisha is another option.
But Indian media are tipping Ahmedabad, the key city in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat.
The city is home to a 130,000-seater arena, the world's biggest cricket stadium, named after Modi. It staged the 2023 Cricket World Cup final.
India last year submitted a formal letter of intent to the International Olympic Committee to host the 2036 Games. India has staged World Cups for cricket and the Asian Games twice, and will co-host the Women's World Cup cricket in September.
Nigeria and at least two other nations have reportedly expressed interest in hosting the Commonwealth Games, which struggled to find a replacement host for 2026 after the Australian state of Victoria withdrew citing costs.
Glasgow stepped in and will stage a slimmed-down version.
Following IOA approval, India has until the end of August to submit a formal bid.
The decision will be made in November in Glasgow.
India said that if it wins the bid, the Commonwealth Games would be a "full-fledged" event. "We will have all the sports we are good at and have a chance of winning maximum medals," said IOA executive council member Rohit Rajpal, according to the *Times of India* newspaper. That would include tag-type sports such as kabaddi and kho kho, which India is pushing to be included in the Olympics.
Despite its 1.4 billion people India's record at the Olympics is poor for a country of its size, winning only 10 gold medals in its history.



FOCUS

## LA28 to allow venue naming rights in first for Olympics; Comcast, Honda debut deals

**Reuters**
Los Angeles

Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games will, for the first time in Games history, allow venue naming rights, organisers said yesterday, unveiling Comcast and Honda as inaugural partners in a move aimed at boosting commercial revenues.

The pilot programme, developed with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), will let qualifying LA28 partners retain existing venue names during the Games and buy additional marketing assets.

It also opens naming rights for up to 19 temporary venues to worldwide Olympic partners and LA28 sponsors, while standard "clean venue" rules continue for non-partner sites.

Comcast will lend its name to the Comcast Squash Center at Universal Studios, where squash will make its Olympic debut on the Courthouse Square backlot.

Honda Center in Anaheim will become the first arena to keep its name during an Olympic competition, hosting indoor volleyball.

"Anytime you're the first to do something in the context of the Olympics, it's a big deal," LA28 chair Casey Wasserman told Reuters.

"It's a big opportunity for us and it's a big statement of support from the IOC. We think it will be a really powerful platform and opportunity in the commercial sector, so we're really excited." Wasserman said the deals introduce a "new commercial model" for the Olympic movement. The IOC traditionally enforces strict branding rules during the Games, masking corporate signage at competition venues.

He noted money from selling venue naming rights would be in addition to the overall sponsorship revenue target of $2.5bn, which LA28 calls the largest commercial revenue raise in sports.

"We've been very conservative, so we have none of this revenue in our budget so any revenue is upside," he said.

"Having said that, we think it could be significant.

"It's a really powerful platform for branded partners of ours to engage with us and also with the globe, because it's part of the broadcast. The reach is really stunning."

From a practical perspective, the potential for SoFi Stadium and Crypto.com arena to maintain their names during the Games will help fans navigating the city.

"As a pure matter of wayfinding, it's actually an important piece of the puzzle," he said.

Comcast, which holds US broadcast rights through NBC and Peacock, said it would support LA28 "across our entire company," including coverage and the squash showcase.

Honda, which in June was named the Games automotive sponsor, said its long-backed Anaheim arena would "step onto the international stage to power Olympic dreams," according to Ed Beadle, a vice-president at American Honda Motor Co LA28 said additional naming-rights partners are expected as the three-year countdown continues.

The LA28 Games will mark Los Angeles' third time to host the Olympic Games, previously hosted in 1984 and 1932, and first time to host the Paralympic Games.

Los Angeles will host the world's most elite athletes in 2028 as it welcomes Paralympians and Olympians from around the world to compete on the biggest stage in sports.

The LA28 Games are independently operated by a privately funded, nonprofit organisation with revenue from corporate partners, licensing agreements, hospitality and ticketing programs and a significant contribution from the International Olympic Committee.

Comcast Corporation (Nasdaq: CMCSA) is a global media and technology company. From the connectivity and platforms we provide, to the content and experiences they create, their businesses reach hundreds of millions of customers, viewers, and guests worldwide.

Honda started operations in the United States with American Honda Motor Co., Inc. in 1959.

Today, Honda employs over 30,000 associates in America engaged in the development, manufacturing, sales and service support of Honda and Acura automobiles, Honda power equipment, Honda powersports products and the HondaJet advanced light jet.

FOCUS

# Super Cup winner PSG begin Ligue 1 campaign on Sunday

'Now we want to keep on making history, and that means winning consecutive Champions Leagues'

**AFP**
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) will be hoping a severely curtailed summer break does not come back to bite them as the Ligue 1 season begins this weekend, headlined by the newly-crowned European champions and featuring the return to France of Paul Pogba.

It is just the second time that the French top flight has boasted the Champions League winners among its ranks, with PSG's success against Inter Milan in May following Marseille's triumph in 1993. Luis Enrique's team added the UEFA Super Cup on Wednesday as they came from two goals down against Tottenham before winning on penalties.

The nature of that success was made all the more remarkable given they had just a week's preseason training under their belts, and no friendly matches.

That is after they went all the way to the Club World Cup final in the United States, their 3-0 defeat against Chelsea on July 13 bringing the curtain down on a marathon 65-game season.

That did not take the shine off their achievement in winning the Champions League, but those exertions risk having an impact on Luis Enrique's players further down the line.

"What we did last season had been the objective for all PSG supporters, for the whole club, and for everyone who played for the club," PSG's coach said this week.

"Now we want to keep on making history, and that means winning consecutive Champions Leagues, so that is our objective. That is the dream."

Put another way, continued European success is the priority over winning a 12th domestic title in 14 years. PSG are nevertheless overwhelming favourites to do that as they attack the season having added goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier from Lille to replace Gianluigi Donnarumma, and Ukrainian centre-back Illia Zabarnyi from Bournemouth.


Goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier lifts the trophy as his team PSG celebrate winning the 2025 UEFA Super Cup in Udine. *(AFP)*

## Luis Enrique applauds keeper Chevalier after dream PSG debut

Lucas Chevalier impressed on his debut as Paris St Germain's new first-choice goalkeeper on Wednesday in their Super Cup victory over Tottenham Hotspur, drawing praise from manager Luis Enrique. The 23-year-old former Lille keeper was thrust into the spotlight after Luis Enrique made it clear earlier this week that Gianluigi Donnarumma had been axed from the squad, prompting the Italian international to begin searching for a new club. Chevalier, who arrived at the club on Sunday, earned praise from teammates and fans alike after making several acrobatic saves, including Micky van de Ven's attempt during the penalty shootout. "We relied on Lucas ... he just arrived, but it was time for him to show off. We're very happy because he made it," Luis Enrique told reporters after PSG beat Tottenham 4-3 on penalties. "This is PSG, you have to know how to handle the pressure, Lucas is a top-class goalkeeper, he's capable of it. He did his job, welcome to him with a trophy." Luis Enrique admitted that the publicity surrounding Donnarumma was far from ideal for the club. "Everyone was talking about the situation; his (Lucas's position) wasn't easy, but he showed great character," Luis Enrique added. "It's a bit of a script: he comes in and saves a penalty. It's a good start for him, we're happy," teammate Ousmane Dembele said.

French football has been mired in crisis due to difficulties finding a domestic broadcast partner willing to offer the kind of money needed to help teams beyond PSG compete with their European counterparts.

At the end of last season, the French league pulled the plug on a cut-price deal with streaming platform DAZN.

Instead it has launched its own platform, a bold step which may succeed in the long run but for now means clubs have no guaranteed television income.

Seven-time champions Lyon's woes almost led to them being relegated - they were initially demoted to Ligue 2 by French football's financial watchdog before successfully appealing that punishment.

However, they were told they would have to cut their wage bill and transfer budget for this campaign and the future still looks uncertain - key players such as Rayan Cherki, Alexandre Lacazette and goalkeeper Lucas Perri have all departed.

Marseille and Monaco completed the podium in Ligue 1 last season and surely have the best chance of challenging PSG this time.

Monaco have signed Pogba on a two-year deal, giving the 2018 World Cup winner a chance to revive a career that has been stalled by injury and an 18-month doping ban.

Pogba is now 32 and has hardly played in three years, but Monaco are hopeful he can help them make a real push at the top of the table.

"The next step for us is to have a team that is mentally stronger, that really believes it can go far in the Champions League and challenge Paris," said Monaco CEO Thiago Scuro.

Pogba has never previously played in France having left Le Havre for Manchester United as a teenager. Fellow 2018 World Cup winner Olivier Giroud, meanwhile, has returned to Ligue 1 aged 38 to join Lille.

It remains to be seen what impact he might have, and whether Paris FC can feature prominently following promotion.

They have big ambitions after a takeover last year by the Arnaults, one of the world's wealthiest families.

It is the first time since 1990 that two Parisian teams have featured in the top flight, and the rivalry between them will be stoked by the fact Paris FC will play home games at the Stade Jean-Bouin -- a stone's throw from PSG's Parc des Princes.

Paris FC have already invested significant sums in the transfer market but will probably have to wait before seriously challenging their neighbours.

"Everyone is eagerly looking forward to the derbies, but we know very well that the gulf between us is huge. They are on another planet," said Paris FC president Pierre Ferracci.

PREVIEW

# Alonso's Real start La Liga with fresh energy

**AFP**
Madrid

Real Madrid, featuring several new signings, approach the new season with fresh hope under recently-appointed coach Xabi Alonso, looking to turn the page on a disappointing end to the Carlo Ancelotti era with "ambitious" football.

Former Liverpool and Los Blancos midfielder Alonso saw at the Club World Cup in the United States this summer there is plenty of work to do, as Paris Saint-Germain thrashed Madrid 4-0 in the semi-final. "Things are going to be different... we are starting from scratch," said Alonso, although some of his findings from the tournament will undoubtedly influence his approach.

Madrid fans also got their first glimpse of the Basque tactician's plans, and also of England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold.

Alonso showed tactical flexibility, utilising both a four-man and three-man defence, whereas his predecessor Ancelotti tended to stick with four at the back and was criticised for not being adaptive enough in games.

By contrast Alonso was keen to adjust things during matches if he could, including the positioning of his players, and keen to impress on his squad they must all help defensively and with pressing.

"We need and want everyone to defend -- the 11 players on the pitch have to be involved defensively," said Alonso during the tournament, asked specifically about star forwards Vinicius Junior and Kylian Mbappe.

"They have to know how we want to press, and without that, things will be very complicated," continued Alonso. "Vini, Jude (Bellingham), Fede (Valverde), Kylian, those up front, the defence has to push forward too."


Real Madrid's Spanish coach Xabi Alonso. *(AFP)*

Alonso is looking to obtain the balance that Ancelotti failed to achieve last season following Mbappe's arrival from PSG.

Although the French superstar struck 43 goals under Ancelotti it was not enough to inspire a Madrid side that finished the season without a major trophy, while Barcelona reclaimed La Liga as part of a domestic treble.

Mbappe's illness with a stomach bug kept him out of Madrid's group matches at the Club World Cup, but on his first start was in the destruction by PSG.

"We have to be self-critical, but it will also serve us as a guide for where we need to improve," said Alonso.

If Alonso can find the formula for Mbappe and Vinicius to work together without sacrificing too much out of possession remains to be seen, while winger Rodrygo Goes does not appear to be part of the coach's plans, playing a bit-part role in the States.

Madrid go into the season without Luka Modric in the squad for the first time in over a decade, with the Croatian's experience and quality a big miss for a side lacking some guile in midfield.

Los Blancos' hope is for Turkish playmaker Arda Guler to be able to thrive there and become a player who can control the tempo of a game.

"The coach is trying to make us have more control of the game, and that's better for me," said Guler.

The 20-year-old should get plenty of chances to play at the start of the season with Jude Bellingham sidelined until around mid-October after shoulder surgery to solve a long-running issue.

By then new arrival and fellow England international Alexander-Arnold may have established himself in the side. The full-back, who joined from Liverpool before the end of his contract so he could play at the Club World Cup, adds further attacking quality to a Madrid squad brimming with it.

Madrid hope Dean Huijsen could help solve some issues at the back, while Alvaro Carreras and Franco Mastantuono also join, with Los Blancos spending over 170 million euros ($200 million) this summer.

Dani Carvajal's return from a long-term knee injury is another piece of good news for a Madrid side who need it after their 2024-25 campaign was more noteworthy for the club's attacks on referees than for success on the field.

Alonso, who hopes to play an "ambitious" game with "emotion and energy", wants the world to be talking about Real Madrid's football once again.

SPOTLIGHT

# Owner Brady didn't understand football, says Rooney after 'work ethic' jibe

**AFP**
London

Wayne Rooney has described criticism of his work ethic by Birmingham minority owner **Tom Brady** as "unfair" and said the NFL legend did not understand football.

Former Manchester United and England captain Rooney, was sacked as Birmingham manager in January 2024 after less than three months in charge.

Seven-time Super Bowl champion quarterback Brady, who became a minority shareholder at Birmingham in August 2023, said he was "a little worried about our head coach's work ethic" during a recently-aired documentary after visiting Blues' training ground two months later.

"I think Tom came in once, which was the day before a game where the days are a little bit lighter anyway, and I don't think he really understood football that well," Rooney said on his new podcast, The Wayne Rooney Show, which will be aired on the BBC's digital platforms.

"Football is not NFL - NFL works for three months a year. Players do need rest as well, so I think he's very unfair, the way he's come out and portrayed that."

Following Rooney's departure, Birmingham appointed Tony Mowbray and Gary Rowett as managers in the 2023/24 season but were relegated to League One.

"When I went into Birmingham, they were in a mess really," added Rooney. "Hence the fact that the players weren't really the players who could take the club forward.

Since then the project, headed by American-based hedge fund Knighthead Capital, has turned around. Birmingham's wealthy backers invested an unprecedented £30mn ($41mn) in transfers for a League One club last season and broke an English Football League record by amassing 111 points as they stormed to the title.

"Listen, I respect Tom Brady massively," said Rooney.

"He's one of the greatest, if not the greatest athletes of all time and Birmingham do look like they're getting it right now, which is good and I think what they have done is got the players out that they needed to get out."

