To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
44466635



ATHLETICS | Page 3

Javelin star Kitaguchi finds new home in small Czech town



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Alonso says 'no excuses' as Real Madrid prepare for opener



Tuesday, August 19, 2025
Safar 25, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES
SPORT



CRICKET

Pakistan tell Babar to improve strike rate for T20 comeback

Page 2

FOCUS

Qatar's Fares prepares for 94kg debut at World Weightlifting Championships

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Olympic gold medallist Fares Ibrahim is preparing for a significant new chapter in his weightlifting career as he gears up to compete at the 2025 World Weightlifting Championships, scheduled to take place in Volda, Norway, from October 1 to 10.

The event will mark his first appearance in the 94kg weight category, following recent weight class changes introduced by the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF).

The shift is part of a broader early preparation strategy for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, where the 94kg category will be officially adopted.

Having previously competed in the now-abolished 102kg category, Fares and his team have identified the 94kg class as the most suitable option technically and physically after careful evaluation.



Qatar's Olympic gold medallist Fares Ibrahim to take part in 2025 World Weightlifting Championships to be held in Volda, Norway, from October 1 to 10.

Secretary-General of the Qatar Weightlifting Federation and member of the IWF's Development and Education Committee Jassim Ibrahim al-Mansouri emphasised that the move to 94kg was the result of a detailed study of Fares' capabilities.

The decision was made in close consultation with his coach, Ibrahim Hassouna and the technical team, who believe this category aligns best with Fares' natural physical profile. Al-Mansouri added that while the 110kg category was considered as an alternative, Fares' build is better suited for 94kg.



Secretary-General of the Qatar Weightlifting Federation Jassim Ibrahim al-Mansouri.

He acknowledged the high level of competition expected in the new class but expressed full confidence in Fares' ability to adapt and emerge as a strong contender.

Although the 2025 World Championships are not part of the official Olympic qualification process, al-Mansoori described the event as a critical testing ground to assess Fares' performance in the new category.

The results will help shape a comprehensive long-term plan for the upcoming qualification period, which begins in China in November 2026 and concludes in Doha in December 2026.

"We are counting on Fares Ibrahim not only because he is an Olympic and world champion, but also because he is a role model in determination, discipline and ambition. We are fully committed to supporting him in this transitional phase and ensuring he continues to raise Qatar's flag at the highest levels," al-Mansouri.

Fares is Qatar's first ever Olympic gold medallist, having claimed the 96kg title at the Tokyo Games.

TENNIS

Alcaraz claims Cincinnati Open as Sinner retires

'I tried to make it at least a small match but I could not handle more'

AFP
Cincinnati

Carlos Alcaraz won the ATP Cincinnati Open title yesterday after defending champion Jannik Sinner retired due to illness during the first set.

World number one Sinner came into the final feeling poorly and lost the first seven points of the match played in 30 degrees Celsius summer heat.

Alcaraz is the third Spaniard to win the pre-US Open title here after Carlos Moya and Rafael Nadal.

Sinner will now focus on recovery with the US Open starting on Sunday. The Italian is due to take part in the US Open's revamped mixed doubles on Tuesday, but his participation in that draw is now in doubt.

"I'm super-super sorry to disappoint you," Sinner said at the trophy ceremony to fans. "I was not feeling great yesterday but I thought it would go away overnight.

"I tried to make it at least a small match but I could not handle more."

The defending champion, who turned 24 last Saturday, added: "Some of you (fans) had to (miss) work or do other things today, so I'm really sorry.

"I'm sorry to disappoint. Congrats to Carlos, I know this is not how you wanted to win. You are having an amazing season.

"I'm sorry to disappoint but sometimes it's like this. This has been one of the hottest tournaments we have played."



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain poses with the Rookwood Cup after his win over Jannik Sinner of Italy in the Cincinnati Open final at Lindner Family Tennis Center in Mason, Ohio, yesterday. *(AFP)*

Sinner lasted for just 22 minutes, calling for the doctor after losing the fifth game and shortly after going to shake hands with Alcaraz. It was the second match in a row he had won over an ailing opponent, with Alexander Zvrev playing ill in the closing stages of their semi-final. Alcaraz won his 22nd career title as he claimed his 17th victory in a row at the Masters 1000 level. "This is not the way I want to win trophies," Alcaraz said. I understand how Jannik is feeling right now."

He called the Italian "a true champion, I know you will come back better and stronger than ever."

SPOTLIGHT

Qatari players shine at WTT Youth Contender Championship

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's table tennis team delivered an impressive performance at the WTT Youth Contender Championship held in Amman, adding a new achievement to the nation's growing success in international table tennis.

The Qatari players secured a total of seven medals: one gold, three silver and three bronze. Rasha Laghribi stood out with a gold medal in the U-11 category and a bronze in the U-13, showcasing her remarkable talent across age groups. Alia Albaz claimed silver in the U-11 category, while Serena Shaikh earned silver in the U-13. Abdulaziz al-Abdullah added another silver for Qatar in the U-15 competition. Bronze medals were won by Rabia al-Kuwari (U-11), Ruqayya al-Baz (U-15), and Mubarak Marzouq (U-11), rounding off a strong showing by the team.

The Qatar Table Tennis Association praised the achievement, stating that it reflects the ongoing development of Qatari youth in the sport and highlights the effectiveness of the training programs and support systems in place. The association emphasised that these results are the fruit of hard work, commitment, and the growing investment in Qatari sports. With more determination and ambition, the future looks bright for Qatar's next generation of table tennis champions.



Ismail records Asia's fastest 400m time of 2025

Team Qatar's **Ammar Ismail** delivered a standout performance at the Voor Mon Meeting in Belgium, clocking 44.90 seconds in the men's 400m. The result marked not only his season's best but also the fastest Asian time of the year, underscoring his rise as one of the region's premier sprinters. Ammar finished second behind USA's Bryce Deadmon (44.86 secs) on Saturday. The achievement highlights Ismail's strong preparation ahead of the World Championships in Tokyo, where he is expected to compete as a serious contender. Currently based in Europe for an intensive training camp, he is sharpening his start, refining his race distribution, and building both physical and mental strength for the global stage. Team Qatar's success extended beyond the 400m. In Germany, Ibrahim Abbas stormed to victory in the 800m at the Sondershausen Meet, finishing in 1:44.90 minutes to continue his excellent European form. Teammate Hatem Hameed also impressed, taking second place in the same race with a new personal best of 1:45.36 minutes.



SPORT

CRICKET

Pakistan tell Babar to improve strike rate

Reuters
Lahore

Former Pakistan captain **Babar Azam** has been told to improve his batting against spin and boost his overall strike rate to be considered for Twenty20 Internationals, coach Mike Hesson said.

Babar is Pakistan's batting mainstay in other formats but has not played a T20 International since their tour of South Africa late last year.

The 30-year-old could not find a place in the Pakistan squad for the Asia Cup next month as the team management showed faith in rising players such as Sahibzada Farhan.

"There's no doubt Babar's been asked to improve in some areas around taking on spin and in terms of his strike rate," Hesson said of the top-order batter who has a modest strike rate of 129 in T20 Internationals.

"Those are things he's working really hard on. But at the moment the players we have, have done exceptionally well.

"Sahibzada Farhan has played six games and won three player-of-the-match awards."

Babar should use the Big Bash League in Australia to improve his 20-overs batting and stage a comeback, Hesson said.

"A player like Babar has an opportunity to play in the BBL and show he's improving in those areas in T20s. He's too good a player not to consider," he said.

Hesson stated he'll continue with the aggressive, top-heavy strategy he's known for, saying it's a style that fits Pakistan's game well.

"We were challenged with three different surfaces (in each of the three series)" Hesson said in a story posted on *www.cricinfo.com*.

"In Lahore, the surfaces were flat and the batting excelled. We went to Bangladesh where they were incredibly challenging and low-scoring games. Our top order sets the game up. All the games we won the top order performed really well.

The third game in the West Indies, our openers put on 140 (138). We need that at a run rate that gets us ahead of the game. T20 is all about setting the game up and being ahead of the game all the time in case you get yourself out. From a batting point of view we've got a line-up that can continue to do that," he added.

Aqib Javed, the director of high-performance for the PCB, has backed the decision, confidently stating that the new, more aggressive squad is capable of winning major tournaments. He believes the team can beat any side, including India, and that the omission is part of a strategic shift towards more attacking cricket.

Kamran Akmal, the former wicket-keeper, however has questioned the decision to drop the experienced duo.

He stated: "Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan should have been part of the team."

While he had previously advocated for giving new players a chance, he believes the senior players are essential for major tournaments

Pakistan will begin their Asia Cup Group A campaign against Oman in Dubai on September 12 before meeting arch-rivals India at the same venue two days later.



GOLF

Scheffler outlasts MacIntyre to win BMW crown

'I try not to take days off. I try not to take shots off. Today was a grind'

AFP
Washington

Scottie Scheffler chipped in for birdie from 82 feet on the 17th hole on Sunday to win the US PGA Tour's BMW Championship by two strokes over Scotland's Robert MacIntyre.

World number one Scheffler, who began the day four strokes behind the Scotsman, fired a three-under par 67 to finish on 15-under 265 at Caves Valley in suburban Baltimore.

Scheffler, this year's British Open and PGA Championship winner, became the first player since Tiger Woods in 2006-07 to win five or more times in back-to-back seasons.

The two-time Masters champion also ensured his role as the favourite to become the first back-to-back winner of the FedEx Cup playoffs when he tees off at next week's Tour Championship in Atlanta.

Scheffler clung to a one-stroke lead after going over the green into the rough at the par-three 17th. He pitched out, the ball hitting the green and rolling 82 feet for birdie, the day's most amazing shot restoring Scheffler's two-stroke advantage.

"Any time you hole a chip like that it's pretty nice," Scheffler said. "It looked good when it landed, it looked good when it was rolling and it was nice to see that one go in."

Scheffler nearly went at the pin instead of playing it safe to the left side of the green opposite the hole.

"I played smart off the tee. That was obviously the miss there," Scheffler said. "Part of me wanted to go at the pin and then I kind of held it off. I knew par wasn't going to be a bad score on that hole today."


Scottie Scheffler poses with The Keeper after winning the BMW Championship golf tournament at Owings Mills, Maryland, USA. *(Reuters)*

MacIntyre, runner-up to JJ Spaun at June's US Open, was going for a wire-to-wire win but came undone with back-to-back bogeys at the start and three in the first five holes.

"I got off to an absolutely horrific start," MacIntyre said.

"It's come out dead and then it's got a massive mud ball just short of the green. I just felt great going out. I wasn't even expecting to be over par, to be honest. I was really expecting to go out there, foot down, and perform the way I have the last couple days."

Scheffler managed his 17th consecutive sub-par PGA round and credited intensity for his consistency.

"I think it has a lot to do with the intensity I bring to each round," Scheffler said. "I try not to take days off. I try not to take shots off. When it gets to this time of year it cane be a little bit tiring. Today was a grind."

SIX SET FOR RYDER CUP

Scheffler's spot on the US team for next month's Ryder Cup at Bethpage Black was also made official with the points race closing Sunday.

He topped a points list that also saw berths confirmed for US Open winner JJ Spaun, two-time major winner Xander Schauffele, Russell Henley, Harris English and LIV Golf's Bryson DeChambeau, a two-time US Open champion.

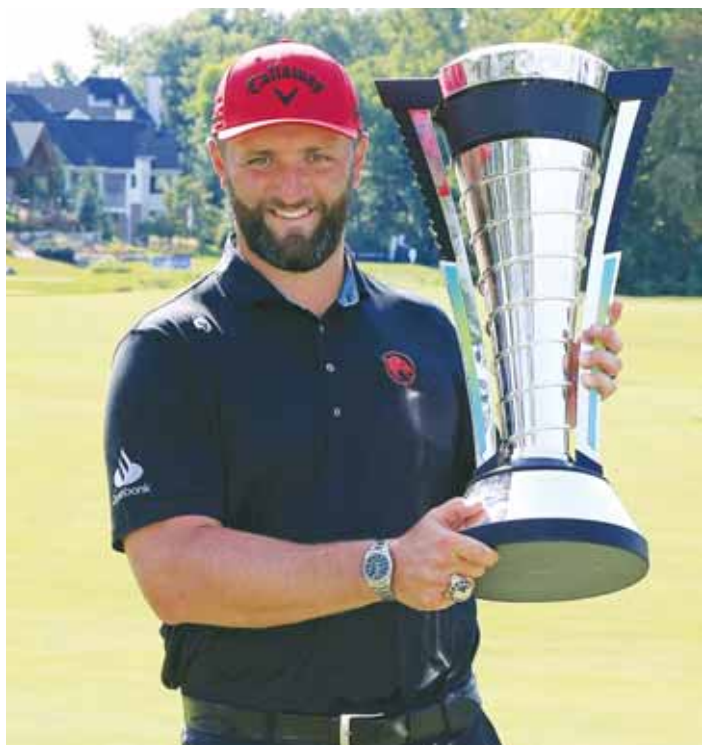
Scheffler sank a birdie putt from just inside seven feet on the first hole and answered a three-putt bogey at the third with birdies from 12 feet at the fifth and just inside six feet at the seventh to grab the solo lead.

Bogeys at 12 and 14 trimmed his lead to a single stroke, but Scheffler answered with a six-foot birdie putt at 15. MacIntyre sank a three-foot birdie putt at the par-five 16th to pull within one, setting the stage for Scheffler's stunner at 17.

The BMW was the second PGA playoff FedEx Cup event, with the top 30 in season points advancing to East Lake next week. England's Harry Hall, who was sixth on 272, was the only one to jump into a spot, bumping out past US Open winner Lucas Glover.

SPOTLIGHT

Rahm edges Niemann for LIV season title as Munoz wins at Indy


Jon Rahm of Legion XIII poses with the LIV golf season individual trophy on day three of LIV Golf Indianapolis at The Club at Chatham Hills in Westfield, Indiana. *(AFP)*

AFP
Chicago

Spain's Jon Rahm captured his second consecutive LIV Golf season crown on Sunday, shooting an 11-under par 60 before losing a playoff to Colombia's Sebastian Munoz at LIV Golf Indianapolis.

Munoz birdied the first playoff hole to beat Rahm for the Indy title after both finished on 22-under 191 through all 54 holes at Chatham Hills in the Saudi-backed series' last individual event of the year.

"First time I've ever beat him, so really proud of that and happy I got to go home with the trophy," Munoz said.

But Rahm's result, a second playoff loss in as many weeks, was enough to edge Chile's Joaquin Niemann in the season points chase for the second year in a row, delivering heartbreak on the campaign's last day as he did in 2024.

"Still slightly bittersweet," Rahm said. "I know I'm supposed to be happy. It's a great moment. But it just doesn't feel great to finish the year losing two playoffs.

"I'm sure over time I'll get over that and I really appreciate what I've done this year."

Rahm won the season title without winning any LIV event while Niemann took titles this year in Adelaide, Singapore, Mexico City, Virginia and Britain.

"It sucks," Niemann said. "I started playing my best golf on the back nine, which I'm proud of, but at the end of the day, the putts didn't drop, and it wasn't enough. It's kind of hard to swallow."

Rahm, a Masters and US Open champion, wasn't overjoyed about a season crown without a win all year.

"To be able to win the season without actually winning a tournament, I know eventually I'll be proud of that. Right now it's slightly more something I'm going to suffer over a little bit more, and it may never be replicated," Rahm said.

"You need a lot of coincidences to go on exactly with the year Joaquín had. He's won five times. He has played incredible golf. One could argue he was probably the more deserving guy to win this. But we have the points system we have and somehow, I don't know how, I managed to pull through and get it done."

Rahm captured $18mn for claiming the season crown with Niemann taking $8mn for his runner-up season finish after sharing fourth at Indy on 196 with a closing 66.

Munoz, who battled two-time major winner Dustin Johnson for the lead most of the day, birdied the 17th and 18th holes in regulation and the 18th again in the playoff to win his first title since the 2019 PGA Tour Sanderson Farms Championship.

"We came today to try and take care of business," Munoz said. "Of course Jon shot 10-under so you go from one legend to another one. It was pretty cool. Awesome experience. Making birdie two times in a row (at 18), it's undescribable."

Munoz battled for the victory after firing a 59 on Friday, only the third sub-60 round in LIV history.

"I feel really proud of myself," he said.

"It has been a long time coming, six years since my last win, and it's awesome right now."

A severe overnight storm toppled trees and swamped fairways, delaying the shotgun start by 55 minutes, with players using lift, clean and place rules on the rain-softened course.

England's Lee Westwood and Ian Poulter avoided being dumped from LIV for 2026, finishing in the season's top 48 in points to escape the relegation zone.

Niemann's Torque won the Indy team title, it's first triumph since 2023, but Rahm's Legion XIII holds the top seeding for next week's LIV Team Championship.

AKIE IWAI JOINS TWIN SISTER CHISATO AS LPGA WINNER

Los Angeles, United States: Japan's **Akie Iwai** fired six birdies in a six-under par 66 to win the Portland Classic by four strokes and join twin sister Chisato as a first-time LPGA winner in their rookie season on the US tour.
Iwai started the day at Edgewater Country Club with a two-stroke lead and never faltered to finish with a 24-under par total of 264.
Chisato Iwai was among the golfers trying to apply pressure, charging up the leaderboard with an eight-under par 64, but it was American Gurleen Kaur who finished second after an impressive, bogey-free seven-under par 65 for 268.
Former US collegiate standout Kaur, opened with three straight birdies and had four more coming in for her career-best LPGA round.
Akie Iwai became the 10th first-time LPGA winner this season and the fifth Japanese player to triumph.
She said she'd felt pressure to join the flood of Japanese winners, but even more she was inspired by her sister's triumph at the Riviera Maya Open in Mexico in May.
"(She) really inspired me," said world number 29 Iwai, who was runner-up this year at Thailand and the LA Championship. "That's why I did my best this year."
Iwai got off to a steady start, with back-to-back birdies at the fifth and sixth and two more at 11 and 14.
She got up and down for par from off the green at 16, then capped her day with another birdie brace, curling in a testing birdie putt at 17 before draining an 18-footer at 18.
"Today I was able to conquer myself," she said.



US Open 2025: All about the Grand Slam event at Flushing Meadows in New York City

NEW YORK: The US Open is the final Grand Slam tournament of the year and is set to host the best players in the world for two weeks. Among those in action will be defending champion Jannik Sinner, 2022 titlist Carlos Alcaraz, Alexander Zverev, home favourite Taylor Fritz and four-time winner Novak Djokovic.

Here's what you need to know about the final Grand Slam of the year:

When is the US Open?
The US Open will run for two weeks, from August 24 to September 7 . The hard-court tournament first began in Newport in 1881, but has since moved to New York. Flushing Meadows is now the iconic site of the tournament and one of the most famous grounds in world tennis. The tournament director is Stacey Allaster.

Who is playing at the US Open?
Sinner, Alcaraz, Zverev, Fritz, Jack Draper, Djokovic, Lorenzo Musetti, Ben Shelton, Holger Rune and Andrey Rublev are set to compete at the US Open.

When is the draw for the US Open?
The US Open draw for the men's singles will be made on Thursday August 21 at 12pm. The draw for the men's doubles will be made on Wednesday, August 27 at 6pm.

What is the schedule for the US Open?
Main Draw: Sunday, August 24 – Sunday, September 7 at 11am and 7pm.
Singles Final: Sunday, September 7 at 2pm.
Mixed Doubles starts, August 19 and
Doubles starts, August 29
Mixed Doubles Final: August 20
Doubles Final: September 6

What is the prize money and points for the US Open?
The prize money for the US Open is US$40,412,800.

SINGLES
Winner: $5,000,000 / 2,000 points
Finalist: $2,500,000 / 1,200 points
Semi-finalist: $1,260,000/ 720 points
Quarter-finalist: $660,000 / 360 points
Round of 16: $400,000 / 180 points
Round of 32: $237,000 / 90 points
Round of 64: $154,000 / 45 points
Round of 128: $110,000/ 10 points
Qualifying: --- / 30 points
Qualifying 3: $57,200 / 16 points
Qualifying 2: $41,800 / 8 points
Qualifying 1: $27,500 / 0 points

DOUBLES ($ per pair)
Winner: $1,000,000 / 2,000 points
Finalist: $500,000 / 1,200 points
Semi-finalist: $250,000/ 720 points
Quarter-finalist: $125,000 / 360 points
Round of 16: $75,000 / 180 points
Round of 32: $45,000 / 90 points
Round of 64: $30,000 / 0 points

How can I follow the US Open?
Instagram: usopen
Facebook: US Open Tennis Championships
X: @usopen
YouTube: US Open Tennis Championships
TikTok: @usopen
Hashtag: #USOpen

Who won last year's edition of the US Open?
No. 1 player in the PIF ATP Rankings Jannik Sinner defeated American Taylor Fritz 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 in last year's singles final to claim his maiden US Open title. In the doubles final, Max Purcell and Jordan Thompson defeated Germans Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz 6-4, 7-6(4).

Who holds the US Open record for most titles, oldest champion, youngest champion and more?
Most Titles, Singles: Jimmy Connors (5), Roger Federer (5), Pete Sampras (5)
Most Titles, Doubles: Mike Bryan (6)
Oldest Champion: Novak Djokovic, 36, in 2023
Youngest Champion: Pete Sampras, 19, in 1990
Highest-Ranked Champion: No. 1s Jimmy Connors in 1974, 1976, 1978, John McEnroe in 1981, 1984, Ivan Lendl in 1986-87, Pete Sampras in 1996, Roger Federer in 2004-07, Rafael Nadal in 2010, 2017, Novak Djokovic in 2011, 2015 and Jannik Sinner in 2024.
Lowest-Ranked Champion: No. 20 Andre Agassi in 1994
Last Home Champion: Andy Roddick in 2003
Most Match Wins: Jimmy Connors (98)



Jannik Sinner, the defending champion at the US Open starting next week

ATHLETICS

Kitaguchi finds new home in small Czech town

Reigning Olympic, world champion finds home away from home

AFP
Domazlice, Czech Republic


Reigning Olympic and world javelin champion Haruka Kitaguchi prepares to throw the javelin during a training session in the Athletics tunnel in Domazlice, Czech Republic *(AFP)*

Reigning Olympic and world javelin champion Haruka Kitaguchi has found a new home in a remote corner of the Czech Republic, a country that is home to several javelin legends.

The 27-year-old Japanese is getting ready for next month's world championships in Tokyo in the western Czech town of Domazlice.

"I can concentrate on training here. And the weather is better than in Tokyo which is too hot for me," Kitaguchi told AFP at the local training centre – on a scorching hot Czech summer day.

She ended up in the cosy historic town after teaming up with local coach David Sekerak at a training seminar in Finland in 2018.

Former javelin thrower Sekerak knew that she had won the world youth championships in 2015.

"She was a big woman and I could see she had something in her," he added, hailing her self-discipline.

Kitaguchi followed him to the country of three-time Olympic javelin champion Jan Zelezny and two-time Olympic winner Barbora Spotakova.

"When I came for the first time, my coach said, today you can throw with my friend," Kitaguchi said.

"I went with him, and there was Barbora Spotakova. It was a good experience as she is my idol," Kitaguchi told AFP.

Sekerak has since led her to the 2023 world title and the 2024 Olympic crown, together with two Diamond League titles.

Mixing English and Czech, Kitaguchi said she appreciated "a good balance" in Sekerak's training.

"He also finds a way... for me to throw far. And every competition he stands behind me, supporting me. It's great mental aid," she added.

A lover of heavy Czech meals like goulash or dumplings in cream sauce, Kitaguchi said she had taken Czech lessons during the pandemic.

"But they only taught me to say 'I have a pen'. Nothing I could use in training," she said, bursting out laughing.

Her tinkling laughter can be heard even as she jogs and stretches alongside her Czech training partner Petra Sicakova, the javelin silver medallist from this year's European under-23 championships.

"My mum said when you train hard, it helps to smile. It's good for good training and good results, she said. So I do that," Kitaguchi said.

When she competed at the Paris Olympics, a cafe in Domazlice's sprawling historic square put up a large screen for locals to cheer for their neighbour.

A party followed, and city officials staged an official welcome with a local bagpipe band when Kitaguchi and Sekerak returned home.

In Domazlice, Kitaguchi lives in a flat in a hotel run by her coach's wife.

"I did a lot of the building work there myself," said Sekerak, who also owns a printing shop and makes his own javelins, used by his team.

Kitaguchi, who has her mother, a physiotherapist and a cook with her now, has her own model called Giant Baby, which is her Instagram nickname.

Kitaguchi, whose personal best is 67.38 metres from 2023, said her dream was to beat 70 metres.

"It's my target for my life," she said.

Sekerak said Kitaguchi could even tackle Spotakova's world record of 72.28 metres from 2008.

One condition is to drop "silly thoughts" that got into Kitaguchi's head as she was coping with fame following the two big titles, he added.

"I think we wasted about a year there, but she's OK now.

"It helps to go for a drink and some good food and ice cream together."

Ahead of the Tokyo championships starting on September 13, Kitaguchi's form is a great unknown – she is ranked sixth worldwide this season with a best of 64.63 metres.

She will compete at the Diamond League in Lausanne and Zurich in August and then fine-tune her form in Turkiye before leaving for Tokyo.

Sekerak said she was safer in Domazlice than in Japan where she has become the face of the championships, featuring on billboards across the country.

"It's crazy," Kitaguchi chuckled, waving aside her celebrity status.

"I hope I can show the best (in Tokyo) with people cheering (for) me and it's going to be a great memory for me.

"I'm really looking forward to it."

RUGBY

Injured Springboks captain Kolisi out for four weeks



AFP
Johannesburg

South Africa captain and flanker **Siya Kolisi** will be sidelined for four weeks due to a knee injury suffered in a shock loss to Australia at the weekend, coach Rassie Erasmus said yesterday.

The injury occurred early in the second half of a 38-22 defeat in Johannesburg last Saturday in a Rugby Championship first round match.

Kolisi will not only miss another Test against the Wallabies, on Saturday in Cape Town, but is also likely to be sidelined for the Springboks' two away matches against arch-rivals New Zealand next month.

Erasmus said three other starters in Johannesburg – wings Edwill van der Merwe (ankle) and Kurt-Lee Arendse (knee) and flanker Pieter-Steph du Toit (concussion) – will also miss the Cape Town Test.

In the absence of Kolisi, outside centre Jesse Kriel will take over as captain of a team that slipped from first to third behind New Zealand and Ireland in the world rankings after the shock defeat. South Africa built a 22-point lead within 18 minutes, then failed to score again while Australia crossed the tryline six times for a first victory in Johannesburg since 1963.

"Obviously, everyone is ashamed, no one is proud of themselves," Erasmus told a press conference in Cape Town. "It only strengthens our cohesion and our desire to do well. You do not learn anything from a match like that – when you see what we sometimes handed them on a plate."

Australia have also been hit by injuries with wing Dylan Pietsch (broken jaw) and prop James Slipper (concussion) flying home after the Ellis Park Test.

Coach Joe Schmidt has called up three replacements, wing-centre Filipo Daugunu, centre Hamish Stewart and prop Rhys van Nek, as cover.

The Wallabies hope captain and No 8 Harry Wilson, who scored two tries in Johannesburg before limping off injured, will be fit for Cape Town.

FOCUS

Wallabies expecting Cape Town backlash

Reuters
Sydney

The Wallabies are bracing for a violent backlash from the Springboks in the second Rugby Championship test in Cape Town on Saturday after their stunning upset of the Springboks at Ellis Park. Australia's recovery from an early 22-0 deficit to post a first win since 1963 at the crucible of South African rugby on Sunday left many back home just as incredulous as the fans of the back-to-back world champions.

Wallabies lock Will Skelton, however, said the 38-22 victory would mean only one thing when the teams clashed again at Newlands in the second round of the Rugby Championship. "They're going to try and punch you in the face this week," he told reporters from South Africa. "So we're going to have to be ready, have a good week of preparation again and really fight until the end."

Wallabies coach Joe Schmidt has been very clear throughout his rebuilding project over the last year that consistency of performance is the acid test of progress.

That Saturday's victory backed up a win in the third test of the lost series against the British & Irish Lions was a huge positive, but the players know a humiliating reverse on Saturday would be an equally significant step backwards.

Skelton said the Lions series, where Australia played well only in parts of the first two tests before producing an 80-minute performance in the third, had established a bedrock of resilience in the squad.

"It's definitely been building throughout the Lions series," Skelton added. "We didn't have the best start against the Lions in the first test as well.

"At 22-0 (behind on Saturday), we stuck to the game plan. We stuck to the processes. We stuck in there and we fought to come back to where we got the game."

The euphoria of the Ellis Park victory came less than two years after the nadir of the game Down Under, Australia's first ever exit in the pool stage of a World Cup.

While some declared the performance in Johannesburg as the best by a Wallabies team outside a World Cup, former Australia lock Justin Harrison was more circumspect. "Comparisons with previous eras is impossible," he said. "But this is the best win since the nightmare of the 2023 World Cup, the best result for this group."

MOTORSPORT

Piastri gets own grandstand for 2026 Australian GP

Reuters
Melbourne

Formula One leader Oscar Piastri will have a grandstand named after him at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix next year, by which time the McLaren driver could be returning home as world champion.

The Melbourne-born 24-year-old, who has yet to stand on the Albert Park podium in three attempts, leads British teammate Lando Norris by nine points after 14 of the season's 24 rounds.

Piastri has already won more races in a single season than any other Australian driver since the world championship started in 1950, with six so far this year along with three second places.

"It feels very surreal and I never thought this would happen but the support is incredible and I can't wait to see it all come together next March," he said in an Australian Grand Prix statement.

The stand will be on the main straight, opposite the pit lane, with the existing Fangio grandstand expanded and sectioned in two.

Meanwhile Racing Bulls Team Principal Alan Permane has conceded that Liam Lawson was 'downbeat' following his Red Bull demotion at the start of the season, but praised the rookie for the way he has bounced back before his "breakthrough" in Austria.

The New Zealander had a turbulent beginning to the 2025 season having been promoted to the Red Bull seat alongside Max Verstappen ahead of the campaign. However, after two challenging race weekends, he was dropped back down to sister outfit Racing Bulls with Yuki Tsunoda taking his place at the senior squad. As a result, Lawson was forced to pick himself back up and go again in a new car – the VCARB 02 – that he had no prior experience in.

"Two races at Red Bull, obviously, were very tough for him. He won't thank me for saying this, but he definitely was a bit downbeat. He didn't have a spring in his step, and we've done what we can to help him there. To jump in our car straight away without having tested it was, of course, not easy," Permane said.

"He's up against Isack (Hadjar) who has been outstanding this year. (The) first race for him was Japan and Isack was absolutely flying there. So, it's a tough introduction for him, but we've made some changes. He's worked hard. Him and his engineering team have worked really, really hard."

LA LIGA

Alonso says 'no excuses' as Real prepare for opener

'I TEND TO BE MORE OF A DOER THAN A TALKER'



Real Madrid's coach Xabi Alonso (left) leads a training session at the club's training ground in Madrid yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Madrid

Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said the team's shortened pre-season will not be used as an excuse as they prepare to kick off their La Liga campaign at home to Osasuna today.

Alonso will take charge at the Santiago Bernabeu for the first time after beginning his reign at the Club World Cup in the United States, where Madrid reached the semi-finals.

Madrid's request to postpone their league opener to a later date was rejected by Spanish football officials, and the team have played just one friendly since their 4-0 loss to Paris Saint-Germain in New Jersey on July 9. "Obviously it would have been nice to receive some support with our request, especially for the players' health... after such a long season and to have a little more preparation time," Alonso said yesterday.

"But anyway, in the end it wasn't to be and that's that. We've only had two weeks and there's no point looking for excuses now."

Alonso has several new signings, including former Liverpool defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, at his disposal as Madrid look to turn the page on a disappointing end to the Carlo Ancelotti era.

Madrid won the Champions League and La Liga in 2023-24 but finished runners-up domestically to arch-rivals Barcelona last season and suffered a quarter-final exit to Arsenal in Europe. Alonso, who led Bayer Leverkusen to a remarkable Bundesliga and German Cup double two seasons ago, was coy about his expectations in the Spanish capital.

"I tend to be more of a doer than a talker. So making promises before taking action in football doesn't usually work," said Alonso.

"We are working hard and people are eager, you can feel that. We are also very eager, we want to start this new project, with new players, a new coach, and bring this energy we have to the stadium, and then earn it, not just talk about it. "Talking about it won't make it happen, otherwise it would all be very easy. We have to earn it and we have to start tomorrow on that path to get where we want to be in May."

Alonso also fully backed Madrid's opposition to plans to stage a La Liga game between Villarreal and Barcelona in Miami in December. Madrid said last week it would "give an undue sporting advantage" to the teams involved.

"I agree wholeheartedly with the club's statement," added Alonso. "I believe that at the start of the competition, we all knew what the rules were, and if the rules are to be changed, it must be unanimously agreed upon by all participants.

"Therefore, I believe that this is not appropriate at this time and that all La Liga participants should have been consulted beforehand."

FOCUS

Atletico beaten by Espanyol in opener

AFP
Madrid

Espanyol staged a late comeback to grab a shock 2-1 win over Atletico Madrid on Sunday as Diego Simeone's men made a disappointing start to their La Liga campaign.

Pere Milla scored a late winner as Atletico stumbled to defeat in Barcelona despite leading through Julian Alvarez's brilliant goal.

Atletico have been busy in the transfer market, with notable arrivals including Alex Baena, David Hancko, Johnny Cardoso and Giacomo Raspadori, in a bid to challenge Barcelona and Real Madrid for the title.

Angel Correa, Rodrigo De Paul and Cesar Azpilicueta have all departed as part of the rebuild after Simeone's team finished third, 12 points behind champions Barca last term.

Barcelona kicked off their title defence with a 3-0 win at Mallorca on Saturday, while Real Madrid host Osasuna today.

Slovakia centre-back Hancko had the best chance of a cagey opening half-hour for Atletico but could only head straight at Espanyol goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic.

The visitors forged ahead in spectacular fashion in the 37th minute, though, as Alvarez curled a free-kick into the top corner, well beyond the dive of Dmitrovic.

Alvarez went close to doubling Atletico's lead just before the hour mark when he crashed a shot against the post.

Espanyol hit back 17 minutes from time as Miguel Rubio netted after a set-piece.

Substitute Milla completed the turnaround, heading in Omar El Hilali's cross to snatch all three points for the home side in the 84th minute.

Athletic Bilbao got off to a winning start as substitute Robert Navarro's late goal sealed a dramatic 3-2 victory over Sevilla.

Nico Williams' penalty and Maroan Sannadi's strike put the Basque club two goals up at half-time at the San Mames.

But Dodi Lukebakio fired in off the post on the hour to cut the deficit before Lucien Agoume drew Sevilla level with 18 minutes to play.

Navarro had the final say in the 81st minute, though, giving Bilbao an opening win as they look to back up a fine campaign last term when they finished fourth to qualify for the Champions League.

FIFA boss condemns racial abuse in German Cup games

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has condemned the alleged racial abuse which occurred during two German Cup fixtures on the weekend as "unacceptable", in a statement issued yesterday.

"I repeat myself and will continue to do so. There is no place for racism in football," Infantino said in the statement.

On Sunday, a match between home side Lokomotive Leipzig and Schalke was halted after winger Christopher Antwi-Adjei said he was racially abused by home spectators.

An announcement on the stadium PA was made condemning racist abuse. After the match resumed, the winger was booed repeatedly by the home support and Lokomotive issued an apology later on Sunday.

Also on Sunday, a player from visiting side Kaiserslautern also alleged racial abuse from a member of the crowd at club RSV Eintracht. Infantino said FIFA would "continue to closely monitor these incidents" and promised to work with the German FA (DFB) "in the fight against racism".

The incidents come after Bournemouth winger Antoine Semenyo alleged he was racially attacked by a member of the crowd in Friday's Premier League season opener at Liverpool. Play was halted after Semenyo reported he was abused by someone in the crowd during the first half of Liverpool's 4-2 win, with Merseyside Police later arresting a man for a racially aggravated public order offence.

Semenyo later said on social media the incident would "stay with him forever" but added the response by players and officials meant "football showed its best side when it mattered most".

Infantino, who also issued a statement on Sunday after the Semenyo incident, said yesterday it was "absolutely unacceptable that racist abuse has occurred at football matches for the second time in recent days".

SPOTLIGHT

Mueller has goal ruled out on MLS debut for Vancouver

AFP
Los Angeles



Junior Urso of the Houston Dynamo and Thomas Muller of the Vancouver Whitecaps (left) vying for the ball during the MLS match at BC Place in Vancouver, British Columbia. *(AFP)*

Thomas Mueller made his Major League Soccer debut on Sunday as a second-half substitute for Vancouver Whitecaps in a 1-1 draw with Houston Dynamo that left the Germany great with "mixed feelings" after he had a goal disallowed for offside.

Vancouver were up 1-0 courtesy of Brian White's sixth-minute penalty when the former Bayern Munich striker Mueller entered the contest to a massive ovation in the 61st minute.

Mueller, a World Cup-winner with Germany whose storied tenure at Bayern included 13 Bundesliga titles, had made his way into Vancouver's BC Place stadium through a throng of excited supporters, high-fiving and shaking hands as he went.

The Whitecaps had officially unveiled their new signing on Thursday, a week after he inked a deal through the end of the 2025 season with an option for 2026.

The crowd of 26,301 stood and cheered when he was introduced before kickoff, and Mueller applauded fans in return.

Minutes after entering the game Mueller blasted a ball into the back of the net, but it was ruled offside.

"Mixed feelings, mixed feelings," the 35-year-old said. "The result is disappointing, to be honest. "But, yeah, I came in at my first moment directly with my first goal here. The crowd was going crazy, but then it was taken off for offside.

"We have to take the next steps in the next game," he added after seeing Houston's Artur grab the equaliser with a long-range blast in the first minute of second-half injury time. "But I'm very happy to be here. I think the crowd was amazing."

The draw left Vancouver in third place in the Western Conference on 46 points, six behind conference leaders San Diego and one back of Minnesota.

San Diego moved to the top of the Supporters' Shield standings for best overall record – ahead of Eastern Conference leaders Cincinnati on goal difference – with a come-from-behind 2-1 victory over the San Jose Earthquakes on Sunday. "We had to win it clear," Mueller said. "We had to get big chances. But in the end, yeah, it's soccer and it can happen."

He was happy to have his first MLS match under his belt and looking forward to settling in after a whirlwind first week.

"I'm happy now that my first game is in the books," said the German, who joined Bayern's youth programme in 2000 and then called the club home for 25 years.

"I can start next week, just a regular week," he said.

"I just have to settle down today after this game in my apartment and think about what happened this week – it was crazy stuff."

DEAL

Forest sign forward Kalimuendo

AFP
London



French striker **Arnaud Kalimuendo** has signed a five-year contract with Nottingham Forest, the Premier League club announced yesterday.

According to French media, the transfer paid to ex-club Rennes is believed to be at least 30mn euros ($35mn).

"Nottingham Forest is delighted to announce the signing of Arnaud Kalimuendo, who joins the club on a five-year deal," read a statement on the English club's website.

The 23-year-old came through the ranks at Paris Saint-Germain, before enjoying a breakthrough season at Ligue 1 side Rennes last year when he netted 18 times in 34 appearances in all competitions. Prior to joining Rennes in 2022, he made five appearances for PSG and enjoyed success during loan spells at Lens – scoring 21 goals in 65 outings.

"When I heard about the interest from Forest, I was honoured. This is a proud moment for me, joining a team who had a strong season last year and a club with great history," said Kalimuendo. "I'm ready for the challenge, and I arrive here with good experience. I had a good season last year with goals and assists but I want more and want to reach a new level here."

Two-time European champions Nottingham Forest finished the 2024/25 season in seventh place after surprisingly spending much of the season in the Premier League's top three. Before the start of the new campaign, manager Nuno Espirito Santo endured a disappointing pre-season – no wins and only one goal scored in seven matches – and a disappointing transfer window.

However, Forest kickstarted the season with a comfortable 3-1 win over Brentford on Sunday and new signings have begun arriving at the City Ground.

The recent additions of winger Dan Ndoye, playmaker Omari Hutchinson and ex-Manchester City midfielder James McAtee have bolstered Nuno's squad.

"It's been a busy few days for us – the culmination of a lot of hard work from our staff over a number of weeks," said Forest chief football officer Ross Wilson.

DIARRA SEEKS 65MN EUROS FROM FIFA AND BELGIAN FA IN TRANSFER CASE

Former France international Lassana Diarra is seeking 65mn euros ($76mn) from FIFA and the Belgian football association as part of a long-running legal battle, the player's lawyer announced yesterday.

Diarra's challenge to FIFA prompted world football's governing body to amend its transfer rules after a landmark legal ruling last year, but he has been unable to reach a settlement.

His lawyer Martin Hissel said the claim was for "compensation for damage caused by FIFA rules" on transfers, which the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled to be contrary to European law last October. "Following a ruling by the CJEU, in the absence of an amicable solution, it is natural to return to the national courts so that they can implement the CJEU ruling," Hissel said in a statement. "That is what we are doing today, on the basis of a very clear ruling by the CJEU, which has settled all the essential legal points. The Belgian courts should deliver their decisions within 12 to 15 months."

The CJEU in October found that FIFA rules impede the free movement of players by "imposing considerable legal risks, unforeseeable and potentially very high financial risks as well as major sporting risks on those players and clubs wishing to employ them", thereby disrupting the transfer system.

At the request of the Belgian courts, the Luxembourg-based CJEU examined the case brought by Diarra, who 10 years ago had contested the conditions of his departure from Russian club Lokomotiv Moscow.