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Gaudu pulls away from Vingegaard to take Vuelta stage



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Real Madrid too strong for Oviedo as Mbappe and Vinicius strike

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SPORT



TENNIS

Sabalenka, Djokovic into US Open round two as fuming Medvedev exits

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FOOTBALL

Preparations continue for new-format QSL Cup

The Qatar Stars League continues with preparations for the 2025-26 QSL Cup aligning with modern formats used in several continental and international tournaments.

This is part of a development plan that includes raising technical standards, increasing the number of matches, enhancing competition and exposure, providing young players with the opportunity to gain experience, and developing competitions for Second Division teams.

To clarify all details related to the tournament, the match system, and the levels, the organisation held a meeting with the participating clubs (First Division and Second Division) yesterday. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Qatar Stars League: Ahmed Salman al-Adsani, Director of Competitions; Abdullah Saleh al-Sulaiti, Director of Media and Communications; Ahmed Abdullah al-Sayed, Head of Football Operations; and representatives from several clubs and media outlets.

The meeting included the following:

An explanation of the tournament system and the draw mechanism. The participating teams (20 teams) will be divided into five levels, each containing four teams.

The process of determining the five levels will be based on the final standings of the teams in the First Division and Second Division Leagues for the previous season (2024-2025).

A draw will be conducted to determine the matchups. According to the tournament system, during the league stage, each team will play 10 matches over 10 weeks against teams of different levels (two matches from each of the five levels).

The tournament will begin on September 1, 2025.

A Technical Meeting for the tournament was also held, attended by representatives of the Foundation, the participating clubs, and the Referees Department of the Qatar Football Association.

The new conditions and system were reviewed, and it was emphasised that the first and second-placed teams will qualify directly for the quarter-finals. Teams ranked third through fourteenth will also advance to the next stage, with six knock-out matches played, from which six teams will advance to the quarter-finals.

The organisational procedures, guidelines for match-day operations, and confirmation of the home and away kits for each team were also discussed.



HORSE RACING

Amir Sword Festival to be held over four days from Feb 11-14

THE NEW SEASON WILL OPEN WITH AL GHARIYAH CUP AT AL RAYYAN RACECOURSE ON OCT 15



In the upcoming season, 70 race meetings will be held at Al Rayyan and Al Uqda racecourses.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club (QREC), chaired by Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiyah, has unveiled its horse racing programme for the 2025–26 season, which will feature an extensive calendar of 70 meetings across Al Rayyan and Al Uqda racecourses.

The season's schedule has been finalised following a comprehensive review, incorporating feedback from owners and trainers and drawing on the QREC's internal technical reports.

This season will introduce several firsts for QREC, most notably the expansion of the HH The Amir Sword Festival to four consecutive days at Al Rayyan Racecourse. The first two days will be run on dirt, with turf racing scheduled for the final two days. Across the four-day event, a total of 32 races will be staged – an unprecedented format. The season will also see an increase in the number of meetings and races overall.

Commenting on the new season's programme, QREC Racing Manager Abdulla al-Kubaisi, stated: "The season will commence on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, and conclude on Thursday, 16 April 2026. It includes 70 race meetings – 46 at Al Rayyan and 24 at Al Uqda – with a total of 547 races, up from originally 543 last season, which eventually rose to 556 last term after splitting and adding races based on demand and we may do the same again this season to ensure opportunities are available across all horse categories."

"We'll open the season with the Al Ghariyah Cup at Al Rayyan and close it at the same venue with the End Of Season Cup", he added, "The highlight of the season will undoubtedly be the HH The Amir Sword Festival, along with other key race days, including The Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Bin Thani Trophy, Qatar Derby, HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy, HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle, HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy and Qatar Gold Sword And Trophy."

Al-Kubaisi highlighted major changes to the HH The Amir Sword Festival: "For the first time, the festival will run across four days – from February 11-14,



QREC Racing Manager Abdulla al-Kubaisi.

2026 – at Al Rayyan. The HH The Amir Trophy for Thoroughbreds and the HH The Amir Sword for Purebred Arabians will headline the final day's card as the third and fourth races.

New races have also been introduced to the festival. On the final day, the Qatar International Thoroughbred Handicap Cup for horses rated 90–110 will be run over 2,400m and open to international runners. On day two, two new races will be staged.

These are The Middle Distance Cup, a handicap forLocal Purebred Arabians rated 85-105over 1,700m, and the Sand Sprint Cup, a handicap for Thoroughbreds rated 85–105over 1,200m.

CATEGORIES OF RUNNERS

As for horse categories included in the programme, al-Kubaisi noted: "Races will be open to imported and local Purebred Arabians aged three and up and Thoroughbreds, both imported and local bred, aged two and up. The programme accommodates a wide range of classifications, from newcomers to seasoned champions with outstanding local and international records."

"QREC will also continue to support Qatari jockeys in line with its long-term strategy to nurture local riding talent and prepare them to compete at the highest level. Our riders are currently attending a two-month training course at the South African Jockey Academy. This strategy has already proven successful, with a growing number of Qatari jockeys participating regularly in QREC's weekly meetings and even achieving remarkable results at some of the world's most prestigious racecourses," he said.

SPORT

CYCLING

Slick Gaudu wins Vuelta stage 3 as Vingegaard leads

'I'm very happy. I'm very, very proud to win for me, for the team'

Reuters
Ceres, Italy


Groupama-FDJ's David Gaudu celebrates winning stage 3 at Vuelta a Espana – from San Maurizio Canavese to Ceres – San Maurizio Canavese, Italy, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Frenchman David Gaudu of team Groupama-FDJ outwitted his rivals on the late hairpin turns to win stage three of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday, as Jonas Vingegaard came third to retain the overall lead.

Gaudu, who was third on Sunday, finished ahead of Mads Pedersen (Lidl-Trek) to climb to second place in the general classification, 14 seconds behind two-time Tour de France champion Vingegaard.

"I was thinking in the bus this morning it was more for Pedersen, but (teammate Stefan) Kung said to me I have a punch and I can win today," Gaudu said after his first Vuelta stage win since 2020.

"I'm very happy. I'm very, very proud to win for me, for the team," Gaudu said.

"This is, I think, the best start to the Vuelta we could get."

Pedersen's teammate Giulio Ciccone finished fourth and was third overall at the end of the first medium-mountain stage of the race, a 139km ride from San Maurizio Canavese to Ceres in Italy.

The riders made a fast start, covering 45.8km in the first hour as Sean Quinn, Luva Van Boven, Patrick Gamper and Alessandro Verre formed a leading pack.

Lidl-Trek's riders stayed in front of the peloton for most of the race, controlling the chase as only Verre and Quinn remained in the breakaway pack during the first big climb of the stage to Issiglio.

Quinn (EF Education-EasyPost) made a push to become the sole leader with around 39km to go, as Harold Martin Lopez (XDS Astana) and Jardi van der Lee (EF Education-EasyPost) crashed during a turn but got back up immediately.

The peloton sprinted to catch Quinn during a descent, and the American lost his lead with 19km left.

Several teams jostled to control the front of the peloton until Lidl-Trek and Ineos Grenadiers positioned themselves in the lead going into the last kilometre.

Gaudu made his move in the final hairpin bends, gaining on his opponents and getting to the front after the last turn just 50 metres from the finish.

"When I (saw) Pedersen launching the sprint... I (disconnected) totally on the last corner and pushed all my limits to the finish line," Gaudu said.

Denmark's Vingegaard rose to the top of the points classification after green jersey holder Jasper Philipsen (Alpecin-Deceuninck) struggled to keep up with the peloton. Vingegaard's third-place finish came after his team Visma-Lease a Bike said that their mechanics' truck was broken into the previous night and several bikes were stolen.

Police have launched an investigation into the incident, the team added.

Jorge Arcas (Movistar) and Axel Zingle (Visma-Lease a Bike) did not start the stage after crashing in wet conditions on Sunday.

The race continues today with a 192km ride from Italy's Susa to Voiron in France.

CRICKET

Qatar beat Kenya in 2025 ICC Men's World Cup Challenge League


Qatar batsmen celebrate winning their match against Kenya during the 2025 ICC Men's World Cup Challenge League, currently being held in Jersey, United Kingdom.

QNA
London

Qatar national cricket team secured a handsome victory over Kenya, winning by eights wickets in their match at the 2025 ICC Men's World Cup Challenge League, currently being held in Jersey, United Kingdom.

Kenya scored 242 for 8 wickets but Qatar reached the target for the loss of only two wickets.

The tournament runs until August 31 and features numerous teams from around the world.

The match saw standout performances from several Qatari players, notably Imal Liyanag, who scored 107 runs off 136 balls, becoming the first player to reach this milestone in the tournament.

This performance highlights the advancing level of Qatar cricket team on the international stage, reflecting ongoing efforts to achieve further success in the future.

Qatar had lost its opening match of the tournament to Kuwait by 22 runs.

The team is set to face Denmark tomorrow, followed by a match against Papua New Guinea on Saturday, as part of the ongoing competition.

Qatar win 7 medals at karate championships



The Qatari karate team won 7 medals: one gold, one silver, and five bronze, during their participation in the Arab Championships held in Jordan over three days and in the West Asian Karate Championships in Jordan, which concluded yesterday. In the West Asian Karate Championships, Yaman al-Natsheh won the gold medal in the men's under 67kg category, Abdulrahman Mustafa won the silver medal in the under 21 under 60kg category, and Hassan Mansour al-Sheikh won the bronze medal in the junior over 70kg category. In the Arab Karate Championship, the Qatari karate team won four bronze medals, won by Yaman al-Natsheh in the men's under 67kg category, Hassan Mansour al-Sheikh in the juniors over 70kg category, and Abdulrahman Mustafa in the men's under 60kg category. The same player also won a bronze medal in the under 21 under 60kg category.

GOLF

Fleetwood secures elusive first PGA victory to lift FedEx Cup title, gets richer by $10mn

Reuters
Atlanta


Tommy Fleetwood of England celebrates with the Fedex Cup trophy after winning the final round of the TOUR Championship 2025 at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, Georgia. *(AFP)*

Asked and now answered. Empathically. Stop questioning Tommy Fleetwood about finally getting his first PGA Tour victory. He got his win, after so many close calls, in a big way. The Englishman captured the FedEx Cup championship with a victory in the Tour Championship at East Lake Golf Club on Sunday. He takes away the coveted playoff championship and a $10mn winner's check.

Fleetwood finished 18-under par with a final-round 68. Patrick Cantlay (71), who played in the final pairing, and Russell Henley (69), the first- and second-round leader, tied for second at 15-under.

Fleetwood had a huge smile, maybe of relief, after making his tap-in putt to finish as fans circled the 18th green. They chanted "Tom-my, Tom-my," as he hugged his caddie.

The win came in Fleetwood's 164th career start on tour, which included 30 top-5 finishes. Two of those near misses came in these playoffs, a tie for third at the St Jude's Championship and a tie for fourth at the BMW Championship. He's had to answer questions about finally breaking through, especially when he entered the final round holding a share of the lead.

"I love that I'm up there again, and it's just another chance," Fleetwood said after the third round where he shared the lead at 16-under with Cantlay. "It's another opportunity. It's another day where I get to go out and do what I love and enjoy it and be in contention and just go and hit the golf shots, and what is like the best pressure, if you like. We're trying to win a golf tournament and do something very special."

Fleetwood, who entered fifth in the points standings, became the first player in the FedEx Cup era (since 2007) to claim his first career PGA tour title at the Tour Championship. Cantlay found trouble early with a bogey at the first hole and a double-bogey at the second hole. When Fleetwood birdied the second, he was 17-under to Cantlay's 13-under. First- and second-round leader Russell Henley took over second place at 15-under. Fleetwood took a three-stroke lead, at 18-under, into the second nine over Cantay and Henley. When Cantlay birdied and Fleetwood bogeyed the 10th, just a stroke separated the two. Cantlay bogeyed the 11th, and Fleetwood's edge was back to two strokes. A Fleetwood birdie at the 13th, and the lead was back to three at 19-under.

When Fleetwood's tee shot at the par-3 15th landed on dry land, after he hit water in the third round, the tournament was all but over even though he took a bogey. He would play the final hole with a three-stroke lead.

Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player and FedEx Cup points leader, started four strokes back. He hit his opening drive out of bounds and managed bogey. He would get two within two strokes of Fleetwood on the back nine but put his tee shot on the par-3 15th in the water and made double-bogey. Scheffler's chance at back-to-back FedEx Cup titles was over. Scheffler (68) finished tied for fourth at 14-under.

The Tour Championship changed formats this year to a winner-take-all final with all players starting at even par. However, had they used the starting- strokes format from the previous six years, Scheffler would have won the tournament and the title. Fleetwood, starting at 5-under, who have finished at 23-under. Scheffler, starting 10-under, who have finished 24-under.

Brooke wins CPKC Women's Open



Brooke M Henderson of Canada speaks to the media after winning the CPKC Women's Open 2025 at Mississaugua Golf and Country Club in Mississauga, Ontario. Henderson wiped away the memory of a difficult number of years on tour by winning her national open for the second time. The Canadian finished with three spectacular rounds of golf to win the title. Henderson carded a final round 4-under-par 67 at Mississaugua Golf and Country Club to best Australia's Minjee Lee by one stroke. The two started the day tied atop the leaderboard. Japan's Mao Saigo (66) and Akie Iwai (69) finished at 11 under and 10 under, respectively, and New Zealand's Lydia Ko (67) and Belgium's Manon De Roey (68) tied for fifth place at 9 under. after the final round. *(AFP)*

ANNOUNCEMENT

BCCI ends $43.6mn sponsorship after online gambling ban

AFP
New Delhi

Indian cricket is looking for a new main sponsor after a fantasy sports gaming platform pulled out of a deal worth $43.6mn following a government ban on online gambling, reports said yesterday.

Dream11, the biggest online gaming platform in the country, became the lead sponsor of the men's and women's national teams after signing a three-year deal in July 2023.

The Dream11 logo is printed on the jerseys of the Indian players.

It is also the sponsor of several Indian Premier League franchises.

Last week, the Indian parliament passed the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, criminalising the offering and financing of such games, with offenders facing up to five years in prison.

The Indian Express newspaper said yesterday that representatives of Dream11 visited the office of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and informed its chief executive, Hemang Amin, that they won't be able to continue.

"As a result, they won't be the team's sponsors for the Asia Cup. The BCCI will float a new tender soon," the daily said, quoting a BCCI official.

The T20 Asia Cup starts on September 9 in the United Arab Emirates.

"There's not much time left for the Asia Cup, but we are exploring options," a board official was quoted as saying by Sportstar website.

Dream11 is also the official partner of the Caribbean Premier League and sponsors Australia's Big Bash League.

The gaming ban impacts platforms for card games, poker and fantasy sports, including India's wildly popular homegrown fantasy cricket apps.

The government said the rapid spread of gambling platforms had caused widespread financial distress, addiction and even suicide among the youth.

It also said it was linked to fraud, money laundering and terrorism financing.

COMMENT

Williams relishes US Open return at 45

AFP
New York

Venus Williams said Saturday she is relishing the prospect of her record-extending 25th US Open appearance, saying the experience of playing in her home Grand Slam never gets old.

The 45-year-old US tennis icon is poised to make what could be her farewell singles appearance at Flushing Meadows where she will face 11th seed Karolina Muchova in the first round.

"Super thrilling to be back," said Williams, who is competing in New York after being handed a wild card by organisers with her world ranking now standing at 610th.

"It does not get old; it just gets more exciting," she told reporters.

Williams only returned to tennis in July following a 16-month absence from the sport, winning her opening match at the Washington Open before exiting in the second round.

This year's appearance comes some 28 years after she first graced the US Open as a 17-year-old in 1997, embarking on a fairytale run to the final where she lost to Martina Hingis.

Following that dazzling debut, Williams would go on to forge a legacy as one of the greatest women's players in history, winning seven Grand Slam singles titles – two US Opens, five Wimbledons – and 14 Grand Slam doubles titles alongside sister Serena.

Williams said Saturday that despite the litany of achievements over a career that has straddled four different decades, her passion for tennis remained undiminished.

"I love my job," Williams told reporters. "So there's the joy right there."

Asked what people could take away from her appearance, she replied: "I haven't thought about what people would take away from it. I just mostly think about what I would get from it."

Williams meanwhile said she will take a relaxed approach into her 25th US Open appearance.

"I want to be my best, and that's the expectation I have for myself, to get the best out of me. And that's all any player can ask for," she said.

"I haven't played as much as the other players, so it's a different challenge ... I'm just trying to have fun, stay relaxed, and be my personal best." While Williams' professional career may be drawing to a close, the US veteran says she expects to still be swinging a racquet well into old age.

"I think I'll always play tennis. It's in my DNA. So it doesn't matter if it's now or 30 years from now," Williams said. "God willing, I'll be here, we'll all be here, we'll all be hitting balls. Maybe I'll come back to watch. Maybe I'll be saying I did it better, and it won't be true. But in any case, tennis will always be one of the most important parts of my life."

Williams' participation also falls on the 75th anniversary of African-American trailblazer Althea Gibson's first appearance at the US national tennis championship in 1950.

"I think the most important part is that we are celebrating it and recognising it, because Althea accomplished so much, and a lot of it has not been given the credit it deserves and the attention and the praise," Williams said. "I think that's the most important part to me, just shining light on it and seeing, just acknowledging that."



TENNIS / US OPEN

Positive starts for Sabalenka and Djokovic in NY

Medvedev loses in first round and then smashes racket in anger

Reuters
New York

Aryna Sabalenka and Novak Djokovic overcame early tests to reach the US Open second round before the Grand Slam descended into chaos late on Sunday when Daniil Medvedev launched a tirade at the match umpire and fans disrupted his opponent's service game.

New York's famously rowdy fans caused a six-minute delay by refusing to stop jeering and booing midway through Medvedev's 6-3 7-5 6-7(5) 0-6 6-4 defeat by Benjamin Bonzi on Louis Armstrong Stadium.

The controversy began when a photographer entered the court prematurely after Bonzi missed his first serve on match point at 5-4 in the third set, prompting chair umpire Greg Allensworth to award the Frenchman another first serve for the disturbance.

An incensed Medvedev exploded at the official and whipped up the crowd, preventing a rattled Bonzi from serving.



Daniil Medvedev breaks his racket after losing in five sets to Benjamin Bonzi of France during their first round match on Day One of the 2025 US Open. *(AFP)*

Medvedev, the 2021 champion at Flushing Meadows, fought off the match point and took the set in a tie break before bageling Bonzi in the fourth to set up a decider.

It was not to be his day, however, as Bonzi composed himself to secure a dramatic win.

"The energy was wild. Thanks to all the ones booing. Thanks for the energy in the fifth," the Frenchman said.

"It was crazy match point in the third. A crazy scenario. I was exhausted in the fourth set. I gave what I had in the final set. That's a crazy win."

World number one Sabalenka was among the marquee names on the opening day's schedule and the Belarusian fed off the vocal Arthur Ashe crowd to overcome determined Swiss Rebeka Masarova 7-5 6-1.

"I didn't choose to play on Sunday, but if you win the match, it feels great. You have an extra day off, which can be good and bad. I've got used to it. I like it," Sabalenka said.

"But it only works when you win the match. Imagine if you finish the tournament on Sunday. Then you can be a little bit frustrated with the scheduling."

Novak Djokovic has had plenty of time to recuperate after his run to the Wimbledon semi-finals but the Serb needed to find an extra gear to battle past

Learner Tien 6-1 7-6(3) 6-2 as he launched his latest bid for a record 25th major title. Victory in draining conditions under the lights made Djokovic the first player since the sport turned professional in 1968 to win 75 straight opening-round matches at Grand Slams.


Serbia's Novak Djokovic signs autographs for fans after winning his first round match against Learner Tien of the US on day one of the 2025 US Open. *(AFP)*

Americans Taylor Fritz and Ben Shelton enjoyed more straightforward wins.

Last year's finalist Fritz beat compatriot Emilio Nava 7-5 6-2 6-3 while 2023 semi-finalist Ben Shelton eased past Peruvian qualifier Ignacio Buse 6-3 6-2 6-4.

Fourth seed Fritz and sixth seed Shelton have emerged as two of the brightest hopes to end a 22-year US men's drought at their home major, as their women's counterparts have long carried the torch for American tennis. Canada's Leylah Fernandez, who lost to Emma Raducanu in the final four years ago, defeated compatriot Rebecca Marino 6-2 6-1 while 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova saw off Oksana Selekhmeteva 6-3 7-6(3).

Former French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko made smooth progress with a 6-4 6-3 win over Chinese qualifier Wang Xiyu before last year's New York runner-up Jessica Pegula got past Mayar Sherif 6-0 6-4.

There were a handful of surprises, as qualifier Janice Tjen earned Indonesia's first victory in a Grand Slam main draw in 22 years when she knocked out 24th seed Veronika Kudermetova 6-4 6-4 to book a match-up with Raducanu.

Alexandra Eala of the Philippines got the crowd on their feet as she battled back from 1-5 in the deciding set to defeat Denmark's 14th seed Clara Tauson 6-3 2-6 7-6(11) at the Grandstand.

Keys falls to Zarazua in opening round of US Open

Sixth seed Madison Keys struggled to find any rhythm as her quest for a hardcourt Grand Slam double went up in flames after a 6-7(10) 7-6(3) 7-5 defeat by unseeded Mexican Renata Zarazua in the first round of the US Open on Monday.

The 30-year-old American, who lifted her maiden Grand Slam trophy at the Australian Open in January, made a staggering 89 unforced errors with 14 double faults and became the highest seed to exit the women's draw at the year's final major.

"I'm just very happy obviously coming in to the match I was like almost crying because I was really nervous but I think the crowd made it so chill for me... thank you guys, for staying," Zarazua said.

"I know my game is a bit tricky so sometimes people get a bit bored ... We don't have many tennis players as you can see but I had some Mexico players from doubles cheering for me. I could hear some Mexican cheering so that was very nice."

SPOTLIGHT

Team Falcons crowned Esports World Cup 2025 Club Champions



The Esports World Cup Foundation (EWCF) has announced the conclusion of the Esports World Cup 2025 (EWC 2025) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where Team Falcons claimed the Club Championship Trophy and the $7mn grand prize. The award was presented to Musaad AlDossar, CEO of Team Falcons, by Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, with international icon Cristiano Ronaldo delivering the trophy to the stage in a memorable Closing Ceremony.

After seven weeks of fierce competition that came down to the final weekend of play, Team Falcons amassed 5,200 points across 22 tournaments, including victories in Overwatch 2 and top finishes in Dota 2, Chess, PUBG BATTLEGROUNDS, Rocket League and Counter-Strike 2.

Team Liquid (4,200 points), Team Vitality (4,050 points), Twisted Minds (3,200 points) and Virtus.pro (3,200 points) rounded out the top five of the final Club Championship ranking.

Heading into the final two weeks of competition, seven Clubs were still in contention, as only 1,500 points separated 1st and 7th place. The race narrowed to five contenders after Week 6, and Team Falcons sealed the Club Championship in Week 7 when Team Liquid's Street Fighter 6 player Alan "Nephew" Sun was eliminated, ending Team Liquid's hopes of overtaking them.

Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Sultan al-Saud, Chairman of the Saudi Esports Federation said: "With the unwavering support of our leadership and the continuous guidance from Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, the Esports World Cup has once again showcased the transformative impact of esports and the pivotal role this industry now plays in cultures and societies across the globe. The organisational success of the tournament's second edition reflects the Kingdom's ability to host and manage the world's largest events at the highest standards, while embodying the progress of the National Gaming and Esports Strategy. I extend my congratulations to Team Falcons on their outstanding achievement."

The EWC 2025 set new viewership records in its second year, recording 750 million viewers – with a peak of 7.98 million viewers during Gen.G Esports' dominant victory in Week 2's League of Legends tournament – and 350 million hours watched, outperforming 2024's inaugural event across the board.

The competition and festival also drew 3 million visitors to Riyadh's Boulevard City, topping last summer's 2.6 million. During the event period (July 4-August 24), Riyadh also welcomed an estimated 300,000 international tourists, a 7.4% increase compared to the same period in 2024, further underscoring the city's growing appeal as a global destination for esports, entertainment, and culture.

The Esports World Cup will return to Riyadh from July 6-August 23, 2026 for its third edition.

Olympic Council of Asia says Saudi Winter Games 'on schedule'

Hong Kong: The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) says that preparations for the 2029 Asian Winter Games in Saudi Arabia are "on schedule" after South Korea and China emerged as potential replacements.

Saudi Arabia is supposed to host the next edition of the regional winter competition in a move derided by environmental groups.

The OCA in 2022 unanimously approved the desert kingdom's bid to stage the Games at its $500bn megacity NEOM, part of Saudi Arabia's splurge on major sporting events, including the 2034 football World Cup.

The futuristic and under-construction NEOM will feature a year-round winter sports complex in the mountains of Trojena.

However, the *Financial Times* last week reported that Saudi Arabia was "struggling to deliver" the ski resort on time and had discussed staging the event four years later than planned.

The Saudis were mulling approaching South Korea and China to instead play host in 2029, the newspaper said.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the OCA asked Korean Sport & Olympic Committee (KSOC) president Ryu Seung-min if the country would be willing to replace Saudi Arabia.

On Sunday the Kuwait-based OCA said that it was "pleased with the strong progress being made, as we closely monitor the on-schedule work from the LOC (local organising committee).

LA LIGA

Mbappe on target as Real Madrid beat Oviedo 3-0

'IT WAS A VERY SERIOUS, VERY COMPLETE GAME'

AFP
Oviedo, Spain


Real Madrid's forward Kylian Mbappe scores his team's second goal during the La Liga match against Real Oviedo at Carlos Tartiere Stadium in Oviedo. *(AFP)*

Kylian Mbappe was again on target for Real Madrid as they overcame Real Oviedo 3-0 in La Liga on Sunday.

For Oviedo, returning to Spain's top flight after an absence of almost a quarter of a century, the arrival of the 15-time European champions was a gala occasion, and the Asturian fans made their presence heard.

Star turns Mbappe and Vinicius Junior made the difference in the north of Spain. The Frenchman notched a brace before the Brazilian slid in a late third.

Coach Xabi Alonso made a couple of notable changes to his starting line-up from Madrid's opening 1-0 win against Osasuna, dropping Vinicius and Trent Alexander-Arnold for Rodrygo Goes and club captain Dani Carvajal, returning from injury.

The dropped Vinicius responded by producing an assist and a goal in his half-hour cameo.

"It was a very serious, very complete game," said Alonso. "With and without the ball. Playing as a team.

"And Vini came on and had a role in those two goals that gave us peace of mind. There will be games for everyone. Decisions are made with the team in mind, and that's how it was today."

Argentinian teenage sensation Franco Mastantuono made his full debut in another change for Los Blancos.

The 18-year-old showed his explosive dribbling ability early on when he burst past two defenders into the Oviedo box before going down and looking appealingly at the uninterested referee.

A rare foray forward by the hosts saw Leander Dendoncker try to catch Thibaut Courtois out with a chipped effort in the 23rd minute, but the Belgian shotstopper easily gathered the ball. Madrid came close to forcing a breakthrough when Arda Guler's drive from inside the box was excellently saved by goalkeeper Aaron Escandell.

The Turkish international turned provider as he drilled a pass into Mbappe's feet on 37 minutes, which the Frenchman welcomed on the turn before firing across Escandell. The goal was met by furious protests from the home side. Madrid's Aurelien Tchouameni seemed to follow through strongly on Dendoncker when winning possession back for his side in the build-up.

Rodrygo and the lively Mastantuono made way for Vinicius and Brahim Diaz just after the hour.

Diaz immediately created a chance for the galloping Fede Valverde, but Escandell produced a fingertip save.

Kwasi Sibo came within inches of sending the home support wild when, out of nowhere, he struck the post for Oviedo with Courtois rooted to the spot on 81 minutes.

That chance woke Madrid up. Vinicius won the ball two minutes later and drove forward before slipping a disguised pass to Mbappe who slotted home first time. The Brazilian scored in the 93rd minute, when Diaz found him in space and he slid home a composed finish.

Elsewhere, Villarreal hammered Girona 5-0 at home as new signing Tajon Buchanan netted a hat-trick to open his La Liga account.

A second-consecutive defeat to start the season leaves Girona, who played Champions League football last season, bottom of the table with seven goals conceded and none scored.

"When you don't compete at 100 percent, a team of Villarreal's calibre will run you over," said Girona coach Michel Sanchez.

"That's what happened. We play for the pride and respect of the people and we didn't do the job we should have done."

The home side raced into a 4-0 lead inside 30 minutes, with Nicolas Pepe and Rafa Marin scoring as Buchanan grabbed a brace.

The Canadian then got his third four minutes after the hour to cap a scintillating performance by the Yellow Submarine.

Real Sociedad fought back from being 2-0 down at half-time in the Basque country to earn a point against Espanyol.

Pere Milla and Javi Puado gave the Catalans the lead, before Ander Barrenetxea and Orri Oskarsson hit back for Sociedad in eight second-half minutes. Ante Budimir's ninth-minute goal gave Osasuna a 1-0 win over 10-man Valencia.

FOCUS

Qatar shooters clinch one silver and two bronze

QNA
Doha

Qatari shooters continued their strong showing at the 16th Asian Shooting Championship in Shymkent, Kazakhstan securing three medals – one silver and two bronze – in the trap and rifle events yesterday.

Raya Bassil claimed silver in the women's trap, finishing second in a highly competitive final featuring shooters from India, Chinese Taipei, Japan, and Iran. Qatar also took bronze in the men's trap team event through Mohammed al-Rumaihi, Saeed Abu Shareb, and Angelo Scalzone, who scored 340 across five rounds. The second bronze went to Amal Mahmoud in the mixed 20+20 rifle event.

Last week, Qatari shooters won three bronze medals in skeet. Ali Ahmed al-Ishaq earned one in the men's individual, then teamed up with Mohammed al-Kuwari and Rashid Saleh al-Athba to claim bronze in the men's team event. Al-Ishaq also partnered with Sarah Ghulam for a third bronze in the mixed skeet. The Qatari delegation, led by Ahmed al-Kuwari and team manager Nawal al-Sulaiti, includes around 32 shooters competing in pistol, rifle, skeet, and trap events.

President of the Qatar Shooting and Archery Federation, Dr Mishaal Ibrahim al-Nasr, praised the athletes' performance, attributing their success to the country's leadership and the team's dedicated preparation. "These medals mark a qualitative leap in Qatar's shooting history," he said, adding that the momentum will continue into the World Championship in Doha this December.

The championship continues tomorrow with the women's 30m rifle 3 positions final.







SERIE A

David strikes on debut as Juventus ease past Parma

AFP
Rome


Juventus' forward Jonathan David celebrates scoring during the Serie match against Parma at the Allianz stadium in Turin. *(AFP)*

Jonathan David made a goalscoring start to his Serie A career on Sunday, netting the opening goal in Juventus' straightforward 2-0 win over Parma.

Canada striker David guided home from Kenan Yildiz's low cross in the 59th minute to send Juve on their way to three points at the Allianz Stadium in Turin.

"It was everything I hoped for... I'm happy to score in my first game. But the most important thing is the three points," said David to DAZN.

"The target is to help the team as much as I can. If it's by scoring goals or getting assists or running back and defending, I will do everything."

The 25-year-old was brought in as a free agent to help boost an attack which had for too long been let down by misfiring Dusan Vlahovic, and David showcased the goalscoring instincts which made him a hero at Lille.

But it was Vlahovic, who is reportedly on the transfer list at Juve, who made sure of the win near the end of an uninspiring contest when he tapped home another Yildiz pass from close range with six minutes remaining.

Vlahovic netted moments after Andrea Cambiaso was given a straight red card for lashing out at Mathias Lovik after battling for the ball with the Norwegian defender.

Juve were also boosted by the solid return of key defender Gleison Bremer who missed most of last season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

Another player struck down by an ACL injury last term, Gianluca Scamacca scored his first goal in over a year as Atalanta drew 1-1 with promoted Pisa in their first league fixture under new coach Ivan Juric.

Scamacca hadn't scored since May 2024 before he classily fired home the leveller for Atalanta in the 50th minute, ending a nightmare which started this time last year with the knee ligament tear.

The 26-year-old's strike cancelled out Isak Hien's own-goal which gave Pisa a shock lead midway through the first half.

"A lot of time has passed but I worked this hard so I could have moments like this... It's a shame that we only managed to draw but it was a good performance," said Scamacca.

"I always try to give my best, to help my teammates and be the best version of myself. I don't know if it's going to be my year but the important thing is that it's Atalanta's year."

Scamacca, who thumped the crossbar with a towering header shortly after scoring, was one of the heroes of Atalanta's historic Europa League triumph which ended up being the crowning glory of previous coach Gian Piero Gasperini's long reign in Bergamo.

And fans loudly cheered the Italy striker when he was replaced by Nikola Krstovic in the 72nd minute, with his excellent performance a huge plus for Atalanta following the big-money departure of Mateo Retegui for Saudi Arabia this summer.

LIGUE 1

'Big brother' Giroud strikes late to lift Lille past Monaco

AFP
Marseille

Even though he is about to turn 39, **Olivier Giroud** promised "this is only the beginning" after striking in added time on Sunday to give Lille a 1-0 Ligue 1 win over visiting Monaco.

Giroud, the French national team's all-time leading scorer, was brought in by Lille in part to replace Jonathan David, who was making a scoring Serie A debut for Juventus on Sunday night.

"It was a challenge I thought I could take on," said Giroud. "I'm a man who likes a challenge.

"I'm enjoying myself, even if it's a little harder to recover with age."

Giroud had scored 11 minutes into his first outing for Lille as they drew 3-3 at Brest in the first round. Sunday's was a far cagier match, before Giroud broke the dull deadlock in the 91st minute.



Receiving the ball with his back to goal, the centre forward spun, glanced towards the far post and then, with goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky moving the wrong way, thumped a shot into the middle of the net.

"This is only the beginning," said Giroud. "There will also be moments that are a little less cool, but we'll deal with those too."

With Monaco pressing, Lille won a penalty on the counter-attack but Giroud swerved his spot-kick over the bar. A "slight blemish", he said.

"We needed this victory to get our season off to a flying start," said Giroud. "I'm going to continue... in this big brother role, which I quite enjoy.

"We have young players pushing behind us, and at some point they will also be able to contribute."

Coach Bruno Genesio was impressed that Giroud did his damage in the closing minutes, praising the striker's "technical mastery at the end of the match, despite his fatigue".

"We played a real team game and he contributed a lot by keeping possession," he added.

Rooney forecasts 'massive future' for Arsenal teen Dowman

Wayne Rooney believes Arsenal teenage rising star Max Dowman is set for a "massive future" following an impressive Premier League debut. Dowman came on as a substitute aged just 15 years and 234 days during the Gunners' 5-0 win over Leeds at the Emirates on Saturday. He also did more than take the field during his 26 minutes on the pitch, with the attacking midfielder earning a late penalty, which saw Viktor Gyokeres score from the spot.

Former England captain Rooney made his Everton debut aged 16 in 2002 and was five days short of his 17th birthday when he briefly became the Premier League's youngest goalscorer by registering a stunning late winner against Arsenal. Speaking on his BBC podcast, the Wayne Rooney Show, the Manchester United great said of Dowman: "To play at that age in the Premier League is crazy. I know I played when I was young, but I think he's like 150 days younger than I was, or more. "For Max and his family and friends, I'm sure they're all living in a dream and a fairytale and it probably hasn't hit home yet. But you can see his future is so bright, he is going to have a massive future. "Everyone you speak to in football, the same name keeps coming back: Max Dowman."

Dowman's teammate Ethan Nwaneri remains the youngest player in Premier League history after featuring in Arsenal's 3-0 victory at Brentford in September 2022 aged 15 years and 181 days. The now 39-year-old Rooney, speaking about the pressures that come with playing top-flight football at such an early age, added: "It's surreal. It's so strange that one minute you're in the youth team and the next you're in the first-team dressing room with some of your heroes. "It's something you really need to get used to quickly because it can be overwhelming."

"Max Dowman looks like a very level-headed lad."