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Pakistan down Afghanistan in noisy tri-series opener



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'Sometimes I want to quit,' says troubled Man United boss

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SPORT



TENNIS

Alcaraz romps into US Open fourth round, Rybakina advances

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Al Wasmiyah Racing's Alhaarith gains revenge in French Arabian Breeders' Challenge – Poulains





PICTURES: Scoopdyga

Alhaarith produced a strong performance to win the Gr 2 (PA) French Arabian Breeders' Challenge – Poulains at La Teste. The 2,000m contest, restricted to three-year-old Purebred Arabian colts and geldings, brought together a field of five. Trained by François Rohaut, owned and bred by Al Wasmiyah Racing and ridden by Maxime Guyon, the colt finished third in the Gr 3 (PA) Prix Munjiz last month, almost three lengths behind Khaddah, who finished second that day. This time, however, he reversed the form decisively to secure the first Group success of his career. Slower away, the colt travelled in last in a race led by Mahroos Al Shahania. Niggled along around the turn for home, he was still last entering the straight behind the strongly fancied Khaddah, who was cruising on the bridle. However, Maxime Guyon did not wait for the favourite to make his move, instead, he boldly sent Alhaarith for home early. Quickening smartly down the inside, Alhaarith surged into the lead before Khaddah could react, quickly opening a clear advantage. He galloped on strongly to win by two lengths. The hot favourite Khaddah had to settle for second while Sab'aan Al Shahania took third. Bred by Al Wasmiyah Racing, Alhaarith is out of Jamaheer, a Gr 2 (PA) and Gr 3 (PA) winner over 1,900m at four, and runner-up in a Gr 1 (PA) over 2,000m the same season. Jamaheer is out of Ziva, a five-time winner between 2,000m and 2,300m at ages four, five and six. Jamaheer is also a half-sister to Handassa, a dual Gr 1 (PA) winner over 2,000m at seven and a triple Gr 2 (PA) winner over 2,100m at five, six and seven.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Veretout late free kick gives Al Arabi first win of season

AL SAILIYA TO FACE AL SHAMAL AT AL BAYT STADIUM, WHILE QATAR SC WILL MEET AL AHLI TODAY

By a Sports Reporter
Doha

A fabulous stoppage-time free-kick strike from Jordan Veretout saw Al Arabi prevail over Umm Salal in a five-goal thriller in a third round clash of Qatar Stars League (QSL) at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday.

The French midfielder's brilliant dead ball kick was produced in 90+9 minute from about ten yards left of the box and saw the ball swing into the far right top corner while brushing past the crossbar. It took Al Arabi to 3-2 after the teams were deadlocked at 2-2 since early in the second half.

The other goal-scorers in the match were Michael Baidoo (28') and Oussama Tannane (49') for Umm Salal, and Wassim 'Simo' Keddari (45'), Ahmed Moein (54'), and Veretout (90+9) for Al Arabi.

It was Al Arabi's first win of the league and took their tally to 4 points, while Umm Salal's second loss kept them at 3 points.

The second clash of the day saw Al Wakrah prevail over Al Shahania 1-0.

Umm Salal had a good start to the match with Baidoo opening the scoring after connecting perfectly with an overhead pass from Tannane to hit the top of the net.

Al Arabi hit back before the break with their Spanish pro Simo nodding home a perfect cross from Pablo Sarabia to restore parity.

Tannane himself got into the act of scoring four minutes into the second half with a right-footed shot from a set piece that beat goalkeeper Yousof Hassan by far.

Umm Salal's lead, however, only lasted for five minutes before substitute Ahmed Doozandeh, who replaced Mohamed Gouda at half time, restored parity for the home team.

Just when it seemed that a highly-entertaining match was heading for a stalemate, Veretout did wonders with the free-kick for the



Al Arabi and Umm Salal players vying for the ball in Qatar Stars League third round clash at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha yesterday.



Al Wakrah's El Amin Zahzouh celebrates after scoring against Al Shahania yesterday.

Dream Team. Later at the Khalifa International Stadium, Al Shahania were left to rue a penalty miss which eventually saw Al Wakrah escape with a 1-0 win.

It was The Blue Wave's second win of the league championship and took their tally to 7 points while Al Shahania remained on one point.

Al Shahania's big hopes of finding the equaliser were dashed in the 76th minute as Dutchman Pelle van Amersfoort kicked wide and high over the target.

The spot kick was awarded following a VAR check after Moaz Tawhed Elwadia was checked by rival defenders on the edge of the box.

Earlier (68th minute) El Amin Zahzouh had successfully scored from the spot for Al Wakrah to go up the lead. The penalty was gained after the Moroccan professional was dribbling his way inside the box and was wrongly tackled and felled by Al Shahania's Daoud Soliman.

Today, Al Sailiya will face Al Shamal at Al Bayt Stadium (6.30pm) while Qatar SC will meet Al Ahli at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium at 8.30pm.

SPORT

CRICKET

Salman, Rauf star as Pakistan down Afghanistan

'I knew that if I could get in, I could hit sixes against any bowler'

AFP
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Skipper Salman Agha hit an unbeaten half century and fast bowler Haris Rauf grabbed four wickets as Pakistan upstaged Afghanistan by 39 runs in the tri-series opener in Sharjah yesterday.

Salman hit a 36-ball 53 not out with three sixes and as many boundaries which lifted Pakistan to 182-7 in their 20 overs.

Pacers Rauf took 4-31 and Shaheen Afridi 2-21, while spinners Mohammad Nawaz (2-23) and Sufiyan Muqeem (2-25) dismissed Afghanistan for 143 in 19.5 overs before a noisy capacity 16,000 crowd at the Sharjah stadium.

Afghanistan matched Pakistan with opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz, 27-ball 38 with a six and three boundaries, adding 51 for the second wicket with Sediqullah Atal, who made 23.

It was Rauf who changed the game with a two-wicket 12th over sending Atal and Karim Janat back without conceding a run.

Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan smashed five sixes and a four in his whirlwind 16-ball 39 but fell to Rauf to end his team's fight.

Salman - who was named the Player of the Match - said yesterday: "I saw the first seven-eight overs, it was holding (for the spinners when they bowled slow and for the change-ups of pacers). I knew that if I could get in, I could hit sixes against any bowler, and that is what I did."

When asked about batting against spin, he said: "I am not as good as I used to be, but we came here ten days early, and we know there is going to be a lot of spin and we are up to that challenge."

The Pakistan captain praised his bowlers. "Our bowling was outstanding. Whoever came in, they bowled hard lengths. We knew there were going to be lot of slower balls. They (Rauf and Shaheen) are some of the best fast bowlers in the world. Even Muqeem as well (was impressive). The pick of the bowlers for me was Nawaz. He always bowls difficult overs. It is not easy for a finger-spinner and he is doing so well - I am so happy for him," Salman said.

"Scoring above par (today), it was a 150-160 kind of wicket, we scored 180-odd and we knew it would be challenging for them. In team meetings and stuff, we talk about going above-par. We bat very deep. Faheem comes in at 8 and he is a good enough batter to win Pakistan games," he added.

Earlier, Pakistan was lifted by Salman's fourth T20I half century. Salman anchored the innings admirably well after opener Sahibzada Farhan smashed two sixes and a boundary in his 10-ball 21 after Pakistan won the toss and batted.

Agha added 53 for the fifth wicket with Nawaz whose 11-ball 21 had two sixes and a boundary as the duo helped Pakistan get 51 runs in the last five overs.

Pakistan play hosts United Arab Emirates today.

All three teams face other each other twice with the top two playing the September 7 final.


Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi (third left) celebrates during the first T20 international against Afghanistan in Sharjah yesterday. Pakistan won by 39 runs.


Pakistan's Salman Agha bats during the first T20 international against Afghanistan in Sharjah yesterday.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 182 for 7 (Salman 53*, Farhan 21, M Nawaz 21, Fareed 2-47) **beat Afghanistan 143** (Rashid 39, Gurbaz 38, Rauf 4-31) **by 39 runs**

SPOTLIGHT

Madushanka grabs a hat-trick to help Sri Lanka hold off hosts Zimbabwe



Reuters
Harare

Sri Lanka fast bowler **Dilshan Madushanka** took a last-over hat-trick to steer the tourists to a dramatic seven-run victory over Zimbabwe in their first One-Day International at the Harare Sports Club yesterday.

Zimbabwe needed 10 runs off the last over to win as they chased down an imposing 299-run target, but Madushanka bowled Sikandar Raza for 92 with the first ball of the over and then had Brad Evans caught as he scooped the next ball to fine leg.

The third ball of the over saw Madushanka bowl Richard Ngarava middle stump.

He conceded only two runs off the last three balls to ensure a narrow win as Zimbabwe finished on 291-8 in reply to Sri Lanka's 298-6.

Sri Lanka, who were put in to bat, piled on the runs near the end of their innings as Janith Liyanage and Kamindu Mendes led a recovery after they were reduced to 161-5 with 13 overs remaining.

Liyanage hit 70 not out off 47 balls and Kamindu 57 off 36 as they added 137 runs off 83 balls to set a daunting total for Zimbabwe to chase.

The home side's bid began disastrously as they lost their first two wickets in four balls, without scoring, but stand-in captain Sean Williams and Ben Curran put on 118 runs for the third wicket to give the home fans hope. Curran scored 70 but it was a 128-run partnership for the sixth wicket between Raza and Tony Munyonga, who was 43 not out, that took Zimbabwe close before Madushanka's heroics. The Sri Lanka speedster ended with figures of 4-62.

Zimbabwe captain Craig Ervine was ruled out of the series after a calf tear on Thursday, with Williams taking over as skipper.

The last of the two-match ODI series is being played tomorrow followed by three Twenty20 internationals.

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 298 for 6 (Nissanka 76, Liyanage 70*, Kamindu 57, Ngarava 2-34) **beat Zimbabwe 291 for 8** (Raza 92, Curran 70, Williams 57, Madushanka 4-62, Fernando 3-50) **by seven runs**

CYCLING

Ayuso attacks to win Vuelta stage seven, Traeen retains red

Reuters
Madrid

Spaniard Juan Ayuso (UAE Team Emirates-XRG) went alone on the climb to the finish to win stage seven of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday, showing a remarkable recovery from his collapse in the Pyrenees the previous day, while Torstein Traeen retains the red jersey.

Ayuso, tipped to be one of the main challengers to pre-race favourite Jonas Vingegaard, had slipped way down the general classification after getting dropped on the final climb on Thursday, but was back to his best on the 188km ride from Andorra la Vella to Cerler.

Italian Marco Frigo (Israel Premier Tech) crossed the line more than one minute behind Ayuso in second, with another Spaniard, Raul Garcia Pierna (Arkea-B&B Hotels), finishing third.

Norwegian Traeen (Bahrain Victorious), who sprung a surprise by finishing second on Thursday to take the red jersey, holds a two minutes and 33 seconds lead over Vingegaard, who moved from fifth to second in the standings but without closing the gap to Traeen.

Ayuso was the first to get away early in the stage, before he was joined by a group of 11 riders, including Australian teammate and stage six winner Jay Vine, and with



11 kilometres left to the finish, the Spaniard made his telling move.

The 22-year-old, who finished third overall in 2022 and fourth the following year, was just eight seconds off then leader Vingegaard in second place before Thursday's downfall. While Ayuso is still almost seven and a half minutes off the red jersey, he has managed to win his first individual Vuelta stage, following up the Team Time Trial win on stage five.

"It's amazing. After the Giro, when I won my first Grand Tour stage, to win a stage here in the Vuelta, which is my favourite race," Ayuso said. "The way especially I won the race, I will remember always and I'm super proud."

Vingegaard had managed to get away from Traeen in the final kilometres, but the Norwegian fought back, leaving the Dane still with it all to do.

ATHLETICS

Lyles trumps Tebogo in Zurich, Alfred shines

AFP
Zurich

Olympic 100m champions Noah Lyles and Julien Alfred will head to the world championships in Tokyo in two weeks' time on the back of impressive victories at Thursday's Diamond League finals.

Lyles and Alfred were but two of the cream of track and field's elite who rose to the top in a scintillating night of action at a 25,000 sell-out Letzigrund Stadium.

Lyles produced a strong finish to outpace Botswanan rival Letsile Tebogo for victory in the men's 200m in 19.74 seconds for a record-breaking sixth Diamond League track trophy.

"Another record in the list. It is pretty nice to have that," said Lyles. "The most important is getting wins. I know if I panicked I was not going to win. If you are tight you are done for."

Lyles said he would head to Tokyo "with a lot of energy. I will use that to my advantage".

Alfred had earlier clocked 10.76sec for her win over 100m ahead of Jamaica's Tia Clayton (10.84) in what was the perfect tonic before departing to the September 13-21 world championships in Tokyo.

"I feel like I want to add another gold in my collection," she said. "I am much fitter than before and also mentally, I am on the right place where I want to be."

Twenty-six Diamond League champions were unveiled at the Letzigrund Stadium as quality oozed through at every turn as athletes fine-tuned preparations for the Tokyo worlds. One of the most competitive events on the men's circuit is the 800m, with athletes edging ever nearer to David Rudisha's world record of 1:40.91.


Noah Lyles of the US celebrates after winning the 200m event of the Diamond League athletics meeting at the Letzigrund stadium in Zurich on Thursday night. *(AFP)*

Kenya's Emmanuel Wanyonyi faded in the home stretch in Zurich, but just managed to hold on for victory in 1:42.37, 0.05sec ahead of Britain's Max Burgin, with Canada's world champion Marco Arop taking third.

There were no surprises in the 400m hurdles as Dutch world champion Femke Bol improved on her own meet to 52.18sec, her 30th straight hurdles race victory on the Diamond League circuit.

"it's crazy, another Diamond League season undefeated, it's really cool!" said Bol. Norway's Karsten Warholm, the world record holder and three-time world champion, then nonchalantly repeated Bol's feat, bettering his 2019 mark with a new meet record of 46.70sec.

"That was my target for this meeting," said Warholm. "I'm on the right path for Tokyo. I have three titles as world champions and I want more. I'm greedy."

Two loaded short hurdles races went the way of in-form American Cordell Tinch for the men over 110m and Jamaican Ackera Nugent (12.30sec) in the women's 100m.

Tinch underlined his credentials as the favourite for Tokyo with a winning time of 12.92sec, equalling the meet record - and then world record - set by double Olympic champion Roger Kingdom back in 1989.

"It is about consistency," said Tinch, who set a world lead of 12.87 in May.

"All I have done this year has been a next big moment, every time I get into something, it is another big moment. And I am ready for the next one. I am ready to go to Tokyo and be great."

Dutchman Niels Laros ran a timely national record of 3:29.20 in the men's 1,500m, which promises to be one of the most competitive events in Tokyo and there was a Swiss record of 1:55.91 for in-form Audrey Werro in the women's 800m.

Ewart Shadoff surges to share LPGA lead at TPC Boston


Jodi Ewart Shadoff of England plays her second shot on the ninth hole during the first round of the FM Championship 2025 at TPC Boston in Norton, Massachusetts. Ewart Shadoff birdied her last four holes to share the first-round lead alongside Kim Sei-young and Allisen Corpuz. *(AFP)*

TENNIS

Alcaraz storms into round four as Rybakina wins

'I'm not an early morning person so it's difficult for me to wake up'

AFP
New York



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain mimics a golf swing as he celebrates after defeating Luciano Darderi of Italy in their 2025 US Open match at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in the Flushing neighbourhood of the Queens borough of New York City. *(AFP)*



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan celebrates after defeating Emma Raducanu of Great Britain during their third round match of the 2025 US Open. *(AFP)*

Carlos Alcaraz surged into the fourth round of the US Open yesterday.

Spanish second seed Alcaraz breezed past Italian 32nd seed Luciano Darderi in emphatic fashion, winning 6-2, 6-4, 6-0 on the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Alcaraz's one hour 44-minute victory sends the 2022 US Open champion into a meeting tomorrow against France's Arthur Rinderknech, who defeated compatriot Benjamin Bonzi 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-2.

Alcaraz is aiming to finish the season on a high after winning the French Open in June before losing in the final of Wimbledon last month.

The five-time Grand Slam singles champion opened Friday's play on the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center's main court, and admitted he had been nervous about his early 11.30am local time start.

"I'm not an early morning person so it's difficult for me to wake up in the morning," Alcaraz said. "One of the good things today though I woke up early, did the warm up and felt good.

"Starting at 11:30 my first goal is to start well with a good energy and rhythm. I played great tennis, good performance so I'm proud of that.

Alcaraz needed a medical timeout while leading 5-4 in the second set for treatment on his right knee, but later said he had no injury concerns.

"I just asked the physio to have a look at it because I wanted to be feeling good physically for that last set," he said. "I'm not worried about it."

In another early game, Czech 20th seed Jiri Lehecka sailed into the next round with a 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 defeat of Belgium's Raphael Collignon.

In the women's draw meanwhile, ninth seed Elena Rybakina produced a ruthless display to end Emma Raducanu's run at the US Open, advancing to the fourth round for the first time with a 6-1 6-2 victory yesterday.

The 2022 Wimbledon champion, who had beaten Raducanu in their only previous meeting in 2022, struck early in both sets and never lost her focus as she sealed victory in 62 minutes.

"Yeah I'm really happy with the performance. It's always not easy to play against Emma," said the 26-year-old Rybakina.

"The score doesn't show it but she's a tough competitor. I'm pretty happy with the way I'm playing and I'm looking forward to the next match."

Rybakina wasted no time imposing herself, breaking serve in the opening game with a number of clean returns before consolidating behind her own powerful delivery. She raced to a 3-0 lead, her ball-striking consistently pushing Raducanu onto the back foot. The Briton, who had swept through her first two rounds without dropping serve, was repeatedly undone by errors and found no answers as Rybakina closed out the set.

The second set followed a similar script. Raducanu's first service game slipped away with another flurry of mistakes, and Rybakina capitalised with a straightforward hold to consolidate. The Kazakh landed just 47% of her first serves, yet Raducanu was unable to make any inroads against the second delivery.

The 22-year-old briefly lifted the crowd by saving two break points, greeted by a loud cheer of encouragement.

But the reprieve was short-lived as Rybakina dragged her across the baseline before finishing the rally with a forehand winner out of reach, breaking again as Raducanu vented her frustration by swiping her racquet.

Rybakina then inched closer with an ace and sealed victory on the next point as Raducanu sent another shot long. The defeat ended Raducanu's most encouraging campaign at Flushing Meadows since she unexpectedly lifted the title in New York four years ago as a qualifier. Rybakina will next face 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova who beat Italian seventh seed Jasmine Paolini 7-6, 6-1.

"It's true, in the (past few) years it's not been easy at the US Open and I was not successful," Rybakina added.

"I hope this year it will change. I'm really happy now that I'm getting through and hopefully I can go as far as possible."

SPOTLIGHT

Badminton federation addresses shuttlecock scarcity in new move



China's Chen Yufei serves against Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong during the women' single quarter-final match at the Badminton BWF World Championships at the Adidas Arena in Paris, yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Paris

Skyrocketing raw material prices in China have caused shuttlecock prices to more than double in recent months as suppliers struggle to meet rising demand from badminton enthusiasts around the world.

However, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) insists the shortage is not "at a crisis level yet".

"We are aware of the global supply chain challenges and subsequent increases in feathered shuttlecock prices impacting badminton communities around the world," BWF Secretary-General Thomas Lund said in written statement. "And while we are naturally concerned by this barrier to participation, in our dialogue with the large-scale manufacturers and their assessment of the situation, we don't believe this is at a crisis level yet."

The shortage can, in part, be attributed to changing consumer habits in China.

The production of shuttlecocks relies heavily on the supply of duck and goose feathers. One high-quality shuttlecock requires 16 carefully selected feathers, typically sourced from the wings of ducks or geese.

A single shuttlecock can use feathers from two birds, with premium models requiring up to four.

This dependence on poultry has caused strain. Duck and goose output in China, the global leader in shuttlecock production, has declined sharply in recent years.

The China Animal Agriculture Association, cited in state media reports, said 4.22 billion ducks and 569 million geese were slaughtered in 2024. That was 10 percent down from 2019 peaks as pork production has rebounded following the African swine fever outbreak which started in 2018. "(The increase in pork production) does have some impacts, but it's only one of the factors," said Wu Xin, manager of Antarctic Wind, a leading domestic shuttlecock supplier, in a phone interview with AFP. Wu pointed to the soaring popularity of badminton in China as the primary driver of surging demand for shuttlecocks.

"In the past two years, we have scaled down export and focussed more on serving the domestic market," Wu said, adding that China is the fastest growing market for his company.

This shift reflects the sport's growing appeal, which has intensified competition for limited resources.

Woody Mao, co-founder of an export-focussed badminton supplier in Zhejiang, said that duck and goose feather prices have more than doubled since late 2022.

"But the price hike this year could only be described as insane," Mao said, adding that prices sometimes rose in just hours.

The price volatility has forced manufacturers to act to secure supplies in a highly competitive market. Antarctic Wind's Wu said that he had witnessed a boom-and-bust production cycle before, but the current situation was unprecedented.

"When the price goes up, if you don't buy it, others will. There are hundreds of factories. For their own existence, they have to make those purchases," Wu said.

One solution is a switch from natural to synthetic shuttlecocks.

This is the approach favoured by the BWF as part of its sustainability drive.

The BWF said a professional-level badminton match uses, on average, 13 shuttlecocks. At that rate, the world championships, running until Sunday in Paris will smash through just shy of 3,500 shuttlecocks across its five events.

MOTORSPORT

McLaren's Norris fastest in Dutch practice

Reuters
Zandvoort, Netherlands



McLaren's Lando Norris *(inset)* during practice at the Dutch Grand Prix in Circuit Zandvoort, Zandvoort, Netherlands, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

McLaren's Lando Norris sounded a warning to teammate and Formula One championship leader Oscar Piastri when the Briton topped the first and second Dutch Grand Prix practice sessions which were marred by crashes and red flags yesterday.

Piastri had been second-fastest in the first session (FP1) but the Australian was pipped to second place in FP2 by Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, with both drivers completing lap times within a tenth of a second of Norris. The two McLaren drivers are separated by nine points in the championship battle with 10 races left.

"Today was a good day... The car was handling well. I felt we made some good improvements from FP1 to FP2 but, at the same time, the others caught up more than we would like," said Norris, who has won three of the last four races. "Even the Aston and Fernando were more quick than they have been recently. A good start but a bit closer than we'd like."

George Russell was fourth-fastest for Mercedes while home favourite Max Verstappen improved one place on his sixth-fastest from FP1. The second session began amid a light drizzle, although not enough for a switch to wet tyres.

But the session was red-flagged early on when Lance Stroll, who was third-fastest in FP1, locked up on the banked corner at turn three and crashed into the wall, severely damaging his car.

"Just a little lock-up and I was a passenger. One of those things," Stroll said. "We looked competitive throughout the day, so we are in a good spot and will see what we can do tomorrow."

MCLAREN FINED

The session also provided drama in the pit lane when Piastri, who was asked to go around his teammate, swerved back into the path of Russell.

The pair nearly made contact as the Briton took evasive action when he braked.

Piastri was summoned by the stewards and the team were fined 5,000 euros ($5,853.50). "I think he pulled in too early then pulled back out. A bit unfortunate," Russell said.

"It scared me a bit. When you're on track, you're ready for anything but when you're in the pit lane going relatively slow, you're chilling out then suddenly 'Jeez!' It caught me out by surprise."

Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton had struggled in FP1 when he nearly spun out at turn two but managed to regain control to stay on the track, although he had a moment of deja vu in FP2 with another 360-degree spin.

The Briton went slightly wide at turn nine and his tyre strayed off track to spin him around once again, but with no damage as he regained control.

FERRARI RECOVER

He recovered to finish sixth-fastest while teammate Charles Leclerc was eighth, a marked improvement after the two Ferraris finished 14th and 15th in FP1, prompting Leclerc to say they were "miles off" the pace on the team radio.

Rain clouds steered clear of the Zandvoort circuit and once the track was bathed in sunshine, Norris took charge with the fastest lap, clocking one minute 9.890 seconds. The session was red-flagged a second time when Alex Albon, fifth-fastest in P1, locked up a front tyre and crashed his Williams on turn one, damaging his front wing.

"It's incredibly windy and we are seeing drivers getting caught out with gusts of wind," Williams team principal James Vowles said.

Earlier in FP1, Verstappen also found himself in the gravel at the end of the session when he botched a practice start by locking up into turn one.

His teammate Yuki Tsunoda was only 16th fastest in FP1 but the Japanese driver improved to seventh in FP2.

Kimi Antonelli had also struggled with understeer at turn nine and beached his Mercedes in the gravel, bringing out the red flag and prematurely ending his session.

He could only manage 12th-fastest in FP2.

Staying at Red Bull in 2026 a 'simple' decision: Verstappen



Zandvoort, Netherlands: Four-time world champion **Max Verstappen** didn't get stressed by widespread speculation in recent months that he might leave Red Bull Racing for Mercedes in 2026. In fact, he said "it was very, very simple" in making the decision to stay with Red Bull. He is under contract until the 2028 Formula 1 season but had a potential exit clause based on his championship points standing that ended up not being triggered.

"I only say what I want to say," Verstappen told *ESPN* in a report published yesterday. "And I was never even stressed about it at all because... of course naturally you always want to win. But at the same time, you just work on performance. People always come up with stories or ask questions. But for me, it was quite straightforward all the time."

For someone in an intense profession, this matter did not put him in duress. "I think in general, I'm a person that is always quite relaxed about it," said Verstappen, 27. "Like I don't stress out or go to bed massively overthinking stuff. I just live my life, you know, see what happens next. For me, there's nothing wrong with talking or listening (to offers) or whatever, but it was all under control."

What wasn't in his control were the statements coming from Mercedes boss Toto Wolff, who in Verstappen's own words has a good relationship with the driver. Wolff was openly interested in the possibility of signing Verstappen. It didn't help that social media went viral with images of Wolff and Verstappen spending time together on a yacht this summer. Both were vacationing in Sardinia. "There's no secret," Verstappen said. "I even went for lunch with Toto and the family and I think that's absolutely allowed. It's not even that you speak about Formula 1 business, it's just life. We parked up next to each other because we were in the same bay to sleep and during the day everyone does their thing. "But sometimes you meet up and you have a good relationship with people. I think that's nice, that it's not only about competition."

FOCUS

Arteta concerned by Saka injuries after latest hamstring blow

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta said **Bukayo Saka's** recurring hamstring injuries are a "big concern" after the Arsenal winger was ruled out for at least two weeks.

Saka was forced off in the second half of Arsenal's win against Leeds last weekend and will be sidelined for Sunday's trip to Premier League champions Liverpool.

The 23-year-old could be in a position to return to action next month, but Gunners boss Arteta is worried about his star forward's cycle of injuries.

Saka missed three-and-a-half months of last season following surgery on his right hamstring in December. He returned in April and played 13 times before sustaining the latest hamstring issue, this time in his left leg, in just his second appearance of this season.

"He does not need surgery. It's not as bad as the previous one. He felt something, so he will be out for a couple of weeks," Arteta told reporters yesterday.

"But it is obviously a concern, a big one, especially when we talk about a sprinter and a player that gets into that zone very often in a football match, who needs that burst, that change of rhythm of pace to be as threatening as possible.

"We will learn again as to why it happened and make him stronger. Unfortunately injuries are part of a career. He hasn't had that many to be fair with the amount of games that he has played at his age but it is something that we want to eradicate."

Arteta could be without as many as seven players for Arsenal's early showdown with title rivals Liverpool at Anfield.

Saka, Gabriel Jesus and Kai Havertz are all out, while Martin Odegaard, Christian Norgaard, Leandro Trossard and Ben White are doubts.

Havertz underwent what the club described as a minor surgical procedure on his knee this week.

Odegaard could feature after falling awkwardly on his shoulder in the win over Leeds.

"It is very unfortunate, and very sad for him," said Arteta of Havertz, who missed three months of last season with a hamstring injury.

"He did tremendously well to recover from the previous one. He's never had an injury before. And suddenly this happens.

"Obviously, we lose another big player for many, many weeks. But it was the right thing to do. The doctors advised, and he was very convinced at the end, that it was the quickest and the best way to resolve that issue."

Arsenal finished as runners-up to Liverpool last season, coming 10 points behind Arne Slot's side.

Asked if Liverpool are the favourites to retain the crown, Arteta said: "The favourite is always the one that won the previous year.

"Somebody has to come and take that crown away from them so that is what we will try to do. The aim is to be better than them."



WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Alexander-Arnold dropped by England as Spence called up

'I know that both of them are desperate to come back, which is really important'

AFP
London

Trent Alexander-Arnold was dropped by England as coach Thomas Tuchel yesterday handed first call-ups to Elliot Anderson and Djed Spence for the World Cup qualifiers against Andorra and Serbia.

Alexander-Arnold was part of England's most recent squad at the end of last season, but Tuchel opted to leave him out of the September matches.

The right-back quit Premier League champions Liverpool to join Spanish side Real Madrid on a free transfer in the summer.

However, Alexander-Arnold was left out of Madrid's starting team for last weekend's win against Real Oviedo in favour of Dani Carvajal.

Speaking about his decision to axe Alexander-Arnold and leave out Everton winger Jack Grealish, Tuchel said: "First of all, we decided on a bit more competitive squad.

"There is no doubt that I'm a big fan of Trent and Jack because of their talent and their personalities.

"They are big players. They will always be big players, and they will always be in the mix to be called up. I know that both of them are desperate to come back, which is really important.

"So competition is up, then they will stay in the mix. I know how desperate they are to come back but they can maybe have a bit more rhythm."



Tuchel has named a 24-man squad for the qualifiers, with Nottingham Forest midfielder Anderson involved with the senior side for the first time.

Anderson starred in England's Under-21 Euros triumph over the summer, while uncapped Tottenham full-back Spence fills the gap left by Alexander-Arnold's absence.

"Elliot Anderson, very physical, a lot of volume, very precise clean passing, it is a good package," Tuchel said. "A regular player for Nottingham Forest and had a fantastic season. He is excited to come join us and hope he can make his mark."

Marcus Rashford, now on loan at Barcelona from Manchester United, returns after missing June's fixtures through injury.

Adam Wharton is included in Tuchel's squad for the first time, but there is no place for Kyle Walker, Phil Foden and Ivan Toney.

Harry Maguire was also overlooked by Tuchel, while injury has ruled out Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka, Cole Palmer and Levi Colwill. Fit-again John Stones is included for the first time since Tuchel took charge, although he spent time with the group in Spain during a June camp as he continued his rehabilitation from a thigh injury.

Brentford midfielder Jordan Henderson, 35, is again included after featuring in three of Tuchel's games in charge.

The Three Lions host Andorra on September 6 before the Group K leaders head to Belgrade to face Serbia on September 9.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Jordan Pickford (Everton), James Trafford (Manchester City), Dean Henderson (Crystal Palace)
Defenders: Reece James (Chelsea), Marc Guehi (Crystal Palace), John Stones (Manchester City), Dan Burn (Newcastle), Ezri Konsa (Aston Villa), Myles Lewis-Skelly (Arsenal), Tino Livramento (Newcastle), Djed Spence (Tottenham)
Midfielders: Elliot Anderson (Nottingham Forest), Morgan Gibbs-White (Nottingham Forest), Jordan Henderson (Brentford), Adam Wharton (Crystal Palace), Morgan Rogers (Aston Villa), Declan Rice (Arsenal)
Forwards: Harry Kane (Bayern Munich), Eberechi Eze (Arsenal), Jarrod Bowen (West Ham), Anthony Gordon (Newcastle), Noni Madueke (Arsenal), Marcus Rashford (Barcelona), Ollie Watkins (Aston Villa)

Tuchel apologises to Bellingham over 'repulsive' blast

England boss Thomas Tuchel has apologised to Jude Bellingham after describing the Real Madrid star's on-pitch behaviour as "repulsive".
Bellingham's competitive personality has led to questions over his temperament after several high-profile rows. Tuchel said in an interview the day after England's 3-1 friendly loss to Senegal in June that he loved the 22-year-old's "fire" but revealed his mother found some of the midfielder's antics repulsive. The German has now said sorry to Bellingham, who is absent from the England squad for September's World Cup qualifiers against Andorra and Serbia after shoulder surgery.
"I used this word unintentionally, just to make it very clear," Tuchel said yesterday.
"I had no intention, there was no message, there was no hidden agenda.
"I fully understand it's my responsibility that I created these headlines. I'm sorry for the upset and for the headlines that I created."
As a former Chelsea, Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain boss, Tuchel admitted he should have had the experience to handle the situation better. "I'm experienced enough, I should have known better and should have done better," he said.
"I thought I have a little bit more credit with you guys, that I do all this in my second language.
"I did it on the morning after a loss and not a lot of sleep. I did it in a live interview and I used the wrong word."
Conceding his use of the word repulsive was inappropriate, Tuchel added: "It's my responsibility. I used the wrong word.
"I didn't want to use this word. I used it. I created the opposite. It's my responsibility.
"I made straight away contact with him, of course and I got in touch with him straight away. Jude's focus is now in his rehabilitation."



COMMENT

'Sometimes I want to quit,' says Man United manager Amorim

AFP
London

Ruben Amorim admitted he has thought about quitting Manchester United as the under-fire boss revealed he sometimes "hates" his players.

Amorim sparked speculation he is considering leaving Old Trafford with a cryptic interview after United's humiliating League Cup second round defeat against fourth tier Grimsby on Wednesday.

United's penalty shoot-out loss to the Mariners prompted Amorim to say "something has to change" following their slow start to the season.

Amorim's side were beaten by Arsenal and drew with Fulham in their opening two Premier League games before the Grimsby debacle.

The 40-year-old former Sporting Lisbon coach has only been in charge of United since November, but he is already in deep trouble after the club's worst top-flight finish since 1973-74 last term.

Another bad result against promoted Burnley on Saturday would pile further pressure on Amorim, who reportedly retains the support of United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe at present.

"Every time in the future we have one defeat like that I'm going to be like that, I'm going to say sometimes I hate my players, sometimes I love my players, sometimes I defend my players and sometimes I think I cannot," Amorim told reporters yesterday.

"This is my way of doing things and I'm going to be like that. I felt that in that moment, I was so frustrated, I was so annoyed.

"Sometimes I want to quit, sometimes I want to be here for 20 years.

"Sometimes I love to be with my players, sometimes I don't want to be with them. I need to improve on that, it's going to be hard but now I'm focused on the next game."

Amorim said he felt like walking away from United after the Grimsby embarrassment, but he is now focused on dragging his team out of their latest slump.

"I felt that after the game. I don't feel that now. So it's a little bit like that. I think that is the hardest part of the defeat," he said.

"Sometimes it's not the result, it's the way we lost that game or draw that game. That is the thing that is hard to accept.

"Because we can do better. In this moment, we cover positions, fight for the ball, running, all these small things, sometimes we drop a little bit the level. The good thing is that we now have the next game to put that level up.

"I know, again, that you have a lot of experienced people talking about the way I should perform with the media, to be more constant, to be more calm. I'm not going to be like that."

United's loss to Grimsby was a huge blow to Amorim after a £200 million ($269 million) spending spree on forwards Benjamin Sesko, Bryan Mbeumo and Matheus Cunha during the close-season.

Amorim's overhaul came after United were beaten by fellow strugglers Tottenham in the Europa League final - a dismal defeat that cost them a place in the Champions League.

The Portuguese coach, highly-rated prior to his move to England, conceded he was surprised by United's failure to improve on last season.

"I felt we had a very good preseason, we were playing better, we were being consistent in the way we played," Amorim said.

"We played badly for 30 minutes against Fulham and that kind of performance (against Grimsby) I was really disappointed with everything, but now it's a new game and we focus on that."

SPOTLIGHT

Goalkeepers still posing problems for Man City coach Guardiola



AFP
London

Pep Guardiola has still to determine the identity of his first-choice goalkeeper, with the Manchester City manager uncertain who will be between the posts when his side face Brighton in the Premier League tomorrow.

James Trafford started the season in goal but a nervous display during last week's loss to Tottenham, when his glaring error led to a goal, has cast doubt over the position. The 22-year-old had retained his place from the season-opening win against Wolves, when Ederson was unable to play due to illness.

But with speculation also surrounding the future of the Brazilian - and City also linked with Paris Saint-Germain's Gianluigi Donnarumma - the question of who will be City's 'number one' may remain unresolved until after the closure of the transfer window next week and when club football resumes following the upcoming international break. "In this part of the season, and at all the clubs before the international transfer window is closed, everything is possible," Guardiola told reporters yesterday. "It's as simple as that.

"After that, we're going to play (Manchester) United and (in the) Champions League and Arsenal. After that everything will be more clear and we'll take decisions.

"It depends on the performance and it depends on many reasons. It's not just the keepers, (it's) all the players."

Trafford, a City academy graduate, rejoined the club in a £27mn ($36mn) deal in July after starring at Burnley, with Guardiola confident the keeper will regain his confidence following an anxious home debut against Spurs.

"We take care of them. Of course, he was concerned - I would not like it if he was not concerned, but of course we are here to help them, no doubt about that. We're here to support in the bad moments."

Guardiola, asked on Friday if he had decided who will play at Brighton, replied: "Tomorrow - because I don't have a press conference."

Both of City's other frontline keepers, Ederson and Stefan Ortega, are in the final years of their contracts and have been linked with moves away before Monday's deadline.

Guardiola refused to comment on any possible departures, even though he has repeatedly said his squad is too large for his liking.

"We have a long squad and all the players have maybe signings (elsewhere) - maybe," he said yesterday. "People leave. It's what it is. The transfer (window) is in that way. You have to accept it."