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No need to temper aggression, captains say before the India-Pakistan clash

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WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Barshim faces uphill battle in Tokyo as rivals peak

SOUTH KOREA'S WOO LEADS THE FIELD WITH A 2.34M CLEARANCE AT DIAMOND LEAGUE IN MONACO

By Sports Reporter
Doha

A mere four centimetres separates the season's bests of the top nine entrants, setting up a tightly contested high jump competition at the Tokyo World Championships — one where Mutaz Barshim will arrive as an outsider rather than a favourite.

Barshim, a three-time world champion and Olympic gold medallist, has cleared just 2.13m this season — 30 centimetres below his personal best.

If he misses the podium, it will be the first time since the 2011 World Championships in Daegu that he fails to medal at a global outdoor event.

His long-time rival Gianmarco Tamberi of Italy is also not in top form, having managed a best of 2.20m in 2025. The two, who shared gold in the Tokyo Olympics, have been outpaced this year by a new crop of contenders.

Korea's Woo Sang-hyeok leads the field with a 2.34m clearance at the Diamond League in Monaco and also won the World Indoor Championships in Nanjing.

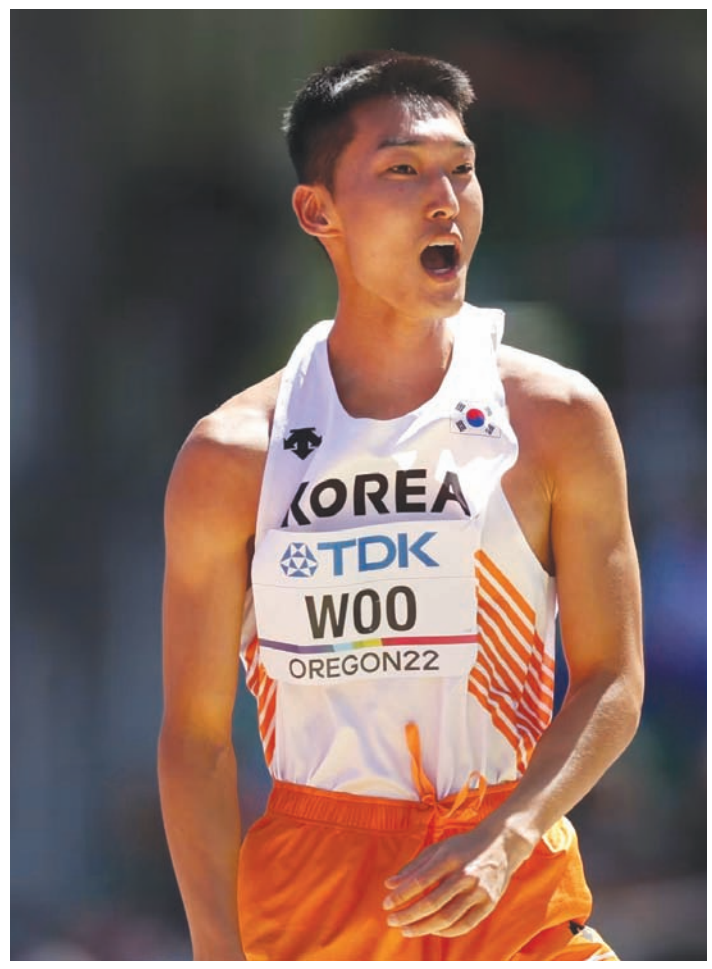
He cut his European leg of the season short because of a calf injury, but he has allayed fears it was anything serious in the lengthy lead-up to Tokyo.

The 29-year-old is still hopeful of producing his best finish at an outdoor global championships, improving on the bronze medal he earned at the 2022 World Championships.



Three-time world champion Mutaz Barshim.

Ukraine's Oleh Doroshchuk also cleared 2.34m indoors this season and was recently beaten by just two centimetres by New Zealand's Hamish Kerr at the Diamond League final in Zurich.



Olympic champion Woo Sang-hyeok.

Kerr won Olympic gold last year in a dramatic contest with US jumper Shelby McEwen. Unlike Barshim and Tamberi's shared gold moment, Kerr and McEwen chose to compete for outright victory, with Kerr prevailing.

McEwen insists to this day he has no regrets about going for outright gold, despite having to make do with the runner-up spot. McEwen has struggled to find form this year, with a best of 2.26m.

Two men have bests of 2.33m this season: Jan Stefala of Czechia and Yuto Seko of Japan, the latter of which was a national record leading to high hopes of a potential medal in front of his home fans.

Seko, who competes wearing spectacles, seemed to have room to spare when he cleared 2.33m. Four more men have made their way over 2.30m this year. At 22, Israel's Jonathan Kapitolnik is one of the rising stars of his discipline.

A world and European U20 champion in 2021, this year he has progressed to 2.31m and won at the World University Games.

Tamberi is joined on the Italian team by Stefano Sottile, a two-time Olympian and part-time computer programmer, who hails from an athletic family.

His brother Davide competed in a number of different disciplines while Stefano began with the javelin before making the move across to the high jump where he has excelled ever since.

He faces competition for top Italian in Tokyo from another rising star, Matteo Sioli. The 19-year-old earned European indoor bronze earlier this year, then claimed gold at the European U23 Championships.

FOOTBALL

Qatar beat Bahrain 2-1 to qualify for U-23 Asian Cup



Qatar U-23 squad and staff celebrate after the qualification for the 2026 Asian Cup.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar took top spot after two late goals steered them to a 2-1 win against Bahrain in their AFC U-23 Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2026 Qualifiers Group H tie at the at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha yesterday.

Qatar finished with seven points with India one behind after ending their campaign with a 6-0 win against Brunei Darussalam.

Two wins from two made Qatar as firm favourites to finish top but Bahrain proved to be a handful as neither side was able to break the deadlock heading into the break. The stalemate was finally broken after Abdulrahman Sami al-Khayyat found the back of the net for Bahrain in the 71st minute.

Staring at possible elimination, Qatar upped their tempo and drew level through Al Hashmi al-Hussain in the first minute of added time at the end of the second half.

The drama, however, did not end there as Qatar were then reduced to 10 men in the fifth minute of added time following Ayoub Mohamed al-Ouwi's sending off.

Incredibly, the numerical disadvantage seemed to push Qatar as Jassem al-Sharshani scored the winner from the penalty spot in the ninth minute of added time.

Meanwhile, Vibin Mohanan opened India's account in the fifth minute, converting Muhammed Suhail's cutback before doubling his tally three minutes later after Brunei keeper Khairul Hisyam misjudged the bounce of the ball.

It was one way traffic and India scored their third in the 42nd minute after Ayush Chhetri exchanged neat passes with Sreekuttan Manikuttan before drilling the ball home.

Brunei fell further behind in the second half with Mohanan completing his hat-trick in the 62nd minute with an inch perfect free-kick. Mohammed Aimen added their fifth in the 87th minute.

Aimen hit India's six in second half stoppage time with an effort from distance to complete the victory but despite that they were eliminated from qualification.

The Blue Colts finished with six points from their three matches, and had to wait a nerve-wracking end to the remaining Group H match between Qatar and Bahrain.

Qatar finished top of the group with a perfect record (nine points from three matches), while India ended up second with six points. While the four best second-placed teams (from 11 groups) also qualified, India finished the campaign at number five amongst the group runner-ups.

Al Shaqab Racing's Al Wakrah captures Group 2 PA French Arabian Breeders' Challenge Sprint

Al Wakrah, a seasoned seven-year-old Purebred Arabian mare, showed her class once again to win the Group 2 (PA) French Arabian Breeders' Challenge Sprint over 1400m at Bordeaux, France on Monday. The race drew eight runners, but Al Wakrah's experience and determination secured her another Group (PA) title by the narrowest of margins. Trained by Jean De Mieulle, ridden by Olivier d'Andigne, and carrying the colours of Al Shaqab Racing, Al Wakrah added to an already impressive record that includes victory in the Group 3 (PA) Premio UAE President Cup at San Sebastian in her previous outing, a second-place finish in a Group 2 (PA) in Germany and a Group 1 (PA) winner in the Qatar International Cup over 1400m at Al Uqda. This marks her fifth Group (PA) success.

Soon in midfield in a race led by Zakyna Al Zarayan, Al Wakrah was positioned just ahead of her main danger, Haseef, owned by Wathnan Racing. The early tempo was even, but not fast, with Al Wakrah travelling smoothly in fifth while a small break formed behind her where Haseef and Ghaidaa raced at the rear. As the sprint began approaching the final stretch, Al Wakrah was switched to the outside and ridden forward while Kamun Du Nil briefly took the lead. Moving quickly into second with only one left to pass, she accelerated strongly inside the final 200m, taking the lead. D'Andigné looked to his right for a challenger, but danger came on his left as Haseef surged late, finishing strongly, but failing by a short head. Al Wakrah held on gamely, Haseef finished second and Ghaidaa ran on for third.

Bred by Al Shaqab Racing, Al Wakrah is out of Majida (Majd Al Arab), runner-up in a Listed (PA) race over 1400m at five and third in a Group 3 (PA) over 2000m at four. She is a half-sister to Ghadah (Azadi), winner of a Group 1 (PA) over 2000m at four and a Group 3 (PA) over the same distance, and to Subahiyah (Mahabb), third in a Group 1 (PA) over 2000m at three.



Olivier d'Andigne rides Al Wakrah to Group 2 (PA) French Arabian Breeders' Challenge Sprint victory at Bordeaux, France, on Monday. **PICTURE:** *Robert Polin*

SPORT

CRICKET

No need to temper aggression, captains say

Reuters
Dubai

India captain Suryakumar Yadav and his Pakistan counterpart Salman Agha will not tell their teammates to temper aggression when the arch-rivals clash in a geopolitically-charged Asia Cup contest in Dubai on Sunday.

It will be the first cricket match between the sides since four days of military conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours in May this year.

While players from both sides have shared cordial relations over the years despite geopolitical realities, both the captains were asked if they would instruct their players to dial down their aggression considering the larger context.

"Aggression (is) always there when we take the field," a relaxed-looking Suryakumar said at the captains' pre-tournament media interaction yesterday.

"Without (some degree of) aggression, I don't think you can play the sport. I'm really excited to take the field."

Opposite number Salman also found it unnecessary to try and curb a player's natural aggression as long as it did not spill over the game's confines.

"You don't need to say anything to any player because every individual is different," said Salman.

"If someone wants to be aggressive in the field, they are more than welcome to do that.

"When it comes to fast bowlers, they are always aggressive and you can't stop them because that's what keeps them going.

"So from my side, there is no instruction to anyone as long as it stays in the ground."

While reigning 20-overs world champions India are the firm favourites to retain their title, Pakistan are on a high having beaten Afghanistan in the final of a tri-series, also involving hosts United Arab Emirates, on Sunday.

India have not played T20 Internationals since the home series against England in February but Suryakumar would not call his team undercooked.

"Well, if your preparations are great then you are certainly confident when you take the field," he said.

"Yes, we are playing after quite a while but we came here three-four days back and we had a good time as a team together. Really looking forward to this tournament."



FROM LEFT: Oman's captain Jatinder Singh, Hong Kong's Yasim Murtaza, Pakistan's Salman Agha, Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, India's Surya Kumar Yadav, Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka, Bangladesh's Litton Das and UAE's Muhammad Waseem attend a press conference of the DP World Asia Cup 2025, at Dubai International Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

CYCLING

Bernal wins stage 16 as protesters again hit Vuelta

Protests cause premature finish as Vingegaard remains in red

Reuters
Madrid

Pro-Palestinian protesters disrupted the Vuelta a Espana again yesterday as Colombian Egan Bernal (Ineos Grenadiers) won stage 16, which ended 8km before the scheduled finish at Castro de Herville, with Jonas Vingegaard retaining the overall lead.

The race directors announced on Radio Vuelta that due to a "big protest at three kilometres before the (finish) line", the stage winner would be decided early.

The race had entered the final 15km, with Bernal and Spain's Mikel Landa (Soudal Quick-Step) out in front, and the Colombian won the sprint to the new finish line, with Brieuc Rolland (Groupama-FDJ) coming in third.

A large group of protesters, waving Palestinian flags, had completely blocked the road on the ascent to the line, and the finish was moved to the foot of the climb, on the 167.9km ride from Poio to Mos.Castro de Herville.

Landa and Bernal were part of a 17-man breakaway group early in the stage, and the pair had dropped everyone else by the time the announcement came, and Bernal, a former Tour de France and Giro d'Italia winner, claimed his first Vuelta stage win.

"It's a victory and after the drop from the GC, I really wanted a win," Bernal said.

"In the end, with Landa the cooperation was super good and when we knew that the final would be with eight kilometres left we were like 'okay so we just sprint?'"

The peloton had been content to allow the riders up ahead to stay away, but on the penultimate climb the main bunch began to split, with the general classification contenders forming their own group.



Pro-Palestinian protesters wave flags and shout as the peloton rides by in Poio at the start of the 16th stage of the Vuelta a Espana, a 167.9km race between Poio and Castro de Herville, yesterday. *(AFP)*

VALIANT VINGEGAARD

Vingegaard, who suffered a puncture and needed to take one of his teammates' bikes, came in 15th, almost six minutes behind the stage winner, with the Dane's GC rivals alongside him.

"It's a shame that this has happened again," Vingegaard said yesterday.

"Everyone has the right to protest, but it's unfortunate that it had to happen here and in this way, preventing us from finishing the race."

The pre-race favourite remains 48 seconds ahead of Portugal's Joao Almeida (UAE Team Emirates XRG) with Britain's Tom Pidcock (Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team) third overall, over two and a half minutes down on the red jersey.

Previously there was no winner on stage 11, after organisers ordered the race to finish 3km from the line due to pro-Palestinian protesters causing disruption at the finish in Bilbao.

There were incidents on stage 10 which caused a rider to crash and also during stage five's team time trial when the Israel-Premier Tech team were stopped on the road by a group of protesters holding Palestinian flags. Israel-Premier Tech removed their name from riders' jerseys on Saturday, but the protests have continued, with Javier Romo (Movistar) suffering a crash on Sunday's stage 15.

The Spanish rider was not at the start of yesterday's stage, abandoning the race due to injuries picked up in the crash after a man with a Palestinian flag tried to run up to the riders and a policeman ran across the road towards the spectator.

FOCUS

Afghanistan kick off Asia Cup campaign with win over HK



Afghanistan's Sediqullah Atal (left) and Azmatullah Omarzai gesture during the Asia Cup 2025 Twenty20 match against Hong Kong at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Dubai

Azmatullah Omarzai hammered a 20-ball fifty as Afghanistan thrashed Hong Kong by 94 runs in the opening match of the Asia Cup yesterday.

Afghanistan elected to bat first in Abu Dhabi and posted 188-6 with opener Sediqullah Atal playing the anchor role with an unbeaten 73.

His fifth-wicket partnership of 82 with Omarzai, who hit 53 off 21 balls including two fours and five sixes, proved key for Afghanistan in the Group B fixture.

Afghanistan's bowlers then combined to keep Hong Kong down to 94-9.

Temperatures early on touched 40C but it was the humidity in the evening that tested the fitness of the players who took regular drinks breaks.

Hong Kong bowlers struck two early blows, but Atal stood firm to put on 51 runs with veteran Mohammad Nabi, who made 33, as the two counter-attacked.

Off-spinner Kinchit Shah broke the stand to dismiss Nabi but Atal raised the run-rate with Omarzai, who raised his first T20I fifty - the fastest by an Afghan batter - with three sixes and a four before his departure. Hong Kong, whose fielders dropped five catches, were never in the chase after they slipped to 22-4 inside five overs including two run-outs.

BRIEF SCORES
Afghanistan 188 for 6 (Atal 73*, Omarzai 53, Kinchit 2-24) **beat Hong Kong 94 for 9** (Hayat 39, Naib 2-8, Farooqi 2-16) **by 94 runs**

ENGLAND'S STOKES BACK IN TRAINING

London: England Test captain Ben Stokes has resumed training and fast bowler Mark Wood is in line to return to action next week in a major boost to England's preparations for the Ashes series in Australia later this year.

Stokes missed the fifth and final Test against India at the Oval having hurt his shoulder in the previous match at Old Trafford in July.

Durham head coach Ryan Campbell said the 34-year-old had started batting in the nets and that he had no doubts about the all-rounder's availability for the Ashes series beginning in Perth on Nov 21.

"Over the last week, he's started to hit balls and had a really good session," Campbell told *BBC Radio 5 Live*.

"The batting side of things is going very well but the bowling will take a lot longer. He is being treated very steadily."

Campbell said Stokes must play all five Tests in Australia if England are to reclaim the Ashes urn. The first Ashes Test starts in Perth on Nov 21.

SPOTLIGHT

McIlroy reveals he has taken advice from Federer to avoid golf boredom



Rory McIlroy

AFP
London

Rory McIlroy has revealed advice from tennis legend Roger Federer is providing the inspiration for his battle to avoid becoming bored of golf.

McIlroy became the newest member of golf's career Grand Slam club after his victory in the Masters earlier this year

The Northern Ireland star's fulfilment of his bid to win each of golf's major prizes has left him pondering what can motivate the rest of his career.

After speaking to 20-time Grand Slam winner Federer towards the end of his career, McIlroy believes the answer is to play only the tournaments that he has a special feeling for, regardless of their size and status.

With that in mind, the 36-year-old will play in India for the first time this year and also plans to feature in Australia.

The world number two was criticised last month for skipping the first FedEx Cup event on the PGA Tour.

But McIlroy wanted to take a break before a busy September that began with him winning last week's Irish Open and has now taken him to Wentworth for the BMW PGA Championship before the Ryder Cup in New York.

"I want to go and play in different places in the world and experience things that I haven't experienced before, to be able to do things for the first time 18 years into a career," he told reporters in an interview yesterday.

"I had a chat with Roger Federer, I don't know, a few years ago sort of at the end of his career and he was saying he wanted to go and play a lot of the places he could never play in his career, some of the smaller events, just because a lot of people had never seen him play tennis before.

"I think as time goes on and I get to this stage of my career, I get excited about doing that sort of thing.

"I don't want to name a tournament but you're going back to the same place, the same thing 15, 20 years in a row, it can get a little bit monotonous and a little bit tedious.

"I want to play in the locations that I love to go to, and I want to play the majors and the Ryder Cup. That's it."

McIlroy is not thinking about the end of his competitive career, but the five-time major winner acknowledges his priorities have shifted and he is no longer beholden to the weekly trudge around the golf circuit.

"I don't want to be grinding out here at 50 years of age," he said.

I'll turn up and play the majors and have a nice time but whenever I'm done, I'm done, whenever that is," he said.

"That's certainly not right now, but I'm certainly closer to that point now than I was in 2007 when I turned pro.

"I'll obviously do my bit to make sure I keep my membership on certain tours but I'm going to play where I want to play."



Roger Federer

ATHLETICS

Coe admits 'heat challenges' at Tokyo worlds

'I don't think it's any great secret, we do have some heat challenges'

AFP
Tokyo



World Athletics president **Sebastian Coe** yesterday admitted that the world championships starting in Tokyo this weekend face "heat challenges", after Japan sweltered through its hottest summer on record.

Japan's average temperature between June and August was 2.36C above "the standard value", making it the hottest since records began in 1898, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) has said.

It was the third consecutive summer of record high temperatures, the agency noted. The world championships begin in Tokyo on Saturday, four years after the pandemic-delayed 2021 Olympics were held in the Japanese capital.

Coe told reporters that temperatures, which were still as high as 33C yesterday, would be an issue for the athletes.

"I don't think it's any great secret, we do have some heat challenges in Tokyo," he said.

"We had them actually at the time of the Games in 2021."

Marathon and race walk events at the 2021 Olympics, which were held that year from July 23 to August 8, were moved to the cooler northern city of Sapporo because of heat concerns.

Both events are set to stay in Tokyo for the world championships.Coe said after a meeting of the World Athletics Council that the sport's leaders were discussing the future risks of global warming.

"These are not transient, they're here to stay," he said. "Governments have not stepped up to the plate and sport is going to have to take some unilateral judgements and decisions here. And we have reflected in the past, if we are committed to athlete welfare, then we should probably be openly committed to that," he added.

Coe believes that World Athletics is better equipped to deal with the challenges of global warming than other sporting bodies. "I'm very proud to be able to say with full justification that we have the most accomplished and the most capable health and science team in any international sport, and frankly any sporting organisation," he said. Growth was a topic of discussion during the council meetings, said Coe, who noted World Athletics' revenues are up 38% since 2018.

There were several rules approved during the council meeting, including a fixed running order of man-woman-man-woman for the 4x100m mixed relay beginning with next year's World Athletics Relays in Botswana.

FOCUS

Back from injury, Kitaguchi won't give up title without a fight

Reuters
Tokyo

Haruka Kitaguchi can expect a hero's welcome when she takes to the field at Tokyo's National Stadium for the World Athletics Championships next week but recent injury woes mean the Olympic javelin champion may struggle to defend her title.

The 27-year-old shot to fame in 2023 when her final throw of 66.73 metres in Budapest made her the first Japanese woman to win a world title in a field event.

Her celebrity status in Japan reached new heights last year when she repeated the feat in Paris, becoming the first Japanese woman to win an Olympic track and field gold outside of the marathon.

Kitaguchi's dominance – coupled with her bubbly demeanour and trademark dimpled smile – had marked her out as one of the highlights for local fans at the big event, which is being held in the Japanese capital for the first time in 34 years.

But those expectations fizzled after Kitaguchi, who is based in the Czech Republic, developed inflammation in her right elbow in June. Upon her return to competition last month she placed dead last in the Diamond League final in Zurich.

Still, that has not stopped the Hokkaido native from aiming to defend her title.

"Since I've already experienced how amazing it feels to win a gold medal, I know I love being number one," she said on a video call from Turkiye, where she is spending the final two weeks of training in warm, humid conditions similar to Tokyo.

"So I'm going to give it everything to be the best.

"Aside from my elbow and arm, I feel my overall condition is much better than it was for the Paris Olympics. If I can go into the event in a state where I can throw properly, I'll be pretty confident."

Although only her last throw in Zurich cleared 60m – and just barely at that – Kitaguchi said she was no longer in pain and that reaching that distance without sustaining another injury was a weight off her shoulders.

"My number one fear was that I would get injured and not be able to come back... The 60m result boosted my confidence."



QUIET TEBOGO'S LEGS TO 'DO THE TALKING' IN LYLES 200M BATTLE

Olympic 200m champion Letsile Tebogo said yesterday he would let his "legs do the talking" in his battle with brash American Noah Lyles at the world championships in Tokyo.
The softly spoken Botswanan won his country's first Olympic gold medal in any sport in Paris last year, where Lyles finished third. Tebogo labelled his flamboyant American rival "arrogant" after the race, and Lyles's outsized character is likely to command the global spotlight again when the world championships begin on Saturday. Tebogo said he was comfortable with having "different personalities" in the sport, as he took part in an event with children at a primary school in Tokyo.
"I'm one person who always shies away from the media, but the sport forces me to step up, up my game into becoming a sports personality," said the 22-year-old. "At the end of the day, it's all about what do you want to see: to be on the spotlight or off the spotlight. "For me, I choose off the spotlight and then just my legs do the talking."
Lyles got the better of Tebogo in the 200m in the Diamond League finals in Zurich two weeks ago, edging the Botswanan by two-hundredths of a second. The pair are also set to square off in the 100m in Tokyo. Tebogo is looking to win his first world title after picking up silver in the 100m and bronze in the 200m in Budapest two years ago. He said he felt like "a hero" to Botswanans after his historic Olympic success but vowed not to change his approach in Tokyo.
"Once you invite pressure inside yourself, then it means you are not doing it for yourself, you are doing it for the people," he said.
"Yes, you should do it for the people but it's you first and then the people later. "Once you put pressure inside yourself, it means you have done something wrong."
Tebogo has said that athletics saved him from a life of crime and he is a global ambassador for the Kids Athletics development programme.
He was all smiles during his school visit, banging a traditional Japanese drum to start a race that saw about 100 children scramble under nets and tip-toe over balance beams. He said he felt a responsibility to "inspire kids all over the world". "I'm so excited to see how the Japanese relay culture works and I really can't wait to work with these kids because we had a fun time in Botswana," said Tebogo. "I believe we're also going to have fun here."



Olympic 200m champion and a global ambassador for the Kids Athletics development programme, Letsile Tebogo of Botswana, plays a drum during a visit to a primary school gymnasium yesterday, ahead of the start of the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. *(AFP)*

FORMULA 1

Hamilton will be on the podium this year: Vasseur

Reuters
Monza

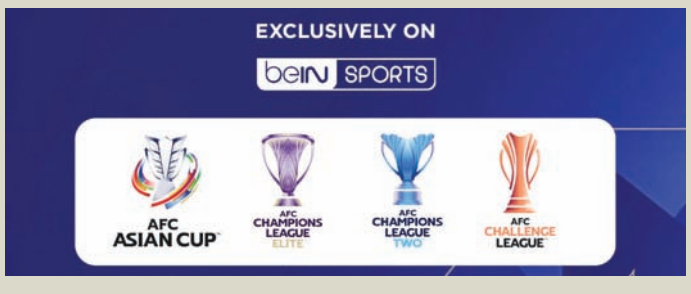
Lewis Hamilton has yet to stand on the Formula One podium as a Ferrari driver but team boss Fred Vasseur has no doubt the seven-times world champion will get there before the end of the season. Hamilton started 10th in Sunday's Italian Grand Prix after a grid penalty and finished sixth, with Ferrari fans showing him plenty of love on his Monza debut in the red overalls worn by so many greats before him.

Vasseur said the support had been a boost and Hamilton's performance in following former Mercedes teammate George Russell – a race winner in Canada – across the line suggested the results would come for the 40-year-old. "Yes, we can expect him to be on the podium," said the Frenchman, who had also expected Ferrari to be on the podium at Monza. Ferrari are second in the constructors' standings, a massive 337 points behind runaway leaders McLaren, but the only team in the top four yet to win – other than Hamilton's victory in a Saturday sprint in Shanghai in March. There is no podium celebration after the sprint.

"I think the energy he received from the tifosi on Wednesday, Thursday in Milano was something very special for him," Vasseur said of Hamilton, who joined from Mercedes in January and had previously raced at Monza as a Ferrari foe. "It was something mega and I think this gave him an extra boost all over the weekend." Hamilton's teammate Charles Leclerc was fourth on Sunday, at a circuit where he won last year, but qualified on pole in Hungary and has a season's best of second in his home Monaco Grand Prix.

beIN confirms Mena-wide broadcast plans for Asian football

DOHA: With the next few weeks bringing increased attention to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), beIN Media Group has announced its AFC coverage plans through 2032, as well as a streamlining of its programming that will see the global sports, entertainment, and media conglomerate broadcast all its Asian football coverage across the entire Middle East and North Africa (Mena) on its flagship beIN Sports channels.
On 15-17 September, the first round of the AFC Champions League Elite (ACL Elite), the most prestigious club competition in Asian football, played by the national league champions and AFC Champions League Two (ACL Two) will get underway on beIN Sports' premium sports channels.
In addition to every round of the three most prestigious club competitions in Asian football, fans can enjoy AFC Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and 2030, two AFC Asian Cups – including the 2027 edition in Saudi Arabia – two AFC Women's Asian Cups, all Men's and Women's Asian Cups across U23, U20 and U17 age-groups, and the AFC Women's Olympic Qualifying tournaments for both Los Angeles 2028 and Brisbane 2032.
Mohammed al-Bader, Managing Director of the MENA Channels at beIN, said: "Our rights package with the AFC is unrivalled and we are delighted to confirm we will broadcast AFC Asian Qualifiers



for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, as well as the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027, and eight more years of elite Asian club competitions all on beIN Sports. Being able to broadcast our Asian Football Confederation coverage across the entire Middle East and North Africa all on beIN Sports is hugely significant for beIN and our business, cementing beIN as the home of Asian football in Mena."
With the draws of the ACL Elite League Stage and ACL Two Group Stage concluding last month, the on-field action gets underway on 15-16 September. The pick of the first round of ACL Elite matches includes reigning champions Al Ahli of Jeddah hosting Uzbekistan's Nasaf, and Japanese champions Vissel Kobe travelling to face Chinese Super League winners Shanghai Port. The first round of the ACL Two Group Stage meanwhile is scheduled for September 16-17 with Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr hosting Tajik outfit Istiklol and last year's defeated finalists Lion City Sailors of Singapore taking on Indonesia's Persib, setting the stage for a thrilling opening campaign.
With beIN's best-in-class studio analysis and the network's state-of-the-art studio facilities, the matches will be broadcast exclusively across 17 Mena territories: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. In addition, beIN has non-exclusive broadcast rights in the following six countries: Chad, Djibouti, Iran, Mauritania, Somalia, and Sudan.
beIN's partnership with the AFC started in 2010, has evolved over the past 15 years, and will run until 2032. The network's comprehensive Asian football coverage adds to its unparalleled sports portfolio across the Mena region, which includes the UEFA Champions League, Premier League, LA LIGA, Ligue 1, AFCON, and a multitude of other sports rights.

SPOTLIGHT

Preparations underway for Qatar Classic Squash Championship

The Qatar Squash Federation is in the final stages of preparation for the Qatar Classic Squash Championship 2025, set to take place from September 28 to October 4 at the Khalifa International Complex, featuring 64 of the world's top-ranked male and female players.

This event marks the first Platinum tournament of the 2025–2026 Professional Squash Association (PSA) World Tour, highlighting its prestige on the international squash calendar.

Leading the star-studded line-up are World No. 1 Mostafa Asal of Egypt and Women's World No. 1 Nouran Gohar, reflecting the tournament's elite status. The men's draw will also feature the return of Peru's Diego Elias, World No. 2 and 2024 champion, alongside New Zealand's Paul Coll (No. 3), Wales' Joel Makin (No. 4), and England's Marwan and Mohamed El Shorbagy.

For the host nation, World No. 22 Abdulla al-Tamimi will lead the Qatari squad, joined by Salem al-Malki and Ali al-Darwish, both competing as wildcard entries.

In the women's competition, Egypt's Nour El Sherbini, World No. 2 and reigning 2024 champion, headlines the field, alongside compatriot Hania El Hammamy (No. 3) and England's Georgina Kennedy (No. 4).

The tournament offers a $231,500 prize pool for both men and women, reinforcing its position as one of the most prestigious Platinum events on the PSA World Tour.

Tariq Zainal, Secretary-General of the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel, and Badminton Federation and Tournament Director, stated that the federation is finalising all organisational and technical arrangements to deliver a world-class championship worthy of its legacy. He emphasised that hosting such a top-tier group of athletes demonstrates the international sporting community's confidence in Qatar's ability to stage major events to the highest global standards.

Zainal also expressed appreciation to QTerminals, the title sponsor, and other partners for their continued support in enhancing the tournament's global stature. Ticket sales have already been launched via the federation's official website, giving fans the opportunity to attend the matches and cheer on their favourite players.



World No. 22 Abdulla al-Tamimi will lead the Qatari squad, joined by Salem al-Malki and Ali al-Darwish, both competing as wildcard entries.

FOOTBALL

Nottingham Forest swoop for Postecoglou after sacking Nuno

Nuno loses his job after his relationship with owner Marinakis had deteriorated

AFP
London

Nottingham Forest appointed Ange Postecoglou as manager yesterday to replace Nuno Espirito Santo, who was sacked following a dispute with club owner Evangelos Marinakis.

Nuno led Forest to European qualification for the first time in 30 years last season by finishing seventh in the Premier League. But he became the first Premier League manager to lose his job this season after publicly stating that his relationship with Greek billionaire Marinakis had deteriorated.

Postecoglou himself was sacked by Tottenham in June just days after winning the Europa League. Despite ending Spurs' 17-year wait to win a trophy, the Australian was dismissed due to Tottenham's worst league season since 1976/77 as they finished 17th.

However, Marinakis backed the 60-year-old to continue his record of winning trophies at Tottenham, Celtic, Yokohama Marinos and during his spell in charge of Australia.

"We are bringing a coach to the club who has a proven and consistent record of winning trophies," said Marinakis. "His experience of coaching teams at the highest level, along with his desire to build something special with us at Forest, makes him a fantastic person to help us on our journey and achieve consistently all our ambitions."

Greek-born Postecoglou will take charge of Forest, who sit 10th in the Premier League on four points after three games, for the first time in Saturday's daunting trip to Arsenal.


Ange Postecoglou will take charge of Forest, who sit 10th in the Premier League on four points after three games, for the first time in Saturday's daunting trip to Arsenal. *(Reuters)*

Marinakis is hoping he can repeat his Europa League success, with Forest among the favourites to win the competition.

But Postecoglou's attacking style is vastly different to the cautious approach that reaped rewards for Nuno at the City Ground. "After gaining promotion to the Premier League, then building consistently season after season to secure European football, we now must take the right step to compete with the very best and challenge for trophies," added Marinakis. "Ange has the credentials and the track-record to do this, and we are excited he is joining us on our ambitious journey."

Nuno took charge in December 2023 after Steve Cooper was sacked and went on to save the club from relegation. Forest surpassed all expectations last season, but cracks in the relationship between Nuno and Marinakis began to show after they let slip a promising opportunity to qualify for the Champions League.

Marinakis appeared to confront Nuno on the pitch following a 2-2 draw against Leicester in May, although the club claimed that was due to the decision to let striker Taiwo Awoniyi play on following an 88th-minute injury that later required urgent abdominal surgery. Nuno was then publicly critical of Forest's transfer activity before the season began, saying that he was "worried" about their prospects and his squad had been left "unbalanced".

Forest eventually brought in 13 players as new sporting director Edu Gaspar took a more hands-on role in signings.

"Following recent circumstances, Nuno Espírito Santo has today been relieved of his duties as head coach," Forest said in a statement released just after midnight on Tuesday morning.

"The club thanks Nuno for his contribution during a very successful era at the City Ground, in particular his role in the 2024/25 season, which will forever be remembered fondly in the history of the club."

WORLD CUP QUALIFYING

Italy avoid disaster, Kosovo stun Sweden

AFP
Paris

Sandro Tonali's last-gasp winner edged Italy to a 5-4 victory over Israel in 2026 World Cup qualifying on Monday, while Kosovo beat Sweden despite Alexander Isak making his first appearance of the season.

After collapsing from leading 4-2 in the final two minutes to drawing 4-4, Tonali's 91st-minute strike in the Hungarian city of Debrecen sent Italy above Israel and into the play-off spot in Group I. New coach Gennaro Gattuso's side trail leaders Norway by three points and still have a chance of taking first place and the group's sole direct qualifying spot as they seek to avoid missing out on a third-consecutive World Cup finals appearance.

"We'll take the win which was crucial for us, but we're completely nuts, nuts because we conceded some absurd goals," said Gattuso. "We need to work on that because we're too fragile, we concede goals too easily. The boys know that, but this is my problem to fix."

Israel, whose players donned black armbands in honour of the victims of Monday's deadly shooting at a bus stop in east Jerusalem carried out by Palestinian gunmen, took an early lead through an own-goal. Moise Kean wiped out the nominal hosts' lead on two occasions before Italy went 4-2 ahead on 81 minutes.

A second Dor Peretz strike in the 88th minute and a clumsy Alessandro Bastoni own-goal two minutes later made it appear the four-time world champions were on course for a disastrous result. But Tonali's speculative effort went through a sea of legs and into the net to spark wild celebrations as the topsy-turvy encounter held one last surprise.


Italy's Giacomo Raspadori (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring during the 2026 World Cup qualifiers against Israel in Debrecen, Hungary. *(AFP)*

Sweden's slow start to their qualifying campaign continued into matchday two as they went down 2-0 to Kosovo in Pristina. The Swedes now sit on just one point after a last-gasp equaliser by Slovenia condemned them to a 2-2 draw on Friday.

Goals in the first half by Elvis Rexhbecaj and Vedat Muriqi were enough to give Kosovo just their second-ever win in World Cup qualifying. Augsburg midfielder Rexhbecaj bundled the hosts ahead on 26 minutes after goalkeeper Robin Olsen saved his initial one-on-one effort. Kosovan captain Muriqi then doubled the lead three minutes before the interval with a powerful strike from the edge of the box.

Premier League record signing Isak was sent on from the bench to try and salvage something for the Swedes inside the final 20 minutes. The Liverpool star had a chance to halve the deficit on 85 minutes but was stoutly denied by 'keeper Arijanet Muric as Kosovo moved second in Group B despite finishing with 10 men.

"(Isak) had only done three training sessions with the team," Sweden boss Jon Dahl Tomasson said. "He had no pre-season with the team and of course no playing time," he added of the 25-year-old who endured a turbulent departure from former club Newcastle.

Switzerland, who beat Kosovo 4-0 last week, stay top of the pool following a dominant first-half display in Basel against Slovenia. The home side ran out 3-0 winners after goals by Nico Elvedi, Breel Embolo and Dan Ndoye inside the first 40 minutes.

Denmark won by the same margin in Greece as they moved top of Group C on four points. They sit level with Scotland, who beat Belarus 2-0 in Zalaegerszeg, Hungary. Croatia took the lead in Group L with a 4-0 home victory over neighbouring Montenegro. Kristijan Jakic opened the scoring in Zagreb, before Montenegro were reduced to 10 men as Andrija Bulatovic saw red. Andrej Kramaric went clear at the top of the qualification goal-scoring chart with his sixth goal of the campaign on 51 minutes, before a late Edvin Kuc own-goal and an Ivan Perisic strike put gloss on the result.

The 2018 World Cup runners-up leapfrogged Czech Republic atop the table with both countries boasting 12 points, although Croatia have a match in hand. Faroe Islands moved to third in the group with a 1-0 win over Gibraltar.

Egypt made to wait for World Cup qualification

Cairo: Egypt's bid to secure World Cup qualification was put on hold after a 0-0 draw against Burkina Faso in a sluggish Group A encounter in Ouagadougou yesterday. Hossam Hassan's unbeaten side moved to 20 points and lead Group A by five points from Burkina Faso, with two matches remaining in the qualifiers.

Egypt suffered an early setback when Manchester City forward Omar Marmoush was forced off through injury in the ninth minute. Egypt's best moment came in the 67th minute when Mohamed Salah set up Osama Faisal but the substitute's strike was ruled offside.

TEDESCO REPLACES MOURINHO AS FENERBAHCE COACH

Former Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco has replaced Jose Mourinho as manager of Turkish outfit Fenerbahce on a two-year contract, the Istanbul club said. The Italian-German manager would be assisted by former team captain Gokhan Gonul.

Tedesco, 39, had coached Belgium from February 2023 until he was sacked last January. He previously managed Schalke, Spartak Moscow and RB Leipzig. Portuguese Mourinho was dismissed on August 29 after the club failed to make the lucrative Champions League league phase, losing to Benfica in the qualification playoffs.

Hopes had been high when the 62-year-old arrived in Istanbul 14 months ago.

But he failed to make good on his dream of ending the title drought that has plagued the 19-times league champions since 2014. The former Chelsea, Real Madrid, Inter Milan, Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur and Roma coach led Istanbul's Yellow Canaries to second place in the league last season behind Galatasaray.

BARCA TO PLAY AT TRAINING GROUND AS CAMP NOU NOT READY

Barcelona will kick off their home LaLiga campaign in front of 6,000 fans at their training ground stadium after Camp Nou renovation delays left the Spanish giants effectively homeless. The club announced on Tuesday that they will face Valencia at the Johan Cruyff Stadium on Sunday, a modest venue at their Sant Joan Despi training facilities on the outskirts of Barcelona.

The move to stage their fourth LaLiga game this season there comes after the iconic Camp Nou renovation fell nine months behind schedule, forcing the club to find a temporary solution. The cramped 6,000-seat venue required LaLiga to grant Barca a special exemption from competition rules requiring first-division clubs to have a minimum capacity of 15,000 seats. League technicians have spent the past week inspecting the Johan Cruyff Stadium facilities and demanding essential adjustments, including VAR camera installations.

Barca had desperately hoped to return to a reduced-capacity Camp Nou with 27,000 spectators, but failed to obtain the necessary permits from Barcelona City Council.

The alternative Lluis Companys Olympic Stadium, where they have been staging their games for the past couple of seasons with the lowest attendance in their recent history, was ruled out after a Post Malone concert left the pitch in poor condition.

The crisis leaves Barcelona, coming off a La Liga title and strong Champions League run, as a club without a home with the season already under way.