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Ganna takes Vuelta a Espana stage 19 time trial victory



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I have nothing to prove, says Forest's new coach Postecoglou

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CRICKET

Pakistan must 'focus on job' in highly charged India clash: coach Hesson

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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Sadd eye third straight win as Duhail chase first victory

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Stars League returns today after the international break, and all eyes will be on Al Sadd's push to stay in the title race and Al Duhail's bid to rescue a faltering campaign. Fourth-placed Al Sadd host Al Shahania in today's early kick-off at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. The Wolves are eager to maintain momentum after back-to-back wins. Coach Felix Sanchez stressed the challenge of refocusing his squad after national team duty.

"When players return from their national team participation, it is important to monitor their feelings and ensure they are fully prepared. Matches are always different after the international break. We know we need points and that the match will be difficult," tehe Spaniard said.

Tenth-placed Al Shahania, still searching for their first win, see the clash as a chance to prove progress. Coach Santi Denia said: "We had a week to prepare well. It will be a difficult match against Al Sadd, but we must keep working to turn our opportunities into goals."

Last season's runners-up Al Duhail, who are ninth in the table with just point, are enduring a nightmare start and host eight-placed today, in search of their first win. Coach Djamel Belmadi admitted his team are in a must-win position. "We have not won yet, and this is unusual for us.





Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez and his Al Duhail counterpart Djamel Belmadi speak to the media yesterday.

We scored only one goal in three matches, which is a very weak indicator. We must impose our style on Umm Salal from the start," he said.

Goalkeeper Salah Zakaria added: "We are fully focused to get back on track. Umm Salal are dangerous on counterattacks, but we have worked hard to fix our mistakes."

But Umm Salal coach Patrice Carteron promised his team will put up a fight. "Al Duhail's poor results do not diminish their value as a major club. For us, the focus is on delivering a strong performance and achieving a positive result," Carteron said.

Sixth-placed Al Gharafa welcome bottom side Al Sailiya today. Gharafa are strong favourites, while Sailiya must stop a three-match losing streak.

Tomorrow, Leaders Al Shamal will aim to extend their dream run when they meet Al Arabi at Al Bayt Stadium. Shamal, who beat Al Sailiya 2-1 in Round 3, are enjoying their best-ever start. Al Arabi, meanwhile, picked up their first win against Umm Salal and want to keep climbing after a slow beginning. Meanwhile, second-placed Qatar SC take on fifth-placed Al Rayyan at Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium in a marquee fixture. Qatar SC are enjoying their best start in years, while Rayyan are buoyed by their win over Al Duhail before the break.

Both teams reinforced heavily during the summer: Qatar added Yann Matheus and Presnel Kimpembe, while Rayyan brought in Wesley and star striker Aleksandar Mitrovic.

WORLD ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIP

Lyles, Alfred the targets in 100m

Lyles will come under pressure from Jamaican's Thompson and Seville

AFP
Tokyo

Olympic champions Noah Lyles and Julien Alfred will take to the track in Tokyo tomorrow for heats of the 100m. Lyles will come under pressure from a top Jamaican duo seeking to break US dominance in the blue riband event. Alfred meanwhile will look to bag another global title for St Lucia, her Olympic gold the first for the tiny Caribbean island. *AFP Sport* looks at three elements of the men and women's 100m:

LYLES, ALFRED IN SPOTLIGHT

There is no doubt that Lyles and Alfred have touched down in the Japanese capital with targets on their backs. Although Lyles had a delayed start to the season, both have tasted success on the Diamond League circuit.

Lyles outran Botswana's Olympic 200m champion Letsile Tebogo in that event in the Diamond League finals in Zurich last month. It was a result the American said had left him "with a lot of energy" heading to Tokyo.

Alfred also notched up a morale-boosting win over 100m in Zurich and was in no doubt about expectations in Japan. "I feel like I want to add another gold in my collection," Alfred said. "I am much fitter than before and also mentally, I am in the right place where I want to be."

THOMPSON LEADS THE HUNTERS

Kishane Thompson, who won Olympic 100m silver just five-thousandths of a second behind Lyles in Paris, could be the biggest threat to the American. Thompson went sixth in the all-time list after running a world-leading 9.75 seconds this season. Fellow Jamaican Oblique Seville has also notched up two victories over Lyles in the Diamond League.

Their form left sprint legend Usain Bolt in no doubt over who would top the podium on Sunday. "There's no reason they shouldn't be 1-2 because they are at the top, fastest times in the world this year and they've been competing for a while," said Bolt. "It's just about one of them executing and it should be fine."

Alfred will be targeted by a raft of sprinters from the US and Jamaican squads, not least American Melissa Jefferson-Wooden. Jefferson-Wooden, 24, became the first woman since 2003 to win the 100-200m double at the US trials.

She has a personal best of 10.65 seconds, making her the joint fifth-fastest woman in history, and is the world-leading time this year. "I know that I'm in great shape and that it's all about putting together the perfect race at the perfect time, when it matters the most, and that is at the world championships in Tokyo," she said.



Saint Lucia's Julien Alfred speaks ahead of the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. *(Reuters)*



Noah Lyles

TEBOGO AND UNLIKELY OUTSIDER

Botswana's Tebogo is seen as the likeliest candidate to gate-crash the US-Jamaican battle in the men's 100m. The 22-year-old is a proven competitor over the shorter sprint and can be expected to be in the battle for a podium place.

He accused Lyles of "arrogance" after the 200m Olympic final, but insists he is content not to have chosen the American's outspoken style. "For me, I choose to be out of the spotlight and then just my legs do the talking," Tebogo said in Tokyo.

It may seem odd to mention the name of Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce in the same sentence as the word outsider, but that is certainly the case in her career-closing world champs.

The 38-year-old Jamaican is a five-time world champion over 100m, and in the last worlds in Budapest in 2023 claimed bronze.

Advancing years means Fraser-Pryce will finally hang up her spikes after Tokyo, having spent an incredible 17 years as a dominant force in women's sprinting.

"I'm looking forward to just finishing the chapter and ending this career in a magnificent way," said the sprinter who has won three Olympic gold medals and 10 world titles, with a total of 25 Olympic and world medals to her name. "And I'm sure it'll work out in Tokyo."

Another relative outsider is Sha'Carri Richardson, who is the defending world champion but whose life off the track sometimes detracts from her on-field ability.

SPOTLIGHT

DuPlantis excited to be back in Tokyo for World Champs after 'apocalyptic' Olympics

AFP
Tokyo

Pole vault world record holder Armand 'Mondo' DuPlantis said yesterday that he hoped the world championships in Tokyo would be more fun than the "apocalyptic" Olympics there four years ago.

The Tokyo Games, delayed a year to 2021 because of the pandemic, were held in strict conditions to prevent the spread of the virus, with fans shut out of most events and athletes forced to undergo tests and social distancing.

DuPlantis won gold and, like other athletes, received his medal wearing a mask in an empty stadium.

There will be no such restrictions when the world championships begin on Saturday, with fans expected to flock to Tokyo's National Stadium, which seats almost 70,000.

DuPlantis is aiming to better his own world record for a 14th time and he said he hoped to enjoy the experience more than the Tokyo Olympics. "It was just strange for everyone, very apocalyptic almost, in a way," said the 25-year-old US-born Swede. "In a lot of ways not enjoyable and just scary. I'm happy to have a more real, true experience where you get the real meaning of sport, which is bringing people together and having a sense of community."

DuPlantis is one of the biggest names competing in Tokyo, where he will chase a third world title. He is being pushed by Greece's Emmanouil Karalis, but DuPlantis is untouchable on his day and arrives in Tokyo fresh from winning at the Diamond League finals.

He also improved his world record to 6.29m in Budapest last month. DuPlantis said he was "pretty calm and pretty chilled" heading into the world championships, where high temperatures are likely to be a factor in several events. "I'm very glad I'm not a marathon runner," said DuPlantis. "I do very short sprints so I wouldn't say we're so much affected by the heat. If anything, it has a benefit."



Sweden's pole vaulter Armand Duplantis and his fiancee Desire Inglander attend an event to celebrate next year's inaugural Ultimate World Athletics Championship in Tokyo yesterday. *(AFP)*

CRICKET

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan must 'focus on job' in highly charged India clash: Coach

AFP
Dubai

Coach Mike Hesson has told his Pakistan team to "focus on the job" in Sunday's highly charged Asia Cup clash with arch-rivals India.

The match in Dubai is the first time that the neighbours will have met in cricket since a brief but deadly border conflict in May and emotions will be running high.

The New Zealander Hesson said yesterday: "I guess, from my perspective, just like any time you enter a match, whether it be a final of a world event or whatever, it's about keeping everybody focused on the job at hand and that'll be no different on the weekend."

The eight-nation Twenty20 tournament began on Tuesday with Afghanistan beating Hong Kong by 94 runs. India crushed hosts the United Arab Emirates by nine wickets on Wednesday.

Pakistan begin their campaign against Oman today, but all the talk is already of world champions India two days later.

"We know that India are obviously hugely confident and rightfully so in terms of how well they've played," Hesson said of the Asia Cup holders, who skittled UAE for just 57 in 13.1 overs.

India cruised to victory in just 4.3 overs. Since winning the World Cup last year they have won 18 of their 21 T20Is.

Hesson is excited to be part of a blockbuster, which will be watched by a packed stadium in Dubai and hundreds of millions of television viewers.

"Look, I've certainly watched many games from afar, so certainly being on the other side of the fence, I guess, being right and amongst such a highly charged event is going to be exciting," he added.

Pakistan enter the Asia Cup with a tri-series win in the UAE also involving Afghanistan and UAE, and confidence is growing.

"We're very much focused on improving as a team, sort of day by day, and not getting too far ahead of ourselves," said Hesson.

Hesson praised Pakistan's spin depth while calling Mohammad Nawaz the best spinner in the world. When asked if Sunday's game would be a battle of wrist spinners, with India having Varun Chakravarthy and Kuldeep Yadav in the ranks, Hesson said: "I don't think you can expect that this pitch is going to spin like it did in Sharjah. Even yesterday, Kuldeep Yadav didn't spin a huge amount. You know, whenever you got wrist spinners like that, you know it doesn't really matter about the surface as much."

Hesson then highlighted Pakistan's variety in spin attack.

"I guess the beauty of our side is we've got five spinners. We've got Mohammed Nawaz who is the best spin bowler in the world at the moment and he's been ranked that over the last six months since his come back in the side. We've had Abrar and Sufiyan do as well as he has," Hesson said.

In the ICC T20I rankings, Nawaz stands at the 30th position on the other hand Kuldeep is at 39. In terms of wickets Nawaz has 70 wickets in 71 T20I matches and Kuldeep has 73 wickets in only 41 matches.

India, Pakistan, Oman and UAE are in Group A while Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Bangladesh form Group B.



Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson attends a press conference at Dubai International Stadium yesterday, on the eve of their Asia Cup Twenty20 match against Oman. *(AFP)*

ASIA CUP

Litton leads the way as Bangladesh beat Hong Kong

BANGLADESH STARTED THEIR CAMPAIGN WITH A 7-WICKET WIN

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Skipper Litton Das top-scored with 59 as Bangladesh beat a spirited Hong Kong by seven wickets in their first match of the Asia Cup yesterday.

Hong Kong posted 143-7 after Nizakat Khan made 42 in the T20 meeting in Abu Dhabi where the minnows were invited to bat first.

Bangladesh lost two early wickets in their chase to raise Hong Kong hopes of an upset but Litton put on a stand of 95 with Towhid Hridoy, who made an unbeaten 35, to reach 144-3 in 17.4 overs. Litton reached his 50 in 33 balls but fell to medium-pace bowler Ateeq Iqbal before Towhid hit the winning run for a team that came into the T20 tournament with three successive series victories.

"Very important to win the first game," said Litton, who was named player of the match.

"Last couple of series, we have played good cricket. But in Asia Cup, little bit of pressure comes automatically. We played well today. Last couple of years, our pace department has done really well. We were looking for a leg-spinner and Rishad, in the last two or three years has done well for us."

Bangladesh registered their first T20 win against Hong Kong, who had defeated the Tigers in their only previous meeting in 2014.

It was Hong Kong's second straight defeat in Group B, which includes Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan beat Hong Kong by 94 runs in the tournament opener.

Hong Kong lost two early wickets before Nizakat paired up with Zeeshan Ali, who made 30, in a third-wicket stand of 41.

Nizakat then got into another partnership of 46 with skipper Yasim Murtaza, who hit 28 off 19 balls, as the two counter-attacked.

Murtuza was run out and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain struck twice in the next over, including taking Nizakat's key wicket, as the Hong Kong batting line-up stuttered towards the end.

"I am happy with the way our batters scored," said Murtaza.

"But I will be happier if we got 160-170 plus – that would be a different total."

Pace bowler Tanzim Hasan Sakib stood out with figures of 2-21 from his four overs. Taskin Ahmed and Rishad also took two wickets each.

In reply, Bangladesh slipped to 47-2 before Litton and Towhid rebuilt the innings and then bossed the opposition bowling.

Pakistan will open their campaign today against Oman in Dubai.


Bangladesh's captain Litton Das runs between the wickets during the Asia Cup match against Hong Kong at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. *(AFP)*

Along with regional bragging rights, the Twenty20 competition will serve as a build-up towards the T20 World Cup in February-March in India and Sri Lanka.

BRIEF SCORES: Bangladesh 144 for 3 (Litton 59, Hridoy 35, Iqbal 2-14) **beat Hong Kong 143 for 7** (Nizakat 42, Zeeshan 30, Sakib 2-21, Rishad 2-31) **by seven wickets.**

FOCUS

South Africa beat England by 14 runs in rain-marred T20

AFP
Cardiff, United Kingdom

Marco Jansen and Corbin Bosch took two wickets apiece as South Africa beat England by 14 runs on the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method in a rain-marred first T20 in Cardiff yesterday.

Bad weather reduced what should have been a 40-over contest at Sophia Gardens to just 12.5 in total. England chasing a revised 69 in five overs for victory, finished on 54-5 as they failed to keep pace with a daunting run rate of nearly 14 an over against a quality attack.

Jansen (2-18) and Bosch (2-20) did the bulk of the damage in an England innings where only Jos Buttler (25) passed 20.

Earlier, several South Africa batsmen made quickfire 20s in a total of 97-5 in 7.5 overs after Brook won the toss.

South Africa captain Aiden Markram struck 28 off 14 balls, with two fours and two sixes, although he was dropped in the deep by Phil Salt.

Donovan Ferreira, the player of the match, hit three sixes in his 25 not out and Dewald Brevis made 23.

Fast bowler Luke Wood was only playing after the hosts decided against risking Jofra Archer in the wet conditions following the express quick's four-wicket haul in England's record 342-run win over South Africa in the third ODI at Southampton.

But Wood had opener Ryan Rickelton caught behind for a golden duck in a haul of 2-22.

"It feels like madness, but you can think about things. It was swinging about with the new ball, but you need one or two guys to make a cameo and you can reach a good score," said Markram who led the Proteas to a 2-1 ODI series win, at the presentation ceremony.

England captain Harry Brook added: "We can't read into that too much. We didn't execute as well as we could have done."

Both Salt, who holed out off the very first ball of the chase to the returning Kagiso Rabada, and Brook were out for ducks.

In between Jacob Bethell, fresh from his maiden professional century at Southampton, made seven before he skyed Jansen to cover.

Buttler kept England in the hunt before he was caught behind, off Jansen's last ball of the fourth over.

England now needed 26 off six balls and Bosch, who dismissed Tom Banton with the opening delivery of the last over, ensured they never really got close, with South Africa going 1-0 up in this three-match series ahead of Friday's second T20 at Old Trafford.

BRIEF SCORES: South Africa 97 for 5 in 7.5 overs **beat England 54 for 5** in 5 overs **by 14 runs via DLS method.**


South Africa's Marco Jansen celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of England's Jacob Bethell during their Twenty20 match at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff. *(Reuters)*

India's Dube credits coach Morkel after crucial spell in Asia Cup win over UAE

Shivam Dube impressed in India's crushing nine-wicket win over the United Arab Emirates at the Asia Cup on Wednesday and the all-rounder credited bowling coach Morne Morkel with the tactical tweaks and advice that led to his three-wicket haul. UAE were skittled for 57 runs in the Twenty20 match, with Dube recording career-best figures of 3/4 and Kuldeep Yadav picking up four wickets, before India chased down their target in just 4.3 overs.

"Morne has been working with me since I came back into the Indian team for the England series," Dube told reporters.

"He told me to bowl a line that is slightly outside the off-stump. He also worked with me in developing a slower delivery and tweaked my run-up a bit. The head coach and the skipper had told me that my bowling will have a role to play."

Dube's bowling has improved significantly in the past year, with half of his 16 wickets in 36 T20I matches coming in his last four innings with the ball, but he was quick to shut down any comparisons with established all-rounder Hardik Pandya. "Hardik is like a brother from whom I tend to learn a lot as he has way more experience both in IPL and international cricket compared to me," Dube said.

"Comparison, I never thought of, as my only endeavour is to learn as much as I can from his vast experience."

India next play Pakistan on Sunday while UAE take on Oman the following day, with the tournament hosts looking to bounce back from a batting collapse which saw them record their lowest total in a T20I.

"For our batters, to be very honest, they were playing (India's world-class bowlers) for the first time," UAE head coach Lalchand Rajput told reporters. "They were overawed by India's big names. We should have batted 20 overs. But nevertheless, I think this is a learning process for us."


India's Shivam Dube (left) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of UAE's Dhruv Parashar during the Asia Cup match in Dubai on Wednesday. *(AFP)*

VUELTA A ESPANA

Ganna claims stage 18 as Almeida gains time on Vingegaard

'IT'S JUST A PITY THAT IT WAS NOT 27KM, BUT IT IS WHAT IT IS'

AFP
Valladolid, Spain

Italian Filippo Ganna tore through the final third of yesterday's shortened individual time trial to win stage 18 of the Vuelta a Espana in Valladolid, and third-placed Joao Almeida gained 10 seconds on overall leader Jonas Vingegaard.

Time trial specialist Ganna was fifth out of the gate and set a time of 13 minutes, but the Ineos Grenadiers rider then had an agonisingly long wait to see if he had repeated his success of two years ago in the same city.

With the aim of ensuring greater protection for the stage after the disruptions caused by pro-Palestinian protesters during this year's race, the organisers of La Vuelta decided to shorten the route to 12.2km instead of the scheduled 27.2km.

"Obviously, with the news of the change in the parcours last night it was a bit strange, but I tried to do all the best today," Ganna said.

"I hope it's enough, we cross the fingers. If someone was stronger than me, I will just say 'chapeau!"

Nobody was stronger, though Australian Jay Vine (UAE Team Emirates-XRG) came close, finishing one second off the Italian to take second place, with his Portuguese teammate Almeida a further seven seconds behind, and now 40 seconds off Vingegaard. "I think I did the best I could," Almeida said. "It's just a pity that it was not 27km, but it is what it is."

Almeida and Vingegaard are locked in their own GC battle, and with three stages remaining, including a mountain stage on Saturday, the pre-race favourite and two-times Tour de France winner Vingegaard, who was ninth in yesterday's time trial, still holds the red jersey.



Team Ineos' Italian rider Filippo Ganna celebrates on the podium after winning the 18th stage of the Vuelta a Espana, a 26km race against the clock between Valladolid and Valladolid yesterday. *(AFP)*

"I think I can be happy with my performance and I'm still in the lead so I'm happy with how today turned out," the Dane said.

Ganna, who also has seven Giro d'Italia stage wins to his name of which six came in time trials, was the hot favourite to take the stage, and although he began slowly, outside the top 10 at the first intermediate check, nobody could match the Italian in the last four kilometres. "I struggled to find my rhythm in the first part of the course, so then I just tried to push with everything I had, without thinking about the numbers or anything," Ganna said.

Almost two hours after Ganna finished, Vine looked like claiming his third stage win of this year's race, but the mountains classification leader fell just short.

Ganna then had to wait for the top GC riders before he could celebrate.

"I think I suffered more in the last three hours in the hot seat than on the bike," Ganna said.

Yesterday's stage passed off without disruption, although Spanish authorities told Reuters that two protesters were arrested in Valladolid's University Square.

During stage five's team time trial, when the race reached Spain for the first time, protesters waving Palestinian flags halted the Israel-Premier Tech riders.

Stage 11 in Bilbao was stopped with 3km to go – with no winner awarded – due to protesters blocking the road, while stage 16's finish line was changed mid-race to the 8km-to-go banner.

CYCLING

Pogacar warms up for world championships with races in Canada

AFP
Quebec City

Tadej Pogacar says a 47-day break since his latest Tour de France triumph has left him rested and ready to launch his build up to the world championships with two races in Canada.

The 26-year-old Slovenian crushed his rivals to collect a fourth Tour de France title, but opted out of the Vuelta a Espana to recover and will return to action in today's Quebec Grand Prix before tackling the Montreal Grand Prix on Sunday.

"It's my first race back after the Tour, so I will have to see how my legs are turning," he told reporters in Quebec, noting that late-season fatigue was nothing new. "It's like every year," he said. "It's always difficult to be in good shape at the end of the season, but I have some motivation left for the six races I have left.

"I hope my peak will be at the world championships. The championships are the main goal of this part of the season," added Pogacar, who will be defending his title in the world championship road race in Rwanda on September 28.

He will also compete in the September 21 world championship time trial, where he hopes to challenge two-time defending champion Remco Evenepoel of Belgium.

"I trained quite a few trainings on the TT bike," he said. "It was more than usual. We will see how it will go in the world championships ... I always like the discipline, but you need to have a great day on the spot."

Pogacar's biggest challengers in Canada are expected to be Belgians Wout Van Aert and Arnaud De Lie.

While he has claimed victory twice in Montreal, in 2022 and 2024, he has never won in Quebec, where he finished seventh last year when he was reeled in by the peloton at the top of Montagne Hill, just a few hundred meters from the finish line.

This year the roller-coaster finishes of recent editions have been replaced by steady ascent of two kilometres before the finish line.

"I think in general it can be easier, but the final sprint will be, I think, harder than the previous edition," he said.

After the two Canadian classics and the world championships Pogacar still has the European Championships in Drome-Ardeche, where he will only compete in the October 5 road race before wrapping up the season at the Tour of Lombardy a week later, which he has won for the last four years.



Norman officially steps down from LIV Golf

Greg Norman, the first CEO of LIV Golf, has officially moved on from the Saudi-backed tour.

"After four unforgettable years, I have officially closed out my time with LIV Golf, and reflecting with nothing but gratitude, pride and achievement," Norman posted on Instagram.

"Together, we built a movement that changed the game globally. We created opportunities for both players and fans and broaden the ecosystem of golf. We truly globalised the game and expanded golf's reach to fans around the world. We brought entertainment, innovation and private equity into golf (including to the PGA Tour) positioning the sport as an asset class. It's been an incredible chapter,

and I'm so proud of what we accomplished. My commitment to do what was and still is, the right thing for golf, the players and fans never waivered (sic).

"Thank you to everyone who has been part of the journey with me during this time. I'll always look back on this time with great fulfilment and appreciation.

"As for what's next ... stay tuned! Exciting times ahead. Onward to the next adventure."

Norman, 70, was the original CEO when the upstart golf league launched in 2021 and was involved in recruiting several high-profile players from the PGA Tour and European circuit. He was replaced as the CEO and commissioner by Scott O'Neil in January.

The two-time major winner, an Australian known as "The Shark" during his PGA Tour career, had remained with the tour in an unnamed position. Golf Digest reported that his contract expired in August.

In January, Norman joined the organising board for the 2032 Summer Olympics in Brisbane, Australia.

LIV Golf recently completed its fourth season.

Talks of a merger with the PGA Tour have stalled since April, when the PGA Tour rejected a reported $1.5bn reunification offer.

TENNIS

Hewitt to appeal ban, hits out at timing

AFP
Sydney

Unrepentant Australian Davis Cup captain Lleyton Hewitt vowed yesterday to appeal against a two-week suspension for shoving a doping control official, hitting out at the timing of the decision.

The former world number one was slapped with the sanction and a Aus$30,000 ($19,800) fine on Wednesday following an independent tribunal ruling under the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme.

He was charged in January after pushing a 60-year-old volunteer anti-doping chaperone following Australia's Davis Cup semi-final defeat to Italy in Spain two months previously, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) said.

The two-time Grand Slam winner denied the charge, citing self-defence. The case was referred to an independent tribunal and, following a hearing in Sydney in July, chairman Michael Heron upheld the charge of offensive conduct.

But the suspension will only take effect from September 24, meaning he is free to captain Australia in their second-round qualifier against Belgium in Sydney this weekend. "I'm just really disappointed about the overall decision but also the whole process to be honest, and the lack of facts that have been put out," Hewitt said at Ken Rosewall Arena. "I'll be going to the appeal process with my legal team, so I won't be talking about it any further." Asked if he considered stepping down this weekend in light of the ban, he replied: "No."

"Unlike the ITIA and the ITF, I won't be making it a distraction for the Davis Cup," he added. "This competition means too much. I think deep down it will make the boys even stronger to go out there and get the job done."

During his suspension, Hewitt will be unable to take part in all tennis-related activities including coaching, mentoring, playing, captaincy and other associated roles.

ATHLETICS

I could have run 9.42 in super-spikes, says Bolt

Reuters
Tokyo

Usain Bolt, whose 9.58 seconds world record for the 100m is now 16 years old, says he could have run 9.42 in the carbon-plated "super-spikes" that today's sprinters are racing in.

The Jamaican set his mark at the 2009 world championships in Berlin, breaking his own 9.69 record from the previous year's Beijing Olympics, and it has now stood for longer than the 14 years of Jim Hines's 9.95 set at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.

Research by Puma, the company that shod him through his glorious era of dominance, predicted that Bolt would run 9.42 in today's shoes and, speaking at an event ahead of the world championships in Tokyo, he said: "I fully agree."

"Someone who continued after I retired was Shelly-Anne Fraser-Pryce and I saw what she did – she got faster with the spikes," Bolt said yesterday.

"I probably would have run way faster if I'd continued and if I knew that spikes would have got to that level maybe I would have, because it would have been great to compete at that level and running that fast."

Bolt's compatriot Kishane Thompson ran 9.75 at the Jamaican championships in June – the fastest time by anyone for 10 years to make him the sixth-fastest of all time – but Bolt said he was not worried about anyone breaking his record anytime soon.

"I think the talent is there and those who are coming up will do well but, at this present moment, I don't think they will be able to break the world record," he said.

Bolt retired in 2017 with six Olympic and seven world individual 100m and 200m golds, and no Jamaican man has won a global sprint title since his Rio Olympic double in 2016.

Thompson came within five thousandths of a second of ending the drought when he was pipped on the line by Noah Lyles in last year's Olympic 100m final and Bolt says he, or compatriot Oblique Seville, could go one better in Sunday's 100m.



Usain Bolt poses ahead of the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo yesterday. *(Reuters)*

"I think we have a very good chance this year. Kishane and Oblique have really showed this season that they're really doing extremely well," Bolt said.

"I'm looking forward to it, I mean they should be one-two because they've proved they are running fast times so it's just all about execution. So I'm happy to go into the stadium and see and hopefully I'll be able to present the gold medal to one of them."

Tokyo will be the first global athletics event Bolt has attended since his farewell at the London world championships in 2017, though whether he presents the medals is likely to depend on who is doing the receiving.

Bolt might find himself otherwise engaged if it is defending champion Lyles on the top step.

He said he has no issues with the American, despite having a social media spat with him a few years back, and despite Lyles getting under Jamaica's skin by announcing that he had Thompson "in his pocket" earlier this season.

"I don't think Noah is as crazy as dealing with Justin (Gatlin), so for me it's no different," Bolt said of his former rival. "I think Gatlin over the years, we pushed back and forth, but he was a different breed because he came up in the era where trash talking was just normal to everybody.

"As you know I never listened to anybody, I know when I'm preparing and I'm ready you can say whatever you want you're not going to beat me so I'm always focusing so it would never be a problem."

FOOTBALL

I have nothing to prove: Forest's new coach Postecoglou

'I'll win things here and people will still have doubts about me'

Reuters
Nottingham

Ange Postecoglou said he had nothing to prove at his official unveiling as Nottingham Forest's new manager yesterday, saying he hoped to add another chapter to the club's storied history.

"I don't see it as a point to prove. You let your actions speak for themselves," the bullish 60-year-old told reporters at his first news conference at the City Ground since being named as Nuno Espirito Santo's successor. "You have to understand the responsibility you have. You have to provide joy to the supporters – that's why football clubs exist. They are the lifeblood of this game. That's all I care about. I'll win things here and people will still have doubts about me."

Postecoglou was axed by Tottenham Hotspur in June, days after winning the Europa League, a decision he knew was coming after the London club's 17th-placed finish in the Premier League. "It wasn't great, I knew it was coming a fair way before the Europa League final," he said. "It's allowed me to move into this and maybe these things happen for a reason."

During a rare close-season off, Postecoglou did not know when, or if, another chance to manage in the Premier League would arise but on Saturday he returns to north London for his first game in charge, away to Arsenal. "I was actually on the school run when the call came. It developed over the weekend but came to a head on the Monday," he said. "Once we'd got into discussions, it didn't take too much for me to realise it was a great opportunity. If you asked me at the start of the year if a job with Nottingham Forest was a possibility then I'd have said no because of the job Nuno had done."

Usually a new coach takes over a struggling team, but Espirito Santo put Forest back in Europe last season after a seventh-placed Premier League finish – 27 points better off than Postecoglou's Tottenham. However, a falling out between Espirito Santo and Forest's owner Evangelos Marinakis, meant the Portuguese was doomed.

"The opportunity presented itself because of the work I've done," Postecoglou, who delivered Tottenham's first trophy since 2008 and twice won the Scottish title for Celtic, said. "That's opened doors for me."



New Nottingham Forest manager Ange Postecoglou poses for a photograph in the stands before his unveiling in Nottingham. *(Reuters)*

Postecoglou will need to win over Forest fans who will point to Tottenham's lamentable league season. "They are not going to love me from the first day, I've got to earn their respect. It's a unique club where if you get that momentum, great things can happen," he said. "Hopefully I can bring some special times to this club."

Postecoglou was criticised for sticking rigidly to his attacking style of play at Tottenham and said he would not make apologies for doing things his own way. "I do like my teams to play exciting football and score goals. I want fans to be excited," he said. "But it is all with the end goal of winning football games."

With his Greek heritage, Postecoglou will at least have something in common with Marinakis whose relationship with Espirito Santo deteriorated so quickly. "I love the fact that he's taken a club with a fantastic history but were in the Championship, into Europe. That tells you a lot about the kind of person he is," Postecoglou said.

Postecoglou faces the toughest of starts at Arsenal.

"It is what it is," he said. "First four games are away so I got a good look at the stadium today. Every Premier League fixture is challenging. It's a great game."

HORSE RACING

Al Shaqab Racing's Aylin claims Group 2 May Hill Stakes

Aylin, a talented two-year-old filly, produced a powerful late run to capture the Gr.2 Betfred May Hill Stakes over 1600m, a race restricted to two-year-olds, at Doncaster in the United Kingdom yesterday.

She broke her maiden in July over 1400m on heavy ground at Goodwood and ran a strong third in the Gr.3 Virgin Bet Prestige Fillies' Stakes over the same course. Stepping up in trip, she improved again and is now a Gr.2 winner.

Trained by Karl Burke, ridden by David Egan, and owned by Al Shaqab Racing & Amo Racing, Aylin continues to rise rapidly through the juvenile ranks.

Soon at the rear, the field split into two groups, with Aylin tracking the far-side group led by Timeforshowcasing, while Swift Winds set the pace for the smaller near-side trio. Both groups went a steady early tempo before merging as the pace increased. Aylin came under pressure and was briefly off the bridle, still near the back as Timeforshowcasing came under pressure. Approaching the final 2f, Pacific Mission loomed up to take the lead, with Sugar Island in close pursuit. Aylin, switched wide for a clear run after weaving through rivals, quickened smartly to overhaul both challengers and win decisively by three-quarters of a length. Pacific Mission finished second, while Sugar Island kept on for third.

Bred by Yeomanstown Stud, Aylin is out of Angelic Light, a Listed winner over 1200m at two. She is a half-sister to Sturlasson, a 1000m winner at three, and to Fuji Mountain, a dual 1000m winner at two.



David Egan rides Aylin to Group 2 Betfred May Hill Stakes win at Doncaster in the United Kingdom yesterday. **PICTURE**: *Steve Davies*

Chelsea face 74 charges over alleged breaches of agent rules

London: Chelsea were charged by the Football Association with 74 alleged breaches of rules related to payments to agents between 2009 and 2022.

The FA said the charges primarily relate to the period between the 2010/11 and 2015/16 seasons. The Premier League club has until September 19 to respond. Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich transformed Chelsea's fortunes after buying the west London club in 2003.

He sold the Blues in May 2022 to a consortium led by American investor Todd Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital. Chelsea issued a statement saying the club were "pleased to confirm that its engagement with the FA concerning matters that were self-reported by the club is now reaching a conclusion". "The club's ownership group completed its purchase of the club on May 30, 2022," the statement said.

"During a thorough due diligence process prior to completion of the purchase, the ownership group became aware of potentially incomplete financial reporting concerning historical transactions and other potential breaches of FA rules. Immediately upon the completion of the purchase, the club self-reported these matters to all relevant regulators, including the FA."

Chelsea said they had "demonstrated unprecedented transparency" and would continue working with the FA. In July 2023, Chelsea agreed a resolution with European football's governing body to hand over 10mn euros ($11.7mn, £8.6mn) after owning up to "incomplete financial reporting" under the Abramovich regime.

UEFA said it had been "proactively" approached with the information by Chelsea's new ownership group. Abramovich was sanctioned by the British government in March 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

He was described by ministers as part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle but has denied financial ties to the Kremlin. In June this year the British government threatened the former Chelsea owner with legal action over the frozen £2.5bn generated from the sale of the club. Ministers want the funds to be directed towards humanitarian purposes in Ukraine, but the oligarch insists they be used for all victims of the conflict, including in Russia.

SPOTLIGHT

Madrid to host 2027 Champions League final

Reuters
Zurich

Madrid and Warsaw will host the 2027 men's and women's Champions League finals respectively, UEFA announced yesterday, but European footballs governing body did not take a decision on requests from La Liga and Serie A to play a league match abroad.

The Executive Committee met in Tirana and decided the men's Champions League final will be played at the Estadio Metropolitano, home of Atletico Madrid and the venue where Liverpool beat Tottenham Hotspur in the 2019 final. The women's final will be held at the National Stadium in Warsaw. UEFA also announced that its Super Cup match next year will take place in Salzburg, Austria. The 2026 men's Champions League final will be held at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, while the women's showpiece match will take place at the Ullevaal Stadion in Oslo.

Meanwhile, Italy's football federation (FIGC) in July gave Serie A the green light to allow AC Milan to take on Como in Perth, Australia, while La Liga hopes to move Villarreal's game against Barcelona to Miami in December after the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) last month approved the request.

UEFA said it would consult all stakeholders, including fans, before making a decision on the Serie A and La Liga matches. "The Executive Committee discussed the requests from the RFEF and FIGC to approve the playing of one domestic league match each outside the home country, in particular outside the UEFA territory," UEFA said in a statement.

"The committee acknowledged it as an important and growing issue but expressed the desire to ensure that it has the views of all stakeholders before coming to a final decision. There are many issues to resolve and as the European governing body, UEFA has a responsibility to take all such factors into account."

Supporters' groups from across Europe had voiced their opposition to attempts from European leagues to stage domestic matches outside the country. They labelled the plans 'absurd' and said the concept undermines the rules of the competition for short-term financial gain.

FOCUS

City 'keeper Donnarumma ready for challenge of world's best league

AFP
London



Manchester City's new goalkeeper **Gianluigi Donnarumma** is ready to prove himself in the "best league in the world" after leaving Paris Saint-Germain.

Donnarumma linked up with City for the first time yesterday following his £30mn ($40mn) switch to the Premier League club on transfer deadline day. The 26-year-old won the Champions League and his fourth French title last season, but PSG boss Luis Enrique surprisingly made it clear that Donnarumma was no longer first choice at the Parc des Princes.

That paved the way for his move to City, with a potential debut for the Italian in Sunday's Manchester derby at the Etihad Stadium. "It's a new chapter in my life and my career. Playing in the Premier League with Manchester City is a great emotion for me and I'm ready for this challenge," Donnarumma said.

"I've always dreamt about playing in the Premier League as it's the best league in the world. For a player, I think achieving in the Premier League is the maximum for his career, therefore I'm really happy to be here. I'm willing to take to the pitch for this club, who has been trying so much to sign me and I hope I can pay that trust back."

Having arrived in Manchester after spending the international break with Italy, Donnarumma is trying to get up to speed with boss Pep Guardiola, his new teammates and the club's facilities. "It's a club that has always fascinated me," he said.

"I've always followed City with pleasure. I see everything around me like the training centre and the stadium, they are fantastic. You can't tell what the club values are until you really see it with your own eyes.

"The buildings and the staff here are fantastic so I'm proud to be here and happy about the choice I've made and I hope I will make history here and win as many trophies as possible, that is my goal. I am fully focused on my new challenge here now to make history and become a symbol for the city and for the club."

FIFA U-turn allows Athletic Bilbao to sign Laporte

Bilbao, Spain: Athletic Bilbao will sign Aymeric Laporte after world football governing body FIFA changed their stance. The Basque side tried to bring in the Spanish defender from Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr on September 1 but the move was not completed before the transfer deadline.

FIFA last week rejected a request from the Spanish football federation (RFEF) to make an exception for Laporte's move, but Athletic said the RFEF request has now been granted after they sought to overturn the decision. Spanish media said Al Nassr had not filled in the details of the transfer online into FIFA's Transfer Matching System.

Laporte, 31, left Athletic for Manchester City in 2018 before joining Al Nassr in 2023.

ERIKSEN SIGNS WITH WOLFSBURG

Denmark international Christian Eriksen has joined German Bundesliga club Wolfsburg on a free transfer until 2027, the club announced. Eriksen, 33, had been a free agent since his contract with Manchester United expired in the summer.

Wolfsburg is Eriksen's third club since he suffered a cardiac arrest during Denmark's game against Finland at the Euros in 2021. Although he made a comeback after being fitted with an implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD), he was forced to leave his then-club Inter Milan as Italian regulations prevent athletes from competing with ICDs. After a highly-successful six-month spell at Brentford, Eriksen joined United in 2022. Although he was initially a success, he gradually fell out of favour, first under Erik ten Hag and then even more so under Ruben Amorim, and left the club at the end of last season.

Eriksen, who also played for Tottenham and Ajax earlier in his career, has 144 Denmark caps, scoring 46 goals. Eriksen becomes the sixth Danish member of Wolfsburg's squad alongside Joakim Maehle, Jesper Lindstrom, Andreas Skov Olsen, Jonas Wind and Adam Daghim.

VENEZUELA SACK COACH AFTER WC HOPES END

Venezuela sacked coach Fernando Batista on Wednesday night, a day after their World Cup qualification dream died and after an intervention by the country's president. News of Argentine Batista's sacking, alongside his entire backroom staff, came after President Nicolas Maduro had called for a "restructuring of the technical staff".

That was 24 hours after Venezuela, known as the Vinotinto, were thumped 6-3 at home by neighbours Colombia, ending their hopes of reaching a World Cup for the first time. "Yesterday we suffered a painful defeat," said Maduro. "All of Venezuela demands a restructuring of the technical staff of the Vinotinto, a reorganisation of the strategy, of the doctrine and of the line of combat and hard work."

The decision by the sport's world governing body FIFA to expand the 2026 World Cup in North America from 32 to 48 teams had boosted the hopes of teams like Venezuela – the only side in the CONMEBOL federation never to qualify for a finals – to make it to the global extravaganza for the first time.

But their defeat to Colombia meant that Bolivia – 1-0 winners over five-time champions Brazil – pipped them to a place in the intercontinental play-offs. Peru, whose hopes of World Cup qualification had ended before the final round of matches, also sacked their coach, Oscar Ibanez.