To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
44466635



BASKETBALL | Page 2

QBF conducts league draw and launches Super Cup



TENNIS | Page 3

Djokovic overcomes exhaustion to reach quarters

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Wednesday, October 8, 2025
Rabia II 16, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES
SPORT



FOOTBALL

Goal-shy Salah seeks change as Egypt eye World Cup place

Page 4

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Mental focus key, says coach Lopetegui as Qatar face Oman

Only the group winner is guaranteed automatic qualification to the next year's World Cup

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

Qatar head coach Julen Lopetegui has underlined the high stakes and intense pressure surrounding his side's upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers play-off match against Oman, which will be played today at 6pm at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Al Sadd.

The Group A encounter marks the opening round of the fourth stage of the AFC Asian Qualifiers, with the United Arab Emirates also part of the group with matches to be played in a single round-robin format. Group B hosts Saudi Arabia will have Iraq and Indonesia for company.

Only the group winner is guaranteed automatic qualification to the next year's World Cup, which will be co-hosted by USA, Canada and Mexico. A final qualifying chance is available to the runners-up of each group, who will square off in a two-legged showdown across November 13 and 18. This Knockout Stage will determine the Asian representative at the FIFA Play-Off Tournament, where they will have to fend off opponents from other confederations to claim one of two berths.

Speaking at a press conference ahead of the match, Lopetegui stressed the importance of mental focus and readiness in this critical stage. "We are heading into a decisive and pivotal stage with two crucial matches requiring the highest levels of mental preparedness," said the Spanish coach, who took charge of the team in May.

The former Spain and Real Madrid manager acknowledged the strength of the Omani side, now led by veteran Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz, who had a brief stint with Qatar as well.

"We will face a strong Omani team, whom we know well and respect, under the leadership of a great coach in Carlos Queiroz. Our goal is to achieve the dream of reaching the World Cup, which will only be achieved by exerting our utmost effort."

While optimistic, Lopetegui made it clear that Qatar's lineup for the match is not yet finalised, citing ongoing assessments of player fitness and readiness. "We have many different situations, and we must wait until tomorrow to determine the full readiness of the players before selecting the ideal lineup for the first match," he said.

Qatar, who are still finding their rhythm under Lopetegui, will be hoping for a strong start after an uneven run of results — including losses to Lebanon and Russia, and a 2-2 draw with Bahrain in friendlies. Almoez Ali is expected to lead the attack, with creative duties falling to star forward Akram Afif.

Lopetegui remained firm in his belief that the squad has what it takes to rise to the occasion — if they channel their focus and energy effectively. "It is important for the players to work hard to achieve this dream. We must work to demonstrate the required balance in order to perform optimally in both matches and harness all our positive energy to achieve victory," the Spaniard said



FROM LEFT: Mohammed Waad, Akram Afif and Hassan al-Haydos look in a relaxed mood during the training session yesterday. **PICTURES:** *Noushad Thekkayil*

PLAYERS' MORALE IS HIGH, SAYS KHOUKHI

Veteran defender Boualem Khoukhi echoed his coach's sentiments and emphasised the team's preparation and determination to start the campaign with a win.

"We are ready for the match, which will not be easy. The players' morale is high, and we seek to demonstrate a high degree of focus to achieve victory," he said.

The experienced centre-back acknowledged the challenge posed by Oman but stressed that the players are aware of what's at stake. "We realise the importance of the two matches, and our focus will now be on the match against Oman. The fans' presence will be a great motivator and incentive for the players to achieve victory and secure our first three points."

With expectations running high and only limited opportunities in the group stage, Boualem made a direct appeal to the supporters and vowed that the team is ready to deliver. Oman, meanwhile, will look to continue their progression under Carlos Queiroz. In-form striker Issam al-Sabhi, who scored twice in their most recent win over Qatar during the 2024 Gulf Cup, will be key to their attacking hopes.

SORIA TRAINS WITH QATAR SQUAD AFTER EIGHT-YEAR ABSENCE

Meanwhile, 41-year-old Sebastian Soria was spotted training with the Qatar national team yesterday. Although there has been no official confirmation from the Qatar Football Association, which had yet to announce the squad on the eve of the match, the veteran Qatar SC striker took part in the team's session.

Soria made his Qatar debut nearly two decades ago, and it has been eight years since his last international appearance. The Uruguayan-born forward's presence in training has sparked speculation about a possible surprise appearance at a crucial stage for Al Annabi.



Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui keeps a close eye on training session.

SPOTLIGHT

Oman prepared and confident for Qatar clash, says Queiroz



Oman coach Carlos Queiroz speaks at a press conference at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha. **PICTURE:** *Noushad Thekkayil*

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Oman coach Carlos Queiroz acknowledged the tough test awaiting his side against hosts Qatar at the fourth round of the Asian Qualifiers for the 2026 FIFA World, but said his players are ready and confident. Oman will take on Qatar at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today in their Group A opener, with the UAE completing the three-team group. Only the group winner secure a direct berth in the next phase, while the runner-up will move into a two-legged play-off for a final shot at qualification.

"We're excited to begin our campaign against Qatar," said Queiroz at the pre-match press conference yesterday. "The team has prepared well and we believe in our ability to get a positive result to kick off our journey."

In the past, the 72-year-old has taken South Africa, Portugal and Iran twice into the World cup but doing so with Oman would be his biggest achievement yet. Today's match will be Queiroz's first against Qatar since he was sacked in the lead-up to last Asian Cup, a tournament won by Al Annabi.

"In my opinion, if I was still the head coach, Qatar would not have been playing tomorrow," said Queiroz with a smile. "Qatar would have already qualified for the World Cup."

The veteran coach expressed his delight at returning to Qatar. "It's always a pleasure to be back in Qatar after having spent a wonderful time here. We hope to play at a level that reflects the aspirations of our fans in Oman."

Queiroz acknowledged the pressure that comes with high-stakes qualifiers but said his players are ready to rise to the occasion. "Pressure is part of football, you take risks, you gamble at times. But I have full trust in my players and their ability to stay focused and avoid costly mistakes in such an important match."

Meanwhile, veteran Omani defender Ali al-Busaidi expressed his team's determination to fight for qualification. "We're fully prepared for this stage. We understand the responsibility on our shoulders and are committed to doing everything we can to qualify for the World Cup," he said.

Al-Busaidi praised the Omani supporters for their unwavering backing and vowed to deliver a performance they can be proud of. "Our fans have always stood by us. We'll give everything on the pitch to make them proud in these qualifiers. The level among the three teams is close. Every match will be a battle," he said.

Oman are seeking a maiden FIFA World Cup appearance.

Qatar play Oman today before facing the UAE next Tuesday while Oman face the Emirates on Saturday, three days after their clash with the hosts, to determine who takes one of the two remaining automatic World Cup slots available to Asian teams.

Six teams have already qualified from Asia – Japan, Iran, South Korea and Australia as well as the two debutants, Uzbekistan and Jordan.

SPORT

BASKETBALL

QBF conducts league draw, launches first Super Cup

A modified league system, designed to enhance the technical level, unveiled for the new season





The Qatar Basketball Federation held the official draw ceremony for the 2025-2026 Men's General League yesterday at the Al Wasil Hall in the Qatar Olympic Committee in Doha headquarters.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) held the official draw ceremony for the 2025-2026 Men's General League yesterday evening at the Al Wasil Hall in the Qatar Olympic Committee headquarters. The event was attended by key figures from the Qatari basketball community and representatives of the nine participating clubs.

The ceremony was graced by the presence of Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, General Secretary of the QBF and National Teams Director; Ahmed Youssef al-Darwish, Assistant General Secretary and Head of the Competitions Committee; and Essam Lotfy, Technical Expert at the QBF.

A NEW ERA: THE QBF SUPER CUP

In a significant development for the sport, al-Kuwari announced the launch of the inaugural Qatar Basketball Super Cup. This new competition will kick off the 2025-2026 season and will feature four top clubs: Al Arabi and Al Rayyan (last season's league and HH The Amir Cup finalists), along with Al Sadd and Al Ahli (the third and fourth-placed teams in the previous league).

The Super Cup semi-finals are scheduled for Saturday, October 11, 2025, pitting Al Arabi against Al Sadd, and Al Rayyan against Al Ahli. The final will be held on Monday, October 13, 2025.

TRIBUTES AND ARAB ACHIEVEMENTS

Al-Kuwari commenced the event with a heartfelt tribute, eulogising the late Dr Mustafa Diab, a technical expert at the QBF, praising his immense contributions to developing Qatari basketball. He also expressed the Federation's pride in Al Arabi club's achievement of winning the bronze medal and securing third place in the 37th Arab Clubs Basketball Championship, recently held in Dubai. He also commended Al Rayyan club for their strong and competitive performance, stating that these results reflect the growing stature of Qatari basketball on the Arab stage.



Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, General Secretary of the QBF and National Teams Director; Ahmed Youssef al-Darwish, Assistant General Secretary and Head of the Competitions Committee; and Essam Lotfy, Technical Expert at the QBF; during the press conference yesterday.

LEAGUE REFORMS AND WORLD CUP PREPARATIONS

Al-Kuwari detailed a modified league system for the new season, designed to enhance the technical level and increase the number of matches to 15 per team. This reform aims to provide more competitive experience and is part of a broader strategy to optimally prepare the national team for its upcoming commitments, most notably the Asian Qualifiers for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027, which Qatar will host.

Echoing this vision, Ahmed al-Darwish emphasised the Federation's commitment to introducing new organisational and technical initiatives.

"We are facing an exceptional season with many milestones, including Al Arabi's participation in the Asian Super League, which is an honourable representation for Qatari basketball," al-Darwish stated.

"We are consistently working in the best interest of the clubs and to prepare our players for the most significant event in the country's basketball history: hosting the 2027 World Cup."

LEAGUE DRAW RESULTS AND SEASON SCHEDULE

The draw set the stage for intense early competition. The first round, starting on October 18, 2025, will feature strong matchups: Al Wakrah vs Al Sadd, Al Shamal vs Al Khor, Al Rayyan vs Qatar Club, and Al Ahli vs Al Gharafa.Al Arabi will have a bye in the opening round.

The league will proceed at an intensive pace until the sixth round on November 5, 2025, before pausing to allow the national team to participate in the first window of the Asian World Cup Qualifiers.

The first half of the league concludes on December 13, 2025, with the second half running from December 20, 2025 to January 17, 2026.

The semi-final play-offs are scheduled for January 22-31, 2026, culminating in the final between February 2 and 7, 2026.

The season will also feature a "Play-In" tournament for teams ranked third to sixth, adding a dynamic layer of competition to determine the final play-off contenders.

CRICKET

Former Test opener Renshaw named in Australia ODI squad

Reuters
Melbourne

Former Test opener **Matt Renshaw** is in the frame for a long-awaited one-day international debut after being named in Australia's squad for this month's home series against India.

Renshaw played the last of his 14 Tests against India in New Delhi nearly three years ago but has earned a surprise place in the Mitchell Marsh-captained squad released yesterday after piling on the runs for Australia 'A' against Sri Lanka 'A' in July.

The 29-year-old lefthander was one of four additions to the 15-man squad, joining fast bowler Mitchell Starc and all-rounders Matt Short and Mitchell Owen.

With Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis recently retiring from ODI cricket, Renshaw and power-hitter Owen could form part of a new-look Australian middle order in the lead-up to the 2027 World Cup.

Starc, meanwhile, returns to international action for the first time this summer after resting from the South Africa tour.

Australia will play three ODIs against India starting October 19 in Perth, followed by a five-match T20 series.

Skipper Marsh will continue to lead the ODI side in Pat Cummins's absence, with the fast bowler recovering from a back injury ahead of the home Ashes.

Selectors also named a 14-man squad for the first two T20s in Canberra (October 29) and Melbourne (October 31), with Josh Inglis to replace Alex Carey as wicketkeeper after recovering from a calf strain.

Carey, who helped Australia beat New Zealand 2-0 in the recent T20 series at Mount Maunganui, was included in the ODI squad by the selectors but will miss the series-opener to play red-ball cricket in the domestic Sheffield Shield.



ODI SQUAD
Mitchell Marsh (captain), Xavier Bartlett, Alex Carey, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Mitchell Owen, Matthew Renshaw, Matthew Short, Mitchell Starc, Adam Zampa.

T20 SQUAD (FIRST TWO GAMES):
Mitchell Marsh (captain), Sean Abbott, Xavier Bartlett, Tim David, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Mitchell Owen, Matt Short, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.

AUSTRALIA VS INDIA ODI SERIES
Oct 19, Sun 1st ODI, Perth Stadium, Perth
Oct 23, Thu 2nd ODI, Adelaide Oval, Adelaide
Oct 25, Sat 3rd ODI, Sydney Cricket Ground, Sydney

T20I SERIES
Oct 29, Wed 1st T20I, Manuka Oval, Canberra
Oct 31, Fri 2nd T20I, MCG
Nov 02, Sun 3rd T20I, Bellerive Oval, Hobart
Nov 06, Thu 4th T20I, Bill Pippen Oval, Gold Coast
Nov 08, Sat 5th T20I, The Gabba, Brisbane

FOCUS

Knight rides her luck as England survive Bangladesh scare

AFP
Guwahati, India

England overcame a spirited Bangladesh side to go top of the Women's World Cup points table after a nerve-jangling chase in Guwahati yesterday.

Former captain Heather Knight weathered the storm with an unbeaten 79, steering the four-time champions home by four wickets with 23 balls to spare.

The seasoned campaigner, who was sacked as captain after a disastrous Ashes tour last winter, had luck on her side in an innings that could easily have gone pear-shaped. Not once, not twice, but thrice she was reprieved, each time thanks to the decision review system.

Yet to get off the mark, she survived an lbw verdict that was overturned on review. On eight, another lbw decision went her way.

Then, on 12, Knight chipped tamely to cover and even began the long walk back before the third umpire ruled the fielder had not completed the catch cleanly. Third time lucky, the 34-year-old made it count. "It's probably the most reviews I've ever had go my way," Knight laughed afterwards. "That one at cover, I thought it was a fair catch. I walked off, but the TV umpire saw it differently." Her 27th half-century, not the prettiest of her career but certainly priceless, was laced with eight fours and a six, her sweep and reverse sweep proving the lifelines on a sluggish surface.



England's Heather Knight and Charlie Dean celebrate their win at the end of the 2025 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup ODI against Bangladesh at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati yesterday.

BRIEF SCORES
England 182 for 6 (Knight 79*, Fahima 3-16, Marufa 2-28) **beat Bangladesh 178** (Mostary 60, Rabeya 43*, Ecclestone 3-24) **by four wickets**

GOLF

Initial Hero World Challenge field named but Woods not confirmed yet

Reuters
Albany, Bahamas

Tournament host **Tiger Woods** was not listed in the initial player field released yesterday for the December 4-7 Hero World Challenge in Albany, Bahamas but could still be added as one of the three exemption spots.

The 15-times major champion has not competed since he missed the British Open cut in July 2024 and had surgery in March to repair a ruptured left Achilles tendon.

So far, twice defending champion Scottie Scheffler and 2016 winner Hideki Matsuyama of Japan are among the 17 players who have officially committed to the Hero World Challenge's 20-man field.

In total, six of the top 10 players in the world are among those 17, a group that in addition to Scheffler includes Xander Schauffele, Justin Thomas, JJ Spaun, Robert MacIntyre and Harris English. The rest of the field will be announced at a later date. On Monday, TGL, the tech-infused indoor team golf league that Woods founded with Rory McIlroy, said the American would make his Season 2 debut on January 13.

SCHEFFLER SEEKS THREE-PEAT AT WORLD CHALLENGE

World number one Scottie Scheffler will seek a third consecutive title at the Hero World Challenge golf tournament as part of the field announced yesterday for the 20-man event. Scheffler, a two-time Masters champion, won this year's British Open and PGA Championship among six crowns collected in the 2025 season.

Others in the lineup include England's Justin Rose, Austria's Sepp Straka, 2016 Challenge winner Hideki Matsuyama of Japan, Canada's Corey Conners and Americans Keegan Bradley, Cameron Young, Sam Burns, Patrick Cantlay, Chris Gotterup, Wyndham Clark and Brian Harman.

Woods, a 15-time major winner, has not played a top-level event since last year's British Open. He underwent back surgery 13 months ago and was training for a return when he suffered a ruptured left Achilles tendon last March.

Woods, who turns 50 on December 30, is set to play for his Jupiter Links team in the TGL tech-golf series, with an opening match on January 13.



TENNIS

Djokovic quells exhaustion to push through to quarters

The 24-time Grand Slam champion had a good start despite the 84 percent humidity, breaking in fourth game

AFP
Shanghai

Novak Djokovic banished exhaustion and played through an ankle injury scare to make it to the quarter-finals of the Shanghai Masters yesterday, beating Spain's Jaume Munar 6-3, 5-7, 6-2.

The hard-won victory keeps Djokovic on track as the favourite to take a record-extending fifth title in the Chinese financial hub, with other top seeds already withdrawn or knocked out.

The 38-year-old almost looked unable to continue when the match went to a decider, but he conjured up the energy to break his decade-younger opponent twice in the third set.

"Thank you, thank you everyone, I love you!" he shouted in Chinese to the adoring crowd before leaving court almost immediately after play finished.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion had a good start despite the 84 percent humidity, breaking in the fourth game.

His problems began shortly afterwards when his left ankle slid out behind him as he rushed towards the net, and he had to take a medical timeout.

He grimaced in pain as he was attended to by an on-court physio, but managed to resume to hold the fifth game.

Djokovic received treatment again in the second set, and looked increasingly fatigued, crouching over frequently in between rallies and throwing up on court.

Serbian-flag-waving Chinese fans roared in support, but 41st-ranked Munar ultimately broke in the 12th game of the second set after an unforced error from his opponent.

An agonised Djokovic dropped to the floor and remained splayed out on court with his chest heaving, as a medic rushed over.

But he picked himself up for an incredible third-set revival, breaking in the first and seventh games and sending the stadium into a frenzy.

Oldest quarter-final player



Serbia's Novak Djokovic crouching during his match against Spain's Jaume Munar at the Shanghai Masters in Shanghai yesterday. *(AFP)*

Djokovic is now the oldest player to reach an ATP Masters 1000 quarter-final, and the highest-ranking player left in the competition in Shanghai.

World number one Carlos Alcaraz withdrew from the tournament to rest, and second, third and fourth-ranked Jannik Sinner, Alexander Zverev and Taylor Fritz have all been eliminated. The event in Shanghai has been beset by injuries, as players have battled the humidity coupled with temperatures over 30 Celsius.

Sinner was forced to retire on Sunday after being seized with extreme cramps.

World number 11 Holger Rune, who has also struggled with the conditions, called on Tuesday for tennis authorities to bring in a heat policy for events like Shanghai. The Dane is through to the last eight after he took out France's Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 6-4, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3.

Djokovic will next face 44th-ranked Zizou Bergs.

The Belgian took Canada's Gabriel Diallo down to the wire, prevailing in a prolonged third set tiebreak 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (10/8).

Denmark's Rune calls for heat rule at Shanghai Masters

Denmark's Holger Rune called yesterday for tennis authorities to introduce a heat rule at events like the Shanghai Masters, as governing body ATP said it was considering bringing in such a policy.

Temperatures of more than 30C and humidity soaring past 80 percent have seen a string of retirements due to injury or illness in Shanghai, with defending champion Jannik Sinner the highest profile casualty.

With players marvelling at the "brutal" conditions in post-match interviews, the body governing men's tennis, the ATP, confirmed to AFP yesterday that it was evaluating bringing in a heat policy. World number 11 Rune said he thought "every player would agree" that the tournament needed a rule like those in place at Grand Slams.

"We can handle a certain amount of heat, because we're strong and mentally strong as well, but there is always a limit," the Dane told reporters.

"It's also important to take care of your health. We need to survive."

Rune had to take a medical timeout in his match against Ugo Humbert on Sunday because of the heat.

Those who have dropped out due to sickness or injury so far include Casper Ruud, David Goffin, Tomas Machac, Terence Atmane, Hamad Medjedovic and Wu Yibing.

The ATP said in a statement that player safety was its top priority.

Currently, decisions affecting play to do with weather conditions, including heat, "lie with the on-site ATP Supervisor, in coordination with on-site medical teams and local authorities", it said.

Its medical services team also implements "several measures in cases of extreme heat" to protect competitors' health.

"This remains under active review and additional measures including the implementation of an official heat policy are currently being evaluated in consultation with players, tournaments, and medical experts," the statement added.



Denmark's Holger Rune hits a return to France's Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard during their Shanghai Masters match yesterday. *(AFP)*

FOCUS

Swiatek coasts through Wuhan debut while heat wilts players

AFP
Wuhan, China

World number two Iga Swiatek enjoyed a victorious debut at the Wuhan Open on a scorching yesterday that saw Emma Raducanu and Jelena Ostapenko both retire from their matches.

Swiatek, who had an opening-round bye, eased past the Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova 6-1, 6-1 to book a third-round clash with Belinda Bencic or Elise Mertens.

After her win, Swiatek called on organisers to take player safety into account when scheduling matches on the outside courts, where there is no roof that can be closed to control the temperature.

"I feel like it's getting hotter in different places over the years," she said. "I'm just trying to use my experience, recover well between the points, and just spend all my energy on having the best quality possible. But for sure it's a challenge."

High temperatures above 30C (86F) forced organisers to put the heat rule into effect on Monday, where play was suspended on the outside courts.

The heat rule was also in effect yesterday between 12:30 and 17:30 but no matches were suspended.

"I'm happy I didn't play yesterday because I think it was too much for most of the players," said Swiatek, who needed just 79 minutes to get through her match.

"On centre court, I think it's a little bit cooler with the air-conditioning and everything, but I hope the other matches will be scheduled at a time where girls can compete, rather than just die on the court."

Earlier, Raducanu had her blood pressure and other vitals checked before retiring with dizziness from her first-round match when down 6-1, 4-1 to American Ann Li.



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return to Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova during their Wuhan Open match yesterday. *(AFP)*

The British world number 30 appeared to be struggling with the conditions as the temperature soared.

The 2021 US Open champion received medical attention five games into the second set.

She made the call to retire, sending Li into a second-round meeting with ninth-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova.

The heat rule allows players to take a 10-minute break between the second and third sets, and means the tournament can partially or fully close the centre-court roof to protect players.

Ostapenko, who was scheduled on a roofless outside court, also had her vitals checked and was feeling unwell before she retired, citing heat illness, while down 6-0, 2-1 to Sorana Cirstea.

Meanwhile, four-time major champion Naomi Osaka claimed her first victory at the Wuhan Open with a hard-fought 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over Canada's Leylah Fernandez.

In a tense two-hour 30-minute affair, the 11th-seeded Osaka fired 41 winners and 56 unforced errors.

Osaka, who is playing in Wuhan for the first time since 2017, will take on last week's Beijing finalist Linda Noskova in the second round.

"Mentally it was just really tough for me today," said Osaka. "And I think it's a part of the season that's just tough. But I think I'm, like, really happy to have gotten through it, and I think it'll be easier from now on."

Chinese wildcard Zhang Shuai, ranked 142 in the world, stunned 14th-seeded Emma Navarro 6-2, 2-6, 6-3. It is Zhang's second victory over Navarro in as many meetings, and her first top-20 win of the season.

The 36-year-old will take on Cirstea in round two.

MOTORSPORT

World MotoGP champion Marquez to miss two races with fracture

AFP
Paris

Newly-crowned world champion Marc Marquez was on Monday ruled out of the next two races after suffering a fracture and ligament injury to his right shoulder in the Indonesia MotoGP race.

The Spaniard was shunted off his Ducati at high speed on the first lap of the Indonesia MotoGP on Sunday.

Ducati said the Spaniard had "suffered a fracture at the base of the coracoid process and a ligament injury to his right shoulder," but ruled out any connection with a previous shoulder injury.

Marquez's medical team in Madrid have "opted for a conservative treatment plan, involving rest and immobilisation of the affected shoulder until it is fully healed and the fracture is clinically consolidated," Ducati said.

This rules Marquez out of the Grand Prix in Australia (October 17-19) and another at Malaysia (October 24-26).

That leaves two more races at Portugal (November 07-09) and Valencia (November 14-16) of the 22 race program.

"Fortunately, the injury isn't severe, but it's important to respect the recovery timeline," said Marquez, who wrapped up a seventh world title the previous week in Japan.

"My goal is to be back before the end of the season, but without rushing things beyond the doctors' recommendations. Both my personal and the team's main goals have been achieved, so now the priority is to recover properly and return at 100 percent."

The incident happened when Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi, who started the race on pole, slammed into the back of him as he tried to regain lost ground at the Mandalika circuit in Lombok.

It sent both riders flying into the gravel and rookie Fermin Aldeguer went on to win a chaotic grand prix.

Marquez and Italian Bezzecchi both walked gingerly away from the crash, but the Spaniard was clutching his shoulder.

The 32-year-old Marquez will undergo weekly check-ups and his progress will determine the final recovery time and his return to competition, the team said.

The Spaniard has a long history of injuries, including breaking his right arm in 2020, almost forcing him to retire.

He sealed the world crown at Motegi in Japan last weekend with five events to spare.

It was his first MotoGP world title since 2019.

Pogacar wins Tre Valli Varesine warm-up for Il Lombardia Monument

Tadej Pogacar added yet another victory to his stunning season by winning the Tre Valli Varesine cycling race yesterday as he prepares for the final Monument of the season. Having recently added the European title to his world crown, Pogacar also prevailed in northern Italy thanks to a trademark attack more than 20 kilometres from the end of a tough 200.3km course. Pogacar has won 19 times this season and is red-hot favourite to make it 20 on Saturday when he will bid to become the first man to win the Giro di Lombardia five years in a row. The 27-year-old is aiming to join Italian great Fausto Coppi on five wins at the "Race of the Falling Leaves", which this year runs from Como to Bergamo. He is also hoping to match a feat only ever achieved by Belgian superstar Eddy Merckx by winning three of the five Monuments in the same season.

Record Le Mans winners Porsche pull plug on endurance racing

Porsche, record 19-time winners of the Le Mans 24 Hours, are ending their participation in the world endurance championship, the German constructor announced yesterday.

As part of a shift in focus from 2026, Porsche will only compete in the FIA's Formula E electric series and the North American IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship featuring the 24 Hours of Daytona. "We very much regret that, due to the current circumstances, we will not be continuing our involvement in the WEC after this season," said Michael Steiner, a Porsche AG board member.

Porsche opened their Le Mans account in 1970, going on to claim seven consecutive wins in the pinnacle of motorsport endurance racing between 1981-87, with the last of their 19 wins coming in 2017.

FOCUS

Goal-shy Salah seeks change as Egypt eye World Cup place

'MO IS A BIG STAR, AND WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE HIM IN OUR TEAM'

AFP
Johannesburg

Mohamed Salah wants to put a disappointing start to his season with Liverpool behind him today and help Egypt beat Djibouti and qualify for the 2026 World Cup.

A win for the record seven-time African champions over one of the lowest ranked teams in the continent will give them an unassailable lead over second-placed Burkina Faso in Group A with one match to spare.

A two-time African Footballer of the Year, Salah has lost his spark with the Premier League champions, scoring just three goals in nine appearances in all competitions this season. Last season, the 33-year-old netted 29 times in 38 league matches to win the Golden Boot award as Liverpool surged to a record-equalling 20th Premier League title.

Salah has fond memories of playing against Djibouti, scoring four goals in a 6-0 Cairo romp in the opening round of World Cup qualifying two years ago.

It does not help Djibouti that they do not have a FIFA-approved stadium, so their 'home' match against Egypt will be staged in the Moroccan commercial capital Casablanca.

Three subsequent goals took Salah to seven in the qualifying campaign, one less than chart-topper Denis Bouanga of Gabon with two rounds remaining.

Fellow Egypt forward Mostafa Mohamed, who plays for French Ligue 1 outfit Nantes, is not concerned about Salah, telling reporters the lack of goals is "a temporary setback".

"Mo is a big star, and we are lucky to have him in our team. He is the best player in the history of Egypt," he told the FIFA website.

"He is amazing. For me, he has a great personality. I love him a lot. He is a wonderful player," added Mohamed, who also scored against Djibouti.

Egypt coach Hossam Hassan has an embarrassment of attacking riches, Apart from Salah and Mohamed, he can call on Omar Marmoush, Mahmoud 'Trezeguet' Hassan and Ahmed 'Zizo' Sayed.

Given Djibouti have lost seven of eight qualifiers and lie 158 places below Egypt in the FIFA rankings, it would be a shock if they prevent the Pharaohs sealing a fourth World Cup appearance.



Egypt forward Mo Salah arrives at the Casablanca airport for the World Cup qualifier against Djibouti. *(@EFA)*



Egypt coach Hossam Hassan.

ALGERIA SET TO QUALIFY

Algeria and Cape Verde are the other two countries who can clinch places at the World Cup with matchday nine victories, and join already-qualified Morocco and Tunisia in North and Central America next year.

Senegal, reigning African champions Ivory Coast and Ghana could also take unassailable leads, but they must win and hope other group results favour them.

Group C, where Benin lead South Africa on goal difference and Nigeria and Rwanda are three points behind, is the one section where a qualifier cannot emerge before the final round, starting on Sunday.

Like Egypt, Algeria can qualify if they secure maximum points against a much lower ranked opponent. The Desert Foxes have the added advantage of playing an 'away' Group G match against Somalia at home.

Security concerns prevent Somalia staging matches in Mogadishu, and a 163-place rankings gap behind Algeria demonstrates the difficult challenge facing the Ocean Stars in Oran on Thursday.

Algeria coach Vladimir Petkovic has called up for the first time Luca Zidane, a 27-year-old goalkeeper with Spanish second-tier club Granada and son of French great Zinedine Zidane.

Luca, who qualifies for Algeria because his paternal grandparents were born there, has switched international allegiance after representing France at youth levels.

Algeria are seeking a fifth appearance at the global showpiece, while Cape Verde are hoping to qualify for the first time. They face Libya in Tripoli on Wednesday.

A former Portuguese colony, Cape Verde is a group of islands off the west coast with about 550,000 inhabitants.

Qualification would make them the African country with the smallest population to do so.

Even if the Cape Verdeans fail in Libya, they will get a second chance on Monday to collect three points needed to finish above Cameroon when they host bottom team Eswatini in Group D.

Ghana will win Group I today if they beat the Central African Republic and Madagascar do not collect maximum points against the Comoros.

Senegal can qualify from Group B if they win in South Sudan on Friday and the Democratic Republic of Congo fail to win in Togo.

Ivory Coast, who last featured at a World Cup in 2014, would return if they win away to the Seychelles and Gabon lose to the Gambia.

Failure to win a group does not spell the end of the road, though. The four best-ranked runners-up enter African play-offs in November from which the winners go to intercontinental play-offs in March.

City star Stones considered retiring after injury woes

Manchester City defender John Stones says he considered retiring last season as he struggled to cope with recurring injury problems.

Stones spent most of the last campaign on the sidelines due to foot and hamstring injuries.

The 31-year-old made just 24 appearances for City and England before his season ended prematurely in February.

He is fit again and could make his first appearance under England boss Thomas Tuchel in the friendly against Wales on Thursday or next week's World Cup qualifier in Latvia.

"Last season was tough for me, to the point where I thought about stopping," Stones told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"I didn't want to do it. I had had enough of being so professional and trying to do everything right in my power, to then keep breaking down and not having the answers. It was a very difficult place to be in.

"There comes a point where you don't know why it happens and it's even harder when you put in so much effort, or you are ultra professional, to be able to play and be available.

"When that time comes and something happens, it would be easier to say, 'Well I didn't do X, Y and Z, that's why', but when you do it, it's then mentally challenging. Hopefully I don't go back to that place."

Stones has been unable to make more than 27 appearances in a league campaign for City since signing from Everton in 2016.

He has won six Premier League titles, two FA Cups, two League Cups and the Champions League during his time at the Etihad Stadium.

And the centre-back, who has been in the England squad at five major tournaments, said he quickly realised he couldn't walk away from the sport.

"My emotions were high. I wasn't thinking straight. I don't think deep down I would have ever done it," he said.

"I said years ago when City wanted me to have a new challenge, I said, 'I am going to fight'. That's all I have known since I was a kid - why should I stop that now?

"So yes, there is that fight in me and that winning mentality that doesn't want to stop."

England boss Thomas Tuchel gave Stones a watching brief as a non-playing member of his squad for the games against Andorra and Senegal at the end of last season.

It was a gesture of faith that Stones appreciated.

"I love England so much and I love playing for England. Some of the best moments in my career have been playing for England at tournaments," he said.

"And when he said to me, would I come out and be with the guys and continue my training, it was a no-brainer. It was a special moment."

BARCELONA CHANGE CAMP NOU RETURN PLAN AGAIN

BARCELONA: Spanish champions Barcelona said yesterday that they now plan to return to their renovated Camp Nou home only once they get permission to have a temporary capacity of 45,000 supporters.

The decision comes less than a week after Barca once again delayed their expected return to their iconic home stadium - which was initially slated for November 2024 before being pushed back several times.

Previously, the Catalan giants were hoping to reopen their stadium once they obtained a licence to host matches in front of 27,000 fans - something that they had hoped to secure last month.

The decision to wait until the temporary capacity is increased to 45,000 is almost certain to cause further delays to the re-opening of one of Europe's great stadiums after a re-development that has suffered several setbacks.

The club are estimated to be paying 1.5 billion euros ($1.75bn) for the Camp Nou rebuild, which has been beset by reconstruction chaos.

"Although it is expected to soon receive the first occupancy licence for phase 1A... Barcelona will work with the goal of returning to Spotify Camp Nou once the licence for phase 1B is obtained, which will expand the capacity to 45,000 spectators," the club said in a statement without giving any indication of when that would be.

Barcelona were humiliatingly forced to play two matches at their 6,000 capacity Johan Cruyff training ground stadium in the first weeks of the season after failing to get the permit they needed for Camp Nou.

The city council said in September that they would not allow Barcelona to return to the stadium, which will have a capacity of 105,000 when it is completed, because of safety issues.

Barcelona confirmed yesterday that they will host their next La Liga game against Girona on October 18 at the Olympic stadium on the city's Montjuic hill. The club played there for the last two seasons while Camp Nou was closed and had to return there at the end of September following their two games at the tiny Johan Cruyff venue.

Barca had already announced their next Champions League match against Olympiakos will also take place there on October 21. Their next home games after that are against Elche on November 2 and Athletic Bilbao on November 23.

SPAIN, INTER MIAMI STAR ALBA RETIRING AT END OF SEASON

MIAMI: Inter Miami's former Spanish international defender Jordi Alba yesterday announced his decision to retire from football at the end of the ongoing Major League Soccer season. Alba, who won 93 caps for Spain between 2011 and 2023 and was also a key member of Barcelona's team over the same era, confirmed his decision in a post on Instagram.

"The moment has come to close a truly meaningful chapter in my life. I've decided to bring my professional football career to an end at the conclusion of this season," Alba said in the post.

"I feel I've walked this path with every ounce of passion I had and now it's the right time to open a new chapter and close the previous one with the best possible feeling.

"Today I close this chapter knowing I've given it my all, football has been and always will be an essential part of my life. Thanks football for everything."

Alba, a gifted attacking fullback, joined Inter Miami in 2023, linking up with former Barcelona teammates Lionel Messi and Sergio Busquets.

While Alba initially had planned to extend through the 2027 season, he has reversed course and called time on a career that included six La Liga titles with Barcelona as well as a Champions League crown. He was also a key part of the Spain team which romped to victory at the 2012 European Championship.

SPOTLIGHT

Kane could extend Bayern stay as interest in Premier League cools

AFP
London

Harry Kane is considering extending his stay at Bayern Munich after the England captain claimed his interest in returning to the Premier League has cooled.

Kane has made a fast start to the season at Bayern, scoring 18 goals in 10 games to fuel the German champions' Bundesliga title defence.

The 32-year-old, who has netted 103 goals in 106 appearances for Bayern, is under contract in Munich until 2027 and is "fully all in" ahead of possible negotiations over a new deal. "In terms of staying longer, I could definitely see that," said Kane, who has reported for England duty ahead of a friendly with Wales and a World Cup qualifier in Latvia.

"I spoke openly a couple of weeks ago that I have not had those conversations with Bayern yet, but if they were to arise I would be willing to talk and have an honest conversation.

"Obviously it depends on how the next year or so goes and what we achieve together. Right now, I would say we are in a fantastic moment and I am not thinking about anything else."



When Kane left Tottenham in 2023, it was expected the striker would return to England to try and break the Premier League goalscoring record.

He needs 48 goals to eclipse Alan Shearer's mark of 260.

Tottenham boss Thomas Frank recently said he would love to have the club's record goalscorer back in north London.

"In terms of the Premier League, I don't know. If you had asked me when I first left to go to Bayern, I would have said for sure I would come back," added Kane, who is reported to have a £57mn ($66mn) release clause in his Bayern contract.

"Now I have been there a couple of years I would probably say that has gone down a little bit, but I wouldn't say I would never go back.

"What I have learnt in my career is that different opportunities and different timings happen and things fall in place. Going back to my first point with Bayern right now I am fully all in with Bayern."

Bayern Munich sporting director Christoph Freund recently said his side are "probably witnessing the best version of Harry Kane there has ever been".

Kane won the Bundesliga last season with Bayern, his long-awaited first major trophy, and that success has driven England's record goalscorer to improve even further.

"When you win a title like I did last year, maybe it could be easy to go the other way and be like, 'OK I've done what I wanted to achieve'," Kane said.

"But it's given me more motivation to do more and be better. I think I've shown that this year.

"I was interested in how I would feel after winning a trophy. Obviously, there's still a lot more I want to achieve in terms of other trophies and bigger trophies for sure."