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Hendricks hits 60 as South Africa Crush Pakistan



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Messi on 2026 World Cup: 'I would like to be there'



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FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP

Qatar's home advantage makes opener a tough test: Italy coach

The Azzurrini have never progressed beyond the last eight at the U-17 World Cup tournament

The start of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025 is drawing ever closer, with Italy set to go into the tournament as one of the title favourites. They will head to expanded 48-team competition on the back of reaching the semi-finals of the UEFA European U-17 Championship earlier this year. The Azzurrini, who have never progressed beyond the last eight at the U-17 World Cup, will be now be out to showcase their class on the global stage.

They have been drawn in a fascinating group with battle it out with the host nation Qatar, Bolivia and South Africa. Speaking to *FIFA.com* coach Massimiliano Favo acknowledged the threat posed by Qatar, noting that the home team's togetherness and familiarity with local conditions could give them a crucial advantage. Excerpts from the interview



Italy will head to the World Cup on the back of reaching the semi-finals of the UEFA European U-17 Championship earlier this year.



Italy coach Massimiliano Favo.

Q: The first-ever 48-team U-17 World Cup kicks off on November 3. How are preparations going?

Massimiliano Favo: When it comes to national sides, I don't think preparation is the right word. It's more about picking up from where we left off since we don't get to train together every day. We don't play together every week, so opportunities to correct mistakes or build on the things we do well are few and far between.

This time the tournament is much longer with 104 matches. What is the key to going all the way?

First and foremost, we'll need to quickly adapt to the climate and the humidity, and rotate our squad wisely to keep players fresh. The aim is to play for the shirt and do ourselves proud.

As always, we want to compete against nations as steeped in footballing history as ours, and go as far as we can in the tournament without putting any limits on ourselves. We narrowly missed out on the final of the European U-17 Championship in Albania after losing out on penalties [to Portugal]. We know we've got a strong squad and we're confident we can compete with every team.

You've been pitted against the hosts Qatar, Bolivia and South Africa. What do you expect from the group?

If a team has made it this far to compete at a World Cup alongside us, you can bet your bottom dollar they're organised and up to the task. Qatar, for example, have the edge of being able to train together every day, playing on home soil, and being fully acclimatised to the conditions.

We will play them in our tournament opener, which will be a tough first test for us. We also know what to expect from Bolivia and South Africa. We're going to show every team respect, but we're not scared of anyone. I'm expecting teams to be physically strong, technically sound, and extremely well drilled, as football has become a global game.

Is the U-17 category an important phase in a footballer's development?

It's definitely an important age, as it essentially marks the transition from youth football to senior football. Luckily, some of the lads from this age group are already plying their trade at senior level, which is something for us to be incredibly proud of, and playing international football can only be good for their development.

How can playing on the world stage help players come on?

The benefits are endless, as it helps develop their skills and awareness when coming up against players from some of the best footballing nations around the world.



What style of football are you going to play in this tournament?

As always, we'll look to play attacking, well-organised football, giving our players the freedom to express themselves on the pitch and put on a show for the fans. The results will take care of themselves.

What does pulling on the shirt and representing the values of the Italian national team mean for such young players?

Every player dreams of wearing the blue shirt and representing Italy at a World Cup. It's important for them to be aware of this responsibility, respect it, and show commitment, determination, and quality out there on the pitch.

HORSE RACING

Geneva clinches French Arabian Breeders' Challenge Classic

Geneva confirmed her quality and consistency with a hard-fought success in the Gr.1 (PA) French Arabian Breeders' Challenge Classic – Wathba Stallions at Toulouse.

The race, run over 2200m for four-year-old and older Purebred Arabians, featured a field of six, and the talented filly finally earned the Group 1 (PA) title that had previously eluded her.

Trained by François Rohaut, ridden by Alexandre Gavilan, and carrying the colours of Abdulla bin Fahad al-Attiyah, the four-year-old came into the race on the back of a strong third-place finish in the Gr.1 (PA) Qatar Arabian Trophy des Juments at ParisLongchamp.

Last year, she had also crossed the line first in the Gr.1 (PA) Qatar Arabian Trophy des Pouliches at Saint-Cloud, before being disqualified due to her jockey exceeding the permitted number of whip strikes. This time, justice was firmly served as Geneva officially became a Gr.1 (PA) winner.

She fired slightly left coming out of the stalls and soon settled in fourth in a race led by Almurjanah. Still travelling behind Kanti de Bozouls, the pace steadied down the back straight, with the filly always moving comfortably. When the tempo lifted entering the final bend, Geneva momentarily looked outpaced as the leaders kicked on, but she soon found her rhythm again.



Alexandre Gavilan rides Geneva to victory in Toulouse, France.

Inside the final 400m, the leader had opened up a few lengths on the field, but Geneva began to close in, moving into third and challenging Molfit.

In the last 200 metres, she produced a determined effort to sweep past both rivals, though Wala'a emerged with a strong late run on the outside. In a thrilling finish, Geneva held on gamely to win by half a length, with Wala'a finishing second and Molfit taking third.

Bred by Patrick Lombrail, Geneva is by Azadi out of Theeba, a dual winner over 1600m at four and 1700m at five, as well as twice third in Gr.1 (PA) company over 2000m at five.

She is a half-sister to Fleur du Soleil, a Listed winner over 1750m at four; to Eclipse du Soleil (Munjiz), a winner over 2000m at four; to Al Theeb (Azadi), a winner over 2100m at four; and to Kiaora du Soleil (Mahabb), runner-up in a Gr.3 (PA) over 1900m at three.

SPOTLIGHT

Nerci D claims Prix Mushrae

Nerci D confirmed his progress with a victory in the Gr.3 (PA) Prix Mushrae at Toulouse, a 1600m contest for three-year-old Purebred Arabian colts.

The race brought together a field of eight, and the promising colt showed class to record his first Group (PA) success.

Trained by Thomas Fourcy, ridden by Guillaume Guedj-Gay, and carrying the colours of Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari, Nerci D was making his first start for these new connections, having previously been trained and owned elsewhere.

He came into the race on the back of a confidence-boosting win in the Prix Saint-Laurent, a conditions race over the same trip last month, where he broke his maiden.

After a good start, Nerci D settled in fourth, racing upside MN Hattan in a race led by Ghazan du Soleil. The pace was even throughout the back straight, with positions remaining unchanged as the runners began to quicken turning for home.

While several rivals came under pressure in the final bend, Nerci D was still travelling well. Entering the straight, he switched to the outside of the long-time leader to launch his challenge. Inside the final 300 metres, he moved into the lead, going a length clear, but inside the final 150 metres, Alibaba du Nil made a strong bid on his inside, with MN Hattan closing on the outside. Showing courage, Nerci D found more and held on gamely to win by half a length. MN Hattan stayed on for second, while Alibaba du Nil took a close third.

Bred by Daniel Stud, Nerci D is out of Neige Al Maury, a dual winner over 2400m at five in the UK. She is a half-sister to the top-class No Risk Al Maury, a dual Gr.1 (PA) winner over 2000m at five and six, and a five-time Gr.2 (PA) winner between 1600m and 2000m from ages five to nine.



Nerci D, ridden by Guillaume Guedj-Gay, gallops to victory.

SPORT

CRICKET

Hendricks hits 60 as South Africa hammer Pakistan

SOUTH AFRICA PREVAIL IN THE FIRST T20I BY 55 RUNS

Reuters
Rawalpindi

South Africa opener Reeza Hendricks struck 60 from 40 balls and seamer Corbin Bosch took a career-best 4-14 in four overs to help their side to a 55-run victory over hosts Pakistan in the first Twenty20 International in Rawalpindi yesterday.

The visitors were sent into bat and amassed 194 for nine in their 20 overs, before restricting Pakistan to 139 all out in reply.

Hendricks and fellow opener Quinton de Kock (23 from 13 balls) got their side off to a fast start, before debutant in this format, Tony de Zorzi, added a quickfire 33 from 16 deliveries and all-rounder George Linde 36 from 22.

Left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz was excellent with the ball for Pakistan and returned figures of 3-26 in four overs.

Pakistan were restricted by the South African seamers in their reply and never managed to build momentum in the innings, despite 37 from 28 balls at the top of the order from Saim Ayub.

Babar Azam, playing his first T20 international since December last year, did not last long as he spooned a catch to Hendricks at cover off Bosch for a two-ball duck. South Africa spinner Linde finished with 3-31.

South Africa captain Donovan Ferreira said yesterday: "Very proud of the effort - it was a collective effort. We had a good powerplay batting effort and Linde finished it well. We kept it simple with the ball and wanted to keep it nice and simple - top of off."


South Africa's Reeza Hendricks plays a shot during the first Twenty20 international against Pakistan at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

He added: "When guys are rested, new guys get opportunities and they really put up their hands today. Bowled well but we put up a good score too. Reeza held it together nicely for us which allowed George license to explode. Bosch had really good energy on the ball. He usually goes for the yorkers but he hit the deck today and got something out of the deck. Four wickets is an amazing achievement."

Pakistan captain Salman Agha said yesterday: "We didn't start well with the ball but we pulled things back. With the batting, we are losing wickets quickly and we need to have a quick turnaround."

When asked about the 'ultra aggressive batting approach, Agha said: "We just need to bat properly, do singles and doubles and build partnerships. We are missing partnerships."

The second match in the three-game series will be played in Lahore on Friday, before it concludes at the same venue on Saturday.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 194/9 in 20 overs (Reeza Hendricks 60, George Linde 36; Mohammad Nawaz 3 for 26) **beat Pakistan 139 all out in 18.1 overs** (Saim Ayub 37; Corbin Bosch 4 for 14, George Linde 3 for 31) **by 55 runs**

COMMENT

Australia fans can block out English taunts: Carey

Reuters
Melbourne

Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey remembers a hostile reception from English crowds after stumping Jonny Bairstow at Lord's during the 2023 Ashes and hopes home fans can drown out the taunts of the Barmy Army in the coming series.

Carey sparked a 'Spirit of Cricket' row when he threw down the stumps as Bairstow left his crease at the end of an over on the final day of the second Test at the game's spiritual home.

Australia's players were subjected to abuse from MCC members in the stadium's Long Room, while incensed England coach Brendon McCullum questioned the visitors' sportsmanship.

More than two years on from the incident, Carey said he was expecting some reminders from England's travelling fans during the five-Test series which starts in Perth from November 21.

"It's going to be exciting ... the Barmy Army, I think I've seen a few chants come through already, which is great," he told reporters in Adelaide yesterday.

"That sort of stuff just, it's in the history of the game, it will get spoken about forever," he said.

"But as a player and as a playing group, you want to be in those big moments. I experienced it over in England so hopefully the Australian crowd can sort of block out some of that noise – and we have more fans here for Australia than England."

Australia won the Lord's Test to take a 2-0 lead and ended up retaining the urn despite losing two of the last three matches.

Carey was a target of jeering fans for the rest of the series after Lord's but said he was comfortable with his part in Ashes history.

"It's part of the game," he said. "We love it, it's sports – totally understand there's heroes and villains. That's what Ashes cricket is all about."

STAGE SET FOR 3-2-1 QATAR OLYMPIC AND SPORTS MUSEUM RAPID CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP


Hamad al-Tamimi, Executive Director of the Qatar Chess Association


Abdullah Yousef al-Mulla, Director of the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum

DOHA: The Qatar Chess Association (QCA) has announced that it will organize the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum Rapid Chess Championship for Under-12 players tomorrow, as part of a series of promotional tournaments leading up to the FIDE World Cup, which Qatar will host at the end of December.

The championship will feature 40 players, boys and girls, and the matches will be played in the rapid chess format according to the Swiss system. The top winners will be determined after five rounds of competition.

Hamad al-Tamimi, Executive Director of the Qatar Chess Association, said that the tournament has attracted a large number of players from various nationalities.

He explained that this event is part of a series of tournaments being held in preparation for hosting the World Championship in December and also aligns with the Federation's strategic plan to achieve several goals, foremost among them the promotion of chess culture in the community.

Al-Tamimi expressed his hope for increased co-operation with various entities and institutions across the country, which would help QCA realise its vision, develop the game of chess, and build a strong foundation for it.

He added that these tournaments aim to develop a new generation of players to support national teams, represent Qatar in international events, and attract young talents. Such events also provide valuable opportunities to discover promising players and broaden the pool of those who can represent Qatari chess in future competitions abroad.

Al-Tamimi concluded by appreciating the partnership between QCA and the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum in organising this event for young players and for supporting efforts to encourage chess participation among all members of the community.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Yousef al-Mulla, Director of the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, expressed his delight in hosting the Under-12 Chess Championship in partnership with QCA.

He described it as a unique opportunity for everyone to play chess inside a museum that houses some of the most significant sports artifacts in the world.

Al-Mulla added that the museum focuses on sports that play an important role in Qatari society, noting that chess has grown significantly in recent years and has gained wide popularity through the organisation of major tournaments and the attraction of world chess stars to Doha. He added that there is growing anticipation for the upcoming FIDE World Cup in December.

He also pointed out that the museum combines sports, art, and culture through distinctive interactive exhibitions that highlight how sports and art complement each other, offering visitors a rich and diverse experience.

He noted that this event reflects the mission of the Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, to research, collect, educate, and share the story of global and Qatari sports in an engaging and entertaining way. Through its interactive spaces and carefully designed programs, the museum aims to inspire the community, encourage public participation, and promote physical activity and sports involvement.

QCA has organised several open tournaments in co-operation with various state institutions as part of its efforts to promote chess culture and foster strong competition among professional and amateur players of all ages and nationalities.



IYER RECOVERING WELL FROM SPLEEN INJURY, SAYS INDIA'S SURYAKUMAR


India's captain Suryakumar Yadav with coach Gautham Gambhir during a training session in Canberra yesterday. *(@BCCI)*

MELBOURNE: India batsman Shreyas Iyer is in stable condition and recovering well from a spleen injury, Twenty20 captain Suryakumar Yadav said yesterday.

Iyer suffered a lacerated spleen during India's victory over Australia in the third one-day international on Saturday when he fell awkwardly in taking a catch.

The 30-year-old was admitted to hospital and Indian media reported that his condition was life-threatening.

"We spoke to him," Suryakumar told reporters before India's five-match Twenty20 series against Australia beginning in Canberra today.

"When we got to know about his injury, I called him. Then I realised Shreyas doesn't have his phone on him and I called our physio, Kamlesh Jain, who told us he's stable.

"He's looking good (now). We've been in touch for two days, he's replying. If he's able to reply on the phone, then he's stable."

Suryakumar said all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy, who was ruled out of the final ODI with a quadriceps injury, was fit.

"He's doing fine, he did a bit of running and batting in the nets yesterday. Today he wanted to take a break as it was optional practice, but we came to the ground because we had a team meeting," Suryakumar said.

India's cricket board (BCCI) later issued a statement.

"Shreyas Iyer sustained a blunt injury to his abdomen, resulting in a laceration of his spleen with internal bleeding on 25th October during the third ODI against Australia," BCCI said in a statement.

"A repeat scan has shown significant improvement, and Shreyas is on the road to recovery."

PREVIEW

South Africa's Wolvaardt calls for calm in women's World Cup semis

AFP
Guwahati, India

South Africa skipper **Laura Wolvaardt** yesterday said the "calmest team" will emerge on top in their semi-final clash with England at the Women's World Cup.

The Proteas won five of seven matches in the league phase to take third spot below England in the standings, and the two face each other again in Guwahati today.

"I think for me tomorrow it will be just about keeping everyone as calm as possible," Wolvaardt told reporters on the eve of the first semi-final.

"I think the calmest team out there will most likely win. I think 50 overs is a very long time and it is very easy to let the pressure of a semi-final get to you."

South Africa are chasing their first World Cup title, having fallen short in the latter stages of previous tournaments.

They were beaten by England in the semi-finals of the last two ODI World Cups in 2017 and 2022, and although they reached the final of the last two T20 World Cups (2023 and 2024), the trophy still eludes them.



"That semi-final loss against England was four years ago so I think we were a totally different looking side, they have got a lot of different players as well," Wolvaardt said of their defeat in 2022.

"It's sort of a fresh opportunity and it starts from zero, so I am looking forward to the challenge and hopefully I am able to learn from those (T20) semi-final victories that we have got and stay calmer under pressure."

Led by Nat Sciver-Brunt, England's only defeat so far at this edition of the tournament was to Ashes rivals Australia.

They are favourites against a South Africa team that was bundled out for 97 by Australia in their last game. That heavy defeat ended a run of five straight wins for South Africa, who suffered a 10-wicket thrashing by England in their tournament opener.

"I am proud of this group, the way they have stuck together," England coach Charlotte Edwards said. "We have sort of five weeks away now and our best cricket is yet to come and that's a really exciting place for us as a group."

Defending champions Australia will face hosts India in the second semi-final tomorrow in the outskirts of Mumbai. The final is on Sunday.

FOCUS

Window for fast marathons closing because of climate change, report finds

Reuters
London



Climate change is narrowing the window for record-breaking performances at the world's top marathons, according to new research released ahead of Sunday's New York City Marathon.

Concerned elite athletes say rising temperatures are reshaping the sport with some city marathons more impacted than others. Berlin's event last month was raced in unseasonal temperatures of 75F.

A report by US-based non-profit Climate Central finds that 86% of 221 global marathons analysed on their 2025 dates are expected to see a decline in the odds of optimal running conditions by 2045, including all seven Abbott World Marathon Majors.

Mhairi Maclennan, the fastest British female finisher at the 2024 London Marathon, said the findings reflect a growing challenge for elite runners. "At the elite level, conditions make or break a performance," Maclennan said.

"We train day in, day out for years and manage every aspect of our lives to race our best, only for that elusive target to drift further away as ideal temperatures become rarer. "Climate change isn't just about races becoming harder; it's about knowing that record-breaking performances could soon be out of reach if conditions keep getting hotter."

The report identifies a 'sweet spot' for marathon temperatures that supports peak performance. For elite runners, men do best in cooler conditions (on average, 4C or 39F) and women do better at warmer temperatures (10C, 50F).

The report, however, warns that global warming is making those conditions increasingly hard to find. Tokyo currently offers the highest likelihood of ideal temperatures for elite male runners (69%), but is also projected to see the steepest decline by 2045. The 2025 Berlin and Tokyo Marathons were cited as examples of how heat waves have already pushed race-day temperatures beyond peak performance thresholds, although starting races earlier in the day can modestly improve conditions. Former world record holder Catherine Ndereba said the sport was already adapting.

"Climate change has altered the marathon," said Kenya's Ndereba, a two-time world champion and four-time Boston winner. "Dehydration is a real risk, and simple miscalculations can end a race before it begins. Every step now carries a message - that if we don't take care of our planet, even our strongest strides will fall short."

Ibrahim Hussein, the first Kenyan to win both the New York and Boston Marathons, echoed the sentiment.

"The climate is part of the course now," Hussein said. "If we don't protect it, the records of the future and the enjoyment for all become less and less likely."

Eala advances to Hong Kong Open round of 16 after Boulter retires

Alexandra Eala didn't advance to the Prudential Hong Kong Tennis Open second round in the way she'd hoped. After a barnburner of a first set, last year's runner-up Katie Boulter was forced to retire while trailing the Filipina 6-4, 2-1 due to a left leg injury. But the atmosphere at the Victoria Park Tennis Stadium had been electric throughout that opener, which saw the pair hammer forehands at each other, as well as pulling of an array of hot shots including flicked, angled passes from Boulter and perfect drop shots from Eala.

Much of that was down to the fervent crowd support for Eala, who has become a sensation in her home country ever since breaking through with a run to the Miami semifinals in March. Filipinos constitute the largest ethnic minority group in Hong Kong, and they showed up and showed out in support of their trailblazing heroine. Signs, flags and fan art abounded in the audience.

TENNIS

Medvedev eases past Munar into second round

AUGER-ALIASSIME RALLIED TO BEAT COMESANA 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 6-3

AFP
Paris



Russia's Daniil Medvedev serves to Spain's Jaume Munar during their Paris Masters match yesterday. *(AFP)*

Former world number one Daniil Medvedev kick-started his campaign at the Paris Masters yesterday with a comfortable 6-1, 6-3 win over Spaniard Jaume Munar.

The 2020 Paris Masters champion began briskly on the vast centre court of the event's new La Defense Arena home, claiming the opening set in under half-an-hour. Eleventh seed Medvedev then secured the crucial break in the sixth game of the second set and served out to set up a second-round meeting with Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov.

Earlier, Canadian ninth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime kept alive his hopes of qualifying for the ATP Finals in Turin with a comeback 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 6-3 victory over Argentinian Francisco Comesana.

Auger-Aliassime is ninth in the race for the eight-place tournament and needs a deep run in the French capital to make his second career appearance at the season-ending tournament. Shock Shanghai Masters winner Valentin Vacherot raised the roof on the 17,500-capacity centre court as he continued his remarkable form in the opening match of the day.

The Monegasque wildcard beat Czech 14th seed Jiri Lehecka 6-1, 6-3 in under an hour, and will next meet his cousin Arthur Rinderknech in a repeat of the Shanghai final earlier in October. Canadian Gabriel Diallo beat Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands 6-3, 6-4 and France's Corentin Moutet fought past American lucky loser Reilly Opelka in three sets.

Earlier, Grigor Dimitrov returned to action by beating Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 in the first round as the event made its debut in its new La Defense Arena home.

After being held for nearly 40 years at Paris' Bercy Arena, the tournament has moved across the city to set up shop in the cavernous multi-purpose arena.

Opened in 2017, the venue is best known as the home ground of French Top 14 rugby club Racing 92 and for having played host to the swimming events at the Olympics last year. It also welcomes concerts and political rallies. Now in its current guise as a tennis venue, La Defense Arena boasts the second largest showpiece court on the current global tennis circuit - second only in size terms to the US Open's Arthur Ashe Stadium.

It was the scene of a triumphant comeback for former world number three Dimitrov as he played his first match since having to retire injured from his fourth round match at Wimbledon in July when leading two sets to love against eventual champion Jannik Sinner. "Winning or losing this match today would have been a win for me, I'm just so happy to be able to compete again," 34-year-old Dimitrov said on-court.

"I had to be extremely patient with myself... clearly I'm playing against such an amazing player but I'm just grateful (to win)."

Dimitrov overcame fervent home support in the night session to grind out the first set on a tie-break against big-serving Frenchman Mpetshi Perricard.

Bolstered by his lead, the Bulgarian swiftly secured the first break of the match in the opening game of the second set as he glided through to the round of 32.

COMMENT

Impossible to finish year as world number one, says Sinner

AFP
Paris

Jannik Sinner said yesterday that he had come to terms with finishing the season behind rival Carlos Alcaraz in the rankings.

The Italian world number two lost top spot in the standings when he was fell to the Spaniard in the final of the US Open in September - after having held it for 65 weeks.

"It's impossible (to finish the year at No 1). Honestly, I'm not thinking about this at the moment. It's going to be a goal for next year," Sinner told reporters ahead of his opening match at the Paris Masters.

Trailing the Spaniard by less than 1,000 points, Sinner could theoretically overtake Alcaraz if he wins the Paris Masters and his rival fails to reach the last four.

But he will then have to defend 1,500 points at the season-ending ATP Finals in Turin - which he won in 2024 - whereas his rival was eliminated in the group stage and has few points to lose.

"This year it's not in my hands," Sinner simply added.

He comes into the event in the French capital on good form after winning the Vienna Open on Sunday.

But the long season has taken its toll on the 24-year-old.

He retired after suffering from cramps at the Shanghai Masters earlier in October and experienced problems with his thigh in the Austrian capital.

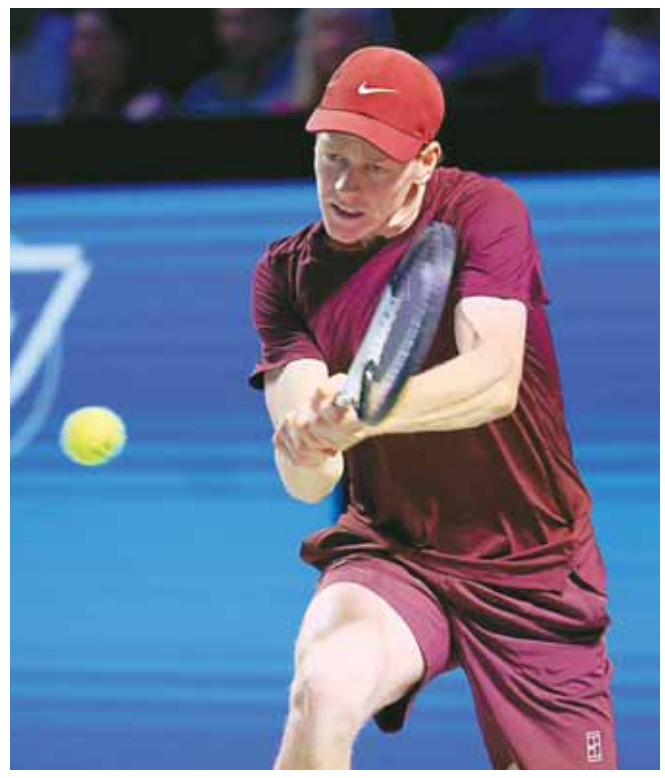
"It was not the same issue at all (in Vienna)," Sinner revealed.

"I feel like (it) was normal. You know, I played five days in a row. The final was very physical. It can happen."

The four-time Grand Slam champion said he was "not worried physically" ahead of his opening match in Paris today against Belgium's Zizou Bergs.

"The body feels good now. A bit tired, of course, playing five matches in a row and coming here is not much time to recover," he said.

"But I'm happy how I'm feeling. I recover every day better."



MOTORSPORT

Aston Martin escape sanctions after 'very minor' F1 cost cap breach



Aston Martin's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso drives out of the garage during the qualifying session of the Mexico City Formula One Grand Prix in Mexico City on Saturday. *(AFP)*

Reuters
London

Aston Martin committed a "very minor" procedural breach of Formula One's cost cap regulations last year due to exceptional circumstances but will face no penalties, the sport's governing body said yesterday.

The International Automobile Federation (FIA) said the other nine teams and five engine manufacturers were all in compliance, despite speculation last week that a more substantial breach might be announced.

The FIA said the breach, involving a failure to submit signed versions of its audited annual financial statements by a March deadline, was due to unpredictable circumstances outside the team's control.

Significantly, Aston Martin had not exceeded the cost cap level.

The Silverstone-based team had acted cooperatively and in good faith, added the FIA, entering an Accepted Breach Agreement last month to resolve the matter.

"The Cost Cap Administration confirm that there is no accusation or evidence that AMR has sought or obtained any undue advantage as a result of the breach," the FIA said. Speculation about a team being in breach of the cost cap had mounted after the FIA was late publishing the accounts for the 2024 season.

Confirmation of teams' compliance had come much earlier in previous years.

Aston Martin appoint US driver Crawford as F1 reserve

Aston Martin appointed American Jak Crawford as their Formula One reserve driver yesterday, replacing Brazilian Felipe Drugovich as backup to Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll.

Crawford, 20, is currently second in the Formula Two championship and will be reserve at all races in the 2026 season.

Drugovich, the team's third driver since he won the 2022 Formula Two title, never got to race in Formula One and has joined the Andretti team in all-electric Formula E. Crawford, in his third year in F2, has racked up more than 2,000km in Formula One machinery and took part in Friday practice in Mexico last week, driving Stroll's car.

Aston Martin, seventh of 10 teams in the constructors' standings, are switching to Honda engines next season and have top designer Adrian Newey on board after he joined from Red Bull.

Rayyan beat Duhail, Shahaniya stun Sadd at QSL Cup



Doha: Al Rayyan defeated Al Duhail 3-1 in the fourth round of the QSL Cup at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. Ali al-Qahtani opened the scoring for Al Rayyan in the 54th minute, with Mohammed Siraj and Faisal Mohammed adding goals in the 66th and 76th minutes respectively.

Mubarak Shanan had earlier put Al Duhail ahead in the 35th minute. The win lifted Al Rayyan to 13 points, while Al Duhail remained on four.

At the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Al Shahaniya pulled off a surprise 2-1 victory over Al Sadd in an exciting contest. Mohammed Balah gave Al Shahaniya the lead in the 32nd minute, before Abdulrahman al-Sultan equalised early in the second half. However, Ali Saeed al-Mohannadi struck deep into stoppage time to hand Al Shahaniya their third win of the competition. Al Sadd, meanwhile, suffered their fourth defeat, having drawn once so far.

In another fixture, Al Arabi crushed Lusail 6-1 at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium. Yazan al-Naimat scored a hat-trick (22nd, 34th, 87th minutes), while Joao Pedro netted twice (19th, 40th), and Michel Olunga added a sixth in the 75th minute. Mohammed Shaaban scored Lusail's lone goal in the 57th minute. The result took Al Arabi to 13 points, while Lusail stayed on four.

At Saud bin Abdulrahman Stadium, Al Gharafa and Mesaimeer played out a 2-2 draw. Moaz Adam and Abu Al-Qasim Mohammed put Al Gharafa 2-0 ahead, but Hamad Balgheeth struck twice to earn Mesaimeer a share of the spoils. Qatar SC, who were languishing in 16th place with three points, improved slightly to four following this round, while Mesaimeer moved to six points.



FOOTBALL

Messi eyes next year's World Cup despite age and fitness concerns

Argentine great recently extended his contract with MLS side Miami through 2028

Reuters
Miami



Lionel Messi has enjoyed a professional career spanning more than 20 years, debuting for Barcelona at just 17 in 2004.

Lionel Messi, still chasing international glory nearly two decades into his career, says he hopes to play at the 2026 World Cup in North America, acknowledging his age and fitness will dictate his role in defending Argentina's 2022 title.

The Argentine great recently extended his contract with Major League Soccer side Inter Miami through 2028, signalling he is not yet considering retirement despite turning 39 next June. Speaking to *NBC News*, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner said he will take time next year to assess his physical condition before deciding whether to play in the tournament across the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

"It's something extraordinary to be able to be in a World Cup, and I would love to," the Argentine captain said in the interview.

"I would like to be there, to be well and be an important part of helping my team, if I am there. I'm going to assess that on a day-to-day basis when I start preseason next year with Inter (and see if I can really be 100%, if I can be useful and then make a decision.

"I'm really eager because it's a World Cup. We're coming off winning the last one, and being able to defend it on the field again is spectacular because it's always a dream to play with the national team."

Messi has enjoyed a professional career spanning more than 20 years, debuting for Barcelona at just 17 in 2004 before playing for Paris St Germain and joining Inter Miami in 2023. He sparked fresh interest in the American league in a critical moment for the sport in North America ahead of hosting next year's World Cup.

While Messi has amassed countless club and individual accolades, international success had eluded him until claiming the 2021 Copa America before beating France 4-2 on penalties to win the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

"It was the dream of my life," Messi said of the victory. "It was also true that it was the only thing missing at a professional level because I had been lucky enough to have achieved everything at an individual level, at a team level with Barcelona, and I think that's every player's dream. When you ask a player what their dream is, it's to be world champion."

Messi said he is enjoying his time in MLS. "The truth is that I like everything about living here," Messi said of Miami. "I spent a lot of time in Barcelona, which for me is an extraordinary city, where I grew up and had many spectacular moments, and which we miss a lot. But Miami is a city that allows us to live very well, that makes us enjoy life, that allows us to be calm, that allows the kids to be themselves and live day to day."

Messi has played in 195 matches and scored a record 114 goals for his country. A return for the 2026 World Cup would mark his sixth appearance in the tournament.

Saliba, Martinelli add to Arsenal's injury issues ahead of League Cup game

London: Arsenal duo William Saliba and Gabriel Martinelli will miss the League Cup fourth-round tie against Brighton as the Gunners' injury problems mount.
France defender Saliba was forced off at half-time due to an unspecified injury in the Premier League leaders' win over Crystal Palace on Sunday. Brazil forward Martinelli limped down the tunnel with a knock after coming on as a second-half substitute against Palace.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta, who revealed Declan Rice will be available to face Brighton after he was also injured against Palace, is unsure how long Saliba and Martinelli will be on the sidelines.

Losing two of his key players for any length of time would be a major setback as Arsenal try to win a first Premier League title since 2004 and a maiden Champions League crown. The north Londoners are already without Martin Odegaard, Kai Havertz, Noni Madueke and Gabriel Jesus due to injuries.

"He's out. We are assessing him but he won't be involved in this match," Arteta said of Saliba. "It looks as well Martinelli is going to be out. We have to do some more tests and see the extent of the injury but this game is going to be too early for him."

Martinelli's absence is another blow to Arteta's attacking options. Viktor Gyokeres, signed from Sporting Lisbon in the summer, has started all 12 of Arsenal's Premier League and Champions League fixtures this term, scoring five goals. Arteta, who last won a trophy with the 2020 FA Cup, is wary of becoming further depleted in attack and is likely to rest the Sweden striker against Brighton.

Victory over Palace moved Arsenal four points clear at the top of the Premier League, with seven wins from nine top-flight matches.

PSG set revenue record of 837mn euros

Paris: Paris St Germain posted record revenue in the 2024-2025 season of 837mn euros ($976.11mn), the Champions League winners announced in their financial results. PSG, third in the Deloitte Football Money League in January, beat their previous revenue high of 806 million euros.

The Ligue 1 club generated 367mn euros of commercial revenues and 175mn euros from matchday income, with the Parc des Princes sold out for 170 consecutive matches. The 2024-2025 season was one for the history books as PSG won their first Champions League title plus the Ligue 1 crown, French Cup and Trophee des Champions before losing in the Club World Cup final.

Qatar Sports Investments took over the club in 2011. Revenue from the Club World Cup up to the quarter-finals was included in this season's financial report, while the latter stages will be reflected in next year's results. Despite record revenue, PSG registered an annual loss although the club did not disclose the deficit. Last season, PSG reported a loss of approximately 60 million euros.

DE BRUYNE OUT FOR AT LEAST THREE MONTHS

Kevin De Bruyne will be out of action for at least three months after suffering a hamstring injury while scoring a penalty for Napoli, the club's team manager Gabriele Oriali said. The midfielder scored Napoli's opening goal in a tempestuous 3-1 win over Serie A title rivals Inter Milan on Saturday, but pulled up immediately after netting the spot-kick and had to sit out the rest of the match.

De Bruyne, 34, has scored four times since joining Napoli following his departure from Manchester City in the summer, three times from the penalty spot and once with a free-kick. Oriali did have some good news for Napoli fans as he said that Romelu Lukaku would return to training this week, although he did not specify when the Belgium striker would be ready to play.

Lukaku suffered a thigh injury in a pre-season friendly and is yet to feature in Napoli's league title defence. Napoli lead Serie A on goal difference from Roma, with whom Antonio Conte's side are locked on 18 points.

'DIVISIVE' RODGERS QUITS AS CELTIC MANAGER

Brendan Rodgers has resigned as Celtic manager with the Scottish giants' major shareholder accusing him of "divisive, misleading and self-serving" behaviour. Former boss Martin O'Neill, 73, and ex-player Shaun Maloney will take charge until a permanent successor is appointed, the club said Monday.

Rodgers' second spell at Celtic ended after Sunday's 3-1 Scottish Premiership defeat at Hearts left them eight points adrift of the Edinburgh side in second. The club added that the search for a replacement was already under way, with former manager Ange Postecoglou among the bookmakers' favourites following his recent sacking by Nottingham Forest. Rodgers, 52, returned for a second spell at Celtic Park in 2023, winning successive titles, to add to his league triumphs from 2017 and 2018. But clouds have gathered over the club this season with Celtic knocked out of the Champions League by Kazakhstan minnows Kairat Almaty. Rodgers had appeared at odds with his employers over their summer transfer policy. After Celtic's first defeat at Dundee in 37 years this month, he said the team had "lost a lot of firepower, a lot of goals".

MOTORSPORT

Lusail Circuit to host Global Race Track Summit & Awards

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has been confirmed as the official host circuit for the inaugural edition of CIRCUIT – The Global Race Track Summit & Awards, set to take place from February 16-18, 2026 in Doha.

As one of the world's most advanced and architecturally striking motorsport venues, Lusail Circuit provides the ideal stage for an event dedicated to the future of global motorsport infrastructure. The summit will unite circuit promoters, designers, architects, engineers, investors, and operators from around the world, all driven by a shared mission: to shape the next evolution of motorsport venues. CIRCUIT serves as a global platform for these professionals to network, exchange ideas, and celebrate excellence in race track design, operations, and innovation.

Supported by former Formula 1 driver David Coulthard and his global events company, Whisper Group, CIRCUIT will deliver a world-class production experience, combining storytelling, insight, and spectacle in equal measure. Over three days, the event will feature networking sessions, a



global conference, and an investment forum, culminating in the Global Race Track Awards, which will celebrate excellence in design, operations, innovation, and guest experience across every level of motorsport venue worldwide.

The announcement reinforces Qatar's growing leadership in international motorsport and reflects LIC's continued commitment to driving global collaboration, innovation, and excellence within the industry. Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi, CEO of Lusail International Circuit, said: "LIC has always been more than a venue, it is a symbol of Qatar's vision for the future of motorsport. We are honoured to welcome the world's leading circuit professionals and to play a central role in defining the next generation of race track development."

Chris James, Founder & CEO of CIRCUIT, added: "CIRCUIT exists to bring together the global motorsport venue community, the people who design, build, and run the places where the world comes to race. Lusail International Circuit is the perfect home for that story, a symbol of progress, precision, and the ideal partner as we shape the next evolution of motorsport venues. I wish to thank the President Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai and the CEO Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi of Lusail International Circuit for their vision, belief, and commitment to helping bring this global gathering to life."