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Wednesday, November 19, 2025
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GULF TIMES

SPORT

U-17 WORLD CUP

Brazil rally to shootout win as Japan and Austria power on

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The quarter-final lineup at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar is now complete after eight compelling Round of 16 ties at the Aspire Zone in Doha yesterday. Italy were the first to advance with a narrow win over Uzbekistan, while Portugal and Austria booked their spots in style with emphatic victories over Mexico and England. Switzerland and Morocco also hit three goals each to cruise into the last eight. Burkina Faso, Brazil and Japan required penalty shootouts to progress, edging past Uganda, France and North Korea respectively.

ITALY 3-2 UZBEKISTAN

Italy are through after holding off a spirited Uzbekistan side. Thomas Campaniello set the tone with a composed first-half finish, only for Amirkhon Muradov to level shortly after the break as the Asian champions grew in confidence. Campaniello restored Italy's lead with a smart header before Dauda Iddrisa's low drive made it 3-1. Uzbekistan pulled one back in stoppage time through Azizbek Erimbetov, but Italy held on to open the day's proceedings with a win.

UGANDA 1-1 BURKINA FASO (3-5 PENALTY SHOOTOUT)

Burkina Faso earned a last-eight meeting with Italy after a narrow shootout vic-



Brazil booked a quarter-final meeting with Morocco following a dramatic shootout win over France at the U-17 World Cup at Aspire Zone yesterday.

tory over debutants Uganda. The match lacked clear chances early on but came alive when Arafat Nkoola curled a superb effort into the far corner ten minutes after the interval, sparking huge celebrations among Uganda's energetic fans. Burkina Faso responded with growing urgency, and Alassana Bagayogo equalised with a well-taken volley. With no winner in regulation

time, penalties followed, where Derick Ssozi — brought on late specifically for the shootout — struck the bar with Uganda's only miss, sending the Burkinabe through.

MEXICO 0-5 PORTUGAL

Portugal underlined their title credentials with a ruthless dismantling of ten-man Mexico. Captain Rafael Quintas put

them ahead from the spot after Jose Navarro conceded a penalty and was later sent off for an elbow, leaving Mexico with a mountain to climb. Anisio Cabral added his sixth goal of the tournament with a calm finish early in the second half, before Zeega, Miguel Figueredo and Yoan Periera struck in the closing minutes to complete a resounding win. Mexico ended the match with nine players after a late red card to Santiago Lopez.

BRAZIL 1-1 FRANCE (4-3 PENALTY SHOOTOUT)

Brazil survived another shootout to eliminate France and book a meeting with Morocco. France went ahead when Abdoulaye Camara won a penalty, and although Christ Batola's spot-kick was saved, Remi Himbert followed up to score. Brazil pressed relentlessly in the second half, hitting the post twice before Pietro Tavares produced a stunning half-volley to level. In the shootout, Joao Pedro saved Camara's opening attempt and later denied Milan Leccese, allowing Ruan Pablo to strike the winner.

SWITZERLAND 3-1 IRELAND

Switzerland extended their unbeaten run at the tournament to 12 games after breaking down a determined Republic of Ireland side. Adrien Llukas opened the scoring early in the second half, followed by a clinical strike from Sandro Wyss. Ireland rallied and pulled one back through Vinnie Leonard, but a deflected late effort from Mladen Mijajlovic restored Switzer-

land's two-goal cushion, securing a quarter-final date with Portugal.

NORTH KOREA 1-1 JAPAN (4-5 PENALTY SHOOTOUT)

Japan edged North Korea on penalties after a closely fought encounter. Jelani Ren McGhee's looping header put Japan in front, before Ri Hyok-gwang equalised following sustained pressure. Goalkeeper Shuji Muramatsu made several key saves in regular time and stopped one penalty, while Hiroto Asada converted the winner to send Japan into a quarter-final clash with Austria.

AUSTRIA 4-0 ENGLAND

Austria delivered one of the performances of the round by sweeping aside England. After a tight first half, Hasan Deshishku broke the deadlock with a clever solo finish. England's hopes faded when Alejandro Gomes Rodriguez was sent off, and Austria quickly took control as Johannes Moser scored twice — first from the spot and then from open play — before Ifeanyi Ndukwe rounded off an emphatic win.

MOROCCO 3-2 MALI

Morocco booked a quarter-final against Brazil after edging a gripping all-African tie. Ziyad Baha and Ismail El Aoud gave Morocco two goals from set pieces, either side of Raymond Bomba's penalty. El Aoud then struck again from distance to make it 3-1 before Seydou Dembele's powerful goal reignited Mali's hopes. But Morocco held on to close out a deserved victory.

ISLAMIC SOLIDARITY GAMES

Al-Yafei, Shaheen deliver bronze medals for Qatar

Qatar's tally stands at seven: three gold, two silver and bronze each

By Sports Reporter
Riyadh

Qatar secured two bronze medals yesterday in fencing and wrestling at the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh. Khalid al-Yafei earned bronze in the men's foil competition, while wrestler Shaheen Eidimohammad climbed the podium in the 77kg division. With these results, Qatar's overall medal tally at the Games now stands at seven: three gold, two silver, and two bronze.

Al-Yafei clinched the bronze medal despite falling in his semi-final bout to Turkiye's Kivanc Kirtay, 10-15. In the women's epee event, Qatar's Sheikha Jassim exited in the round of 16 after an 8-15 defeat against Saudi Arabia's Nada Abed. Teammate Thikrayat al-Abdullah was eliminated in the round of 32 following a narrow 14-15 loss to the host nation's Dhi al-Amri.

Meanwhile, Shaheen sealed his bronze medal with a dominant 8-1 victory over Tunisia's Sami Salama. He opened his campaign strongly, defeating Turkiye's Younes Basar 4-1 in the quarter-finals before narrowly losing 3-5 to Kyrgyzstan's Akzhol Makhmudov in the semis, which sent him into the bronze-medal match.

His teammate Aref Mohammedi finished fourth overall after a 2-5 loss to Uzbekistan's Aytjan Khalkhmakhanov in the 67kg bronze-medal contest.

HANDBALL TEAM FACES BAHRAIN IN SEMIS

Qatar's handball team wrapped up the group stage in emphatic fashion, overpowering the Maldives 44-6 in their final Group A match. With three straight victories and a perfect six points, Qatar topped the group and will face Bahrain — the runners-up in Group B — in today's semi-finals. The other semi-final will see Saudi Arabia, winners of Group B, face Group A runners-up the UAE.

Qatar is aiming to defend the gold medal it won at the previous edition in Konya, Turkiye, in 2022, where it defeated the hosts 26-23 in the final. The UAE claimed the second qualifica-



Fencer Khalid al-Yafei (left) and wrestler Shaheen Eidimohammad pose with their medals at the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh yesterday.



tion spot from Group A after edging Iran 28-25, while Saudi Arabia and Bahrain advanced from Group B.

HAYDAR ADVANCES TO 800M FINAL

In athletics, Qatar's Abubaker Haydar qualified for the 800m final after winning his heat in 1:50.09. Teammates Ashraf Osman and Hussein Ibrahim were unable to progress to the 400m final. In the men's shot put event, Ahmed Jibril

finished fourth with a best throw of 18.51m.

TURKIYE CONTINUES TO LEAD MEDAL TABLE

Turkiye maintained its commanding position atop the overall standings with 123 medals (61 gold, 36 silver, 26 bronze).

Uzbekistan remains second with 69 medals, followed by Iran in third with 57. Egypt sits fourth with 36 medals, while Kazakhstan occupies fifth place with 40.



Qatar's Abubaker Haydar qualified for the 800m final at the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games after winning his heat in 1:50.09.

Cherif and Tijan cruise into last 16 at Beach Volleyball World Championships

Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan booked their place in the last 16 of the Beach Volleyball World Championships in Adelaide, Australia yesterday with a gritty straight-sets win over Brazil's George Souto Maior Wanderley and Saymon Barbosa Santos. The Olympic bronze medallists were pushed hard throughout but held their nerve to edge the first set 23-21, before securing a 22-20 win in the second set to seal a 2-0 victory. Tomorrow, Younousse and Tijan take on France's Teo Rotar and Arnaud Gauthier-Rat for a place in the quarter-finals.

TRI-SERIES

Pakistan start on a winning note against Zimbabwe

FAKHAR, USMAN AND NAWAZ SHINE FOR THE HOSTS

Agencies
Rawalpindi

Pakistan began their campaign in the tri-nation T20I series with a five-wicket victory over Zimbabwe as they chased the 148-run target with four balls to spare here at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Zimbabwe will now take on Sri Lanka at the same venue tomorrow in the second match of the series. Player of the match Mohammad Nawaz's all-round contributions (4-0-22-2, 21 not out 12) coupled with a crucial 61-run fifth-wicket stand between Fakhar Zaman (44, 32b, 2x4s, 2x6s) and Usman Khan (37 not out, 28b, 3x4s) led Pakistan to their third T20I win in their last four fixtures.

Zimbabwe's opening pair of Brian Bennett (49, 36b, 8x4s) and Tadiwanashe Marumani (30, 22b, 3x4s, 1x6) put on a solid 72-run stand in eight overs after Pakistan opted to bowl first.

Pakistan's bowling attack reined in Zimbabwe's batting line-up taking eight wickets for 75 runs in the remaining 12 overs after Nawaz halted the opening duo's advance.

After walking in to bat at 94-3 in the 13th over, skipper Sikandar Raza remained unbeaten for 34 off 24 balls (3x4s, 1x6) including a six and a four in the last over of innings. In turn, Pakistan stumbled

to 54-4 after Saim Ayub (22, 26b, 1x4, 1x6) and Sahibzada Farhan (16, 15b, 3x4s) put on 27 runs for the opening stand.

Fakhar and Usman came together when Pakistan required 94 runs off 63 balls and saw off boundary-less 11th over. Usman then hit a boundary each in 12th and 13th over, while Fakhar found a six each in the next two overs bringing the equation down to 42 needed off last five overs.

Zimbabwe threatened to tighten the screws with Fakhar's scalp in the 16th over off Richard Ngarava before Nawaz walked in and stitched an unbeaten 36-run match-winning stand with Usman. Nawaz hit a six over long-on off Brad Evans in the 17th over after which Pakistan required 17 off the last two overs. The duo then gathered 12 runs off Evans in the penultimate over as in a dramatic turn of events he overstepped, they dropped Nawaz and Usman hit a four in a space of two balls.

Tinotenda Maposa – defending five runs off the last over – got hit for back-to-back fours by Nawaz on the first two balls as Pakistan got over the line.

BRIEF SCORES: Zimbabwe 147-8 in 20 overs (B. Bennett 49, S. Raza 34 not out, T. Marumani 30; M. Nawaz 2-22) **lost to Pakistan 151-5 in 19.2 overs** (F. Zaman 44, U. Khan 37 not out, S. Ayub 22, M. Nawaz 21 not out; B. Evans 2-26) **by five wickets.**



Pakistan's Mohammad Nawaz in action against Zimbabwe in the tri-nation T20I series match in Rawalpindi yesterday.

ASIA CUP RISING STARS

India A cruise past Oman to enter semis; Pakistan A thrash UAE

By Sports Reporter
Doha

India A scored a six-wicket win over Oman yesterday to book their semi-final spot in the Asian Cup Rising Stars T20 Tournament at the West End Park International Stadium.

India A chased down a modest target of 136 with six wickets in hand and 13 balls to spare, thanks to a composed half-century from Harsh Dubey and impactful cameos from the top order. Oman A, asked to bat first, struggled for momentum despite a fiery start by skipper Hammad Mirza.

Mirza smashed 32 off just 16 balls, striking three fours and two sixes, but his dismissal in the fourth over derailed the momentum.

Wasim Ali stood out with a steady unbeaten 54 off 45 balls, anchoring the innings while wickets fell around him.

India A's bowlers, led by Suyash Sharma (2/12) and Gurjapneet Singh (2/37), kept the scoring rate under control.

Suyash's tight spell in the middle overs strangled Oman A's scoring opportunities, while Gurjapneet struck at the death to ensure Oman A could only reach 135/7 from their 20 overs.

Chasing 136, India A lost early wickets but kept up the required run rate. Openers Priyansh Arya (10 off 6) and Vaibhav Suryavanshi (12 off 13) fell within the powerplay, but Naman Dhir (30 off 19) injected momentum into the innings with aggressive stroke play.

It was Harsh Dubey who took control of the chase, crafting a well-paced unbeaten 53 off 44

balls. He was ably supported by Nehal Wadhwa (23 off 24), whose wicket fell with just two runs needed. Jitesh Sharma finished things off with a boundary, sealing the win in the 18th over.

Earlier, Pakistan A produced a ruthless display to thrash United Arab Emirates by 9 wickets in a one-sided contest, chasing down a modest 60-run target in just 5.2 overs.

Choosing to bowl first, Pakistan A's bowlers ripped through the UAE batting order. Sufiyan Muqem was the standout, finishing with figures of 3/12 in 4 overs, while Ahmed Daniyal (2/7) and Maaz Sadaqat (2/19) also played key roles in dismantling UAE for just 59 in 18 overs.

Only Syed Muhammad Haidar Shah (20 off 19) showed any resistance with the bat. The rest of the UAE top order crumbled under pressure, with three batters – Babar Hayat, Muhammad Arfan, and Muhammad Rohid – registering ducks. At one stage, UAE were reeling at 50/9, before a small stand between Mohammad Faraz (12)* and Jawadullah (1) pushed them to 59.

In reply, Pakistan A wasted no time. After losing Mohammad Naem for 6 in the first over, Maaz Sadaqat tore into the UAE bowlers with a blazing 37 off 15 balls*, including 4 fours and 3 sixes.

He was well supported by Ghazi Ghori, who remained unbeaten on 16 off 12 balls.

Pakistan A reached 61/1 in just 5.2 overs, sealing a dominant win to finish on top Group B with 6 points, ahead of India (4), Oman (2) and UAE (0).

Bangladesh A lead Group A with 4 points and will play Sri Lanka A today while Afghanistan A will meet Hong Kong.



India A batsman Harsh Dubey received the man-of-the-match award after scoring a half-century against Oman in Doha yesterday.

England quick Wood back bowling after injury scare

Veteran pace ace **Mark Wood** unleashed a fiery spell in the nets yesterday in encouraging signs for England after an injury scare during a pre-Ashes warm-up match last week. The 35-year-old thundered down at what appeared to be top speed off his full run after a tentative start in the tourists' first training session at Perth Stadium ahead of the opening Test against Australia on Friday. Wood sent shudders through the England camp last week when he complained of left hamstring stiffness and was sent for scans. He came through the tests unscathed, but didn't bowl again in the three-day match against the second-tier England Lions. It was his first game in almost nine months following knee surgery and he only got through eight overs. "He was absolutely rapid today. I can tell you that first hand," wicketkeeper Jamie Smith, who drew the short straw and faced him in the nets, told reporters.

"He was near enough full tilt, so it's good signs for us." Whether the 37-Test veteran, who regularly clocks speeds of more than 150kph (93mph), plays the first Test remains to be seen. Should he be fit, England could pair him with fellow speedsters Jofra Archer and Gus Atkinson. If they opt for an all-pace attack on what is tipped to be a lively track, Josh Tongue and Brydon Carse are in line for the fourth spot with allrounder Ben Stokes chipping in overs. Tongue said he believed Wood was capable of playing this week. "If his body's all good and the management think he's good to go, I don't see why not," Tongue told reporters. England, who last lifted the Ashes urn at home in 2015, have lost 13 of their last 15 Tests in Australia. The other two were drawn. They have a golden opportunity to snap the winless streak in Perth with Australia pace spearheads Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood both out injured.



FOCUS

Qatar's veteran cricketers earn historic call-up, paving the way for Qatar team status at over-40s World Cup

In a landmark moment for Qatari sports, three of the nation's most dedicated cricketers have been selected for the international stage, signalling a potential new dawn for the sport in the country. Adnan Khan, Badar Atique, and Hasham Khan will represent the 'Rest of the World XI' in the prestigious International Masters Cricket (IMC) Over-40s T20 World Cup, commencing November 21, 2025, at Karachi's iconic National Stadium.

Their selection is a direct result of Qatar's vibrant, multi-national cricket scene, driven by passionate communities from the UK, Canada, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. This achievement aligns with Qatar's globally unique commitment to sporting culture, exemplified by its National Sports Day – a national holiday dedicated to promoting health and athleticism at all levels.

"This isn't just a tournament; it's a reconnaissance mission for Qatari cricket," notes a veteran cricket analyst. "The performance of this trio on a stage featuring legends like Pakistan's Abdul Razaq provides a crucial case study for establishing an official Qatari veterans' team in the near future."

The squad boasts significant experience. Badar Atique is a proven performer, having represented Canada in the 2023 IMC Global Cup



in Pakistan. His big-tournament temperament, combined with the all-round skills of Adnan Khan and Hasham Khan, will be vital as the Rest of the World XI navigates a tough Group B against cricketing giants like Australia, Sri Lanka, and the combined Rest of the Gulf team.

Farewell event fuels vision for a Qatari Masters team

The community's pride was on full display at a farewell dinner at Spice & Sizzle on November 16. The event, buzzing with optimism, transcended a simple send-off and became a strategic springboard. Central to the discussions was the formal proposal to establish a Veterans Cricket Association in Qatar. This initiative aims to harness the immense talent pool from the South Asian communities, creating structured pathways for Over-40s and Over-50s players to eventually wear Qatar's colours. The selection of Adnan,



Badar and Hasham demonstrates that the raw talent is already here; the structure is the logical next step. One of the organisers and an active member of local community in Doha spoke with RKI and

expressed his pride. Qaiser Anwar said, "this is a great moment for all of us. Having three of our members representing the Rest of the World XI in a major international cricket tournament. This

is just the beginning, and we look forward to seeing more talent from Qatar shining on the global stage."

A Festival of Legends in Karachi: The IMC Over-40s T20



World Cup is a celebration of cricket's enduring spirit, featuring iconic names from the sport's recent past.

The journey of these three cricketers is more than personal glory; it's a beacon. As they step onto the field in Karachi, they carry not only their own ambitions but also the collective aspiration of a nation poised to carve out its own identity in the world of international veterans' cricket.

The 12-team tournament is split into two compelling groups:

Group A: Pakistan (captained by Abdul Razaq), UAE, Canada, Hong Kong China, South Africa, West Indies.

Group B: Australia, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, USA, Rest of the Gulf, Rest of the World (featuring Qatar's trio).

47TH CISM WORLD MILITARY PARACHUTING CHAMPIONSHIPS QATAR 2025

Qatar's record-breaking skydivers feted as winds delay action at CISM worlds

By Sports Reporter
Al Khor

The 47th CISM World Military Parachuting Championships hit a snag as fierce winds battered the Umm Shakhout Airfield, forcing a temporary halt to the high-stakes competition yesterday.

Organisers, keenly monitoring the weather conditions, have postponed the fourth round of the event, prioritising the safety of the world-class military athletes.

In a crucial decision, the Local Organising Committee, in consultation with CISM, postponed yesterday's scheduled parachuting round.

Weather warnings indicated that Doha would face winds exceeding 20 knots, rendering it unsafe for pilots and jumpers — both men and women — to take to the skies above Umm Shakhout.

Organisers are now awaiting stable conditions to proceed with the critical fourth round today.

37 champions crowned with Guinness World Record

However, the turbulence could not overshadow a spectacular moment of triumph and recognition yesterday as the Qatar Air Sports Committee (QASC) honoured its sky-diving legends.

The Qatari squad was celebrated for their incredible feat in setting a new Guinness World Record for the largest aerial fireworks display on a parachute formation entanglement.

Thirty-seven Qatari jumpers, carrying a staggering 89.55kg of pyrotechnics, cemented their place in history in Zephyrhills, Florida, last August.

At a colourful ceremony at Umm Shakhout Airfield, Brigadier General Mohammed bin Zayed al-Otaibi, Head of the QASC and Commander of the Joint Qatari



Brigadier General Mohammed bin Zayed al-Otaibi, Head of the QASC and Commander of the Joint Qatari Forces, accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Saeed al-Mansoori, Deputy Head of the QASC, cut a cake to honour record-breaking skydivers from Qatar. **Right:** A group photograph of Qatari skydivers who were honoured yesterday.



Forces, accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Abdullah Saeed al-Mansoori, Deputy Head of the QASC, yesterday presented the gold medals and officially documented certificates from Guinness World Records.

A wave of euphoria swept over the 37 honoured champions, whose world-class achievement brought immense pride to the QASC family, the International Military Sports Council (CISM) and the global Guinness body.

Brig Gen al-Otaibi delivered an inspiring address, applauding the team's achievement — their fifth world record — as a powerful “catalyst and motivator” for all Qatari sports teams. “You are world champions, and you must confirm your athletic superiority and double your efforts,” the Brigadier General said, emphasising the need for continued dedication and performance quality. The celebration concluded with a commemorative photo shoot and the ceremonial cutting of a massive cake emblazoned with the Guinness certificate.

The Qatari Aerobatic Team: A mark of excellence

Since its formation in 2013, the Qatari Aerobatic Team has become synonymous with quality and distinction within the QASC. Known for their efficiency and merit, the team consistently secures coloured medals and places on global podiums.

First Lieutenant Abdullah Ahmad al-Hammadi told reporters yesterday: “Our men have honoured us on the global stage. They deserve this recognition for their dedication, distinction, and for sitting atop the world of aerobatics, culminating in five Guinness World Records. This is not surprising for them — they are the Knights of the Sky and always rise to the occasion.”

First Lieutenant Ghanem al-Kubaisi said yesterday: “Our champions are the best ambassadors for air sports. The organising and technical success of the CISM World Military Parachuting Championship has been outstanding. I congratulate the Qa-



First Lt Abdullah al-Hammadi



First Lt Ghanem al-Kubaisi



First Lt Abdulaziz al-Mutawa

tari heroes. They have honoured Qatari air sports and been the best ambassadors for the nation internationally.”

First Lieutenant Abdulaziz al-Mutawa said yesterday: “The recognition from Brigadier General Mohammed bin Zayed al-Otaibi is a strong incentive for our exceptional athletes. The Qatari Aerobatic Team is a model of giving and perseverance and a source of immense pride. We hope they continue with the same high spirit.”

A dazzling array of five World Records

The Qatari Aerobatic Team is now unequivocally the world's best, holding five Guinness World Records:

1st Record (Nov 19, 2018): Largest aerial parachute formation entanglement (25 jumpers) in De-Land, Florida, USA.

2nd Record (Jan 2021): Largest parachute formation entanglement (25 jumpers, 5 points) in Evora, Portugal.

3rd Record (2021): Largest parachute formation entanglement (25 jumpers, 4 position changes) in Zephyrhills, USA.

4th Record (Oct 2022): Largest aerial parachute formation with fire-works (37 jumpers) in Zephyrhills, USA.

5th Record (Aug 5, 2025): The record celebrated yesterday: Largest aerial fireworks display on a parachute formation entanglement (37 jumpers, 89.55 kg payload) in Zephyrhills, Florida, USA.

TENNIS

World No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz out of Davis Cup finale

‘I am very sorry to announce that I will not be able to play with Spain’

AFP
Bologna, Italy

Spain's world number one Carlos Alcaraz will miss the Davis Cup Final 8 tournament in Italy this week due to injury, the two-time Wimbledon champion posted on X yesterday.

“I am very sorry to announce that I will not be able to play with Spain in the Davis Cup in Bologna. I have swelling in my right hamstring and the medical advice is not to play,” the 22-year-old six-time Grand Slam winner said.

“I’ve always said that playing for Spain is the greatest thing there is and I was really looking forward to helping the team fight for the Davis Cup trophy.”

The ATP on Monday published the 2025 year-end PIF ATP Rankings on ATPTour.com with Alcaraz finishing as ATP Year-End No 1 presented by PIF.

The Spaniard enjoyed a back-and-forth battle with Sinner for top spot throughout the season before ultimately securing his second year-end No 1 honour (also 2022).

At just 22 years old, Alcaraz has now held World No 1 in the PIF ATP Rankings for 46 weeks, more than 15 other members of the prestigious ATP No 1 Club. He recaptured the position from Sinner after winning the US Open and, with the exception of one week, has held it since.

Alcaraz is just the second active player to secure multiple year-end No 1 finishes, joining Novak Djokovic (8). The Murcia native won eight titles to lead the ATP Tour. It was the most he has claimed in



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz gestures during the singles final match against Italy's Jannik Sinner at the ATP Finals in Turin on Sunday. (AFP)

a season in his career. Alcaraz's announcement yesterday comes two days after he lost to arch rival Jannik Sinner, the Italian world number two, 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 in the ATP Finals title-decider in Turin.

Sinner had already announced he would miss the tournament, with hosts Italy aiming for a third title in a row. Italy's second-highest ranked player, Lorenzo Musetti has also pulled out of Italy's defence as his wife is expecting a child. “Those are very three specific cases,” International Tennis Federation chief executive Ross Hutchins told AFP.

“You can actually understand why those cases have happened this year,” he added.

Austria, France, Belgium, Czech Republic, Argentina and Germany are the other countries vying for victory in Bologna.

BELGIUM TAKE 1-0 LEAD AGAINST FRANCE

Raphael Collignon of Belgium yesterday helped his team take a 1-0 lead in their Davis Cup clash when he beat France's Corentin Moutet in three sets.

Collignon won 2-6, 7-5, 7-5 in two hours and 33 minutes.



Belgium's Raphael Collignon reacts during his singles match against France's Corentin Moutet yesterday. (AFP)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Report says Stenson returning to Tour after LIV relegation

Reuters
Stockholm, Sweden

Henrik Stenson, one of the first players to join LIV Golf, told the media outlet *Bunkered* yesterday that he is returning to the DP World Tour in 2026.

Stenson, 49, reportedly settled his fines with Europe's top tour totalling more than £1mn. They accumulated because Stenson, since 2022, participated in LIV events that conflicted with DP World Tour tournaments without the latter's permission. Stenson later resigned his DP World Tour card.

The Swede, best known for beating Phil Mickelson to win the 2016 Open Championship, was stripped of the 2023 Team Europe Ryder Cup captaincy as a result of his pivot to LIV Golf.

He won the first LIV event he entered, LIV Golf Bedminster in

July 2022, but did not win again on the Saudi-funded tour. He finished better than 20th only once in 2025 and finished 49th in the season standings, the first one in the league's “drop zone” despite his status as a captain of Majesticks GC.

Stenson opted to return to Europe rather than try to play his way back onto the LIV circuit.

“Over the course of a career, you’re going to have good years, you’re going to have bad years,” Stenson told *Bunkered*. “It’s part of professional sports. You’re going to have disappointment. You’re going to have good times.”

The news came on the same day that Laurie Canter of England officially became the first former PGA Tour player to earn back his eligibility on the tour after defecting to LIV. Canter's season in Europe allowed him to finish second in the PGA Tour eligibility rankings via the Race to Dubai.

FOCUS

Rai replaces Thomas in Hero World field

Reuters
London

England's Aaron Rai will replace Justin Thomas in next month's Hero World Challenge field.

Thomas will miss the start of the 2026 season after announcing last week that he had undergone microdiscectomy surgery on his back. No timetable has been announced yet for his return to competition.

Rai is up to No 23 in the Official World Golf Ranking after winning the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship two weeks ago before finishing 41st at the DP World Tour Championship on Sunday.

He also tied for third at the BMW Championship.

Rai posted 10 top-25 finishes in 21 events on the PGA Tour this

season. This will be the second time he has played in the Dec 4-7 event at the Albany Golf Course in the Bahamas hosted by Tiger Woods, having tied for 14th in the 20-player field last year.

2026 HERO WORLD CHALLENGE FIELD: Scottie Scheffler JJ Spaun Robert MacIntyre Harris English Keegan Bradley Justin Rose Sepp Straka Hideki Matsuyama Cameron Young Sam Burns Corey Connors Chris Gotterup Wyndham Clark Brian Harman Andrew Novak Alex Noren Akshay Bhatia Billy Horschel Jordan Spieth Aaron Rai

Thomas said a successful microdiscectomy was performed last Thursday in New Yorks, alleviating a disc problem that had been causing hip pain.

Thomas, 32, is a 16-time PGA event champion, having won the PGA Championship in 2017 and 2022.

WORLD CUP

Last-gasp penalty snatches Iraq play-off berth

AFP
Paris

Iraq scored a penalty in the 17th minute of injury time to beat the United Arab Emirates 2-1 in the second leg of their 2026 World Cup qualifying tie yesterday and secure a place in the inter-confederation play-offs.

Substitute Mohanad Ali, who plays in the UAE for Dibba, and Amir al-Ammari scored in Basra as Graham Arnold's men came from behind to secure a 3-2 aggregate victory after last week's 1-1 first-leg draw.

Iraq, whose only appearance at a World Cup was a group-stage exit in Mexico in 1986, progressed to the six-team play-offs where the last two tickets to the finals will be decided. The UAE broke the deadlock in the 52nd minute, as Yahia Nader slipped the ball through for Brazilian-born forward Caio Lucas to fire the ball past Iraq goalkeeper Jalal Hachim.

But Iraq hit back midway through the second half when

Mohanad Ali headed home al-Ammari's free-kick. The home side piled on the pressure late on, with Mohanad Ali missing two good chances to score a winner. But VAR awarded Iraq the latest of penalties for a handball, and al-Ammari stepped up to net the spot-kick and keep alive his nation's hopes of ending their 40-year wait to play in a World Cup.

Bolivia, New Caledonia and the Democratic Republic of Congo have also booked their places at the inter-confederation play-offs.

The other two play-off spots will be decided by the final round of CONCACAF qualifiers, which was scheduled for late last night, with Jamaica and Panama currently in position to qualify for the mini-tournament.

Iraq's Mohannad Ali celebrates with teammates after scoring against the UAE in the second leg of their 2026 World Cup qualifying match in Basra yesterday. (Reuters)



Tuchel plans talks with sidelined players over England recall

England manager Thomas Tuchel says he will be contacting players who have been left out of the squad in recent matches to help them plot a path back into contention before World Cup. Several players, including Real Madrid's Trent Alexander-Arnold and Everton's Jack Grealish, were dropped for this month's qualifiers against Serbia and Albania, while Jude Bellingham was not included for October's matches against Wales and Latvia. England beat Serbia 2-0 at home and then claimed a 2-0 win in Albania to finish top of Group K in the World Cup qualifiers with eight wins in as many games, while also not conceding a single goal. "First of all, it's my job now to make contact with everyone, players like Trent," Tuchel said. "Players that are on our long list, 55, 60 players, to reach out to them, be in touch with them, explain to them why they were not here."

FOCUS

Germany, Dutch lock up World Cup spots in style

'Tonight we showed the quality we have in this team. It was a pleasure'



Germany's Assan Ouedraogo (centre) celebrates with teammates Felix Nmecha (left) and Nathaniel Brown after scoring his team's sixth goal during the FIFA World Cup 2026 European qualification Group A match against Slovakia in Leipzig. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

Germany and Netherlands went on goal sprees as they wrapped up World Cup qualification with resounding wins in their last European group matches on Monday. "Every player played well today and worked like a dog," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said.

Both European giants needed only to draw to be sure of reaching the global footballing showpiece in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Instead, both went on the attack. Germany took early control as they beat Slovakia 6-0 in Leipzig. The Netherlands took longer to pull away before overcoming Lithuania 4-0 in Amsterdam.

Slovakia finished second in Group A. Poland, who survived a scare to win 3-2 in Malta, ended up second to the Dutch in Group G. Second spot secures a place in the 16-team European play-offs in March.

Northern Ireland's 1-0 win over

Luxembourg in Belfast could not lift them out of third in Group A but they will make the play-offs because of their Nations League performance.

In Group L, Croatia, already assured of first place, scored twice in the last 18 minutes to come from behind and win 3-2 away to Montenegro. The Czech Republic, in second, slaughtered visiting Gibraltar 6-0.

In Leipzig, four times winners Germany started the night level on points with opponents Slovakia atop Group A but with an edge in goal difference. Slovakia, who beat Germany earlier in qualifying, created some threatening moments but could not take them.

Nick Woltemade headed the Germans into an 18th minute lead. Once Serge Gnabry added a second 11 minutes later, the hosts were in total control.

Leroy Sane scored twice before half time and substitutes Ridle Baku and Assan Ouedraogo struck in the second half.

"We're relieved. It's a great moment," Woltemade said. "I'm playing, I'm scoring goals and I'm

hopefully playing at the World Cup. Tonight we showed the quality we have in this team. It was a pleasure."

Nagelsmann praised his team's attitude. "We showed incredible team spirit and pushed ourselves on the pitch from the very beginning," he said.

In Amsterdam, Ronald Koeman's Dutch team entertained the 50,000 spectators as their high-tempo play constantly pinned Lithuania back in their own half. Tijani Reijnders perfectly set up by Frenkie de Jong gave the hosts a 15-minute lead but the massed visiting defence and a spectacular first-half display by goalkeeper Edvinas Gertmonas held the Dutch at bay until the 58th minute.

Cody Gakpo added a second from the penalty spot before Xavi Simons and Donyell Malen struck in the next four minutes allowing Koeman to bring on five substitutes. Like Woltemade, the 27-year-old Reijnders was excited to be heading to the World Cup. He did not make his Netherlands debut until after the 2022 Qatar finals.

"I watched it at home, on the couch, with my Oranje shirt on," he said. "This time round it's obviously going to be very different for me. I'll have to wait a while until it comes around, but I'm really looking forward to taking part for the first time."

In Malta, Poland were given a scare on the way to a victory which ultimately did not lift them out of second place. Robert Lewandowski, whose unhappiness at a reduced role in the team led to a coaching change earlier in the campaign, gave the Poles the lead after 32 minutes. Irvin Cardona replied for the home four minutes later.

Lewandowski then set up Pawel Wszolek after 59 minutes but the game took a wild swing to Malta in the 68th minute. Karol Swiderski finished a Polish counter-attack by sticking the ball into the net but a video check showed that at the start of the move Jakub Kiwior had fouled Cardona in the Polish box.

Teddy Teuma levelled from the penalty. But Piotr Zielinski's long-range strike flew in off a post after 85 minutes to give Poland victory.

COMMENT

Lopetegui takes positives from Qatar's loss to Zimbabwe

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar national team coach **Julen Lopetegui** insists the friendly against Zimbabwe provided crucial insights despite the 2-1 defeat, serving as a vital preparatory step for the upcoming FIFA Arab Cup, which will be held in Qatar from December 1.

In Monday's pre-tournament friendly at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Qatar succumbed to a late comeback by the visitors. Lopetegui, who opted to rest key players including Akram Afif, Boualem Khoukhi and Karim Boudiaf, utilised the match to evaluate 22 different players.

Lopetegui acknowledged the team's disappointment with the result but emphasised it was a

minor setback in their broader journey. He explained that the primary objective was to grant playing time and assess the capabilities of more players, particularly new additions to the squad.

The Spaniard confirmed his preference for a single international friendly this month, with full preparations resuming after the tenth round of the Qatar Stars League concludes. The team will also be bolstered by the return of players competing for Al Sadd, Al Duhail and Al Gharafa in the AFC Champions League Elite.

Lopetegui reiterated the team's ambition to compete fiercely in the FIFA Arab Cup and make a significant impact.

He affirmed his commitment to meticulous planning for the upcoming competitions, having taken over the coaching role last May.



Trump unveils fast-track visas for World Cup ticket holders

Washington: President Donald Trump on Monday unveiled special fast-track visas for people with tickets to the 2026 World Cup - but his administration warned it was no guarantee of entry to the United States.

The United States has promised a seamless experience for next year's tournament despite concerns that Trump's border crackdown could hurt fans. "For those who intend to join us for the World Cup, I strongly encourage you to apply right away," Trump said as he announced the scheme in the Oval Office with Gianni Infantino, the boss of global soccer body FIFA.

Infantino - who has repeatedly appeared at Trump's side since the Republican's return to the White House in January - said the so-called "FIFA Pass" was a "very important announcement."

"If you have a ticket for the World Cup, you can have a prioritised appointment to get your visa," Infantino said. "We'll have between five and 10mn people coming to America from from all over the world to enjoy the World Cup, and with this FIFA pass, we can make sure that those who buy a ticket, that are legitimate football fans or soccer fans, they can come

and attend the World Cup in the best conditions."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio however issued a warning to those hoping to come for the tournament. "Your ticket is not a visa," Rubio said at the announcement. "It doesn't guarantee admission to the US. It guarantees you an expedited appointment, you're still going to go through the same vetting."

Rubio said ticket holders would get an interview within six to eight weeks under the plan but urged people to act now. "Don't wait till the last minute," he said. Trump has made the World Cup a centrepiece event of both his second presidency and the 250th anniversary of US independence next year. But the giant sporting extravaganza has not escaped the political turmoil caused by Trump's hardline stance on a host of issues.

Trump has raised the possibility of moving games from certain host cities amid a crackdown on what he says is crime and migration in some Democratic-run cities. The draw for the World Cup is due to take place in Washington on December 5. FIFA will present a new peace prize on the same day, with widespread speculation that it could go to Trump.