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MOTORSPORT

Off-road hero al-Attiyah grabs Dakar Rally top spot

MOTORCYCLE CHAMPION SANDERS VOWS TO CONTINUE DAKAR DESPITE INJURY

The Dacia Sandriders' Qatari driver Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and Belgian co-pilot Fabian Lurquin compete in Stage 10 of the 48th edition of the Dakar Rally 2026, between Bisha and Bisha, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. *(AFP)*

Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Daniel Sanders in action during stage 10 of the Dakar Rally yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Reuters
Jeddah

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah yesterday returned to the top for Dacia and opened up a 12 minute gap on Toyota's South African Henk Lategan and a further 50 seconds on Ford's previous leader Nani Roma after stage 10 of the Dakar Rally.

"It was very tough," al-Attiyah, a five-time Dakar champion, said after retaining top spot in the car category.

"My head and body have taken a real beating. But we really attacked from start to finish," al-Attiyah added.

Lategan had described Tuesday as a bit of a disaster and it continued on stage 10 where he made a navigational mistake and ran out of fuel. "I don't know what to say any more.

"Everything that could go wrong has gone wrong in this race," he said.

"We lost power steering yesterday, ran out of fuel today and got lost twice missing waypoints. This isn't how you win the Dakar."

France's nine-times world rally champion Sebastien Loeb was fourth overall, 23 minutes behind teammate al-Attiyah.

Mathieu Serradori won the stage for the Century Racing team, with al-Attiyah second and Loeb third.

The race, which ends on Saturday on the Red Sea coast, is also the first round of the World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) season.

Dacia Sandriders' Qatari driver Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah talks to the event media after stage 10 of the 2026 Dakar Rally yesterday.

Meanwhile, reigning motorcycle champion Daniel Sanders vowed to battle on in the Dakar Rally yesterday despite suffering a suspected broken collarbone on stage 10 in the Saudi Arabian desert.

KTM RIDER CRASHED OVER A DUNE

The Australian KTM rider crashed over a dune after 138km of the 371km stage from the overnight bivouac to Bisha and dropped from the lead to fourth overall, with American Ricky Brabec taking over at the top on a Honda.

"It looks like for sure a snapped collarbone… We've let the rally go now. We'll go back to the team and re-evaluate the injuries and the situation and see if its safe to continue I guess," said Sanders.

"I want to continue, I wouldn't finish today if I didn't want to continue… I've just done 150k in the sand dunes, it's all rocks now so I can just stand up and cruise along.

"On the gravel roads its a little bit easier, but we'll see. We don't quit. Mum and dad didn't raise no quitter, so I'm not pulling out now. Until someone else tells me to pull out, or they drag me out of the race, I'm not stopping."

Honda's Adrien Van Beveren won the stage ahead of Brabec, who was credited with a minute and 37 seconds for assisting Sanders and assumed the overall lead.

The American leads Argentina's KTM rider Luciano Benavides by 56 seconds with Spaniard Tosha Schareina third for Honda but 15 minutes and 43 seconds off the pace.

FOOTBALL

Mane takes dominant Senegal past Egypt into AFCON final

AFP
Tangiers, Morocco

Sadio Mane scored a 78th-minute winner to give Senegal a 1-0 victory over Egypt yesterday in their Africa Cup of Nations semi-final in Tangiers.

Former champions Senegal dominated possession against cautious Egypt and will face hosts Morocco or Nigeria on Sunday in the final.

The result maintained the dominance of Senegal over Egypt. The Teranga Lions beat the Pharaohs in the 2022 AFCON final and in a 2022 World Cup play-off. Both victories came after penalty shoot-outs.

Egypt captain Mohamed Salah was well contained by the Senegal defence. This was his fifth AFCON and the closest he has come to a winners' medal is finishing a runner-up twice.

Veteran Senegal centre-back Kalidou Koulibaly was yellow-carded after 17 minutes for fouling Egypt striker Omar Marmoush.

It was his second booking in as many matches and ruled him out of the final.

The second semi-final will be played later.

Worse was to follow for the 34-year-old based in Saudi Arabia as he sustained an injury six minutes later and had to be replaced by Mamadou Sarr. Senegal did more attacking in a cagey first half without seriously threatening 37-year-old Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy.

An attempt by Nicolas Jackson flew over and, soon after, teammate Pape Gueye was on target with a low angled shot, but it lacked power and was comfortably saved.

The rival benches became involved in heated verbal exchanges and some pushing as half-time approached, leading rival head coaches Pape Thiaw and Hossam Hassan to appeal for calm.

Thiaw and Hassan were then addressed by the referee and order was restored in the rival dugouts. Egypt threatened the Senegal defence for the first time in added time at the end of the opening half when awarded a free-kick close to the touchline.

But the set-piece delivery from Salah slipped through a crowded goalmouth and out of play beyond the far post.

Both teams made changes for the second half. Egypt replaced Ahmed Aboul-Fetouh with Mahmoud 'Trezeguet' Hassan and Senegal introduced Lamine Camara for Habib Diallo, who had been cautioned.

As the semi-final passed the hour mark, the pattern of the opening half continued.

Egypt were content to let Senegal have more possession, confident they would snuff out any threat to El Shenawy.

Senegal's Sadio Mane (right) celebrates his goal with teammate Iliman Ndiaye during the Africa Cup of Nations semi-final against Egypt at the Grand stadium in Tangiers yesterday. *(AFP)*

With 15 minutes of regular time remaining, Egypt had not had a goal attempt on target nor had they forced a corner. Finally, with 12 minutes remaining, the Senegalese pressure was rewarded with two-time African player of the Year Mane scoring. An ambitious long-range effort by Camara was deflected to Mane, and his low shot flew past El Shenawy and into the net.

CRICKET

Mitchell smashes unbeaten century as NZ level series

NEW ZEALAND BEAT INDIA BY SEVEN WICKETS IN SECOND ODI

Reuters
Rajkot

Daryl Mitchell scored an unbeaten 131 from 117 balls to lead New Zealand to a seven-wicket win over India in the second One Day International yesterday and level the three-match series at 1-1.

New Zealand won the toss and sent India into bat, restricting the hosts to 284/7 in Rajkot. The visitors chased down that target with 15 deliveries remaining to set up a series decider.

Mitchell, who has been in fine form in ODI cricket and scored 761 runs in 2025 at an average of 54.35, came in with New Zealand in a difficult position at 46-2.

The 34-year-old quickly built a strong partnership with Will Young as the pair combined for 162 runs, with Mitchell being dropped on 80 by Prasidh Krishna before going on to notch his eighth ODI century.

"We haven't won here for a couple of years. Nice to get a win. I am just enjoying doing the job for the country," Mitchell said.

"Young is a class player, I love batting with him, we also have fun batting together. He enjoyed playing the spinners and using all his options."

Young (87) also came close to scoring a century before he top-edged a Kuldeep Yadav delivery and sent the ball looping into Nitish Kumar Reddy's hands, ending the partnership.

New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell (right) and Will Young bump fists during the second one day international against India in Rajkot yesterday. *(AFP)*

It was too little too late from India, however, as Mitchell and Glenn Phillips (32) took New Zealand over the finish line and helped them complete their highest-ever ODI run chase in India.

"It is a complete performance from us and proud of the team. We were very happy at the halfway point. We bowled very well. We were ready to chase anything, really," New Zealand captain Michael Bracewell said.

Earlier, Kristian Clarke took three decisive wickets to stall India's top-order, sending Rohit Sharma, Shreyas Iyer and Virat Kohli back to the dressing room.

K L Rahul was the cornerstone of India's innings as he struck an unbeaten 112 from 92 balls.

He put together a 73-run stand with Ravindra Jadeja (27) and added another 57 with Reddy (20) as he scored his eighth century and also recorded his joint-highest score in the 50-over format.

"We did get a decent start with the ball, but they batted very well in the middle overs," India captain Shubman Gill said.

"In the first 10-15 overs that we bowled, the ball was doing well. After that the wicket settled. But we could have been more brave, and taken more chances."

The decisive third match of the series will be played in Indore, before the teams wrap up their preparations for next month's Twenty20 World Cup with a five-match T20I series.

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 286 for 3 (Mitchell 131*, Young 87, Prasidh 1-49) **beat India 284 for 7** (Rahul 112*, Gill 56, Clarke 3-56) **by 7 wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

Hazlewood 'on track' to start T20 World Cup after Ashes absence

Reuters
Melbourne

Australia fast bowler **Josh Hazlewood** expects to be ready for the start of the Twenty20 World Cup next month after sitting out their Ashes series victory against England through injuries, the 36-year-old said.

The right-arm quick missed Australia's 4-1 Ashes victory with a hamstring strain.

He subsequently suffered Achilles soreness in his rehabilitation, but was confident he would be ready for Australia's tournament opener against Ireland in Colombo on February 11.

"Everything's going to plan," Hazlewood told the *ESPN Cricinfo* website.

"We took a few extra weeks once we couldn't make the test matches," he said.

"I had a couple of bowls off the half-run last week.

"Running's going well, all the strength stuff's going well so, yeah, on track."

Hazlewood's availability from the start will be a big boost for Australia, who are fretting over the composition of their pace attack.

Australia have named Pat Cummins in the World Cup squad but are considering delaying his return from a lumbar stress injury that prompted the team to rest the quick after his single Ashes appearance in Adelaide.

With their Ashes hero Mitchell Starc retiring from T20 internationals, Xavier Bartlett is set to claim the second pace bowling slot in the group stage of the World Cup.

After the World Cup, Hazlewood will be in action in the Indian Premier League, the world's richest T20 franchise competition.

Later this year, Australia will enter an 11-month stretch during which they will play up to 21 tests.

Hazlewood said it was too early to plan his Test workload.

"(With) white ball, you can really sit down and nut it out because you know you're involved for four or 10 overs pretty much," Hazlewood said.

"With the red ball, it is a bit more on the run.

"You can map out the way you want to train to get ready for that first one, but I think once the Tests start then it's sort of play it by ear and have those conversations on the go."

FOCUS

Pakistan set to play Australia in final T20I World Cup preparation

AFP
Lahore, Pakistan

Former champions Pakistan and Australia will face off in three Twenty20 internationals to wrap up their preparations for next month's World Cup, the Pakistani cricket board said yesterday.

India and Sri Lanka are co-hosts of the Twenty20 World Cup, which runs from February 7-March 8.

"Pakistan will play Australia in three Twenty20 internationals in Lahore which serves as crucial game time for both sides ahead of the World Cup," the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said in a statement.

They will play at the Pakistani city's Gaddafi Stadium from January 29-February 1, it added.

Australia's T20I squad will arrive in Lahore on January 28, the PCB revealed.

Pakistan are placed in Group A of the 20-team World Cup along with arch-rivals India, the United States, Namibia and the Netherlands.

Australia are placed in Group B with Sri Lanka, Ireland, Zimbabwe and Oman.The top two teams from each of the four groups will qualify for the Super Eight stages.

PCB chief operating officer Sumair Ahmed said fans were looking forward to Australia's visit.

"We are excited and look forward to hosting Australia to mark a blockbuster beginning of the year for Pakistan cricket fans," he said.

Pakistan vs Australia series schedule in Lahore:
January 29: 1st T20I
January 31: 2nd T20I
February 1: 3rd T20I

AC Milan coach Allegri carries torch as others complain

Rome: Massimiliano Allegri, the coach of Italian soccer side AC Milan, joined the ranks of Winter Olympics torchbearers yesterday, amid a row over the exclusion of former athletes that has prompted government intervention.

The torch is journeying through Italy's 110 provinces ahead of the start of the Milano-Cortina games, scheduled for February 6-22.

Allegri walked with other volunteers through the city of Borgomanero, about 70 kilometres (45 miles) northwest of Milan.

Some 10,001 torchbearers have been mobilised to carry the flame, wearing white uniforms with a red-and-yellow pattern recalling the Olympic flame.

But former cross-country skiing champion Silvio Fauner is complaining that he and other Olympic medal winners have been sidelined.

"There's no respect for us champions. I consider it an incredible insult," Fauner said in an interview on Tuesday with sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.

"I represent 10 athletes who have won 35 Olympic medals, starting with the two gold relay teams of 1994 and 2006... We were not involved in the slightest in any Winter Olympics initiative in our country. Neither torchbearers, nor ambassadors, nor any role. Nothing," he said.

Olympics organisers said in a statement Fauner had been excluded from torchbearing duties because political office holders are disqualified.

Fauner is deputy mayor of Sappada, a ski resort in the Dolomites.

In a follow-up on *Facebook*, the retired athlete complained of double standards, noting that a local politician was among the torchbearers in Sicily.

COMMENT

LA28 promise 'affordable' Olympic Games tickets

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

Los Angeles 2028 Olympics chiefs promised an "affordable and inclusive" Games as they prepared to open registration for a lottery to buy tickets.

LA28 chairman Casey Wasserman said one million tickets to the Olympics and Paralympics would be priced at $28 while a third of the roughly 14 million tickets due to go on sale would cost $100 or less.

"From the beginning, we've been clear: access to these games, because these games belong to everyone," Wasserman said. "These games have to be affordable and inclusive."

Wasserman was speaking in the shadow of the historic Los Angeles Coliseum on the eve of the first step towards tickets going on sale.

Chairman of the LA2028 Olympics Organising Committee Casey Wasserman speaks during a ceremonial lighting of the LA28 Olympic cauldron in Los Angeles.

Yesterday at 7:00am local time (1500 GMT), fans around the world wereable to register for the chance to secure an opportunity to buy tickets starting in April. Fans registering will be entered into a draw that will randomly assign time slots to buy tickets for the games.

Wasserman's comments yesterday follow weeks of criticism of world football's governing body FIFA's ticketing strategy for this year's World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

FIFA was forced to announce a limited number of tickets priced at $60 last month after ticket prices for the tournament were condemned as "extortionate and astronomical."

"This is the first step for fans around the city, around the country and yes around the world, to get their ticket to history and join us here in LA for the greatest games the world will have ever seen," Wasserman said.

"The foundation of everything we're building tomorrow is about fans, the people who bring the energy, the enthusiasm and the noise."

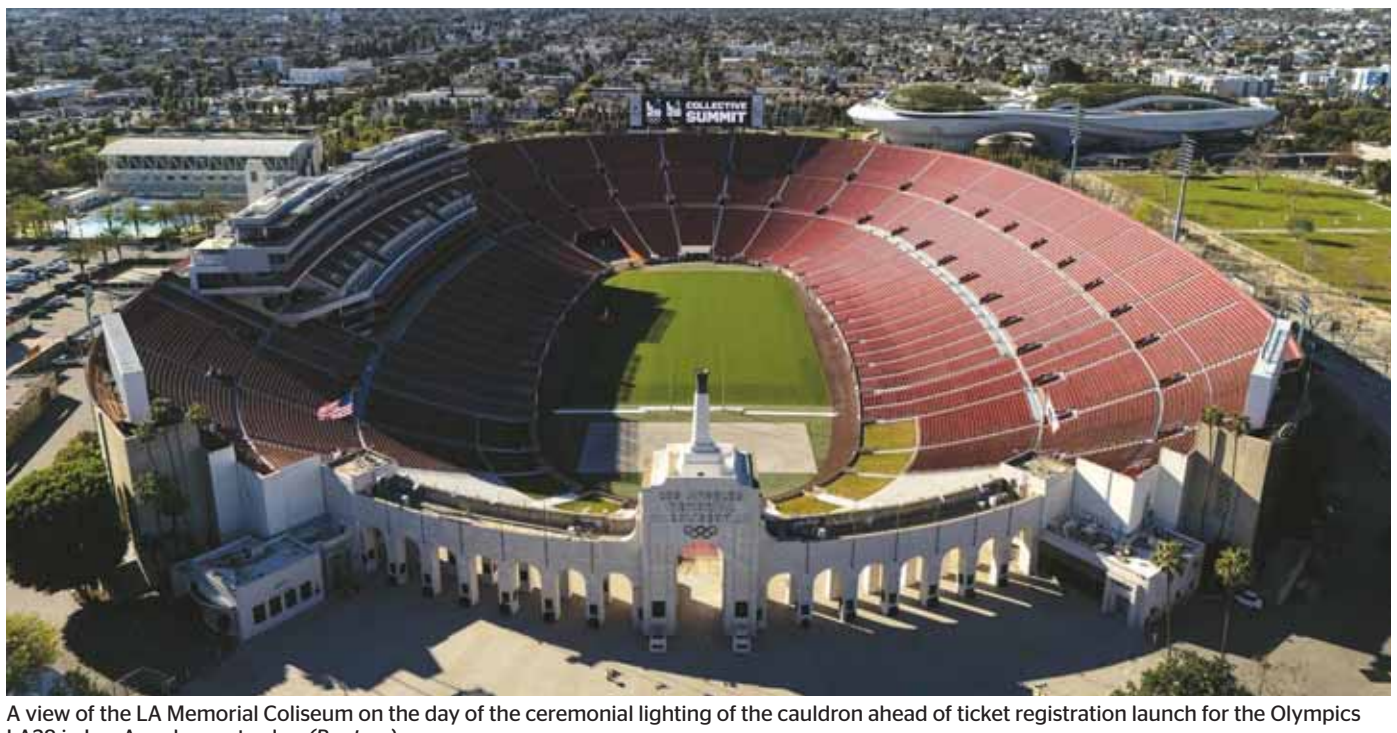
The ceremony yesterday gathered around 300 Olympians and Paralympians from past Games as officials conducted a ceremonial lighting of the Olympic cauldron at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

"Our tickets are going to be affordable, our games will be accessible, and they're right here in our backyard," LA28 chief executive Reynold Hoover said at the event.

Hoover added that organisers had already seen more than 150,000 people sign up to be volunteers at the Games.

"That's nearly 150,000 supporters saying 'I want to be a part of this, I want to be a part of history," he said.

US swimming legend Janet Evans, a four-time Olympic gold medallist and LA28's chief athlete officer, cited her own experience of going to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics as a fan.



A view of the LA Memorial Coliseum on the day of the ceremonial lighting of the cauldron ahead of ticket registration launch for the Olympics LA28 in Los Angeles yesterday. *(Reuters)*

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Sinner in way as Alcaraz targets career Grand Slam

Success on the Melbourne Park hard courts has eluded Spaniard

FROM LEFT: Greece's Maria Sakkari, Russia's Andrey Rublev, Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik, Germany's Alexander Zverev and Spain's Carlos Alcaraz react during the 'One Point Slam' exhibition event at Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne. *(AFP)*

AFP
Melbourne

Carlos Alcaraz is targeting a career Grand Slam at the Australian Open but winning the only major to elude him will be no easy feat with great rival Jannik Sinner standing in his way.

Spain's Alcaraz already has six major titles under his belt aged just 22, but success on the Melbourne Park hard courts is a glaring hole in his resume. He has not made it past the quarter-finals in four trips to Australia, losing at that stage in 2025 to Novak Djokovic and Alexander Zverev the year before.

"It's my first goal to be honest," Alcaraz said of Australia after winning the US Open last year, his second Slam title of 2025 after defending his crown at Roland Garros. "When I just go to the pre-seasons to what I want to improve, what I want to achieve, Australian Open is there."

Should he snap his Australia drought at the tournament starting on Sunday, Alcaraz would become the youngest man to bank a career Grand Slam, surpassing retired compatriot Rafael Nadal. Nadal secured all four majors by the age of 24. Alcaraz faces a significant roadblock in Italy's Sinner, the two-time defending champion who is chasing his own slice of history.

If the 24-year-old makes it three in a row in Melbourne he would join Djokovic as the only men in the Open era to do so. The Serbian legend has done the three-peat twice during his 10 titles at Melbourne Park.

"I feel like a better player than last year," warned Sinner after completing his 2025 campaign with 58 wins and just six defeats. "A lot of wins and not many losses. And in the losses I had, I tried to see the positive thing and tried to use it to evolve me as a player."

Sinner came from two sets down to defeat Daniil Medvedev in the 2024 Australian Open final before seeing off Zverev in straight sets a year ago. While Sinner is the defending champion, Alcaraz leads 10-6 in their head-to-head record and bumped Sinner from the season-ending world number one spot.

They met in a light-hearted exhibition match in South Korea last weekend, the pair's only warm-up for Melbourne, with Alcaraz coming out on top.

Such is the dominance of "Sincaraz", as they are being called, they have shared the last eight Grand Slam titles, picking up four each since Djokovic won his 24th major at the 2023 US Open.

The Serb is back again at his most successful hunting ground, but there are questions over his fitness and form with the 38-year-old pulling out of this week's Adelaide International. Still chasing a record 25th major crown, Djokovic could be at his last Australian Open and will be desperate to win there again.

Djokovic made the semis at all four majors last year but went no further, admitting "I can do only as much as I can do".

World number three Zverev, along with Lorenzo Musetti, Alex de Minaur and Felix Auger-Aliassime, ranked five, six and seven respectively, will be looking to crash the party and win a first major.

Three-time losing finalist Medvedev is a dark horse after winning the lead-up Brisbane International, while American Learner Tien spearheads the new guard fresh from lifting the ATP Next Gen title.

Jakub Mensik and Joao Fonseca are also among the young talents looking to make a mark, while Alexander Bublik will fancy going deep after winning the Hong Kong Open and breaking into the top 10.

TENNIS

Amateur stuns stellar field to win 'One Point Slam' and Aus$1mn

AFP
Melbourne

Amateur Jordan Smith sensationally upset a star-studded field to collect a Aus$1mn (US$670,000) prize by winning the pressure-packed "One Point Slam" ahead of the Australian Open. The innovative sudden-death contest at a sold-out Rod Laver Arena pitted 24 professionals led by Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff alongside 24 amateurs and celebrity wildcards.

Each match consisted of one just point – win and you advanced, lose and you were out. The 16 top-seeded professionals had first-round byes before the competition morphed into a Grand Slam-style knockout from the last-32 stage onwards.

Instead of a traditional coin toss, a game of "rock, paper, scissors" decided who served. Crucially, the amateurs were allowed two serves but any current ATP or WTA-ranked players only one.

Australia's Smith, who qualified as the New South Wales champion, beat world number 117 Joanna Garland in the final, having upset Sinner and Amanda Anisimova along the way. Taiwan number one Garland beat Alexander Zverev, Nick Kyrgios and Maria Sakkari.

"Coming in tonight, I was just happy to win one point," said Smith, who planned to buy a house with his winnings. "I was nervous, but I enjoyed being out here. Was a great experience."

Top-ranked Alcaraz fell to women's world number 52 Sakkari, while three-time Australian Open finalist Daniil Medvedev was beaten by Anisimova before she was sent packing by Smith. Six-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek exited at the hands of Spaniard Pedro Martinez, who drew gasps from the crowd at the Rod Laver Arena when he caught world number 10 Alexander Bublik by surprise with an underhand serve.

The amateur field comprised winners of eight state championship rounds played across Australia, along with eight others who came through qualifying this week. Eight wildcards went to celebrities, including Taiwanese singer Jay Chou.

"This event is the ultimate grassroots-to-Grand Slam experience," Tennis Australia chief Craig Tiley told reporters.

"The AO One Point Slam is tennis at its most exciting – one point, one shot at glory. Fast, unfiltered and open to everyone."

The Australian Open starts at Melbourne Park on Sunday with Sinner defending the men's title and Madison Keys the women's.

"I gave him a taste of his own medicine," Martinez said of Bublik, who is known for his phenomenal touch and penchant for trick shots.

Australia's Jordan Smith celebrates after defeating Taiwan's Joanna Garland in the 'One Point Slam' exhibition event. *(AFP)*

GOLF

Rahm, DeChambeau, Smith snub PGA Tour offer to stay with LIV

AFP
Los Angeles

Major winners Bryson DeChambeau, Jon Rahm and Cameron Smith all committed to stay with LIV Golf in 2026 on Tuesday, turning down the chance to follow Brooks Koepka back to the US PGA Tour.

Five-time major winner Koepka announced his return to the US circuit on Monday under a new program that created a pathway back for stars who joined the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit. It was open to those players who had won either a major or the Players Championship between 2022 and 2025, meaning American DeChambeau, Spain's Rahm and Australian Smith would have been eligible to make the move back from LIV. But none of them were interested.

"Look, I'm contracted through 2026, so I'm excited about this year," said two-time US Open champion DeChambeau at a LIV Golf media day in Florida.

Asked if he shared the sentiment, Rahm, who won the US Open in 2021 and the Masters two years later, replied: "I'm not planning on going anywhere. Very similar answer to what Bryson gave. I wish Brooks the best."

Smith, the 2022 Open winner, was similarly keen to stay with the breakaway tour. "I'm going to stay," he told reporters. "I have made my bed and I'm gonna sleep in it. I feel like I am in a really good place in my career and my life, my family life, and I don't need to change it."

PGA Tour chief executive Brian Rolapp said this week Koepka's decision to leave LIV last month had prompted officials to consider how they handled the issue of embracing players who wanted to rejoin.

LIV Golf has signed Thomas Detry, who last year became the first Belgian to win on the PGA Tour.

The result was the PGA Tour's new "Returning Member Program", which came with "severe and justified consequences".

That included a five-year forfeiture of rights to participation in the PGA Tour's player equity program, while Koepka had agreed to make a $5 million charitable contribution to a recipient which will be determined jointly by Koepka and the PGA Tour. Launched in 2022, LIV Golf's emergence led to bitter divisions throughout the sport as several of golf's biggest names left the PGA Tour after signing big-money deals.

LIV GOLF SIGNS BELGIAN DETRY, RE-SIGNS TWICE MAJOR WINNER JOHNSON

LIV Golf has signed Thomas Detry, who last year became the first Belgian to win on the PGA Tour, to its roster while former world number one Dustin Johnson has re-signed with the league, the Saudi-funded circuit said.

World number 58 Detry, who picked up his lone PGA Tour victory at last February's Phoenix Open, is joining the 4Aces team captained by two-time major champion Johnson, who signed a multi-year extension with LIV.

Detry is arguably the biggest LIV signing since Rahm and Englishman Tyrrell Hatton joined the league ahead of the 2024 season.

The 33-year-old Detry is coming off a career year during which he made the cut in 19 of the 24 events he played, including at the Phoenix Open where he romped to a seven-shot victory.

For the first time, Detry also played every major in the same calendar year in 2025, missing the cut at the Masters and PGA Championship before earning a share of 23rd at the US Open and finishing joint 45th at the British Open. Johnson, who did not meet the criteria for PGA Tour reinstatement under a new and limited program announced this week by the US-based circuit, has been with LIV Golf since its launch in June 2022.

He was LIV's first season-long individual champion in 2022 and his 4Aces also won that year's team championship. The 41-year-old American, whose peak years are behind him, missed the cut in the first three majors of 2025 before earning a share of 23rd at the British Open.

Ofner celebrates early then loses in Australian Open qualifying

Melbourne: Austria's **Sebastian Ofner** suffered a brutal exit from Australian Open qualifying when he celebrated too early thinking he had won, before collapsing and crashing out.

Ofner and American Nishesh Basavareddy split the first two sets at Melbourne Park and the third went to 6-6, which sent the game to a super tiebreak. The Austrian former world number 37 pulled 6-1 clear, and when he picked up the next point he lifted his arms and strolled to the net in apparent triumph.

It needed the chair umpire to inform him that the winner was the first to 10. Rattled, Ofner then lost eight of the next nine points and eventually the whole tiebreak 13-11.

"I knew there was still some time... In a super tiebreak, you always have a chance, so I kept believing," Basavareddy said. "I saw him tense up a little bit, but the balls were quite old there, so every rally was a war and that was my main focus, just to put as many balls in play."

Victory for the American booked a final-round qualifying showdown against Britain's George Loffhagen.

KEYS OVERCOMES SERVE DEMONS TO WIN LATEST AUSTRALIAN OPEN WARM-UP

Defending Australian Open champion Madison Keys overcame some first-set serve wobbles to win her latest warm-up match for the opening Grand Slam of the year. The 30-year-old American, who will be seeded ninth when the Australian Open begins on Sunday, beat Czech teenager Tereza Valentova 6-4, 6-1 at the Adelaide International.

Keys, who won in Adelaide last year before going on to lift her maiden major, served up seven double faults in the opening set against the 18-year-old. She improved in the second, breaking twice and converting her third match point to reach the quarter-finals after an 85-minute workout on court.

"Experience helps get through the tricky moments," Keys said. "I was able to take momentum in the second set and play really well. I had to raise my level. You have to take your chances on any opportunities you get."

World number 60 Valentova is one of a number of rising young talents on the women's circuit. Keys said that facing the new generation was always a challenge. "I have to lean on my experience a little bit. They are so young, have so much energy and are just so good. You expect them to play great tennis."

The American will face another teenager, 17th-ranked Victoria Mboko, in the last eight. The 18-year-old Canadian announced herself on the world stage last year by winning the WTA 1000 title in Montreal and the Hong Kong Open. Keys began her 2026 Australian Open preparations last week in Brisbane, losing in the quarter-finals to world number one Aryna Sabalenka in a rematch of last year's Australian Open final.

Promoter says Joshua will return to ring when 'time is right' after horror car crash

London: Anthony Joshua's promoter believes the former world heavyweight champion will eventually box again following a fatal car crash in Nigeria that killed two of his close friends.

The British fighter was a passenger in a Lexus SUV that collided with a stationary truck on a busy highway linking Lagos and Ibadan in southwest Nigeria on December 29. Joshua's backroom team members Latif Ayodele and Sina Ghami died in the crash, while the boxer sustained minor injuries.

The incident sparked speculation as to whether Joshua will box again, but promoter Eddie Hearn said yesterday the 36-year-old would be given all the time he needed to cope with the loss of two key members of his staff.

"I think AJ, as we have seen in the past on boxing-related stuff, is always a brave-face guy, a very positive guy," Hearn said. "This is very different to that and I know he will take his time. He will need his time physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually before he makes a decision on his future. I do think he will want to return to boxing, but that will be his decision when the time is right."

The crash happened while Joshua was on holiday in Nigeria following his win against Youtuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul in Miami on December 19. Both Ayodele, the personal trainer of the former two-time unified heavyweight champion, and Ghami, Joshua's strength and conditioning coach, died at the scene of the crash.

HORSE RACING

Posuelo Py lands Al Kharrara Cup, jockey Boudot completes treble

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Jockey Pierre Charles Boudot continued his outstanding run this season guiding Posuelo Py to Al Kharrara Cup triumph and completed a hat-trick of wins at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Drawn widest in the Purebred Arabian Handicap (1,200m) race, the eight-year-old bay gelding travelled midfield before powering down the home straight to score decisively by 1¼ lengths for owner Ibrahim Mohammed al-Fadala and trainer Hamad al-Jehani, giving Boudot a treble.

Settled midfield through the early and middle stages, Posuelo Py was ridden with patience as Mared Al Jasra dictated a steady tempo, tracked closely by Naseeb Zakhir and Taymoor Al Shahania, the order at the head of affairs remaining unchanged.

On straightening, Taymoor Al Shahania pressed sharply to take over, with Naseeb Zakhir quickly ranging up to challenge and for a moment it appeared the contest would be settled between the pair. Posuelo Py, however, was unleashed from the middle of the pack with an electrifying turn of foot, sweeping past his rivals to assert decisively and maintain his advantage to the line. Naseeb Zakhir filled second, trained and owned by Osama Omer al-Dafea and ridden by Faleh Bughenaim, edging Taymoor Al Shahania, who finished third for Al Bida Racing, trainer Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed and jockey Alberto Sanna, with the pair separated by just a quarter of a length.

Boudot had opened the card with a neck-winning ride on La Quyood for trainer Julian Smart in the Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (1,900m), and later guided Deauville to victory in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (1,200m, Class 5) for trainer Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed.

Jockey Pierre Charles Boudot guided Posuelo Py to the Al Kharrara Cup win at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURE:** *Juhaim*

Other winners included Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki-trained Burkan, in the 1,900m Purebred Arabian Conditions race, Jassim al-Ghazali-trained Galeb Al Shahania under Marco Casamento supervision in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap, Funny Bunny in the Thoroughbred Handicap, Tawfeeq in the Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate, and Fantastic Deal in the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate.

RESULTS 36TH AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING - AL KHARRARA CUP
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1: Al Kharrara Cup, Purebred Arabian Handicap
Posuelo Py, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
2 - Purebred Arabian Conditions
Burkan, Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki, Tomas Lukasek
3 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap
Galeb Al Shahania, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
4 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap
Deauville, Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed, Pierre Charles Boudot
5 - Thoroughbred Handicap
Funny Bunny, Ibrahim Saeed Ibrahim al-Malki, Mohammed Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik
6 - Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate
Tawfeeq, MHK al-Attiyah, Szczepan Mazur
7 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate
Fantastic Deal, Abdulla al-Mulla, Ivan Rossi
8 -Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate
La Quyood, Julian Smart, Pierre Charles Boudot

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Title-chasing Gharafa meet in-form Arabi

By Sports Reporter
Doha

In a high-profile showdown league leaders Al Gharafa take on a resurgent Al Arabi in the Qatar Stars League today at Al Thumama Stadium.

Gharafa sit top of the standings on 28 points and will be aiming for a second successive win to preserve their five-point cushion over closest challengers Al Sadd and Al Rayyan. Pedro Martins' side responded strongly to a shock 3-0 defeat to Al Shahaniya by edging Umm Salal 3-2 in the previous round, a result that restored belief as they continue their long pursuit of the league title.

However, Al Arabi arrive full of confidence after a remarkable resurgence under Romanian coach Cosmin Contra. The Dream Team are unbeaten in their last six matches, recording five wins and a draw against Al Rayyan, and occupy fifth place on 20 points. They returned to winning ways last round with a hard-fought 1-0 win over Al Wakrah.

"We have prepared well and the atmosphere is very positive after our last win," said Martins. "Al Arabi have strong qualities and are performing very well under their coach. This is one of the most important matches of our season."

Contra, meanwhile, urged caution. "The match is very important at this stage of the league," he said. "It will not be easy, but we are ready and ambitious to win and continue progressing."

Today's action also features a key mid-table battle between Al Wakrah and Al Duhail at Saud bin Abdulrahman Stadium, with both sides looking to bounce back after disappointing results. Al Wakrah slipped to eighth on 16 points after a 1-0 defeat to Al Arabi, while seventh-placed Al Duhail were held to a goalless draw by Al Shahaniya.

Al Duhail coach Djamel Belmadi expects a tough contest but welcomed the return of several key players. "We are expecting a difficult match and must give everything to achieve a positive result," he said, confirming the return of Adel Boulbina, Karim Boudiaf, Marco Verratti and goalkeeper Salah Zakaria.

Vicente Moreno, coach of Al Wakrah, echoed those sentiments. "Al Duhail are a great team and the points are close, so we must give our best to win and take the three points," he said.

Tomorrow, defending champions Al Sadd will look to extend their revival when they host Al Ahli at Jassim bin Hamad Stadium. Al Sadd have won four matches in a row, including a thrilling 3-2 victory over Qatar SC last round, lifting them to second place on 23 points, level with Al Rayyan but ahead on goal difference. Al Ahli enter the match boosted by a 4-2 win over Al Shamal, which lifted them to 15 points and ninth place after a difficult spell.

Al Rayyan host Al Shamal on Saturday at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in another high-stakes encounter. Al Rayyan strengthened their title hopes with a 3-1 win over Al Sailiya to reach 23 points, while Al Shamal slipped to fourth on 21 points after losing to Al Ahli.

Elsewhere, Umm Salal face bottom side Al Shahaniya tomorrow at Al Khor Stadium, with both teams desperate for points. Umm Salal remain tenth on nine points after their narrow defeat to Al Gharafa, while Al Shahaniya sit last on goal difference despite earning a point against Al Duhail.

In another tie, Al Sailiya meet Qatar SC at Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium. Qatar SC have lost five matches in a row and sit sixth on 17 points, while Al Sailiya are second from bottom on eight points following their defeat to Al Rayyan.

Al Gharafa players at a training session.

FOOTBALL

Semenyo finds Man City set-up 'perfect'

Ghana international moved to City from Bournemouth last week

AFP
Newcastle, United Kingdom

Antoine Semenyo believes he is in the perfect place to thrive after scoring in each of his first two games for Manchester City.

The Ghana international has made an instant impact since his £65mn move from Bournemouth last week and netted the opening goal in City's 2-0 League Cup semi-final, first leg win at Newcastle on Tuesday.

Semenyo, who scored in a 10-1 thrashing of Exeter in the FA Cup on Saturday, also had a second goal controversially ruled out by a lengthy VAR review at St. James' Park. "The whole environment here is perfect. Everyone is confident and wanting to achieve the best. I have come into that and they helped with my confidence and made me feel welcome," said Semenyo, who now has 12 goals in all competitions this season. "It's been a lot but I have enjoyed it so far. I am picking things up very quickly and enjoying it. I am just taking the confidence I had from Bournemouth here and playing with a smile on my face. I am enjoying every moment."

Semenyo also scored on his debut on Saturday in a 10-1 demolition of Exeter in the FA Cup. In previous years he would have been cup-tied after featuring for Bournemouth earlier in the competition. Newcastle boss Eddie Howe made clear his dissatisfaction before the game with a rule change this season that allows players to play for two clubs in the one campaign and City took full advantage.

Rayan Cherki struck what could be the knockout blow to the holders deep into nine minutes of added time due to the interruption for the VAR review on Semenyo's disallowed goal. After a VAR review lasting over five minutes, the officials finally adjudged that Erling Haaland had prevented Malick Thiaw's ability to play the ball from an offside position.

Manchester City's Antoine Semenyo (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring the opening goal against Newcastle in the League Cup first leg semi-final at St James' Park. *(AFP)*

Despite taking a commanding lead, City were still furious at the decision with Pep Guardiola citing two penalties his side were not awarded in their 2-1 defeat to Newcastle earlier in the season in the Premier League.

"It should have been 3-0 but we are quite used to this at the moment," said City captain Bernardo Silva. "It is so frustrating because the last time we came here we also had a lot of decisions go against us." Guardiola showed his desire to reach the final for the first time since 2021 as Erling Haaland made a first League Cup start in three years in a strong City selection just days before they visit Manchester United in the Premier League.

Newcastle ended a 70-year wait for a domestic trophy by winning the League Cup last season, but will need a heroic fightback to reach Wembley when the sides meet again for the second leg of the semi-final on February 4.

Spurs sign England midfielder Gallagher from Atletico Madrid

London: Tottenham signed England midfielder Conor Gallagher from Atletico Madrid in a deal worth a reported £34.7mn. Gallagher agreed a long-term contract with the Premier League club that reportedly runs until 2031.

Tottenham won the race to sign Gallagher after Aston Villa also expressed interest in the former Chelsea player. The 25-year-old was keen to leave Atletico for more regular action in a bid to secure a place in England's squad for the World Cup later this year.

Gallagher's signing is a boost to under-fire Tottenham boss Thomas Frank. Frank is fighting to save his job after a dismal run of five victories in 20 matches, including seven defeats in 13 after last weekend's FA Cup third round exit against Aston Villa.

Only seven months after arriving from Brentford to replace the sacked Ange Postecoglou, pressure has mounted on Frank, who has been booed on multiple occasions by frustrated fans. Gallagher's signing will fill a void in Tottenham's midfield after Rodrigo Bentancur had surgery on a hamstring injury on Tuesday, while Lucas Bergvall is also sidelined and Pape Sarr is at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Gallagher scored 10 goals in 95 appearances for Chelsea.

Qatar's al-Marri strikes Asian youth gold with record-breaking skeet performance

Doha: Qatar's Meteb al-Marri claimed gold and set new Asian and world records in the youth skeet competition on the third day of the Asian Shotgun Championship at the Lusail Shooting Complex.

Al-Marri produced a stellar performance in the final, hitting 32 of 36 targets to establish the new records. Kazakhstan's Maxim Pochivalov took silver with 31 targets, while his compatriot Vladislav Zavodilenko earned bronze with 26.

Qatar added another medal in the youth team skeet competition, as the trio of al-Marri, Jassim Mohammed al-Yafai and Abdulrahman Ahmed al-Harami secured silver with a total of 304 points. The Kazakhstani team of Pochivalov, Zavodilenko and Artem Ryfkov won gold with 340 points, while Kuwait's Ahmed al-Hassan, Ibrahim al-Harbi and Mohammed al-Rashidi claimed bronze with 266.

In the Junior Women's Skeet event at the Asian Grand Prix, Kazakhstan swept the podium. Lydia Basharova won gold with 25 targets, followed by Asul Sadakbayeva with 23 for silver, and Angelina Sorokina with 21 for bronze. The medallists were crowned by Dr Meshaal Ibrahim al-Nasr, President of the Qatar Shooting and Archery Federation, and Sheikh Salman al-Hamoud al-Sabah, President of the Asian Shooting Federation.

Qatar's Meteb a-Marri, Jassim Mohammed al-Yafai and Abdulrahman Ahmed al-Harami secured silver in the youth team skeet competition.