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TENNIS

Alcaraz eyes improvement as Doha battle beckons

THE NEW AUSTRALIAN OPEN CHAMP IS TOP SEED AT THIS WEEK'S QATAR EXXONMOBIL OPEN

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

Australian Open champion Carlos Alcaraz of Spain is unbeaten in the new season but the 22-year-old is no mood to relax ahead of this week's Qatar ExxonMobil Open where he is the top seed.

Alcaraz beat Grand Slam 'king' Novak Djokovic in the final of the Australian Open two weeks ago to be 7-0 in the new season that has just completed six weeks of top flight tennis.

"Coming here, these days, my team and I, just we set up some goals for this tournament," Alcaraz said during a pre-event news conference yesterday.

"We are not talking about results at all. It's just more about the process to be better, still in the process to grow up. There are some things that I really want to be better and (I want to) develop my game in a way that I really want to show up and to pull off here in this tournament.

"That would be a really successful week for me, besides results. I (want to) see myself that I'm just doing the right things on and off the court," the 25-time Tour-level champion said.

Alcaraz will take on France's Arthur Rinderknech in their open-



ing match in Doha where his chief opponent is second seed Jannik Sinner of Italy. The Doha field also includes former champions Andrey Rublev, Daniil Medvedev and Karen Khachanov.

Alexander Bublik is seeded third, followed by Medvedev in fourth and Rublev in fifth. Jakub Mensik, Khachanov and Jiri Lehecka complete the top eight seeds at the \$2,833,335 tournament. The singles champion will get richer by \$529,945 while the winning doubles team will split \$174,050.

"I know how difficult every match is. Every match is different, our play is totally different," Alcaraz said yesterday. "I think this draw is a really tough one for a 500 tournament. We can see the first matches how good matches

that we have in the first round. So (I'm) just thinking about a match at a time, and let's see how far I can go. Obviously my mind is trying to go as far as I can. If it's possible to play a final, obviously that would be great, and that's what I'm looking for, so let's see. I'm not thinking about playing or just putting myself in the final too early. I want to think day by day," he added.

Alcaraz said recent successes have made him more determined to work harder and not take his opponents lightly.

"Obviously I can see myself that (I have had) a lot of success so far, winning the biggest tournaments in the world," Alcaraz said.

"But I just see myself with weaknesses. A lot of players, I know that they're trying to catch

me up in terms of they are studying my game, they study how I play, trying to beat me, trying to challenge me," he said.

"I have to be ready for that, and I have to see where my level is, where my tennis is. I have to try to put myself in their minds and think what they could do when playing against me.

"So that's what I mean about saying I have to improve some things.

"Obviously, you cannot be lagging in the level, you just have to keep it going," he explained.

Prior to arriving in Doha, Alcaraz enjoyed a short stopover in Bahrain where he met fellow Spaniards superstars Fernando Alonso and Carlos Sainz at an F1 pre-season testing week.



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain during a training session on the centre court at Khalifa International Tennis Complex in Doha yesterday.

FOCUS

Qatar F1 Grand Prix show car revealed as ticket sales begin

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) unveiled the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026 show car, in line with early bird ticket offers, showcasing its striking new livery

The 2026 Car reflects Formula 1's new era of racing, ahead of ticket sales opening for the milestone fifth year of Formula 1 at LIC.

The FIA Formula One World Championship will enter a new era in 2026 with a comprehensive overhaul of its technical regulations.

The next-generation cars have been designed to be shorter, lighter, and more agile, improving racing quality and sustainability. Central to the new rules are advanced Active Aerodynamics systems, allowing drivers to adjust aerodynamic configurations to enhance overtaking opportunities and overall performance.

The 2026 regulations also introduce a new power unit formula, featuring increased electrical power deployment and the use of 100% sustainable fuels, marking a significant step forward in Formula 1's environmental commitment.

Reflecting this transformative moment for the sport, Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has unveiled its 2026 Formula 1 show car livery.

This 2026 Show Car embodies the sport's technical evolution, pairing the new car's dynamic proportions and Active Aero concept with a striking visual identity.

The livery features a flowing gradient from the nose to the rear



wing. Dynamic speed lines and Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix's branding colours are integrated alongside LIC's visual elements, capturing the energy and unique atmosphere of night racing.

Following the show car reveal, Lusail International Circuit launched ticket sales for the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026, taking place from November 27 to 29, 2026.

Tickets are available on the Lusail International Circuit website, with travel, accommodation, and

visa information supported by Visit Qatar for international fans.

The 2026 Qatar Grand Prix marks a significant milestone, celebrating five years of Formula 1 racing at Lusail International Circuit.

Since joining the calendar in 2021, the race has become a signature night time event, known for its high speed layout, flowing corners, and dramatic wheel to wheel racing.

As the championship enters this bold new era, the 2026 Qatar Grand Prix promises a weekend of

innovation, speed, and celebration, combining the thrill of racing with Qatar's unique cultural identity.

Fans can take advantage of a 10% early bird discount across all three-day ticket categories:
Main Grandstand: QR1,800 (Regular price: QR2,000)
North Grandstand: QR 350 (Regular price: QR1,500)
T2, T3 & T16 Grandstands: QR900 (Regular price: QR1,000)
General Admission: QR540 (Regular price: QR600)

Al Duhail to take on Al Shorta in must-win game in Baghdad



Al Duhail football players land in Baghdad yesterday.

BAGHDAD: Al Duhail SC will have to do what they haven't been able to in their last three away ties - defeat Al Shorta if they are to stand a chance of advancing to the Round of 16 of the AFC Champions League Elite 2025/26. Qatar's Al Duhail, who landed in Baghdad yesterday, are seventh in the standings but tied on eight points with fellow Qatari side Al Sadd SC and Sharjah FC of the United Arab Emirates. Al Shorta's slim hopes of advancing were dashed following their 1-1 stalemate with Uzbekistan's PFC Nasaf but the Iraqi side will be aiming to end their campaign with a win - having only managed two draws in their previous seven games.

The major reason for their continental woes has been a porous defence, with Al Shorta having conceded 10 goals in their three home games this season, the most by any side. Al Duhail will be hoping to capitalise, having battled hard to keep themselves in contention by fighting back to hold Sharjah FC to a 1-1 draw last week.

They, however, have won just one of their last 11 away games on the continent and conceded - at least - twice in their last three defeats when travelling. In another match today, hosts Sharjah FC will expect to defeat PFC Nasaf when the sides meet in the AFC Champions League Elite 2025/26. United Arab Emirates side Sharjah need three points to stand a chance of advancing while Nasaf's campaign is already over after securing just a single point from their earlier seven matches. Sharjah sit ninth in standings but are equal on eight points with Qatari sides Al Duhail SC and Al Sadd SC. They could have confirmed their Round of 16 spot with victory over Al Duhail last week but will be confident of getting maximum points against Nasaf, having never been beaten by the Uzbekistan outfit.

SCHEDULE: Al Shorta (IRQ) v Al Duhail SC (QAT)
Venue: Al Zawraa Stadium (Baghdad)
Kick-off: Today, 21:15 (UTC+3)

MATCH REPORT

India hammer Pakistan to sail into Super Eight stage

Player-of-the-match Ishan Kishan smashes explosive 77 off just 40 deliveries as Pakistan fail to impress

Reuters
Colombo

Defending champions India steamrolled Pakistan by 61 runs in a grudge Group A match at the Twenty20 World Cup in Colombo yesterday.

The match between the bitter neighbours did not live up to the hype with India, who now have an 8-1 record against their arch-rivals in the T20 World Cup, maintaining their unbeaten run with another dominant performance.

Opener Ishan Kishan's break-neck 77 powered them to a commanding 175-7 at the R Premadasa Stadium against Pakistan's six-pronged spin attack, which bowled 18 of their 20 overs.

India returned to bundle out Pakistan for 114 in 18 overs to register their third win in a row.

"India v Pakistan is a special game for us and our country. It is a very important game," player of the match Kishan said.

"They had good spinners and we tried to play good shots. It gives us confidence going ahead in the tournament."

The match went ahead after Pakistan earlier reversed their decision to boycott the game in solidarity with Bangladesh, who refused to tour India over safety concerns and were replaced by Scotland. Pakistan captain Salman Agha and his India counterpart Suryakumar Yadav did not shake hands at the toss, though.

India were reinforced by the return of Abhishek Sharma, who missed the first two matches with a stomach infection, but the opener could not make it count.

Salman sprang a surprise by opening the attack himself and trapped Abhishek lbw for a duck.

Pakistan used three spinners in the powerplay to try to stem boundary flow and India's score of 52-1 after six overs suggested the ploy worked to an extent.

Kishan could not be contained though and the southpaw tore into the Pakistan attack with his take-no-prisoners batting.

The opener took only 27 balls to race to his second successive fifty of the tournament. Saim Ayub ended Kishan's match-defining 40-ball blitz but India cruised to 92-2 at the halfway stage of their innings.

Ayub (3-25) dismissed Tilak Varma (25) and Hardik Pandya with successive deliveries to turn the heat back on India.

Suryakumar (32) and Shivam Dube (27) could not quite provide



India's Ishan Kishan plays a shot during the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup group stage match against Pakistan in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

the late flourish but India still posted a total that proved well beyond Pakistan's reach.

Pakistan became the first team to employ six spinners in a T20 World Cup match but the joy of having restricted India to under 200 soon evaporated as they slumped to 13-3 in two overs in their chase.

Pandya removed Pakistan's in-form opener Sahibzada Farhan for a duck and Jasprit Bumrah dismissed Ayub and Salman in the

same over to pin down Pakistan.

Babar Azam (five) did not last long either and Pakistan were gasping at 38-4 after the six powerplay overs.

Usman Khan (44) defied India for a while but Axar Patel lured him out to be stumped to effectively snuff out Pakistan's chances of an unlikely victory.

Salman felt Pakistan spinners did not bowl well in the match.

"Our spinners had an off day to-

day," he said. "We always believe in them because they have done well in the last six months. In the first innings it was tacky and the ball was gripping but the execution was missing."

BRIEF SCORES
India 175 for 7 (Kishan 77, Suryakumar 32, Ayub 3-25) **beat Pakistan 114** (Usman 44, Hardik 2-16, Bumrah 2-17, Varun 2-17, Axar 2-29) **by 61 runs**

What they said after India beat Pakistan



India's Hardik Pandya (right) celebrates with captain Suryakumar Yadav after their team's win against Pakistan in Colombo. (AFP)

COLOMBO: India thrashed Pakistan by 61 runs in a blockbuster T20 World Cup match in Colombo yesterday to book their spot in the Super Eights stage of the tournament.

AFP SPORT PICKS OUT SOME OF THE BEST REACTION:

"I think this is for India. We played the same brand of cricket that we wanted to play. Batting first was the better option on this wicket."

— India captain Suryakumar Yadav

"We believed in our spinners and they had an off day today. Execution was missing when it came to bowling. We (still) believe in our spinners, they've done well in the last six months."

— Pakistan captain Salman Ali Agha

"Ishan (Kishan) thought out of the box. After 0-1, someone had to take responsibility and the way he took it was amazing."

— Suryakumar
"India v Pakistan, it's always a special game, not only for us but also for our country as well."

— India's man-of-the-match Ishan Kishan
"Winning this against Pakistan

will give us a lot of confidence going ahead in the tournament and we will look to keep the momentum going."

— Kishan

"There was slight nervousness. But I focused on one ball at a time. The way Ishan batted was brilliant. I told him: 'just keep playing the way you are.'"

— India's Tilak Varma

"It was a no contest. Indian bowlers bowled better. You have to hit the pitch and that's how Hardik Pandya started off with the ball. And (Jasprit) Bumrah is a class apart."

— Anil Kumble, India spin great on ESPNcricinfo

"There is no contest between India and Pakistan any more. We are talking about this rivalry because of what happens off the field."

— Irfan Pathan, former India pace bowler on JioHotstar

"India seem to intimidate Pakistan on the cricket field.. they are so much better in all facets of the game & such a better mentality of coping with the huge occasion."

— Former England captain Michael Vaughan on X

SPOTLIGHT

Holder and Hope steer West Indies into Super 8

Reuters
Mumbai

West Indies charged into the Super Eight stage of the Twenty20 World Cup after the two-times champions defeated Nepal by nine wickets in Mumbai yesterday, with Jason Holder's four-wicket haul and Shai Hope's half-century setting up the win.

Chasing a modest 134 for their third straight victory after battling knocks by Nepal's Dipendra Singh Airee (58) and Sompal Kami (26 not out), West Indies eased to victory at Wankhede Stadium with 28 balls to spare.

After paceman Holder's wickets laid the platform, captain Hope (61 not out) and Shimron Hetmyer (46 not out) guided their team home to rule Nepal out of the reckoning for the next stage of the tournament.

"I'm very pleased. This is what we set out to do and we got here. That's one step and one hurdle that we've crossed and now on to the next stage," Hope said.

"I'm glad I actually got the opportunity to decide what I wanted to do first. The guys put the ball in the right areas... It was difficult work for Nepal in the powerplay. Then it was about trying to limit the flow of runs and picking up wickets."

"It's crunch time now, back into the Super Eights."

A little over four months since their confidence-boosting 2-1 T20 series win over a weakened West Indies in Sharjah, Nepal arrived for the clash seeking their first victory in Group C of the World Cup after defeats by England and Italy.

POOR START FOR NEPAL

They made a poor start after being asked to bat by table-toppers West Indies with Kushal Bhurtel bowled by Akeal Hosein on the fifth delivery of the innings and skipper Rohit Paudel trapped lbw by Matthew Forde shortly afterwards.

Holder (4-27) ramped up the pressure by having Aasif Sheikh caught in the deep off a loose ball before Nepal limped to 22-3 in six overs, the lowest powerplay score in this edition of the event, silencing a large group of their fans.

Several soft dismissals meant Nepal struggled to recover before Airee cut loose and reached his half-century with a big six and Kami marked his recall to the side with late fireworks to take them to 133-8 in 20 overs.

"It was a challenge in the powerplay, their bowlers were using the conditions well," Paudel said. "As a batting unit, we failed again. We need to step up."

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies 134 for 1 (Hope 61*, Hetmyer 46*) **beat Nepal 133 for 8** (Airee 58, Holder 4-27, Forde 1-10) **by nine wickets**



West Indies' captain Shai Hope plays a shot during the T20 World Cup group stage match against Nepal in Mumbai. (AFP)

US KEEP SUPER 8 HOPES ALIVE WITH 31-RUN WIN OVER NAMIBIA

CHENNAI: The United States kept their hopes of reaching the Twenty20 World Cup's Super 8 stage alive as they ended their Group A campaign with two straight wins, after beating Namibia by 31 runs yesterday.

Captain Monank Patel and Sanjay Krishnamurthi led with half-centuries as the Americans chose to bat and posted 199-4 in Chennai. Namibia fell well short as Shadley van Schalkwyk (2-27) and Saurabh Netravalkar (1-27) restricted their flow of runs.

Patel, who scored 52 off 30 balls, got the US off to a fast start and combined with Krishnamurthi for an 87-run partnership for the fourth wicket to get his team to their highest total in the campaign.

Krishnamurthi hit six sixes and four

boundaries in his unbeaten knock of 68 from 33 balls, his first half-century in T20 internationals.

Namibia started well with Louren Steenkamp (58) guiding them to 97-1 in 10 overs, but struggled after Steenkamp got caught at point in the 13th over, ending their innings at 168-6 to lose their third straight game.

The US, who lost their first two matches to India and Pakistan, finished with four points, and will hope that their positive net run rate earns them a top-two finish and a place in the next round.

BRIEF SCORES
USA 199 for 4 (Krishnamurthi 68*, Monank 52, Myburgh 2-22) **beat Namibia 168 for 6** (Steenkamp 58, van Schalkwyk 2-30) **by 31 runs**



USA's Milind Kumar (right) and Sanjay Krishnamurthi run between the wickets during the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup group stage match against Namibia in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Fan-favourite experiences return at Qatar Exxonmobil Open 2026

ExxonMobil Qatar has launched its public village stand at the Qatar ExxonMobil Open 2026, running from February 16 to 21. Returning for its second year as an ATP 500 event after earning 'Tournament of the Year' in its debut season, the tournament promises another world-class experience.

ExxonMobil Qatar has been the proud title sponsor of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open since 1995. Its long-standing partnership with the Qatar Tennis Federation (QTF) has contributed to making the tournament one of the region's most prestigious sporting events, consistently attracting top-tier talent and global attention.

"The federation continues to work diligently, in close collaboration with all our partners, to further develop the tournament and raise its standards across every level. At the forefront of these partners is ExxonMobil, our title sponsor, whose support we deeply appreciate and whose pivotal role has significantly enhanced the tournament's stature on the global stage," said Tariq Zainal, Secretary-General of the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel, and Badminton Federation.

As the tournament has grown, the ExxonMobil Qatar stand has similarly become a highly anticipated, favorite destination in the



Public Village, annually welcoming thousands of fans with engaging and interactive experiences. It also features live entertainment, performances, food stalls offering traditional cuisines, and activities for all ages, making it a must-visit destination throughout the tournament.

"The Qatar ExxonMobil Open is more than a tournament; it's a celebration of sport and community. Our stand is designed to bring

people together and create lasting memories. Here, tournament-goers can meet their favorite tennis players and connect with our team," said Rashid al-Hajri, Vice President and Public and Government Affairs Manager at ExxonMobil Qatar. The booth also includes a dedicated space for Dadu, Qatar's Children's Museum. It is designed to give kids a fun place to learn about mangroves during the tournament, offering hands

on activities that bring Dadu's educational experience straight to families attending the event.

"At Dadu, we believe the most meaningful learning happens through exploration. During the ExxonMobil Qatar Tennis Open, children are invited to become environmental scientists - discovering what mangroves need to grow and thrive in Qatar. Through hands-on experiments and playful exploration, children can ex-



perience how real scientific research can spark curiosity, build care for our environment, and inspire a lifelong love of learning," said Maha Hamad al-Hajri, Acting Director of Dadu, Children's Museum of Qatar.

ExxonMobil Qatar joined Qatar Museums as a founding member of Dadu, becoming the exclusive sponsor of the museum's Sustainability and Valuing the Environment Gallery, a dedicated space to teaching children about Qatar's environment and biodiversity.

The gallery ties in with ExxonMobil Qatar's commitment to educational development, particularly in science, technology,

engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, advancing the goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy.

The company plays an active role in community development and education initiatives particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as a key driver of economic growth and opportunity, aligning its efforts with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy. This commitment supports the creation of a skilled workforce that propels growth and opportunities for a sustainable future.

TENNIS

Third time lucky as De Minaur finally wins in Rotterdam

'IT FEELS GREAT TO FINALLY BE ABLE TO LIFT THE TITLE'

AFP
The Hague

Australia's Alex de Minaur won the Rotterdam Open at the third time of asking yesterday, producing typical counterpunching tennis to overcome Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3, 6-2.

The top-seed had lost the previous two finals to Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, but he seized on the absence of the world's top two to make it third time lucky.

"It feels great to finally be able to lift the title," said the world number eight. "Every day I got better and I'm super pleased with the performance today," he added.

Canada's Auger-Aliassime threw everything at the 26-year-old but the Australian soaked up the pressure and retrieved brilliantly to finally take the crown in Rotterdam.

The early games went with serve but de Minaur seized the initiative in the 6th game, breaking the Canadian's serve with some trademark retrieving and a spectacular backhand winner up the line.

The top seed sealed the first set 6-3 with a powerful service, his consistency proving too much for Auger-Aliassime who was left to rue 14 unforced errors, mainly on the forehand wing.

The pattern repeated in the second set, on serve until de Minaur clinched a break to love in the fifth game after two disastrous Auger-



Australia's Alex de Minaur celebrates with the trophy after defeating Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime in the Rotterdam Open in Ahoy, Rotterdam, yesterday. (AFP)

Aliassime double faults. After this setback, the Canadian took a medical time-out for a reason that was not immediately clear, returning with no obvious movement issues.

However, de Minaur again broke his serve to love, Auger-Aliassime dumping a forehand into the net to put the Australian on the brink. De Minaur made no mistake, tak-

ing the title with his first ace of the match and raising his arms in triumph and relief.

"Third time lucky. We finally managed to get the title," said the Australian as he collected the trophy.

"I'm glad I was finally able to get the title. It's been one of my favourite spots on the calendar. I love coming back here in Rotter-

dam. I've played some of my best tennis here and I finally get the reward."

Auger-Aliassime paid tribute to his opponent, saying, "he had no holes in his games and I couldn't find a way."

"Sometimes I have to accept the loss and the fact that my opponent was better and today he definitely was," added the Canadian.

GOLF

Bhatia grabs two-stroke lead at Pebble Beach

AFP
San Francisco

Akhay Bhatia birdied six of the first seven holes on the way to a four-under par 68 to seize a two-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the PGA Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

With gusting winds at the seaside course's signature 18th hole keeping balls wobbling and rolling out of position, Bhatia endured a hefty wait before missing a seven-foot birdie putt and closing with a par.

"Always nice to get off to a good start," Bhatia said. "Making six out of the first seven was pretty nice."

Despite his sizzling start, the 24-year-old American never made another birdie and finished 54 holes on 19-under 197, seeing a five-shot lead trimmed to two ahead of Sunday's final round. "Just battling the elements at Pebble Beach is always fun," Bhatia said.

"Then you're holding on for a little bit once you get to eight, nine, 10, 12. And then 17 is a brutal hole today. Happy with today for sure."

Sharing second on 199 was two-time major winner Collin Morikawa, who birdied five of the last six holes to fire a 62, plus fellow American Jake Knapp and Austrian Sepp Straka. American Jacob Briggeman was on 200 and Japan's Hideki Matsuyama on 201. "I wanted to come out and win the tournament," Morikawa said. "Now we've given ourself a chance."

Bhatia, who shared third last week at Phoenix, seeks a third

career PGA title after wins at the 2023 Barracuda Championship and 2024 Texas Open.

"One out of every 30 events we play can get this challenging," Bhatia said. "I'm just looking forward to that and having a good time."

Sunday's forecast features gusts around 35 mph after wobbling golf balls at 18 had Bhatia hoping for a moment for a delay to Sunday.

"I was hoping so but tomorrow doesn't look any better," Bhatia said. "Our golf balls were just oscillating and technically it's not a moving ball but it's just hard to get over a putt when you see your golf ball moving forwards, backwards, backwards, forwards. It's just brutal."

"It's hard to hit a putt like that with those conditions and with everything going on in your head. I was happy to make five there."

Bhatia began with birdie putts from five feet and nine feet on the first two holes, an eight-footer at the fourth and a 27-foot birdie putt at the par-three fifth.

His superb start ended with a six-foot birdie putt at the par-five sixth and a birdie putt from just inside eight feet at the par-three seventh.

Bhatia took bogeys at the par-three 12th and 17th holes.

Japan's Ryo Hisatsune, who had shared the 36-hole lead with Bhatia, stumbled to a 74 to stand on 203.

World number one Scottie Scheffler fired a 67 to share 22nd and stand eight adrift on 205 while defending champion Rory McIlroy fired a 72 to share 39th on 207.



Akshay Bhatia of the United States lines up a putt on the 18th green during the third round of the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am 2026 at Pebble Beach Golf Links in Pebble Beach, California. (AFP)

FOCUS

Kim captures first title in 16 years

AFP
Adelaide

An "overwhelmed" Anthony Kim outplayed two-time major winner Jon Rahm to capture his maiden LIV Golf title yesterday and first on any tour since 2010 to complete an amazing redemption story.

The 40-year-old American, a one-time alcoholic, fired a nine-under-par 63, surging home with five birdies on the back nine to claim victory in Adelaide by three strokes.

He began the day five behind former world number one Rahm and fellow overnight leader Bryson DeChambeau, but reeled them in at Grange Golf Club with a faultless round.

In front of bumper crowds and a carnival atmosphere, he finished at 23-under, three clear of Spain's Rahm, who never really got

going, mixing two birdies with a bogey in his 71. American DeChambeau, also a two-time major winner, suffered a horror round with four bogeys in six holes on the front nine to slide down the leaderboard.

He finished tied for third, six off the pace, with Tyrrell Hatton and Peter Uihlein.

Victory capped an incredible comeback by Kim - a Ryder Cup champion, three-time PGA Tour winner and former world number six who retired from golf in 2012.

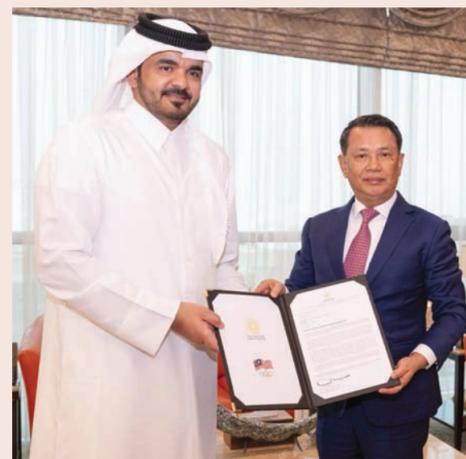
After battling drug and alcohol addiction and suicidal thoughts, he returned to the sport in 2024 as a wildcard on the Saudi-backed LIV Tour. He was relegated last season but earned his way back at last month's LIV Golf Promotions when he claimed one of three qualifying spots.

Kim then got offered a full-time position with Dustin Johnson's 4Aces GC for the 2026 season when Patrick Reed suddenly quit to play on the DP World Tour.

US teen Lutkenhaus breaks world junior indoor 800m record

American athletics prodigy Cooper Lutkenhaus broke the world junior indoor 800m record on Saturday with a victory in 1min 44.03secs at the Sound Running meet in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The 17-year-old Texan won the invitational event by 0.70 of a second over Penn State's Handal Roban to become the sixth-fastest athlete indoors in 800m history. Lutkenhaus erased the under-20 world record of 1:44.35 set in January 2000 by Russian Yuriy Borzakovski, who won 800m Olympic gold in 2004 at Athens. Lutkenhaus was a stunning runner-up at last year's American championships at Eugene, Oregon, to earn a berth in the 2025 World Championships at Tokyo. Also in the Winston-Salem meet, Paris Olympic 1,500m champion Cole Hocker won the mile in 3:45.94 with fellow American Cooper Teare second in 3:50.49. Hocker clocked the second fastest world indoor mile time in history behind the world record of 3:45.14 set by Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen last February in France.

SHEIKH JOAAN VISITS OCA HEADQUARTERS IN KUWAIT



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani paid his first visit to the headquarters of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) in Kuwait yesterday as President. He chaired the 108th meeting of the OCA Executive Board, where the minutes of the previous meeting, held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on January 26, were approved. The Executive Board members also discussed upcoming 2026 Asian Games, including the 2028 Asian Beach Games in the Philippines and the 2030 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Mongolia. They were also briefed on the latest developments regarding the Afro-Asian Cultural Summit scheduled for March 28 in Kuwait. Sheikh Joaan met with OCA staff and thanked them for their efforts, saying: "I am delighted to be here at the OCA headquarters today. We have a strong team, and each and every one of you is a part of that team. Your hard work is appreciated, especially over the past few years." He continued: "We have a lot of work ahead of us, and we look forward to achieving even more. We have three Asian Games in 2026, and as the new president, I am confident that everyone here will contribute their expertise to working with all the National Olympic Committees. We have a strong team, but we need to strengthen it further to overcome future challenges together."

FOOTBALL

Arsenal stroll to Wigan win, reach FA Cup fifth round

'We made a lot of changes because of players who needed minutes'

AFP
London

Arsenal powered into the FA Cup fifth round for the first time in six years as the quadruple chasers crushed Wigan 4-0 yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side routed the third-tier strugglers with four goals in the first 27 minutes of the fourth round tie at the Emirates Stadium. Noni Madueke and Gabriel Martinelli netted before Jack Hunt's own goal was followed by a Gabriel Jesus strike.

The Gunners are back in the last 16 for the first time since they won the FA Cup in 2020, a success that remains the only major trophy of Arteta's reign. Holding a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League, through to the League Cup final against Manchester City and into the Champions League last 16, Arsenal could end their silverware drought with a remarkable quadruple this season.

"We made a lot of changes because of players who needed minutes. The intensity that we showed, the connections between players and the threat we had, I'm very pleased. The first-half made a difference, obviously," Arteta said.

Arsenal's latest FA Cup clash with Wigan lacked the drama of their previous one in 2014 - a semi-final win featuring a penalty shoot-out goal from then Gunners captain Arteta.

Wigan have fallen on hard times since, arriving in north London stuck in the League One relegation zone and led by interim boss Glenn Whelan after Ryan Lowe's recent sacking.

Arsenal defender Riccardo Calafiori was injured in the pre-match warm-up, forcing Arteta to bring Bukayo Saka back into the line-up instead of resting the England winger.

Despite the late reshuffle, it took just 11 minutes for Arsenal to go in



Arsenal's Gabriel Martinelli (right) tries to cross the ball during the FA Cup fourth round match against Wigan Athletic at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. (AFP)

front. Arteta gave Eberechi Eze another start despite hauling the England midfielder off at half-time after his latest disappointing display in Thursday's 1-1 draw at Brentford.

Eze repaid Arteta's faith, cleverly turning into space for a superb pass to Madueke, who raced into the Wigan area and finished with aplomb. Eze, signed from Crystal Palace last year, provided another assist in the 18th minute.

He guided a pin-point pass to Martinelli and the Brazilian stroked a cool finish into the far corner from 12 yards.

Arsenal's third goal arrived in the 23rd minute when Wigan defender Hunt headed Saka's cross into his own net.

Arteta's men showed no mercy

as Christian Norgaard's pass sent Jesus clean through for a delicate chip over Wigan keeper Sam Tickle in the 27th minute.

Arsenal will resume their push for a first English title since 2004 at bottom of the table Wolves on Wednesday.

Leeds survived a penalty shoot-out to edge past second-tier Birmingham at St Andrew's.

Birmingham substitute Patrick Roberts snatched an 89th-minute equaliser to cancel out Lukas Nmecha's 49th-minute opener for Leeds.

With a feisty fourth round tie level at 1-1 after extra-time, Leeds won the shoot-out 4-2. Joel Piroe, Dominic Calvert-Lewin, Brenden Aaronson and Sean Longstaff all converted their penalties for

Daniel Farke's team. Battling to avoid relegation from the Premier League, Leeds are one win away from reaching the quarter-finals for the first time since 2003.

Wolves also avoided an upset as they won 1-0 at fourth-division Grimsby. Grimsby stunned Manchester United in the League Cup earlier this season.

But Wolves avoided similar embarrassment thanks to Santiago Bueno's 60th-minute goal from the visitors' first shot on target on a mud-caked pitch at Blundell Park.

It was Wolves' first away win since beating Manchester United in April.

Fulham came from behind to win 2-1 at Stoke, while Sunderland won 1-0 at Oxford.

AMIR CUP

Gonzalez treble in Umm Salal's 4-2 win over Al Ahli

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Cristo Gonzalez fired a brilliant hat-trick as Umm Salal came from behind twice to defeat Al Ahli 4-2 in the final Amir Cup Round of 16 clash at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

The Orange Fortress will now face defending champions Al Gharafa SC in the quarter-finals.

Erik Exposito handed Younes Ali's Al Ahli the lead in the 37th minute, but Gonzalez responded five minutes later to restore parity for Umm Salal. Sekou

Yansane put Al Ahli back in front four minutes after the restart. However, Gonzalez struck again in the 52nd minute to level the score for a second time.

Ahmed El Sayed then gave Umm Salal the lead with a goal in the 56th minute, before Gonzalez completed his hat-trick in the 73rd minute to seal the victory and confirm Umm Salal's place in the quarter-finals.

In the other quarter-final fixtures, Al Sadd SC will take on Al Shamal SC, while Al Duhail SC are set to face Al Arabi SC. Al Rayyan SC will meet Al Wakrah SC in the remaining last-eight encounter.



Umm Salal's Cristo Gonzalez (right) celebrates after scoring against Al Ahli in the Amir Cup Round of 16 clash at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

LA LIGA

Rayo thrash Atletico who 'deserved to lose'

AFP
Madrid

Rayo Vallecano waltzed to a 3-0 victory over Atletico Madrid yesterday in La Liga, leaving Diego Simeone's side 15 points behind leaders Real Madrid.

Atletico dropped to fourth after their heavy defeat at Leganes's Butarque stadium, where Rayo hosted the fixture due to pitch problems at their own Vallecas ground.

Fran Perez, Oscar Valentin and Nobel Mendy struck for Rayo, who thoroughly deserved their triumph against an Atletico side that had thrashed Spanish champions Barcelona 4-0 in the Copa del Rey on Thursday.

With the Spanish cup their best chance of silverware this season it has seemed that Atletico have lacked some focus in La Liga, and that was reflected in this humbling by their city rivals. The Rojiblancos have not won in their last three league matches.

"It seems like the league has slipped away, we can't lose games like this and we can't play a game the way we did today," angry Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak told DAZN.

"Competing like this is going to be to tough, you can't choose your games, every game has to be played at the highest level..."

"Today they were much better, congratulations to them, we lost and deserved to lose."

Simeone, who rotated much of the team that beat Barca with Wednesday's Champions League play-off against Club Brugge in mind, did not agree with all of Oblak's analysis.

"I don't share (his opinion), I thought the team gave what it could, they were better, but the truth is there is no need to criticise the team in terms of effort, work, of wanting to do well," said Simeone.

"We didn't have a good match, the opponent was better, congratulations to them and let's think about what's coming on Wednesday."

Inigo Perez's Rayo took the lead in the 40th minute when Perez finished Andrei Ratiu's cross, and Valentin doubled their advantage after Clement Lenglet gave the ball away.

Mendy netted the third in the 76th minute after some more poor Atletico defending to round off a miserable afternoon for Simeone's side.

Rayo, whose players have complained in recent weeks about the way the club is being run, as well as the state of the Vallecas pitch and their training ground facilities, backed by the coaching staff, climbed up to 16th. "This is a battle-hardened team that adapts well to circumstances," said Rayo coach Perez.

Last-gasp Zielinski effort keeps Inter at Serie A summit

Poland midfielder Piotr Zielinski scored a 90th-minute winner as Inter Milan edged Juventus 3-2 on Saturday to move eight points clear in Serie A.

Zielinski found the net after the 2024 champions had led twice thanks to an Andrea Cambiaso own goal and an effort from Pio Esposito in the Derby of Italy. "It is very important, perhaps the most important win for now," Zielinski told Sky Sport.

"We have to avoid these type of things, because we took the lead with Pio's goal and were in the lead. "Then there was a bit of a lack of concentration, we need to manage it better," the 31-year-old added.

Local rivals AC Milan are second

in the table after Luka Modric's late strike claimed a 2-1 win at Pisa on Friday. Cambiaso and skipper Manuel Locatelli had equalised for visitors Juve, who are 15 points behind Inter in the standings.

Inter coach Cristian Chivu made just one change from Sunday's 5-0 hammering of Sassuolo as Italy's Nicolo Barella replaced Armenia's Henrikh Mkhitaryan in midfield. France defender Pierre Kalulu started for Juve six days on from scoring a 96th-minute equaliser against Lazio, but was sent off after 42 minutes for a second bookable offence.

Television footage showed Juve officials Giorgio Chiellini and Damien Comolli angrily confronting referee Federico La Penna at

half-time following the decision. By the break, Italy midfielder Cambiaso had scored at both ends putting Inter ahead with an own goal and levelling for Juventus after 26 minutes. With a quarter of an hour to play, Esposito edged Inter back into the lead with a header but Juve captain Locatelli equalised for the visitors with seven minutes left.

Inter responded to keep their cushion atop the table as 105-time Polish international Zielinski fired home from the edge of the box.

- Atalanta eye Europe - Earlier, Ederson and Nicola Zalewski scored as Atalanta beat Lazio 2-0 to strengthen their claim for a place in European football next season.

The Brazil midfielder and the Poland winger netted either side of the break in Rome as the Bergamo team moved a point clear of Como in the UEFA Conference League qualifying spot.

Maurizio Sarri's Lazio fell nine points off the pace in the race to feature in continental competition. Como lost 2-1 at struggling Fiorentina earlier in the day.

In the Italian capital, Lazio were without Spain striker Pedro due to an ankle injury, after he scored in last Sunday's 2-2 draw at Juventus. Raffaele Palladino made three changes to his Atalanta side from Monday's win over Cremonese with captain Mario Pasalic on the bench, as Ederson was joined in midfield by Marten de Roon.