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TENNIS

Former coach Macci
says Serena certain
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ATHLETICS

Kerr to launch Diamond League campaign in Doha

The Kiwi world and Olympic champion finished second in Doha last year with a jump of 2.23m

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Olympic, world and Commonwealth high jump champion Hamish Kerr of New Zealand will return to Qatar for the Doha Meeting – the opening meeting of the 2026 Diamond League series – on May 8.

A proven championship performer, the 29-year-old national record holder has a best of 2.36m, a title-winning height he's achieved on three occasions, first at the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Glasgow (2024), followed by the Olympic Games in Paris (2024) and most recently, at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo (2025).

He finished second at the Doha Diamond League meeting in 2025 with 2.23m, but after a summer that included series wins in Rabat and Silesia, he went on to claim his first ever Diamond Trophy with 2.32m at the Diamond League final in Zurich.

"The Doha crowd support was amazing last year and while I was happy enough with my result, I obviously wanted more from a performance perspective," said Kerr, who is currently preparing for the New Zealand Championships – and a tilt at his tenth national title – next month.

"It's still early in the season so my training will be pretty heavy, but it's about building momentum and confidence. I've always said you can chase easy or you can chase growth, and taking risks – even when it's early season and it feels a bit scary – can be where you learn the most. That all said, nothing beats the feeling of jumping high and I hope I can give the crowd something to really cheer about this time around."

Kerr is the second major star announced for the Doha meeting, after pole vault world record holder Mondo Duplantis confirmed his attendance earlier last month. The Swedish pole vaulter will be hoping it's third-time lucky the Qatar Sports Club. A two-time Olympic gold medalist, the dominant 26-year-old Duplantis has been crowned world champion six times at senior level (three times outdoors, three times indoors), won a hat-trick of senior European outdoor titles and won five successive Diamond League titles from 2021-2025 inclusive.

He has broken the world record 14 times since 2020, most recently clearing a grav-



Hamish Kerr is the second major star announced for the Doha meeting, after pole vault world record holder Mondo Duplantis confirmed his attendance earlier last month.

ity-defying 6.30m at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo where he successfully defended his global title.

He is also unbeaten in this Doha Diamond League fixture, but it's been far from plain sailing. The 2020 event was postponed due to the pandemic (he won the rescheduled competition with a best of 5.82m), while in 2022 the men's pole vault was delayed by one day and moved indoors

due to high winds. Duplantis cleared 6.02m for the win on that occasion – a mark that still stands as the meeting record.

Meanwhile, the organisers of the Doha meet have already confirmed that athletes who set new meeting records at the 2026 event will be awarded a \$5000 bonus, an innovative concept that was first introduced in 2025. The Diamond League series broke new ground in 2025 with \$9.84mm

awarded in prize money across the series as a whole, the largest prize pool in Diamond League history.

While the introduction of meeting record bonus payments in Doha provided another welcome incentive for athletes, the high standard of past-performances meant that only Bahrain's Olympic silver medalist Salwa Eid Naser came close. Her winning time of 49.83 in the women's

400m matched the meeting record set by Allyson Felix of USA in 2008, but it wasn't quick enough for the outright best required to meet the criteria for the \$5000 bonus payment. The Doha Meeting is the opening meeting of 2026 Diamond League. The series comprises 15 events in global track and field across four different continents. It concludes with a single final across two days in Brussels on September 4 and 5

PREMIER LEAGUE

Thrashing Spurs dragged Arsenal out of title hell: Arteta



Arsenal restored their five-point advantage over second-placed Manchester City thanks to doubles from Eberechi Eze and Viktor Gyokeres against Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta said Arsenal's 4-1 demolition of north London rivals Tottenham was a cathartic release for his Premier League leaders after 72 hours in hell.

Arteta's side restored their five-point advantage over second-placed Manchester City thanks to doubles from Eberechi Eze and Viktor Gyokeres at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. It was a much-needed boost for the Gunners after they blew a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at bottom of the table Wolves on Wednesday that took the destiny of the title out of their hands.

Arsenal had been left devastated by their second successive draw and Arteta admitted it was hard to lift his players in the aftermath of a result that means City will take the title if they win their last 11 games. But Arteta and his coaching staff gradually revived Arsenal's flagging spirits, firing them up so effectively that they tore Tottenham to shreds for the second time this season.

After routing their bitter rivals 4-1 in November, they made the short trip up the Seven Sisters Road to inflict another humiliating defeat that pushed Tottenham deeper into the relegation mire. "I cannot

be prouder and happier from what I saw out there, especially how we lived the last 72 hours," Arteta said.

"I watched it back and there is no explanation for how the hell we drew that game against Wolves. You have to lift yourself up because you are feeling angry, ashamed, upset. You don't feel like that when it is just a job. This our passion. It is the purpose we have. You have to bring everyone together and it has been a joy. We said let's love the players. But then you have to do it on the pitch and we were outstanding."

Without a major trophy since 2020 and having blown substantial leads to City in the 2023 and 2024 title races, Arsenal's character has been questioned during their recent slump.

But Arsenal's third victory in their last eight league games served as much-needed evidence that they aren't certain to choke under the pressure. "When it is really on the edge and people are doubting, you have to stand up," Arteta said. "We showed what we are made of, but then you have to show it again and again. It is a massive rollercoaster."

It was Arsenal's biggest away win against Tottenham in the league since a 5-0 victory in 1978. Having crushed Tottenham by the same scoreline at the Emirates Stadium in November, it was only the second season after 1934-35 in which the

Gunners had won both north London derbies by three or more goals.

No wonder Arteta joined his players on the pitch after the final whistle for a raucous celebration in front of the jubilant Arsenal fans. Tellingly, Arsenal's party took place with the rest of the stadium deserted after dejected Tottenham fans headed for the exits well before the final whistle.

It was a chastening introduction to the Premier League for Tottenham interim boss Igor Tudor. Hired to replace the sacked Thomas Frank, Tudor has arrived to find Tottenham riddled with injuries and low on confidence.

Tudor has been plunged into a relegation battle, with Tottenham just four points above the bottom three as they face the bleak possibility of a first season outside the top tier since 1977-78. "There was a big gap between the teams. Arsenal are one of the best teams in the world. They were too much for us in this moment with the problems we have," Tudor said.

"Our lack of confidence was clear. I'm very sad and angry but in one way it is also good to understand the situation. Now in this moment, the team is full of problems. The only key is to work on the training day by day and be humble. "The medicine is each of us look in the mirror and really try to change the habits."

COMMENT

Hungry South Africa 'want more' after statement win over India

AHMEDABAD, INDIA: A hungry South Africa will "keep wanting more" after their statement victory over co-hosts India at the T20 World Cup earmarked Aiden Markram's side as serious title contenders. India were swept aside by 76 runs as 80,000 fans in Ahmedabad were silenced on Sunday and their 12-match win streak at the T20 World Cup, stretching back to 2022, came to a crashing halt. India, batting second for the first time in the tournament, collapsed to 111 all out in their Super Eights opener after South Africa posted 187-7. David Miller showed India's much-vaunted line-up how to bat on a slow Ahmedabad pitch, building an innings after South Africa lost early wickets and were 20-3 in the power play. Miller put on 97 for the fourth wicket with Dewald Brevis (45) on his way to 63 off 35 balls in a perfectly paced knock.

It set the platform for Tristan Stubbs to launch a late assault with 44 off 24 balls, including a crucial 20 from the final over.

Miller said that India's cloak of invincibility had been removed and now South Africa knew "that they are beatable".

"It wasn't easy. Playing against India is always really difficult and they've got some incredible team and players," Miller told reporters.

"For us in a tournament like this, it's about making sure that we do keep going back to the simple

things, making sure that we stay in our lane as a player, get the job done and keep wanting more. "We're a mature team. A lot of guys have played together and a lot of cricket for South Africa and that goes a long way under pressure," said Miller. Quick bowler Marco Jansen took 4-22, ably supported by left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj (3-24) and fellow quick Lungi Ngidi (0-15) in a rematch of the 2024 final, won by India.

"Look I don't think anyone was thinking of revenge. It was a big game," Ngidi told reporters.

"But if we lift the trophy, that's proper revenge -- if you want to call it that.

"But tonight was just another game we needed to win to put ourselves in a better position to challenge for the trophy."

The West Indies beat Zimbabwe yesterday night in Mumbai in their Super Eights opener in the same group. South Africa play the West Indies on Thursday in Ahmedabad where Markram's side could put one foot firmly in the semi-finals with another win.

On the same day in Chennai, India face giant-killers Zimbabwe, who have already beaten Australia and Sri Lanka, and must win convincingly. Anything less and India will need to beat the West Indies in their final match rely on a combination of other results going their way.



South Africa's captain Aiden Markram cheers while fielding during the T20 World Cup Super Eights match against India in Ahmedabad on Sunday. (AFP)

ANNOUNCEMENT

SA confirm fixtures for home season

Reuters
London

World champions South Africa have confirmed home Test series against England, Australia and Bangladesh in their 2026/27 summer season, but a proposed Twenty20 series against the English has been postponed.

Australia will visit South Africa for three tests starting on October 9 in Durban, their first five-day cricket in the country since the infamous 2018 series when then captain Steve Smith admitted the side had used sandpaper to tamper with the ball.

They will also play Tests in Gqeberha and Cape Town. That will follow a three-match One-Day International (ODI) series between the sides.

Bangladesh will tour for two Tests in Johannesburg and Pretoria in November. They will also play three

ODIs and three Twenty20 Internationals. England will play a Test series starting in Johannesburg on December 17, before a Boxing Day clash in Pretoria and a New Year test in Cape Town.

England will also play three ODIs.

South Africa co-host the 2027 Cricket World Cup with Namibia and Zimbabwe, with that tournament scheduled for October-November next year.

Afghanistan to play white-ball series against SL
Afghanistan will play six white-ball matches against Sri Lanka in the United Arab Emirates next month, it was announced yesterday.

The Afghanistan Cricket Board said there will be three one-day internationals and three T20 matches from March 13 to 25. War-ravaged Afghanistan has never hosted an international match, instead having to play their home fixtures in India or the United Arab Emirates.

MATCH REPORT

Hetmyer scores 85 as West Indies hammer Zimbabwe

WEST INDIES, WHO SCORED 254 FOR 6 WICKETS, GO TOP OF GROUP ONE WITH SUPERIOR RUN RATE

Reuters
Mumbai

Shimron Hetmyer scored a 19-ball half-century as his scorching knock of 85 led West Indies to a dominant 107-run win over Zimbabwe in their first Super Eights match at the Twenty20 World Cup, continuing the two-time champions' winning run.

Hetmyer scored the fastest fifty by a West Indian at a T20 World Cup as the two-time champions posted a mammoth total of 254-6 in Mumbai, the second-highest total in the tournament's history after Sri Lanka's 260-6 against Kenya in 2007.

Zimbabwe were all out for 147 as Gudakesh Motie took four wickets, sending two-time champions West Indies to the top of the Group One table thanks to a better net run rate than South Africa, who had beaten India on Sunday.

Zimbabwe's decision to bowl first initially paid off with opener Brandon King falling in the third

over. Blessing Muzarabani almost got Hetmyer out in the next over, but Tashinga Musekiwa dropped a flat pull shot at long on.

Player-of-the-match Hetmyer hit five sixes in the last six deliveries he faced before completing his half-century in the eighth over, with West Indies looking strong at 92-2.

Musekiwa dropped Hetmyer again at the same position in the 12th over, when the 29-year-old had scored 70 runs.

Rovman Powell (59 off 35 balls) stood by Hetmyer to add 122 runs for the third wicket, until Hetmyer finally fell in the 15th over, having hit seven fours and seven sixes to score 85 off 34 balls, his personal best in T20 internationals.

Sherfane Rutherford piled further misery on Zimbabwe, scoring an unbeaten 31 from 13 balls as West Indies added 46 runs in their last three overs.

Needing to chase a tournament-record 255, Zimbabwe lost three batters within five deliveries when Akeal Hosein took two wickets in a maiden over to leave the Afri-

can side at 20-3 after three overs. Dion Myers (28 off 15 balls) put up a fight, but was bowled by a flighted ball from spinner Motie (4-28), with Zimbabwe 52-4 in the seventh over.

Motie also bowled Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza (27) and Musekiwa in back-to-back deliveries, before getting Tony Munyonga (14) caught at deep midwicket, demolishing the middle order.

Facing certain defeat, Brad Evans made a defiant last stand, scoring a quick 43 to reduce the Caribbean side's margin of victory as Zimbabwe suffered their first loss in the campaign.

Zimbabwe will face defending champions India in a battle to bounce back on Thursday, the same day West Indies play last edition's finalists South Africa.

BRIEF SCORES

West Indies 254 for 6 (Hetmyer 85, Powell 59, Muzarabani 2-42) **beat Zimbabwe 147** (Evans 43, Myers 28, Motie 4-28, Hosein 3-28) **by 107 runs**



West Indies' Shimron Hetmyer plays a shot as Zimbabwe wicketkeeper Tadiwanashe Marumani looks on during the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup Super Eights match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

PREVIEW

'Ugly' England aim to spin their way to win against Pakistan today

AFP
Kandy, Sri Lanka

England are yet to catch fire at the T20 World Cup, but they won't mind one bit if another "ugly" win secures Harry Brook's side a semi-final berth with a game to spare.

England bowled out Sri Lanka for 95 on Sunday to open their Super Eights campaign with a 51-run win.

With the Pakistan-New Zealand clash on Saturday being washed out, a win against Pakistan today at the same stadium will be enough to see the 2010 and 2022 T20 World Cup champions into the last four.

England again stuttered with the bat and were restricted to 146-9 by Sri Lanka on Sunday.

"We know that we can play a lot better," all-rounder Liam Dawson told reporters after the win, in comments only made public yesterday. "But at the end of the day in tournament cricket, you just need to get the win, however ugly."

England's bowlers came to the rescue for the third time in the tournament, after also defending below-par totals against Nepal and Italy.

"The fight we've shown with the ball shows that this team is in a very good place," said Dawson.



England's Will Jacks celebrates after taking the caught and bowled wicket of Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis at Pallekele International Cricket Stadium, Kandy, Sri Lanka, on February 22, 2026. (Reuters)

Pakistan possess a dangerous spin attack, featuring a unique weapon in Usman Tariq and his pronounced pause before he releases the ball.

But Dawson said England would fight fire with fire with their own potent slow-bowling arsenal.

England captain Brook also has speedster Jofra Archer, the hit-the-deck-hard Jamie Overton and left-arm swing bowler Sam Curran as the seam options.

England's flexibility enabled Will Jacks to open the bowling with his off-spin on Sunday and destroy Sri Lanka's top order.

He returned figures of 3-22 in tandem with Archer, who removed both opening batsmen, to leave Sri Lanka in tatters at 34-5 at the end of the six-over power play.

England's variety offers Brook endless options, said Dawson who bowls left-arm spin, as does Jacob Bethell.

"We're all very different types of spinners. Jacks gets very good over-spin, very good bounce.

"Dilly (wrist spinner Adil Rashid) has all these variations and me, I'm probably more of a defensive spinner and that's my role. I'm just trying to be consistent for the captain.

"Adil can use all of his tricks and he comes on to get wickets and get us back in games or put us ahead in games. Obviously, Jacks, he's been brilliant. He's exploited conditions here very well.

"And I think the way Brookie captained today was phenomenal, how he used us all differently."

MITCHELL HOPES KIWIS CAN RIDE WAVE OF SUPPORT AS INDIA'S 'SECOND FAVOURITE TEAM'

Bengaluru: New Zealand will embrace their status as Indian cricket fans' "second favourite team" as they look to navigate a tough Super Eight group and reach the semi-finals of the Twenty20 World Cup, all-rounder **Daryl Mitchell** said.

The 2021 finalists, who were knocked out in the group stage at the last edition, find themselves facing two must-win matches against former champions Sri Lanka and England after Saturday's washout against Pakistan.

"We think of ourselves as India's second favourite team and the support that we get in the country is really cool," Mitchell told Reuters.

"Hopefully we could turn the sea of blue that we're used to when we play against India into some black shirts as well."

New Zealand must first negotiate the turning tracks of Colombo when face Sri Lanka tomorrow and England two days later, with Mitchell hopeful that his team's experience can come into play.

"We all grew up in New Zealand on fast, bouncy, grassy wickets," he added.

"I guess the experience that our group has got from playing in these parts of the world over a number of years has helped in how we want to go about it."

While New Zealand have one eye on their maiden World Cup trophy, Mitchell stressed the importance of staying focused.

"It'd be really nice to get over the line and win a trophy, but there's a lot of cricket to be played between now and then," the 34-year-old said.

"So for us, the strength is that we stay present in the moment.

"We don't look too far ahead and we don't make it bigger than what it is."

Mitchell, who has 1,856 T20 international runs from 100 matches since his debut in 2019, has slotted into the role of a finisher thanks mainly to the explosive form of openers Tim Seifert and Finn Allen.



"The 'Bash Brothers' up top have done a great job and long that continue throughout this tournament. We've recognised the balance of our side over here in India," Mitchell said. "The powerplay is very important, but the same goes for the middle (overs) with spin and the death as well. "I have a finisher's role from the 10 overs onwards - trying to read and adapt to the situation of the game and try and help us win those moments at the back end of the innings."

EXXONMOBIL QATAR HONOURS PARTNER INJAZ QATAR FOR EDUCATION IMPACT

DOHA: During the closing ceremony of the Qatar Open 2026, ExxonMobil Qatar proudly recognized its long-standing educational partner, INJAZ Qatar, for reaching a milestone of 500,000 students through its collaborative programs. This achievement reflects a shared commitment to empowering youth and advancing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, directly aligning with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy.

STEM education is a core corporate social responsibility area for ExxonMobil Qatar, recognized as a key driver of economic growth and opportunity. Through strong community partnerships, the company supports innovative STEM initiatives, equipping Qatar's youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Taher Hamid, President and



General Manager of ExxonMobil Qatar, presented Emad al-Khaja, Chief Executive Officer of INJAZ Qatar, with a commemorative plaque, honouring the organization's exceptional impact and unwavering commitment to youth empowerment and educational excellence. Joining them was Neil Chapman, Senior Vice President of Exxon Mobil Corporation, along

with senior representatives from ExxonMobil Qatar and Qatar Tennis Federation. "As we celebrate another outstanding Qatar ExxonMobil Open, we want to take a moment to formally recognize our partner, INJAZ Qatar, for its incredible work and for positively impacting half a million students since our partnership began," said Hamid. "INJAZ Qatar

has been instrumental in creating meaningful opportunities that impact the future of young people in local communities." ExxonMobil Qatar has partnered with INJAZ Qatar since 2007 to provide young people with opportunities to channel their creativity and innovation into shaping a brighter future. As a founding board member, Ex-

onMobil Qatar supports programs such as the INJAZ Mubadara Annual Young Enterprise of the Year Competition, sponsoring the Best Company of the Year Award to encourage local student entrepreneurship.

In November 2023, ExxonMobil Qatar signed a sponsorship agreement to support INJAZ Qatar's Life Skills for Elementary Students Project.

The initiative delivers five programs in Arabic for Grades 1 to 6 under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

"We are proud of this recognition, which reflects the strength of our long-standing partnership with ExxonMobil Qatar and our shared commitment to education and youth empowerment. This milestone underscores the collective impact that can be achieved through collaboration between the private sector, educational institutions, and national

partners. At INJAZ Qatar and INJAZ AI Arab, we remain committed to equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and opportunities they need to succeed and contribute meaningfully to the future of our communities," said Sheikha Hanadi bint Nasser bin Khalid al-Thani, Chairperson, INJAZ Qatar and INJAZ AI Arab.

An industry leader in nearly every aspect of the energy and chemical manufacturing industries, ExxonMobil's commitment extends beyond the business world to make a meaningful impact within the local community.

The company plays an active role in community development and education initiatives, aligning its efforts with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Third National Development Strategy. This commitment supports the development of a skilled workforce that drives growth and fosters opportunities for a sustainable future.

TENNIS

Former coach says Serena certain to make comeback

'SHE'S COMING BACK BECAUSE SHE IS A COMPETITOR AT HEART'

Reuters
New York

Serena Williams' former coach Rick Macci believes the 23-times Grand Slam champion is certain to return to competitive tennis and said the 44-year-old is "going all out" in training to get herself ready for a return to the sport.

Williams, who won her last Grand Slam singles title in 2017 and has not competed since the 2022 US Open, can officially enter tournaments after rejoining the tennis anti-doping testing pool last year.

The American has denied that she is preparing to return to the sport she dominated for two decades, but raised eyebrows last month by deflecting questions about a comeback during an appearance on NBC's *Today Show*.

Macci, who previously coached Williams and her sister Venus in the early 1990s, told French publication *L'Equipe* that he believed she is preparing for a comeback.

"She's training with lots of sparring partners - guys," he said. "She's also played with Alycia Parks, a good friend of hers in South Florida. So I have no doubt about it (her comeback). I always thought she would come back from time to time to make appearances with Venus in doubles."

"But we're not just talking about doubles here ... she's going all out. If she didn't think she could compete with the best and win matches, she wouldn't do it. It's 100% certain she'll dive back into competition."

Macci, 71, had no doubts about Williams' ability to handle the



rigours of the tour. "The question is whether that competitive spirit is still there," he added.

"She's answering that question herself: she's coming back because she is a competitor at heart."

Williams said in August 2022 that she was "evolving away from tennis" and her team has not responded to Reuters requests for comment on her potential comeback.

Macci suggested that Williams could use Indian Wells or the Miami Open to launch her comeback next month.

"It'll be interesting to see how fit she is," he added.

"Making an appearance, playing an exhibition match or a match is one thing. Doing it again the next day and the day after that, and performing well day after day is another."

Williams is widely regarded as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, fundamentally transforming the sport with her power, athleticism, and mental fortitude.

Over her career, she captured an Open Era record 23 Grand Slam women's singles titles, surpassing Steffi Graf and sitting just one shy of Margaret Court's all-time record.

Her dominance extended well beyond singles. Alongside her

sister Venus, Williams won 14 Grand Slam doubles titles, maintaining an undefeated record in major doubles finals.

Furthermore, she earned four Olympic gold medals, one in singles and three in doubles, making her the only player in history to achieve a Career Golden Slam in both disciplines.

Williams spent 319 weeks ranked as the world No. 1 by the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), including a record-tying 186 consecutive weeks.

Retiring with 73 career singles titles, her legacy as a transcendent athletic icon remains firmly cemented.

FOOTBALL

Al Wajba post emphatic win in Al Thumama Ramadan Tournament



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Wajba claimed a resounding 5-0 victory over Doha in the third Al Thumama Ramadan Tournament at Al Furjan Stadium on Sunday night.

Mansour Khalid al-Ruwaili starred in the dominant performance and was named Man of the Match after leading his side with an impressive display.

The football tournament, held in the Al Thumama area in cooperation with the Qatar Sports for All Federation, is dedicated to players aged 10 to 14 (born between 2012 and 2016). The competition continues to showcase emerging talent in a competitive Ramadan atmosphere.

Al Zaeem secured a 3-0 win over Al Thumama with Ziad Muawad Khader delivering a standout performance and was awarded Man of the Match following his decisive contribution to the victory.

In the other match, Al Rayyan and Abdullah Bin Turki shared the points after a 1-1 draw in a closely contested encounter.

Mohammed Hassan al-Emadi of Abdullah Bin Turki earned the Man of the Match award for his influential performance.

Youssef Abdul Noor, Director of the Al Thumama Ramadan Tour-



namment, said the third edition has been strong and distinguished at all levels. He praised the remarkable level of skill shown by the young players, noting that the matches have been characterized by competitiveness and enthusiasm, reflecting the tournament's sporting and educational objectives.

He said the high number of goals has been one of the most notable features of this year's edition, highlighting the attacking spirit of the teams and the players' determination to perform at their best.

Abdul Noor concluded by expressing satisfaction with the engagement of teams and parents, emphasising the commitment to providing a safe and motivating sporting environment.

GOLF

Bridgeman hangs on to claim first PGA Tour title

AFP
Los Angeles

Jacob Bridgeman held his nerve as his seven-shot lead dwindled to one, draining a short par putt at the 72nd hole to claim his first PGA Tour title with a one-shot triumph at the Genesis Invitational on Sunday.

The 26-year-old American had started the day with a six-shot advantage that swelled to seven after his birdies at the first and third.

But those were his only birdies of the day, with Bridgeman grinding his way to a one-over-par 72 at iconic Riviera Country Club for an 18-under total of 266 that left him one clear of Rory McIlroy and Kurt Kitayama.

McIlroy started six back in second and carded a four-under 67 while California's Kitayama powered up the leaderboard with a seven-under par 64.

Aussie veteran Adam Scott, winner at Riviera in 2020, had eight birdies in an eight-under 63 to finish alone in fourth on 268.

"I thought it was going to be a lot easier than that," admitted Bridgeman, who had cruised to back-to-back 64s on Friday and Saturday.

His third bogey of the day, from a greenside



Jacob Bridgeman receives the trophy from Genesis President and CEO Jose Munoz during the final round of the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club. (Reuters)

bunker at the par-three 16th, saw his lead reduced to one. "I didn't really feel really crazy nervous until I had a five-footer for bogey on 16," Bridgeman said. "That one was sketchy. I hit a really good putt and luckily it went in and then I was really nervous from there on out."

Bridgeman was in a greenside bunker again at the par-five 17th, and two-putted from 21 feet for par.

At hole 18, he put his approach at 20 feet from the pin, and after leaving that one short

finally made the winning putt. "I couldn't even feel my hands on the last couple of greens, just hit the putt hoping it would get somewhere near the hole," he said. "And both of them I left a mile short - I'm glad it's done now."

McIlroy, who completed his career Grand Slam with a Masters triumph last year, had five birdies including a hole-out from a greenside bunker at the 12th.

The Northern Ireland star, who had struggled all week to get to grips with Riviera's challenging greens, said his main reaction was to tell his caddie "it saves us from putting."

McIlroy got up-and-down birdie from a bunker at 17 before he rolled in a 30-foot birdie putt from the fringe at the last.

"Once I started to trust my reads a bit on the back nine and I went more with my first instinct, I putted a little bit better," McIlroy said.

Kitayama, 33, chasing a third tour title, thrust himself into contention with four birdies in his first five holes, and had eight birdies on the day. McIlroy said he was impressed with playing partner Bridgeman's response to the late challenge.

"He was making a lot of pars and then obviously at the end Kurt did what he did and Adam posted and I started to make a couple birdies," McIlroy said.

AUGER-ALIASSE WINS IN DUBAI AFTER MATCH-POINT HICCUPS

DUBAI: Top seed Felix Auger-Aliassime needed six match points before despatching Zhang Zhizhen 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) in the first round of the ATP 500 event in Dubai yesterday.

"I stopped counting at some point, it was getting too frustrating," said the Canadian. "Having match points is the position you want to be in as a player, but it's weird how the mind plays a trick on you."

"How much further I am from losing than he is, he should be the one that's tight."

Auger-Aliassime, the losing finalist in Dubai last season, has reached the final of his last two tournaments this season - winning in Montpellier before losing in Rotterdam.

He will next face Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard whose big serve saved him in two tie-breaks as he beat Tunisia's Moez Echargui 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4) for a first tour win since reaching the quarter-finals in Auckland in January.

The Frenchman hit 29 aces, including one on match point. Stan Wawrinka continued his farewell tour by beating Benjamin



Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime in action during his Dubai Open match against China's Zhang Zhizhen in the United Arab Emirates yesterday. (Reuters)

Hassan 7-5, 6-3 with Swiss Davis Cup and Olympic team-mate Roger Federer, who won the Dubai event eight times, in the stands. It was Wawrinka's 10th tour-level win since turning 40, a record in the Open Era.

SPOTLIGHT

UEFA provisionally suspends Benfica's Prestianni over alleged discriminatory behaviour

Reuters
Madrid

UEFA has provisionally suspended Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni for one match after the Argentine winger was accused of directing a racist slur at Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr. during the Spanish side's 1-0 Champions League playoff first-leg win, European soccer's governing body said.

Prestianni will miss tomorrow's return leg at the Santiago Bernabeu, with Real Madrid holding a 1-0 lead from the first leg in Lisbon. The suspension is pending the outcome of the ongoing proceedings, as UEFA has appointed an Ethics and Disciplinary Inspector to investigate the allegations of discriminatory behaviour.

"This is without prejudice to any ruling that the UEFA disciplinary bodies may subsequently make following the conclusion of the ongoing investigation and its respective submission to the UEFA disciplinary bodies. Further information about this matter will be made available in due course," UEFA said in a statement.

The first leg was suspended for 11 minutes shortly after Vinicius curled Real into the lead five minutes into the second half. Television footage showed Prestianni covering his mouth with his shirt repeatedly before making comments that Vinicius and nearby team-mates interpreted as a racial slur against the 25-year-old.

Referee Francois Letexier halted the



Gianluca Prestianni, who argued with Vinicius while covering his mouth with his shirt, insists he did not racially abuse the Real Madrid forward during the UEFA Champions League knockout round play-off first leg match in Lisbon on February 17. (AFP)

match after activating FIFA's anti-racism protocols. The footage appeared to show Real forward Kylian Mbappe confronting Prestianni and calling him "a bloody racist" while images from the broadcast seemed to show Benfica fans imitating a monkey.

Prestianni denied the allegation, saying

Vinicius "misunderstood what he thinks he heard".

Benfica, who last week said they stood by their player, issued a statement saying they "regret being deprived of the player while the case is still under investigation and will appeal UEFA's decision", though

acknowledged the deadlines in question were unlikely to have any practical effect on the player being available for tomorrow's match. Mbappe told reporters he heard Prestianni direct the same racist remark at Vinicius several times, an allegation also made by Real's French midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni. Mbappe said he had been prepared to leave the pitch but was persuaded by Vinicius to continue playing.

"We cannot accept that there is a player in Europe's top football competition who behaves like this. This guy (Prestianni) doesn't deserve to play in the Champions League anymore," Mbappe told reporters.

Vinicius later posted a statement on social media voicing his frustration. "Racists are, above all, cowards. They need to cover their mouth with their shirt to show how weak they are. But they have the protection of others who, theoretically, have an obligation to punish them. Nothing that happened today is new in my life or my family's life," Vinicius wrote.

Anti-discriminatory body Kick It Out said focusing on Vinicius' goal celebration instead of acknowledging the report was a "form of gaslighting" after Benfica coach Jose Mourinho said he thought Vinicius had incited the crowd.

"This approach not only harms the individual affected but also sends the wrong message to others around the world who may have experienced similar situations," Kick It Out said. Mourinho will not be on the bench for the second leg after receiving a red card for complaining in the first game.

Police investigating racist abuse of four Premier League players

London: Police said yesterday they are investigating "abhorrent" racist abuse directed online at four Premier League footballers last weekend.

Wolves striker Tolu Arokodare and Sunderland midfielder Romaine Mundle were the latest players to be targeted on Sunday. Chelsea's Wesley Fofana and Burnley's Hannibal Mejbri suffered similar abuse on Saturday following a 1-1 draw between their clubs.

Chief Constable Mark Roberts, the head of the UK Football Policing Unit (UKFPU), said Monday: "There is absolutely no place for racial abuse, either online or in person, and anyone who believes they can hide behind their keyboards should think again." The UKFPU condemns this abhorrent behaviour and we will ensure that, through our dedicated team of officers, we do everything possible to identify those responsible and bring them to justice."

Arokodare missed a penalty in Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Crystal Palace and subsequently received racist messages from several accounts. Sunderland later revealed Mundle had endured similar attacks following his substitute appearance in a 3-1 loss at Fulham.

Kick It Out, a British-based charity aiming to combat racism in football, condemned late Sunday an "appalling weekend" of abuse and calling for meaningful action. The Premier League warned of "serious consequences" for those found guilty of abuse, insisting: "Football is for everyone -- there is no room for racism."

But French defender Fofana had little hope of significant action. "2026, it's still the same thing, nothing changes," he posted. "These people are never punished. You create big campaigns against racism, but nobody actually does anything."

An official spokesman for UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer also condemned the "abhorrent" abuse and said the government would put pressure on technology companies to provide greater protection. "Meta has said that it will continue to work to protect people from abuse," the spokesman said. "Ministers will be holding them to account to ensure it happens."

Meanwhile, Scottish giants Rangers condemned the "simply unacceptable" racial abuse directed towards Djedji Gassama and Emmanuel Fernandez. The pair were subjected to racism on their Instagram accounts after featuring in a 2-2 draw at Livingston on Sunday. Rangers said Meta had been notified of the abuse and the incidents will be reported to the police.

Nigel Dewale, who sent online abuse to England defender Jess Carter during last year's Women's Euros, is set to be sentenced on March 25 after pleading guilty to a charge of malicious communication in January.

European football's governing body UEFA last week began an investigation into claims by Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior he was racially abused on the pitch by Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni during a Champions League game in Lisbon.

The Argentinian has denied the allegations but was suspended from Benfica's Champions League play-off second leg against Real Madrid pending the ongoing investigation. Benfica have also launched their own probe into two fans who were filmed making what appeared to be monkey gestures towards Vinicius.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Tudor sees harsh reality of Spurs' plight

Interim manager was left in no doubt that his side are in a relegation battle

Reuters
London

Igor Tudor needed hard evidence as to the size of his task at Tottenham Hotspur he got a filing cabinet's worth in Sunday's 4-1 home defeat by Arsenal in the north London derby.

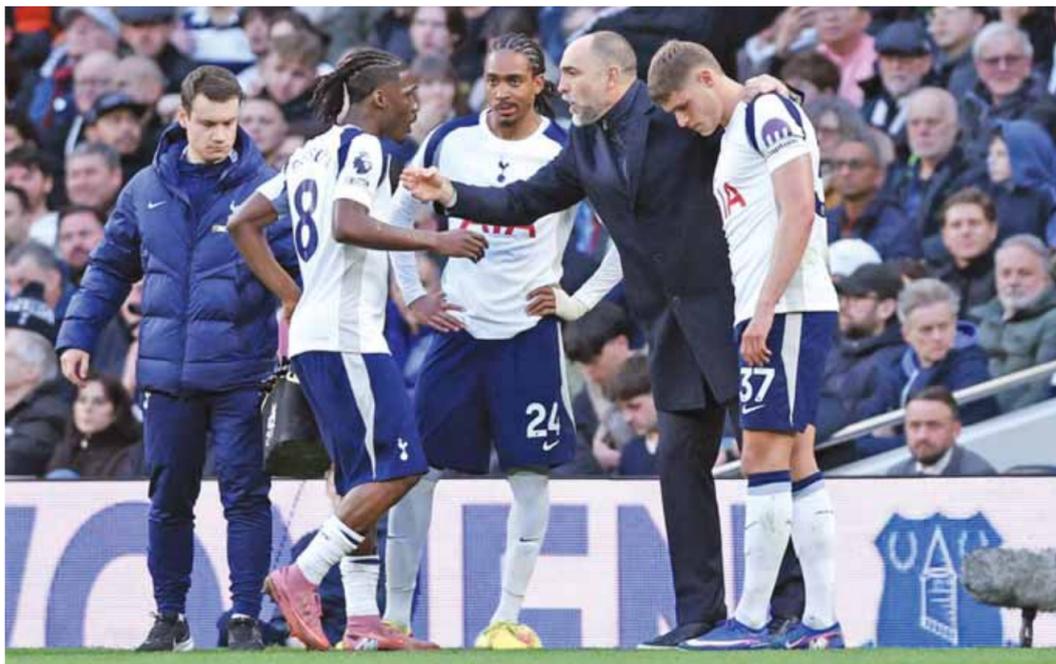
There had been a slight lift in the mood amongst Tottenham fans ahead of the game, a feeling that Tudor might be able to initiate a "new manager bounce" against an Arsenal side showing signs of nerves in the Premier League title race. Instead, a dominant Arsenal strolled to three points with their biggest league win at their arch-rivals since 1978.

Tudor was left in no doubt that his side are in a relegation battle that could see them drop out of the top flight for the first time since 1977. "Where is the goal? What is the level? So today, totally different worlds. I need to be honest. Two totally different psychological and physical worlds," the straight-talking Croatian said of the contrast between the two sides.

"A lack of confidence is very evident in the team. I'm very sad and very angry and everything but in one way it is also good to understand where is our goal. What is the goal of this club? What is the goal of this team? What is this goal of this coach, these players, this staff? To become serious. Serious, not just a group of 20 players. Each of us look in the mirror and really try, really start to change the habits. Working hard is the only way."

With 11 games remaining, Tottenham are in 16th place, four points above the relegation zone. But their form is shocking, even compared to the two clubs directly below them, Nottingham Forest and West Ham United.

They have not won a Premier League game in 2026 and have only won twice at



Tottenham Hotspur's interim manager Igor Tudor gives instructions to Djed Spence, Yves Bissouma and Micky van de Ven during the Premier League match against Arsenal in London on Sunday. (Reuters)

home in the league this season. Based on the last 12 games, Tottenham are bottom of the table - five points worse off than West Ham and Forest, who both look better-equipped for a relegation scrap.

Apart from a brief spell when Randal Kolo Muani equalised on Sunday, Arsenal toyed with Tottenham and could have won by an even larger margin. Former Juventus

and Lazio coach Tudor, who replaced Thomas Frank this month, was correct to point to the crippling injury list that left him with 13 senior outfield players on Sunday while suspended captain Cristian Romero will complete his ban at Fulham next weekend.

That is a match Tottenham dare not lose. "It was too much Arsenal for us in this moment with the problems we have," Tudor

said. "Also it's nice to understand where we are because you prepare in the best possible way then there is the game to show you reality. I said to the players, stay quiet, come on Tuesday and restart after these three or four training sessions to work harder than we did until now. To change our habits, to change the state of mind which is now as a team."

FOCUS

Croatian basketball great Radja to attend FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers in Doha



Croatian basketball legend **Dino Radja** will visit Qatar to attend the second window of the Asian qualifiers for the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup, following an invitation from the Local Organising Committee and the Qatar Basketball Federation.

The 58-year-old former World Cup bronze medalist will be in Doha from February 26 to March 3 to attend Qatar's two matches in the qualifying window - against India on February 27 and Saudi Arabia on March 2 - both scheduled at Lusail Arena. He will also interact with media at the Qatar Basketball Federation headquarters in Al Gharafa on March 1 at 10:30am.

Born in Split, Croatia, Radja enjoyed a distinguished career spanning more than two decades across Europe and the

United States, collecting numerous individual and team honours. He won two Olympic silver medals - first with former Yugoslavia at the 1988 Seoul Games and again with Croatia at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, where Croatia faced the United States' famed Dream Team in the final.

Radja later helped Croatia secure bronze at the 1994 FIBA Basketball World Cup in Canada, earning selection among the tournament's five best players alongside stars such as Shaquille O'Neal, Shawn Kemp and Reggie Miller. He also claimed five EuroBasket medals, including gold in 1989 and 1991.

In recognition of his achievements, Radja was named among FIBA's 50 greatest players in 1991 and was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2018.

Liverpool boss Slot encouraged by Mac Allister's return to form

Nottingham: Liverpool manager Arne Slot believes Alexis Mac Allister is regaining his best form following the attacking midfielder's last-gasp winning goal at Nottingham Forest.

Mac Allister struck deep in added time at the City Ground on Sunday to secure a 1-0 win for the Premier League champions. The Argentina international sealed victory by pouncing on a loose ball from close range just minutes after he had a goal ruled out by VAR. "I think what he needed is what he showed in the last six, seven or eight games - a run of games where he's getting back to his usual level that he showed so many times last season," said Slot.

"And he had that level also in the first half of the season but it

went a bit with ups and downs, as the team went in terms of performances with ups and downs. But I see much more consistency recently - not only in Macca's performance but in the team performance and many individual performances. But I think it's always nice for a player to score, especially if it's in extra time of extra time."

The Dutch boss, whose side are now just outside the Champions League places on goal difference alone following a run of poor results, added: "We needed this goal, we needed that win to be on the right side of things once in a while because we've been so, so unlucky this season. And for the first time, at least it felt to me for the first time, we've been a bit lucky this season."