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FOOTBALL

PSG and Enrique sweat on Vinha ahead of Champions League semis

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ASIAN BEACH GAMES

# Qatar handball team begin title defence with double win

Qatar are top of the group, level with Thailand, boosting their chances of qualifying for the semis



Qatar secured a 2-0 win over Pakistan in their opening match before beating Oman by the same scoreline at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China.

By Sports Reporter  
Sanya, China

Qatar's beach handball team began their campaign at the 6th Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026 with two well-deserved victories over Pakistan and Oman in the opening matches of the men's competition, which got underway yesterday.

President of the Olympic Council of Asia and President of the Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani attended the games along with Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, Second Vice President of the QOC; Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the QOC, and Ahmed al-Shaabi, President of the Qatar Handball Association.

Qatar secured a 2-0 (17-14, 19-16) win over Pakistan in their opening match, before continuing their strong performance with another 2-0 (20-14, 18-14) victory over Oman. The team delivered a dominant performance in both matches, controlling the tempo from the start. Their well-organised play, attacking efficiency, and defensive solidity enabled them to secure both wins convincingly.

With this strong start, Qatar are top of the group with four points, level with Thailand, boosting their chances of qualifying for the semi-finals and continuing their title defence.

Qatar are drawn in Group B alongside Bangladesh, Oman, Jordan, Pakistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Thailand and Mongolia. Qatar will continue its campaign tomorrow against Bangladesh and Mongolia, before facing Jordan on April 24, Thailand on April 26, and concluding the group stage against Maldives on April 27.

Qatar team captain Mutasim Abdulwahed described the two wins as an ideal start to the campaign. "We played both matches with high focus and strong determination to deliver our best performance, and thankfully we achieved two wins and a solid display," he said.

**QATAR 3X3 TEAMS LEARN THEIR PATH**  
In 3x3 basketball, the draw placed Qatar's men's team in Group C alongside Bahrain,

## Sheikh Joaan chairs Olympic Council of Asia's Executive Board meeting



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), chaired the 109th meeting of the OCA Executive Board in Sanya, China, on the sidelines of the 6th Asian Beach Games Sanya 2026. The meeting reviewed reports from organising committees, particularly the report of the Organising Committee for the 2026 Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan. The committee presented an update on preparations, noting that the Games programme will include 43 sports, 70 disciplines, and 468 events, alongside positive indicators of strong public interest and high ticket sales. The Council announced that Doha, Qatar, will host the next General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia on January 27, 2027, during which the Council's President for the new term (2027-2035) will be elected.

India, and Kazakhstan, while the women's team was drawn in Group A with China and Kazakhstan.

The men's competition features 16 teams divided into four groups, while 15 teams are competing in the women's event across four uneven groups. The competition will follow a round-robin format to determine qualification for the knockout stages.

Qatar's men will open their campaign on April 25 against Bahrain, before facing Kazakhstan and concluding the group stage against India. The women's team will begin against China, followed by Kazakhstan. The knockout stage matches will

take place on April 28, with the semi-finals and finals scheduled for April 29.

Meanwhile, Qatar's national sailing team continued its preparations, with the support staff focusing on enhancing the players' physical and technical readiness, as well as adapting to the marine conditions at the competition venue.

The team will begin its participation tomorrow, with Tamim Shams competing in the Optimist event for boys, while Thani Shams will take part in the ILCA 4 competition. The Games, which conclude on April 30, feature 1,790 athletes representing 45 countries. Qatar is represented in this edition by 34 athletes.



President of the Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani attended the Qatar's team's matches, along with Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, Second Vice President of the QOC; Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the QOC, and Ahmed al-Shaabi, President of the Qatar Handball Association.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

# Ahli face star-studded Nassr for a place in the final

By Sports Reporter  
Dubai

A classic is on the cards when Qatar's Al Ahli take on Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr in the AFC Champions League Two West Zone semi-final today at Al Wasl Stadium in Dubai. Al Ahli booked their place in the last four with a convincing 3-1 victory over Jordan's Al Hussein in the quarter-finals, while Al Nassr - captained by Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo - advanced in emphatic fashion with a 4-0 win against the UAE's Al Wasl.

Although Al Ahli did not progress with a perfect record, they reached the semi-finals unbeaten and, with continental glory now just two matches away, the Doha-based side will be determined to rise to the occasion.

Success has long eluded Al Ahli on the continental stage, but after overcoming several quality opponents en route to the semi-finals, they will believe they have what it takes to advance at the expense of a star-studded Al Nassr side, with Japan's Gamba Osaka waiting in the final.

Al Ahli coach Younes Ali expressed confidence in his team's readiness for the challenge ahead. "We are fully prepared to face Al Nassr," he said. "We are looking to deliver a strong performance against a formidable opponent like Al Nassr, a team that has many well-known names in world football. But we also have high ambitions to make a significant impact."



Al Ahli booked their place in the last four with a convincing 3-1 victory over Jordan's Al Hussein in the quarter-finals.

Ali noted that the victory over Al Hussein provided a major boost to team morale. "The team received a big morale boost after our quarter-final win, and all the players are eager to maintain their strong form in tomorrow's match," he said. "Our strikers showed high technical ability in the previous game. They created many chances and faced a goalkeeper who made several saves. I believe we will be more clinical against Al Nassr."

He added that his side must remain patient in what is expected to be a tightly contested encounter. "Tomorrow's match will be difficult and different from the pre-

vious one, given the strength of the opponent and the quality of their players. I expect few scoring chances, but we will be ready for the challenge."

Al Ahli goalkeeper Marwan Sherif also emphasised the team's determination to extend their impressive run in the competition. "We have gone nine matches unbeaten since the start of the tournament, and we will give everything to maintain this momentum in tomorrow's game. The match will not be easy, but we are aware of the responsibility on us. But we will exert every effort against Al Nassr."

Al Nassr head coach Jorge Jesus, mean-



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo (centre) trains with team-mates in Dubai yesterday.

while, is equally determined to guide his side to continental success, stating his ambition to make history by becoming the first Saudi Arabian club to lift the AFC Champions League Two title.

"Our goal is to qualify for the final," Jesus said. "We have great respect for Al Ahli. The team includes well-known professionals who have played for major European clubs, and they deserve to reach this stage. I expect a difficult match. Semi-final

games cannot be predicted in advance."

After rotating his squad in the earlier rounds, Jesus fielded his strongest lineup in the quarter-final against Al Wasl, a move that paid dividends as the Saudi side delivered a dominant performance. Al Nassr have been in scintillating form throughout the tournament, advancing to the semi-finals with a perfect record of nine wins, and will be confident of maintaining that momentum as they chase the coveted title.

## CRICKET

## Fakhar's brilliant 103 powers Qalandars



Fakhar Zaman of Lahore Qalandars hooks during his century against Quetta Gladiators in a PSL match in Karachi yesterday.

Agencies  
Karachi

In a high-octane encounter at the National Stadium in Karachi, former champions Lahore Qalandars secured a vital nine-run victory over the Quetta Gladiators yesterday, largely thanks to a masterclass in power-hitting from Fakhar Zaman.

The left-handed opener's third PSL century proved to be the difference-maker in a match that kept players of both teams on the edge of their seats until the final delivery.

Choosing to bat first, Lahore's innings was defined by "The Fakhar Storm." Despite the early loss of Mohammad Farooq, Fakhar remained unfazed, dismantling the Gladiators' bowling attack with clinical precision. He reached his century in just 50 balls, eventually finishing with a magnificent 103 off 51 deliveries, an innings decorated with 11 boundaries and six

towering sixes. Fakhar found a reliable partner in Charith Asalanka, who played a steady supporting role with 31 off 24 balls. Together, they anchored a 96-run partnership for the third wicket, allowing Lahore to post a formidable total of 197/6 in their allotted 20 overs.

Khalil Ahmed was the pick of the Quetta bowlers, claiming 2/38 amidst the onslaught.

Quetta's response was spirited, keeping the required run rate within reach for much of the innings.

Shamyl Hussain (53) and Rilee Rossouw (62 off 29) led the charge, with Rossouw looking particularly dangerous as he cleared the ropes five times.

At 149/5, the Gladiators appeared to be favorites, but the tide turned when Rossouw fell to Ubaid Shah.

Lahore's death bowling, led by Haris Rauf (2/28) and Shaheen Afridi, held their nerve under immense pressure.

Despite a late cameo from the lower order,

Quetta finished on 188/7, falling just short of the target.

With this victory, the Qalandars jump to fourth on the points table, reigniting their campaign. For his historic and record-equaling third PSL ton, Fakhar was deservedly named Player of the Match.

Fakhar said yesterday: "At the start, the wicket wasn't easy and the ball wasn't coming nicely onto the bat, with some seam and swing as well. But whenever you play in Karachi, once you survive the new ball, it gets easier to bat. Once you've faced the new ball, it becomes easier to take on the spinners with the old ball, but if you have to play them earlier, especially the quality of Usman and Abrar, it's not easy."

## BRIEF SCORES

**Lahore Qalandars 197 for 6** (Fakhar 103, Asalanka 31, Khalil 2-38) **beat Quetta Gladiators 188 for 7** (Rossouw 62, Shamyl 53, Rauf 2-28) **by nine runs**

## INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

## Abhishek's ton powers SRH to 3rd straight win

The left-handed opener smashes 135 against Delhi Capitals

AFP  
Hyderabad, India

Swashbuckling opener Abhishek Sharma struck an unbeaten 135 to fire Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) to their third IPL win in a row as they hammered Delhi Capitals by 47 runs yesterday.

The left-handed Abhishek struck 10 fours and 10 sixes in his 68-ball blitz to steer Hyderabad to a mammoth 242-2 at their home ground.

Their bowlers did not disappoint either and Sri Lankan pacer Eshan Malinga stood out with his IPL best of 4-32 to help restrict Delhi to 195-9 as Hyderabad won for the fourth time in seven matches this season.

Hyderabad, the 2016 IPL champions, jumped to third in the table. Delhi remain in fifth after three wins and three defeats. Nitish Rana and KL Rahul attempted to launch the chase in their second-wicket partnership of 86, but once both departed, Delhi fell well behind the required rate.

Rahul went for 27 before Malinga struck twice in two balls to send back Rana (57) and big-hitter David Miller, for a golden duck.

South Africa's Tristan Stubbs avoided the hat-trick and went on to score 27 in a 59-run partnership with Sameer Rizvi, who made 41.

The partnership kept Delhi in the hunt, if only by a whisker, until Malinga struck again to remove Stubbs and the chase fizzled out.

Earlier, Abhishek put on a 97-



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abhishek Sharma celebrates after scoring a century (100 runs) during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals in Hyderabad yesterday. (AFP)

run opening stand with fellow left-hander Travis Head (37) and was supported later by Heinrich Klaasen, who hit an unbeaten 37 off just 13 deliveries.

Abhishek was dropped on 86 by Rana and made him pay for the spill with two straight sixes off the bowler to reach his second IPL century, with his father in attendance.

He kept up the entertainment

alongside South Africa's Klaasen, and is the leading run scorer in this season's tournament with 323. Klaasen is second with 320 runs.

Abhishek, the Player of the Match, said yesterday: "The way we started, we had a plan, we wanted to use the powerplay, but the wicket was a bit slow so we had to re-plan, we had match-ups in mind too ... wanted to use the

powerplay, you don't know what a par score is ...but I love playing here and want to entertain the crowd."

## BRIEF SCORES

**Sunriser Hyderabad 242 for 2** (Abhishek 135\*, Klaasen 37\*, Head 37, Axar 1-23) **beat Delhi Capitals 195 for 9** (Rana 57, Rizvi 41, Malinga 4-32, Dubey 3-12) **by 47 runs.**

## Smith smashes 56 as Sultans beat Rawalpindiz



Steve Smith of Multan Sultans during the PSL match against Rawalpindiz in Karachi yesterday. Smith scored 56 off 31 deliveries as Sultans beat Rawalpindiz by six wickets. Rawalpindiz scored 166/4 in 20 overs. Sultans reached 167/4 in 18.4 overs. Smith was declared the Man of the Match.

## CYCLING

## London team time trial to feature at women's 2027 Tour de France

AFP  
Paris, France

The landmarks of London will provide a spectacular backdrop as the 2027 women's Tour de France opens in England, with the seven-rider teams collectively contesting an 18km circuit culminating on The Mall before returning to France.

Race director Marion Rousse revealed Monday the first three days will be contested in England with races from Leeds to Manchester on stage 1, and from Manchester to Sheffield on the second day before the London showpiece on August 1.

The full route and details of the London route will be revealed lat-

er this year as part of the official launch of the 2027 edition in Paris.

"The team time trial has always been one of the most spectacular formats in cycling, and we are very proud, it's a first in the history of the women's Tour de France," said Rouse.

Organisers say it is expected to be the best attended women's sporting event ever staged in Britain.

"I'm proud that London will host this historic moment for women's cycling," London Mayor Sadiq Khan said.

"Londoners and visitors will be lining the streets to cheer on the world's best riders as they race through our capital, taking in some of our best-known landmarks before a triumphant finish on The Mall."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Varma's hundred injects life into MI's IPL campaign

Reuters  
Mumbai

Mired in a four-match losing streak, Mumbai Indians needed something special to revitalise their Indian Premier League (IPL) campaign and batter Tilak Varma duly delivered with an unbeaten century in Monday's win over Gujarat Titans.

The middle-order batter smashed 101 off 45 balls to lead the five-time champions to a 99-run win that hauled them off the bottom of the table and up to seventh in the 10-team league.

Varma's previous best this season was 20 and the 23-year-old said he had struck form at just the right time.

"The first hundred will always be special - and to be honest, it was very important for us," he added.

"We don't have much time from here. Every game is important for us."

Batting at number five, Varma collected 19 from his first 22 balls before racing to his first IPL hundred in just 45 balls.

After going five innings without a six, he launched seven against a potent Gujarat attack that included Mohammed Siraj, Kagiso Rabada and Rashid Khan.

"In the last five games, I haven't spent much time in the middle. So I was just thinking that in this game, I want to spend time in the mid-



Mumbai Indians' Tilak Varma (right) and Hardik Pandya react during their IPL match against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad on Monday. (Reuters)

dle," he said. "If you see the first 20 balls, I was just going ball-by-ball. Later on, once I had faced a few balls, I knew what I am capable of."

"I was stable, keeping my head still and following my basics. I've got all the fancy shots - when the team needs, I can use that."

Mumbai captain Hardik Pandya, who played

a largely support role in an 81-run stand with Varma, never doubted his teammate's talent.

"The only thing I kept telling him (was) - you're going to just watch the ball and hit the ball because I genuinely believe the kind of (way the) ball travels from his bat is something really special," Pandya said.

## BOXING

## Yoka's bout called off after opponent fails test

AFP  
Paris, France

French Olympic boxing champion Tony Yoka's high-profile bout with former cruiserweight world champion Lawrence Okolie has been called off after the Briton returned an adverse finding in a doping test yesterday.

Despite promoter Queensberry's best efforts to find a replacement at short notice to fight the 2016 Olympic super heavyweight champion in Paris on Saturday they were unable to reach an agreement with the host broadcaster DAZN and the entire event was cancelled.

"(On Monday), the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association (VADA)

informed Queensberry that Lawrence Okolie returned an adverse finding following an anti-doping test conducted ahead of the show in Paris this Saturday," the promoter said in a statement.

Okolie, 33, said nothing sinister should be read into the adverse finding.

"Before anyone starts imagining the worst, following my bicep injury last year, I sustained an elbow injury on the same arm during this camp," he posted on Instagram.

"I had a treatment on it and now we are here. I truly hope sense prevails."

"I will of course be fully cooperating with all relevant authorities and I'm confident any investigation will clear my name."

"I won't be making any further comment at this time."

TENNIS

# Sinner to use Madrid Open to boost career Grand Slam chances

'I'm here trying to do my best and then we'll see how it goes'

AFP  
Madrid

**W**orld number one Jannik Sinner said yesterday his principal aim as he prepares for the Madrid Open is to be in the "best possible shape" for Roland Garros next month as he seeks to complete a career Grand Slam.

The 24-year-old won his first major title on clay earlier this month as he downed rival Carlos Alcaraz in straight sets in the Monte Carlo Masters final.

Next he turns his attentions to the 1000-level event in Madrid as the clay-court season ramps up towards the only Grand Slam tournament Sinner has not yet won - Roland Garros, which will run from May 24 to June 7.

"I never played very well here, so let's see how it goes this year," Sinner, who has never got past the quarter-final stage in the Spanish capital, told reporters the day before the Madrid Open begins.

"I'm trying to improve as a player and here might be one of the most challenging ones because of certain things (altitude and wind)."

Despite being heavily favoured to pick up a fifth consecutive Masters title, Sinner revealed that for him "the most important is Roland Garros".

"We try to maximise to be in the best possible shape there, but I'm here trying to do my best and



Italy's Jannik Sinner poses on the Red Carpet ahead of the 27th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid. (AFP)

then we'll see how it goes," he added. Sinner lost an all-time classic Roland Garros final last year to Alcaraz, despite holding three championship points.

But the Italian said he regretted the upcoming absences of the world number two, due to Alcaraz

suffering a wrist injury, and 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic in Madrid. "It's a very big pity to not have (Alcaraz) here and also Novak, the two biggest stars in tennis," Sinner said.

"We have shared since last year a lot of tournaments, but again, in

my mind I also know if I want to play against Carlos it's in the final and the way to the final is very long."

Top seed Sinner will start his Madrid Open campaign in the second round against a yet to be determined opponent.

GOLF

## DeChambeau held meeting during Masters to discuss LIV exit

AFP  
London

**B**ryson DeChambeau used his spare time at the Masters Tournament earlier this month to discuss a possible return to the PGA Tour, according to a report by *The Athletic*.

Playing in the final season of his original LIV Golf contract, DeChambeau not only was competing in the first major tournament of the 2026 season at Augusta, Georgia, he also had meetings with unnamed "organizations" about a LIV departure, according to the report.

DeChambeau did have the opportunity to return to the PGA Tour earlier this year through the Returning Member Program but reportedly declined.

That program was developed as Brooks Koepka departed LIV for his return to the PGA Tour earlier this year. Also declining the option to return were Jon Rahm and Cam Smith.

DeChambeau, Rahm and Smith were the only three LIV stars who were offered a path to return amid new parameters that were restricted to players who had departed for at least two years and had won a major tournament or a Players Championship title between 2022 and 2025. DeChambeau's reported meetings at the Masters came as rumors started to circulate that LIV Golf Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund may be preparing to end its financial support of the league.

However, LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil said last week that the league would not fold.

O'Neil later added that LIV Golf is financed through the 2026 season. The league's fourth season has seven tournaments remaining - five in the United States - after last week's event in Mexico. DeChambeau complained about course conditions at the Mexico event then withdrew after two rounds citing a wrist injury.

Up next is LIV Golf Virginia at Trump National Golf Club from May 7-10.

DeChambeau, 32, prevailed in a playoff in consecutive weeks in March by winning at both LIV Golf Singapore and LIV Golf South Africa. The two-time US Open champion has won five individual LIV Golf titles.

When LIV Golf began in 2022, DeChambeau reportedly signed a \$125mn contract for 4 1/2



years. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, he had been seeking as much as \$500mn on a new contract to remain with the league.

### PGA Tour to scrap Hawaii opening events from 2027

The PGA revealed on Monday that it intends to end its tournament lineup in Hawaii in 2027.

That news came on the heels of the 2026 Maui event having to be cancelled due to drought-like conditions on the Plantation Course at Kapalua.

The Sentry, formerly known as the Tournament of Champions, served as the starting-off point for the PGA Tour each January from 1986-2013 and 2024-25.

This season's cancellation created a less ceremonious January start to the PGA season at the Sony Open in Hawaii, at Waialae Country Club in Honolulu, a week later than usual and The American Express, in La Quinta, California, after that.

The star-studded Sentry event typically boasted the top 50 from the FedEx Cup final standings and all winners from the previous season. Overall, the PGA has hosted an event in Hawaii for more than 50 consecutive years.

The Plantation course that hosted The Sentry had been involved in a water rights dispute with another local company that it had been unable to resolve, leading to the announcement of the cancellation of the 2026 event last October.

The Sony Open on Oahu, an event which paired with The Sentry to enable golfers a two-week stay in the Pacific, has been caught in the crossfire and could be moved to the Champions Tour instead. The PGA Tour floated the possibility of pairing it with the senior circuit's Mitsubishi Electric Championship at Hualalai going forward.

Still, the PGA Tour stressed that more details about the 2027 schedule would be shared at a later date.

## Alcaraz may skip French Open rather than rush injury comeback

French Open champion Carlos Alcaraz insisted he would rather miss defending the Roland Garros title in May rather than rush treatment on a "serious" wrist injury.

The 22-year-old pulled out of the Barcelona clay-court tournament last week when he felt his wrist "give out on a return" and then revealed the injury to be "a more

serious injury than any of us expected". He then pulled out of the Madrid Open on Friday, casting doubt on his participation in Paris as of May 18.

On Monday that doubt deepened when he told press at an award ceremony he was taking a long term view.

"I'd rather come back a little later

but in great shape than come back early, rushing around, and unwell." "God willing, I have a very long career ahead of me, many years, and pushing myself too hard at this Roland Garros could seriously harm me in future tournaments," he said Monday.

"Things happen in the professional world. You have to accept them," he said. "I need to recover

really well if I don't want it to affect me later on."

The world number two lost his top ranking following his defeat by Jannik Sinner in the Monte Carlo Masters final April 12. Before that Alcaraz had won his past 17 matches on clay, dating back to last season when he lifted titles in Rome and at Roland Garros.

FOCUS

## Venus eliminated from Madrid Open

AFP  
Madrid

**V**enus Williams was knocked out of the Madrid Open yesterday as the 45-year-old went down in straight sets to Kaitlin Quevedo.

The 20-year-old Spanish wild card beat the seven-time Grand Slam champion 6-2, 6-4 in just under one hour and 45 minutes on court. Ranked 479th in the world, Williams has now lost all seven matches she has played this season. It was her first match

on clay since Roland Garros five years ago.

Every game was closely contested in a first set marked by numerous unforced errors due to the wind blowing across the Estadio Manolo Santana but the world number 140, playing in her first 1000-level event, was the more consistent of the two.

Williams got off to a better start in the second set, taking a 3-0 lead, before Quevedo began to fight back and the match was then interrupted by rain while the roof over the centre court was closed.

Quevedo won five consecutive

games to seal her passage to the second round.

Earlier, former world number two Paula Badosa lost 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-0 to Julia Grabher as the Spaniard exited her hometown event at the round-of-128 stage.

Beatriz Haddad Maia, a 2023 Roland Garros semi-finalist, went out 6-1, 6-1 to Jessica Bouzas Maneiro.

Later, 2025 Roland Garros sensation Lois Boisson makes her return to action when she takes on Peyton Stearns for a spot in the second round, where top seed and defending champion Aryna Sabalenka awaits.

ATHLETICS

## Bolt hopes sprint sensation Gout has strong support system

Reuters  
Los Angeles

**U**sain Bolt said Australian sprint sensation Gout must surround himself with a strong support team in order to stay focused on his career and avoid the distractions that will come with track and field success.

Gout has earned comparisons with the Jamaican sprinting great and the 18-year-old is already being talked about in Australia as a potential gold medalist when Brisbane hosts the Olympics in 2032.

He clocked 19.67 seconds to win the 200m title at the Australian Athletics Championships this month and followed it up with a victory in the under-20 100m event where he finished in 10.21 seconds. Bolt holds the world record in the 200m (19.19) and the 100m (9.58).

"At that young age, because I was there, you start getting put left and right and then you forget track and field," eight-times Olympic gold medalist Bolt told



Australia's Gout Gout reacts after competing in Backmarkers Invitation 120m event during the 2025 Stawell Gift at Central Park in Stawell on April 21, 2025. (AFP)

CNN. "Hopefully he has the right set of people to guide him and keep him focused on track and field because the rest of the stuff will always be there.

"But if you mess up on track and field, then it all goes away."

Gout, the son of South Sudanese immigrants, is set to make his Diamond League debut in the 200m in Oslo on June 10, lining up in a strong field led by reigning Olympic champion Letsile Tebogo of Botswana.

### QSL, ICSS reaffirm commitment towards integrity and transparency

As part of their ongoing co-operation and co-ordination to ensure the highest standards of integrity in competitions and guarantee transparency and fair play for teams and players, the Qatar Stars League (QSL) and International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS) have reaffirmed their commitment towards integrity in Doha Bank Stars League matches.



Both entities collaborate to ensure integrity and transparency in competitions throughout the season, particularly in crucial rounds. The final round of the season has become crucial in determining the league champions

and final positions - be they the top-four finish or relegation to Second Division. It may be noted that QSL and ICSS have a joint work programme in place based on promoting integrity and transparency. It included several workshops and training courses for those involved in professional football, with the participation of club company representatives, players and coaches.

## Manchester City, Inter, Chelsea and Juve to face off pre-season in Hong Kong

English and Italian football giants Manchester City, Chelsea, Inter Milan and Juventus will square up for pre-season friendlies in Hong Kong in August, the clubs announced on Tuesday.

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, currently arm-wrestling Arsenal for the Premier League title, will take on Inter Milan on Saturday, August 1, spearheaded by their Norwegian goal machine Erling Haaland.

The match will kick off the "Hong Kong Football Festival" at the city's futuristic 50,000-seat Kai Tak stadium. The gleaming arena opened a year ago, featuring a roof that can be closed and air-conditioning to combat the fierce summer heat and humidity in Hong Kong. Chelsea will play Juventus on Wednesday August 5 to round off the mini-tournament.

Inter, under former Romanian

international Cristian Chivu, are eight points clear at the top of Serie A as they look for a 21st title, second only to Juventus who have won a record 36 Italian top-flight championships.

Juventus are fourth and looking to secure a Champions League spot under Luciano Spalletti. Chelsea beat PSG to win the Club World Cup in the United States last year but have since parted company with then manager Enzo Maresca.

Liam Rosenior took charge but is under pressure to keep his job after Chelsea lost five of their last six Premier League matches to drop to sixth, seven points adrift of the Champions League places. It remains to be seen whether Rosenior will still be in charge when Chelsea land in Hong Kong as they were also drubbed 8-2 on aggregate by PSG in the Champions League last 16. All

the teams will hold open training sessions ahead of the matches giving Hong Kong fans an extra chance to see star players such as City's Gianluigi Donnarumma, Chelsea's Cole Palmer, Inter's Lautaro Martinez and Juventus's Dusan Vlahovic.

The action does not stop there for fans in the football-mad southern Chinese city, as Bayern Munich and Aston Villa have already announced they will play a friendly in Hong Kong on Friday, August 7.

During pre-season last year, 50,000 sell-out crowds in Hong Kong watched Liverpool play AC Milan and Tottenham face Arsenal in the first north London derby outside of the UK.

Tens of thousands also turned out to watch the teams' open training sessions. (AFP)

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# PSG, Enrique sweat on injured Vitorinha ahead of semi-final

'We need to manage Vitorinha's minor injury; some players are a bit tired'

AFP  
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said yesterday he was unsure if midfielder Vitorinha would be fit to play against Bayern Munich in the Champions League semi-finals.

The Portuguese central midfielder will miss PSG's Ligue 1 clash against Nantes today due to a heel inflammation. "We'll take a calm and measured approach to see how the injured players can make a comeback. But I don't know," he told reporters when asked if Vitorinha would be back in time for next Tuesday's semi-final first leg at the Parc des Princes.

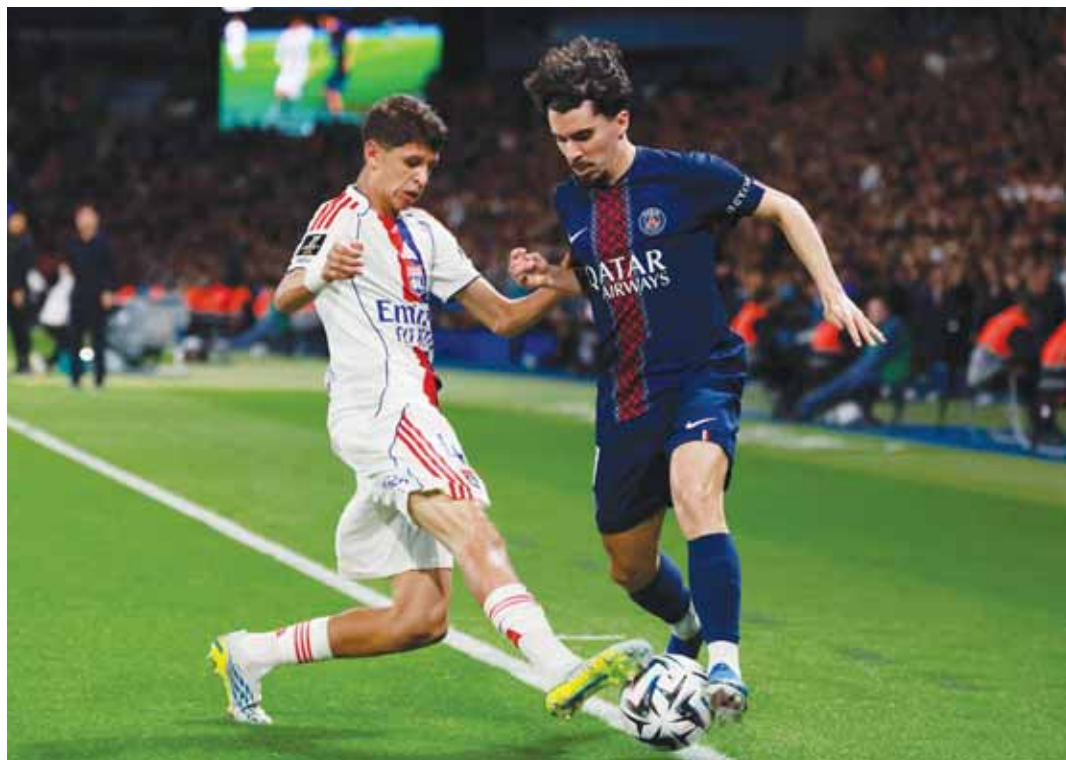
"We need to manage Vitorinha's minor injury; some players are a bit tired or have a few niggles," the Spaniard also told PSGTV.

Should the 26-year-old be unavailable, his place at the heart of the PSG midfield could be filled by the returning Fabian Ruiz.

Alongside Vitorinha and Joao Neves, Ruiz formed the midfield trio that anchored much of PSG's success last season as they won a maiden Champions League title and lifted the Ligue 1 trophy.

The Spaniard returned for the final 18 minutes of PSG's 2-1 league loss at home to Lyon last weekend as he continues his comeback from a knee injury.

Luis Enrique cooled expectations on the 30-year-old, however, as he said Ruiz would need



Paris St Germain's Vitorinha and Olympique Lyonnais' Khalis Merah vying for the ball during the Ligue 1 match in Paris on Sunday. (Reuters)

"time to regain fitness" after spending three months on the sidelines.

"Fabian Ruiz needs more matches and minutes to recover," Luis Enrique insisted, before adding he was nonetheless "happy" with his return against Lyon.

The former Barcelona and Spain coach warned that even as PSG

close in on a repeat of their double-winning season this term, he still demands "more" from all his charges.

Exciting Senegalese 18-year-old Ibrahim Mbeye was not included in the squad for Sunday's defeat to Lyon, with Luis Enrique explaining: "Every minute you get to play for PSG must be special.

I have no regrets about Mbeye, but you have to be ready. He was ready, but I expect much more from all the players."

Victory in the French capital against Nantes on Wednesday would send PSG three points clear of surprise Ligue 1 title challengers Lens with five matches remaining in the campaign.

## FOCUS

## Machida Zelvia enter Asian Champions League final

AFP  
Jeddah

Tournament debutants Machida Zelvia secured a place in a first Asian Champions League final following a controversial 1-0 victory against UAE side Shabab Al Ahli in Jeddah yesterday.

The Japanese team, who until this season had never appeared in the continent's premier club competition, triumphed in front of a sparse crowd at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium thanks to Yuki Soma's early goal.

However, Shabab Al Ahli were denied an injury-time equaliser when Guilherme Bala's brilliant solo run and finish was ruled out because the Emiratis had restarted play before a Machida substitution was complete.

Machida will now face defending champions Al Ahli, of Saudi Arabia, in Saturday's final at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium. They are attempting to become the ninth continental champions from Japan.

A place in the showpiece marks another notable milestone in the career of manager Go Kuroda, who had spent 28 years coaching a high-school football team before being given the Machida reins in 2023.

In his first season, Kuroda guided the club to promotion

from the J2 League, before sealing a third-placed finish in the top tier to qualify for the Asian Champions League. In contrast, Shabab Al Ahli are managed by former Portugal international Paulo Sousa, who won the UEFA Champions League with Borussia Dortmund in 1997.

Machida were given a perfect start when, on 12 minutes, Soma pounced on a mistake by Serbian defender Bogdan Planic to round Shabab Al Ahli goalkeeper Hamad Al Meqbaali and slot home.

Runners-up in 2015, Shabab Al Ahli pushed for an equaliser against Machida late in the first half, Brazilian defender Kauan Santos curling a brilliant effort from the edge of the penalty area that crashed off the crossbar.

Five minutes before half-time, Machida were awarded a penalty when Shabab Al Ahli captain Federico Cartabia was adjudged to have felled Soma in the box. However, the decision was overturned by VAR.

Just after the hour, Bala had a first equaliser ruled out for offside. Moments later, Shabab Al Ahli substitute Mohammed Juma somehow missed the target from four yards out.

The match ended in controversy, with Sousa storming down the tunnel before injury time had finished, while Al Meqbaali was sent off for remonstrating with the referee after the final whistle.



Machida Zelvia's Yuki Soma (right) celebrates his goal with teammate Erik during the Asian Champions League match against Shabab Al Ahli in Jeddah yesterday.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Barca need leaders to fulfil Flick's dream

AFP  
Barcelona

Barcelona require leaders on the pitch if they are to achieve their coach Hansi Flick's dream of winning the Champions League, the German said yesterday.

The 61-year-old was speaking a week after his Champions League dream was dashed for a second successive season - this time ousted in the quarter-finals by La Liga rivals Atletico Madrid.

Flick - whose side went out in the semi-finals last season to Inter Milan - guided Barcelona to the domestic double last term and his charges are on course for retaining their league title, they are nine points clear of Real Madrid with seven games to play.

"It is not an excuse but in the business end of the campaign in March and April, it is very important to have all the players available," he said at his press conference on the eve of their league

match with Celta Vigo. "Against Atletico we were missing Frenkie (de Jong) and Raphinha.

"Last year we had Inigo (Martinez), who was a great leader.

"We need these type of players, capable of providing leadership on the pitch, to speak up during matches, in the quarter-finals or semi-finals of the Champions League, and to show the way."

Flick added the team, largely made up of players who came through the club's youth system, were "young" and must "learn" from each defeat in order to progress.

"I believe we can do it, we have a fantastic team for the years ahead, and one must make the right decisions, notably in the transfer market," he said.

Flick would not go into any further detail on the type of forward Barcelona will be looking to recruit nor on his future even if he hopes his "contract is extended" in what he repeated would be his "last job".



## PREMIER LEAGUE

## West Ham's draw at Palace relegates Wolves

AFP  
London

West Ham's 0-0 draw against Crystal Palace condemned Wolves to relegation from the Premier League and boosted their own survival bid to leave struggling Tottenham deeper in trouble.

Bottom of the table Wolves have long been destined for the drop and their descent into the Championship was confirmed by the stalemate at Selhurst Park.

Wolves are now 16 points behind fourth-bottom West Ham, with a maximum of 15 available from their last five matches.

After eight seasons in the top-flight, Wolves succumbed tamedly, winning just three of their 33 league matches to date this term.

Despite notable recent wins against Aston Villa and Liverpool, Wolves have looked relegation certainties for months and their eight-year stay in the Premier League is coming to an end.

Vitor Pereira, now in charge of Nottingham Forest, started the season in charge of the Molineux club but the Portuguese coach was sacked in early November after a terrible start to the campaign.

Former Middlesbrough boss Edwards was brought in but he had an almost impossible task and has been unable to work a miracle.

Second-bottom Burnley look certain to join Wolves in the second tier next season.

They will be relegated if they lose against title-chasing Manchester City today.

The Hammers' draw improved their own survival prospects, moving them two points clear of third-bottom Tottenham.

Tottenham's 2-2 draw against



West Ham United's Callum Wilson, Jarrod Bowen, Tomas Soucek and Kyle Walker-Peters applauds the fans following the Premier League match against Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park in London. (AFP)

Brighton on Saturday was a boost to West Ham, with the two London rivals having five games left in the fight to avoid relegation.

Tottenham, winless in their first two games under boss Roberto De Zerbi, haven't played in the second tier since 1977-78.

The north Londoners have going 15 league matches without a win stretching back to December.

Last in the Championship in 2011-12, West Ham's biggest league win for three years, 4-0 over Wolves nine days ago, moved them out of the bottom three for only the second time in 2026.

Nuno Espirito Santo's side built on that result with a gritty point against UEFA Conference League semi-finalists Palace.

"It will go all the way, for sure. Not only at the bottom of the table but at the top. This season has been very tight," Nuno said.

"We have a mission ahead and keep going. It's going to be a fight until the end."

Palace's win at West Ham in September sparked Graham Potter's sacking and Nuno's eventual appointment as his replacement.

Nuno has gradually revived West Ham since then and from January 17 onwards, only four Premier League teams have picked up more points than the Hammers.

West Ham threatened first when Valentin Castellanos fired over from the edge of the area.

Brennan Johnson should have

put Palace in front from Tyrick Mitchell's cross, but the unmarked forward headed wastefully wide.

Johnson tried to make amends, curling narrowly wide from 18 yards.

But it was West Ham who finished the half stronger, with El Hadji Malick Diouf's cross reaching Konstantinos Mavropanos for a towering header that forced a fine save from Dean Henderson.

Mavropanos had another header repelled by Henderson after the interval.

Palace winger Ismaila Sarr was denied a late winner when he slammed home from close-range, only for the goal to be disallowed for handball by Jean-Philippe Mateta.

## NEW BATCH OF FIFA WORLD CUP TICKETS TO GO ON SALE

A new batch of World Cup tickets to all 104 matches will go on sale today, just 50 days before the tournament kicks off, FIFA said yesterday. Tickets to games across the United States, Mexico and Canada will be available via FIFA's website "on a first-come, first-served basis" from 1500 GMT, the sport's governing body said in a

statement. "Along with this set of tickets, additional tickets will continue to be released to the public on an ongoing basis up until the final on Sunday, 19 July (subject to availability)," it said. The latest batch of tickets comes after FIFA President Gianni Infantino said more than five million tickets have already been sold

to the tournament, which begins June 11. The most tickets ever sold previously for a World Cup was 3.5m, when the event was last held in the US back in 1994. Based on the capacity of the 16 stadiums hosting this tournament, approximately seven million tickets are expected to be available in total for the 2026 edition. FIFA has come under

fire for the sky-high prices of tickets, with the most expensive ticket for the World Cup final surpassing \$10,000, excluding the re-sale market. Organizers have defended the pricing of tickets, which Infantino attributed to "crazy" demand, and used a "dynamic pricing" strategy where prices are automatically raised for high-

demand matches. Yesterday, the Athletic reported that ticket sales were lagging for the United States team's high-priced World Cup opener against Paraguay in Los Angeles - a claim disputed by FIFA. "Ticket sales for the FIFA World Cup remain strong with a high degree of interest for all matches," a FIFA spokesperson told AFP.