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Rana stars as Bangladesh down Pakistan in 1st Test thriller



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SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

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TRIVIA

Who is the oldest player to score a goal in a World Cup match?
Roger Milla (Cameroon) in 1994 against Russia at 42 years, 39 days old.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar swimmers make splash with three golds at GCC Games

Hosts win 10 medals, including four silver and three bronze, on the opening day of the multi-sport event

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's swimmers delivered an impressive performance on the opening day of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026, winning three gold medals and two silvers at the Hamad Aquatic Centre yesterday. Hosts won 10 medals, including four silver and three bronze, on the opening day of the multi-sport event.

Saadeddin claimed Qatar's first gold after winning the men's 800m freestyle in a Games record time of 7:57.54 secs. Bahrain's Robert Bonsall finished second, while Kuwait's Saud Alshamroukh took bronze. Mohamed Mahmoud added another gold for the hosts by topping the men's 200m individual medley in 2:03.02, also setting a Games record ahead of Bahrain's Saud Ghali and Kuwait's Khaled Alotaibi. Qatar's third gold came through Emile Fouzai, who won the men's 200m butterfly in 2:02.20 ahead of Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Alzaki and Kuwait's Mohammed Alotaibi.

In the men's 50m freestyle, Qatar's Ali Tamer Hassan settled for silver after clocking 22.69 seconds, narrowly behind Saudi Arabia's Emad Addin Zaben, who won gold with a Games record of 22.64. Bahrain's Mikhail Arkhangelskiy claimed bronze.

Abdalla Elghamry secured Qatar's second silver medal after finishing runner-up in the men's 100m backstroke with a time of 58.32 seconds behind Saudi Arabia's Ali Alessa, who set a Games record of 57.39.

Mahmoud expressed his delight after his victory, describing the achievement as the result of months of hard preparation and teamwork. He revealed that he and teammate Saadeddin had been training in France since September as part of an extended camp ahead of the Games, adding that home support and the atmosphere at the Hamad Aquatic Centre helped him deliver his best performance.

"This is just the beginning of our journey to continue achieving more glory and accomplishments, raising Qatar's name high, winning many more medals and setting outstanding Gulf records," he said.

Mahmoud said the victory also came with a new Gulf record and a personal best time, but he is looking ahead to adding more medals, with three more races and relay events still to come.

Swimming action resumes today with the second day programme including the 400m freestyle, 50m breaststroke, 100m freestyle, 200m backstroke, and the 4x100m freestyle relay.

HOSTS WIN ONE SILVER AND TWO BRONZE IN TAEKWONDO

Qatar's taekwondo team also a strong start to their campaign securing three medals - one silver and two bronze on the opening day of the games.

Maram Fatnasi claimed the silver medal



Swimmers in action during the opening day of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 at the Hamad Aquatic Centre yesterday.



Qatar's Maram Fatnasi claimed the silver medal in the taekwondo women's under-67kg category.



Qatar's swimmers Mohamed Mahmoud (right) and Saadeddin are delighted after winning gold at the Hamad Aquatic Centre yesterday.



Qatar's women's 3x3 basketball team secured their place in the semi-finals.

in the women's under-67kg category to lead the host nation's charge, while Hassan al-Nuaimi earned bronze in the men's under-58kg division. Shaalan Mohamed added another bronze for Qatar in the men's under-80kg category.

In bowling singles, Qatar's Bader Alsada took silver, while compatriot Talal Almarri settled for bronze.

Meanwhile, Qatar's women's 3x3 basketball team secured their place in the semi-finals at Al Gharafa Sports Hall after winning both their group stage matches. They opened their campaign with a 15-10 win over Oman, and followed it up with a hard-fought 14-13 victory against Kuwait in a thrilling encounter.

Qatar is scheduled to face Saudi Arabia

today, while Bahrain meet Kuwait to determine the finalists, with the final set for 6:45pm.

In other women's results, Kuwait beat Oman 13-12 in overtime. In Pool B, Saudi Arabia defeated the UAE 19-12, Bahrain beat the UAE 18-9, before Bahrain also overcame Saudi Arabia 17-12.

In the men's competition, Qatar made a dominant start with three straight wins, defeating the UAE 22-9, Bahrain 21-15 and Kuwait 21-7 on the opening day. They are scheduled to face Saudi Arabia at 3:25pm in their final group match, with the top four teams advancing to the semifinals. The competition will then progress to the third-place playoff and final, scheduled for 7:10pm.



In bowling singles, Qatar's Bader Alsada took silver, while compatriot Talal Almarri settled for bronze. Saudi's Abdulrahman Alkhelawi won gold.

FOCUS

GCC Games Organising Committee honours officials and delegations

In an atmosphere that reflected the deep-rooted GCC ties and the spirit of sporting unity, the Organising Committee of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 hosted a luncheon in honour of Vice Presidents and Secretaries General of the GCC Olympic Committees, heads of administrative and sporting delegations, partners, sponsors and senior GCC media representatives.

The luncheon was held at "Feeh Al Afyah" Restaurant in Katara Cultural Village following an invitation extended by Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and Vice Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Games.

Al Buenain welcomed the GCC guests to their second home, Qatar, expressing pride in the distinguished Gulf participation and the close cooperation among the Gulf Olympic Committees. He affirmed that Doha 2026 represents a new milestone in the journey of joint Gulf sports cooperation and reflects the growing stature of Gulf sport on both the regional and international stages. He also wished all participating GCC teams every success during the Games.

The luncheon was attended by Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani, Sports Sector Director at the QOC and Director General of the Organising Committee, alongside a number of senior Gulf sports of-

officials, presidents of sports federations, administrative delegations.

The initiative forms part of the Organising Committee's commitment to strengthening ties and enhancing communication among Gulf participants, while reinforcing the friendly atmosphere that characterises the Games and embodies the noble sporting values and spirit of fair competition shared across the region.

For their part, attendees praised the outstanding organisational standards of the Games and the warm Qatari hospitality, expressing their delight with the positive atmosphere surrounding the event and wishing continued success and progress for Gulf sport.



Jassim Bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, Second Vice President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, at the luncheon hosted by the Organising Committee of the 4th GCC Games Doha.

CRICKET

Rana sparkles in Bangladesh's big win over Pakistan

'VERY HAPPY - PROUD OF ALL THE GUYS, THE WAY WE PLAYED'



Bangladesh's Nahid Rana (centre) celebrates with teammates their team's win on the fifth day of the first Test against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Dhaka

Pace bowler Nahid Rana claimed five wickets as Bangladesh trumped Pakistan by 104 runs in a rain-hit first Test yesterday after a thrilling fifth day of batting collapses.

Chasing 268 for victory in Dhaka, Pakistan were 119-3 before they fell to 163 all out in the final session with debutant Abdullah Fazal scoring a valiant 66.

Bangladesh now hold a 1-0 lead in the two-match home series.

The Test win was Bangladesh's first against Pakistan on home soil and their third overall.

The 23-year-old Fazal put on 51 runs with Salman Agha, who made 26, to raise Pakistan's hopes of victory before Rana rattled the opposition with career-best figures of 5-40.

Rana, 23, made an impact with

his pace and reverse swing and his final spell of 4.5 overs got him four wickets for just 10 runs to turn the match on its head.

"Very happy - proud of all the guys, the way we played," Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said.

"We have been working hard the last few months and slowly we are getting better at Test cricket - that's one thing we have always wanted to do."

The victory also saw Shanto equal Mushfiqur Rahim's record of seven Test wins as Bangladesh captain, achieving the milestone in just 17 matches compared to Mushfiqur's 34.

Bangladesh came into the final day with a lead of 179 runs at 152-3 but a clutch of wickets made them falter despite Shanto's 87.

Bangladesh declared their second innings on 240-9 to hand Pakistan a competitive target and a chance for their bowlers to make use of the deteriorating pitch.

Taskin Ahmed took down opener Imam-ul-Haq for two and Mehidy Hasan Miraz bowled debutant and first-innings centurion Azan Awaiz for 15.

Rana removed Pakistan captain Shan Masood for two before Fazal and Agha counter-attacked in their fourth-wicket partnership, but Bangladesh bowlers proved their mettle on home turf to secure victory in the final session of the day.

Rana delivered the decisive blows. He had Saud Shakeel caught behind before producing the ball of the match -- a thunderous 147 kmph (91.3 mph) in-swinging yorker that bowled Mohammad Rizwan for 15.

Rana was on a roll as he trapped Noman Ali lbw and then bounced out Shaheen Shah Afridi, with Mahmudul Hasan Joy taking a simple catch to complete a famous victory.

Pakistan captain Masood professed no excuses for his side's fail-

ure to seize the key moments in the match.

"In the first innings, with bat and ball, we needed to do better," he said. "When you have the game in your hands you have to push the opposition away, but we failed to do that."

Shanto stood out for his batting brilliance as he made 101 in the first innings to guide Bangladesh to 413.

Pakistan responded with 386 in their first innings but conceded a slender lead after off-spinner Mehidy returned figures of 5-102.

Rain played spoilsport on the third and fourth days of the Test with a few overs lost due to interruptions. The second match will begin on Saturday in Sylhet.

BRIEF SCORES: Bangladesh 413 and 240 for 9 dec (Shanto 87, Mominul 56, Hasan 3-52) beat Pakistan 386 and 163 (Fazal 66, Salman 26, Rana 5-40) by 104 runs.

FOCUS

Dravid bets on new franchise league to grow cricket in Europe

Reuters
New Delhi

Former India stalwart Rahul Dravid built a great career on judgement, patience and the discipline to leave the ball well alone - an instinct that has followed him from the crease to the boardroom.

So when he agreed to buy the Dublin franchise in the European T20 Premier League (ETPL), it was because he saw it not as a speculative punt, but as a safe bet with a greater purpose - to help cricket find its niche in Europe's soccer-dominated sporting landscape.

"I thought it was quite an exciting opportunity to be able to build something in Europe," Dravid told Reuters after being unveiled as owner of the Dublin Guardians in the six-team league backed by the cricket boards of Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands.

"I feel that while cricket may not be the number one, or the number two sport in this part of the world, it already has a great rich history and tradition of cricket."

Former India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will be Dublin's captain and mentor in a league that will also feature teams based in Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

Cricket's 12 test-playing nations include only two from Europe - England and Ireland - though Scotland, the Netherlands, and Italy also played in this year's T20 World Cup.

Dravid believes ETPL held a clear advantage over competitions in newer markets, including those in the U.S. and the

Gulf, which rely heavily on talent and audience from the South Asian diaspora.

"It really is a question of giving them the right kind of exposure and environment to be able to fulfil that potential," former India captain Dravid said.

"Giving them these opportunities to play with some of the best players in the world in a very organised league structure and also to give them access to some of the best coaching in the world will mean that the talent can grow here."

The ambition is not merely to stage another franchise tournament, but to create a pathway. Dravid, who scored over 24,000 international runs before retiring in 2012, would not be surprised if more European countries were challenging the traditional powerhouses in T20 Internationals within a decade.

"I definitely think that given the right resources and platform, some of these countries can certainly become very, very competitive."

"I think New Zealand is a good role model for a lot of these countries because they also have a slightly smaller population and fewer people playing the game, but they're a very, very good side."

"It's not like some magic bullet where one tournament will overnight make them world champions. But there certainly is that foundation that we have an opportunity to work with."

Former Australia captain Steve Waugh, South Africans Faf du Plessis, Jonty Rhodes and Heinrich Klaasen, and former West Indies captain Chris Gayle are among the co-owners in the league, which will be played in August and September.



Rajasthan Royals head coach Rahul Dravid with opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi during the warm up before their IPL against Mumbai Indians in Jaipur on May 1, 2025. (Reuters)

CYCLING

Narvaez powers to Giro stage four win, Ciccone in the pink

Reuters
Catanzaro, Italy

Ecuator's Jhonatan Narvaez (UAE Team Emirates XRG) powered to the line to win stage four of the Giro d'Italia yesterday, outpacing Orluis Aular, with Italian Giulio Ciccone taking over the leader's pink jersey after crossing the line in third.

The first shake-up in this year's race coincided with its arrival home in Italy following the opening three stages in Bulgaria, and after Aular hit the front ahead of Ciccone, Narvaez came from behind and left the Venezuelan in his wake. Narvaez had previously won Giro stages in 2020 and 2024 but had not raced since a crash in January at the Tour Down Under in Australia.

"It's really big for me, coming from three months training in Ecuador," Narvaez said.

"I want to say thanks to my family, my wife, my team. They've been a great support in this time."

The 138-km ride from Catanzaro to Cosenza only kicked into gear when the stage reached the foot of the long climb to Cozzo Tunno 80 km into the race, and the peloton was broken up leaving a reduced bunch of 42 riders to fight for the stage.

After a relatively sedate three days in Bulgaria, apart from crashes on the opening two stages, Aular's Movistar team set the pace on the ascent, quickly reeling in a six-rider breakaway and leaving most of the sprint favourites behind, along with Guillermo Thomas Silva. Silva had worn the



UAE Team Emirates - XRG Ecuadorian rider Jhonatan Narvaez celebrates on the podium after winning the 4th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026 in Cosenza, Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

leader's jersey since winning stage two, but the Uruguayan had no answer on the climb, and finished the stage over 12 minutes down on the winner.

Narvaez's teammate Jan Christen was first to make a move when the riders came to the 1.5-km run-in to the finish, but having taken valuable seconds in the intermediate sprint, this time his dash was in vain.

"Jan is a great guy, he was trying to take the pink jersey," Narvaez said.

"He's a young guy, he needs to learn how to race. He did a great

final and in the end for me it was just waiting for the sprint."

Christen did move into second overall, four seconds behind Ciccone (Lidl-Trek), with the Italian snatching pink thanks to his bonus seconds at the finish and in the earlier sprint, which will ease the disappointment of not winning his fourth Giro stage.

Australian Kaden Groves abandoned the race during Tuesday's stage, still suffering after his involvement in the crash at the end of stage one. Today's stage five is a 203-km hilly ride from Praia a Mare to Potenza.

SPOTLIGHT

Rabada on target as Gujarat Titans crush Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL

AFP
Ahmedabad

South Africa's Kagiso Rabada led an inspired pace attack to power Gujarat Titans to the top of the IPL table with an 82-run thrashing of Sunrisers Hyderabad yesterday.

Hosts Gujarat defended 168 in Ahmedabad as Rabada took 3-28 and, with his fellow quicks, bowled out Hyderabad for 86, their lowest ever score in the IPL. Fellow quick Jason Holder cleaned up the Hyderabad middle and lower-order to claim 3-20 from his four overs.

"Worked out for us nicely," said Gujarat skipper Shubman Gill. "We bowled very well. We knew if we bowled well, we would always be in the game."

Former champions Gujarat leapfrogged Hyderabad and defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to top the 10-team table, moving closer to a playoff spot.

Gujarat have 16 points with eight wins from 12 matches and are favourites to finish in the top two after the league stage.

The top four will make the playoffs with the top two getting an extra chance to make the final in Ahmedabad on May 31.

Gujarat pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj struck in the first over of the Hyderabad chase as he dismissed Travis Head for a duck with the fourth ball of the innings.

In the next over, Rabada removed the dangerous Abhishek Sharma for six before striking



Gujarat Titans' Kagiso Rabada celebrates with teammates taking the wicket of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Smaran Ravichandran during their IPL match in Ahmedabad, India, yesterday. (Reuters)

twice in his next two overs, having skipper Ishan Kishan (11) caught behind by Jos Buttler followed by Ravichandran Smaran to (9) miscuing to Gill at mid-off.

"Season in, season out, all you try to do is do the best you can," said player of the match Rabada.

"I have been backed and it has been clear what my role has been: leave everything out for the team. Rhythm is everything. And for me, it's about bowling as much as I can, but also preserving myself to be match-ready."

On the bowling group, Rabada said, "We each have our own natural attributes that we bring as bowlers. And then it's about seeing how much you can extract off those attributes without looking too far ahead."

Wickets kept tumbling as Holder took two in one over including Heinrich Klaasen, who

made 14 to regain top spot in this season's IPL batting chart with 508 runs. Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan trapped Praful Hinge lbw for the final wicket as Gujarat bowled out Hyderabad in 14.5 overs.

The batters set up victory after Sai Sudharsan, who made 61, and Washington Sundar put on 60 for the fourth wicket to lift Gujarat from early trouble to 168-5.

Hyderabad pace bowler Hinge struck two early blows including Gill (5) and Buttler (7) to put Gujarat on the backfoot.

BRIEF SCORES
Gujarat Titans 168 for 5 (Sai Sudharsan 61, Washington 50, Hinge 2-17, Sakib 2-37)
beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 86 (Cummins 19, Holder 3-20, Rabada 3-28, Prasidh 2-23) **by 82 runs**

GOLF

McIlroy has 'clear road ahead' to win more majors

AFP
Newtown Square, United States

Rory McIlroy brings a sharper mental focus into the 108th PGA Championship that tees off yesterday at Aronimink than he had a year ago after a historic Masters triumph.

The 37-year-old from Northern Ireland, who won last year's Masters to complete a career Grand Slam and end a 10-year major win drought, said Tuesday he has managed to rest and reset after defending the green jacket last month at Augusta National.

"Coming into this tournament feels a lot different than what it did last year," McIlroy said. "I've got some nice clear road ahead to try to get some more of these majors."

The six-time major winner could capture his third PGA crown

this week, but more importantly has a much better vision of his game than this time last year when after achieving a major milestone struggled to 47th at the PGA at Quail Hollow, his worst major finish since 2021.

"Especially after the last couple of years, I need to take the time after the Masters to reset and decompress and get myself in the right mental space again to get myself up for this tournament and keep going for the US Open and The Open Championship," McIlroy said.

"I came into this tournament last year a little bit sort of uncertain of what my future was - I conquered this thing that I wanted to conquer for so long, and I still hadn't really reset goals or found whatever that motivation was to keep going or go forward and set myself goals for the rest of my career."

"It probably took me a good few

months to get to that point."

McIlroy took three weeks off after his latest Masters victory before returning last week at Quail Hollow, where he has won four times.

World number two McIlroy, who has a cameo in the new movie "The Devil Wears Prada 2", skipped Doral two weeks ago to attend a White House State Dinner.

"I know how fortunate I am and so lucky to be in this position in life, and sometimes you have to enjoy the perks because I know this isn't going to last forever," McIlroy said.

"There's going to be a day where I'm not competing for major championships, so I guess while I'm doing it, I have to enjoy it, as well."

"It has been amazing but there's still a lot of things I want to achieve. If I can enjoy it along the way that's a nice thing to do."

McIlroy snuck in a practice round at Aronimink during his week off.

"I wanted to do the State dinner, and if I was going to do that, it was probably better I take that week to practice and prepare, come up here and see the golf course," McIlroy said. It allowed him to relax and arrive at Aronimink on Monday night without being stressed about missing a day of practice. "I wanted to just get an early look because I knew that was going to be my only opportunity," he said.

"I definitely think courses we don't see very often... it certainly has benefited me over the years."

McIlroy first made an early practice trip for a major in 2011 at Congressional on the advice of Jack Nicklaus and won his first major title at that US Open. "For the most part, when I have made an advanced trip, it has worked out well for me," McIlroy said.



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland speaks to the media during a practice round prior to the PGA Championship at Aronimink Golf Club in Newtown, Pennsylvania. (AFP)

TENNIS

Sinner dismisses Pellegrino to reach Rome quarters

ZVEREV OUT AS RUUD CRUSHES MUSETTI, CIRSTEA ENTERS SEMIS

AFP
Rome

Jannik Sinner's charge towards a first Italian Open title continued yesterday after the world number one calmly dispatched countryman Andrea Pellegrino 6-2, 6-3, while Alexander Zverev suffered a shock exit at the hands of another local hero in Luciano Darderi.

Second seed Zverev fell 1-6, 7-6 (12/10), 6-0, the German collapsing to defeat in front of a passionate crowd that roared on 18th-seeded Italian Darderi.

But as expected, top seed Sinner outclassed qualifier Pellegrino on centre court in a match which was in truth never much of a contest.

The 24-year-old Sinner has now won 31 straight matches in Masters 1000 events to equal Novak Djokovic's record run.

"I'm very happy about the outcome, but at the same time I'm very happy for him, I know he's working very hard," said Sinner of Pellegrino.

"Tomorrow, a day off is important for me, trying to rest, and then hopefully I'm ready for quarters."

Pellegrino's arrival in the last 16 of his home tournament is by far his best result in a Masters 1000 event.

The 29-year-old is set to move up to a career-best world ranking of 123rd after not just making the main draw of a top-ranked ATP tournament for the first time but also getting to face his country's biggest sporting star in front of over 10,000 fans.

Pellegrino received warm cheers as he put in a creditable performance against the dominant force in tennis, and he also showed some deft technique when given room to breathe by Sinner.

But Sinner was never in top gear and still comfortably dealt with Pellegrino to set up a clash with either 12th seed Andrey Rublev or another qualifier in Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili.

Should Sinner win a record-extending sixth straight Masters 1000 title, he will be the first Italian to win at the Foro Italico since Adriano Panatta 50 years ago.

With great rival Carlos Alcaraz out injured and Zverev now gone, Sinner is red-hot favourite for



Italy's Jannik Sinner hits a return to Italy's Andrea Pellegrino during the Italian Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

victory as he builds towards completing the career Grand Slam at Roland Garros.

Zverev, the 2024 champion in Rome, slumped in three sets as Darderi rallied to his first ever win over an opponent ranked among the world's top 10 players.

"It's my most important win, to beat Zverev at Roma is the most exciting win of my career," said Darderi.

While Sinner and Darderi - set to rise to a career-high 17th in the world - reached the last eight, their compatriot Lorenzo Musetti was not so fortunate as physical problems led to him being beaten 6-3, 6-1 by Casper Ruud.

Musetti was in tears at the end of his third-round win over Francisco Cerundolo and had to take a medical time-out for a problem with his left thigh during the second set against Ruud.

The Italian will drop out of the top 10 of the men's rankings ahead of the French Open next week, and he later told reporters that he is

unsure of whether he will participate in Paris.

"I don't know, in the next couple of days we'll do some closer tests, something I've not been able to do given that I'm constantly playing," said Musetti.

Norwegian Ruud is on the other side of the draw from Sinner and will face Karen Khachanov in the last eight after exploiting Musetti's struggles with fitness.

"I realised that... we try to make him run as much as possible. It's cruel and it's brutal, but that's sport," Ruud told reporters.

Khachanov, seeded 13th, ended Dino Prizmic's bid to reach his first Masters 1000 quarter-final, seeing off the spirited Croatian qualifier 6-1, 7-6 (7/2).

Prizmic had announced himself on the big stage this week by knocking out Novak Djokovic in the second round.

Veteran Sorana Cirstea, who knocked out world number one Aryna Sabalenka in the third round, reached the semi-finals

of the women's tournament after beating Jelena Ostapenko 6-1, 7-6 (7/0).

GAUFF BEATS ANDREEVA
Romania Cirstea is set to retire at the end of the season and will face American star Coco Gauff who yesterday beat Mirra Andreeva 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.

Nearly seeing a 5-1, two-break lead in the third set dwindle against No. 8 seed Andreeva, Gauff - needing five match points - now advances to the semifinals of the Internazionali BNL d'Italia with her three-set win, the fourth time in her career.

The 2025 Rome finalist will next encounter Cirstea for a spot in the 2026 final, meeting the Romanian for the third time this season and in back-to-back tournaments.

Gauff's now 5-0 against Andreeva, and for the second straight year, knocks out the 19-year-old in the quarterfinals of Rome - the 2025 quarterfinal was also their most recent meeting.

FOCUS

Spieth makes 10th bid for career Grand Slam at PGA Championship

AFP
Newtown Square, United States

Jordan Spieth makes his 10th attempt to complete a career Grand Slam at this week's PGA Championship, trying to snap a nine-year major win drought.

The 32-year-old American won the 2015 Masters and US Open and the 2017 British Open, but has struggled in recent years, taking only two PGA Tour titles since capturing the Claret Jug at Royal Birkdale.

While he has not cracked the top 10 in a PGA Tour event since last year's Memorial, Spieth is confident he can contend this week at Aronimink.

"I've been driving the ball really well which is a nice premium. I feel like that puts me in a position to contend here versus maybe when I hadn't been in other PGAs," Spieth said.

"Driver has to be a weapon in the PGA Championship, so if I can continue on the path I've been on, then that leaves me with plenty of opportunities."

"My game has been getting better and better. It's pretty good to have a chance to win. It's about working my way into contention."

World number 51 Spieth, who last won at the 2022 PGA Heritage event, produced his best PGA Championship result in 2015, finishing second to Australia's Jason Day at Whistling Straits. In nine prior tries to complete a career Slam at the PGA, his best finish was third in 2019.

"It would be amazing, because it's just a very short list in history," Spieth said of the



Jordan Spieth hits an approach shot on the second hole during a practice round prior to the PGA Championship at Aronimink Golf Club in Newtown. (AFP)

career Slam. "Just winning this tournament in general would be very special."

"Having won the other three, that's the one that everyone focuses on. But when I'm out here, and certainly when I get out on the golf course, I've been in contention a couple of times in this tournament. It didn't feel any different than any other majors, so I wouldn't expect to if I get there this week."

Spieth resists adding pressure to an already tension-packed week. "As far as the career grand slam, this tournament is always highlighted. If I can win one more tournament in my life, it would obviously be this one for that reason. But the easiest way to do that is to not try to, in a weird way," he said.

"Just go out and get ready for the first hole, get a good game plan in and attack it the way it needs to be attacked."

MOTORSPORT

Nuerburgring feels Verstappen effect as fans rush to 24hr race

Reuters
Nürburg, Germany

Max Verstappen's Nuerburgring 24 Hours debut this weekend has triggered so much interest that multi-day tickets have sold out for the first time in the history of the endurance race, organisers said.

Red Bull's four-times Formula One world champion is making the most of a weekend off from his regular job to pursue his passion and race a Mercedes-AMG GT3 sportscar at the daunting German track.

The 28-year-old Dutch driver will share the Team Verstappen Racing car with Spaniard Dani Juncadella, Frenchman Jules Gounon and Austrian Lucas Auer in the race that starts on Saturday at the "Green Hell".

"Weekend tickets sold out. For the first time in the history of the ADAC Ravenol 24h Nuerburgring," the circuit's official X account said.

"There will be no ticket sales at the box office on Saturday. Please do not travel without a

valid ticket under any circumstances."

Verstappen, winner of 71 grands prix, has taken part in other races at the Nuerburgring to build experience and impressed with his speed in qualifying events.

"The 24h Nuerburgring is a race that's been on my bucket list for a long time, so I'm really thrilled we can make it happen now," Verstappen said when his Red Bull-backed entry was confirmed in March.

Organisers said that while Verstappen's presence had generated worldwide attention, his participation was only part of the story with 161 entries making the largest grid in more than 10 years. The SP9 class in which Verstappen will be competing for overall victory features nine brands: Aston Martin, Audi, BMW, Ferrari, Ford, Lamborghini, McLaren, Mercedes-AMG and Porsche.

The race, held annually since 1970, is over a 25-km (16-mile) loop that combines the Nord-schleife layout raced on by Formula One in the 1960s and 70s with the more modern grand prix circuit.

WORLD BOXING LIFTS RESTRICTIONS ON BELARUS BUT NOT RUSSIA

World Boxing yesterday lifted restrictions on Belarusians competing under their own flag but those on Russian athletes remain in place. Competitors from Russia and their allies Belarus had been banned from international competition following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, although some were permitted to compete as neutrals.

Boxing's governing body had decided last month to allow athletes from Belarus, as well as those from Russia, to participate in its competi-

tions under a neutral banner. But it has decided to lift these restrictions concerning Belarusian boxers following a recent recommendation by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

"The removal of restrictions on Belarus has been introduced with immediate effect and means it is now able to participate without restrictions," World Boxing said. However the "procedure will continue to be applied to Russia," it said.

"Russian delegations will not be allowed to

participate with national flags, uniforms or anthems and will have to pass a detailed vetting process to be able to take part in World Boxing competitions."

Several federations, such as those for judo and swimming, have recently lifted their sanctions, allowing athletes from both countries to compete under their flags. Other organisations, like the International Figure Skating Federation and World Athletics, continue to exclude both countries entirely from their competitions.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Lopetegui names 34-player Qatar prelim WC squad

QATAR TO PLAY TWO FRIENDLIES AHEAD OF 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar football coach Julen Lopetegui yesterday named a 34-player preliminary squad for the 2026 FIFA World Cup to be held from June 11 to July 19.

Qatar, the two-time Asian champions, will play World Cup matches against Switzerland in San Francisco on June 13, followed by games against Canada in Vancouver on June 18 and a match against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle on June 24.

The large squad that Lopetegui approved yesterday includes the core team members who featured in their two AFC Asian Cup title wins in 2019 and 2024.

Fearful striker Akram Afif will be joined by veteran midfielder and captain Hasan al-Haydos, forward Moez Ali and Bassam Al Rawi. Experienced defender Pedro Miguel is also in the squad along with

Mohammed Muntari who scored Qatar's only goal at the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

In a surprise inclusion, veteran forward Sebastian Soria has also been named in the 34-member squad. The 42-year-old striker first appeared for Qatar at the 2006 Asian Games held in Doha. Overall, Soria has played 124 international matches for Qatar, scoring 39 goals.

Meshaal Barsham - younger brother of track and field icon Mutaz Barsham - will be key to Qatar's World Cup plans this summer. Meshaal was the Goalkeeper of the Tournament at the AFC Asian Cup which Qatar won on home soil in Feb 2024.

A QFA official confirmed on Monday during the QFA Awards ceremony that the Qatar squad will train behind closed doors starting May 15 before flying out for the World Cup. During Qatar's training camp, two friendly matches will be played aimed at fine-tuning preparations ahead of the tourna-



Coach Julen Lopetegui

ment. Qatar will face Republic of Ireland at Aviva Stadium in Dublin on May 28 before taking on El Salvador in Los Angeles on June 6. The 2026 tournament will be

the first FIFA World Cup to feature 48 teams and to be jointly hosted by three countries - the United States, Canada and Mexico.

FIFA's updated guidelines for the 2026 World Cup allow nations to name an initial longlist of up to 55 players, offering coaches ample room to evaluate their options before the final cut.

From that pool, teams must submit a final roster of 23 to 26 players, a range that mirrors the 2022 Qatar format, which must include at least three goalkeepers.

Fans and analysts can mark their calendars for June 2, the anticipated deadline for the official squad reveals.

THE SQUAD: Meshaal Barsham, Mahmoud Abu Nada, Salah Zakaria, Shehab Al Laithi, Ahmed Al Janahi, Ahmed Alaa, Ahmed Fathi, Tarek Salman, Edmilson Junior, Ayoub Al Lawati, Sultan Al Brake, Al Hashmi Al Hussein, Boualem Khoukhi, Bassam Al Rawi, Jassim Jaber, Nail Mason,



Sebastian Soria, Ryan Al Ali, Assim Madibo, Abdulaziz Hatem, Issa Laay, Mohammed Manal, Karim Boudiaf, Lucas Mendes, Tahseen Mohammed, Mubarak

Shanan, Homam Al Amin, Youssef Abdurisag, Mohammed Muntari, Mohammed Waad, Hassan Al Haydos, Akram Afif, Almoez Ali and Pedro Miguel.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Guardiola says Man City 'still fighting' for Premier League title

AFP
London

Pep Guardiola said Manchester City do not feel extra pressure even though they realistically need to beat Crystal Palace yesterday to keep their Premier League title hopes alive.

City, with three games left, are five points behind leaders Arsenal with a game in hand.

Failure to win at the Etihad would mean Mikel Arteta's side could clinch their first Premier League title for 22 years against Burnley on Monday. Guardiola was asked at his pre-match press conference on Tuesday how much pressure City were under after recent results, including last week's damaging 3-3 draw at Everton.

"Same one, two days, three days, four days ago, one week, two weeks, same one," he said.

The City boss, chasing a seventh Premier League title in nine seasons, said he had not seen his players to gauge their mood since the dramatic end to Arsenal's match at West Ham on Sunday.

The Gunners won 1-0 after relegation-threatened West Ham's last-gasp equaliser was ruled out following a lengthy VAR check.

"I learned from my career as a manager, what you cannot control, forget about it," said Guardiola.

"(Focus) and do better what we have not done better this season to fight for the Premier League. We are still fighting and (next it is) Crystal Palace."



Palace host Arsenal on the final day of the Premier League season, just days before they face Spanish side Rayo Vallecano in the Conference League final, but Guardiola said he was not concerned at the prospect they could field a weakened team.

"They are so professional, the teams," he said. "Crystal Palace will play top. We saw Leeds yesterday against Spurs (a 1-1 draw), how even being out of the relegation battle... how they compete."

Guardiola said Rodri and Abdou Koulibaly were both "better" and that he would decide after training on Tuesday whether either were ready to return to action.

City face Chelsea in the FA Cup final on Saturday, still in the running for a domestic treble after winning the League Cup earlier this season.

Arsenal's White out for rest of the season with knee injury
Arsenal defender Ben White will miss the rest of the season with a knee injury, ruling him out of the

club's Premier League run-in and the Champions League final, the club confirmed yesterday.

The medial knee ligament injury also means the 28-year-old is highly unlikely to feature for England in the World Cup in North America, which starts next month.

White left the London Stadium with a brace on his right knee after he was substituted in the first half of Arsenal's crucial 1-0 win against West Ham on Sunday.

Gunners manager Mikel Arteta admitted shortly afterwards that White's injury "didn't look good at all", and the Premier League leaders have now confirmed he will be unavailable for their final two league games, and their European final against Paris Saint-Germain on May 30.

"Assessments and specialist reviews have confirmed that Ben White has sustained a significant medial knee ligament injury, which will rule him out for the remainder of this season," Arsenal said in a statement.

"Our medical team are now managing Ben's recovery and rehabilitation programme, with everyone fully focused on supporting the aim of Ben being ready for the start of our pre-season preparations."

White's absence will provide Arteta with a selection headache at right-back for their pivotal games against Burnley, Crystal Palace and PSG, with Jurrien Timber also sidelined.

Arsenal, on track for their first Premier League title since 2004, are five points clear of Manchester City having played a game more.

FOCUS

Spain coach counting on Yamal and Williams fitness for World Cup

AFP
Madrid

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said yesterday he was counting on wingers **Lamine Yamal** and Nico Williams to be fit and available for the World Cup next month.

Yamal, 18, suffered a hamstring injury in late April, which has caused him to miss the rest of the season for Barcelona, though his club have said he should be fit in time for the start of this summer's showpiece in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Athletic Bilbao's Williams picked up a muscle injury on Sunday, while Arsenal midfielder Mikel Merino is also on the sidelines after breaking his right foot three months ago.

"I think that all the players who have been mentioned will be fit and available for the start of the World Cup and I believe for the first match," De la Fuente told journalists.

"But if it's not for the first match, it would be for the second or third, and it doesn't cause any major setbacks," the Spanish coach continued, adding it had been "a very tough year in terms of injuries."

"The world of injuries, which is the tragedy of sport, is what truly keeps us under a lot of pressure, especially in this critical phase because injuries that occur from now on, any minor muscular injury, are really difficult to recover from," he added.

Meanwhile, De la Fuente con-



Brazil's Estevao to miss World Cup

Chelsea forward Estevao will miss this summer's World Cup for Brazil due to a thigh injury, ESPN reported. The 19-year-old sensation has not played since sustaining the injury on April 18 against Manchester United. While Estevao was left off the preliminary 55-player roster submitted by Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti on Monday, veteran forward Neymar was included in the expanded squad, per ESPN.

Team's competing in the 2026 FIFA World Cup in North America had until Monday to submit a preliminary 55-man roster. The final 26-man squads must be selected from those preliminary player pools. Neymar's reported inclusion is a big step as the 34-year-old pursues his fourth World Cup appearance. He is the nation's all-time leader with 79 goals but has not been selected to compete for Brazil since Ancelotti became the head coach in June. Estevao has left his Premier League side and returned to Brazil to undergo treatment with Palmeiras, his former club. He had been considered a lock for the World Cup roster after scoring five goals in his first 11 caps.

Also missing the World Cup due to injuries are Real Madrid's Eder Militao and Rodrygo.

Five-time World Cup champion Brazil is in Group C this summer with Morocco, Haiti and Scotland. Brazil opens against Morocco on June 13 in East Rutherford, N.J.

firming that his World Cup squad list will include 26 players but that there would be additional players who would be included for a friendly against Iraq on June

4. Spain's World Cup opener will be against Cape Verde on June 15 in Atlanta.

Their group also includes Uruguay and Saudi Arabia.

SPOTLIGHT

Advocaat returns as Curacao coach

AFP
Caracas

Veteran Dutch coach **Dick Advocaat**, who led Curacao to World Cup qualification, will return as coach for the tournament after his successor Fred Rutten resigned.

"Advocaat is returning," the president of the Curacao Football Federation (FFK), Gilbert Martina, told AFP in a phone message.

Advocaat, 78, was in charge when the Caribbean island off the coast of Venezuela reached the finals but resigned three months later because of his daughter's health. His fellow Dutchman Rutten took over, but Curacao suffered two comprehensive friendly defeats in March, losing



5-1 to fellow World Cup qualifiers Australia and 2-0 to China.

On Monday, the FFK said Rutten, 63, had resigned following "constructive discussions" among federation officials.

Reports in the Dutch media suggest Advocaat, who will be the oldest coach to take charge of a team at a World Cup, agreed to return to his former role because his daughter's health has improved. Curacao are the smallest country by population to qualify

for a World Cup. They face Germany on June 14 in their Group E opener, before playing Ecuador and Ivory Coast.

The much-travelled Advocaat has coached the Netherlands on three occasions and has also taken charge of the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Serbia among a string of managerial positions.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Weiss will return to coach the Slovak team after Francesco Calzona stepped down last month, the Slovak football association (said yesterday).

Weiss previously led Slovakia from 2008 to 2012, guiding them to the last 16 of the 2010 World Cup on their debut appearance at the finals.

The 61-year-old has been head coach of Slovak champions Slovan Bratislava since 2021.

Real Madrid president Perez calls club elections, will stand again

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez yesterday called club elections and announced that he would stand again. "I am not going to resign," the 79-year-old Perez told a press conference towards the end of a season which Real Madrid will finish trophyless. Barcelona defeated Real Madrid 2-0 in the Clasico at Camp Nou on Sunday to claim back-to-back La Liga titles with three games to spare. Madrid bowed out of the Champions League with a quarter-final exit against Bayern Munich. Current Real coach Alvaro Arbeloa, who replaced Xabi Alonso in January, is unlikely to remain at the helm next season and former Madrid coach Jose Mourinho has been linked with a potential return. This season has seen Madrid finish without a major trophy for a second year running. Fans have been protesting against star player Kylian Mbappe for a perceived lack of commitment, while there are stories of multiple training ground bust-ups, including one that sent midfielder Fede Valverde to hospital. Perez justified his bid for a new term in response to what he dubbed an "absurd campaign" against Real Madrid. "I've made this decision because an absurd situation has been created to generate a tide of opinion against the interests of Real Madrid,"

argued Perez. "I've been here 26 years and it's been a wonderful time." Perez took aim at media campaigns and other personalities, claiming they were taking advantage of this season's poor results to target him personally. "I want to put an end to this anti-Madrid current that wants to destroy Real Madrid," he said. "I'm standing for re-election to return the club's assets to its members. If anyone wants to run, they shouldn't just pretend - let them run, but let them say what they're going to do, how they're going to finance everything." Perez added: "They say out there that Real Madrid is a problem case, but it's the most prestigious club in the world."

But he admitted that he was as frustrated as the rest of Madrid fans about the lack of trophies for the second consecutive year and also about the altercation between Valverde and Aurelien Tchouameni. "I think it is very bad and I think it's even worse that it was made public," Perez said of the clash which ended with both players being fined 500,000 euros. Perez added that he and his backers were putting together a 500-page dossier that he will send to UEFA over allegations of corruption in Spanish refereeing.