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**GCC GAMES DOHA**

# Qatar secure 10 more golds to continue medal surge

Hosts have also won 19 silver and 14 bronze for a total of 54 medals, reinforcing their dominance



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee and Organising Committee of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026, crowned the winners of the men's 4x200m freestyle relay event at the Hamad Aquatic Centre.

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

Qatar's gold rush continued at full throttle as the hosts collected 10 more gold medals yesterday, powered by three from swimming and five from the athletics contingent, keeping them comfortably on top of the standings at the GCC Games Doha 2026.

Qatar now sit on 21 gold, 19 silver and 14 bronze for a total of 54 medals, reinforcing their dominance across the multi-sport regional event. Saudi Arabia sit in second place with 14 gold, 11 silver and 12 bronze, totalling 37 medals, while Bahrain are third with 8 gold, 10 silver and 5 bronze for a total of 23 medals.

In the pool at the Hamad Aquatic Cen-

tre, Qatar's swimmers once again delivered a commanding performance. Mohamed Mahmoud added another gold to his growing tally after winning the men's 100m breaststroke final in 1:03.10 seconds. He finished well clear of Bahrain's Saud Ghali, who clocked 1:05.17, while Saudi Arabia's Emad Alsibyani took bronze in 1:05.37.

Saadeddin also continued his remarkable run of form, securing his third gold medal of Doha 2026 in style by winning the men's 200m freestyle. He set a new Games record of 1:49.59, with teammate Ali Tamer Hassan producing a strong swim to claim silver in 1:50.38, completing a Qatari one-two finish. Kuwait's Saud Alshamroukh took bronze in 1:54.56.

The hosts then extended their dominance in the water with gold in the men's 4x200m freestyle relay. The quartet of Ali Tamer, Mahmoud, Saadeddin and

Emil Fuzai combined to produce another Games record time of 7:29.22. Kuwait finished second in 7:45.38, while Bahrain took bronze in 7:49.07.

Qatar also added two silver medals on the day in swimming. Fuzai finished second in the men's 400m individual medley after clocking 4:32.69, behind Bahrain's Robert Bonsall, who set a Games record of 4:27.71. Kuwait's Khaled Alotaibi finished third in 4:37.56.

Tameem Elhamayda secured another silver for the hosts in the men's 50m butterfly, stopping the clock at 24.58. Bahrain's Mikhail Arkhangelskiy took gold in 23.80, while Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Alotaibi earned bronze in 24.80.

Beyond the pool, Qatar continued to collect titles across multiple sports. In cue sports, Ali al-Obaidli and Abdullatif Alfawal stormed to gold in the men's 10-ball



Ali al-Obaidli and Abdullatif Alfawal stormed to gold in the men's 10-ball doubles billiards.



Qatar's handball team made a winning start to their campaign, defeating the UAE 28-20.

doubles billiards, producing a dominant 7-1 win over Kuwait in the final. The pair had reached the title match after a 7-4 semi-final victory over Saudi Arabia.

In bowling, Qatar struck gold in the trios event as Talal al-Marri, Bader al-Sada and Jassim al-Muarikhi delivered a dominant performance, finishing top of the standings with 3,785 points over six rounds.

Saudi Arabia claimed silver through Bandar al-Yaba, Ziyad al-Tuwairab and Ahmed Abu al-Reesh after accumulating 3,655 points, while Kuwait's trio of Aseel al-Roumi, Faisal Saleem and Mustafa al-

Mousawi settled for bronze with 3,633 points.

Boxing delivered two silver medals for Qatar, with Mohamed Alfagay finishing runner up in the men's 55kg category after a 1-4 defeat to Saudi Arabia's Muhammad Majrashi, while Mohammed Dbichi also took silver in the men's 75kg final following a loss to Bahrain's Aly Abdalla.

Meanwhile, Qatar's handball team made a winning start to their campaign, defeating the UAE 28-20 at Al Duhail Sports Hall. They will face Kuwait next as they continue their group stage matches.

**ATHLETICS**

# Two generations, two medals: Barshims shine at GCC Games

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

While legendary Mutaz Barshim soared to yet another high jump gold medal at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026, another member of the Barshim family quietly produced one of the most emotional moments of the tournament.

Mutaz's father Essa Barshim captured silver in the men's 5,000m race walk at the Qatar Sports Club yesterday, in a performance that resonated far beyond the medals table and became a celebration of passion, perseverance and family legacy.

Competing in front of an appreciative home crowd, Essa completed the race in 32:27.68mins to finish second behind fellow Qatari Mabrouk Saleh al-Karbi, who claimed gold in 24:21.75. UAE's Ayoub Saroushi took bronze in 34:13.80.

Yet it was not merely the silver medal that captured the imagination of spectators. Essa's appearance on the podium became one of the defining stories of the Games, with fans applauding the veteran athlete's determination and enduring love for sport.

From the opening laps until the medal ceremony, the crowd rallied behind Essa, whose spirited performance reflected the essence of an athlete driven not by age or circumstance, but by unwavering commitment and pride in representing his country.

The Barshim name occupies a spe-



Mutaz Barshim and his father Essa Barshim pose proudly with their medals after a memorable night at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026. While Mutaz claimed high jump gold, Essa secured silver in the 5,000m race walk at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium, Qatar Sports Club.

cial place in Qatari sport. Essa is the father of Olympic and world champion Mutaz Barshim, one of the greatest high jumpers in history, and also the father of Meshal Barshim, goalkeeper for Al Sadd and the Qatar national football team.

The Games delivered a rare and touching family moment as Mutaz cel-

ebrated his high jump gold while his father stood proudly on the podium with silver in the race walk. The sight of father and son winning medals on the same night was widely hailed as one of the most memorable scenes of GCC Games Doha Doha - a powerful symbol of sporting continuity and shared achievement across generations.

## Barshim channels Tokyo spirit to share gold as Qatar athletes dominate

**Doha:** Qatar's high jump icon Mutaz Barshim marked his return to competition in memorable fashion as the hosts produced a glittering 14-medal haul on the opening day of athletics at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

Qatar finished the day with five gold, four silver and five bronze medals, with Barshim's high jump triumph providing the standout moment of the evening.

The Qatari star shared the gold medal with Oman's Fatih Abdulghafour Beit Jaaboub after both athletes cleared 2.16m, recreating the spirit of sportsmanship that made headlines at the Tokyo Olympics when Barshim famously shared Olympic gold with Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi.

After the judges asked whether he wished to continue the contest, Barshim chose to share the title with the Omani athlete in a gesture that reflected the spirit of Gulf unity and camaraderie. The gold was Barshim's fourth medal in Gulf Games history, having previously won titles in the first, third and fourth editions, in addition to a bronze medal in the second edition. Saudi Arabia's Ahmed al-Tarouti claimed bronze.

Barshim, having been out of action for long due to recurring injury setbacks, expressed delight at making a successful return. "Praise be to God. This is my first championship of the season after an absence of almost two years since the Paris Olympics. Last year I was unable to participate due to a serious injury, and today, thank God, I was able to return, participate, and win gold," Barshim said.

Jaaboub said sharing the title with one of the sport's greatest athletes was a proud moment. "It's a wonderful feeling competing with the legend Mutaz Barshim. Sharing the gold with a champion of his calibre is a great honour for me," the Omani athlete said.

Qatar also dominated the men's 5,000m race walk, securing gold and silver through Mabrouk Saleh Al-Karbi and Essa Barshim respectively. Al-Karbi won in 24:21.75, while Essa Barshim clocked 32:27.68. UAE's Ayoub Sarwash took bronze.

In the men's 3,000m steeplechase, Zakaria Ibrahim delivered another gold for the hosts with a winning time of 8:35.13, while compatriot Yasser Salem Bughrab secured silver in 9:08.58.

Seifeldin Abdelsalam added to Qatar's golden run by winning the pole vault title ahead of Saudi pair Hussein Al-Hizam and Mohammed Al-Qudaihi.

On the women's side, Sara Ali struck gold in the 100m hurdles after clocking 13.87secs, while teammate Shaheed Mohammed claimed bronze. UAE's AlJazi Farhan won silver.

Qatar's medal tally continued to grow across the track and field programme. Hatem Hamida claimed silver and Mubarak Abdi bronze in the men's 800m, won by UAE's Ibrahim Al-Dhafeeri. Hamza Al-Suwaisi secured silver in the men's shot put behind Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Tolu. Meryem Salek won bronze in the women's 800m, while Dana Salem added another bronze in the women's 100m sprint. Salma Hamed also finished third in the women's long jump.

## FOCUS

## Kohli senses end after roaring back to form with ton

AFP  
New Delhi

Virat Kohli said his love of cricket keeps him going but admitted his career "is going to finish one day" after ending a mini slump in form with a match-winning IPL century.

Regarded as one of the most accomplished batsmen of his generation, the 37-year-old Kohli is a hero to hundreds of millions of Indian fans.

"Cricket is absolutely something that I truly love," he said. "I just give my heart and soul out there on the field, whether I'm fielding or batting, because it's going to finish one day."

Kohli bounced back from two consecutive ducks to hit an un-

beaten 105 and lead defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a crucial win on Wednesday.

He scored his ninth hundred in the Indian Premier League - but first this season - as Bengaluru chased down 193 with five balls to spare against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Kohli also became the fastest player to 14,000 runs in T20 cricket.

He achieved the feat in 409 innings, bettering Chris Gayle's 423. Kohli, who has retired from Tests and T20 internationals, guided Bengaluru to their maiden title on the 18th attempt last year.

"I just love batting, even after all this. That is my core feeling," Kohli said on Wednesday after being named player of the match.

"What an honour to be playing

at this level, what an honour to be competing with the very best in the world still," he added.

"This is all I've done, all my life."

Kohli is third on the batting charts in this IPL season with 484 runs including three fifties and one ton, at an average of 53.77 in 12 matches.

Kohli's 60-ball knock was laced with 11 fours and three sixes, as he equalled Jos Buttler's record of three IPL centuries in successful chases.

Called "King Kohli" for his prolific run-scoring, the opener got off the mark with a single in the first over of the chase, punching the air in mock celebration after his successive ducks.

He raised his fifty in 32 balls, and then his first hundred of the season.

"I want to make the most of

every day that I'm on the field, and just enjoy myself, and have a lot of fun," he said.

Kohli said he enjoys being tested. "I look forward to a pressure situation, look forward to scenarios where I'm feeling a bit of heat," he said.

"Then I challenge myself to say, 'you know what, just go for it'," he added.

"And, when you cross the line, it makes you a better player. I just love hitting the ball in the middle of the bat. And that joy is still there."

The number 18 jersey worn by Kohli is by far the most popular piece of merchandise worn around grounds across the country.

He ended his T20 career with a match-winning innings in the 2024 World Cup final victory in Barbados.



RCB's Virat Kohli gestures during the IPL match against KKR at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in Raipur. (AFP)

## IPL

## Tilak and Shardul hand Punjab fifth successive defeat

Bumrah enjoys success in his first game as Mumbai captain

AFP  
Dharamsala

Jasprit Bumrah made a winning start to his Mumbai Indians captaincy stint yesterday, as Tilak Varma hit 75 not out off 33 balls helped beat Punjab Kings by six wickets in the IPL.

Bumrah stood in for the unavailable duo of Hardik Pandya and Suryakumar Yadav, as Varma starred again for Mumbai, lifting his side from 88-3 to 205-4, and crossing the finish line with a ball to spare. Varma hit six sixes. He had Will Jacks (25 not out) for company at the end.

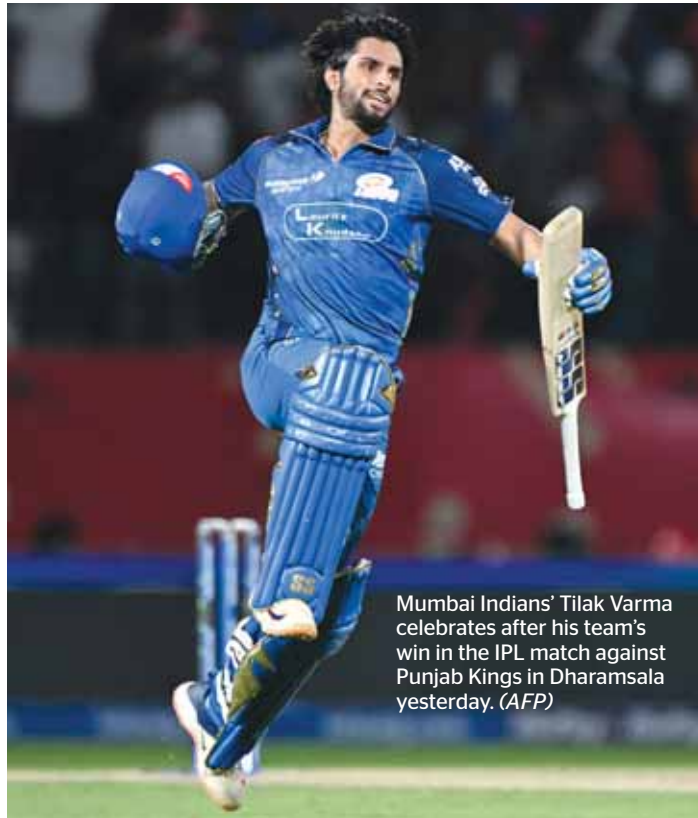
Earlier, Punjab recovered to 200-8 after a middle-order collapse precipitated by Shadul Thakur's 4-39.

Azmatullah Omarzai's 38 off 17 balls turned the game around for the Kings, but it did not suffice.

Fourth-placed Punjab, struggling to stay afloat in the top four, lost a fifth consecutive game, and must win both their remaining games to make the knockouts. Mumbai are ninth with four wins in 12 games.

Put into bat, Punjab made a quick getaway with its openers putting on 50 off 33 balls.

Prabhsimran Singh, who has



Mumbai Indians' Tilak Varma celebrates after his team's win in the IPL match against Punjab Kings in Dharamsala yesterday. (AFP)

been criticised on social media for being overweight, replied with four sixes and hit 50 off 29 balls. He added 57 off 35 balls with

Cooper Connolly (21). Thakur applied the brakes as he picked four wickets in three overs. He had Prabhsimran Singh

caught in the 12th over, and bowled skipper Shreyas Iyer two balls later.

Punjab did not score a run for six balls as Raj Bawa bowled Connolly. They lost six wickets for 33, crashing to 140-7.

Late carnage helped Punjab hit 63 runs in the final three overs and reach 200. Omarzai struck 19 runs off the 18th over, then Bartlett scored 22 and 12 off the final two - the duo hit four sixes between them. Skipper Bumrah took no wickets and conceded 35 runs in his four overs.

Mumbai started quickly as Ryan Rickelton hit 48 off 23 balls with four sixes. He put on 61 off 39 balls with Rohit Sharma (25).

Omarzai struck with the ball, dismissing both Rickelton and later Sherfane Rutherford for 20 after a stand of 61 with Varma.

Yuzvendra Chahal bowled a controlled first spell of wrist spin on a slowing Dharamsala wicket, before Varma broke free with 50 off 25 balls.

Varma and Jacks put on 56 off 20 balls to secure victory.

**BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai Indians 205 for 4 (Tilak 75\*, Rickelton 48, Omarzai 2-36) beat Punjab Kings 200 for 8 (Prabhsimran 57, Shadul 4-39, Chahal 2-36) by six wickets.**

## SPOTLIGHT

## Key urges 'world-class' bowler Robinson to make recall count

AFP  
London

England cricket chief Rob Key highlighted Ollie Robinson's eye-catching statistics after recalling the seamer for the first Test against New Zealand following two years in the international wilderness.

The 32-year-old Robinson has a superb record in five-day cricket, with 76 wickets at a miserly average of 22.92 in just 20 appearances.

The Sussex bowler, however, has not played for England since February 2024 because of concerns over his fitness and ability to maintain his top speed over long spells.

But England need a new-ball spearhead at Lord's following the retirements of James Anderson, Stuart Broad and Chris Woakes and the absence of express quick Jofra Archer.

Archer is unavailable for the first Test, which starts in London on June 4, due to Indian Premier League commitments, meaning Robinson could find himself leading England's attack.

"I think I said when we left him out the last time, to him and publicly, that Ollie Robinson, when he's fit and bowling at a decent pace for him, which is around 82, 83 miles per hour, he is world-class," said Key.

"When you look at his record, he is one of the few bowlers right up there statistically in all the bowlers globally of all time," he added Wednesday after announcing England's squad for the first Test at Lord's.

Key, a former England batsman, said Robinson, now the Sussex captain, had been monitored closely and appeared to be

firing on all cylinders. "Ollie has started the summer really well, and even the other day he said, 'what do I need to do?'," said Key.

"First of all, you need to show that you can maintain your skill, your speed throughout the game. That's what we require, and that's what he's done."

Key said the absence of the injury-prone Archer due to his commitments with the Rajasthan Royals, was a sign of the times, with players juggling commitments across the globe.

"When Jofra comes back from the IPL and touch wood has played some cricket going into it, then he adds to an already strong attack," he said.

The New Zealand series opener will be England's first Test match since an embarrassing 4-1 Ashes defeat.

England, who remain under the leadership of captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, a former New Zealand captain, were heavily criticised for an overly aggressive approach in Australia.

They have hinted at a more balanced approach to Test cricket ahead of the upcoming three-match series, acknowledging the need to be less gungho in certain situations.

Key said he wanted Emilio Gay, set to make his Test debut at Lord's in place of dropped opener Zak Crawley, and England's record run-scorer Joe Root to stay true to themselves.

"What we want is to have players to be able to go out there and play their best game," said Key. "It doesn't mean there's one way of playing where you're looking to play shots."

The second Test takes place at the Oval from June 17, while the third and final match starts at Trent Bridge on June 25.

## CYCLING

## Ballerini pounces for Giro win as favourites crash

AFP  
Naples

Davide Ballerini dodged a mass of crashes on the final corner on slick Naples cobbles to win stage six of the Giro d'Italia yesterday as overall leader Afonso Eulalio finished safely in the peloton.

As sprinters, jockeying for position for the final run to the line, went tumbling in a series of crashes, Ballerini and Jasper Stuyven emerged upright and alone.

The pair surged for line and the XDS Astana man held off the Belgian Soudal Quick-Step rider.

"When we arrived at the last corner, I saw the first guys had crashed," said Ballerini. "I just exited from the corner and I heard on the radio 'Go! Go! Go! To the finish! To the finish! There's a gap!'"

"I was just hoping the line was coming really fast and I made it. I'm really happy," he added.

It was the 31-year-old Italian's first Grand Tour stage victory.

"I was hoping to win one stage on the Giro but it was not the plan today," he said, adding he was at the front to lead out Astana sprinter Matteo Malucelli.

"I was trying to do the maximum for him.

"In cycling there is always some problems and when you don't ex-



XDS Astana Team Italian rider Davide Ballerini celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win in the 6th stage of the Giro d'Italia between Paestum and Naples yesterday. (AFP)

pect the results the win comes"

At the end of a rare flat stage, the sprinters had been eyeing their chances but also the clouds, afraid more rain would turn the cobbled finish into a potential repeat of the carnage last year's wet and chaotic sixth stage, also into Naples, when racing was neutralised for 20 kilometres after a mass crash 70km

from the end.

While the rain largely held off, the cobbles on the final corner were still slick from an earlier shower.

"It was really slippery," said Dutch sprinter Dylan Groenewegen, who went down when perfectly placed. "It's just bad luck."

After a draining start to the Giro

and with a tough weekend ahead, the peloton settled for an easy day in 142km run up the Tyrrhenian coast from Paestum.

The pack rolled through the stage in cool and mostly dry conditions untroubled by any sustained breakaways, reaching the finish more than 35 minutes after the arrival time predicted by race organisers. R

ace favourite Jonas Vingegaard and his Visma-Lease a bike team adopted an unusual strategy, rolling along at the back of the peloton, preferring to minimise the danger of becoming tangled in mass crashes, at the risk of being held up if one occurred and the pack split.

Portuguese rider Eulalio, who became the first rider from the Bahrain Victorious to lead the Giro and the first with all five vowels in his family name to lead any major tour when he finished second on Wednesday despite crashing in the final kilometres, remained 2 minutes 51 seconds ahead of Spaniard Igor Arrieta, his breakaway companion the day before.

Today's stage is a 244 kilometre run starting in Formia and ending with an infamous 7km climb to the Apennine peak of Blockhaus.

It will offer Vingegaard, who is 6min 22sec off the lead, a chance make a move on Eulalio, himself a specialist climber.

## Taylor named England men's fielding coach

Former England women's wicketkeeper Sarah Taylor has been named as fielding coach for the men's team during next month's Test series against New Zealand in a landmark appointment. Taylor, a World Cup winner in 2017, recently worked as an assistant coach to Andrew Flintoff with the second-string England Lions men's team.

But the 36-year-old has broken new ground as the most senior female coach with a major England men's sports team.

Taylor, whom former Australia gloveman Adam Gilchrist once called the "best wicketkeeper in the world", joined the coaching staff of county side Sussex in 2021 and coached Hundred franchise Manchester Originals the following season.

In 2015, Taylor became the first woman to play first-grade, or senior club-level cricket, in Australia for Northern Districts.

Taylor will work with England in their three-Test series against New Zealand, starting on June 4.

"She's done a lot of work in the Lions," said England's managing director of men's cricket Rob Key. "We've been thoroughly, unbelievably impressed with her and the way that she goes about her business."

"I just think she's one of the best in the business at what she does."

One of Taylor's former England teammates, Alex Hartley, has previously worked as a spin coach for Multan Sultans in the Pakistan Super League, with Ireland's Cath Dalton also on the staff as a fast-bowling coach. In football, Marie-Louise Eta was named as interim boss of Bundesliga club Union Berlin in April while in tennis, Britain's three-time major champion Andy Murray worked with Amelie Mauresmo.



TENNIS

# Sinner surges into semis with record straight Masters win

Gauff eases past Cirstea to reach second straight Italian Open final



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

AFP  
Rome

Jannik Sinner will face Daniil Medvedev in the semi-finals of the Italian Open after establishing yesterday a new record of consecutive wins in Masters 1000 tournaments, while his opponent in the last four beat Martin Landaluce 1-6, 6-4, 7-5.

Another straight-sets victory, this time 6-2, 6-4 over Andrey Rublev, moved Sinner up to 32 straight wins in the ATP's top-ranked events, one more than the previous record established by Novak Djokovic in 2011.

Rublev was Sinner's first seeded opponent at this year's tournament in Rome and the world number one made short work of his task in front of a delighted centre court. The Russian offered little resistance, dropping his own serve in the first game of both sets to give Sinner a handy leg-up, and committing 28 unforced errors in 18 games.

Sinner meanwhile showed flashes of his best tennis but also started to look tired towards the end of the match, visibly touching his left thigh before confidently serving for the match.

"It's starting to feel that I've been playing a lot," Sinner later told reporters.

"However it goes, it will be a



USA's Coco Gauff celebrates after winning against Romania's Sorana Cirstea in the Italian Open yesterday. (AFP)

win for me, if I win great but even if things don't go well that's OK because I'll have a few more days to prepare for Paris, which is my main objective this year."

Sinner looks near unbeatable at the moment and with his great rival Carlos Alcaraz out injured he is heavy favourite to become the first Italian to win the Rome title in five decades, ahead of a potential career Grand Slam at the French Open. The 24-year-old will meet Medvedev, tournament winner here in 2023, in the last four after the Russian came through a hugely entertaining match against Spanish lucky loser Landaluce.

After being picked to replace

injured 14th seed Valentin Vach-erot, 20-year-old Landaluce had a dream tournament and looked set for his first Masters 1000 semi-final after racing to the first five games on his way to winning the first set.

But Medvedev stemmed the tide and, helped by a short rain interruption, he roared back with some beautiful tennis as the pair went at each other shot for shot before the seventh seed eventually prevailed.

Earlier, Coco Gauff reached the women's Rome final for the second straight year after beating veteran Sorana Cirstea 6-4, 6-3.

The American star has struggled on clay this season, with a

last-16 exit in the Madrid Open coming after a disappointing run to the quarter-finals in Stuttgart.

But she dealt with Romanian Cirstea - who is set to retire at the end of the year - professionally as spring sunshine burst out on centre court, helped by a marked improvement in her often erratic service game.

The 22-year-old made only one double fault and got 79 percent of her first serves in play, and cut a confident figure on court ahead of a potential title clash with a revitalised Iga Swiatek.

"I think it's like the first time in my career I feel like I'm really stable with that shot," she said of her second serve.

"I obviously don't want to jinx anything, but I think we found the recipe to making it more consistent. Now it's focusing on how to make it more of a weapon."

Swiatek will bid to reach her first final of the year when she faces Elina Svitolina in the final match of the day on centre court.

Since struggling through her second-round win against Katy McNally, Swiatek has dropped just seven games in three matches and looks back to her best on her preferred surface.

Swiatek recently took on board Francisco Roig, the former coach of men's clay-court icon Rafael Nadal, after a difficult opening few months of the season.

ATHLETICS

# El Bakkali targets strong return at Doha Diamond League

Olympic champion and crowd favourite Moroccan will make a welcome return to the Doha meeting when he competes in the 3000m steeplechase at the Khalifa International Stadium on June 19.

El Bakkali, who backed up his Tokyo 2021 Olympic title with gold in Paris 2024, is also a two-time world champion (2022 and 2023). He came agonisingly close to make it a trio of global golds at the 2025 World Athletics Championships in Tokyo but eventually finished second to New Zealand's Geordie Beamish.

The 30-year-old clocked a 3000m personal best of 7:33.87 in his last outing in Doha in 2023. It kick-started a year to remember as he ran a lifetime best of 7:56.68 in the steeplechase in Rabat later the same month and went on to record an unbeaten season of five wins in steeplechase finals from May through to September.

"Doha feels like my second home and it means a lot to me to compete at this meeting where I'm privileged to have such great supporters," said the 2022 Wanda Diamond League champion.

"I faced some challenges last year, and although I came away from the World Championships with a silver medal I was disap-

pointed. The support and encouragement I have had since then gives me great motivation and strength to move forward. I continue to set big goals and I am very disciplined in my approach. In the future, my ambition is to win the Olympic gold in LA, but the one that I dream of for now is to set a new world record in the 3000m steeplechase. Doha might come too soon, but to have the opportunity to race in this event with the backing of so many Moroccans will be special."

The Doha meeting was originally due to take place at the Qatar Sports Club on May 8 as the opening meeting of the 2026 Wanda Diamond League season. Due to the conflict in the Middle East, it has been rescheduled to take place at the Khalifa International Stadium (which is temperature regulated to allow athletes to compete safely in even hotter conditions).

The Doha meeting is now the seventh meeting of the 2026 Wanda Diamond League. The series comprises 15 of the most prestigious events in global track and field across four different continents and begins in Shanghai/Keqiao on 16 May (as a result of the Doha Meeting being rescheduled).

It concludes with a single final across two days in Brussels (4-5 September).



## Five Canadian cyclists seeking arbitration after women's team pursuit dropped

Five Canadian cyclists are challenging Cycling Canada's decision not to send a women's team pursuit squad to this year's UCI Track World Championships in October, escalating the dispute to arbitration. The CBC reported on Wednesday that Skyler Goudswaard, Fiona Majendie, Jenna Nestman, Lily Plante and Justine Thomas are appealing to the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada in a bid to have the decision overturned and the women's team reinstated for the championships, scheduled for October 14-18.

The men's team pursuit program is unaffected and remains set to compete. Cycling Canada defended its position, calling it "a performance-based decision informed by objective, evidence-based analysis."

"While difficult, it was made in the best interest of the program's long-term success," the federation said in a statement. The decision has cast doubt over the women's team pursuit pathway to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, with the world championships in Shanghai serving as the first Olympic qualifying event. Majendie, one of the riders appealing the decision, voiced her frustration in a recent social media post. "The Canadian women's track team is where 100% of the Olympic medals have come from in the last 30 years," wrote Majendie, a member of Canada's team pursuit that finished eighth at the Paris Olympics two years ago.

FOOTBALL

# Slot has 'every reason to believe' he will remain as Liverpool boss

AFP  
Liverpool

Arne Slot dismissed speculation over his future as Liverpool manager on Thursday, despite a disappointing campaign, with the Dutchman already involved in planning for next season.

Liverpool sit fourth in the Premier League, 20 points adrift of leaders Arsenal, just a year on from winning the title in Slot's first season in charge.

The Reds splashed out a record £450mn (\$609mn) on new players last summer but that investment has so far reaped little reward.

Injuries to key players have hampered Slot all season, while the club has also had to come to terms with the death of Diogo Jota in a car accident in July.

"I don't think I am deciding that alone but I have every reason to believe I am the Liverpool manager next season," said Slot at his

pre-match press conference ahead of Friday's trip to Aston Villa.

"First of all I am contracted to the club and second of all from all the talks we are having. That is my take on it."

A place in the top five will secure Champions League qualification and Liverpool have a four-point cushion over sixth-placed Bournemouth with two games to go. But frustration towards Slot has been growing among the Anfield crowd over recent months.

There were loud boos at full-time of last weekend's 1-1 draw against struggling Chelsea and howls of derision at his decision to replace Rio Ngunmoha during that match.

"I think the world has gone to where if a manager or a club doesn't have the best season, there is always a debate. That is all around the world, not only at Liverpool. That is the new reality in football," added Slot.

"It is not up to me to judge the people who judge me. They have every right of have their opinion."

Slot promised after the Chelsea match to provide a "different team next season" if the transfer window goes as he expects.

The former Feyenoord boss confirmed he is at the heart of the club's plans over transfers and planning for next season.

"We know where we go on tour. Plans have been made and talks have been ongoing with the club for new players and I am involved in that," said Slot.

A former Liverpool favourite Xabi Alonso had been linked as a potential successor to Slot.

However, reports this week suggest the former Bayer Leverkusen and Real Madrid coach is closer to taking over at Chelsea next season.

Slot also confirmed that Mohamed Salah will be fit to feature in a limited role for the trip to Villa.

There had been fears the Egyptian, who will leave after nine glittering years at Liverpool at the end of the season, may have played his final game for the club after suffering a hamstring injury last month.



## FOCUS

# Ancelotti extends contract as Brazil manager until 2030

Italian emphasises human side of coaching, balancing roles as manager

Reuters  
Rio De Janeiro

Carlo Ancelotti arrived in Brazil with five Champions League titles as a manager, league trophies from Europe's big five competitions and a reputation for making elite dressing rooms breathe a little easier.

One year on, he knows this job is something different: less club grind, more national obsession and perhaps his final gig.

In an interview with Reuters on Tuesday, he said he was close to signing a contract extension until 2030.

"It's all sorted, we just have to sign it. I'd like to stay," he said. Two days later, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) confirmed the four-year extension.

"Ancelotti's continued tenure at the helm of the Brazilian national team - the most successful side in the history of world football - reflects not only the CBF's backing for the work carried out by the manager, but also the trust he has earned from the squad and Brazilian fans since his arrival in late May 2025," CBF said in a statement.

"I see a squad with great potential for the future. We have top-class young players, a new generation coming through here, who are of a very high standard," Ancelotti told Reuters on Tuesday to explain why he wanted to stay.

## DIFFERENT KIND OF TEST

The 66-year-old Italian took charge of Brazil after a glittering club career but preparing for the World Cup has brought a different kind of test - fewer training sessions, more emotion and the agony of choosing 26 names in a country where the iconic yellow jersey represents more than just a team.

Brazil will be missing key players including Rodrygo, Estevao and Eder Militao through injury, adding another layer of psychological strain before Ancelotti announces his squad in Rio de Janeiro on Monday.

And there is also Neymar, whose inclusion (or not) in the squad has the country holding its breath.

Brazil, who are joint-fourth favourites with holders Argentina to win the World Cup behind European champions Spain, France and England, face Morocco, Haiti and Scotland in Group C. "It weighs



Ancelotti faces pressure selecting Brazil's World Cup squad amid injuries and Neymar uncertainty

heavily on me," Ancelotti said when asked about the human cost of cutting players from his squad.

"I have to make a professional judgement about a player, a person with whom I get on very well personally, players who have been with us but who I might not be able to call up; ultimately, this has an impact. It affects my emotions. "It's a relief, to present the squad list. Although more than the relief you feel for having done your job, it's something tinged with the sadness you feel at having to make this decision."

Relief is a word Ancelotti returns to often. Winning, he said, does not bring pure joy so much as the easing of pressure before the next demand arrives.

"When you win, what you feel isn't happiness, it's relief," he said. "And when you lose, it's real physical and mental suffering."

That understanding of suffering may be useful in Brazil, where recent World Cup failures have been treated as national autopsies. It is now 24 years since they last won the title.

Ancelotti said he wants to create an atmosphere in the squad that is calm, humble and serious enough to carry the pressure rather than be crushed by it.

## CHANGE OF RHYTHM

Moving from club football to a national team has also changed the rhythm of Ancelotti's life.

At his last club job with Real Madrid, the next match was always a few days away. With Brazil, there is more time to reflect - and perhaps more time for a manager who has spent three decades adapting to football's changing face. "It's a different job," Ancelotti said. "This job allows me more time to reflect, more peace of mind ... Going back to a club? I don't think so. It may well be that this is my last job."

The Italian's connection with Brazil stretches back to his playing days in the early 1980s at AS Roma, when playing alongside icons such as Falcao and Toninho Cerezo.

Also, there was the 1994 World Cup, when he was assistant to Arrigo Sacchi as Italy lost the final to Brazil on penalties.

Ancelotti said he could not have foreseen then that he would one day coach Brazil - or that Italy would be absent from another World Cup.

"I couldn't have imagined a month or two ago either that Italy would be out of the World Cup and, unfortunately, this is now the third consecutive World Cup Italy

has missed," he said. The Italians lost in a penalty shootout to Bosnia and Herzegovina in their play-off final in March.

"For an Italian, this is sad but it's an opportunity for Italians to support Brazil in this World Cup," added Ancelotti.

## ANCELOTTI PLAYS MANY ROLES

The Italian said his greatest continuity as a coach has not been tactical, but human. He has changed with the game, helped by younger staff, but his relationship with players remains much the same as when he began coaching in 1995.

"I feel like the manager, the friend, the team mate, many things; the father sometimes too, why not?" he said.

Then came the Ancelotti twin-kle. He recalled a Brazilian player - unnamed - who once told him he was due to marry in a week but did not want to go through with it.

"I told him: 'Look, you have to make the decision that your heart tells you to make,'" Ancelotti said, laughing.

The player did not get married. "So there are many aspects to my job: coach, father ... sometimes even therapist," Ancelotti said smiling.

"I enjoy it, I really do."

## COMMENT

## PSG's Enrique praises team's mentality after title victory

Reuters  
Paris

Paris St Germain are often praised for their incisive attacking play but the 2-0 victory over Lens on Wednesday which sealed a fifth straight title showed they have the mentality to win games even when they are on the back foot, said boss Luis Enrique.

Goals from Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and substitute Ibrahim Mbeye secured the win that put PSG beyond the reach of Lens in the Ligue 1 title race. "Today, we spent more time defending than usual," said Luis Enrique.

"But if you want to win trophies, you have to be able to dominate both offensively and defensively. And the team today showed the mentality it needs to

win." PSG won the league with just one game to spare, a much tighter margin than in their 2024-25 campaign when they had the title wrapped up with six games left.

"This is the sweetest and hardest title to win. The hardest of the three years we've had here, without a doubt. But that's also because Lens did a very good job," the Spanish manager said.

"And I remember certain moments from this season, the kind of matches they won and the number of consecutive matches they won. And it was tricky. We had to deal with that."

PSG face neighbours Paris FC in their final league game on Sunday, before taking on Premier League club Arsenal in the Champions League final later this month.



## Elliott's lack of action at Villa has been embarrassing: Emery

Unai Emery has labelled Harvey Elliott's lack of game-time with Aston Villa this season as "embarrassing for everyone". Elliott has made just four Premier League appearances since joining Villa on a season-long loan from Liverpool last year. His only league start this season came against Fulham in September, but he was taken off at half-time and has not played in the top flight since February. Villa had an obligation to buy Elliott for £35mn (\$47mn) if the 23-year-old played 10 times in the league. But Elliott, who starred for England's Under-21s when they won the 2025 European Championship, is certain to return to Anfield at the end of the current campaign. Speaking ahead of Friday's clash with Elliott's parent club

Liverpool, Emery said: "It is something embarrassing for everyone involved in it. My apologies for Harvey Elliott are every day in my mind. "But it is the responsibility. We have our responsibility and Liverpool have their responsibility. "As a human and as a person, how the season has gone has been difficult." Liverpool boss Arne Slot confirmed that Elliott will be given the chance to impress in pre-season with the Reds before a decision is made on his future. "It didn't work out as he wanted it, as we wanted it and probably also how Villa wanted it, because you usually sign a player or bring him in on loan to use him," said Slot. "He's contracted to us so he will be with us in the start of the season."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Arteta seeks goal spree for Premier League title cushion

AFP  
London

Mikel Arteta wants Arsenal to put relegated Burnley to the sword in emphatic fashion on Monday as they close in on a first Premier League title for 22 years.

Arteta's men are two points ahead of second-placed Manchester City with two games to go after a controversial VAR call ruled out a late West Ham equaliser against Arsenal last weekend.

But City are one goal ahead on goal difference and could still snatch the title if Arsenal slip up against Burnley or away to Crystal Palace on the final day of the season. Pep Guardiola's side on paper have a tougher run-in as they travel to Bournemouth, who are chasing Champions League qualification, before hosting Aston Villa. "First of all, we have to earn the right to win the game. To make a difference with more goals, even better," Arteta told reporters on Thursday.

"We had a really tough match against West Ham. We managed to win it and it was a great feeling, but we know ideally that scoring goals is going to be important."

Arsenal defender Ben White



suffered a knee injury against West Ham that is set to end his season and likely ruin his chances of playing for England at the World Cup.

Arteta's first-choice right-back Jurrien Timber has also been sidelined in recent weeks. Timber is unlikely to play again in the Premier League this season but Arteta is hoping he could be fit to face Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final on May 30.

"He's such an important player for us, we all know that, and he's

doing everything he possibly can to help the team in any capacity," said Arteta of Timber.

"We know his leadership, his quality and how much the team needs him and he's trying everything he can.

"There is a chance (he could play this season) but how big that chance is, I cannot tell you. He is going to do everything he can to make that chance as big as possible and that's the challenge ahead."

## SELECTION

## Mbappe, Dembele head up France squad for World Cup

AFP  
Paris

Kylian Mbappe will spearhead France at the World Cup after national team coach Didier Deschamps yesterday announced his 26-man squad for this summer's tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Deschamps, who guided France to World Cup glory in 2018 and will leave his role after the 2026 edition, included few surprises.

Mbappe will likely captain the team despite a thigh injury sustained last month, which caused him to miss key matches in Real Madrid's La Liga run-in.

However, the 27-year-old will be on the plane to North America as part of a glittering French forward line, also featuring Ballon d'Or holder Ousmane Dembele and Desire Doue of Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich winger Michael Olise.

Rayan Cherki will make his World Cup debut. The 22-year-old playmaker has enjoyed a sparkling debut season at Manchester City, while his Premier League rival William Saliba of Arsenal will provide defensive



Ousmane Dembele.

solidity for Les Bleus. Full-back Lucas Hernandez and midfielder dynamo N'Golo Kante are, alongside Mbappe and Dembele, the only survivors from Deschamps' World Cup-winning squad from eight years ago in Russia.

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Mike Maignan (AC Milan/ITA), Robin Rissner (Lens), Brice Samba (Rennes)

**Defenders:** Lucas Digne (Aston Villa/ENG), Malo Gusto (Chelsea/ENG), Lucas Hernandez (Paris Saint-Germain), Theo Hernandez (AI Hlal/KSA), Ibrahim Konate (Liverpool/ENG), Maxence Lacroix (Crystal Palace/ENG),

Jules Kounde (Barcelona/ESP), William Saliba (Arsenal/ENG), Dayot Upamecano (Bayern Munich/GER)

**Midfielders:** N'Golo Kante (Fenerbahce/TUR), Manu Kone (Roma/ITA), Adrien Rabiot (AC Milan/ITA), Aurelien Tchouameni (Real Madrid/ESP), Warren Zaire-Emery (PSG)

**Forwards:** Maghnes Akliouche (Monaco), Bradley Barcola (PSG), Rayan Cherki (Manchester City/ENG), Ousmane Dembele (PSG), Desire Doue (PSG), Michael Olise (Bayern Munich/GER), Kylian Mbappe (Real Madrid/ESP), Jean-Philippe Mateta (Crystal Palace/ENG), Marcus Thuram (Inter Milan/ITA)