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Marsh muscle motors Lucknow to victory over Chennai



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Al-Attiyah completes stage whitewash to lead Jordan Rally

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**GCC GAMES DOHA 2026**

# Al-Sharshani, al-Athba inspire Qatar's shooting dominance

Qatar continue to lead the table with 82 overall medals, including 30 gold, 26 silver and bronze each

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's shooters made a spectacular start to the shooting competitions at the 4th GCC Games - Doha 2026, securing three gold medals as part of a nine-medal haul across skeet and rifle events in a day of high-quality competition at the Lusail Shooting Range. The hosts collected three gold, one silver and five bronze medals amid strong regional opposition and an electric atmosphere, reinforcing their dominance at the top of the overall medal standings.

Qatar continue to lead the medals table with 82 overall medals, including 30 gold, 26 silver and 26 bronze. Saudi Arabia remain second with 51 medals (20 gold, 15 silver and 16 bronze), while Bahrain sit third with 41 medals, comprising 16 gold, 17 silver and eight bronze.

Qatar's Reem al-Sharshani emerged as one of the standout performers of the day, producing a superb display to win two gold medals in the women's individual and team skeet events. In the individual competition, a-Sharshani claimed gold, while compatriot Hajar Mohammed took bronze. Bahrain's Mariam al-Asam secured silver. In the team skeet event, Qatar dominated once again as al-Sharshani, Sarah Mohammed and Hajar Mohammed combined to win gold for the hosts. Bahrain's team of Mariam al-Asam, Mariam Hassani and Latifa al-Najm took silver, while Kuwait's trio of Sheikha al-Rashidi, Afrah Al-Mohammed and Fatima al-Zaabi earned bronze.

The men's skeet competition also brought success for Qatar, as Rashid Saleh al-Athba claimed gold after a tense final against Kuwait's Mohammed al-Awadhi, who won silver, while Saudi Arabia's Naif al-Mutairi took bronze.

Qatar also added a bronze in the men's team skeet event through al-Athba, Ali Ishaq and Mohammed Al-Kuwari. Kuwait won gold with Saud al-Kandari, Abdulaziz al-Saad and Mohammed al-Daihani, while Saudi Arabia secured silver with Naif al-Mutairi, Saud al-Saud and Saeed al-Mutairi. In the men's 10m air rifle competition, Qatar's Abdulrahman al-Sulaiti claimed bronze, while Saudi Arabia's Musfer al-Amri took gold and Oman's Salem al-Nabi secured silver.

In the men's 10m air rifle team event, Qatar's Al-Sulaiti, Ali al-Muhammadi and Khalid al-Sharshani added another



Qatar's Reem al-Sharshani won two gold medals in the individual and team skeet events.

bronze. Saudi Arabia won gold through Musfer al-Amri, Fayez al-Anzi and Hussein al-Harbi, while Bahrain claimed silver with Mahmoud Haji, Khalid al-Dosari and Hussein Ali.

In the women's 10m air rifle team competition, Qatar's Rita al-Yafai, Maha al-Ali and Dalal al-Qubaisi won silver, as Bahrain took gold and Oman bronze. al-Yafai also secured bronze in the women's 10m air rifle individual event, adding a second medal to her tally. Bahrain's Nouf al-Dosari won gold, while UAE's Fatima al-Suwaidi claimed silver.

**WINNING AT HOME IS INDESCRIBABLE FEELING, SAYS AL-SHARSHANI**

After her double gold, Al-Sharshani described the victory as deeply emotional, particularly with strong competition and challenging weather conditions.

Al-Sharshani said: "The competition was very tough, and the conditions were not easy. I can never forget the support of my mother, who has always stood by me in every tournament and in all circumstances. She has always been my biggest supporter in continuing on this path, as has my sister, Yasmine. Therefore, this achievement remains very dear to my heart, especially since it was achieved on Qatari soil while

the national anthem was playing an indescribable feeling."

Al-Athba said his gold medal was the result of strong national backing for sport, and highlighted the difficult competition conditions. He said: "The conditions were extremely difficult, both in terms of strong winds and high temperatures. The victory was only decided after a tiebreaker on the final target."

**QATAR FENCING FINISH ON A HIGH**

Qatar's fencing team added further success with three medals (one gold and two bronze), taking their overall tally to five medals. The men's team foil event saw Qatar win gold through Khaled al-Yafai, Abdullah Khalifa, Ali Turki al-Athba and Abdulrahman Bughrib. Bahrain won silver, while Kuwait took bronze.

Qatar also claimed bronze in the men's team epee event through Yousef Abdul-Tawab, Mohammed Abdul Ali, Mohammed al-Hazza and Abdulrahman al-Jadra. Saudi Arabia won gold, while the UAE secured silver. In the women's team foil, Qatar's Dhikrayat al-Abdullah, Sheikha Ali and Fatima al-Maadheed won bronze.

Earlier, Qatar had already secured a gold and silver in individual foil through Ali Turki al-Adhba and Khalid Hussein.



Qatar's Rashid Saleh al-Athba celebrates after winning gold in the men's skeet competition at the 4th GCC Games - Doha 2026 at Lusail Shooting Range.



Qatar's foil fencing team Khaled al-Yafai, Abdullah Khalifa, Ali Turki al-Athba and Abdulrahman Bughrib pose with their gold medals.

**BRONZE FOR BASSEM**

Qatar's equestrian team ended their campaign with another medal after Bassem Mohammed secured bronze in the individual show jumping competition at the indoor arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation.

Riding Wathnan Chakbol, Bassem Mohammed finished third in a 145cm competition held over two rounds with a jump-off, in a strong field of Gulf riders.

The UAE's Abdullah Humaid al-Muhairi won gold riding Koenig, while Kuwait's Ali al-Kharafi took silver. Qatar had earlier won gold in the team competition.

**BILLIARDS SILVER FOR HUSSEIN**

Qatar's Bashar Hussein claimed silver in the 9-ball billiards singles after a hard-

fought 8-6 defeat to UAE's Mahmoud Sharif in the final.

Hussein had reached the final after a strong run, defeating Bahrain's Haider Ali Yaqoub 8-2, Kuwait's Khalid al-Zarouni 8-5, and Saudi Arabia's Abdulaziz al-Amoudi 8-6 in the semi-final.

In the 6-red snooker competition, Qatar's Ali al-Obaidli and Ahmed Saif advanced to the quarter-finals. Al-Obaidli topped Group A with wins over Kuwait's Ammar Taqi (4-3) and Oman's Sami al-Hamrashedi (4-1). He will face Bahrain's Hisham Saqr in the quarter-finals.

Ahmed Saif topped Group C with a 4-2 win over Bahrain's Hisham Saqr and a 3-4 loss to Saudi Arabia's Ayman al-Amri. He will face Kuwait's Ammar Taqi in the quarter-finals.

**SPOTLIGHT**

## Ibrahim sets record as athletes win six more medals

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's athletes added six more medals on the second day of athletics competition at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 yesterday, taking the hosts' two-day athletics tally to 20 medals after Thursday's impressive 14-medal haul.

The hosts collected three gold, two silver and one bronze at the Qatar Sports Club, with Ammar Ibrahim leading the charge after producing a stunning run to win the men's 400m title in 45.51secs - a performance that bettered the previous GCC Games mark of 45.76secs set in 2022. Qatar also completed a memorable one-two in the race as Ashraf Osman claimed silver in 45.71secs, underlining the country's dominance in the event.

Samar Mansouri opened the evening with gold in the women's pole vault after clearing 3.30m ahead of the UAE's Shahad Mubaker, while Ashraf Elseify added another title in the men's hammer throw with a winning effort of 70.18m. Fellow Qatari Ahmed Elsisfy secured bronze in the same event with 65.89m.

Oumar Abakar contributed another silver medal after finishing second in the men's 110m hurdles in 14.08secs behind Kuwait's Yaqoub Alyouha. The latest success followed Qatar's remarkable opening day in athletics, when the



Qatar's Ammar Ibrahim (left) producing a stunning run to win the men's 400m title in ahead of compatriot Ashraf Osman at the Qatar Sports Club.

hosts amassed 14 medals, including five gold, four silver and five bronze. Thursday's stand-out performances included Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim sharing the high jump gold after clearing 2.16m, while his father Issa Barshim taking silver in one of the most emotional moments of the Games.

Elsewhere yesterday, Bahrain's Oluwakemi Adekoya stormed to victory in the women's 400m in 51.87secs, Saudi Arabia's Ahmed Al-taruti won the men's long jump with 7.45m, and Bahrain secured a one-two finish in the men's 10,000m through Abdikani Hamid and Dawit Admasu.

**Saadeddin revels in five-gold haul**

Doha: Qatari swimmer Saadeddin expressed pride after winning five gold medals at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026, stressing that the achievement was the product of hard work and the strong support provided to the national team.

He said the team delivered a strong and exceptional performance throughout the Games, finishing with 26 medals, including 13 gold, a reflection of the significant progress Qatari sport is witnessing in general and swimming in particular. He added that although the competition was tough, determination, focus, and team spirit were decisive in securing these results, while also thanking the federation along with the technical and administrative staff for their continuous support.

He further stated that his ambition going forward is to continue improving and achieving stronger results, setting his sights on winning a medal at the Asian Games in Nagoya next summer and raising Qatar's flag in continental and international arenas.

On the final day of swimming,



the host capped its campaign with a commanding victory in the 4x100m medley relay, underlining its dominance in the competition. The team claimed gold with a new GCC record of 3:45.66 minutes. Saudi Arabia took silver in 3:46.32, while Kuwait finished third in 3:58.42. Saadeddin also starred individually, winning gold in the 1500m freestyle in a new GCC record of 15:19.77. Bahrain's Robert Bonsall claimed silver in 15:45.05, while Qatar's Emil Fawzi secured bronze in 15:50.00.

In the 200m breaststroke, Bahrain's Saud took gold in 2:20.61, narrowly edging Qatar's Mohammed Mahmoud, who claimed silver in 2:20.63. Qatar's Hamza Shaalan completed the podium with bronze in 2:21.24.

## CRICKET

# Marsh smashes 90 as Lucknow beat Chennai

THE AUSSIE OPENER MISSES A CENTURY FOR SECOND TIME

AFP  
Lucknow, India

Australian opener Mitchell Marsh missed out on a second IPL century in three innings, though his brutal 90 was the foundation around which Lucknow Super Giants eked out a seven-wicket victory over Chennai Super Kings yesterday.

Marsh, who had lashed 111 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru last Thursday, hammered nine fours and seven sixes in his 38-ball blitz in Lucknow as the home side made light of Chennai's 187-5, built around a fluent 71 by Kartik Sharma and a grandstand finish from Shivam Dube, whose unbeaten 32 came off 16 deliveries.

Chennai, whose late surge after a poor start netted them three consecutive victories coming into this fixture, must have fancied their chances on a surface that offered considerable bounce and was superbly exploited by Lucknow left-arm quick Akash Singh.

The 24-year-old Akash, playing his first game of the season, winkled out Ruturaj Gaikwad, Sanju Samson and Urvil Patel during an unchanged four-over new-ball burst of three for 26 before Kartik and Dube hauled the five-time former champions to what seemed to be a challenging total. Marsh, however, made it appear positively minuscule with a breathtaking onslaught.

The Australian T20 skipper got the chase underway with two fours in the first over, from Mukesh Choudhary, before using his trademark power to brazen effect.

He unloaded a series of bruising pulls while fellow Australian and opener Josh Inglis was largely



Lucknow Super Giants' Mitchell Marsh plays a shot during the IPL match against Chennai Super Kings at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow yesterday. (AFP)

content to watch the entertainment from the best seat in the ground. Marsh was particularly severe on Anshul Kamboj, Chennai's leading wicket-taker who was smashed for four sixes and a four in the fifth over.

With their best bowler neutralised, Chennai caved in, their designs of breaking into the top four for the first time since the tournament began emphatically dashed.

Inglis and Marsh raced to an

opening alliance of 135 in just 70 deliveries when, against the run of play, the former was caught in the deep off Choudhary.

One brought two when Marsh was dismissed next ball. New batter Nicholas Pooran's straight drive was deflected on to the stumps at the non-striker's end by the bowler with Marsh, backing up, well short of his ground, 10 short of a third IPL hundred.

Lucknow, already eliminated

from the play-off race, weren't to be denied as Pooran applied the finishing touches.

Their fourth win notwithstanding, they still remained rooted to the bottom of the table.

#### BRIEF SCORES

**Lucknow Super Giants 188 for 3** (Marsh 90, Inglis 36, Pooran 32\*)  
**beat Chennai Super Kings 187 for 5** (Kartik 71, Dube 32, Akash 3-26) **by seven wickets**

## COMMENT

## Batting star Kohli open to 2027 World Cup if he can still 'add value'

AFP  
New Delhi

India batting great Virat Kohli said in a podcast released on Friday he would consider playing in the 2027 ODI Cricket World Cup if he can still "add value" to the team.

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

"If I can add value to the environment that I'm a part of, and the environment feels like I can add value, I'll be seen," he said in the podcast posted by his IPL franchise team, Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"If I'm made to feel like I need to prove my worth and my value, I'm not in that space."

Kohli, who now only plays in the 50-over format for India, is the

second-highest scorer in international cricket.

But his India contract was downgraded from the top tier by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) this year.

"I want to play cricket and I want to carry on," he said. "Playing a World Cup for India is amazing."

Kohli bounced back from two consecutive ducks to hit an unbeaten 105 and lead defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a crucial win in the Indian Premier League this week.

It was his ninth hundred in the IPL, but his first this season.

"After operating like this, if I have to be in a place where I have to prove my worth and value, that this is not meant to be for me," he said.

Kohli announced his retirement from Test cricket in 2025, having struggled for form since retiring from T20 internationals after India's 2024 World Cup win.

## FOCUS

## Coach Haddin says Punjab Kings have cracked under pressure

Reuters  
New Delhi

Punjab Kings set the early pace in the Indian Premier League by going seven matches unbeaten, but a run of five straight defeats has left their playoffs hopes in the balance and assistant coach Brad Haddin concedes they have failed to deal with the pressure.

Tilak Varma's match-winning knock powered Mumbai Indians to a six-wicket win on Thursday and left Punjab likely needing wins over Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Lucknow Super Giants in their final two games to stay in contention for a playoffs spot.

"We just haven't been able to handle the pressure in the last few defeats," Haddin told reporters on Thursday.

"We haven't played our best cricket when we need to, which has been disappointing. We are as disappointed as you guys are with the way we started the tournament and where we are now."



"The one thing that does come out of it is we've got to find a way to get out of it. There's no hiding that we've got to play better."

Punjab's slump has raised questions about consistency and squad fitness but Haddin said the players had to focus on winning and block everything else out.

"You've got to deal with everything outside and make sure when you get across that line you're in the right headspace to play and that's exactly what we need to do," he added.

"Now there's no talking about what if. We have to find a way to get the good that we've had."

Punjab next play Bengaluru tomorrow.

## PREVIEW

## Babar boost as Pakistan set for Bangladesh Test

AFP  
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Pakistan will be strengthened by the return of star batsman Babar Azam for the second and final cricket Test against Bangladesh in Sylhet, head coach Sarfaraz Ahmed said yesterday.

A knee injury ruled Babar, 31, out of the first Test, won by Bangladesh by 104 runs to give the hosts a 1-0 lead.

"Babar Azam is available for the next match," Sarfaraz told reporters ahead of the second Test starting today.

"We are disappointed after the first Test but the past is the past. We are hopeful. We will bounce back as a team."

Bangladesh also have injury concerns among their top-order batsmen.



Shadman Islam has been ruled out with a chest injury sustained during the first Test, while fellow opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy's

fitness is also being monitored. White-ball opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim is set to make his Test debut in Shadman's absence.

Rain is predicted for the decider but Sarfaraz sought to play down the conditions.

"The weather is not in our hands. If we have an opportunity to play cricket here, we will definitely play good cricket," Sarfaraz said.

However, veteran Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim said the weather could play a decisive role.

"I think the weather is a bigger challenge than the wicket," he said, adding that there could be a little moisture on the wicket.

Mushfiqur was unmoved by the prospect of facing a fully fit Babar in the second Test.

"If any individual and such a world-class cricketer like him is in the team, then naturally it will be a boost for them," he said.

"But when we won 2-0 against Pakistan in Pakistan, he was there too."

## SAUDI ARABIA TO UNVEIL T20 LEAGUE IN OCTOBER

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia will stage its first professional Twenty20 league in October, marking a major milestone in the Kingdom's sporting development, organisers said yesterday.

Here are some details:  
\* The six-team league will begin in the second week of October featuring "legends of the international game" alongside emerging talent

\* South Asian Network Limited was awarded the rights by the Saudi Arabian Cricket Federation in 2025 to establish and run the Kingdom's first professional T20 cricket competition

\* The league aims to grow cricket across the Gulf by creating opportunities for local players and

delivering a world-class sports and entertainment product.

\* Retired India stalwart Yuvraj Singh will act as league ambassador

\* Details on venues, teams, broadcast partners, and commercial partners will be announced later.

\* Player Rules and Compensation: Maximum of four players who have played Full-Member international cricket in the last two years (to avoid needing full ICC approval).

\* Top contracts could reach up to \$100,000. Expected participants include franchise regulars like Alex Hales, Jason Roy, James Vince, Moeen Ali, and others such as Herschelle Gibbs.

## CYCLING

## Vingegaard makes his move, conquers Blockhaus to win Giro stage seven

Reuters  
Milan

Pre-race favourite Jonas Vingegaard (Visma-Lease a Bike) proved his Giro d'Italia credentials by going alone to conquer the Blockhaus summit finish and win stage seven yesterday in his first telling move of the race to move second overall.

Dane Vingegaard, making his Giro debut, went for broke with just over 5 km to the top, with Austrian Felix Gall (Decathlon CMA CGM) looking impressive as the only rider to get close, coming in 13 seconds behind the winner and now third in the GC.

"Today is a big day for me, it's my first Giro stage win, so it's a nice day," Vingegaard said.

"Felix is a very strong rider, so we knew he'd be up there close. He's a big rival and so he is a guy we

have to worry about," Vingegaard added. Australian Jai Hindley, who triumphed at Blockhaus in 2022 before going on to win that year's Giro, finished third on the longest stage of this year's race, 244 km from Formia ending with the 13.6 km steep climb to the line.

Overall leader, Portugal's Afonso Eulalio (Bahrain Victorious), put in a brave ride, coming home less than three minutes after Vingegaard to hold onto the pink jersey, with the Dane three minutes and 17 seconds behind.

Vingegaard, aiming to become the eighth rider to win all three Grand Tours, began the day 15th in the general classification, over six minutes down on Eulalio, and the first summit finish was always going to be a target for the Dane.

An early five-man breakaway, including sprint specialist Jonathan Milan, was allowed to build a significant gap over the peloton,

and the Italian was caught with 80 km left, his job done having taken maximum points at the intermediate sprint.

With 60 km to go, the gap to the front was six minutes but the reduced bunch upped the pace and were less than three minutes behind when the leaders hit the start of the final climb.

Two riders, Nickolas Zukowsky and Jordi Christiaan van der Lee, tried to stay away but resistance was futile as Visma-Lease a Bike pushed their way up in support of Vingegaard.

Giulio Pellizzari was the only one to keep pace when Vingegaard went in front but the Italian was soon dropped and it was Gall who powered to the finish.

Gall is 17 seconds behind Vingegaard overall and could prove to be the Dane's biggest danger.

Today's stage eight is a 156-km ride from Chieti to Fermo.



Team Visma Lease a Bike Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 7th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026 - Tour of Italy cycling race between Formia and Blockhaus, Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

# Dominant al-Attiyah leads Jordan Rally

By Sports Reporter  
Dead Sea, Jordan

**Q**atar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera won all six demanding special stages to move into a commanding lead after the first leg of the Jordan Rally.

The Autotek Motorsport Skoda Fabia RS driver was in a class of his own on the third round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) and had built up an advantage of 1min 12.8sec at the night halt.

Al-Attiyah said: "It was a good feeling all day and we won every stage. We have a good gap now, a good lead. Now we try to keep going like this."

Al-Attiyah added: "We pushed from the morning and we took a good time. We managed the times this afternoon and will try and do the same tomorrow. We sent the

data to the engineer just to check everything is okay."

Stages were held in the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea areas, but Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi and Ata al-Hmoud admitted that their choice of medium tyres was a mistake for the opening loop of three stages in their Oman Rally Team Skoda Fabia RS. The Omani trailed al-Attiyah by 51.4 seconds at the midday regroup and was unable to grab any time back in the afternoon.

Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhashab is tackling a first full programme of MERC rallies in a Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 supported by Jameel Motorsport. He and Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore settled into a comfortable third position.

Jordan's Shaker Jweihan was the dominant force in MERC2 at the first two rounds in the winter and opened his account on home gravel in similar fashion with Mustafa Juma in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X. He managed his pace per-

fectly to conserve the car, avoided rocks thrown on to the racing line by the Rally2 cars running ahead and held fifth place.

One of the drives of the day came from Palestine's Hamadeh Uda. He teamed up with Zeid Abu Zeid in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X and climbed to seventh place.

Mohammed al-Marri had the bragging rights over Qatari teammate Rashid al-Muhannadi in the battle between the two Peugeot 208 Rally 4s entered by the QMMF. Al-Marri finished the day eighth ahead of the Jordanian duo of Shadi Shaban and Samer Issa. Al-Muhannadi was 11th.

Today's schedule consists of two runs through the Panorama (16.95km), Suwayma (11.12km) and Rawda (26.97km) specials before the ceremonial finish takes place in the HoverUp Park to the north of the Dead Sea. The second pass through Rawda will also act as the Power Stage with additional points available for the fastest crews.



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera in action at the Jordan Rally.

TENNIS

# Ruud in Italian Open final after win over Darderi

'IT'S MY 10TH SEMI-FINAL I THINK IN A MASTERS 1000'

AFP  
Rome

**C**asper Ruud reached the final of the Italian Open yesterday after dismantling Italy's Luciano Darderi 6-1, 6-1 in a rain-interrupted match.

Norwegian Ruud, a specialist on clay, dealt with flamboyant Darderi with the minimum of fuss, even after having to wait nearly two hours to restart a match he was already winning easily.

A huge downpour paused, but had no impact on, Ruud's march to his first final since winning in Stockholm in October last year.

"It's my 10th semi-final I think in a Masters 1000 and it was his first so you try to use that experience to your advantage and I think I did that well today," said Ruud.

"He was maybe a little bit stressed, a little bit nervous of the occasion, but I tried to stay focused and kind of in my own tunnel vision."

When play was stopped Ruud was 4-1 up and at advantage in game six of the first set, which he immediately won after the restart on centre court in Rome.

Not including the rain interruption Ruud took little more than an hour to see off Darderi to win an tour-leading 140th match on clay since the start of 2020, in which time he has won more tournaments on the surface than any other ATP player.

Such was the comprehensive nature of his victory there was a small delay to Daniil Medvedev which was scheduled to start no earlier than



Italy's Luciano Darderi (left) shakes hands with Norway's Casper Ruud after being defeated in their semi-final at the ATP Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

7.00pm local time (1700GMT).

Sinner and Medvedev were nearing the crescendo of their semi-final yesterday when play was suspended due to rain. Sinner was leading Medvedev 6-2, 5-7, 4-2, with the latter serving at Ad/40.

Rudd hasn't won a single set in any of his four matches with Sinner, who destroyed him 6-0, 6-1 in the last eight here last year in one of the most one-sided matches ever seen at the Foro Italico.

"It will be a tough match no matter who it is, either it will be a guy who cannot lose it seems like or it will be Daniil who won this tournament before, so both are great players," added Ruud.

"If it's Jannik it will be another test for me and hopefully I can get some sort of revenge from from last time we played." Sinner is hunting a record-extending sixth straight Masters 1000 tournament victory but seventh seed Medvedev will be by far his toughest opponent in what has been a near stroll into the semi-finals.

**Zverev pulls out of home event in Hamburg with back injury**

World number three Alexander Zverev has withdrawn from next week's ATP tournament in his home city of Hamburg with a back injury, organisers announced yesterday. The 29-year-old did not

suggest he would be a doubt for the French Open, which starts on May 24.

"Hamburg is my hometown, and it is always something very special for me to play in front of my home crowd," said Zverev, who won the Hamburg title in 2023. "Unfortunately, I have been dealing with back problems throughout the entire clay-court season. My medical team has therefore strongly advised me to take a break from competition next week and focus on recovery."

Zverev will hope to be fully fit for his latest bid for a long-awaited maiden Grand Slam title at Roland Garros.

ATHLETICS

# Pole vault star Duplantis adopts longer run-up to generate more power



Reuters  
Stockholm

**T**wo-time Olympic pole vault champion **Mondo Duplantis** is looking to pack more power into his jump with a new 22-step approach, a longer run-up than he previously used to break the world record multiple times since 2020.

Sweden's Duplantis, who set the world record for the 15th time when he cleared 6.31 metres in March, used to have a 20-step approach.

"Tried 22 steps for the first time in the indoor season, which was really nice," the 26-year-old told reporters yesterday, a day before the season's first Diamond League meeting in Shaoxing.

"I feel like I hadn't really made a change in basically any part of

the jump... since five or six years," he added. Duplantis said he was looking forward to developing his new technique, with the World Championships set for next year, followed by the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

"We'll probably try 22 steps again tomorrow, see how it feels, because I'm still very new to it," he added.

Kenya's Faith Kipyegon, who has three Olympic golds and the world record in the 1,500m, is also looking to ease into the season, competing at the 5,000m event today.

Kipyegon took the silver medal in the 5,000m at the Paris Games and was the 2023 world champion at that distance.

"It's really to see how the body is, and going towards the final of the Diamond League," the 32-year-old said.

**TAKING A LONGER RUN UP**

**CAREER BIO: ARMAND 'MONDO' DUPLANTIS (SWE)**  
BORN: NOV 10, 1999 (LAFAYETTE, LA, USA) | CITIZENSHIP: SWE

- 2x OLYMPIC CHAMPION
- 3x WORLD OUTDOOR CHAMPION
- 4x WORLD INDOOR CHAMPION
- 15 WORLD RECORDS (6.17m to 6.31m)

**NEW TECHNIQUE: 22-STEP APPROACH (ADOPTED 2025)**  
→ INCREASED SPEED & POWER

**WORLD RECORD HOLDER: 6.31m**

FOCUS

# Acosta sets the fastest time in free practice for Catalan Grand Prix

AFP  
Montmeló, Spain

**K**TM's **Pedro Acosta** set the fastest time in yesterday's practice for the Catalan Grand Prix, the sixth of 22 rounds in the MotoGP world championship.

Under threatening skies, Acosta finished 0.018sec ahead of fellow Spaniard Alex Marquez of Ducati-Gresini and 0.070sec in front of his South African teammate Brad Binder.

Raul Fernandez posted the fourth-fastest time at the very end of the session, just ahead of Johann Zarco and Italian Fabio Di Giannantonio.

Championship leader Marco Bezzecchi took seventh place for Aprilia, ahead of Honda's Joan Mir and Australian Jack Miller.

In the absence of reigning world champion Marc Marquez, who underwent surgery on his right foot and shoulder on Sunday, Jorge Martin, winner of both the sprint and the Grand Prix at Le Mans last weekend,



failed to seize his chance. The 2024 world champion, who had fallen in the morning during free practice, went down again in the afternoon and could do no better than 17th fastest.

With only the top 10 going directly into Q2, Martin will need to finish in the top two of Q1 to have a chance of a decent starting place on the grid.

Two-time champion Francesco Bagnaia, Marquez's teammate at Ducati, also missed out on direct qualification as he could only manage the 13th quickest time.

GOLF

# Scheffler grabs share of PGA lead

AFP  
Newtown Square, United States

**T**op-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler seized a share of the lead in Thursday's opening round of the PGA Championship while Rory McIlroy was frustrated after a miserable start.

South African Aldrich Potgieter, Australian Min Woo Lee, Japan's Ryo Hisatsune and Germany's Stephan Jaeger each fired a three-under par 69 to share the early clubhouse lead on a wild day at Aronimink.

On the course at three-under were two-time PGA winner Justin Thomas of the United States, Canada's Corey Connors and Scheffler, who made a 38-foot birdie putt at the seventh hole, a 28-foot birdie putt at the 10th

and curled in another from just inside nine feet at 11 to share the lead.

Second-ranked Masters champion McIlroy had no problems with his blister-hit right foot but plenty with his golf swing.

McIlroy, a back-nine starter, closed a round of 74 with four bogeys in a row and five in his last six holes.

"I'm just not driving the ball well enough," McIlroy said. "It has been a problem all year for the most part."

"That's pretty frustrating, especially when I pride myself on driving the ball well. I just need to try to figure it out. I honestly thought I had figured it out."

An unlikely quartet did solve Aronimink's trademark undulating greens, including 23-year-old Hisatsune, who made seven birdies, four of them after each bogey

in his round in only his fifth major appearance.

"I'm very lucky, especially with a lot of birdies and a lot of bounceback, so it's comfortable to play," Hisatsune said. "I'm so happy."

Potgieter, a 21-year-old South African making his sixth major start, made six birdies, including a 43-foot putt at 11, in his PGA Championship debut.

"I definitely left myself in really good positions on the green, made some long putts, so it was nice the putter was warm," Potgieter said.

Jaeger birdied five of the first nine holes but struggled on the back nine.

Lee, a back-nine starter, birdied the fifth and seventh to briefly lead alone before a bogey at the eighth. "Drove the ball really well," Lee said.

## MOTORSPORT

## Premium hospitality packages for F1 Qatar Grand Prix launched

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has officially launched its premium hospitality packages for the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026, taking place from November 27 to 29, offering guests an elevated race weekend experience that combines world class motorsport, luxury hospitality, premium entertainment, and exclusive behind the scenes access.

Set against the backdrop of one of Formula 1's most spectacular night races, the new three-day hospitality offering has been designed to cater to corporate guests, VIPs, motorsport enthusiasts, and international visitors seeking a premium Grand Prix experience in Qatar.

Among the offerings is the Premiere Hospitality Private Suites experience, featuring private suites located within the Premiere Hospitality venue at the end of

the Main Straight. Designed with corporate hospitality and premium client engagement in mind, guests will enjoy indoor seating, outdoor terraces, dedicated track-side and pitlane viewing, premium dining experiences with live cooking stations and premium beverages, as well as exclusive live entertainment throughout the race weekend.

Packages are available for purchase in increments of 50 or 100 guests, making them ideal for large scale corporate hosting, networking, and business development opportunities. Guests also have the flexibility to tailor their hospitality experience to suit their specific needs.

Lusail International Circuit also brings back the Lusail Hill Lounge package located at the iconic Turn 1 section of the circuit. Designed to deliver a relaxed yet refined hospitality atmosphere, the experience combines panoramic racing views with premium culinary offerings, curated cultural activations, dedicated parking access, and personalized hospitality services

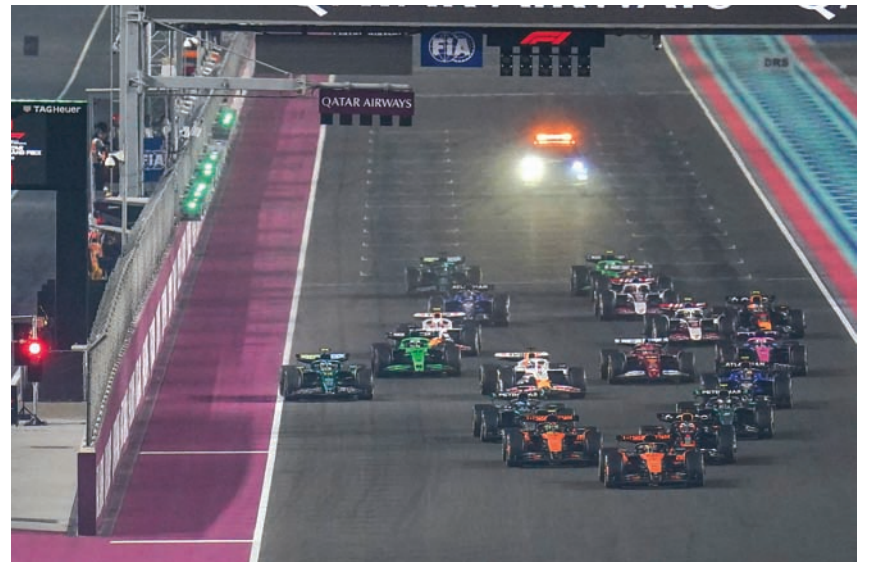
throughout the weekend.

Located within the Premiere Hospitality venue, F1 Experiences Champions Club guests will enjoy exceptional track-side views, premium hospitality, guided F1 paddock tours, championship trophy photo opportunities on the starting grid, insider appearances from leading F1 personalities, and a range of immersive entertainment experiences across the weekend.

The Qatar Grand Prix has rapidly established itself as one of the standout events on the F1 calendar, attracting fans and visitors from around the world to Lusail International Circuit. The launch of the 2026 hospitality packages reflects the circuit's continued commitment to delivering premium guest experiences both on and off the track.

Hospitality packages are now available through the official Lusail International Circuit website.

For more information and bookings, visit Lusail International Circuit - F1 Hospitality



Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026 will take place from November 27 to 29 at the Lusail International Circuit.

## FOOTBALL

## Man City campaign a success regardless of trophies: Guardiola

City head to Wembley today for a fourth successive FA Cup final appearance

AFP  
London

Pep Guardiola insisted Manchester City have had a successful season whether or not they win the Premier League title or today's FA Cup final against Chelsea.

Guardiola's side will put their attempt to catch Premier League leaders Arsenal on hold as they head to Wembley for a fourth successive FA Cup final appearance. City start every season with the Premier League and Champions League as their main targets, but they are on the verge of falling short in both.

Knocked out of the Champions League last-16 by Real Madrid in March, City will be five points behind Arsenal if the Gunners beat relegated Burnley at home on Monday. Guardiola's men can close the gap back to two points with a victory at Bournemouth in their penultimate match of the season on Tuesday.

But Arsenal would then still be able to guarantee their first English title since 2004 by winning at Crystal Palace on May 24. Having already won the League Cup by beating Arsenal, City have a chance for a domestic double this weekend. However, Guardiola is adamant the campaign has been positive, no matter what happens at Wembley or in the title race.

"It depends on the trophies you lift. Sometimes you lift trophies and the season has been successful," said Guardiola, who would only offer "we'll see" when asked if Rodri would be fit to start in midfield.

"Sometimes, you lift and the truth is the season has been really, really bad. I said a few weeks ago this season has been good.

Really, really good."

After starting with Erling Haaland, Rayan Cherkhi and Jeremy Doku on the bench for Wednesday's win against Crystal Palace, Guardiola is likely to field a full-strength team against Chelsea instead of prioritising the title fight.

"It is the final of the FA Cup. The message is there are two prestigious clubs at Wembley in the FA Cup final. Our fans make an incredible effort to come down to London. It is not cheap," he said. "We try to perform as much as possible to win. It is always the game-plan."

City have lost the last two FA Cup finals against Crystal Palace and Manchester United, who they had beaten in the 2023 showpiece.

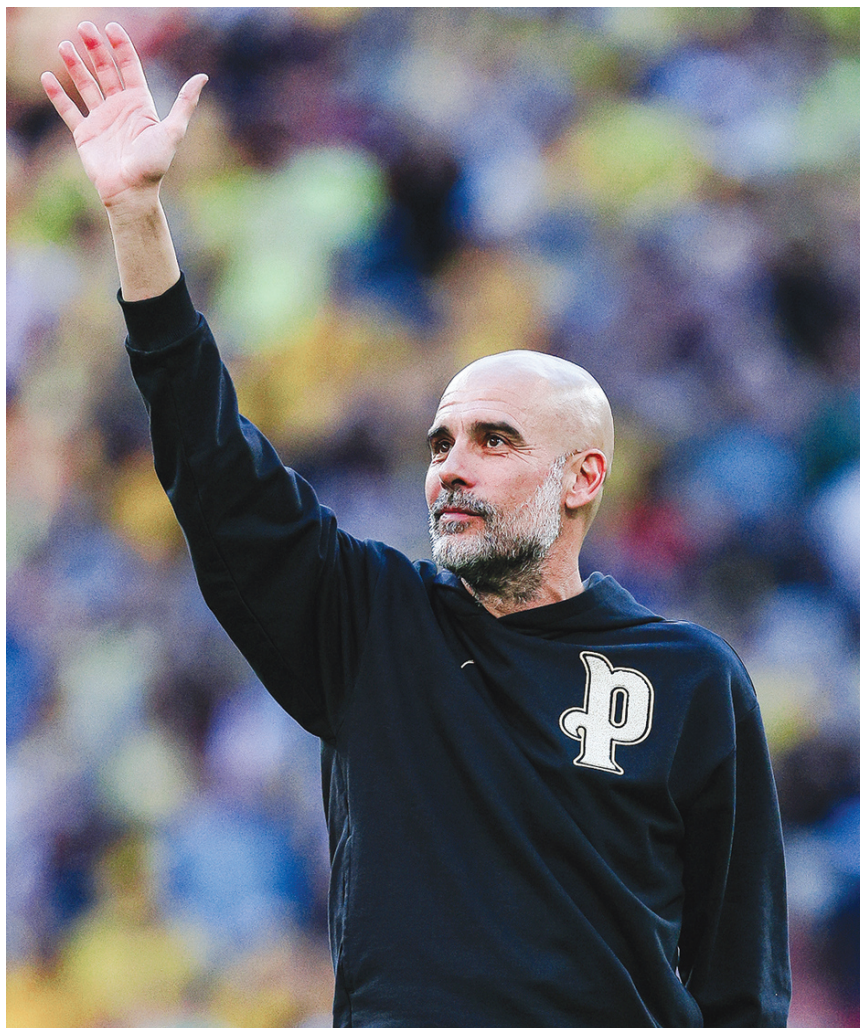
"There's excitement, of course. I hope we can do better than the last two times," Guardiola said. "Wembley is still a special place. Everything is so nice. The pitch is extraordinary. We are desperate to perform well."

Ahead of his 24th trip to Wembley with City, Guardiola joked that he is "so disappointed" he has not had a stand named after him at the home of English football.

"So many times I have been there, at least a lounge or a box or something like that. Maybe I have to go 24 more times!" he said.

Guardiola has one year left on his City contract and is yet to sign a new deal amid speculation that he could end his decade at the Etihad Stadium once the current campaign is over.

Asked about reports that City's fitness coach Lorenzo Buenaventura and goal-keeping coach Xabi Mancisidor are set to leave the club, Guardiola said with a smirk: "I extended the contract with them three more years," before adding: "Nope."



## FOCUS

## Haiti name World Cup squad for first appearance since 1974

Reuters  
Mexico City

Haiti named their World Cup squad, with captain Johnny Placide and all-time top scorer Duckens Nazon included as Les Grenadiers prepare for their first finals in 52 years.

French coach Sebastien Migne selected an experienced squad led by 38-year-old goalkeeper Placide, who plays for Bastia,

while Wolverhampton Wanderers midfielder Jean-Ricner Bellegarde is among the team's most recognisable European-based players. Nazon, who has 44 goals in 76 appearances, was also selected after playing a key role in qualification, with the striker from Iranian club Esteghlal netting six times during the campaign.

The Caribbean side will play at the men's World Cup for only the second time, and first since the 1974 tournament in West Germany, after topping their CONCACAF

qualifying group. They had to play all of their home matches at neutral venues because of the country's security crisis. Haiti will play warm-up matches against New Zealand and Peru before opening their Group C campaign versus Scotland on June 13 followed by games with five-times champions Brazil and Morocco.

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Johnny Placide, Alexandre Pierre, Josue Duverger

**Defenders:** Carlens Arcus, Wilguens Paugain, Duke Lacroix, Martin Experience, JK Duverne, Ricardo Ade, Hannes Delcroix, Keeto Thermoncy

**Midfielders:** Leverton Pierre, Carl-Fred Sainte, Danley Jean-Jacques, Jean-Ricner Bellegarde, Woodensky Pierre, Simon Dominique

**Forwards:** Loucius Deedson, Ruben Providence, Josue Casimir, Derrick Etienne, Wilson Isidor, Duckens Nazon, Frantzdy Pierrot, Yassin Fortune, Lenny Joseph

## Iran to hold pre-World Cup training camp in Turkey: Reports

**Tehran:** The Iran team will head to Turkey for a training camp before taking part in the World Cup in the United States, local media reported.

"The next phase of the national team's preparation is set to be hosted in Antalya, Turkey," Iranian Football360 website reported, adding that the squad would then travel to their World Cup base in Tucson, Arizona.

Antalya also hosted the Iran team for training and matches in March. It was not immediately clear when the squad would leave Tehran for Turkey, where players are also due to undergo visa procedures, although Iranian sports outlet *Varzesh3* reported they are expected to depart today.

As part of their preparations in Antalya, Iran will play a friendly against Gambia on May 29 and are hoping to play a second warmup match against an opponent that is yet to be decided, the agent arranging the matches said. "It is confirmed for 29 May," Sam Mehdizadeh, an Iranian-Canadian who organises friendlies involving the Iranian national team, said.

Iran held a send-off ceremony for the team in Tehran on Wednesday. The players, dressed in red and black tracksuits, were presented on a stage in the Enghelab square in the centre of the Iranian capital, where crowds of people cheered for them, according to videos aired on state TV.

Iran football federation chief Mehdi Taj said Thursday no visas had yet been issued for the team to enter the United States, which launched strikes on Iran in late February at the start of a wider Middle East war. "We have not received any account from the other side regarding who has been granted visas. No visas have been issued yet," Taj said according to *IRNA* state news agency.

Taj is expected to hold talks with FIFA president Gianni Infantino as Tehran seeks assurances for its squad amid tensions following the war. Taj also said players were expected to undergo fingerprinting as part of the visa process but wished to avoid a trip of more than 450 kilometres (280 miles) from Antalya to Ankara.

"The players must travel to Ankara for fingerprinting, but we are trying to arrange for this to be done in Antalya so there will be no need to travel to Ankara," Taj said. Iran and the US cut diplomatic ties in 1980 following the Islamic revolution that toppled Iran's US-backed shah. Iran opens its World Cup campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15 before facing Belgium and Egypt in Group G.

## Carrick says Manchester United future to be decided 'pretty soon'

**London:** Manchester United interim manager Michael Carrick said he expects his Old Trafford future to be resolved "pretty soon" following reports he will be offered the job on a permanent basis. Carrick has earned praise for steering United to Champions League qualification after taking over from the sacked Ruben Amorim in January.

United had been linked with a host of potential managers in recent months, but chief executive Omar Berrada and director of football Jason Wilcox are expected to recommend Carrick's appointment to co-owner Jim Ratcliffe. The former United and England midfielder has exceeded expectations, leading his team into third

place in the Premier League ahead of Sunday's clash with Nottingham Forest.

Contract talks over a two-year deal for Carrick, with the option of a further season, are believed to be underway and could be concluded by the end of the week. Asked about his future, Carrick said: "Can't blame you for asking, two games to go, there's not much else I can say. Listen, the future for me is going to be decided pretty soon. We knew that was going to be towards the end of the season, if not the end of the season, so nothing has changed. There's no big swing on that, that is what it is, and obviously whatever is beyond that is pretty close round the corner anyway."



After failing to lead Middlesbrough into the Premier League, Carrick left the second-tier club in 2025. He has fared much better with United, proving a unify-

ing and stabilising figure after Amorim's turbulent reign. Carrick also won the Premier League, Champions League, Europa League, FA Cup and League Cup during a successful 12-year spell as a United midfielder.

"It's a unique football club, a special football club. I'm immensely proud to have come back and been a part of it, to help," he said. "As a supporter and ex-player, as a pure supporter and caring about the club so much, to come back and help and move the club forward was important. To make a big step and get back in the Champions League is good. We're happy with the work we've done so far."

United haven't won the Premier League

since Alex Ferguson's final season in charge in 2013. A host of top managers including Jose Mourinho and Louis van Gaal have failed to restore United to the summit of English football.

"You've always got to aim upwards. That's the beauty of football and competition, to achieve something and back it up, improve on things, that's always the challenge," Carrick said of United's gradual improvement this season. "For the players, for the squad, for the whole group, for the club, we want to keep moving in a positive way and in the right direction. The closer you get to the top the less room for progress, but progress is what needs to be aimed for."