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Pakistan players must play more red ball cricket, says Inzamam



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Hard work pays off for humble Englishman Rai

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FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

22
DAYS TO GO

TRIVIA

Who has scored in the most editions of the World Cup all time?
Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal).



FOCUS

Al-Obaidli wins gold medal in 15-red snooker singles

QATAR'S PADEL TEAM, SHOOTERS CONTINUE IMPRESSIVE FORM AT 4TH GCC GAMES - DOHA 2026

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Team Qatar player Ali al-Obaidli won the gold medal in the 15-red snooker singles competition at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026.

Al-Obaidli secured the gold medal after defeating Saudi Arabia's Ziyad al-Qabbani 3-0 in the final.

Earlier, he defeated Kuwait's Ahmed Abu in the semi-finals by the same scoreline, after overcoming UAE's Mohammed Shehab 3-1 in the quarter-finals.

Saudi Arabia's al-Qabbani claimed the silver medal after reaching the final with a 3-0 victory over compatriot Abdullah al-Shamri.

Al-Obaidli delivered an outstanding technical performance and controlled the final from start to finish to claim his fourth medal of the Games, having previously won gold in the 10-ball billiards doubles event, silver in the 10-ball billiards singles competition, and silver in the 6-red snooker singles event.

Qatar lead the medals tally with a tally of 110 (40 gold, 38 silver, 32 bronze). Saudi Arabia are in second spot with 63 medals (24 gold, 20 silver, 19 bronze) while Bahrain occupy the third place with 55 (23 gold, 20 silver, 12 bronze).

GOLD MARCH THRILLS AL-OBAIDLII

Team Qatar player al-Obaidli expressed his great happiness after winning the gold medal, stressing that the achievement was the result of the hard work he had put in over the past period.

Al-Obaidli said: "I am extremely happy to win the gold medal and dedicate it to Qatar and to the fans who supported us throughout the tournament. The competition was not easy due to the strength of the participating players, but I was determined to deliver my best level and achieve the title."

He added: "The final against Saudi Arabia's Ziyad al-Qabbani was very competitive. From the beginning, I focused on maintaining concentration and taking advantage of the opportunities available, and Thank God I managed to secure the victory."

The Team Qatar player noted that winning four medals at the current edition of the Games would serve as a major motivation for him to continue working hard and improving in the future, while also thanking the administrative and technical staff as well as his teammates for their continuous support.

Al-Obaidli also praised the excellent organisational atmosphere of the Games.

ASIAN SNOOKER FEDERATION PRESIDENT PRAISES

AL-OBAIDLII'S ACHIEVEMENT

Mohammed Salem al-Nuaimi, President of the Asian Snooker Federation, stressed that al-Obaidli's achievement in winning the gold medal represents a great source of pride and reflects the high standard reached by snooker players in the region.

Al-Nuaimi said: "We congratulate champion Ali al-Obaidli on this well-deserved achievement after a strong and distinguished performance throughout the competition. He proved his worth and ability to compete at the highest levels, and this gold medal is the result of hard work and the strong support received by Qatari sport."



Qatar Billiards and Snooker Federation officials pose with the top three medal winners in the 15-red snooker singles competition at the 4th GCC Games - Doha 2026. Qatar's Ali al-Obaidli secured the gold medal after defeating Saudi Arabia's Ziyad al-Qabbani 3-0 in the final.



Qatar's Mohammed Saadoun al-Kuwari in action during his team's padel game against Kuwait. Qatar secured a 3-0 win at the courts installed at Aspire Academy.



Ali al-Obaidli in action during his gold medal winning performance.



A Qatari shooter in action during the competitions held at the Lusail Shooting Complex at the 4th GCC Games - Doha 2026. The opening day of the trap competition featured strong and exciting contests in the men's and women's individual and team categories, with shooters competing over 75 targets across three rounds of 25 targets each.



A Qatari athlete in action during the archery competition.

STRONG START TO TRAP SHOOTING COMPETITIONS

The trap shooting competitions at Lusail Shooting Complex got underway yesterday as part of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026, which continue until May 22 with the participation of elite athletes from regional countries competing across 19 sports.

The opening day of the trap competition featured strong and exciting contests in the men's and women's individual and team categories, with shooters competing over 75 targets across three rounds of 25 targets each.

The competition will continue today, with two additional rounds over 50 targets, after which the top eight shooters will qualify for the finals before the winners in each category are crowned. In the men's category, Kuwait's Talal al-Rashidi topped the standings with 72 targets, while Qatar's Mohammed al-Rumaihi placed second with 71 targets, tied with Kuwait's Abdulrahman al-Faihan. In the women's category, Qatar's Maytha al-Buainain led the standings with 66 targets, followed by Kuwait's Shahad al-Hawal with 65, while Qatar's Nawal al-Khalaf ranked third with 63. In the men's team competition, Team Qatar, comprising Mohammed al-Rumaihi, Angelo Scalzoni, and Saeed Abu Shareb, finished first with a total of 209 targets, ahead of Kuwait in second with 205 and the UAE in third with 204.

In the women's team category, Team Qatar, comprising Maytha Al Buainain, Khulood Al Khalaf, and Ray Bassil, also ranked first with 186 targets, ahead of Kuwait with 185 and Bahrain with 171. The final standings will be determined after the conclusion of the second day of competition tomorrow.

QATAR PADEL TEAM CONTINUES WINNING STREAK

Team Qatar padel team continued their winning streak at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 during the ongoing competitions at the specially prepared Aspire padel courts. Team Qatar secured a 3-0 victory over Kuwait, as the duo of Mishari Nawaf and Rashid Nawaf won the opening match in straight sets 6-2 and 6-0.

The pair of Mohammed Saadoun al-Kuwari and Hassan Wali also won the second match in straight sets 7-6 and 6-1, while Mohammed al-Khanji and Ryan al-Jufairi secured victory in the third match. This marked Team Qatar's second consecutive victory after previously defeating Saudi Arabia 3-0 in the opening match.

Team Qatar are scheduled to face Bahrain today in their third match of the tournament as they aim to continue their winning run and retain the gold medal they won in Kuwait.

FOCUS

World Cup hero Inzamam urges Pakistan players to play more red ball cricket



By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

Former batting great Inzamam Ul Haq says Pakistan's current batsmen and bowlers can only improve their performances by playing more red ball cricket.

Pakistan is currently placed eighth in the World Test Championship (WTC) points table among nine teams chiefly because of poor scores by its frontline batsmen in this WTC cycle as well as the previous one.

In a career spanning more than two decades, Inzamam played 120 Tests and scored 8,830 runs. Inzamam also played 245 first-class matches in which he smashed 45 centuries.

"They urgently need to play more domestic, longer-format cricket. And yes, it would be a good idea for Pakistan players to appear in county cricket also," Inzamam, 56, said during a candid chat.

"If Pakistan players do not play the longer format regularly, their technical foundation cannot become strong, which explains the ongoing inconsistency in performances," he added.

"Pakistan's first-class cricket used to be robust, allowing players to spend long durations at the crease to refine both their technique and mental fortitude. This is not the case now. Nowadays, young players pre-

dominantly confine themselves to T20 cricket, where the game ends in just a few overs. This prevents both batsmen and bowlers from developing comprehensive skills," he added.

"If we (Pakistan players) do not play more first-class cricket, we cannot sustain our international performances. Pakistan's first-class cricket, the longer format, has been heavily compromised by the overwhelming focus on T20s and ODIs. That is the root cause of our current performance issues," he underlined.

The 1992 World Cup hero said young players in India play more first-class cricket before making it to the national side.

"Despite the immense popularity of the IPL, every young Indian player prioritizes playing the Ranji Trophy. Consequently, their domestic system remains robust, ensuring a steady influx of fresh talent," Inzamam said.

Inzamam also pointed to Australia, where first-class competitions like the Sheffield Shield are held in high regard. This very foundation ensures that the Australian team maintains consistency and boasts a formidable bench strength.

"Pakistan does not have good bench strength," he added. "Pakistan must revert to a similar model to ensure comprehensive player development."

INDIAN PLAYERS AND RANJI TROPHY

"If you look closely, Indian players still have to play first-class cricket; everyone has to participate in the Ranji Trophy. It isn't just about the IPL. Naturally, the IPL is a massive global tournament that carries immense influence, and they certainly utilize it to select their T20 squads.

However, players are still required to go back and play the Ranji Trophy," Inzamam, who played his 100th Test against India in 2005, explained.

Inzamam said Pakistan's current batting star Babar Azam is as impactful as retired players like Zaheer Abbas, Javed Miandad, Mohammad Yousuf and Younis Khan.

"We have to acknowledge Babar Azam has the same level of elite impact. I prefer to focus on the positives. There are many current players I admire. I highly admire Babar Azam. Despite the intense criticism directed at him, I like his play and believe in his ability," he said.

"It's all about the sheer impact a player leaves on a match and Babar does that. In the generations before and during my time, we had a continuous line of world-class batsmen: Javed Miandad, Zaheer Abbas, Saeed Anwar, Salim Malik, Ijaz Ahmed, followed by myself, Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, and Amir Sohail. It was a regular, uninterrupted cycle of dominance," Inzamam said.

When asked about two of his most admired Indian cricketers, Inzamam quickly mentioned the names of Kapil Dev and Sachin Tendulkar.

"Kapil Dev was one of the most intelligent bowlers I had ever faced. He got me out also once (in a World Cup match). Kapil did not rely purely on pace but he knew how to outsmart batsmen with his sharp cricketing mind and variations. He was a smart bowler. He could set up a batsman for dismissal. A very smart cricketer, I must say," Inzamam said. "Sachin Tendulkar was a proper cricketer. Sachin reached the pinnacle of world cricket through sheer dedication, discipline and relentless hard work."

Inzamam praises Qatar's rapid rise as global sports hub

Former cricketer Inzamam Ul Haq reflected warmly on his return to Doha, calling the Qatari capital a 'popular sports destination'.

"This is my second visit to Doha. I first came here way back in 1998 to play a match. Doha is a global city. I honestly believe it is truly an amazing sporting destination. Many people around the world share the same sentiment. It is an incredible place," said Inzamam.

"The Qatari government's phenomenal support and funding for sports create endless opportunities here. The infrastructure is developing at an astonishing pace, and there is a genuine passion for sports. I foresee that over the next 5 to 7 years, Doha will elevate its sporting stature to an entirely different level. I see massive potential for cricket here. The local expatriate communities - Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan - possess an immense passion for the game. While dedicated cricket infrastructure is still

being built up, the interest is sky-high. Even at the community level, senior players come down and display incredible passion for the game.

"If Doha starts hosting regular cricket events like the Emerging Teams Cup or the Asia Cup (similar to what Dubai did last year), it will generate massive local interest and inspire the younger generation.

"With Doha hosting the 2030 Asian Games, their clear target is to field a highly competitive cricket team for the tournament. Look at how they hosted the 2022 FIFA World Cup. In my view, no one has ever organized a better World Cup than Qatar. Every single fan, player, and visitor left the country delighted. The safety, the seamless organization, and the hospitality were flawless. Now they are aiming for the Olympics. The scope for sports here is limitless, and any opportunity to contribute to cricket's growth in Qatar should be backed," Inzamam added.

'Kohli, Anderson most impactful players in the last 20 years'

I think Virat Kohli has inspired a generation of players. He has done wonderful things for world cricket. Similarly players like Steve Smith, Dale Steyn, Kane Williamson and Joe Root have inspired everyone with their phenomenal, sustained performances over the years. Jimmy Anderson is also on my list as one of the most impactful players. I played against him but he became a regular after I retired (in 2007). He was awesome. Virat and Anderson are two players who have been top performers. Their longevity in cricket is admirable. Virat took cricket fitness to a new level. He set the standards for the new or young players. Anderson changed the concept for fast bowlers who would retire at the ages of 33 or 34. Anderson showed that you can play as long as you want with proper fitness.



TWO GREATS: Jimmy Anderson (left) with Virat Kohli.

SECOND TEST

Mushfiqur ton set Pakistan big target

'To chase 437, you have to be brave and play positive cricket'

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Veteran batter Mushfiqur Rahim hit a glittering century as Bangladesh set Pakistan an imposing target of 427 to win the second Test after another commanding day for the hosts yesterday.

Bangladesh posted 390 all out in their second innings on day three with Mushfiqur, who made 137, and Litton Das, who hit 69, putting together 123 runs for the fifth wicket. The 39-year-old Mushfiqur rolled back the years as he scored his 14th Test century, surpassing Mominul Haque's record of 13 for Bangladesh.

Pakistan openers Azan Awaiz and Abdullah Fazal survived the last two overs of the day without scoring before bad light ended play.

The visitors will end a record chase to level the two-match series after Bangladesh won the opener.

West Indies currently hold the record for the 418 they scored to beat Australia in Antigua in 2003, while Pakistan have never successfully chased more than 377.

Starting the day on 110-3 with a lead of 156 runs, Bangladesh lost skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto for 15 but Mushfiqur and Litton put the Pakistan bowlers to the test.

Litton, who scored a century in



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim celebrates after scoring a century during the third day of the second Test against Pakistan in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

the first innings, looked good for another big score but fell to Hasan Ali at deep third-man.

Mushfiqur reached his century off 178 balls with a boundary off Mohammad Abbas - the shot that moved him clear of Mominul into the history books.

It was also his eighth Test century since 2022. Taijul Islam provided valuable lower-order support, adding 77 runs with Mushfiqur before off-spinner Sajid Khan dismissed him for 22.

Mushfiqur was the last man out

as he became Sajid's third wicket in the innings. Pakistan pace bowling coach Umar Gul, however, said his team will fight on.

"We have two days left and we are mentally prepared. If we bat through the full duration, there is a chance to win - we aren't just looking for a draw," said Gul.

"Two or three good partnerships will be very important. To chase 437, you have to be brave and play positive cricket. In cricket, anything is possible."

Bangladesh spinner Taijul was

confident the target would weigh on Pakistan. "When they see the target number, many things may work in their minds. Discipline is very important now," said Taijul. Pace bowler Khurram Shahzad took four 4-86 while Sajid claimed 3-126.

BRIEF SCORES: Pakistan 232 and 0 for 0 (Fazal 0, Awaiz 0) need 437 runs to win vs Bangladesh 278 and 390 (Mushfiqur 137, Litton 69, Shahzad 4-86, Sajid 3-126).

IPL

Sunrisers Hyderabad qualify for play-offs along with Gujarat

AFP
Chennai

Skipper Pat Cummins' 3-28 and an attacking 70 by Ishan Kishan helped Sunrisers Hyderabad book their play-off spot in the IPL with a nervy five-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings yesterday.

The result at Chennai's M.A. Chidambaram Stadium ensured a play-off berth for Gujarat Titans as well. Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru were the first team to qualify for the play-offs.

Five teams now jostle for one remaining play-off place in the T20 tournament that will conclude with the final on May 31 in Ahmedabad.

Australia's Cummins struck key blows with his pace bowling to restrict the opposition to 180-7 in Chennai's last home game.

Hyderabad slipped to 56-2 in their chase before the left-handed Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen, who made 47, put on 75 runs to guide the team home with six balls to spare.

Chennai's Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad denied Klaasen his fifty and Hyderabad lost another key wicket of Nitish Kumar Reddy before Kishan, a wicketkeeper-batter, struck decisive shots.

He departed after his 47-ball

knock laced with seven fours and three sixes, but the job was done and Ravichandran Smaran hit the winning four.

Five-time champions Chennai's fate hangs by a thread.

Bowlers led by Cummins set the tone for Hyderabad's domination after the Australian quick struck first to dismiss Sanju Samson, caught behind for 27.

Cummins then took down skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, for 15, and Kartik Sharma, for 32, as Chennai lost regular wickets.

Dewald Brevis hit a 27-ball 44 and put on 59 runs with Shivam Dube to raise Chennai's hopes of a 200-plus total but it was not to be. Sri Lanka's Eshan Malunga bowled Brevis and fellow quick Sakib Hussain rattled the stumps of left-handed Dube to hurt Chennai.

In reply, Hyderabad lost their attacking openers including Travis Head, for six, and Abhishek Sharma, for 26, before Kishan and Klaasen took charge.

The left-right batting combination of Kishan and Klaasen put the chase back on track and despite wickets at the end Hyderabad sealed the win and the ticket into the next stage.

BRIEF SCORES: Sunrisers Hyderabad 181 for 5 (Kishan 70, Klaasen 47, Choudhary 2-36) beat Chennai Super Kings 180 for 7 (Brevis 44, Cummins 3-28, Sakib 2-34) by five wickets.



Sunrisers Hyderabad's captain Pat Cummins (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Chennai Super Kings' Kartik Sharma during the IPL match in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

FORMER ENGLAND CAPTAIN SMITH DIES AT 92

Former England captain Mike Smith, known by his initials "MJK", has died at the age of 92, Warwickshire County Cricket Club said yesterday. The right-hand batsman made his debut for England in 1958 and played 50 Tests, cap-

taining the side in 25 of them. "Warwickshire County Cricket Club are saddened to learn of the passing of Bears' legend MJK Smith at the age of 92," the club said in a statement on social media.

Smith scored 39,832 first-class runs in 637 matches, the 18th-highest total of all time. Smith, who also won an England rugby union cap in 1964, was an ICC match referee from 1991 to 1996.

GOLF

Hard work pays off for humble Rai with PGA win

The 31-year-old Englishman credits family, upbringing, work ethics

Reuters
Newton Square, Pennsylvania

With one sizzling round of 65 at Aronimink Golf Club on Sunday, Englishman Aaron Rai emerged from relative obscurity to fulfil his dream of landing a major title with a shock triumph at the PGA Championship.

The 31-year-old started his 13th major as a 300-1 outsider and Sunday's final round as one of 43 players, some of them household names, within five shots of the lead.

Rai kept his composure when it mattered, however, and picked up four birdies on the back nine, including one at the 17th on the back of a monster 68-foot putt, to become the first Englishman in 107 years to claim the Wanamaker Trophy.

"There's so many different things that you face, whether that is in the game, whether that is acquiring the skills, putting the time in that is required, facing all the setbacks that come along with it," the quietly spoken Rai said.

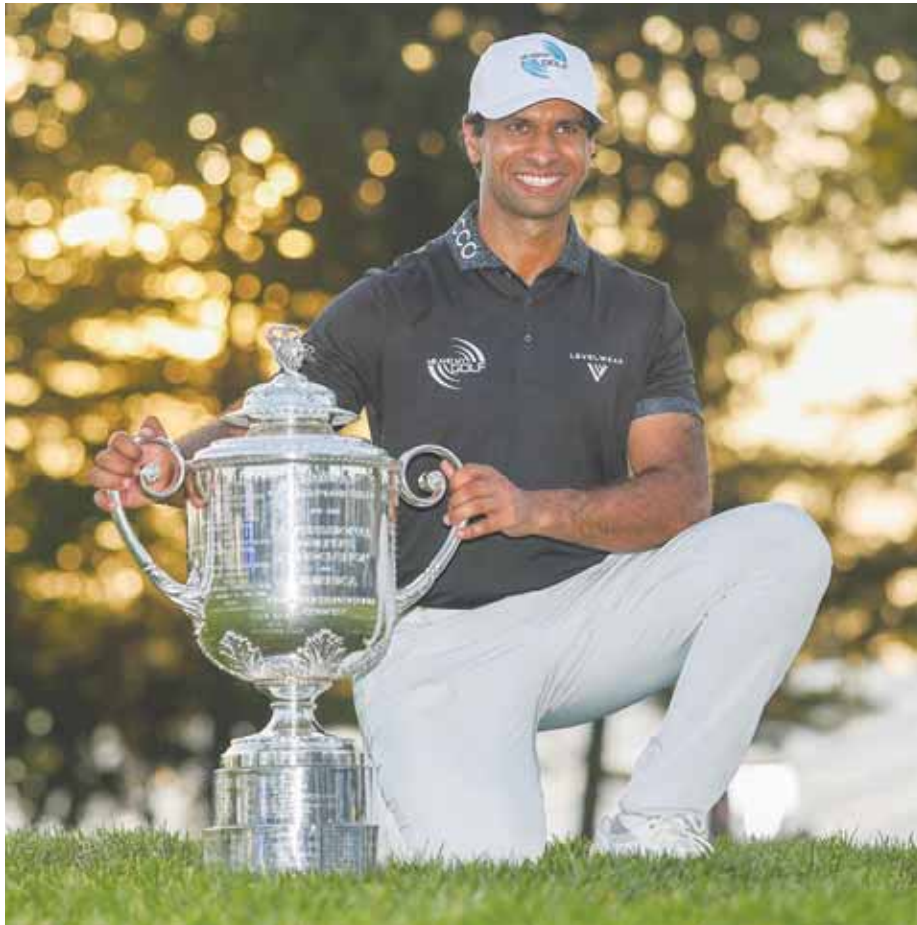
"It is certainly a roller coaster to get to these points, and a week like this, an achievement like this, certainly makes it all feel very much worthwhile. It's an absolute dream come true."

Two-time major champion Jon Rahm, who finished tied for second on Sunday, said Rai was renowned as one of the kindest and most respectful players on the PGA Tour.

Rai said that his humble outlook on life derived from his upbringing in the English Midlands as the son of migrants from India and Kenya. "My mom and my siblings were very fast to reinforce the importance of just being a good person and trying to do the right things away from golf," he said.

Rai also paid tribute to his wife, Indian professional Gaurika Bishnoi, and his father, who was behind his habit of wearing two gloves and putting head covers on his irons as a reminder of how precious his clubs were when he was growing up.

"My dad was with me every day that I went to practice from the age of four or five years old, he actually quit his job and started to focus on my golf from a really young age," Rai said. "He was very much an advocate to really just stay in your lane, focus on the things that you can do and I didn't really mix with a lot of other junior golfers, which didn't give me a



Aaron Rai of England celebrates with The Wanamaker Trophy after winning the PGA Championship in Newtown, Pennsylvania, on Sunday. (AFP)

perspective of what was normal."

Hard work and diligence were the other words being bandied about by his fellow players on Sunday when they were asked to describe the world number 44. "There are a lot of guys that work extremely hard ... so I think that's a prerequisite of what is just required to try and compete out here," Rai said.

"It's reaffirming to know that the things that we're doing are working and they're leading to continued development within the game. Hopefully I can just continue to move along a pretty similar path moving forwards."

Jim Barnes, who won the Wanamaker Trophy in 1916 and again three years later, was the only other Englishman in the long history of the tournament to win the PGA Championship. "There's a lot of incredible and historic English players over those 100 years who have had phenomenal careers," Rai said.

"To be the person that's the first one in such a long time from England is an amazing thing, and something to be extremely proud of. I'm very proud to be from England (and) I'm very proud of India and Kenya as well ... I'm very proud of representing all three, really."

FOOTBALL

Coach Dalic names Modric-led Croatia World Cup squad

AFP
Zagreb

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic announced a preliminary 26-man squad for the upcoming World Cup, to be led by veteran Luka Modric, the key architect of the country's historic success in recent years.

The 40-year-old AC Milan midfielder led the nation of 3.8 million people to the second-place finish at the 2018 World Cup.

The former Real Madrid star was also key for Croatia third place at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. In 2023 the Balkan nation lost to Spain in the Nations League final.

But Modric sustained a cheekbone fracture after clashing heads with Juventus' Manuel Locatelli at the San Siro in late April, and underwent a surgery. The former Ballon d'Or winner was expected to be out of action for between six to eight weeks but should be free to play in the upcoming World Cup, a source said at the time.

"He's training with a (facial) mask and doing well. Maybe this break helped him," Dalic told reporters in Zagreb. "We'll see his condition, but I don't doubt him, he'll be in good form."

Croatia's defence was also weakened due to leg fracture of Manchester City's Josko Gvardiol in January that sidelined him for months. "We hope he'll be ready to play," Dalic said adding that the 24-year-old will be given chances in the warm-up matches to build up his form for the tournament, which kicks off June 11. "We expect him to be a major boost for us in the US."

Commenting on his expectations from the tournament, Croatia's most successful coach,

who took over in 2017, stressed the first goal was to get "through a tough group". "We have quality, youth, and experience... which gives me optimism."

Croatia play their opening Group L match against England on June 17. They will later face Panama and Ghana. During preparations for the championships they will play two friendlies at home against Belgium and Slovenia respectively.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Dominik Livakovic (Dinamo Zagreb), Domink Kotarski (Copenhagen/DEN), Ivor Pandur (Hull City/ENG)
Defenders: Josko Gvardiol (Manchester City/ENG), Duje Caleta-Car (Real Sociedad/ESP), Josip Sutalo (Ajax Amsterdam/NED), Josip Stanisic (Bayern Munich/GER), Marin Pongracic (Fiorentina/ITA), Martin Eric (Midtjylland/DEN), Luka Vuskovic (Hamburg/GER)
Midfielders: Luka Modric (AC Milan/ITA), Mateo Kovacic (Manchester City/ENG), Mario Pasalic (Atalanta/ITA), Nikola Vlasic (Torino/ITA), Luka Susic (Real Sociedad/ESP), Martin Baturina (Como/ITA), Kristijan Jakic (Augsburg/GER), Petar Susic (Inter Milan/ITA), Nikola Moro (Bologna/ITA), Toni Fruk (Rijeka)
Forwards: Ivan Perisic (PSV Eindhoven/NED), Andrej Kramaric (Hoffenheim/GER), Ante Budimir (Osasuna/ESP), Marco Pasalic (Orlando City/USA), Petar Musa (Dallas/USA), Igor Matanovic (Freiburg/GER)
Stand-by list: Lovro Majer (Wolfsburg/GER), Franjo Ivanovic (Benfica/POR), Dion Beljo (Dinamo Zagreb), Ivan Smolicic (Como/ITA), Karlo Leticia (Lausanne/SUI), Luka Stojkovic (Dinamo Zagreb), Adrijan Segetic (Portsmouth/ENG)



World Gymnastics lifts restrictions on Belarus and Russia

Lausanne: World Gymnastics yesterday lifted restrictions imposed on Russians and Belarusians competing after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Meeting on Saturday and Sunday in Sharm El-Sheikh, the executive committee of the body said in a brief press statement that restrictions would be lifted "with immediate effect".

That means gymnasts from both nations are free to return to competition under their own flags and with their anthems rather than appearing as neutrals. They can also compete as teams, rather than as individuals, and the stipulations that they should not have actively supported the war in Ukraine nor been under contract with the army or security service have been dropped.

World Gymnastics did not offer any justification for the decision which is out of line with recent recommendations from the IOC who earlier this month advised international federations to reinstate Belarusians, but not Russians.

The door is now open for Russian and Belarusian gymnasts to qualify for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

Judo and swimming have also voted for the full reinstatement of the two countries while boxing limited itself to following the IOC by lifting only the restrictions on Belarusians.

Other organisations, like the International Figure Skating Federation and World Athletics, continue to exclude both countries entirely from their competitions.

ROUND-UP

Carvajal to leave Real Madrid at end of season

Real Madrid captain Dani Carvajal will leave the club at the end of the season, Los Blancos said. The Spain international, who has played 450 times for Madrid, has won 27 trophies including six Champions Leagues and four La Liga titles.

"Real Madrid wishes to express its gratitude and affection to one of the greatest legends of our club and world football," said the Spanish giants in a statement.

Carvajal, 34, came through Real Madrid's La Fabrica youth academy and after signing for Bayer Leverkusen in 2012, Los Blancos bought him back the following summer.

The defender was hoping to play for Spain at the World Cup this summer but has struggled with various injuries through a disappointing campaign and will not be called up by coach Luis de la Fuente according to Spanish media.

Carvajal will play his last match for the club at the Santiago Bernabeu this weekend

against Athletic Bilbao in La Liga, at the end of a second straight season without a major trophy for Madrid.

SPAIN MIDFIELDER LOPEZ TO MISS WORLD CUP WITH FOOT FRACTURE

Spain midfielder Fermin Lopez is set to miss this summer's World Cup after his club Barcelona diagnosed him with a foot fracture which requires surgery. The 23-year-old would likely have been called up by Spain coach Luis de la Fuente for the tournament this summer in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Fermin suffered the injury during Spanish champions Barcelona's 3-1 win over Real Betis on Sunday in La Liga. Lopez has become a regular for Barcelona over the past two seasons and has seven Spain caps.

BARCELONA REWARD FLICK WITH CONTRACT EXTENSION

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick has extended

his contract through to June 2028, with an option for a further season, after he guided them to a 29th La Liga title, the club said. The 61-year-old's previous deal had been set to expire in June 2027.

Barca clinched the title with three games to spare, sealing it with a win over arch-rivals Real Madrid on May 10.

A treble-winning coach with Bayern Munich, Flick joined Barca in 2024 on a two-year contract, arriving determined to rebuild his reputation after being sacked by Germany in September 2023.

Under his leadership, Barca quickly reasserted their domestic dominance, winning back-to-back La Liga titles along with the 2024-25 Copa del Rey and successive Spanish Super Cups.

However, after a quarter-final exit to Atletico Madrid in the Champions League, they will be looking to mount a stronger challenge in Europe's top club competition next season.

SPOTLIGHT

Iran World Cup squad lands in south Turkey for training

AFP
Antalya, Turkey

Iran's football team arrived in Turkey yesterday for a training camp and to complete visa applications ahead of the 2026 World Cup. The 22 players and coaching staff in the "Team Melli" delegation flew into the Turkish resort of Antalya where they could be seen leaving the airport dressed in navy blue track-suits.

The players were to stay several weeks before heading to the global tournament that is being co-hosted by the United States, which began bombing Iran on February 28 alongside Israel, sparking war.

The team will be based in Arizona in the United States and play all three of their group matches there in spite of the war, which has been temporarily halted by a ceasefire since April 8.

But with negotiations in the doldrums, new weekend drone attacks on Gulf countries and fresh threats from US President



Iran players on their arrival at Antalya airport in southern Turkey. (AFP)

Donald Trump have heightened fears that fighting could resume. The team are hoping to play two friendlies in Antalya, including one against The Gambia on May 29, according to Sam Mehdizadeh, an Iranian-Canadian who heads a company that sets up friendlies for the team and is working to set up a second match.

Iran and the United States cut diplomatic ties in 1980 and the players will use their time in Turkey to complete visa applica-

tions, head coach Amir Ghalenoeei said on Saturday.

Last week, Iran held a send-off ceremony for the team in Tehran's central Engelab Square with the players cheered by crowds of flag-waving supporters, footage on state TV showed.

But others were less enthusiastic. Sepehr, a 19-year-old student from Tehran, said many didn't see the team as representing the people, but as a squad "hand-

picked" by the authorities.

"This team... is not, for many people, representative of the Iranian people, it's the team of the Islamic Republic, and in the minds of many, it will remain the most hated team ever," he said by phone. "They sold themselves and the people of Iran out for money, success and status."

Yasaman, a 32-year-old from the northern city of Rasht, said she was conflicted about supporting the national team after anti-government protests but did not want the players "to get hurt", so it was "a bit complicated" for fans. She also admitted that for some Iranians, watching their team play at the global spectacle "would be a source of happiness" amid the ongoing war with the United States.

Iran secured their spot at the World Cup in March 2025, but since then Washington has twice launched intensive bombing attacks on the country. US officials have insisted Iran is welcome at the tournament, while FIFA has rejected Iranian suggestions their games be moved to co-hosts Mexico or Canada.

"Let 'em play," Trump said in late April. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said any problem would not be with the players but "some of the other people (they) would want to bring with them", suggesting some may have ties to the Revolutionary Guards - branded by Washington as a terror group.

Last month, officials from Iran's football federation abandoned a trip to the FIFA congress in Canada, saying they had been "insulted" by Canadian immigration officers.

Federation chief Mehdi Taj, who is with the delegation, is a former member of the Guards, which is also blacklisted by Canada.

FIFA secretary general Mattias Grafstrom met with Taj and the Iranian federation in Istanbul at the weekend, describing the talks as constructive.

The squad's US base camp will be in Tucson, Arizona. The team, who are in Group G, kick off their campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15, before facing Belgium in the same city and then Egypt in Seattle.

Qatar step up World Cup preparations with friendly against Sudan



Qatar have stepped up preparations for the FIFA World Cup with an intensive training camp in Doha ahead of Thursday's friendly against Sudan at 6:30pm. The Asian champions are using the fixture as part of their build-up to football's biggest stage, with head coach Julen Lopetegui continuing to assess his options before trimming the preliminary 34-man squad ahead of the team's departure to North America later this month. Al Annabi will also face Ireland on May 28 and El Salvador on June 6 in additional warm-up matches before launching their World Cup campaign against Switzerland on June 13. Qatar will then take on co-hosts Canada and Bosnia in the remaining group-stage fixtures. The FIFA World Cup will run from June 11 to July 19.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal on the brink of title after Burnley win

Gunners could be crowned champions today should City fail to win at Bournemouth

AFP
London

Arsenal are on the brink of ending a 22-year wait to win the Premier League after beating Burnley 1-0 to open up a five-point lead at the top. Kai Havertz headed in the only goal but was also lucky to avoid a second-half red card that could have swung the title race back in Manchester City's favour.

The Gunners could be crowned champions as early as today should City fail to win at Bournemouth. Even if City do end the Cherries' 16-game unbeaten run and beat Aston Villa, Arsenal will secure the title with victory at Crystal Palace on Sunday.

However, the narrow margin of victory against a Burnley side that have long since been relegated does offer City hope.

An Arsenal draw at Selhurst Park would allow City to snatch the title on goal difference if Pep Guardiola's team win their final two matches. To add extra intrigue to the final days of the season, reports on Monday suggest Guardiola will leave City after a decorated decade in charge after Villa visit the Etihad on Sunday.

Roared on by an expectant capacity crowd in their final home game of the season, Arsenal were tipped to put the Claret to the sword with ease. Burnley have taken just two points from their last 10 matches but made Mikel Arteta's men work for the three points on another nervy night at the Emirates. Leandro Trossard struck the post from the edge of the area before Bukayo Saka saw a penalty appeal waived away as he attempted to turn in Havertz's low cross. Arsenal were forced to rely on their set piece threat once more to prise Burnley open.

Havertz rose highest to power in Saka's delivery on 37 minutes as they scored from a corner for the 18th time in the league this season. Yet the floodgates did not open and Arsenal were very fortunate not to have to defend their lead with 10 men for the final quarter.

Havertz raked his studs down the calf of Lesley Ugochukwu in a mistimed challenge.



Arsenal's German midfielder Kai Havertz heads the ball to score during the Premier League match against Burnley at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. (AFP)

Despite a VAR review, the original decision of a yellow card was not upgraded to red. Havertz was quickly replaced by Viktor

Gyokeres. The Swede's arrival failed to kickstart Arsenal as an attacking force. But their rock solid defensive record again

edged them closer to the title. Since losing to City last month, Arsenal have not conceded in their last four league games.

Guardiola to leave Man City after decade in charge: reports

Manchester: Pep Guardiola will leave Manchester City after a decade in charge, according to media reports, bringing to a close one of the most successful spells in Premier League history, with former Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca expected to replace him. The 55-year-old will reportedly announce his departure shortly after City's final game of the season against Aston Villa at the Etihad Stadium, capping a campaign that included winning both the League Cup and the FA Cup trophies.

Saturday's FA Cup victory over Chelsea secured Guardiola his 20th trophy with the club. Maresca, who left Chelsea four months ago, has been rumoured for months to be the top contender for the Spaniard's job. Guardiola's contract at City is set to expire in June 2027.

Guardiola shrugged off questions about his future after the FA Cup final. When asked about the rumours, Guardiola replied "What rumours?" and then ended the interview, saying "Have a lovely evening."

City head to Bournemouth today with confidence high after their FA Cup final win, but Guardiola knows his side will have to snap the hosts' 16-match unbeaten league run to keep their title hopes alive.

City travel to the south coast buoyed by their FA Cup triumph over Chelsea at Wembley on Saturday. That victory kept City on course for a domestic treble, following their League Cup success against Arsenal in March. Guardiola's side sit five points behind league leaders Arsenal with two games remaining, setting up a tense title race run-in.

"It's a different competition, but it's always better to travel to Bournemouth with the feeling of winning the FA Cup than the opposite," Guardiola said.

"They are 16 or 17 games unbeaten - their run is incredible. The only chance we have (to win the league) is to win the game, so we have to break that run; otherwise it will be over," he added.

LIGUE 1

Enrique blasts PSG's flat display ahead of Champions League final

Reuters
Paris

Paris St Germain manager Luis Enrique said he was disappointed with his side's lack of intensity after they lost their last Ligue 1 game of the season on Sunday and urged his players to rediscover their fire ahead of the Champions League final.

PSG, who had already secured their fifth straight title, were beaten 2-1 by local rivals Paris FC on Sunday and Enrique said it was clear that motivation was an issue. "Nothing positive to say about this match," he told reporters.

"When you play football without ambition or intensity, this is the sort of thing you'd expect to see. I knew before the match how difficult it would be to play this sort of game with no objective, but I'm a bit disappointed."

PSG are not in action again until May 30 when they defend their Champions League crown in the final against Arsenal. "I think my players need to overcome difficult matches and stay motivated," the Spanish manager added.

"The final part of the season will be more

complicated than usual because last year we played in the French Cup final and that was very motivating for us. But there are still two weeks to go before what I'd call the most important match in our history, and I certainly hope that by that day, there'll be no need to motivate the players."

DEMBELE HAS TREATMENT FOR LEG ISSUE

Meanwhile, forward Ousmane Dembele needs treatment for a right calf issue, PSG said, ahead of the Champions League final against Arsenal later this month. The Ballon d'Or winner was substituted after half an hour during Sunday's 2-1 Ligue 1 defeat against Paris FC "as a precaution after experiencing some discomfort in his right calf," PSG said in a statement. "Dembele will be having treatment over the next few days," the club added.

The 29-year-old did not appear to be struggling when he left the field and boarded the team bus after the match without limping. "I think it is just due to fatigue," Enrique said. "It has been a tricky end to the season but now we have two weeks to prepare for the biggest match in our history."

The former Barcelona player has suf-



PSG players and head coach Luis Enrique (right) celebrate with the Ligue 1 trophy on Sunday. PSG, who had already secured their fifth straight title, were beaten 2-1 by local rivals Paris FC on Sunday.

fered numerous physical setbacks this season, particularly thigh and calf issues. Meanwhile, Achraf Hakimi resumed indi-

vidual training on Saturday after a thigh problem, as did William Pachy, Nuno Mendes, and Lucas Chevalier.

All three were unavailable for Sunday's match against Paris FC. Luis Enrique's side face Arsenal in Budapest on May 30.