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Qatar suffer narrow loss to Ireland in World Cup tune-up



Qatar's substitute Almoez Ali was sent off in the 77th minute by referee Jamie Robinson for shoving Jayson Molumby during the International friendly in Dublin. (Reuters)

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar suffered a narrow 1-0 defeat to the Republic of Ireland in an international friendly at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin yesterday, as Julen Lopetegui's side continued their preparations for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Al Annabi were undone by an early Nathan Collins goal in the fifth minute and could not find a response in a contest that saw both sides reduced to 10 men. The match marked the start of the final phase of Qatar's build-up to the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, where they will make their second successive appearance at the global showpiece.

Ireland made a bright start and took the lead after just five minutes when Jack Moylan delivered a dangerous free-kick into the box and captain Collins rose highest to head past goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada.

The hosts continued to threaten early on, with Troy Parrott curling narrowly wide, while Qatar struggled to create clear openings despite enjoying more possession as the first half progressed. Akram Afif came closest for the visitors midway through the half after being played through by Yusuf Abdurazzaq, but the striker fired well off target.

Qatar gradually settled into the contest and Homam al-Amin, making his 100th international appearance, sent a free-kick over the crossbar from a promising position. The game took a dramatic turn late in the first half when Ireland midfielder Moylan, who had impressed throughout, was shown a straight red card for a high challenge on Jassem Gaber in the 43rd minute.



Republic of Ireland's midfielder Chiedozie Ogbene is put under pressure by Qatar's Homam al-Amin (left) and Ahmed Fathy during a friendly match in Dublin. (AFP)

The dismissal gave Qatar renewed momentum before the break, but Lopetegui's side struggled to seriously test Liverpool goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher. Lopetegui made five changes shortly after the restart, introducing Almoez Ali, Ahmed Alaaeldin, Karim Boudiaf, Assim Madibo and Mohamed al-Mannai as the coach opted to put 21 players through their paces.

Qatar enjoyed more of the ball in the second half but failed to make their pressure count. Edmilson Junior and Alaaeldin both wasted decent opportunities, while Abdurazzaq saw a deflected effort saved by Kelleher. Ireland, meanwhile, threatened sporadically on the counter and nearly doubled their lead late on when Collins headed across goal, but both Parrott and James Abankwah failed to convert from close range.

The friendly became increasingly heat-

ed in the closing stages when substitute Almoez Ali was sent off in the 77th minute for shoving Jayson Molumby, reducing Qatar to 10 men as both teams finished a player short.

There was also concern for al-Mannai, who was forced off injured only minutes after coming on, with veteran Hassan al-Haydos replacing him late in the match.

Qatar will now continue their preparations with a final warm-up match against El Salvador in Los Angeles on June 6.

Al Annabi have been drawn in Group B at the World Cup and will open their campaign against Switzerland on June 13 at the San Francisco Bay Area Stadium before taking on co-hosts Canada in Vancouver on June 19.

Qatar will conclude the group stage against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle on June 24.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arsenal one win from history as PSG stand in their way

Premier League champions face a formidable challenge in Budapest against holders Paris St Germain

Reuters
London

Arsenal's long road back to Europe's top table reaches its defining night tomorrow as they face Paris St Germain in the Champions League final, chasing a first crown that would seal the renaissance engineered by Mikel Arteta.

The London club held off Manchester City to claim a first Premier League crown for 22 years last week, finally shedding the 'nearly men' tag that had weighed on Arteta's shoulders. With the suffocating pressure of trying to deliver the Premier League title now released, they will seek a glittering 'bonus' trophy that would see them surpass even the legend of Arsene Wenger's 2003-04 Invincibles.

They face a formidable challenge in Budapest against Luis Enrique's outstanding PSG team - a rare blend of eye-catching flair, intelligence and hard graft.

Just as in 2006 when they lost to Frank Rijkaard's Barcelona in their only previous appearance in the final, Arsenal will start as slight underdogs. But no one should be in any doubt about Arsenal's ability to deliver on the biggest of stages.

They may not be to everyone's liking with their reliance on defensive stability and set pieces, but the old chant of '1-0 to the Arsenal' that marked the days of former manager George Graham is now being sung with a new sense of pride.

Eight victories came by that score in the Premier League as Arsenal kept 19 clean sheets while in the Champions League they have kept a competition-high nine shutouts and conceded only six goals in 14 unbeaten games.

While reigning champions PSG have been delighting the purists, Arsenal have shown scant regard for critics of their more pragmatic approach and will not be about to tamper with what has become a



Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard (left) and defender Ben White arrive in Budapest yesterday, on the eve of their Champions League final against Paris St Germain. (Reuters)

watertight formula tomorrow.

"The first goal is going to be key," former Arsenal midfielder Paul Merson said looking ahead to the final. "PSG will be worried about going 1-0 down to Arsenal, because they'll know they'll be up against it - they'll be scared of losing the first goal."

Arsenal's 2-1 defeat by Barcelona in 2006 was followed three years later by a run to the semi-finals. After that it was as if they were making up the numbers amongst Europe's elite with seven successive last-16 exits before five seasons when they failed to even qualify for it. Even when Arteta returned to the club as manager in 2019 it took a while for Arsenal to

re-establish themselves in Europe's most prestigious club competition. But since then the progress has been impressive.

Two years ago they lost by the odd goal against Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals before reaching the semi-finals last season, falling to Luis Enrique's PSG again over two tight legs.

Spaniard Arteta felt a deep sense of grievance after that bitter loss just over a year ago - claiming that defeat would make his team even more hungry to conquer Europe. Now they have the chance to set the record straight - and complete the journey from nearly men to champions of Europe.

PSG's Georgian magician Kvaratskhelia ready for another big European night

Paris: Paris St Germain's road to the Champions League final has been fuelled by collective brilliance, but few players capture the chaos and beauty of Luis Enrique's side better than Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. As PSG prepare for another showdown, against Arsenal at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, the Georgian has become one of the symbols of Luis Enrique's exhilarating side, adding improvisation and menace to a team already overflowing with attacking talent.

Long before Paris, however, there was Napoli. When the Serie A club signed the then little-known Georgian from Dinamo Batumi in 2022 for around 10m euros, supporters barely knew how to pronounce his name. Videos have popped up on YouTube and TikTok to guide them.

Even before his first official appearance, expectations had spiralled into mythology. During his initiation ceremony, Kvaratskhelia sang Opus's "Live Is Life", the song forever associated in Naples with Diego Maradona's famous pre-match warm-up against Bayern Munich in 1989. Supporters immediately christened him "Kvaradona".

"I know Maradona means everything to Naples," Kvaratskhelia said at the time. "It's a huge responsibility to be mentioned in the same sentence."

What followed was one of the most explosive breakthroughs in European

football. Operating from the left wing in Luciano Spalletti's thrilling Napoli side, Kvaratskhelia shredded Serie A defences with a dizzying repertoire of feints, body swerves and sudden changes of pace.

By January 2023, he already had six goals and seven assists in 14 league games and was tearing through Champions League opponents with the same carefree brutality.

The unpredictability remains central to his game today. Kvaratskhelia is not merely a dribbler hunting highlights.

Nearly ambidextrous, he can attack outside or drift inside onto either foot, combine in tight spaces or accelerate directly at defenders. He stretches defensive lines through positioning and movement, forcing opponents to retreat even before he touches the ball.

Enrique has refined his game further, demanding relentless pressing and defensive commitment to complement the attacking freedom. In Paris, Kvaratskhelia has become part of a collective machine rather than its sole inspiration, flourishing alongside Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, Vitorino and Joao Neves in a younger, more balanced PSG side.

His path to the elite was hardly conventional. Born in Tbilisi and coached early on by his father Badri, a former footballer, Kvaratskhelia developed in Georgia before moving to Russia with Rubin Kazan.

ers will be deployed across France for the Champions League final between Paris Saint-Germain and Arsenal this weekend, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said yesterday. Paris Saint-Germain's 5-0 victory last year against Inter Milan in European football's showpiece competition saw violence, particularly on the Champs-

Princes stadium, where the match was shown live.

Nunez told online news site Brut that of the 22,000 officers on duty for tomorrow's match, 8,000 would be in the French capital. Last year also saw a huge policing operation, with 5,400 officers mobilised in the Paris metropolitan area.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Won't change our style but we have plans for Vaibhav: Titans

'WE ARE STILL STUCK WITH OUR PROCESS. WE TRUST IN OUR ABILITY. WE KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO'

Agencies
Chandigarh

Former champions Gujarat Titans may have been labelled a predictable side by rivals and experts, but assistant coach Parthiv Patel believes the team's consistent success speaks for itself.

Defending the Titans approach, Patel pointed to the franchise's impressive record since entering the Indian Premier League (IPL) in 2022. The Titans won the title in their debut season and have missed the playoffs only once in their history.

Gujarat Titans will battle Rajasthan Royals in Qualifier two today for a spot in the final against defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB). Patel was speaking to the reporters on the eve of GT's clash against RR in New Chandigarh.

Gujarat Titans' top-order trio of Shubman Gill, Sai Sudharsan and Jos Buttler has thrived despite adopting a more traditional batting approach at a time when many teams rely on ultra-aggressive starts and higher strike rates from their openers.

"We were sitting pretty at number 2 in the points table. I know other teams can think whatever they want to think. There are six teams who have not qualified also and I know that the references which you have come from, that I know Tom Moody has said about GT. But see, we have finished number 2. And we know what kind of cricket we want to play. And we back ourselves to give results," he said.

"Since GT's inception, four out of five years, we have qualified. Results are there for everyone to see. Everybody has their different way of playing. We have our own style of playing. Even in the first half of the tournament, we were not doing that great. We were just doing okay."

"But we still stuck to our process. We trust in our ability. We know what we can do. And that is something which we will try to do tomorrow as well," said Patel.

Patel also praised Rajasthan Royals Vaibhav Sooryavanshi for his impressive form, while mak-



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi watches the ball after playing a shot during the IPL Eliminator against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Chandigarh on Wednesday. (AFP)

ing it clear that GT are preparing specific strategies to counter him.

Patel said the Titans have closely studied videos of the young batter and, like other teams, is focused on dismissing him early in the match. However, he kept the exact plans under wraps, saying their execution on the field would determine the outcome.

"I am feeling good about the way he is batting. Hopefully, we will try to take him out early in the game. As all the teams are planning, we have seen the videos. Hopefully, we will be able to execute our plan. But what it is, we will be able to tell you when we are on the ground," Patel said.

"He has been a phenomenal talent, just the way he has been playing. It's great to see. From the opposition's point of view, we hope that he doesn't get going tomorrow," Patel added.

In this season, Sooryavanshi has been in sensational form, smashing 680 runs in 15 innings at an average of 45.33 and a strike rate of 242.85, including a century and four fifties, with a best score of 103. He has smashed 55 fours and 65 sixes in 280 balls faced.

Parthiv Patel has also lauded West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder for his consistent performances in the ongoing IPL season, saying the franchise had specif-

cally targeted him during the auction due to his all-round abilities and experience in T20 leagues.

Holder, who was picked up by Gujarat for Rs 7 crore in the previous auction, has delivered in crucial stages this season. In nine matches, he has scored 58 runs and taken 15 wickets at an impressive average of 16.46 and an economy rate of 7.63, including a four-wicket haul.

"Even before the IPL auction last year, we had planned that Jason Holder would be our main pick. We know that in the last 1.5 years, Jason Holder has been in good form in the T20 and other leagues across the world. He brings experience as well. It is very important for a team combination, and if you have a player who can bowl in the powerplay as well as in the middle overs, and he can bat as well. After that decision, a lot of things changed for us, and we are glad that Jason Holder has performed in this way," Patel said.

Assistant coach has also backed star leg-spinner Rashid Khan, saying the franchise has full trust in his abilities despite a challenging season following recovery from injury.

In the ongoing IPL season, the Afghan spinner has taken 19 wickets in 15 matches at an average of 23.47 and an economy rate of 8.77, including one four-wicket haul.

"Rashid doesn't need any kind of introduction. He is a kind of bowler. We know he has had a tough season, as you said, because he was coming out of an injury. But after that, he has recovered well. He has been bowling brilliantly. He has been working really hard. In fact, even today, he is here at the training," Patel said.

He added that Rashid's hunger to perform in pressure situations makes him a vital asset for the team. "We know the kind of bowler he is and how hungry he is to contribute. He always wants to be in the action; he always wants those difficult situations, and that is the reason why he has been bowling well.

"As I said, there is no question of Rashid's skill level at all. We have full trust in him, and that is the reason why he is still part of the Gujarat Titans set-up since the inception," he added.

'Six machine' Sooryavanshi, 15, stakes India claim with new stunning knock

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's latest extraordinary innings was hailed by cricket greats yesterday, as calls grow for the 15-year-old phenomenon to be propelled straight into the senior India team.

The teenage opener hit 12 sixes, including three in a row off Australia captain Pat Cummins, before he was out for 97 off 29 balls for Rajasthan Royals in Wednesday's playoff win over Sunrisers Hyderabad.

"Yeah, he played pretty well," said a shell-shocked Cummins, who was launched into the stands four times in all by the left-hander. "The margins are so small. You miss your yorker by a little bit and he doesn't tend to miss them. So, yeah, fair play."

Sooryavanshi hit seven boundaries in a row to reach 97 off 28 balls. But he was caught in the deep attempting another that would have broken Chris Gayle's record of 30 balls for the fastest IPL century.

On the way he smashed the West Indian's 12-year-old record of 59 sixes in a single edition of the IPL. He has cleared the ropes 65 times and is in possession of the Orange Cap for the most runs in the IPL season, with 680 at an average of 45.33.

Past master Gayle called Sooryavanshi the IPL's "new six machine". "What a phenomenal player Vaibhav is. Great entertainment young man!" he posted on social media.

Sooryavanshi was crestfallen when he was out. But he has a chance for more fireworks against Gujarat Titans in the final playoff match on Friday. The holders Royal Challengers Bengaluru await the winners in Sunday's final.

Calls for Sooryavanshi to be fast-tracked into India's team have accelerated since he slammed a 17-ball 52 to start his IPL season.

"He is the best T20 opener in the World... India have to pick him," former England captain Michael Vaughan said on X on Wednesday. India batting legend Sachin Tendulkar lauded Sooryavanshi's technique calling the innings "simply spectacular".

"Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's bat swing has been exceptional," he posted.

"What stands out even more is the way he effortlessly clears his front foot to make room for deliveries targeting his pads. This gives him the freedom to play his natural game."

Comparison with Tendulkar, who made his full international debut aged 16, have been inevitable. But former India wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik warned against heaping expectation on young shoulders.

"What Vaibhav is doing is very special, but what I don't want the people to do is tag him as the next Sachin because he is just 15 years old," Karthik said on the Quest Talk podcasts.

"I think what Sachin did was extraordinary. Vaibhav's challenges will be completely different."

Rajasthan captain Parag said he didn't need to offer much advice to the fearless youngster. "That's the thing we don't have any conversations," Parag said. "He likes batting. Just leave him alone, let him go and have fun." Sunrisers Hyderabad assistant coach James Franklin also hailed Sooryavanshi as a generational talent.

"He doesn't think anyone's ever seen a talent like this. It's freakish what he's doing at the moment," he told reporters.

"To think that he's potentially got 25 years left in the career, it's quite scary."

"He's only going to get better, stronger and more mature with how he bats. So, it's just devastating at the moment."

CRICKET

New Zealand's Smith sparks Ireland collapse in one-off Test

AFP
London

Nathan Smith took career-best international figures of 6-40 as New Zealand made Ireland follow-on in a one-off Test in Belfast yesterday.

Ireland were dismissed for 179 in reply to New Zealand's first-innings 490-8 declared, with paceman Smith doing the bulk of the damage as only Andy McBrine (73 not out) and fast bowler Mark Adair (40) offered much resistance after their side collapsed to 38-6.

The hosts, made to follow-on by New Zealand captain Tom Latham, were 65-2 at stumps on the second day -- still a mammoth 246 runs behind.

Earlier, New Zealand wicket-keeper Tom Blundell extended his first-day 142 not out to 186, his highest score at this level, and there was agony for Dean Foxcroft who just missed out on a century on his Test debut when falling to McBrine for 98.

New Zealand resumed on their overnight 361-5 after being sent into bat on Wednesday's first day of four -- rather than the standard five-day Test -- at Stormont.

Blundell surpassed 150, while Foxcroft brought up his maiden Test half-century as they took their partnership beyond the 100-run mark. Ireland eventually took three quick wickets, with Blundell falling in sight of a double century and Foxcroft a hundred, to prompt the declaration.

The Irish endured a woeful start to their reply, with Smith striking twice in the first over to have Stephen Doherty lbw for a second-



ball duck and number three Cade Carmichael caught behind, also for nought, four balls later.

Smith continued to take wickets after lunch, removing Andrew Balbirnie, Curtis Campher and Lorcan Tucker before McBrine and Adair kept New Zealand at bay with a century stand.

Adair's useful innings ended when he became Smith's sixth wicket of the innings before Ireland were bowled out.

They at least made a better start to their second innings but still have a mountain to climb, with New Zealand well-placed for a morale-boosting win with more than a day to spare ahead of the first of a three-Test series against England at Lord's starting a week on Thursday.

"You'd take 98, it's obviously better than a duck, I was so close

to the century, but at the end of the day the team is in a great position to win this game," Foxcroft told the BBC.

"In terms of the match, I'm delighted where we are at the moment. We've got eight more wickets to go and looking ahead to tomorrow (Friday) morning, we are hoping we can put Ireland under pressure.

"For us enforcing the follow-on was all about momentum. We will want to try and finish the game off and then we can think about England next week."

BRIEF SCORES: Ireland 179 (McBrine 73*, N Smith 6-40) **and 65 for 2** (Doherty 36*, Tickner 2-14) **trail New Zealand 490 for 8 dec** (Blundell 186, Ravindra 121, Foxcroft 98, Adair 3-66) **by 246 runs.**

CYCLING

Magnier sprints to third win of Giro d'Italia, Vingegaard stays in pink

Reuters
Milan

France's Paul Magnier made it a hat-trick of victories in this year's Giro d'Italia as he comfortably won a bunch sprint at the end of stage 18 yesterday.

The 22-year-old Soudal Quick-Step rider was perfectly set up by teammate Jasper Stuyven in the final few high-speed turns and powered to the line ahead of two Italian sprinters.

Edoardo Zambanini (Bahrain Victorious) was second with Jonathan Milan (Lidl-Trek) third. Victory for Magnier, who also won the first and third stages in Bulgaria, means he takes the lead in the fight for the points classification jersey.

Overall race leader Jonas Vingegaard attacked on the day's short sharp final climb inside the last 10km but settled for a place in the main bunch to preserve his big lead. Denmark's Vingegaard (Team Visma - Lease A Bike), bidding to complete his set of Grand Tour triumphs, leads by 4:03 minutes with three stages left.

The 171km stage came alive after a four-man break of Mattia Bais (Polti-VisitMalta), Andrea Mijsud (Polti-VisitMalta), Jonas Geens (Alpecin-Premier Tech) and James Shaw (EF Education-EasyPost) was caught with around 25 km to go.

The 1.1km Il Muro di Ca del Poggio ramp, with gradients of 19%, provided a sharp sting in the tail and for a while it looked like Vingegaard might go for the stage win.

Previous General Classifica-



Soudal Quick-Step French rider Paul Magnier celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 18th stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday. (AFP)

tion leader Afonso Eulalio, who recovered from a crash earlier in the day when his arm got caught in a feed bag, also sensed an opportunity and briefly opened up a gap to the chasing pack.

But in the end it was a day for the sprinters and Soudal Quick-Step played the perfect hand as Stuyven led Magnier into the final tricky corner, giving his young teammate the perfect line for his final burst of acceleration to the line.

"I had a lot of confidence this morning," said Magnier, who also wore the race leader's Maglia Rosa jersey after his earlier stage

wins. "My teammates made it into a sprint and I'm so happy to win. Jasper made an amazing lead-out."

For stage favourite Milan, it was a disappointing day as he got out of position around the final corner.

"My guys did an amazing job and I have to say sorry to them, it was my fault to take that last corner as fourth wheel, I should have been right behind Magnier," he said.

Today's 19th stage returns to the high mountains with a 151-km test in the Dolomites featuring 5,000m of climbing.

FRENCH OPEN

Ailing Sinner crashes out, Sabalenka and Gauff through

Italian was leading by two sets and 5-1 in the third set before suddenly struggling with his movement

AFP
Paris

Jannik Sinner succumbed to illness and a remarkable Juan Manuel Cerundolo comeback to crash out of the French Open on Thursday, blowing the men's tournament wide open, as Aryna Sabalenka safely avoided a similar fate to progress.

Men's world number one Sinner was cruising when leading by two sets and 5-1 in the third set before suddenly struggling with his movement as he lost 18 points in a row. Sinner took a medical time-out, complained of feeling "dizzy" and left a sweltering Court Philippe Chatrier for treatment, but after returning still slipped to a 3-6, 2-6, 7-5, 6-1, 6-1 second-round loss to world number 56 Cerundolo.

"I struggled, starting to feel very dizzy. Very low of energy. Tried to serve it out, but didn't have a lot of energy," said the Italian. "Woke up this morning, didn't feel very well and tried to keep the points very short."

Sinner suffered his earliest exit from a Grand Slam since the 2023 French Open, as Cerundolo completed one of tennis' biggest shocks in recent years and set up a last-32 tie against Spanish youngster Martin Landaaluce on Saturday.

The 24-year-old Sinner was the latest player to wilt under the blazing sun this week, seeing his 30-match winning streak, after taking titles in Rome, Madrid and Monte Carlo, Miami and Indian Wells, come to a shuddering halt.

The Italian will now have to wait until next year, when injured rival Carlos Alcaraz will likely be back in action, for his next chance to complete the career Grand Slam.

The top seed was in total control and romping towards the most routine of victories before he suddenly started to struggle physically, losing three consecutive games to love.

He asked the chair umpire what his options were when 0-40 down in the next game, before being evaluated by a physio, saying he felt dizzy and needed to vomit. Sinner gingerly returned to the court after treatment to applause from the crowd but continued to melt in the 32C heat as Cerundolo took the set.

Unheralded Argentinian Cerundolo appeared inspired by the unexpected opportunity and raced to victory against his deflated opponent, who was left bent over double after every lengthy rally. "I was little bit lucky, I feel sorry for him," said Cerundolo, whose older brother Francisco also booked a last-32 spot shortly afterwards.

French 17-year-old Moise Kouame became the youngest man to reach the third round at a major since Rafael Nadal at Wimbledon 23 years ago. The wildcard delighted a raucous crowd with a dramatic 6-3, 7-5, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (10/8) over Paraguay's Adolfo Daniel Vallejo after four hours and 56 minutes on Court Suzanne Lenglen. "Frankly, without you, I would never have won this match, never," Kouame told the crowd.

Canadian fourth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime reached the third round for only the second time in his last eight Grand Slam events, beating Roman Andres Burruchaga in four sets.

Women's world number one Sabalenka ground down a battling Elsa Jacquemot to win 7-5, 6-2. The 67th-ranked home hope Jacquemot pushed Sabalenka for long periods on Chatrier but ultimately could not live with the Belarusian's power.

Sabalenka, chasing a fifth Grand Slam title and first at Roland Garros, will next take on



Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo appeared inspired by the unexpected opportunity and raced to victory against top seed Italy's Jannik Sinner at the French open. (Reuters)



Aryna Sabalenka ground down a battling Elsa Jacquemot to win 7-5, 6-2. (AFP)

Daria Kasatkina.

Reigning champion Coco Gauff also booked her place in the last 32, seeing off Egyptian qualifier Mayar Sherif 6-3, 6-2. The American, who could face Sabalenka in the semis in a rematch of last year's final, got the better of a scrappy match featuring 11 breaks of serve. "It was a physical match, a tough match, my patience was really tested today," said Gauff.

Naomi Osaka edged closer to a possible last-16 meeting with Sabalenka after reaching the third round for the first time in seven years by beating Croatia's Donna Vekic 7-6 (7/1), 6-4.

The four-time Grand Slam champion will face a tough test from American teenager Iva Jovic on Saturday after the 17th seed thrashed compatriot Emma Navarro 6-0, 6-3.

Sixth seed Amanda Anisimova, who lost the Wimbledon and US Open finals last year, progressed when her opponent Julia Grabher re-

tired after losing the first set 6-0.

SECOND ROUND RESULTS

(x denotes seeding):

Men: Juan Manuel Cerundolo (ARG) bt Jannik Sinner (ITA x1) 3-6, 2-6, 7-5, 6-1, 6-1; Martin Landaaluce (ESP) bt Vit Kopriva (CZE) 1-6, 2-6, 6-4, 7-5, 6-0; Jaime Faria (POR) bt Jan-Lennard Struff (GER) 7-5, 7-6 (7/1), 6-2; Moise Kouame (FRA) bt Daniel Vallejo (PAR) 6-3, 7-5, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (10/8); Alejandro Tabilo (CHI) bt Valentin Vacherot (MON x16) - walkover; Flavio Cobolli (ITA x10) bt Wu Yibing (CHN) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4; Learner Tien (USA x18) bt Facundo Diaz Acosta (ARG) 7-5, 4-6, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3; Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x25) bt Hugo Gaston (FRA) 2-6, 6-4, 6-2, 6-1; Zachary Svajda (USA) bt Adam Walton (AUS) 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2

Women: Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Elsa Jacquemot (FRA) 7-5, 6-2; Daria Kasatkina (AUS) bt Susan Bandecchi (SUI) 7-5, 7-6 (13/11); Iva Jovic (USA x17) bt Emma Navarro (USA) 6-0, 6-3; Naomi Osaka (JPN x16) bt Donna Vekic (CRO) 7-6 (7/1), 6-4; Madison Keys (USA x19) bt Antonia Ruzic (CRO) 6-4, 6-4; Diana Shnaider (RUS x25) bt McCartney Kessler (USA) 7-6 (7/3), 6-1; Oleksandra Oliynykova (UKR) bt Kimberly Birrell (AUS) 6-3, 0-6, 7-6 (10/5); Coco Gauff (USA x4) bt Mayar Sherif (EGY) 6-3, 6-2; Anna Kalinskaya (RUS/N.22) bt Alina Korneeveva (RUS) 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Camila Osorio (COL) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ) 7-5, 6-7 (6/8), 7-5; Maria Sakkari (GRE) bt Claire Liu (USA) 6-7 (7/9), 6-3, 6-3; Maja Chwalinska (POL) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x23) 6-4, 6-0; Diane Parry (FRA) bt Ann Li (USA x30) 6-3, 6-4; Amanda Anisimova (USA x6) bt Julia Grabher (AUT) 6-0 - retired

Sinner 'hits wall' as French Open bid collapses in second round

Paris: Jannik Sinner said he ran out of energy and "hit the wall" as his 30-match winning run came to an abrupt halt in the second round of the French Open.

World number one Sinner, the red-hot favourite at Roland Garros this year, suffered a dramatic five-set defeat by Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo after a sudden collapse on another sweltering day in Paris.

Sinner appeared to be cruising to victory, holding a two-set lead and a commanding 5-1 advantage in the third, before completely unravelling and sliding to a 3-6, 2-6, 7-5, 6-1, 6-1 loss.

"I had no energy today. That can happen. Nobody is a robot," said the four-time Grand Slam champion, who complained of dehydration and dizziness, saying he felt as though he might vomit.

The Italian left Court Philippe Chatrier to receive medical treatment while serving for the match. He returned minutes later but Cerundolo sensed his opportunity against an ailing opponent.

"I struggled, starting to feel very dizzy," added the 24-year-old Sinner. "I was very, very flat, you know, the whole body. I don't remember last time I felt this weak. I woke up this morning, didn't feel very well and tried to keep the points very short. In the beginning I was hitting very clean, very good, and then I just kind of hit the wall."

Sinner revealed he began to fade halfway through the third set as temperatures once again climbed above 30C during a record-breaking heatwave in France. But he refused to blame the conditions for his unexpected exit, his earliest at a Grand Slam since he lost at the same stage here in 2023.

"It was warm, but not crazy warm," said Sinner. "Really it was nothing against the heat, nothing against the weather. It was just me today, but it happens. I don't want to take anything away from him (Cerundolo). He played a very solid match."

Sinner arrived in Paris on the back of winning all three of the clay-court Masters titles, with his odds of completing a career Grand Slam enhanced further by the absence of injured rival Carlos Alcaraz.

Instead, it was another bitterly disappointing ending at Roland Garros for last year's runner-up who held three championship points 12 months ago before losing to Alcaraz.

"It's tough to accept because of the position I've been in and everything considered, but yeah, now I have a lot of time to recover," said Sinner. "I won't play any tournament on grass before (Wimbledon). Now I need really some time off, recover completely, also mentally, and then be ready to go again. As I said, in the beginning of the year, this (the French Open) is my main goal here. A very early exit it was not what I was looking for."

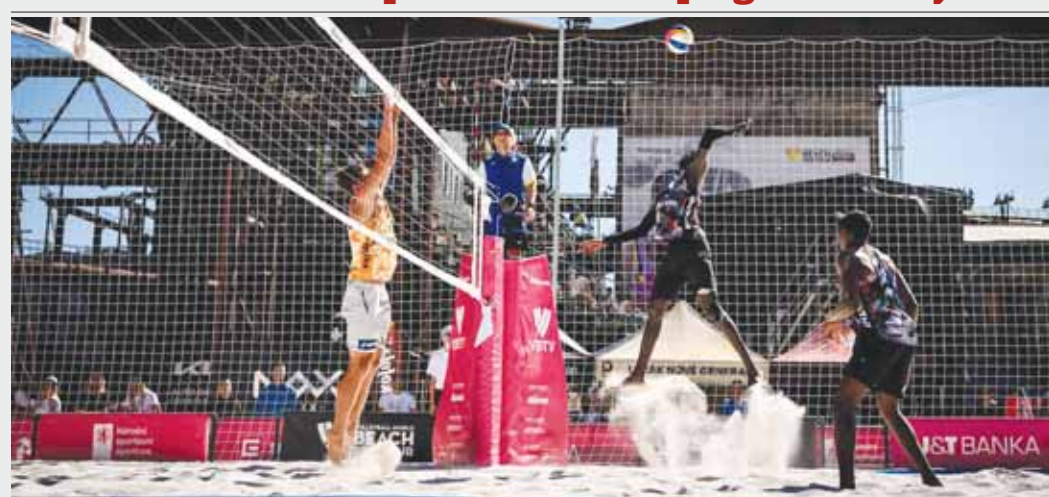
For Cerundolo, who goes on to play Martin Landaaluce or Vit Kopriva in the last 32, it was just the third Grand Slam match win of his career. The Buenos Aires native didn't blink as Sinner tried to gamely hang on, Cerundolo putting away the struggling top seed to pull off a monumental upset.

"It's tough for him (Sinner). I think I was a little bit lucky," said Cerundolo. "I'm super happy. I'm going to keep trying to play my best. It's a tournament I really like to play, clay is my best surface."



Italy's Jannik Sinner, the red-hot favourite at Roland Garros, suffered a dramatic five-set defeat by Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo after a sudden collapse on another sweltering day in Paris. (AFP)

Cherif and Ahmed open Ostrava campaign with easy win



Qatar's beach volleyball duo of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan made a winning start to their campaign at the Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour in Ostrava, Czech Republic after securing a convincing victory over Latvia's Ardis Bedritis and Arturs Rinkevics. The Qatari pair triumphed 21-18, 21-14 in their Group Two clash in the prestigious four-star tournament. Cherif and Ahmed will next face the American duo of Taylor Crabb and Andrew Benesh in the second round today. The Americans opened their campaign with a hard-fought 19-21, 21-17, 15-10 victory over France's Eloane Choueikh and Genevieve Gardock.

SPOTLIGHT

France's Kouame, 17, youngest man into Slam third round since Nadal

AFP
Paris

Home hope Moise Kouame became the youngest man to reach the third round of a Grand Slam tournament since Rafael Nadal 23 years ago, after an epic French Open victory, saying it was a "dream" to one day win the tournament. The 17-year-old wildcard survived a comeback from Paraguay's Adolfo Daniel Vallejo to claim a remarkable 6-3, 7-5, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (10/8) win after four hours and 56 minutes on a raucous, and boiling hot, Court Suzanne Lenglen.

Kouame is the youngest man to reach the last 32 of a major since Nadal at Wimbledon in 2003. Nadal went on to win 22 Grand Slam titles, including 14 at Roland Garros, and Kouame is not putting any limits on what he is hoping to achieve. "Winning Roland Garros is, of course, a dream, but winning all four (Slams) is a dream actually, you know. Being world number one is



also a dream," Kouame, currently ranked 318th, told reporters. "I think thinking about winning the tournament is a bit early. But, yeah, I'm really happy to be in the third round, as well, of course, and I'm going to try my best to win another match."

After wins for Rafael Nadal and Joao Fonseca on Wednesday, it is the first time three teenagers have made the third round of the men's singles at Roland Garros since Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Gael Monfils in 2006.

SJOSTROM'S 100M FREESTYLE WORLD RECORD IN PERIL AS SUB-52 CLUB GROWS

Melbourne: Olympic champion Sarah Sjostrom's 100 metres freestyle world record appears on shaky ground as Dutch dynamo Marrit Steenbergen and young American Anna Moesch shake up the women's all-time rankings.

Moesch, a 20-year-old from the University of Virginia, clocked 51.94 seconds in her win at the AP Race London International this week, only the third sub-52 swim in history.

It was briefly the second-fastest ever, behind only Sjostrom's world record of 51.71 set with the leadoff leg of the 4x100m relay at the 2017 world championships in Budapest.

On Wednesday, though, Moesch's mark was bettered by world champion Steenbergen, who clocked 51.86 on the south coast of France at the Canet stop of the Mare Nostrum series.

Steenbergen finished seventh behind

Sjostrom in the 100 final at the 2024 Paris Olympics but has been setting the standards since the Swede went on maternity leave. She brushed off her Paris disappointment by successfully defending her world title in Singapore last year, edging Australia's former world champion Mollie O'Callaghan.

Sjostrom, 32, returned to competition at a home meet last month but has focused on the 50m freestyle and butterfly as she

builds towards the European championships in Paris in July-August. For US swimming, Moesch's rise may be a game-changer for a nation that has been foiled repeatedly by Australia's women in the Olympic 4x100 relays. The Americans were runners-up at Paris as Australia won a fourth successive gold medal in the event. New Jersey native Moesch adds another weapon to a formidable U.S. programme boasting the versatile Kate Douglass and

Torri Huske, the individual 100m silver medalist at Paris.

Moesch swam a heat in the 100 relay at last year's world championships but was dropped for the final as Simone Manuel, Douglass, Erin Gemmill and Huske finished second to Australia. Australia's women will provide a glimpse of their form when they compete at national trials next month for the Glasgow Commonwealth Games starting on July 23.

SPOTLIGHT

Neymar out of Brazil friendlies and set to miss World Cup opener



Brazil's Neymar faces two to three weeks on the sidelines after injuring his calf. (AFP)

Reuters
Buenos Aires

Neymar has been ruled out of Brazil's upcoming friendlies and is set to miss their World Cup opener after scans revealed a grade-two calf injury, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said. CBF doctor Rodrigo Lasmar delivered the blow ahead of a players' press conference, confirming the 34-year-old forward faces two to three more weeks on the sidelines.

"Neymar reported for duty yesterday here at Granja Comary, underwent all the medical tests, which concluded with an MRI scan revealing a grade-two calf injury, not just swelling. He is expected to be cleared in two to three weeks," Lasmar said.

He did not say whether Neymar could be dropped from the squad. He had joined

the team on Tuesday but missed Wednesday's first training session and was sent to a private clinic in Teresopolis for imaging tests after complaints of swelling in his right calf.

According to Lasmar, the MRI showed not swelling, as previously reported, but a Grade 2 calf strain - a moderate injury involving a partial tear of the muscle fibers that requires rest and rehabilitation.

The diagnosis differs from that presented by Santos prior to the squad announcement. The club's doctor Rodrigo Zogaib had stated the problem was merely swelling and that Neymar would arrive fit to begin training on Tuesday.

Instead, Brazil's all-time leading scorer will miss Sunday's friendly against Panama at the Maracana and the subsequent match against Egypt in Cleveland. He is also all but ruled out of Brazil's World Cup opener against African champions Morocco on June 13 in New Jersey.

Brazil are in Group C also alongside Haiti and Scotland.

Manager Carlo Ancelotti had already been without defenders Gabriel Magalhães and Marquinhos and forward Gabriel Martinelli for Sunday's fixture due to their involvement in last weekend's Champions League final between Arsenal and Paris Saint-Germain.

Neymar's recall last week had generated widespread excitement after he had not featured in Ancelotti's plans during the Italian's year in charge. The forward, who has scored 79 goals in 128 international appearances, has endured years of injury trouble and an underwhelming return to Santos.

In an interview in early May, Ancelotti said that Neymar would receive no special treatment and that his place in the squad would be strictly based on fitness and form, not sentiment.

For now, Brazil must plan without him.

FOCUS

Departing coach Glasner says Palace where they belong

Mateta fires Palace to Conference League glory in Glasner farewell



Crystal Palace's goalkeeper Dean Henderson raises the trophy as he celebrates with his teammates after winning the UEFA Conference League final against Rayo Vallecano in Leipzig on Wednesday. (AFP)

AFP
Leipzig, Germany

Departing Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner toasted Wednesday's UEFA Conference League final victory by saying the club were back where they belong after a "year's detour".

Jean-Philippe Mateta's second-half goal took Palace to a 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano and a maiden European triumph. It also earned them a place in the Europa League. Palace's FA Cup win last season qualified them for this season's Europa League, but UEFA revoked their place in the second-tier competition due to multi-club ownership rules.

"I said to the players, get now what you deserve after winning the FA Cup -- the Europa League," Glasner told reporters after the match. "Now, it's a one-year delay, the club, the fans, the players get what they deserve. Sometimes you have to take a detour, and now we're there."

In January, Glasner announced he would leave the club in the summer. Palace had never won a trophy when he arrived, but he leaves having lifted the FA Cup, Community Shield and now a first European trophy. The Austrian, already a Europa League champion with Ein-

tracht Frankfurt in 2022, once again showed his excellence in knockout competitions.

"We hear a lot when the fans say thank you to us for giving them the best day of their life and all these emotions. And I said thank you to the players, because it's the same for me," Glasner said. "Because they gave me great, incredible days in my life and that's what I really appreciate."

Glasner said his time at Palace was "a good chapter to read in the Crystal Palace book, but other chapters will follow."

Defender Tyrick Mitchell said winning the Conference League felt like "pure delight" after a decade at the London club. "It's amazing, it's the same feeling that we had when we won the FA Cup," Mitchell said.

"It's just pure delight, pure emotions and we're just happy that we were able to get over the line. It definitely is (the hardest season we've played). We play 60 games a season," he said. "So many of our bodies are not used to it. We had times when we weren't winning. We lost a couple games in this competition."

Adam Wharton, whose shot rebounded into the path of Mateta for Palace's goal, struggled to sum up what the win meant for the team and their supporters. "You can't put the feeling into words. It's incredible, south London, the fans. It's unbelievable," Wharton said.

"The start of the game was a bit cagey, as it's bound to be in a final, but we grew into it, found where the spaces were. Wharton missed last season's FA Cup final festivities but said he had "two celebrations to catch up on".

After a cagey opening half with few clear chances, Mateta turned in a rebound for the game's only goal on 51 minutes, dashing Rayo's hopes of landing their first major silverware.

Palace overcame the sales of star players Eberechi Eze and Marc Guehi this season, and the fallout from the latter's January move to Manchester City, to cap their first full venture into European competition with a title.

France striker Mateta, the hero on the night, was a failed medical away from leaving Palace for AC Milan this winter. "I feel fantastic," said Mateta. "First time in Europe, we did it! Now I just want to celebrate, I just want to party. I'm tired, man. I gave everything. The team gave everything and that's why we won today."

Palace became the third London side in four years to win the competition, after West Ham in 2023 and Chelsea in 2025, demonstrating the Premier League's unmatched financial muscle. With Aston Villa already Europa League winners, Premier League champions Arsenal can complete a clean sweep in European competition by beating Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final tomorrow.

ATHLETICS

Paulino to open 400m title bid in Doha Diamond League

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Olympic champion Marileidy Paulino will open her bid to regain the Diamond League title in the women's 400m in Doha on June 19 at the Khalifa International Stadium. Dominican Republic star Paulino has dominated the 400m in the Diamond League in recent years, claiming 18 victories in athletics' premier one-day series and winning the series title three years in a row from 2022 to 2024.

Last season, she picked up victories in Paris, Monaco and Silesia before a surprise defeat to Bahrain's Salwa Eid Naser at the final in Zurich. She returns to action at the Doha Meeting next month, where she hopes to make a winning start to her 2026 campaign.

"I'm looking forward to returning to Doha where the crowd noise is incredible and the conditions are great for fast running," said the three-time Diamond League final winner who has won on both her previous outings to the Qatar

Sports Club in 2022 (51.20) and 2023 (50.51).

"My winter training has gone well and although the meeting record of 49.83 might be a tough one to beat so early in the season, every race is a challenge and an opportunity to grow.

"I'm proud to be an Olympic and world champion, but it's important that I continue to learn and work hard every day to become an even better version of myself so that I can help inspire and motivate the younger generation."

Doha is the seventh leg of the 2026 Diamond League. The meet was originally scheduled to take place at the Qatar Sports Club on May 8 as the opening event of the season. But the event was shifted to new venue and date due to regional tensions.

The first leg was held in Shanghai/Keqiao on May 16 and ends at the two-day series final in Brussels on September 4-5. The series unites the biggest names in track and field in some of the world's most iconic arenas, crossing four continents and 15 cities over the course of the season.



Marileidy Paulino has dominated the 400m in the Diamond League in recent years, claiming 18 victories in athletics' premier one-day series and winning the series title three years in a row from 2022 to 2024.

Qatar drawn with Saudi, Oman and Hong Kong in AFC U-20 Asian Cup qualifiers

Doha: Hosts Qatar were drawn alongside Saudi Arabia, Oman and Hong Kong in Group E of the AFC U-20 Asian Cup China 2027 Qualifiers following the draw held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Thursday.

The qualifiers, to be staged between August 25 and September 6, 2026 in a centralised league format, will introduce a new competition structure approved earlier this year as part of the Asian Football Confederation's youth competition reforms. Qatar will host Group E matches as they aim to secure one of the qualification spots for the 43rd edition of the U-20 Asian Cup, scheduled to take place in China from March 24 to April 10, 2027.

A total of 32 teams in the Qualification Phase were divided into eight groups of four, with the group winners and the seven best second-placed teams advancing to the finals. The team finishing bottom of each group will be relegated to the Development Phase for the next edition.

The revamped format introduces a two-phase system featuring promotion and relegation, designed to provide more competitive and balanced matches between teams of similar technical standards.

Elsewhere, 12-time champions Republic of Korea were drawn in Group A with hosts Kyrgyzstan, Philippines and Lebanon, while hosts Uzbekistan will meet Syria, India and Bangladesh in Group B.

Group C features Iran, hosts Vietnam, North Korea and Palestine, while Group D includes Jordan, Tajikistan, hosts Bahrain and Afghanistan. In Group F, Iraq will face hosts Thailand, the UAE and Turkmenistan, while Japan headline Group G alongside Yemen, hosts Cambodia and Kuwait. Defending champions Australia lead Group H with Indonesia, Malaysia and hosts Laos.

The Development Phase will feature 12 teams divided into three groups of four, with the group winners and runners-up earning promotion to the Qualification Phase of the next edition.

Newcastle winger Gordon undergoes medical ahead of Barcelona move

London: Newcastle United's England winger Anthony Gordon had a medical in Barcelona yesterday before a possible 80m euro (\$92.88m) move to the Spanish champions, British media reported.

Videos showed footage of the 25-year-old player boarding a private jet and said an announcement could come today or at the weekend. Gordon has had the best season of his career, netting 17 times for Newcastle across all competitions including 10 goals from 12 games in the Champions League, and is in England's World Cup squad.

Gordon still has four years on his contract, according to media reports, after joining in January 2023 and signing a long-term exten-

sion in October 2024. But Newcastle have failed to qualify for European competition next season, finishing 12th in the Premier League.

Newcastle manager Eddie Howe recognised this month that Gordon might have played his final game for the club after Bayern Munich expressed an interest, before Barcelona then swooped in.

SAUDI'S ABDULHAMID TO JOIN US CAMP AFTER PASSPORT THEFT DELAY

Saudi Arabia defender Saud Abdulhamid will join the national team's training camp in the United States after resolving a passport issue that delayed his departure.

The 26-year-old had been due to report to a

preparatory camp in Riyadh on Monday before travelling with the squad, but his passport was stolen during a break-in in Amsterdam, where he had been attending his wedding ceremony with family. Local media said Abdulhamid, who is on loan at Ligue 1 side Lens from Roma, will now link up with coach Georgios Donis's 30-man preliminary squad in New York.

Saudi Arabia have begun a series of training camps in New York and Texas, where they will fine-tune their preparations with friendlies against Ecuador, Puerto Rico and Senegal.

They open their Group H campaign against Uruguay in Miami on June 15, before facing Spain in Atlanta on June 21 and Cape Verde in Houston on June 26.