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FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

9
DAYS TO GO

TRIVIA

Who has the record for most goals scored in a single World Cup match?
Oleg Salenko (Russia) with five against Cameroon.



FOOTBALL

Qatar unveil final World Cup squad, begin training in US

Ellethy and Al Ali are the two players to miss out from the squad that travelled to Ireland last week

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

Qatar yesterday unveiled their final 26-player squad for the FIFA World Cup 2026, as coach Julen Lopetegui confirmed the players entrusted with carrying the nation's ambitions onto football's grandest stage in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The announcement, made on FIFA's squad submission deadline, represented a significant milestone in Al Annabi's preparations for what will be their second successive World Cup appearance and their first after earning qualification through merit. In a creative social media reveal, the Qatar Football Association presented the squad through a cinematic video featuring Lopetegui walking across a desert landscape as the players' images and names emerged from the sands, symbolising Qatar's remarkable journey to the global showpiece.

Goalkeeper Shehab Ellethy of Al Shahaniya and Al Gharafa defender Rayyan Al Ali were the two players omitted from the 28-man travelling squad that lost to Ireland in a friendly last week.

The squad announcement came a day after Qatar began training in Santa Barbara, California, following their arrival in the United States. Al Annabi have established their group-stage base at Westmont College, where preparations are now intensifying ahead of their opening fixture. Training sessions will be held at Thorrington Field throughout the first phase of the tournament, with the team set to relocate only if they advance to the knockout rounds.

The 2026 World Cup marks another defining chapter in Qatar's football evolution. Four years after making their tournament debut as hosts, Al Annabi return to the world's biggest sporting event having secured qualification on merit, navigating the Asian play-offs to earn their place among football's elite.

Drawn in Group B, Qatar will begin their campaign against Switzerland at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara on June 13 before facing co-hosts Canada in Vancouver on June 18. Their group-stage journey concludes against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle on June 24.

Before the tournament begins, Lopetegui's side will complete their preparations with a final warm-up fixture against El Salvador at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles on June 6.

QATAR SEEK TO MOVE BEYOND 2022 DISAPPOINTMENT

Qatar's maiden World Cup appearance in 2022 proved a difficult experience as they became the first host nation in tournament history to lose all three group-stage



Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui speaks to star forward Akram Afif during a training session in Santa Barbara, California.

matches. Yet the years since have witnessed a resurgence that has reinforced their standing among Asia's leading football powers.

Al Annabi successfully defended their AFC Asian Cup crown in 2024 and followed that achievement by securing a place at the World Cup through qualification, a landmark accomplishment in the nation's football history.

Preparations for the finals have not been without setbacks. Qatar endured a disappointing group-stage exit at the Arab Cup on home soil last December, while scheduled friendlies against Serbia and reigning world champions Argentina in March were cancelled because of regional tensions, denying Lopetegui valuable opportunities to test his squad against top-tier opposition.

Nevertheless, the squad remains built around the generation nurtured through Aspire Academy, the foundation of Qatar's rise over the past decade. The continuity forged through years of shared develop-

ment continues to be one of the team's greatest strengths.

Veteran captain Hassan al-Haydos adds invaluable leadership after reversing his international retirement at Lopetegui's request. Qatar's most-capped player remains a towering figure within the national setup and was instrumental in both of the country's Asian Cup triumphs.

The attacking burden will once again fall largely on the shoulders of Akram Afif and Almoez Ali.

Afif, crowned Asia's Player of the Year in 2024, remains the creative fulcrum of the side, while Ali, Qatar's all-time leading goalscorer, continues to provide a proven cutting edge at the highest level.

Mohammed Muntari also retains his place in the squad, despite his limited playing time this season due to injuries. The forward occupies a unique place in Qatar's football history as the scorer of the nation's first and only World Cup goal, against Senegal in 2022. Promising

19-year-old winger Tahsin Mohammed, who is of Indian origin, has also earned a place in the final squad after impressing during the build-up to the tournament.

In midfield, Qatar will depend on Assim Madibo, Abdulaziz Hatem and Karim Boudiaf. Jassim Gaber and Mohammed al-Mannai are young and filled with talent, while Ahmed Fathy gives more options.

Boualem Khoukhi, Pedro Miguel, Lucas Mendes and Homam al-Amin form the backbone of a defensive unit. The goalkeeping department features Mahmoud Abunada, Meshaal Barsham and Salah Zakaria.

With the intense spotlight that accompanied the 2022 tournament now behind them, Qatar arrive at this World Cup carrying less external pressure but greater belief. Back-to-back Asian Cup titles and a favourable group draw have fuelled hopes that Al Annabi can finally translate their continental success into a breakthrough performance on football's biggest stage.

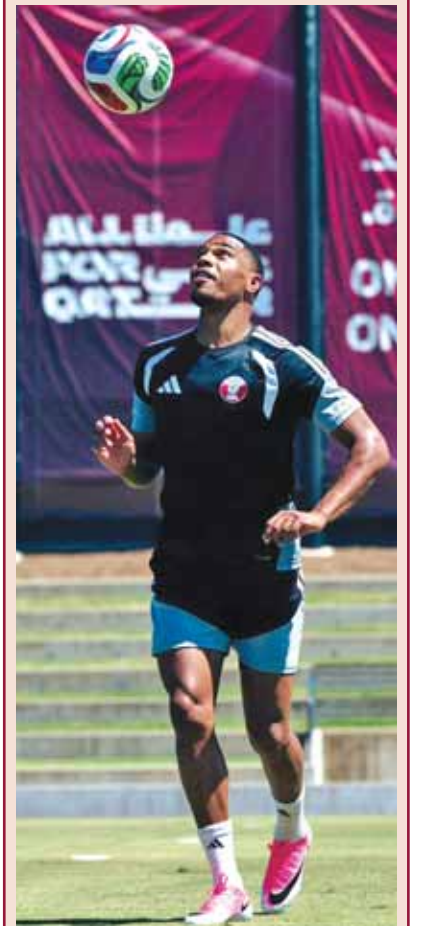
Qatar's final 26-player World Cup squad

Goalkeepers: Mahmoud Abunada, Meshaal Barsham, Salah Zakaria.

Defenders: Ayoub Alawi, Boualem Khoukhi, Homam al-Amin, Lucas Mendes, Issa Laye, Pedro Miguel, Alhashmi al-Hussain, Sultan al-Brake.

Midfielders: Assim Madibo, Abdulaziz Hatem, Ahmed Fathy, Karim Boudiaf, Jassim Gaber, Mohammed al-Mannai.

Forwards: Ahmed al-Janehi, Ahmed Alaa, Akram Afif, Almoez Ali, Edmilson Junior, Hassan al-Haydos, Mohammed Muntari, Tahsin Mohammed, Yousef Abdurisag



Veteran Pedro Miguel will form the backbone of Qatar's defensive unit.

FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP QATAR 2026 GROUP STAGE SCHEDULE REVEALED

Doha: The match schedule has been revealed for the group stage of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026. The tournament will take place from November 19 to December 13, with the finest youth international teams on the planet set to compete for global glory.

The inaugural 48-team edition of event was held in Qatar last year and proved a huge success, with packed-out crowds savouring the chance to watch exceptional young talents showcase their skills on the world stage. More thrills are in store at this year's event, with host of eye-catching match-ups set in the U-17 World Cup draw. A vibrant and colourful atmosphere can be expected when host nation Qatar take on Egypt in Group A. Spain and Morocco will face off



in a tantalising Group H clash, while there will be a showdown between the reigning U-17 South American and Asian champions when Colombia and Japan go

head-to-head in Group L.

The tournament will again be held at the state-of-the-art Aspire Zone complex, with eight matches per day during the group stage and Round of 32 phase. From Saturday to Wednesday, the action will begin at 15:30 local time, with the last kick-off at 18:30. On Thursdays and Fridays, the action will begin at 16:00, with the last kick-off at 19:00.

The final will be staged at the Khalifa International Stadium on 13 December at 19:00 local time. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the spectacular arena, which hosted eight matches at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as well as the last year's U-17 World Cup final.

Ticket information will be announced in due course.

Modric set for final World Cup as Dalic names Croatia squad

Zagreb: Croatia captain Luka Modric is set to lead his country at what is expected to be the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner's final World Cup appearance after coach Zlatko Dalic named an unchanged 26-man squad.

Dalic stuck with the provisional list announced on May 18, trimming the seven standby players as Croatia look to build on recent tournament success. Modric, 40, will have one last chance to guide Croatia to World Cup glory, having led the side to a runners-up finish in Russia in 2018 and third place in Qatar in 2022. Dalic's squad blends experience and youth, particularly in defence, where Manchester City's Josko Gvardiol is joined by highly rated teenager Luka Vuskovic, who is gaining experience on loan at Hamburg SV. Croatia face a challenging Group L campaign against England, Ghana and Panama.

Squad

Goalkeepers: Dominik Livakovic (Dinamo Zagreb), Dominik Kotarski (Copenhagen), Ivor Pandur (Hull City)

Defenders: Josko Gvardiol (Manchester City), Duje Caleta-Car (Real Sociedad), Josip Sutalo (Ajax), Josip Stanisic (Bayern Munich), Marin Pongracic (Fiorentina), Kristijan Jakic (Augsburg), Martin Erlic (Midtjylland), Luka Vuskovic (Hamburg SV)

Midfielders: Luka Modric (Milan), Mateo Kovacic (Manchester City), Mario Pasalic (Atalanta), Nikola Vlasic (Torino), Luka Sucic (Real Sociedad), Martin Baturina (Como), Petar Sucic (Inter Milan), Nikola Moro (Bologna), Toni Fruk (Rijeka)

Forwards: Ivan Perisic (PSV Eindhoven), Andrej Kramaric (Hoffenheim), Ante Budimir (Osasuna), Marco Pasalic (Orlando City), Petar Musa (Dallas), Igor Matanovic (Freiburg)

LUKAKU ON THE COMEBACK TRAIL: BELGIUM COACH

The fitness and form of Belgium's top scorer Romelu Lukaku pose no concerns ahead of the World Cup, coach Rudi Garcia insisted on the eve of today's warm-up clash against Croatia. The 33-year-old Lukaku was included in Belgium's squad despite playing only an hour of competitive football this season. Lukaku did not start for Napoli, making seven substitute appearances and netting a goal at Verona in February, and has been in Belgium since March rehabilitating a hamstring injury. But his role as the country's leading scorer, with 89 goals in 124 appearances, saw Garcia gamble on his fitness, and the coach is pleased with his decision.

CRICKET

ICC to trial pink balls to counter bad light concern

Pink balls are already used in day-night Tests played under lights

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Cricket's governing body said yesterday it would trial the use of pink-coloured balls in Test matches to maximise play during bad light.

The red balls usually used in Tests are not easily visible in fading light, while white balls used in limited-overs matches have been found to be not durable enough for the longer format.

Pink balls are already used in day-night Tests played under lights.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said in a statement its executive board had approved the "trials of the use of a pink ball in Test matches, with prior agreement from both teams, to maximise play in case of anticipated bad light".

The global cricketing body said it had also given approval for new "research on lighting technology for match officials and venues to reduce lost play due to poor light".

"Our discussions... have reinforced the ICC's commitment to governance, administration and the growth of cricket globally," said council chief Jay Shah, following a meeting in India's Ahmedabad.

Meanwhile the ICC has suspended Canada over breaches of the national board's membership



A file photo of England pacer Jofra Archer bowling with a pink ball before an Ashes Test last winter.

obligations, weeks after the global governing body's anti-corruption unit launched an investigation into Cricket Canada.

The Canadian national team will still be able to participate in ICC events, and funding to operate the teams will be provided through a controlled mechanism, the global governing body said yesterday.

A documentary aired in April by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation had made allegations of corruption in the governance of Cricket Canada involving several players and officials, in-

cluding match manipulation and threats of violence.

Media reports said the anti-corruption investigation was launched soon after.

"The ICC board resolved to suspend Cricket Canada from ICC membership with immediate effect due to serious breaches of its membership obligations," the global body said in a statement a day after a meeting in Ahmedabad, India.

Cricket Canada will have to follow a set of conditions, aimed at fixing its governance and administrative issues, to restore mem-

bership, the statement added.

"The progress against these conditions will be monitored by the ICC normalisation committee, supported by ICC management, with reinstatement of membership subject to the board being satisfied that the conditions have been fully met," the ICC said. The ICC also suspended the United States national body, USA Cricket, over membership rule breaches last year. The US national teams continue to participate in ICC events and are set to compete at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

FOCUS

Sooryavanshi sweeps IPL awards - but is too young to drive prize



AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi swept the end-of-season IPL awards and in doing so won an SUV - but the 15-year-old cricket prodigy will have to wait three years to drive it.

The Indian batting sensation plundered 776 runs at an average of 48.50 and a punishing strike-rate of 237.30 in 16 matches.

On Sunday he was named most valuable player, despite his team Rajasthan Royals narrowly failing to reach the final, and he also scooped the Orange Cap for leading the batting charts.

He was also named emerging player of the season, among other prizes.

The boy wonder was gifted a car, a TATA Sierra SUV, which at top price comes in at Rs2.1mn (\$22,000).

His total prize money was over \$57,000.

However, he won't be able to get

behind the wheel in the near future because the minimum driving age in India is 18.

"It feels good, but I'm feeling a little pressure because I'm here for an interview," Sooryavanshi said on winning the awards.

"But yes, it's a proud moment, it feels great, and I'll try to do even better next season," Sooryavanshi added.

Virat Kohli led Royal Challengers Bengaluru to their second straight title after they beat Gujarat Titans in the final in Ahmedabad.

Player of the match Kohli was seen speaking to Sooryavanshi during the presentation ceremony well past midnight.

Sooryavanshi struck 97 and 96 in his final two innings of this edition of the IPL, adding to the growing clamour for him to earn a maiden call-up to the senior national team.

According to Indian media, Sooryavanshi has been included in a 30-member of probables for the Asian Games in September-October in Japan.

COMMENT

Patidar credits coach Flower for RCB win

Reuters
Bengaluru

Royal Challengers Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar said head coach Andy Flower's efforts to change the team culture had helped them retain their Indian Premier League (IPL) crown.

Virat Kohli scored an unbeaten 75 off 42 balls as Bengaluru chased down 156 to secure a five-wicket win over Gujarat Titans in Sunday's final. Zimbabwean Flower, who was appointed ahead of the 2024 season, has helped Bengaluru shake off the "nearly men" tag they acquired after finishing runners-up three times in the first 17 editions of the IPL.

"I've played five seasons of the IPL and he is one of the best coaches. The way he handles players, not only those who play," Patidar told reporters.

"For him, the players who aren't playing, the first-timers, he spends a lot of time with every individual. I don't have words to express, but he's the best coach I've played under.

"The (team) culture has changed. I don't know what it was before 2021. But from when I've come in, there have been a lot of changes in the mindset of



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's captain Rajat Patidar kisses the trophy as he celebrates after his team's win against Gujarat Titans. (AFP)

players. The coaching staff treats every player equally - that's a big change." Speaking at a press conference in the early hours of yesterday, Patidar said Bengaluru had set their sights on becoming the first team to win three IPL titles in a row.

"It's my birthday. There can't be a better gift than this," added Patidar, who turned 32 yesterday. "The individual that I am, I always focus on living in the

present. We have won back-to-back, we'll celebrate but the focus will be how we can now do this three in a row."

'KOHLI USED TO DOING GREAT THINGS'

Patidar said Kohli is "used to doing great things" and his presence in the dressing room was invaluable after they won their second successive Indian Premier League title.



Andy Flower poses with IPL Trophy

"If I speak about Virat Kohli, I don't have words to explain him. He is used to doing great things," Patidar told reporters. "He is a great player, everyone knows him - the way he bats. We all have an opportunity to learn from him on and off the field. We spend lot of time with him and try to learn whatever he says, regarding cricket or anything else."

Patidar added: "He reaches out to players to talk about cricket. I always keep watching him -- what he does and the one thing is that his energy in the nets is same as it is in the match."

Called "King Kohli" for his prolific run-scoring, the star opener sealed victory with a six to cap a magnificent 42-ball innings.

Boutier wins LPGA title in New Jersey



Celine Boutier of France poses with the trophy after putting in to win on the 18th green during the final round of the ShopRite LPGA powered by Wakefern 2026 at Seaview Bay Course in Galloway, New Jersey. Boutier fired a five-under-par 66 in the final round to finish on nine-under 204. The 32-year-old from suburban Paris captured her seventh career LPGA title and first since the 2023 Maybank Championship in Malaysia. Boutier will play in next week's US Women's Open at Riviera

GOLF

Henley edges past Cole in a playoff battle to clinch PGA Colonial crown



Russell Henley with the winner's trophy following the final round of the Charles Schwab Challenge golf tournament. Henley won the tournament in a one hole playoff over Eric Cole. (Reuters)

AFP
Washington, United States

Russell Henley made four birdies in a row, the last in a playoff, to defeat fellow American Eric Cole on Sunday and win the PGA Tour Charles Schwab Challenge.

Henley sank 15-foot birdie putts on the par-three 16th and par-four 17th holes then birdied the 18th from just inside 17 feet to force a playoff with Cole at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas.

On the first playoff hole, the 18th, Henley dropped his approach just inside five feet and, after Cole missed a birdie putt from just inside 13 feet, sank the tension-packed winning putt.

"Felt like I was hitting good putts most of the day and they just went in at the end," Henley said.

"Then to come back to the playoff and do that, I'm still kind of shaking. That was as nervous as I've been over a putt in my whole life."

Henley, who shared third at the Masters in April, captured his sixth career PGA Tour victory and first since last year's Arnold Palmer Invitational.

"I just kept telling myself, 'I want to win,'" Henley said. "I want to be hitting these putts and be in contention. This is why I practice hard."

"I feel like I've worked harder and harder and just been a little off mentally this year. Just fought really hard until the end. It felt good to see an awesome result."

Henley fired a three-under par 67 and Cole shot 70 to finish 72 holes deadlocked on 12-under 268.

Cole overcame a double bogey at the ninth hole with a 24-foot birdie putt at the par-five 11th to regain the solo lead until Henley's closing run, missing out on a prime chance for his first PGA Tour triumph.

"It's very disappointing," Cole said. "I felt like I played pretty well for the most part. Hung pretty tough when I did miss a few shots. It's disappointing but I played well and I'm proud of that."

Defending champion Ben Griffin and fellow Americans Alex Smalley and Mac Meissner shared third on 269 with a sixth-place pack on 270 including reigning US Open champion JJ Spaun, fellow Americans Gary Woodland and Michael Brennan and Colombia's Nico Echavarría.

Henley opened eagle-birdie, made bogeys on the next three holes and was only lurking until his late flurry.

"I was feeling a little jittery or quick or something on the front," Henley said. "I just kind of calmed down a little bit and started to hit some good shots."

Cole, the son of South African pro golfer Bobby Cole and retired US LPGA star Laura Baugh, led by one stroke when the day began and made a birdie-birdie start.

Cole found water on his approach at the ninth hole and made a double bogey but when Spaun and Brennan made early back-nine bogeys and Cole sank his clutch birdie at 11, he was back at the top until the last hole.

SPOTLIGHT

Serena to return to tennis at Queen's Club

AFP
London

Serena Williams confirmed her return to tennis after an absence of nearly four years yesterday, with the American great set to play women's doubles at Queen's club later this month.

The 44-year-old, who has not played competitively since the 2022 US Open, has been granted a wild card for the London tournament, which starts on June 8. The 23-time Grand Slam singles champion will reportedly play alongside teenage Canadian Victoria Mboko. Rumours have swirled in recent months that the former world number one was on the verge of a return and yesterday's confirmation sent the tennis world into a frenzy.

Williams shared a video on social media of herself on a tennis court containing the cap-

tion: "Guess everybody heard the news", with her phone buzzing repeatedly in the background.

A post from the seven-time Wimbledon champion alongside the video said: "Good news travels fast."

Tournament chiefs said her return would be "one of the biggest sporting moments of the year so far."

"Queen's Club feels like the perfect place to begin this next chapter," Williams said in a statement from organisers.

"Grass has given me some of the most meaningful moments of my career, and I'm excited to be back competing on one of the sport's most iconic stages."

Queen's WTA tournament director Laura Robson described Williams as "one of the greatest athletes the world has ever seen".

Williams' third-round loss at Flushing Meadows in 2022 left her one short of the all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles,



Serena Williams will play doubles with Victoria Mboko

jointly held by Margaret Court and Novak Djokovic.

Her imminent return has been touted since it was revealed in December she had re-entered the anti-doping programme - a prerequisite to play on the tour again.

The American, renowned for her unparalleled power, denied she was planning a competitive comeback but speculation grew.

In March, Djokovic predicted a return for Williams and a number of players have spoken about the subject at the ongoing French Open. Coco Gauff, who lost in the third round at Roland Garros on Saturday, said she would love to face Williams for the first time.

Former world number one Martina Navratilova, who launched a comeback at 43, hailed her fel-

low American. "Serena brought the game to another level and it is incredible for the sport that she's pushing the boundaries and coming back," she said.

"To many of the younger players, they never had the opportunity to play her. Some may have never watched her on television so this will be a new and exciting experience."

Williams, who won her last singles Grand Slam in Australia in 2017, spent 319 weeks at the top of the world rankings and won 73 singles titles on the WTA Tour.

She also won 14 major Grand Slam doubles titles with older sister Venus Williams, who ended a 16-month hiatus from professional tennis last year.

When Serena Williams stepped away from the court in 2022 she did not want to use the word "retiring" but instead explained she was "evolving" away from tennis.

She has earned nearly \$95m in prize money and is believed to be

the highest-paid woman athlete of all time.

The American has largely stayed away from tennis over the past few years, giving birth to a second daughter in 2023.

She has focused on entrepreneurial projects through her venture capital fund Serena Ventures and has stakes in a number of sports teams.

Wimbledon starts at the end of June and it is not clear whether Williams, if she plays, would feature as a singles or doubles player.

Three-time Wimbledon champion John McEnroe said he was "semi-shocked" by her decision but added the "logical next step" would be for her to enter the singles draw at the grass-court Grand Slam. "She's not coming back as 'I'm happy to play and it's fun' -- she wants to go win another major," he said on *TNT Sports*.

"That's the only reason that I can think that Serena Williams will want to play tennis again."

FRENCH OPEN

Berrettini powers into last eight as Sabalenka through

AUGER-ALIASSE GALLOPS PAST TABILO AND INTO LAST EIGHT

AFP
Paris

Matteo Berrettini stormed into his first Grand Slam quarter-final in four years with an impressive straight-sets victory over Juan Manuel Cerundolo in the French Open last 16 yesterday.

The former Wimbledon finalist, who has been plagued by injuries, won 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (8/6) against Argentinian Cerundolo, who had dumped out world number one Jannik Sinner in the second round. "This (tennis) is the love of my life, I guess, otherwise I wouldn't keep coming back after all the setbacks, the injuries," said Berrettini.

"There were moments it was really tough to come back and hit a ball... But now I'm back and it's thanks to them (his team), my character and my resilience."

Berrettini, the world number 105, is the lowest-ranked Roland Garros men's quarter-finalist since Igor Andreev in 2007.

"I feel great, I feel happy," he added. "That's why I'm here, I just want to enjoy this atmosphere with my team, with my family."

The 30-year-old will next face either American 19th seed Frances Tiafoe or fellow Italian Matteo Arnaldi on Wednesday.

Berrettini, who lost the 2021 Wimbledon showpiece to Novak Djokovic, is the only Grand Slam finalist left in his half of the draw and one of only two remaining in the men's tournament, alongside Alexander Zverev.

"There are so many players who are playing unbelievable tennis," said Berrettini when asked about the open nature of the draw after surprise early defeats for Sinner and Djokovic.

"Tennis - it's unpredictable... The field is pretty packed and I'm trying to give my best, I'm focusing on my game and I want to enjoy this win."

He showed few ill-effects of playing the longest match of his career when he beat Francisco Comesana, saving two match



Italy's Matteo Berrettini celebrates winning his fourth round match against Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo at the French Open in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

points, in the previous round. Berrettini powered through the first two sets, saving the only break point he faced in the opening game. Cerundolo, who also won in a deciding-set tie-break in round three in the third-longest match in Roland Garros history, dug deep and broke for a 3-2 lead in the third set.

But he failed to serve it out and then missed three set points from 6-3 up in the tie-break.

Berrettini took full advantage, reaching his first major quarter-final since the 2022 US Open on his first match point, as Cerundolo could only dump a blistering return into the net.

Fourth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime despatched Alejandro Tabilo 6-3, 7-5, 6-1 to reach the quarter-finals for the first time. After playing nine sets and more than 11 hours as he won his first three matches in the first-week

heatwave, Auger-Aliassime sped through his fourth match in two hours, eight minutes with the temperature in the mid-20s.

The 25-year-old broke in the fourth game of the first set. He survived two break points as the Chilean attempted to fight back in the next game and then cruised to the set as the next four games were won to love on serve.

In the second set, Auger-Aliassime grabbed the only break he needed in the 11th game, and, as Tabilo subsided, raced through the third in 26 minutes.

Sabalenka downs Osaka
World number one Aryna Sabalenka took down fellow four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka in straight sets in yesterday's night-session match to reach the quarter-finals.

Sabalenka produced an impressive display against a battling Os-

aka to win 7-5, 6-3 and reach the last eight for a 14th consecutive major tournament.

The Belarusian is now the only Grand Slam champion left in either the men's or women's singles draws at Roland Garros.

"I'm mostly happy with the way I served and I was able to keep all the pressure on her," said Sabalenka.

"I didn't expect I would serve that great... I feel like I'm getting better and better with every match I play and overall I'm super happy with how I played today."

She made it three straight wins against Osaka this year, having lost their only previous meeting at the 2018 US Open.

Sabalenka will next take on Russian Diana Shnaider as she continues her bid for a maiden French Open crown and to banish the memories of her painful final defeat last year by Coco Gauff.

MOTORSPORT

McLaren join Ferrari as only F1 teams to make 1,000 GP starts

Reuters
London

Bruce McLaren, in a 1964 eulogy for late friend and fellow driver Timmy Mayer, said "life is measured in achievement, not in years alone" and more than 60 years later his team are still living by the maxim.

Founded by the late New Zealander, with barely a handful of employees, McLaren celebrate their 1,000th Formula One start in Monaco this weekend as only the second outfit after Ferrari to reach such a mighty milestone.

They stand alone in getting there as champions.

In terms of achievement, McLaren are the second most successful Formula One team of all time with 203 grand prix victories since the first in 1968.

They have won 10 constructors' championships and 13 drivers' titles since Brazilian Emerson Fittipaldi took the first in 1974, with Britain's Lando Norris the latest in 2025.

Ferrari, competing since the start of the championship in 1950, reached the 1,000 race milestone at their home Mugello circuit in 2020 and have 16 constructors' titles and 15 drivers' crowns with 247 wins.

The Italians have not won a title since 2008, however.

"It (McLaren) is just an iconic, legendary racing team," said Zak Brown, who became CEO in 2018 and has led his men and women back to the top after years in the doldrums.

"The drivers that we've had over the years are amazing!"

The roll call of champions testifies to that, with Britain's Norris the latest on the list. After Fittipaldi came James Hunt (1976), Niki Lauda (1984), Alain Prost (1985, 1986, 1989), Ayrton Senna (1988, 1990, 1991), Mika Hakkinen (1998, 1999) and Lewis Hamilton (2008).

Other champions to have raced for the team at some point include Fernando Alonso, Jenson Button, Denny Hulme, Nigel

Mansell, Kimi Raikkonen, Keke Rosberg and Jody Scheckter. "To see my name alongside some of these guys is very special," said Norris, who has driven for the team since his F1 debut in 2019.

The Briton described the current team as 'one big happy family' which was not always the case. McLaren, in the Ron Dennis era that started in 1981, were an innovative powerhouse with seven constructors' titles between 1984 and 1998.

Dennis started out as a mechanic and stood out for his attention to detail and vision - the award-winning factory in Woking and road car company are testament to that - while taking McLaren back to the top from a late 1970s slump. While he could appear obsessive and abrasive in a less fan-focused era, and was famed also for his use of convoluted 'Ronspeak' expressions, the team's success was enviable.

In 1988 McLaren won all but one race with Senna and Prost, whose rivalry and feuding lit up the track in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 2007, Hamilton's debut year, McLaren were fined a record \$100m by the governing FIA for being found illegally in possession of confidential Ferrari information in an infamous 'spygate' case.

Dennis was ousted in 2017, the sporting giant's reign ended after a boardroom coup with Bahrain's Mumtalakat investment fund in control.

McLaren returned to the top in 2024 with the constructors' title and both championships in 2025, the fan-focused team returning to the bright papaya colours of old.

"It's all about people," said Brown, an American. "When I started, the team had definitely gone through tough times. We were ninth in the championship, we didn't have many partners and the partners we had weren't very happy. Our fans were disgruntled, a lot of politics inside the racing team. "What was great was our brand. It wasn't in a great place but you can't take away the history and heritage."



McLaren's driver Lando Norris drives during the Chinese GP qualifying session in Shanghai on March 14, 2026. (AFP)

WANYONYI IN SHOCK DEFEAT TO BURGIN IN RABAT DIAMOND LEAGUE

Briton Max Burgin stunned Olympic 800 metres champion Emmanuel Wanyonyi in the Rabat Diamond League meeting on Sunday while Kenny Bednarek eased to a supremely comfortable 200m win over Letsile Tebogo. Burgin, 24, who was earmarked as a future world or Olympic medallist when he broke through the youth ranks before injuries hampered his progress, was simply too strong for Wanyonyi, the man who last year came close to breaking David Rudisha's 14-year-old world

record. The British athlete's win in 1min 42.98sec, over half a second faster than Wanyonyi's 1:43.56, suggests he can aim for something special at the main event of the season, the new World Athletics Ultimate Championships in Budapest in September. Wanyonyi said he realised he is the man to shoot at now: "I expected a race like this where someone would push me to my maximum. The race was so good, my fastest of the season. At the same time, it was very tough."

Bednarek blew away the men's 200m field to win in 19.69sec, a meeting record, as reigning Olympic champion Tebogo lumbered out of his blocks before the Botswanan found his running to break 20 seconds for the first time this season. "Obviously, there are the Ultimate Championships. You are going to see fast times and good competitions out there. I like competing so I can't wait for another year," said American Bednarek. The men's 3,000m steeplechase,

the final event of the evening, was fittingly won by Morocco's two-time Olympic champion Soufiane El Bakkali who clocked a world-leading time for the year of 7:57.25. Geordie Beamish, the New Zealander who created a huge shock by pipping El Bakkali to gold at last year's world championships in Tokyo, finished a distant 13th. American Yared Nuguse dug deep to hold off fast-finishing world champion Isaac Nader of Portugal in 3:30.35 in a high-quality men's

1500ms. In the women's equivalent, Ethiopia's Freweyni Hailu unleashed a decisive final lap to win the sixth Diamond League race of her career in 3:58.25. In the men's 400m, Jacory Patterson set a meeting record of 44.11sec in front of Britain's Olympic silver medallist from Paris, Matt Hudson-Smith, who clocked 44.25 in his season-opening race. Quincy Hall, the man who beat Hudson-Smith to that 2024 Olympic title but who was beset by hamstring injuries last year, showed he still has a

long way to go in his recovery as he trailed in last. Tina Clayton powered to victory in the women's 100m, leading home a Jamaican 1-2-3 with a time of 10.85sec. udney Werro was an impressive winner of the women's 800m in 1min 56.56sec, leaving the reigning world champion Lilian Odira of Kenya in third. Tobin Amusan of Nigeria blasted to victory in the women's 100m hurdles and Ukrainian world record holder Yaroslava Mahuchikh took the women's high jump after clearing 1.97m.



SPOTLIGHT

Fit De Jong offers an extra dimension to the Dutch side

The 29-year-old has battled with a succession of niggling injuries

Reuters
Zeist, Netherlands

For the Netherlands, doing without talismanic midfielder Frenkie de Jong has become a regular occurrence over the last two years, but they are always a better team with him in the lineup.

The 29-year-old has battled with a succession of niggling injuries, notably an ankle complaint that kept him out of Euro 2024 and more recently a hamstring tear that meant he missed the last two internationals in March.

His tally of 64 caps could have been a lot more had it not been for the setbacks, and the Dutch will be keenly awaiting a fit De Jong for the World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

He is the engine of the side, dictating the tempo of play and directing the flow and direction from his deep-lying role in the heart of the midfield. His incisive passing adds an extra dimension to the Netherlands' attacking prowess.

It was no wonder that when he missed a handful of games for Barcelona as they retained the La Liga title last month concern over his availability heightened again, although Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman moved quickly to quell any angst.

"We are not worried, although it would have been better had he played," Koeman said.

De Jong has been to two major tournaments but missing Euro 2024 in Germany proved a major blow. His ankle injury meant he spent almost a half year out of action.

"For someone like me, that is eternity. It was the toughest period of my life," he said.

"I missed some games at Ajax in 2018, which was when Ronald Koeman was about to call me up for the national team. He was actually at the training when it happened. I tried to block a ball and landed wrong, and I tore my ligaments in my other ankle. But that was nothing compared to this one," he said.

De Jong returned to help the Netherlands qualify for the World Cup and last month



Netherlands' midfielder Frenkie de Jong talks to the media in Zeist yesterday.

became the Dutch player with the most appearances for Barca (293), which revealed his worth to the club, who have had a long succession of such greats from Johan Cruyff and Johan Neeskens to Patrick Kluivert and Koeman.

This World Cup is a chance for De Jong to

carve out another place for himself among his country's leading footballers. "You have got even more desire to be there and to get the most out of it. Since my time with the Dutch team, I think we now have the squad with the most potential. But we also need to make sure we become the best team," said.

FOCUS

World Cup heat an obstacle to overcome for England: Tuchel

Reuters
London

Heat and humidity will be obstacles to overcome but England have full belief in their abilities and can go far in the World Cup, manager **Thomas Tuchel** said.

Many of the players reached Miami yesterday evening for a 10-day hot weather pre-tournament acclimatisation camp.

Arsenal's Bukayo Saka, Declan Rice, Noni Madueke and Eberechi Eze have been given more time to recover after Saturday's Champions League final loss to Paris St Germain in Budapest and will delay their departure. Crystal Palace's Dean Henderson, who helped the London club win the Conference League final last week, is also expected to be a later arrival and miss a friendly against New Zealand in Tampa on Saturday.

Premier League players Alex Scott, Jason Steele, Rio Ngunmoh, Josh King and Ethan Nwaneri will also join the squad for England's training camp.

The other 21 players, some of them on holiday in the Americas and Caribbean, will meet up in West Palm Beach. Tuchel advised his players to go on holiday in United States time zones before the tournament, to help the acclimatisation process.

"When I reconnected with the games and built our training sessions and meetings to reconnect the team in Florida with what we have built already, I saw a lot of quality," Tuchel said.

"That instantly gave me the full belief and excitement that we can go a long way."

Tuchel recognised the heat would not be to England's advantage after a long and demanding club season. "We are not used to being in this kind of heat and humidity, and even altitude if we play in Mexico," he said. "There will be a lot of challenges in this World Cup. The heat is one of them but we are prepared already."

"We know the individual reaction of the players to the heat and we have cooling strategies in



place. We've had help from Team GB and specialists all over the world to come up with solutions that help the players to adapt. We know exactly the amount of time we want to expose them in pre-camp, the ideal amount of time that you should train in the sun and that we also don't do too much."

Adapting to the US time zones will also be a factor, with England's tournament training base in Kansas City, Missouri, six hours behind UK time, which is the same as Dallas, where Tuchel's men face Croatia in their opening group game on 17 June.

The remaining Group L matches against Ghana and Panama, which will be played in Boston and New Jersey respectively, will be played in a time zone five hours behind the UK.

Scorching heat was a major concern at the June-July 2025 Club World Cup in the United States, with medical experts and players' unions expressing concerns about heat stress, dehydration and slower recovery times.

Tuchel said England were not making excuses ahead of the tournament in the US, Canada and Mexico.

"It (the heat) is a factor but it should not come across that we are already making excuses," he said. "It's just not in our favour and it is an obstacle to overcome."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hussein to spearhead attack as Iraq name squad

Iraq head coach Graham Arnold named his final 26-man World Cup squad, relying heavily on the core group of players who secured qualification through the intercontinental playoffs.

Experienced forward **Ayemen Hussein** is set to spearhead the Iraqi attack in North America. The veteran striker, a talismanic figure for the national team, leads a potent frontline that also features Ipswich Town's Ali Al-Hamadi and talented youngsters Ali Jassim and Youssef Amyn. A notable omission from Arnold's selection was Dundee defender Dario Naamo. The full-back was excluded after recently changing his sporting nationality, having represented Finland at youth international level.

Arnold's midfield selections boast considerable European experience, headlined by Utrecht's Zidane Iqbal and Heerenveen's Aymar Sher. Arnold has also decided to keep goalkeeper Kamil Saadi with the squad during the training camp as a precaution against potential injuries. Iraq are returning to the global showpiece event for the first time in 40 years after beating Bolivia 2-1 in April to secure the final World Cup spot. They have been drawn in Group I alongside France, Senegal and Norway.

SQUAD: Goalkeepers: Fahad Talib, Jalal Hassan, Ahmed Basil; **Defenders:** Hussein Ali, Manaf Younis, Zaid Tahseen, Rebin Sulaka, Akam Hashem, Merchas Doski, Ahmed Yahya, Zaid Ismail, Frans Putros, Mustafa Saadoun; **Midfielders:** Amir Al Ammari, Kevin Yakob, Zidane Iqbal, Aymar Sher, Ibrahim Bayesh, Ahmed Qasim, Youssef Amyn, Marko Farji; **Forwards:** Ali Jassim, Ali Al Hamadi, Ali Yousef, Ayemen Hussein, Mohamad Ali

BRIGHTON'S GOMEZ IN PARAGUAY'S SQUAD

Paraguay named a World Cup squad featuring Brighton midfielder Diego Gomez while his former club teammate Julio Enciso, now with Strasbourg, will lead the attack. Argentinian coach Gustavo Alfaro called up 20-year-old left-back Alexandro Maidana, who only made his full international debut in March, to fill in for the injured Mathias Villasanti.

Paraguay face joint hosts the United States in their opening Group D game on June 12 in Los Angeles before taking on Turkey on June 19 and Australia on June 25, with both matches in Santa Clara. They are returning to the World Cup for the first time since 2010 when they reached the quarter-finals in South Africa.

SQUAD: Goalkeepers: Roberto Fernandez (Cerro Porteno), Orlando Gill (San Lorenzo



de Almagro/ARG), Gaston Oliveira (Olimpia) **Defenders:** Gustavo Velazquez (Cerro Porteno), Juan Jose Caceres (Dinamo Moscow/RUS), Gustavo Gomez (Palmeiras/BRA), Omar Alderete (Sunderland/ENG), Fabian Balbuena (Gremio/BRA), Jose Canale (Lanus/ARG), Junior Alonso (Atletico Mineiro/BRA), Alexandro Maidana (Talleres/ARG)

Midfielders: Diego Gomez (Brighton/ENG), Andres Cubas (Vancouver Whitecaps/CAN), Damian Bobadilla (Sao Paulo/BRA), Matias Galarza (Atlanta United/USA), Braian Ojeda (Orlando City/USA), Mauricio Magalhaes (Palmeiras/BRA), Alejandro Romero Gamarra (Al-Ain/UAE) **Forwards:** Gustavo Caballero (Portsmouth/ENG), Miguel Almiron (Atlanta United/USA), Julio Enciso (Strasbourg/FRA), Ramon Sosa (Palmeiras/BRA), Antonio Sanabria (Cremonese/ITA), Alex Arce (Independiente Rivadavia/ARG), Gabriel Avalos (Independiente/ARG), Isidro Pitta (Bragantino/BRA)

CAICEDO, PACHO TO LEAD ECUADOR'S HOPES

Chelsea midfielder Moises Caicedo and newly crowned Champions League winner Willian Pacho of Paris Saint-Germain

will spearhead Ecuador's challenge at the World Cup.

Piero Hincapie, who was part of the losing Arsenal squad in the European showpiece in Budapest on Saturday, was also named on Sunday in the squad for the finals in the United States, Mexico and Canada. Enner Valencia, 36, will feature in his third World Cup finals.

Ecuador are in Group E and play their first match against Ivory Coast in Philadelphia on June 14 before facing debutants Curacao on June 20 in Kansas City and Germany on June 25 in New Jersey. They will aim to reach the knockout stage after being eliminated in the group phase at the 2022 finals in Qatar.

SQUAD: Goalkeepers: Hernan Galindez (Huracan/ARG), Moises Ramirez (Kifisia/GRE), Gonzalo Valle (Liga de Quito) **Defenders:** Pervis Estupinan (AC Milan/ITA), Piero Hincapie (Arsenal/ENG), Willian Pacho (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Joel Ordonez (Club Brugge/BEL), Felix Torres (Internacional/BRA), Jackson Porozo (Tijuana/MEX), Angelo Preciado (Atletico Mineiro/BRA)

Midfielders: Moises Caicedo (Chelsea/ENG), Alan Franco (Atletico Mineiro/

BRA), Alan Minda (Atletico Mineiro/BRA), Pedro Vite (Pumas/MEX), Jeremy Arevalo (Stuttgart/GER), Kendry Paez (River Plate/ARG), Jordy Alcivar (Independiente del Valle), Nilson Angulo (Sunderland/ENG), Anthony Valencia (Royal Antwerp/BEL), John Yeboah (Venezia/ITA), Denil Castillo (Midtjylland/DEN), Gonzalo Plata (Flamengo/BRA)

Forwards: Enner Valencia (Pachuca/MEX), Kevin Rodriguez (Union Saint-Gilloise/BEL), Jordy Caicedo (Huracan/ARG), Yaimar Medina (Genk/BEL)

AUSTRALIA INCLUDE ITALY YOUTH INTERNATIONAL VOLPATO

Socceroos coach Tony Popovic named Italy under-21 international Cristian Volpato in his 26-strong squad for the World Cup after he switched allegiance to Australia last week. The 22-year-old attacking midfielder, who was born and raised in Sydney and plays for Sassuolo in Serie A, is one of two uncapped players along with Japan-based striker Tete Yengi.

The squad is led by veteran goalkeeper Mat Ryan after a standout season with La Liga side Levante. He will be at his fourth World Cup, as will Melbourne City forward Mathew Leckie. Seventeen players will be at the global showpiece for the first time.

Volpato's bombshell late switch to Australia on Friday is a welcome boost after injured Middlesbrough midfielder Riley McGree was ruled out of the tournament. Australia, who are at their sixth successive World Cup, are in Group D alongside Turkey, co-hosts the United States and Paraguay.

SQUAD: Goalkeepers: Patrick Beach (Melbourne City/AUS), Paul Izzo (Randers FC/DEN), Mathew Ryan (Levante/ESP)

Defenders: Aziz Behich (Melbourne City/AUS), Jordan Bos (Feyenoord/NED), Cameron Burgess (Swansea City/ENG), Alessandro Circati (Parma/ITA), Milos Degenek (Apoel Nicosia/CYP), Jason Geria (Albirex Niigata/JPN), Lucas Herrington (Colorado Rapids/USA), Jacob Italiano (Grazia AK/AUT), Harry Souttar (Leicester/ENG), Kai Trewin (New York City/USA)

Midfielders: Cameron Devlin (Hearts/SCO), Ajdin Hrustic (Heracles Almelo/NED), Jackson Irvine (St Pauli/GER), Connor Metcalfe (St Pauli/GER), Aiden O'Neill (New York City/US), Paul Okon-Engstler (Sunderland/FC/AUS)

Forwards: Nestory Irankunda (Watford/ENG), Mathew Leckie (Melbourne City/AUS), Awer Mabil (Castellon/ESP), Mohamed Toure (Norwich/ENG), Nishan Velupillay (Melbourne Victory/AUS), Cristian Volpato (Sassuolo/ITA), Tete Yengi (Machida Zelvia/JPN)

Veteran Azmoun omitted as Iran announces squad

Tehran: Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun, the third-highest scorer in the history of the Iranian national team, is not among the players selected for the World Cup, according to a list published Monday by the country's football federation.

Azmoun faced intense criticism in the Iranian media in March after posting a photo on his Instagram account of himself alongside the premier of the United Arab Emirates, a US ally and supporter of Washington in its war against Iran.

Some Iranian state media outlets at the time called it a "betrayal," given that Azmoun plays and lives in Dubai.

The 31-year-old forward, who previously played for Bayer Leverkusen and AS Roma and has scored 57 goals in 91 international appearances, had already drawn criticism in 2022 for his support of protesters during the widespread demonstrations following the death of Mahsa Amini.

Iran is scheduled to play its first match on June 15 against New Zealand in Los Angeles.

SQUAD (ALL IRAN-BASED UNLESS STIPULATED)

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand, Payam Niazmamd, Hossein Hosseini

Defenders: Ehsan Hajsafi, Milad Mohammadi, Ali Nemat, Shojae Khalilzadeh, Hossein Kanaanzadegan, Dania Eiri, Ramin Rezaeian, Saleh Hardani

Midfielders: Saman Ghoddos (Kalba/UAE), Saeid Ezatollahi (Shahab al-Ahli/UAE), Mohammad Ghorbani (al-Wahda/UAE), Rouzbeh Cheshmi, Amir Mohammad Razzaghinia, Mohammad Mohebi (Rostov/RUS), Mehdi Torabi, Mehdi Ghayedi (Al-Nasr/UAE), Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Aria Yousefi

Forwards: Mehdi Taremi (Olympiakos/GRE), Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh, Ali Alipour, Shahriyar Moghanlou (Kalba/UAE), Dennis Eckert (known in Iran as Dennis Dargahi, Standard Liege/BEL)