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TRIVIA

Which country was the first African nation to reach the quarterfinals of the FIFA World Cup?  
Cameroon in 1990.

FOOTBALL

# Lopetegui urges Qatar to turn dream into something special

'We are not going there just to participate. We are there to compete and to enjoy the challenge'

By Sahar Bidappa  
Doha

When Julen Lopetegui speaks of "a dream that has become a reality", the Qatar coach is referring not only to his players but also to himself.

The 59-year-old arrived in Qatar with an impressive managerial pedigree, having coached Spain, Real Madrid, Wolverhampton Wanderers and West Ham United. Yet despite his vast experience, he has never managed at a FIFA World Cup.

He travelled to Russia for the 2018 World Cup as Spain coach, only to be dismissed on the eve of the tournament after news emerged that he had agreed to take charge of Real Madrid following the competition. Eight years later, the opportunity has returned - this time with Qatar, a nation that also has a point to prove after a disastrous World Cup debut on home soil in 2022.

Since taking charge of Qatar on May 1 last year, Lopetegui's tenure has not been spectacular, but he has achieved the primary objective. He guided Al Annabi to a second successive World Cup appearance and their first qualification through the traditional qualifying route.

It was far from straightforward.

The two-time Asian champions finished fourth in their six-team qualifying group before advancing through a three-team play-offs, where a goalless draw

against Oman and a 2-1 victory over the UAE secured their place at the finals.

Qatar's preparations have also been far from ideal. Regional conflict in the Middle East forced the cancellation of high-profile friendlies against Serbia and reigning world champions Argentina in March. A scheduled warm-up match against Sudan last month was also called off due to illness within the Sudanese camp.

Although Qatar gained valuable match practice in last week's 1-0 defeat to Ireland, Lopetegui would undoubtedly have preferred more time on the pitch with his players before the tournament.

Now standing once again on the brink of football's biggest stage, the Spaniard has urged his squad to embrace the occasion while maintaining a competitive mindset.

A day after announcing Qatar's final 26-man squad for the World Cup, which begins on June 11, Lopetegui called on his players to seize the opportunity.

"This is a dream that has become a reality because the players earned their place at the World Cup. Now they have to enjoy the experience, but at the same time maintain the right mentality. We are not going there just to participate. We are there to compete, to enjoy the challenge and to give our best," he said.

Lopetegui's squad retains a familiar core, with several members of the 2022 team included, led by two-time Asian Player of the Year Akram Afif and Qatar's all-time leading scorer Almoez Ali. He has also backed a new generation, with 12

members of the squad preparing for their first World Cup appearance

"It is always important for young players to push the more experienced ones," Lopetegui said. "That is very good for the national team. At the moment, we have two or three new players who are really pushing hard and challenging the others in the squad. This raises the level of everyone and creates healthy competition within the team."

"Competition is important because it makes players more competitive. The experienced players have to be ready to defend their places, and that also says a lot about their character. We have seen this kind of character in several players, which is very positive for us," he added.

Qatar find themselves in a relatively favourable Group B, although each of their opponents will present a significant challenge. Al Annabi open their campaign against Switzerland in Santa Clara on June 13 before facing co-hosts Canada in Vancouver on June 18 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle six days later.

Lopetegui, however, insists his focus remains firmly on his own team rather than the opposition. "I am not worried about whether we face Bosnia, Italy or Switzerland. What concerns me is how we compete. In theory, any of those teams may be stronger than us, but they have to prove that on the pitch. Our job is to defend our chances and compete from the first minute," said Lopetegui, who made 149 La Liga appearances as a goalkeeper

for Real Madrid, Logrones, Barcelona and Rayo Vallecano, earned one cap for Spain and was part of the squad at the 1994 World Cup.

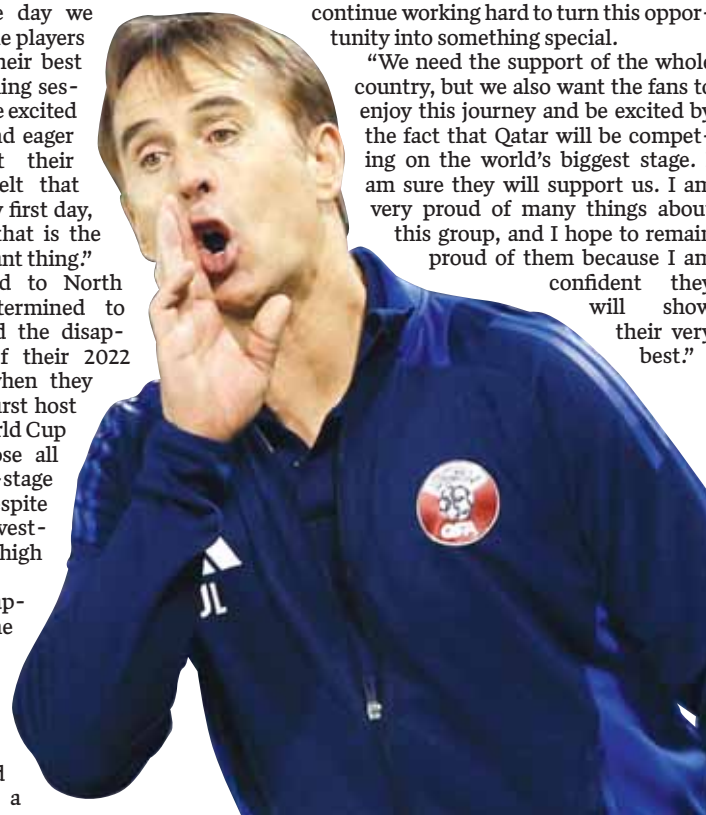
"Since the day we arrived, all the players have given their best in every training session. They are excited to be here and eager to represent their country. I felt that from the very first day, and for me that is the most important thing."

Qatar head to North America determined to move beyond the disappointment of their 2022 campaign, when they became the first host nation in World Cup history to lose all three group-stage matches despite enormous investment and high expectations.

"What happened in the past is history," Lopetegui said. "Before, reaching the World Cup was a

dream, and we achieved it. Now we have another dream and another challenge ahead of us. We have worked very hard to put ourselves in this position and we must continue working hard to turn this opportunity into something special.

"We need the support of the whole country, but we also want the fans to enjoy this journey and be excited by the fact that Qatar will be competing on the world's biggest stage. I am sure they will support us. I am very proud of many things about this group, and I hope to remain proud of them because I am confident they will show their very best."



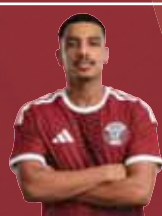
## QATAR'S 26-PLAYER SQUAD FOR THE FIFA WORLD CUP 2026



Julen Lopetegui  
Coach

Qatar's World Cup squad strikes a balance between experience and fresh faces as Al Annabi prepare for their second appearance on football's biggest stage. Led by established stars Akram Afif and Almoez Ali, the 26-man squad includes 12 players set to make their World Cup debuts, reflecting the team's gradual evolution since their difficult campaign on home soil in 2022. Backed by the confidence of successive Asian Cup triumphs, Qatar head to North America determined to leave a stronger mark and showcase the progress made over the past four years

Defenders



Alhasshi Alhussain  
Age: 22  
Club: Al Arabi



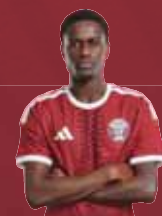
Ayoub Aloui  
Age: 21  
Club: Al Gharafa



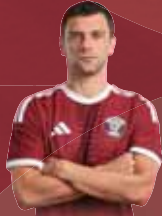
Boualem Khoukhi  
Age: 35  
Club: Al Sadd



Homam Al Amin  
Age: 26  
Club: Cultural Leonesa



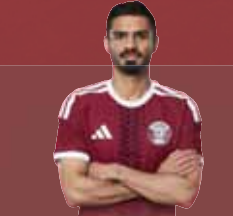
Issa Laya  
Age: 28  
Club: Al Arabi



Lucas Mendes  
Age: 35  
Club: Al Wakrah



Pedro Miguel  
Age: 35  
Club: Al Sadd



Sultan al-Brake  
Age: 30  
Club: Al Duhail

Goalkeepers



Mahmoud Abunada  
Age: 26  
Club: Al Rayyan



Mehaal Barsham  
Age: 28  
Club: Al Sadd



Salah Zakaria  
Age: 27  
Club: Al Duhail



Midfielders



Abdulaziz Hatem  
Age: 36  
Club: Al Rayyan



Ahmed Fathy  
Age: 33  
Club: Al Arabi



Assim Madibo  
Age: 29  
Club: Al Wakrah



Jassim Gaber  
Age: 24  
Club: Al Rayyan



Karim Boudiaf  
Age: 35  
Club: Al Duhail



Mohammed Mannai  
Age: 23  
Club: Al Shamal

Forwards



Ahmed al-Janehi  
Age: 25  
Club: Al Gharafa



Ahmed Alaa  
Age: 33  
Club: Al Rayyan



Akram Afif  
Age: 29  
Club: Al Sadd



Almoez Ali  
Age: 29  
Club: Al Duhail



Edmilson Junior  
Age: 31  
Club: Al Duhail



Hassan Al Haydos  
Age: 35  
Club: Al Sadd



Tahsin Mohammed  
Age: 19  
Club: Al Duhail



Youssef Abdulrazzaq  
Age: 26  
Club: Al Wakrah



Mohammed Muntari  
Age: 32  
Club: Al Gharafa

## CRICKET

# Australia level series with gutsy win over Pakistan

Inglis and Green hit half centuries while pacer Ellis grabbed 4-33

AFP  
Lahore, Pakistan

Fast bowler Nathan Ellis took a career best four-wicket haul as an understrength Australia shocked Pakistan by 41 runs in the second one-day international in Lahore yesterday, levelling the three-match series 1-1.

Australia's total of 231-9 in 50 overs had fighting half centuries from Josh Inglis and Cameron Green before Ellis grabbed 4-33 to leave Pakistan 190 all out in 44 overs.

Pakistan won the first match by five wickets in Rawalpindi which now sets up a series-deciding match, also in Lahore tomorrow.

With a host of top ODI players including skipper Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, Australia's second string staged a remarkable comeback, countering Pakistan's spin and batting with confidence.

Allrounder Shadab Khan played a lone hand for the home team with a resolute 104-ball 71 and was the last man out, stumped off a spinner Tanveer Sangha's wide ball for Australian victory.

Ghazi Ghori made 37 with five boundaries.

Shadab hit three sixes and a boundary and repaired Pakistan's faltering position of 6-78 with a 59-run stand with Arafat Minhas (33) and another 31 with Shaheen Shah Afridi (11).

But Ellis - whose previous best of 2-13 was against India in 2023 - dismissed Minhas leg-before to give Australia the gateway for victory.

Part-time spinner Matthew Short also took a career best 3-36.

Ellis gave Australia an ideal start by dismissing Maaz Sadaqat off the third ball of the innings for nought before getting the prized



Australia's players celebrate after the dismissal of Pakistan's Maaz Sadaqat during the second one-day international (ODI) in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

wicket of Babar Azam for 16.

Inglis said: "I know guys had some good conversations around training yesterday, just about individual method and how they were going to go about it, and it was obviously dependent on the wicket, and it looked very similar to the other day."

He added: "So, I thought the guys played it really well. There were some good contributions across the board and some good partnerships on the batting front. I think it was a pretty good total in the end. It would have been nice for someone to go on and get a big score, but it was just about building that partnership in those

middle overs, just being nice and patient."

Earlier, Green knocked a polished 92-ball 53 while Inglis scored a 74-ball 51 after the visitors were put in to bat by Pakistan.

The Green-Inglis duo lifted Australia from 51-3 with a sedate 51-run stand after Pakistan attacked with the spin as early as from the fifth over.

But it was pacer Shaheen who bowled opener Alex Carey with the first ball of the match before spinners Abrar Ahmed and Minhas struck once each, removing Short (15) and Marnus Labuschagne for five respectively.

Inglis hit five boundaries in

his fifth ODI fifty before he was bowled by Minhas in the 27th over. Minhas, who took five wickets on debut in Rawalpindi on Saturday, finished with 2-27.

Green added another invaluable 65 runs for the fifth wicket with Matthew Renshaw (43) before Abrar removed Green to push the visitors hard.

Green's third ODI half century had a single boundary and two sixes.

Oliver Peake ensured Australia post a fighting total with a brisk 32-ball 31 inclusive of two sixes and a boundary.

Shaheen was the best home bowler with 3-36.

## FOCUS

## Fast bowler Baker pushing for England Test debut at Lord's

AFP  
London

England could hand a Test debut to fast bowler Sonny Baker when they face New Zealand in tomorrow's series opener at Lord's.

The 23-year-old is in contention to feature in England's first Test since their 4-1 Ashes drubbing in Australia. Josh Tongue and the recalled Ollie Robinson appear likely to take two of the seam-bowling places, leaving Baker vying with Gus Atkinson for a spot in the team.

Atkinson has an impressive record at Lord's, with 19 wickets at just 10.94 in two previous Tests at the London ground, as well as a century against Sri Lanka, but Baker's greater speed makes him an attractive option. An unsettled weather forecast could work in Baker's favour if there is a prospect that overs might be lost in the first of a three-Test series.

"He's quick," England coach Brendon McCullum said at Lord's yesterday. "I think he's going to be a cricketer that the country really gets behind."

"You can see he charges in and leaves everything out there. Some guys have a bit more of a rhythmic component to their style - I think Sonny is full noise."

Both Baker and Atkinson were

named in a 12-man squad announced by England yesterday, with Shoaib Bashir the lone specialist slow bowler included.

McCullum, set to give a debut to batter Emilio Gay, said Baker's bowling can touch 90 miles (145 kilometres) per hour.

"He's an exciting proposition and, if it's not in this Test, his time will come. If it is this Test, I'd expect him to do a good job," he said.

"We'll just work out whether we want that extra air speed, if all of a sudden it becomes 35 degrees and flattens out, or if we stick to what's tried and tested at Lord's and remain with the type of bowlers that will extract some movement with the overhead conditions."

Off-spinner Bashir, who has seen off competition from all-rounder Rehan Ahmed, who bowls leg-breaks, has not played for England since last year's India series. The 22-year-old found himself surplus to requirements during the Ashes in Australia.

"I think they are both young and exciting and they've had some great days already in an England shirt," said McCullum. "Bash has the ability to play more of a holding role in the first couple of days here at Lord's."

"As the game deepens, and if spin starts to become more prevalent, then he can go more into an attacking role. There's a little bit of tactical nuance there."

## ANNOUNCEMENT

## England cricket legend Flintoff named Sydney Thunder head coach

AFP  
Sydney

England cricket legend Andrew Flintoff was named Tuesday as head coach of the Sydney Thunder, the Big Bash League team said, hailing it as their "most significant off-field acquisition in club history".

The 48-year-old has signed a two-year deal for what will be his first overseas coaching role, following weeks of speculation.

Former England captain Flintoff starred for his country across all three formats and was last year linked with taking over from Brendon McCullum as England's head coach.

The charismatic former all-rounder has cut his teeth in coaching with the second-string England Lions, as well as the Northern Superchargers in The Hundred.

In 2022 the popular Flintoff was left with severe facial and rib injuries after a car crash while filming for the hit BBC television programme Top Gear. The Big Bash League is Australia's premier Twenty20 competition.

"I can't wait to get over there and get started," he said in a statement released by the team.

"I'm looking at this with a lot of optimism. You look at the franchise, you look at the players, you look at the support, and I think there's something really big to build on."

The Thunder squad is led by former Australian opener David Warner and also includes Sam Konstas, the 20-year-old once seen as Warner's successor at Test level.

They finished bottom of the



table last time out, and Flintoff replaces Trevor Bayliss, who departed the role in February after six seasons at the helm.

"I want our players to connect with the people that come and see us. I want them to enjoy playing cricket," said Flintoff, who had a stint in the BBL as a player over a decade ago.

"However, all that is underpinned by hard work... I want them to play with passion and leave everything out there on the field."

"I'm excited to come over, get involved and coach this team. I'm here to do the best job I possibly can for the team and everybody that comes out and supports us," he said.

Thunder general manager Trent Copeland said: "This is a huge day in the history of Sydney Thunder, and the BBL more broadly. Fred brings something truly unique to Sydney Thunder. He's a global icon of the game, but more importantly he is a modern leader who understands how to build high-performance environments, connect with players as people, and set standards that last."

## COMMENT

## Williamson glad to be back at 'unique' Lord's

AFP  
London

New Zealand's Kane Williamson is relishing his return to Lord's as the iconic stadium stages its 150th Test when the Black Caps take on England this week.

Lord's, which has staged more Tests than any other venue, is cricket's most historic arena and Williamson has no intention of taking his latest appearance there for granted.

"It's always a special Test," the batsman told reporters at Lord's yesterday.

"I've played for a while and only get a handful of opportunities to come to Lord's and play and have the experience that you have here."

Williamson, a veteran of 109 Tests - but only four at Lord's - added: "I know for a number of players in the dressing room it's their first time and they're pretty excited at that prospect."

Asked why playing at Lord's, the headquarters of Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in north London, was different to other grounds, the 35-year-old added: "I think the way they maintain the tradition is quite special. It's

unique to Lord's. The history that surrounds it, the effort that goes into all of that. You come here and you notice those differences to all other grounds.

And I mean, every ground is different. But walking out to the pitch through the Long Room (of the Pavilion), bumping into a few (MCC) members, and obviously the lunches are iconic.

"There's a number of things that are memorable here, but it is a special place to play.

"And I think everybody feels it their first time and also values every opportunity that they have."

Williamson has scored over 9,000 Test runs at an average of 54.58 including 33 centuries.

While celebrated batsmen Ricky Ponting, Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara all failed to score a Test hundred at Lord's, Williamson got his name on the dressing room honours board with an innings of 132 back in 2015.

"I suppose the honours board is something that people talk a lot about," said Williamson ahead of the opening day of the first Test tomorrow.

"A memorable time some time ago, but I do remember it fondly."



Kane Williamson batsman avoids a bouncer at the indoor nets at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. New Zealand take on England in the first of three Tests at Lord's starting tomorrow. (@BLACKCAPS)

## SPOTLIGHT

## Finch beats Hussein as Orx Boxing Show concludes

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Dexter Finch beat Ahmed Hussein in one of 12 fights at the Orx Boxing Show that concluded in Doha over the weekend. In another bout, Abdullah Alfagay beat Naim Darami.

The event - sanctioned by Qatar Boxing Federation (QBF) - was originally planned for 28th Feb with a stacked fight card. However, the event was cancelled at the last minute and rescheduled for May following the start of the regional conflict.

Throughout the months that followed, the tournament hosts kept the fighters fit and ready. The event had participants from local clubs and the QBF. The participants ranged from 14 through to adult competitors. The re-

sult was a deeply competitive, diverse, and inclusive sporting community under one roof.

Many nationalities were involved from all around the world bringing together very diverse and inclusive event.

"We had financial support from Jaidah Group through Hyundai sponsorship who have been helping us all year to provide more top quality coaching and the best uniforms for coaches and athletes," a member of the hosting body said.

"Along side these we also had support for prizes from Shoebox New York and Topside Meats who have been really great and supportive too," he added.

"A special thank you to Qatar Boxing Federation for providing us with the officials for the evening who all did an amazing job," the official said.



Prize winners with their certificates at the Orx Boxing Show held in Doha. A total of 12 fights were held.



Dexter Finch (right) after his win over Ahmed Hussein in one of the 12 fights at the Orx Boxing Show.



TENNIS

# Zverev powers into semis, Kostyuk to face Andreeva

IT IS THE FIFTH TIME IN SIX YEARS ZVEREV HAS MADE IT TO THE LAST-FOUR STAGE IN PARIS

AFP  
Paris

**A**lexander Zverev breezed past Rafael Jodar to stay on course for an elusive Grand Slam title at the French Open, where Marta Kostyuk and Mirra Andreeva will meet for a place in the women's final.

Zverev, the highest-ranked player left in the men's draw, put an end to Spanish teenager Jodar's impressive Roland Garros debut, easing to a 7-6, (7/3), 6-1, 6-3 win yesterday.

The 29-year-old Zverev is the clear favourite for a maiden Grand Slam title. He has finished runner-up on three occasions, including at the 2024 French Open.

"I want to win the matches that are ahead of me, that is my goal, that is my aim," said Zverev, who has only dropped one set en route to the last four.

It is the fifth time in six years he has made it to this stage in Paris.

"I'm happy to be in the semi-finals, for now," he added.

Zverev will play the winner of the night-time encounter between Brazilian sensation Joao Fonseca and Czech youngster Jakub Mensik.

For Jodar, the grind of back-to-back five-setters appeared to take its toll as he struggled to cope after blowing a 5-2 lead in the opening set. The 19-year-old Jodar was featuring at just his second major. He was ranked 707th in the world this time last year, losing in the



Germany's Alexander Zverev plays a forehand return to Spain's Rafael Jodar during their quarter-final on day 10 of the French Open in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

first and second rounds of second-tier Challenger events in the United States during the 2025 French Open.

**'FLASHBACKS'**

Earlier, the in-form Kostyuk held her nerve to withstand a comeback from compatriot Elina Svitolina in the first all-Ukrainian women's quarter-final at a Grand Slam in the Open era, winning 6-3, 2-6, 6-2.

The 23-year-old Kostyuk

extended her unbeaten run on clay this season to 17 matches to reach her first Grand Slam semi-final.

"I'm very happy I found a way. It was very difficult in the first two sets," said Kostyuk, who again dedicated her victory to the people of Ukraine.

Svitolina, 31, fell at the quarter-final stage at Roland Garros for the sixth time. It is the only major where she has not reached the last four.

Kostyuk has been an outspoken supporter of Ukraine during the ongoing war with Russia. Her next opponent is Russian teenager Andreeva, who she beat in the Madrid Open final last month.

"I usually never care who is on the other side of the net. I'm there to play tennis and do my job, and that's it," said Kostyuk.

Andreeva breezed into her second French Open semi-final earlier in the day with a 6-0, 6-3 rout of Romania's Sorana Cirstea, who plans to



Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk reacts to her victory over Elina Svitolina at the end of their quarter-final at the French Open in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

retire at the end of the season.

The eighth seed needed less than an hour to dispatch the 36-year-old Cirstea, appearing in the last eight in Paris for the first time since 2009.

Andreeva beat Cirstea en route to the title in Linz earlier this year, but made short work of her opponent under the roof on Philippe Chatrier as rain and strong winds arrived in Paris after last week's heatwave.

"I'm super happy that I'm going

to be playing in semis again," said Andreeva.

"I felt like it was one of my best matches so far this tournament."

Andreeva atoned for the disappointment of her quarter-final loss to French outsider Lois Boisson 12 months ago.

"I was just trying to have flashbacks only about the weather and only about the court with closed roof, not about how I played. I'm happy that I could turn it around," she said.

BOXING

# 'Only success' matters for Joshua as Fury fight looms

AFP  
London

**A**nthony Joshua said yesterday he would not celebrate that a deal has finally been struck for a heavyweight clash with rival Tyson Fury until after he won.

"I'm not pleased because the pleasure really comes after victory," said Joshua. "Signing a contract doesn't mean anything. Winning is the only true success."

The pair are heading for a long-awaited 'Battle of Britain', probably in November, but before both boxers are eyeing a warm-up fight.

Joshua will face unheralded Albanian Kristian Prenga in Saudi Arabia on July 25 in his first bout since being involved in a car crash in Nigeria last December which killed two of his close friends.

Fury last week posted a video in an Instagram story showing him back in training in Thailand alongside the caption: "Let's go August 1, Dublin, Ireland."

Fury, 37, could take a place on a card being put together by veteran promoter Frank Warren in the Irish capital on that date.

No opponent has yet been named, although Warren has ruled out Fury fighting Andy Ruiz Jr, who dethroned Joshua as world champion in 2019 before losing the rematch later that year.

Joshua insisted it was time to



Promoter Eddie Hearn (centre) stares as Albania's Kristian Prenga (right) and Britain's Anthony Joshua pose together at a press conference in London ahead of their boxing match in Saudi Arabia in July. (AFP)

get back to work as he prepares to take on little-known Prenga.

The fight was originally scheduled to take place in Riyadh, but at their head-to-head press conference it was revealed it has been moved to Jeddah - Saudi Arabia's second largest city.

The 36-year-old Joshua has not fought a meaningful opponent since being knocked out by Daniel Dubois in September 2024.

"What does boxing give me? It gives me an opportunity to work. I'm a contractor, this is a contract, this is my job so I've got an opportunity to work," Joshua said. "You have to put a road map in front of a fighter and show them what is point one, point two, point three. It gives purpose and focus. I know what my year looks like."

"Give me the opportunity to fight Prenga, give me the opportunity to fight Fury, give me the opportunity to fight for the championship."

"It ain't about looking past anyone, it's just knowing your purpose and knowing your steps forward and moving up the ladder."

"I've got a clear goal, I know what this year is about, I know how tough this year is going to be. I've been training hard, that's my life."

GOLF

# Thompson's streak of 19 straight US Women's Opens is finally over

Reuters  
Los Angeles

**F**or the first time in 20 years, Lexi Thompson won't be participating in the US Women's Open when golfers tee off today at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles.

Thompson played in her first US Women's Open at age 12 in 2007 at Pine Needles Lodge and Golf Club in North Carolina. Now 31, Thompson is on the outside for the first time since before that stunning debut.

"It's hard to believe that in 2007, as a 12-year-old girl with big dreams, I qualified for my first US Women's Open," Thompson wrote on Instagram. "At the time, I was just excited to be there. I remember practicing my autograph in the backseat of my parents car on the drive up to @pineneedlesresort! I never could have imagined that week would be the beginning of a career that would take me around the world, allow me to compete against the best players in the game, and help me live out my dream of playing professional golf."

"For the first time since that week, I won't be competing in the US Women's Open. Definitely not a great feeling, I'd be lying if I said otherwise."

"But I have to remind myself that I've played in 19 in a row at the age of 30, and I'm very proud of that."

"It's also made me reflect on how much this championship has meant to me. Some of my most



special memories, biggest challenges, and greatest lessons have come from this event. It helped shape me not only as a golfer, but as a person."

Thompson, now playing part-time, could have qualified for the event if she was ranked in the top 75 of the Rolex World Rankings, but she was No. 98 at the deadline.

Winning an LPGA event represented another way in. But Thompson's best finish in four events this season was a tie for 12th at the Chevron Championship, also a major, and she missed the cut in two others.

Another opportunity was through US Women's Open qualifying events.

Thompson was slated to play in one last month at Naples, Florida, but withdrew a few days ahead of the qualifier to play in an LPGA tourney.

Thompson missed the cut at the past three US Women's Opens. Between 2018-21, she had three top-five finishes in a four-year span.

ANNOUNCEMENT

# Fabled Torrey Pines Golf Course stays on PGA Tour schedule as The Sentry



A view of the Torrey Pines Golf Course.

Reuters  
San Diego, California

**T**he PGA Tour, which has played an annual event at Torrey Pines Golf Course since 1968, will not miss a beat in 2027 with the announcement yesterday of the newly renamed tournament, "The Sentry."

The announcement was made jointly with Sentry Insurance and the Century Club of San Diego, which organizes the tournament. The event is scheduled for Jan 27-30 with a Saturday finish to avoid competing with the NFL conference championship games.

Former title sponsor Farmers Insurance concluded its commitment in January when Englishman Justin

Rose won for the second time at Torrey Pines with a tournament-record 23-under 265.

The Sentry at Kapalua was not held this year because of a water crisis in Hawaii, and neither Hawaii tour stops are on the schedule going forward. The Sentry changed venues as the replacement for what had been the Farmers Insurance Open since 2010.

"We're honoured to continue investing in the game and creating experiences that bring together players, fans, partners and communities," Sentry CEO Pete McPartland said in a news release. "We look forward to working closely with the San Diego community to shine a spotlight on everything that makes the region so special and continue our longstanding dedication of strengthening the communities we're a part of."

The tournament was first called the San Diego

Open at its 1952 debut and moved to Torrey Pines in 1968. Previous titles included the Convair San Diego Open, the Wickes-Andy Williams San Diego Open, the Isuzu-Andy Williams San Diego Open and the Shearson Lehman Brothers Open, as well as the Buick Invitational from 1992-2009.

"For 75 years the PGA Tour has hosted elite competition in San Diego, including the last 60 at revered Torrey Pines, and we are proud to build upon that legacy and longtime philanthropic impact with our partners at Sentry Insurance," PGA Tour CEO Brian Rolapp said in the news release. "We are pleased to have the support of Sentry and the Century Club of San Diego to further grow what fans and players have long recognized as one of our game's most celebrated venues and events."



## FOCUS

# Ancelotti relaxed about Neymar's availability

'HE'S PROGRESSING WELL, HE'S DOING WELL, WE'RE IN NO RUSH'

AFP  
Newark, United States

**B**razil coach Carlo Ancelotti is in no hurry to rush star forward Neymar back from his calf injury, the Italian said yesterday as his team touched down in the United States ahead of the World Cup.

Ancelotti has previously said Neymar would be fit for the Selecao's "first or second" group stage match at the global extravaganza in the US, Canada and Mexico.

Last week, Brazil's team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar revealed Neymar, 34, had suffered a calf injury and would be out for up to three weeks.

Five-time winners Brazil begin their World Cup campaign against Morocco on June 13. "He's progressing well, he's doing well, we're in no rush," Ancelotti said after Brazil arrived in Newark.

Ancelotti's late call-up of 34-year-old Neymar raised eyebrows across the footballing world. The forward had not featured in any of the Italian's previous squads since he took charge a year ago and has not worn Brazil's shirt since suffering a serious knee injury in 2023. Since then, Neymar has endured a subdued spell in Saudi Arabia and returned to boyhood club Santos in an attempt to revive his career, only to struggle for form amid injuries and controversies.

He is Brazil's all-time leading goalscorer with 79 goals in 128 appearances for the Selecao. This will be his fourth World Cup.

Neymar's recall to the squad feels like a blend of faith and necessity as Brazil's resources seem to have been thinned everywhere.

Chelsea winger Estevao and Real Madrid forward Rodrygo



Brazil's forward Neymar gives a thumbs up as he arrives at Newark Liberty Airport in New Jersey. (AFP)

were left out of the squad due to injuries, along with Real defender Eder Militao, who had been expected to fill in at right back in a side vulnerable on both flanks.

For a nation that redefined the role of attacking full-backs through Nilton Santos, Carlos Alberto, Junior, Jorginho, Cafu, Roberto Carlos and many others, the shortage is striking.

Ancelotti has turned to Danilo and Alex Sandro, now at Flamengo and some way from their Juventus pomp, to plug the gaps.

Brazil arrive at the World Cup much less feared than in most previous editions. The team finished fifth in South American qualifying and have lost to France, Japan and Bolivia in the last year.

But Ancelotti insisted his team will be a force to be reckoned with in North America. "We want to compete with opponents, try to do our best, work hard - everyone knows what Brazil's expectations are," he said. "Everyone knows that there are no favourites, there are some strong teams and I think Brazil can compete with anyone."

Brazil may not carry the kind of aura of past teams, but veteran midfielder Casemiro said people back home will be expecting nothing less than a sixth world crown.

"There are big expectations, it will be tough, but we are very excited, we want to win," he said.

Brazil are in Group C and will play Haiti and Scotland after Morocco.



Carlo Ancelotti's late call-up of 34-year-old Neymar has raised eyebrows across the footballing world. (AFP)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Semenyo, Partey named in Ghana World Cup squad



Ghana's hopes rest on Manchester City winger Antoine Semenyo.

**M**anchester City's Antoine Semenyo and former Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey were included in Ghana's World Cup squad as coach Carlos Queiroz left it to the last minute to finalise his 26-man selection.

Ghana fly to North America for their fifth World Cup where they are in a tough Group L with England, Croatia and Panama. The midfield includes Villarreal's Partey, 32, who is due to stand trial in the UK at a later date on rape and sexual assault charges. He has pleaded not guilty. Veteran Leicester City attacker Jordan Ayew will captain the Black Stars, who will be without Tottenham winger Mohammed Kudus because of injury. The 26-year-old Semenyo scored 11 goals in 27 games for City after moving from Bournemouth in January for an initial £62.5mn.

The World Cup kicks off on June 11, with Ghana facing Panama six days later.

**Squad: Goalkeepers:** Benjamin Asare (Hearts of Oak/GHA), Lawrence Ati-Zigi (St. Gallen/SUI), Joseph Anang (St. Patrick's/IRL) **Defenders:** Baba Abdul Rahman (PAOK/GRE), Gideon Mensah (Auxerre/FRA), Marvin Senaya (Auxerre/FRA), Alidu Seidu (Rennes/FRA), Abdul Mumin (Rayo Vallecano/ESP), Jerome Opoku (Basaksehir/TUR), Jonas Adjetey (Wolfsburg/GER), Kojo Opong Peparah (Nice/FRA), Derrick Luckassen (Pafos/CYP) **Midfielders:** Elisha Owusu (Auxerre/FRA), Thomas Partey (Villarreal/ESP), Kwasi Sibbo (Real Oviedo/ESP), Augustine Boakye (Saint Etienne/FRA), Caleb Yirenkyi (Nordsjaelland/DEN), Abdul Fatawu (Leicester/ENG), Kamaldeen Sulemana (Atalanta/ITA)

**Forwards:** Christopher Bonsu Baah (Al Qadsiah/KSA), Ernest Nuamah (Lyon/FRA), Antoine Semenyo (Manchester City/ENG), Brandon Thomas-Asante (Coventry/ENG), Prince Adu (Viktoria Plzen/CZE), Inaki Williams (Athletic Bilbao/ESP), Jordan Ayew (Leicester/ENG).

**SHOMURODOV, KHUSANOV LEAD UZBEKISTAN'S CHARGE**  
Uzbekistan coach Fabio Cannavaro named an experienced squad for the country's first World Cup finals appearance, led by forward Eldor Shomurodov and defender Abdulkodir Khusanov. Captain Shomurodov will be the team's main attacking playmaker alongside his Istanbul Basaksehir teammate Abbosbek Fayzullaev.

Manchester City's Khusanov, 22, struggled with injury earlier in the season but played regularly in the run-in, helping them win the English FA Cup and League Cup. Uzbekistan face Colombia in their opening Group K fixture, before matches

against Portugal and DR Congo.

**Squad: Goalkeepers:** Utkir Yusupov (Navbahor), Abduvohid Nematov (Nasaf), Botirali Ergashev (Neftchi)

**Defenders:** Rustam Ashurmatov (Esteghlal), Farrukh Sayfiev (Neftchi), Khojiakbar Alijonov (Pakhtakor), Sherzod Nasrullaev (Nasaf), Umar Eshmurodov (Nasaf), Abdulkodir Khusanov (Manchester City), Abdulla Abdullaev (Dibba), Bekhruz Karimov (Surkhon), Jakhongir Urozo (Dinamo Samarqand), Avazbek Ulmasaliev (AGMK)

**Midfielders:** Otabek Shukurov (Baniyas), Jaloliddin Masharipov (Esteghlal), Odiljon Hamroboev (Tractor), Oston Urinov (Persepolis), Jamshid Iskanderov (Neftchi), Dostonbek Khamdamov (Pakhtakor), Abbosbek Fayzullaev (Istanbul Basaksehir), Akmal Mozgovoy (Pakhtakor), Azizjon Ganiev (Al Bataeh), Sherzod Esanov (Bukhara)

**Forwards:** Eldor Shomurodov (Istanbul Basaksehir), Igor Sergeev (Persepolis), Azizbek Amonov (Bukhara)

**MONTELLA STICKS WITH EXPERIENCE IN TURKEY SQUAD**  
Turkey manager Vincenzo Montella named his World Cup squad, selecting the experienced Hakan Calhanoglu, Arda Guler, Kerem Akturkoglu and Baris Alper Yilmaz, to lead the side.

Sporting Braga midfielder Demir Ege Tikenaz was left out, with Montella opting for Galatasaray's Kaan Ayhan and Borussia Dortmund's Salih Ozcan. In attack, Danish league Player of the Season Aral Simsir was left out, but Irfan Can Kahveci was included.

Turkey are in World Cup Group D and will play Australia in their opening match before facing Paraguay and co-hosts the U.S.

**Squad**  
**Goalkeepers:** Altay Bayindir (Manchester United), Mert Gunok (Fenerbahce), Ugurcan Cakir (Galatasaray)

**Defenders:** Abdulkerim Bardakci (Galatasaray), Caglar Soyuncu (Fenerbahce), Eren Elmali (Galatasaray), Ferdi Kadoglu (Brighton & Hove Albion), Merih Demiral (Al-Ahli Saudi), Mert Muldur (Fenerbahce), Ozan Kabak (TSG 1899 Hoffenheim), Samet Akaydin (Caykur Rizespor), Zeki Celik (AS Roma)

**Midfielders:** Hakan Calhanoglu (Inter Milan), Ismail Yuksek (Fenerbahce), Kaan Ayhan (Galatasaray), Orkun Kokcu (Besiktas), Salih Ozcan (Borussia Dortmund)

**Strikers:** Arda Guler (Real Madrid), Baris Alper Yilmaz (Galatasaray), Can Uzun (Eintracht Frankfurt), Deniz Gul (Porto), Irfan Can Kahveci (Kasimpasa), Kenan Yildiz (Juventus), Kerem Akturkoglu (Fenerbahce), Oguz Aydin (Fenerbahce), Yunus Akgun (Galatasaray)

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Liverpool close to hiring Iraola: reports

AFP  
London

**L**iverpool are in advanced talks with former Bournemouth manager **Andoni Iraola** as they seek a replacement for Arne Slot, according to reports.

Iraola has emerged as Liverpool's top target to replace Slot, who was sacked on Saturday after a turbulent second season in charge.

Liverpool have reportedly agreed a deal in principle to bring the Spaniard, who left Bournemouth at the end of this season, to Anfield. Sporting director Richard Hughes was heavily involved in hiring Iraola during his time at Bournemouth and is again spearheading the recruitment of the highly rated coach.

The Reds are believed to be keen to wrap up a deal with Iraola before the start of the World Cup next week, which would allow the 43-year-old a lengthy acclimatisation period before pre-season training.

Slot was sacked last weekend after Liverpool finished fifth in the Premier League, 25 points behind champions Arsenal.

The Dutchman had led Liverpool to the Premier League title in his debut season, but his follow-up campaign quickly turned into a nightmare. The death of Liverpool forward Diogo Jota last year had a huge impact at An-



field, while the club's £450mn spending spree on new signings failed to pay off.

Slot's relationship with star forward Mohamed Salah also deteriorated, while Liverpool fans turned on the former Feyenoord manager due to his team's lifeless performances and poor results. Liverpool's pursuit of Iraola is in line with the club's desire to move back towards the aggressive, attacking style used by Slot's predecessor Jurgen Klopp.

Iraola earned plaudits for Bournemouth's impressive sixth-place finish this season, which secured the club's first qualification for Europe in the Europa League.

He arrived at Bournemouth from Raya Vallecano in 2023, having previously managed Mirandes and AEK Larnaca. Bournemouth improved each year under Iraola, finishing 12th, ninth and sixth.

The Spaniard was praised for his astute tactics and development of youngsters including Eli Junior Kroupi and Alex Scott. Iraola is understood to be keen on taking his Bournemouth assistant Tommy Elphick with him to Anfield.

Elphick, a boyhood Liverpool fan, has reportedly rejected an offer to become manager of second-tier side Bristol City.

### SILVA TO LEAVE FULHAM AS BENFICA LINKS GROW

Fulham manager Marco Silva has announced he will leave the Premier League club amid reports he is set to take charge at Portuguese side Benfica. Silva is reported to have entered talks with Benfica about replacing Jose Mourinho, who has been lined up for a second spell at Real Madrid. The 48-year-old, whose contract expires in June, has not revealed his next destination, but will depart Craven Cottage "this summer".

Having previously managed Everton, Watford, Hull, Olympiacos and Benfica's local rivals Sporting Lisbon, Silva made an immediate impact in west London. He guided Fulham to the Championship title in 2021-22 to seal promotion to the Premier League.

## FRIENDLY

## Lukaku scores against Croatia in Belgium return

AFP  
Brussels

**N**apoli forward Romelu Lukaku scored on his first international appearance in more than a year as Belgium beat Croatia 2-0 yesterday in Rijeka in a World Cup friendly.

Lukaku found the net in the 96th minute having been missing since September 2025 due to injury in the Red Devils' penultimate match before their tournament opener against Egypt on June 15. The 33-year-old has played just 64 minutes for his club this season due to a hip niggle.

Croatia, World Cup semi-finalists in 2022, and a strong side including captain Luka Modric wearing a

mask due to injury, end their own World Cup preparations by hosting Slovenia on Sunday. They begin their World Cup campaign against England on June 17. On the Adriatic coast, Lukaku was named on the bench with coach Rudi Garcia starting Atalanta midfielder Charles De Ketelaere in the attacking role.

Garcia's side led 1-0 at the break thanks to an effort from Aston Villa playmaker Youri Tielemans after 38 minutes. A shot from Modric just before the interval was Croatia's biggest chance of the first half before Osasuna striker Ante Budimir hit the bar near the hour mark.

Belgium doubled their lead in injury time as Lukaku claimed his 90th international goal before they host Tunisia on Saturday.



Belgium forward Romelu Lukaku 9 celebrates after scoring against Croatia in a friendly match. (AFP)

### Pele's 1958 World Cup jersey to be auctioned

The jersey worn by late football legend Pele during Brazil's 1958 World Cup victory will headline an auction set to coincide with this year's tournament, Sotheby's announced yesterday.

Pele, then just 17 years old, scored two of Brazil's five goals in the 1958 final against host nation Sweden.

The victory marked Brazil's first of a record five World Cup titles, three of which were won under the man who would become known as "The King."

Pele, born Edson Arantes do Nascimento, died in December 2022 at the age of 82 after being diagnosed with colon cancer.

Sotheby's said in a press release that the Number 10 jersey is estimated to sell for over \$6 million in the auction, which runs from June 29 to July 16 - three days before this

year's final match.

Diego Maradona's "Hand of God" jersey sold for \$9.3mn in 2022, a record for sports-worn memorabilia that was broken several months later by Michael Jordan's "Last Dance" Bulls jersey, which went for \$10.1mn.

Pele gave his 1958 jersey to teammate and friend Dida, whose family held on to it for decades before it was placed in a museum and eventually auctioned off in 2004, according to Sotheby's.

Other items up for auction in Sotheby's special "The Beautiful Game" sale include an armband worn by Maradona during the 1986 "Hand of God" match and gear worn by Argentine superstar Lionel Messi.

A public exhibit of the items will open July 1 at the Sotheby's Breuer building in New York.