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CRICKET | Page 2

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TENNIS | Page 3

Shnaider stuns Sabalenka at windy French Open to make semi-finals

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FOOTBALL

Veteran al-Haydos embraces leadership role with Qatar

Forward under no illusion about the task facing Qatar at World Cup

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

It is far from certain that Hassan al-Haydos will start for Qatar at the FIFA World Cup, which begins on June 11. At 35, the veteran forward is more likely to be called upon from the bench, introduced in the closing stages to provide experience and composure when required.

Yet al-Haydos' importance to the squad extends beyond the minutes he plays.

Qatar's most-capped player, with 184 appearances and 41 goals, retired from international football in March 2024 after leading the country to back-to-back AFC Asian Cup titles. But a year later, following a request from head coach Julien Lopetegui, he returned to the national team setup to help Qatar navigate the final stages of their qualification journey and prepare for the nation's first World Cup appearance earned through competition rather than automatic qualification as hosts.

"I am proud to have represented the national team for all these years. I will continue to live up to the trust placed in me by the people and the fans who have always supported the team," al-Haydos said after a training session in Santa Barbara, Qatar's base camp in Southern California.

"The decision to retire from international football was not an easy one, and neither was the decision to return. At that time, however, I felt the team needed me, particularly in the dressing room, and that played a big part in my decision. As a player, the biggest difference now is the experi-



Hassan al-Haydos retired in March 2024, before reversing his decision a year later at the request of head coach Julien Lopetegui. (Reuters)

ence I have gained. Having gone through a World Cup in 2022, I believe I am better equipped to handle both the small details and the bigger challenges that come with a tournament of this magnitude."

Al-Haydos believes Qatar are well prepared for the challenge ahead. "Our preparation did not begin with this training camp. It started the moment we secured qualification. Since then, everyone has been working to prepare the team in the best possible way and ensure we are fully ready for the World Cup," he said.

"There are many qualities that athletes must possess, and they are not important only for me but for the entire team. One thing every young player, and the squad

as a whole, must understand is the importance of maintaining a constant hunger for success - a desire for results, trophies and achievement. These are not just words. They must be reflected in your daily habits - how you train, how you eat, how you rest and how you conduct yourself every day."

Al-Haydos made his senior debut against Bahrain in a World Cup qualifier in 2008 and has been a central figure during the most successful period in Qatar's football history.

He captained the team to their first Asian Cup title in 2019 and remained an influential member of the squad as Qatar retained the trophy in 2024. At club level, he has spent his entire career with Al Sadd, helping the Doha side win

numerous domestic titles as well as the AFC Champions League in 2011.

"I consider myself fortunate to have represented the national team for so many years. When I was young, wearing the national jersey was a dream. I have been lucky to play alongside outstanding teammates, both with the national team and at club level, and to learn from many great coaches throughout my career.

"Everything I have achieved is a blessing from God. But behind it all lies a great deal of hard work, sacrifice, time away from family and many challenges that people do not always see."

Qatar arrive in North America carrying different expectations from those that surrounded their World Cup debut in 2022, when they became the first host nation to lose all three group matches.

Since then, they have won a second successive Asian Cup title and secured qualification for the 2026 tournament, raising hopes of a stronger showing on the global stage.

Qatar 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.

Al-Haydos is under no illusion about the task facing his side. "From my perspective, this is a very difficult group. Switzerland are among the strongest teams in Europe and the world. Canada will be playing on home soil in front of their supporters, and they are a strong side with excellent players. We know the challenge ahead of us will not be easy, but we believe in our chances. Right now, our full focus is on the opening match. The priority is to be ready, deliver a strong performance and achieve a positive result."

FOCUS

France's Saliba 'fine' after injury scare, says Deschamps

AFP
Nantes, France

France coach Didier Deschamps said that defender William Saliba is "fine" despite reports he was a doubt for the World Cup with a back injury.

Saliba joined the rest of his France team-mates on Tuesday at their pre-tournament camp outside of Paris after playing for Arsenal in their Champions League final loss to Paris Saint-Germain at the weekend.

France will face Ivory Coast in Nantes in a World Cup warm-up match on Thursday, but Deschamps is expected to limit Saliba's workload as a precaution. "William is fine and will be managed. If he had needed to play tomorrow, he would have played," Deschamps said.

Deschamps, who will step down as coach after the World Cup, said he would rotate his squad for the upcoming friendlies, with Les Bleus also due to play Northern Ireland in Lille next Monday. Ousmane Dembele and Desire Doue are among five PSG players in the squad who will be carefully monitored by Deschamps following Saturday's triumph in Budapest. "I will manage the six players involved in the Champions League, even more so those who started, given what lies ahead," Deschamps said.

He added that captain Kylian Mbappe is "in excellent shape, both physically and mentally" despite the forward coming off a turbulent season with Real Madrid. The 27-year-old is yet to win a major trophy in two seasons at the Spanish giants despite his prolific goalscoring record.

Mbappe's commitment has been questioned after he went on holiday while nursing a hamstring injury towards the end of the season. "What happened at club level stays at club level. Here, it's the national team. With the group and those who were there for the first sessions, he has put in the effort," said Deschamps. "He has experience that others don't. It will be his third World Cup. He knows how difficult a World Cup is."



(From Left) France forward Bradley Barcola, defender William Saliba, forward Kylian Mbappe, midfielder Rayan Cherki, head coach Didier Deschamps and forward Desire Doue attend a training session yesterday in Nantes, on the eve of the friendly match against Ivory Coast ahead of the FIFA World Cup. (AFP)

Yamal, Williams should be fit for World Cup opener: De la Fuente

Forwards Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams should be fit for Spain's World Cup opener, coach Luis de la Fuente said.

Yamal and Williams both missed the end of the club season due to hamstring injuries but De la Fuente included them in his World Cup squad anyway, telling reporters last month he expected both to be fit for the global showpiece. European champions Spain begin their Group H campaign on June 15 against Cape Verde in Atlanta.

"We are perfectly coordinated with the clubs, we are giving them continuation in a programme that was established some time ago and the truth is that the players are improving every day," De la Fuente said ahead of Thursday's friendly against Iraq. He said the injured players were "progressing as expected" but that they would not be involved against Iraq in A Coruna. Asked specifically about teenage star Yamal, De la Fuente added: "If everything continues as it has been so far, he could be ready on June 15, but that doesn't guarantee that he will play." Spain will be one of the favourites at the World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States. But De la Fuente insisted the tournament would be "historic because it is the World Cup in which the most teams have a realistic prospect of winning". After facing Cape Verde, Spain will play Saudi Arabia on June 21 in Atlanta before finishing their group stage campaign against Uruguay in Guadalajara on June 27.

FIRST TEST PREVIEW

England to make fresh start against New Zealand

THE LORD'S CRICKET GROUND SET TO HOST ITS 150TH TEST

AFP
London

England will have a chance to prove they have learned from their Ashes drubbing when they face New Zealand in the first Test of their home season at Lord's today.

The tourists were swept aside 4-1 in Australia in a series that ended in January, sparking renewed criticism of Brendon McCullum's men over their ultra-aggressive "Bazball" style of cricket.

Attacking cricket has been the hallmark of McCullum's four years as England coach, starting with a thrilling series win over New Zealand in 2022.

But it has failed to deliver series wins against either Australia or India and McCullum accepts England must display greater cricket intelligence if they are to improve.

"I think from our point of view, we still want us to be recognisable from the past," he told reporters at Lord's on Tuesday, two days before the start of a three-Test series.

"We just want to hopefully be a cricket team which has evolved somewhat."

The former New Zealand captain said: "We want to be a team which is better under pressure, a team which can navigate tactically, can understand where you sit in the game and what's required."

"If you're in front of the game, how are you able to close games out, what's required during those moments? If you're behind the game, tactically, how do you nav-



Rachin Ravindra of New Zealand does shadow batting practice on the pitch at Lord's Cricket Ground.

igate that situation?" Many observers felt McCullum, England managing director Rob Key and captain Ben Stokes were fortunate to all keep their jobs following the Ashes debacle.

But the trio all remain in post, with England keen for all-rounder Stokes to once more make an impact with the bat after he managed just 184 runs in Australia.

England have freshened up their team, dropping underperforming opening batter Zak Crawley and replacing him with debutant Emilio Gay.

The home side are also set to recall off-spinner Shoaib Bashir for his first Test in nearly a year after he saw off competition from leg-spinning all-rounder Rehan Ahmed. "Bash has the ability to

play more of a holding role in the first couple of days here at Lord's," said McCullum.

"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."

England are confident Jacob Bethell, one of their few successes in Australia, will be fit to bat following a finger injury suffered on IPL duty, but will be without fast bowler Jofra Archer because of his commitments in the franchise competition.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson expects a strong challenge from England in the 150th Test at Lord's - the most staged by any ground in the world.

"They've got a hell of a lot of experience and a number of world-class players that have done it for a long time," said the veteran batsman. "So we know they're going to be a very strong opposition, as they always are for us as a team. We're in a similar position, with some experience and some younger players as well. It's always a great battle against England and I know the team's looking forward to it."

Matt Henry could be fit to bolster an impressive seam attack after the paceman missed last week's innings victory over Ireland through injury.

TEST ITINERARY

1st Test: June 4-8, 2026 at Lord's, London
2nd Test: June 17-21, 2026 at The Kia Oval, London
3rd Test: June 25-29, 2026 at Trent Bridge, Nottingham

SPOTLIGHT

Cummins might skip IPL because of heavy Australia workload

Reuters
Sydney

Australia captain **Pat Cummins** indicated he might skip the Indian Premier League (IPL) next year to prioritise a heavy Test schedule and the one-day international World Cup.

The 33-year-old fast bowler first played in the IPL in 2014 and has earned \$1.9m a year as captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad in the last three editions of the blockbuster Twenty20 tournament. Next year, though, Australia play four Tests in India in January and February, have a 150th anniversary test against England in Melbourne in March, and go on a full Ashes tour before the ODI World Cup in southern Africa in October and November.

"Something has got to give at some stage next year and it's not going to be Test matches or an ODI World Cup," Cummins told the *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday.

"I will make a call a lot closer and work with the franchise to see what makes sense. Things can change. I've had a couple of injuries pop up, so I don't really want to lock in anything."

"The priorities for me are always the Test matches and that ODI World Cup."

"I dare say if I play all of India, I need some sort of break before a pretty gruelling Ashes series," he said.

Cummins played only the Adelaide Ashes Test in the last home summer and skipped the T20



World Cup as he dealt with a nagging back injury.

With his fellow fast-bowling stalwarts Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc also deep into their 30s, Cummins said consideration would be given to resting them for part of the home series against New Zealand around the New Year.

"It's possible. I think we're fairly open-minded to anything, as we've seen over the last couple of years," Cummins added.

"I see a world where we're potentially winding some bowlers down, even say at the back end of an Indian series if they don't look like they're going to play, to give them an extra rest ahead of the Ashes."

"It's going to be a big push the next 18 months or so, but I think we'll look back on it hopefully and see it as one of the more rewarding periods of our career."

India stars strike a pose before Afghanistan Test



India's Test captain Shubman Gill strikes a pose for the camera during a team photoshoot ahead of the one-off Test against Afghanistan. The Test will be played at Maharaja Singh PCA Stadium in New Chandigarh from June 6 to 10.

Fast bowler Mohammed Siraj and opener Yashasvi Jaiswal during the team photoshoot. **RIGHT:** Opening batsman KL Rahul, who has played 67 Tests, is also part of the squad.

COMMENT

Stokes defends Archer's England absence

AFP
London

England captain **Ben Stokes** has warned leading players such as Jofra Archer could be driven away from international cricket if England attempt to limit their Indian Premier League commitments.

Several months after their embarrassing 4-1 Ashes series loss in Australia, England return to Test cricket against New Zealand at Lord's today.

But they will be without pace spearhead Archer, a member of the Rajasthan Royals team beaten by Gujarat Titans in the IPL last Friday.

The 31-year-old is now in Barbados, the country of his birth, and his availability even for the second Test at the Oval remains uncertain.

Archer has a lucrative England central contract and has been supported by the England and Wales Cricket Board through five years of injury trouble.

Former New Zealand paceman Simon Doull said it was "absolutely ludicrous" that Archer would be absent from the series opener.

But Stokes told reporters at Lord's yesterday



that top white-ball players could be lost to Test cricket if they had to make themselves available for every match.

"I totally understand people's frustrations around it, but there is another side to it," he said.

"A lot of it has to do with the landscape of cricket and where it is at the moment."

"A lot of points people are making around Jof and that situation are to do with the landscape when they were playing."

"But it's completely different now. There

are opportunities for cricketers now that there were not 10, 15, 20 years ago."

Stokes said Archer's desire to play for his country was unquestionable, warning against a headline approach.

"There is a situation where it could get messy and players like Jofra might not play for England again if you handle it in a different way, and that is not good for there anyone," he said.

"Jofra has shown that he's committed and loves playing for England. Just because he's not available for this first Test match does not change that."

Jacob Bethell represented Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the 20-over IPL but is in the England team at Lord's, the first of a three-Test series.

The batter has played no meaningful red-ball cricket since his stunning Ashes century in Sydney in January.

"It's just one of those things. You have your number three (Bethell), he has a great couple of games out in Australia, then he spends nine or 10 weeks out in India and you are seeing him two days before a Test match," said Stokes.

"That is almost becoming the norm. The game is changing all the time. There are some things you have to roll with and accept, it is what it is."

FOCUS

Seasoned fast bowler Henry is ready to lead New Zealand's attack

AFP
London

Matt Henry is set to lead a full-strength New Zealand pace attack in the first Test against England at Lord's starting today after recovering from injury.

Henry missed last week's innings rout of Ireland in a one-off Test in Belfast with what team management said was "a minor strain in his left hamstring" but has now been passed fit for the first of a three-Test series against England.

Fellow quicks Kyle Jamieson, Will O'Rourke have been given the all clear as well but it is the return of Henry that is the biggest boost to the Black Caps.

Henry has a fine overall Test record of 140 wickets at 27.

But since the retirements of Tim Southee, Trent Boult and Neil Wagner, the 34-year-old has become the leader of the attack with 85 wickets at a miserly average of 18.1 in his last 15 Tests.

"I think if you look at Henna's record

England captain Sciver-Brunt ready for World Cup

Captain Nat Sciver-Brunt is ready to go for England's Twenty20 World Cup campaign after recovering from a calf injury, head coach Charlotte Edwards said, adding the all-rounder probably will not bowl in the tournament. Sciver-Brunt suffered a calf tear playing in the domestic Women's One-Day Cup in April and was ruled out of England's series against New Zealand and India. England face Australia and India in World Cup warm-up games next week before beginning their campaign against Sri Lanka on June 12 in Birmingham. "It is obviously really good for us that Nat is coming back into the team and hitting

the ball well," Edwards told Sky Sports after England beat India by six wickets on Tuesday to clinch a 2-1 series win.

"She is fine and ready to go. She probably won't bowl but her batting is something that she is best in the world at. "She wants to bat number three. She has done very well in global franchises there and that's where she wants to be."

"It's important she bats where she wants." Sciver-Brunt is England's second-highest scorer in women's Twenty20 internationals with 2,960 runs and the side's fourth-highest wicket-taker with 90 wickets in 137 matches.

over the last three or four years, since taking the new ball, he's been amazing for us," New Zealand captain Tom Latham told reporters at Lord's yesterday.

Henry has also had spells in county cricket with Somerset and Derbyshire.

"His record speaks for itself but I think the experience that he brings in New Zealand

but also in these conditions, he's played a lot over here, county cricket, played plenty of Test matches here as well," said Latham.

"He's been fantastic for us, he's a strike weapon, he's got a lot of great skills and he leads the attack really well... It's obviously been a while since he last played

Test cricket in December so he'll be really excited to get the ball back in his hand and obviously lead the attack again."

But Henry is far from the only potent member of the Black Caps' pace attack.

"You've got Henry, Nathan Smith that are able to move the ball in the air off the surface and then you've got the height of Jamieson, O'Rourke and (Blair) Tickner," said Latham.

"To have them all available here for a really important series is awesome. Nets haven't necessarily been that fun, but, yeah, we are looking forward to them running out tomorrow."

INDIA SET FOR BUMPER NZ TOUR LATER THIS YEAR

India will undertake the biggest-ever international cricket tour of New Zealand later this year, playing two Tests, five one-day internationals and five Twenty20 matches against the Black Caps.

India will open the tour with the T20s in late October and early November quickly followed by the ODI series. The first Test match takes place at Wellington's Basin

Reserve from November 19 to 23. The second Test will be at Christchurch's Hagley Oval from November 27 to December 1. "When it comes to cricket - it simply doesn't get bigger than India and we're determined to deliver New Zealanders a tour like no other," said New Zealand Cricket's Glenn Critchley.

"We're expecting all of these games to sell out. The New Zealand government will be supporting the in-bound India tour alongside adjacent sporting tours by India later in the year, as 100 years of sporting ties between New Zealand and India are commemorated," Critchley said.

"This will be about more than just the cricket on the field - it will be a celebration of New Zealand's shared history and culture with India, and our burgeoning rivalry and friendship through cricket."

After travelling to play four Tests in Australia around the New Year, New Zealand will also host Sri Lanka in three ODIs, three T20s, and two Tests in January and February, 2027. The White Ferns women's team will host Bangladesh for three T20s and three ODIs in December.

TENNIS

Shnaider stuns top seed Sabalenka at windy French Open

Italy's Cobolli sinks Canada's Auger-Aliassime to book semi-final spot

AFP
Paris

Aryna Sabalenka's bid for a first French Open title was left in tatters as she fell apart in a bizarre defeat by Russian 25th seed Diana Shnaider in the quarter-finals yesterday.

The world number one led by a set and a double-break before exiting the tournament in a blaze of unforced errors, collapsing to a 3-6, 7-5, 6-0 loss in blustery conditions on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"I feel like when I saw her (Sabalenka) being emotional, I was, like, 'Yes, like, you are in the right direction, you've got to stay, just focus on yourself, don't focus too much on her, what she's talking to her team or whatever she's doing,'" said Shnaider after beating a top-10 player for only the second time in her career.

Shnaider will face Polish qualifier Maja Chwalinska in the semi-finals today, with Marta Kostyuk or Mirra Andreeva awaiting the winner in Sunday's final.

"She's a very tricky player, so I'm not surprised that she's good. Sometimes, it just takes time," said the 22-year-old Shnaider of Chwalinska, who she beat at a lower-tier event in Istanbul four years ago.

Sabalenka was the only Grand Slam champion left in either the men's or women's singles draws at Roland Garros, but belied that status by making a whopping 57 unforced errors.

"You know those rooms where you just go in and you smash everything?" smiled Sabalenka when asked how she would get over the defeat. "Probably I will spend a whole day tomorrow over there destroying stuff. Maybe it will help, maybe not."

Shnaider was playing in her first major quarter-final, but now finds herself a strong favourite to reach the final heading into her last-four tie against world number 114 and fellow left-hander Chwalinska.

"Definitely a special tournament for me here," added the Russian. "It's going to be a lefty battle so I'm looking forward (to the semi-final)."

Sabalenka's scarcely believable defeat was reminiscent of the way she threw away a strong position in last year's final against Coco Gauff.

"I knew the final, last year, I watched it. I knew that it was also super windy," said Shnaider.

"So of course I had that thought in the back of my mind that she was struggling with Coco last year. I was, like, 'Yeah, I've got to



Diana Shnaider celebrates her victory against Aryna Sabalenka in the French Open quarter-final on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. (AFP)



Italy's Flavio Cobolli celebrates after winning against Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime yesterday. (AFP)

use this opportunity, I need to just adjust and do my best?"

Belarusian Sabalenka was playing in a 14th consecutive Grand Slam quarter-final but failed to become the first woman to make seven straight major semis since Serena Williams.

The top seed raced into a 5-1 lead and eventually sealed the opener on her third set point after initially failing to serve it out.

The second set followed a similar pattern at first, as Sabalenka moved 4-1 in front with a double-break before throwing away her next service game.

Sabalenka became increasingly frustrated as the gifted Shnaider three break points to level at 4-4.

After some animated remonstrating with her box, she recomposed herself enough to hold. But the 28-year-old's game

continued to come apart, as a string of dreadful unforced errors allowed Shnaider to break again and tie up the set at 5-5, with Sabalenka left to gesticulate wildly towards her coaching staff.

Shnaider could not believe her luck as Sabalenka dumped successive forehands into the bottom of the net to finish off the set and send the match into a decider.

The Russian grew in confidence and moved 2-0 up in the third as Sabalenka sprayed eight unforced errors around Chatrier in the space of two games. Shnaider cruised to victory from there, fittingly securing a semi-final berth when Sabalenka knocked a routine backhand into the net on the third match point.

A stunned world number one was left to trudge off court after winning just 14 points in the deciding set.

Cobolli beats Auger-Aliassime
Flavio Cobolli came back from a set down to beat Felix Auger-Aliassime 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in the quarter-finals yesterday.

By eliminating the Canadian fourth seed, Cobolli has ensured that there will be an Italian man in the final come Sunday.

At the start of the tournament, that eventuality seemed almost a given with top seed Jannik Sinner on a scintillating clay-court run.

However, the world number one stunningly lost in the second round and blew the top half

of the draw wide open. Three of his compatriots have more than taken advantage of that opening, with Matteo Berrettini and Matteo Arnaldi set to battle it out in the night session in the other top-bracket quarter-final.

The winner of that match will meet 10th seed Cobolli in the last four tomorrow, after the 24-year-old overpowered world number six Auger-Aliassime in their last-eight encounter on Court Philippe Chatrier.

It will be the first all-Italian Grand Slam men's semi-final in history. However, Cobolli said he won't watch the later match between "two of my good friends".

Instead, he said he will adhere to his superstition of not altering a winning routine. "I will do my same routine as every day," he said. "I go dinner with my friends, I go to bed and I sleep."

After an evenly-contested quarter-final across the first three frames, Cobolli earned the crucial break of serve in the fifth game of the fourth set.

He then served out to 15, booking his first Grand Slam last-four appearance with a stinging cross-court forehand winner.

By reaching the semi-finals, Cobolli will enter the ATP top 10 for the first time in his career.

"I felt like this is the chance of my life," Cobolli said. "I have to give everything in my matches and today I did that so I'm really happy."

SHOWJUMPING

Stage set for Al Shaqab League finale

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The curtain will come down on the Al Shaqab Showjumping League season when the final event gets under way at the Longines Indoor Arena today, with riders across multiple categories battling for titles over three days of competition.

Action begins with the Al Shaqab Champions class (140cm), offering a prize fund of QR70,000, followed by the Young Champions class (130cm) with QR45,000 at stake. Preliminary competitions at 40cm and 80cm will also be held.

Tomorrow's programme features the 60cm preliminary class, the Amateur class (100cm) for QR15,000, the Future Champions class (110cm) carrying QR20,000 in prize money, and the Junior Champions class (120cm) with a purse of QR35,000.

The final day on Saturday will see riders contest the Youth Champions class (135cm) for QR45,000, alongside the Amateur (105cm), Future Champions (115cm) and Junior Champions (125cm) classes, before the season concludes with

the Al Shaqab Champions class (145cm), again offering QR70,000 in prize money.

With league standings determined through a cumulative points system, the final round is expected to play a decisive role in crowning this season's champions following closely contested earlier stages.

Fahad Abdullah al-Sulaiti tops the 40cm preliminary standings with 49 points, while Mashael Mohammed al-Thani leads the 60cm category on 35.5 points. Abdulaziz Ibrahim al-Baker heads the 80cm division with 50 points and Haifa Hamad al-Thani leads the Talents category (100-105cm) on 52 points.

Abdullah Ahmed al-Khalifi sits atop the Future Champions standings (110-115cm), while Haya Khalid al-Hitmi leads the Junior Champions division (120-125cm) with 51 points. Mohammed al-Asaker holds first place in the Al Shaqab Champions category (140-145cm) with 50 points. The closest contest remains in the Young Champions division (130-135cm), where Khalid al-Hadi and Abdulaziz Fahad al-Eid are level on 57 points. In the team standings, Team Ghazal lead the way, ahead of Team Afrin on 57 points and Team Hariri on 49.5 points.



The final round is expected to play a decisive role in crowning this season's Al Shaqab Showjumping League champions.

Vollering wins in Giro d'Italia mountains as Reusser rocked

Race favourite Demi Vollering won stage five of the women's Giro d'Italia yesterday while her Dutch compatriot Anna Van der Breggen retained the overall leader's pink jersey.

The first mountain stage of this year's Giro failed to separate the favourites but a four-way sprint between them was settled by Vollering after Van der Breggen had made relentless efforts to drop the others in the run through the Dolomites. "It was a very hard day, with the race splitting much earlier than expected," Vollering said after the 146km ride to Santo Stefano di Cadore.

"Fortunately, I had Lauren Dickson with me, and she kept the pace high before I launched my attack. Now we need to avoid any risks over the next two stages before Saturday's queen stage."

Finishing in the same time as the Dutch duo were Antonia Niedermair and Isabella Holmgren. Reigning two-time champion Elisa Longo Borghini got dropped, but the Italian but rallied back to lose just 15 seconds on the day, crossing the line fifth.

Starting the stage second overall after a fine individual time trial on Tuesday, Swiss ace Marlen Reusser dropped almost a minute as Vollering overtook her in the standings.

For Vollering, the win completed her set of Grand Tour stage victories and left her exactly a minute behind Van der Breggen with four days of racing remaining. Today's stage six is the final flat run of this year's Giro, following the idyllic shores of Lake Garda before a twisting finale that could disrupt the likely bunch sprint ending.

FORMULA 1

Past winner Perez sees Monaco as an opportunity for Cadillac

Reuters
Monaco

Sergio Perez hopes to look back at the end of the Formula One season and see points on the board for newcomers Cadillac.

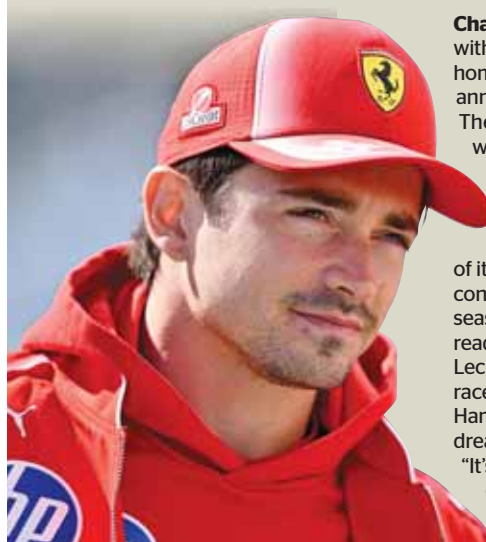
While that may look unlikely on current form after five rounds, with the General Motors-backed team yet to qualify higher than 18th in a regular grand prix and with a best finish of 13th, the experienced Mexican remains optimistic. He also reckons this weekend's Monaco Grand Prix, the slowest race on the calendar, could be an opportunity.

"It can be one of our biggest shots so far," Perez, a winner in Monaco with Red Bull in 2022 and third with Force India in 2016 from seventh on the grid, told Reuters ahead of Cadillac's first race in Europe. "But we have to see where we are in the low speeds."

"I think if we are able to be competitive in the low speed, Monaco can be a track that can bring us something."

MONACO HAS SHOWN SURPRISES CAN HAPPEN
Cadillac have plenty of expertise in their ranks, having recruited

Leclerc extends contract with 'second family' Ferrari



Charles Leclerc has agreed a multi-year extension with his "second family" Ferrari days out from his home Monaco Grand Prix, the Formula One team announced on Wednesday.

The 28-year-old has been with Ferrari since 2019, winning eight Grand Prix -- his last victory was in 2024 -- with his highest finish in the world championship being runner-up to Max Verstappen in 2022.

"Scuderia Ferrari HP announces the renewal of its agreement with Charles Leclerc, who will continue to wear the team's colours for the coming seasons of the Formula 1 World Championship," read a Ferrari statement on their website. Leclerc, who sits in third position in this year's title race, just three points ahead of team-mate Lewis Hamilton, said that he was ecstatic to continue his dream drive with Ferrari.

"It's the team I've loved and dreamt of being part of since I was a child, and after all these years it has become a second family," he said.

"Together we've shared incredible moments and some tougher ones, but I believe in this team more than ever, and I'm deeply grateful that we will keep pushing side by side toward our shared goal of bringing the World Championship back to Maranello."

"Being a Ferrari driver is a dream, but it's also a responsibility I never take for granted." Ferrari lauded their "second-most capped Formula 1 driver and (who) also ranks second for pole positions, behind only Michael Schumacher".

"This renewal feels like something very natural for us," said team principal Fred Vasseur. "Over these seasons we have seen him grow, to become not only one of the strongest drivers in Formula 1, but also a person who is completely at one with the team and everything Ferrari represents."

"We appreciate his talent, we love his determination and the way he approaches every day with the people in the Scuderia, both on and off the track."

heavily from other teams, and Monaco is a race where surprises can happen despite a reputation for professional racing and the risk of crashing around the metal-fenced streets.

It is one where overtaking is tricky and a slower car can keep faster ones behind, depending on grid position.

In 1996, Olivier Panis won for Ligier from 14th on the grid in a wet race that had only three cars running at the chequered flag. Third-placed finisher Johnny Herbert had started 13th while Ferrari's Michael Schumacher was on pole and went into the wall at Mirabeau on the opening lap.

"You never know when your

opportunities will come," said Perez.

"You just have to make sure that you deliver 1,000% every single Sunday and see what happens. You never know which race will be the one."

In Canada last month, Perez finished the Saturday sprint 11th on the road but was demoted to

14th after collecting a penalty for forcing Liam Lawson off track.

That was still a good effort. The Mexican, with a Ferrari engine in the back of his car, finished above an Audi, both Aston Martins, a Haas, a Williams, an Alpine and a Red Bull. Perez, whose teammate Valtteri Bottas won 10 races with Mercedes and was third in Mo-

naco in 2019, missed last season after losing his seat at Red Bull but the 36-year-old has returned with plenty of motivation and hunger.

"It's been very enjoyable," he said of the journey so far. "First of all, the project, the challenge and me getting back to my level has been extremely motivational."

"The main reason I wanted to come back is just to realise that I'm one of the best in the sport, you know, and I felt like I've proven that already in this couple of races to myself. So I'm happy with that, that I came back."

Perez wanted to see rapid advances in all areas, from pitstop routines to strategy and aerodynamic developments.

"I think now the team is just more up to speed in all the areas, all the different departments, which is really helping to evolve and bring things together quicker for everyone," he said.

"We are not short of budget at all. And at the same time, when they give you the opportunities they expect results quickly. So we know in the team that we need to deliver soon and we need to deliver more progress as soon as possible."

"But at the same time, being a new team, it just takes time."



FOOTBALL

England launch World Cup build-up in steamy Florida

Tuchel's side open their campaign against Croatia in Dallas on June 17



England have set up camp in Palm Beach, Florida, ahead of friendlies against New Zealand on Saturday and Costa Rica next week.

AFP
Palm Beach Gardens, United States

England kicked off their pre-World Cup preparations in Florida on Tuesday, holding a light first training session in hot and humid conditions following their arrival in the United States. Thomas Tuchel's squad, who are considered among the favourites for the World Cup, have set up camp in Palm Beach, Florida, ahead of friendlies against New Zealand on Saturday and Costa Rica next week before relocating to their training camp in Kansas City on June 13. England, who open their World Cup Group L campaign against Croatia in Dallas on June 17, got an

early taste of the sweltering heat and humidity they may encounter later in the tournament, when they face Ghana in Boston on June 23 before taking on Panama in New Jersey on June 27. With temperatures on Tuesday reaching 32 degrees Celsius (89.6) in the shade, England's players worked through a series of passing and dribbling drills before a small-sided practice match. "I'm used to a lot worse weather than this, rainy and not this temperature," striker Ollie Watkins told reporters. "But it's nice to be out here adapting to what it's going to be like at the World Cup," the 30-year-old Aston Villa forward added. Watkins was part of the England squad that finished runners-up to Spain at the 2024 European Cham-

ampionship in Germany, one of several near-misses experienced by England in recent major tournaments. "We're a big nation and we haven't been as successful as we wanted in these competitions before, so the aim is obviously to win the World Cup," Watkins said. Midfielder Kobbie Mainoo, who forced his way back into the England set-up on the back of resurgent form for Manchester United during the second half of the season, said the team was not looking past the opening round. "When you look too far ahead to the World Cup it can feel a bit daunting, so we're focusing on now," the 21-year-old said. Veteran midfielder Jordan Henderson, 35, whose inclusion by Tuchel raised eyebrows in a squad selection

that saw several star names left out, echoed Mainoo's comments. "You have to focus on what's important, and what's important at the minute is the next game - the two pre-camp games," Henderson said. "It's important to build some fitness, build some rhythm so that we arrive in the World Cup in a good place against Croatia because they're a very good side." Henderson, who earned the first of his 89 England caps in 2010, appeared to have fallen out of the international set-up after being left out of the Euro 2024 squad. "The last few years have been a roller coaster to say the least," Henderson acknowledged. "But I've worked very hard to be in this position and I'm just very grateful and honoured to be here and be a part of it."

England's World Cup puzzle: Promise, dependence on Kane, search for identity

London: England enter another World Cup carrying the familiar blend of promise and persistent doubt, their prospects still tethered as much to individual brilliance as to coherence as a team. For all the evolution in personnel and the arrival of experienced German coach Thomas Tuchel last year, there remains a sense that the side's ceiling, and perhaps its fragility, is defined by a handful of players, none more so than Harry Kane.

The 32-year-old Kane's scoring record and influence for club and country are beyond dispute, but recent tournaments have exposed a reliance that edges into vulnerability. When he is sharp, England's attack has structure, penalty-box presence and a focal point others can play off. When he drifts or struggles for rhythm, the drop-off is steep.

The alternatives, while capable, are not in his league in terms of all-round impact and England's attacking fluency can suffer. It leaves Tuchel with a dilemma: how to manage Kane's workload and form without compromising the team's identity.

If the Bayern Munich striker reproduces quieter stretches that have marked parts of recent international tournaments, England could again look blunt at exactly the wrong moment.

Compounding that uncertainty is how late in the cycle England still appear to be searching for clarity. Tuchel had called up a total of 51 different players to the England squad between taking charge in January 2025 and unveiling his squad.

Rather than sticking to a fixed roster, he has relentlessly cycled players in and out and has yet to produce a settled team. Perhaps

more concerning is the lack of definition around roles for key players. Playmaker Jude Bellingham, one of the game's undisputed stars, epitomises the uncertainty.

Whether deployed as a deeper midfielder, a roaming number 10, or something in between, his influence can reshape England's approach, but it also raises questions about balance.

That there is still ambiguity over the Real Madrid player's best position, or even how prominently he will feature in certain set-ups, underlines how fluid England remain.

And yet, the upside is obvious.

With Kane firing, Bellingham operating in his most effective role and Bukayo Saka -- back at his best after more than a month sidelined with an Achilles injury -- providing width and creativity, England have a core capable of matching anyone.

Saka's consistency offers a reliable outlet, Bellingham's dynamism brings control and thrust, and Kane's finishing remains elite. Around them, the supporting cast has the talent to complement rather than carry. The challenge, as so often, will be sustaining that level. England have a habit of looking cohesive and convincing one moment, then drifting off the boil and appearing distinctly average the next.

It may take another tournament in which their best team only truly reveals itself under pressure, shaped by circumstance rather than design.

Whether that organic emergence proves a strength or a fatal delay will likely define their campaign, which begins in Group L starting with Croatia on June 17 followed by Ghana and Panama.



Harry Kane (right) tackles Anthony Gordon during England's training session in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. (AFP)

FOCUS

Why Le Mans matters for Team Qatar

The 24 Hours of Le Mans is widely regarded as the pinnacle of endurance racing and one of the most prestigious events in global motorsport. Held annually in June in Le Mans, France, the legendary race has been running since 1923 and forms the centerpiece of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC).

Unlike traditional circuit races that are decided over a fixed number of laps or a short race distance, Le Mans puts teams to the test by making them compete continuously for 24 hours, testing speed, reliability, strategy, teamwork, and physical endurance under day and night conditions. The winner is the car that completes the greatest distance over the 24-hour period.

The race takes place on the iconic 13.626 km Circuit de la Sarthe, one of the most famous tracks in motorsport history. Combining permanent racing sections with public roads temporarily closed for competition, the circuit is known for its high speeds, technical complexity, and demanding conditions.

What makes Le Mans especially unique is the level of endurance required from both drivers and machines. Teams rotate multiple drivers throughout the event, managing fatigue, changing weather, tire wear, fuel strategy, traffic management, and mechanical reliability over an entire day of racing. Even the smallest issue can determine the outcome after thousands of kilometers of competition.

Over the decades, Le Mans has become far more than a race. It is considered a proving ground for automotive performance and innovation, attracting major manufacturers and elite drivers from around the world. Ferrari, Porsche, Toyota, Mercedes, Cadillac, Aston Martin, BMW, Peugeot and Alpine are among the global brands currently competing in endurance racing's top categories.

For Team Qatar, participation in the Le Mans endurance racing pathway represents a major milestone for Qatari motorsport on the international stage.

The team has already made a strong impres-



Team Qatar's GT programme at the 24 Hours of Le Mans will feature Qatari driver Abdulla al-Khelaifi alongside Julian Hanes and Giuliano Alesi.



Unlike traditional circuit races, Le Mans puts teams to the test by making them compete continuously for 24 hours.

sion during the 2026 European Le Mans Series (ELMS) season, a highly competitive championship that serves as an important develop-

ment platform and route toward Le Mans.

Competing in partnership with Iron Lynx, Team Qatar's GT programme features Qatari driver Abdulla al-Khelaifi alongside Julian Hanes and Giuliano Alesi. The team secured pole position during the ELMS season opener in Barcelona, before narrowly missing out on a podium finish and ultimately placing fourth in the LMGT3 category. Al-Khelaifi was also named Most Valuable Driver of the class following a standout performance.

Beyond ELMS competition, Team Qatar has also recorded victories in major endurance events this season, including success at Mugello and Spa-Francorchamps, further underlining the rapid progress of Qatar's presence in international endurance racing.

As Team Qatar prepares for its next chapter on the road to Le Mans, the investment in motorsports by QMMF reflects the country's growing ambitions in global motorsport and its commitment to developing competitive racing talent on the world stage.

SPOTLIGHT

Belgium's Onana revels in chance to prove his versatility

Reuters
Brussels

Belgium midfielder Amadou Onana says he is happy to drop back into defence if needed at the World Cup after a successful experiment with a change of tactical formation in Tuesday's away victory over Croatia.

Onana, usually the midfield destroyer for the Belgians, was shifted to centre back for the start of the friendly in Rijeka, which Belgium won 2-0 with a morale-boosting performance. It was a surprise switch from their traditional 4-3-3 formation, but one that had been planned to see whether it might be an option at the tournament in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

"I felt good in that position," Onana told a press conference. "The partnership with Arthur (Theate) and Nathan (Ngoy) went quite well. They carried out their roles very effectively too. For a first full dress rehearsal, this was certainly not bad at all."

"I've played there a few times before. The team comes first. I'm a midfielder, that's my favourite position, but if they need me at the back, I'll do it. Even if the coach needs me up front as a striker, I'll play there," Onana told reporters.

"I feel most comfortable in midfield and I believe that one day I



can be one of the very best players in the world in that position. The World Cup is the priority right now, though, and if I have to play in defence, I'll do it without complaining. I felt good there yesterday as well."

For coach Rudi Garcia the experiment went well. "This gives us more variety in our play, especially because we have many players who are versatile enough to operate in this system," he said.

"Of course, there are still things that can be improved. But at least we now know that we can use this system to start a match or switch to it during a game and that we can also achieve results with it. Because he is naturally more of a midfielder, it gives us the option to move him around. We saw (against Croatia) that he has all the qualities needed to do this job successfully."