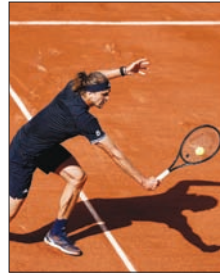


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Atkinson's double
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Zverev to face
Cobolli in French
Open final after
beating Mensik

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SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

5
DAYS TO GO

TRIVIA

Which teams have won a World Cup after losing their opening match of the tournament?
Spain in 2010, Argentina in 2022

Fans turn out in force as Qatar fine-tune World Cup preparations

Doha: Qatar's FIFA World Cup preparations gathered pace in Santa Barbara, California, where the two-time Asian Champions combined intensive training with a chance to connect with supporters during an open training session. The lively event attracted local residents, students and members of the Qatari community, creating a festive atmosphere as fans watched Julen Lopetegui's squad continue their build-up to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, which begins on June 11 across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The national team will complete its preparations today when it faces El Salvador at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles in its final friendly before the tournament. The match is expected to provide Lopetegui with a final opportunity to settle on his starting lineup ahead of Qatar's opening World Cup fixture against Switzerland on June 13 in San Francisco.

Qatar have been training in Santa Barbara following a narrow 1-0 defeat to Ireland in Dublin last month. The camp has focused on fine-tuning tactics and integrating several new faces, with 12 players in the 26-man squad set to make their World Cup debuts. After their opening fixture against Switzerland, Qatar will then face co-hosts Canada in



Qatar players drew warm reception from fans during the open training session in Santa Barbara, California. **RIGHT:** Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui signs autographs for fans.



Vancouver on June 18 before concluding their Group B campaign against Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle on June 24.

After making their World Cup debut as hosts in 2022, Qatar are aiming to go beyond the group stage for the

first time and secure a place in the knockout rounds. The friendly against El Salvador is viewed as a crucial final test

as Al Annabi seek both confidence and momentum before the biggest challenge in international football.

FOOTBALL

Trossard raring to get started at World Cup

Winger eager to contribute to Belgium's campaign after winning PL with Arsenal

Reuters
Brussels

Fresh from Premier League title success, Arsenal's Leandro Trossard now wants to play a significant role for Belgium at the World Cup.

"I really can't wait to get started," he told a press conference, a day after belatedly joining up with his compatriots following last week's Champions League final.

"Everyone is starting the World Cup campaign full of enthusiasm, which is very positive. I've only been able to take part in one training session so far, so not much has stood out to me yet but I can see that everyone is focused and ready to begin the World Cup."

Asked whether he was in his best form ever, Trossard added: "That's always difficult to answer. But I'm certainly in very good form, and I hope to carry that into the World Cup."

Winning the League title is also a positive for Belgium's hopes, he added. "It's very good when players arrive here having won titles, but that doesn't change your status. Not mine either but I will try to bring that experience into the national team."

"We've had a very good season with Arsenal. Of course, it's disappointing how the Champions League ended. Penalty shootouts are a lottery, and it was stressful to experience it from the sidelines. But we've still had a fantastic season and we're very proud of winning the English title. The title celebrations and the parade were fantastic. We were able to celebrate properly with the squad."

As for his club future, Trossard gave nothing away. "At the moment, I am still an Arsenal player. We'll see what happens in the summer," he told reporters.

BELGIUM COACH SEEKS TO TEMPER LUKAKU FEVER

Meanwhile, Belgium coach Rudi Garcia is looking to temper any expectations about a possible return to form for Romelu Lukaku, who netted a 90th goal for his country this week.

Lukaku did not start a game for Napoli this season, scored only one goal and spent long periods out with a hamstring injury, and his selection by Garcia for the World Cup looked to be a gamble.

But Belgium's leading scorer came on for his first national team outing in 12 months on Tuesday and promptly scored as they beat Croatia 2-0 in Rijeka.

Garcia, however, warned against push-



Belgium's Leandro Trossard and Charles De Ketelaere (left) take part in a training session on the eve of their friendly game against Tunisia as part of their preparation for the FIFA World Cup, in Brussels, yesterday. (AFP)

ing the 33-year-old too quickly as he continues his recovery.

"We must keep our feet on the ground," the coach told a press conference on , ahead of the friendly against Tunisia in Brussels today. "We must not rush anything. I was very happy with Romelu's goal against Croatia, just like the rest of the squad. That's very important because Romelu lives for scoring goals. Mentally, that was therefore very positive. But the big dan-

ger now is that you -- the media and the supporters -- will start thinking that he is completely ready again. He has come a long way and still has some distance to go. Thinking that he will start against Egypt is still far too premature."

Belgium's opening game in World Cup Group G is against Egypt in Seattle on June 15. "He has barely played this season and has hardly even trained with the group. So more time will be needed to get him ready

to play more than half an hour. Especially if we want to keep him fit.

"There is a very good chance that he will play around 25 minutes against Tunisia, but it is unlikely to be much more than that," Garcia said about today's friendly.

Belgium have a friendly against Tunisia in Brussels today before Monday's departure to the World Cup, where they begin their Group G campaign Seattle on June 15 against Egypt.

FIFA ups payments to clubs who send players to World Cup

Lausanne: Clubs whose players go to the World Cup, or appeared in qualifying, will receive increased compensation this summer, FIFA, the governing body of world football, announced.

FIFA said it had increased the amount of money in its Club Benefits Programme to \$355mn (306mn euros). It had already announced last September that it planned this increase of 70 percent from the amount distributed for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

While FIFA does not give total revenue figures for the World Cup, it estimates that its total revenue this year will be 56 percent up on 2022, and for the four years to 2026, a period which includes an enlarged Club World Cup in 2025, it will have taken in 72 per cent more than in the previous cycle.

On the other hand, this World Cup is bigger. The field is increased from 36 teams to 48, the number of matches will rise from 64 to 104 and the competition will stretch over 39 days, against 29 last time.

Furthermore, clubs will be compensated for appearances in World Cup qualifying for the first time. The total fund is divided into three parts.

A total of \$250mn is reserved for compensation for players at the finals.

FIFA calculated that the minimum payment per player will be \$5,000 per day spent at the World Cup, "although the final figures will be confirmed after the conclusion of the tournament".

These payments, FIFA said, "will be calculated on a per-player, per-day basis, taking into account both squad inclusion and the duration of each player's involvement".

Another \$100mn is earmarked for qualifiers. FIFA calculates it will pay \$2,362 for each player in a match-day squad for the 905 qualifying games and for 10 friendlies for each of the three host nations, which did not need to qualify.

The remaining \$5mn will pay administrative costs with any balance "allocated to the benefit of global club football".

"This is another benefit from the expanded FIFA World Cup - providing more support across the entire football ecosystem to the clubs that provide all the players who compete to shine on the global stage," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino in the press release explaining the programme.

The payments are based on a player's club registration when squads are announced but there are provisions for players who switch clubs during the tournament and for replacement players.

PREVIEW

Gambhir tells struggling Pant to play his natural game in Test against Afghanistan

AFP
India

India coach Gautam Gambhir told struggling Rishabh Pant yesterday to stick to his natural attacking game after removing him as vice-captain for the one-off Test against Afghanistan.

KL Rahul will be Shubman Gill's deputy for the match starting today in New Chandigarh in place of Pant.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Pant has scored 3,476 runs at an average of 42.91 in 49 Test matches, since his debut in England in August 2018. But the 28-year-old stepped down as captain of Lucknow Super Giants last week, the team having finished last in the IPL.

The usually flamboyant Test match star scored just 312 runs from 14 innings in this year's IPL, at a strike rate of 138.05.

"The responsibility is to play for India - the rest, everything else, is a by-product," Gambhir told



India coach Gautam Gambhir answers a question during a press conference in New Chandigarh yesterday.

reporters on the eve of the Test. "When you start playing for India, you don't think about being a vice-captain. You think about doing good for India."

Gambhir said that no player is told to "play a completely different game than his natural game".

"We will not tell him to 'curb your game', but in international cricket, it is very important to play

the situation, to read the situation," Gambhir added. Gambhir's Test record as India coach is unimpressive with 10 defeats, seven wins and two draws in 19 matches.

India suffered a 2-0 defeat to South Africa at home in November in their most recent Test outing.

They were also whitewashed in 2024 by New Zealand on home soil. Gambhir is taking positives

though from the 2-2 Test series draw in England last year, and performances against the West Indies.

India won 2-0 at home in October.

"We all know how well this young team played in England, and then we won against West Indies," he said, admitting that the South Africa series still "hurts".

"These are young boys," he said. "I think we have got enough talent to turn it around, and I am very hopeful that we will give ourselves the best chance to win the World Test Championship."

The match is not part of the World Test Championship cycle, but is a key game for Afghanistan who played their debut five-day game in India in 2018.

Afghanistan, led by Hashmatullah Shahidi, have since played 12 Tests and won four.

"We're fully focused on this Test match," coach Richard Pybus said.

"Our focus is on, cliché as it sounds, is really our control - it's what we need to do."



India Test captain Shubman Gill bats during a team training session in New Chandigarh yesterday. India take on Afghanistan in a one-off Test starting today.

FIRST TEST

Atkinson double has New Zealand reeling after day 2

The visitors lose three quick wickets in chase of 254 at Lord's



New Zealand's William O'Rourke is bowled out by England's Gus Atkinson during the second day of the first Test at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
London

Gus Atkinson struck twice late on the second day as England pressed for victory in the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's yesterday.

England's strong position also owed much to debutant opener Emilio Gay's valuable fifty in a low-scoring game.

New Zealand were 36-3 in their second innings at stumps. They need a further 218 runs to reach a victory target of 254 after collapsing to 113 all out first time around on a bowler-friendly pitch.

They suffered a woeful start to their run-chase yesterday when captain Tom Latham fell for a third-ball duck, edging a loose drive off Atkinson to Harry Brook in the slips.

Kane Williamson, in what could be the key batsman's final appearance at Lord's, battled hard for 18 before he was lbw to fast bowler Josh Tongue shortly before the close. New Zealand sent out a nightwatchman in Will O'Rourke but he was bowled for a duck by paceman Atkinson, who had close figures of 2-10 in 3.5 overs.

Earlier, Jamie Smith helped England recover from a middle-order collapse before the hosts were dismissed for 226 in their second innings of a frenetic clash in north London.

Gay was England's top scorer in their second innings with 57 and wicket-keeper Smith made 39 in the 150th Test staged at Lord's - the most of any ground. New Zealand quick Nathan Smith took 6-70. But given New Zealand were dismissed for just 113 in the first innings, they need a vastly-improved batting effort to



England's Emilio Gay in action against New Zealand at Lord's yesterday. (Reuters)

prevent England going 1-0 up in the three-match series.

'TOUGH DAY'

"A tough day, the pitch had its demands," Gay told the BBC. "That's the beauty of Test cricket, the challenges it brings. The most important thing was trying to embrace it and see it as an opportunity. When it's a low-scoring game, partnerships of 20 and little bits of momentum there are massive."

Nathan, meanwhile, said: "The game has moved pretty quickly in the first couple of days. We lost one too many wickets tonight but the wicket (pitch) is offering a lot for the seamers."

England lost four wickets for just one run as 126-2 became 127-6 before Jamie Smith steadied the ship during a seventh-wicket partnership of 57 with Atkinson.

Atkinson, however, gave his innings away on 14 when a miscued pull off Kyle Jamieson was caught by the towering fast bowler.

This is England's first Test since a 4-1 series loss in Australia where they squandered several promising positions. It appeared that they might be suffering a repeat of their Ashes debacle when Brook, fresh from a first-innings fifty, and England captain Ben Stokes were both dismissed without scoring yesterday.

There was little Jamie Smith could do when Nathan bowled him with a delivery that kept low.

Gay, who survived a Henry lbw appeal when the Durham batsman would have been out for 24, pressed on to an 84-ball fifty, including seven fours, before he was caught behind off Smith to leave England 126-3.

Brook was trapped in front by O'Rourke for a duck and Joe Root fell in similar fashion to Smith for eight.

Stokes was bowled by an excellent Smith delivery that clipped the top of the left-hander's off stump.

Ollie Robinson made a useful 29 before he was last man out.

The Sussex pace bowler had previously marked his return to England duty with a five-wicket haul. Robinson, in his first Test in over two years, produced a triple-wicket maiden on Thursday during a sensational 4-10 in six overs as New Zealand slumped to 61-6 at stumps.

And yesterday, he bowled last man Matt Henry for a duck to finish with his Test-best figures of 5-39 in 10.1 overs.

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 113 (Robinson 5-39) **and 36 for 3** (Conway 12*) **need 218 more runs to beat England 140** (Brook 56, Jamieson 5-62) **and 226** (Gay 57, Smith 6-70)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Nepal, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Oman qualify for Asian Games cricket

Reuters
Dubai

Nepal, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Oman have qualified for the men's cricket competition at the Asian Games, set to be held in Japan in September and October.

Nepal and Malaysia finished top of Group A in the qualifying tournament in Singapore, while Hong Kong and Oman led Group B.

With Qatar withdrawing from Group A before the start of the tournament, Nepal secured top spot after winning both their matches, while Malaysia qualified with victory over China in their opening fixture.

Hong Kong and Oman remained unbeaten in Group B and will face off to decide the semi-final matchups, with the winner taking on Malaysia and the loser meeting Nepal.

They will join Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who qualified automatically as Asia's Full Member nations, along with hosts Japan.

The men's competition will begin on September 24, with the final scheduled for October 3.

SHAUN TAIT STEPS DOWN AS BANGLADESH COACH

Shaun Tait has resigned from his role as Bangladesh's fast bowl-

ing coach with immediate effect, bringing an end to his stint with the side after 12 months.

Tait joined Bangladesh in May last year on a contract running until November 2027. The former Australia speedster had replaced ex-New Zealand all-rounder Andre Adams in the role.

During his tenure, Bangladesh's pace unit made notable strides, with the fast bowlers increasingly becoming match-winners across formats.

Young quick Nahid Rana was among the bowlers to flourish under Tait's guidance. Rana, who produced a five-wicket haul against Pakistan in the opening ODI in March, credited the Australian for helping build his confidence at the international level.

"To be honest, he is an outstanding coach because he behaves with us not only as a coach but also as a friend," Rana had said about Tait.

"He always tells us to stick to our strengths," Rana said in praise of Tait.

"He says, 'You will play on the field, I will give you the plan, and you have to execute it and win the match.'"

One of the standout moments during Tait's tenure with the Bangladesh side came during their historic 2-0 Test series win over Pakistan, where the seam attack played a major role.

Hussain urges India to fast-track teen prodigy Sooryavanshi

Dubai: Former England captain Nasser Hussain has thrown his full support behind teenage sensation **Vaibhav Sooryavanshi** for an India call-up.

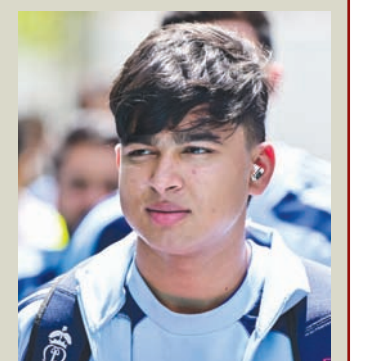
Speaking on the latest edition of *The ICC Review*, the former England captain backed the 15-year-old to don the India colours sooner rather than later following a breathtaking IPL campaign in which he emerged as the tournament's leading run-getter.

"Such an easy answer to give to that is that yes, he has to play. I didn't watch too much of the IPL to be honest, but I watched clips of Sooryavanshi and what an incredible talent," Hussain said. Sooryavanshi notched up 776 runs in sixteen games at an astonishing strike rate of 237.30, while his tally of 72 sixes was the highest by a player in a single edition of the tournament.

The youngster is certainly not short of admirers, with former India head coach Ravi Shastri already tipping him for an India debut, while more recently, batting great Sachin Tendulkar was also full of praise for the teenager's extraordinary talent and fearless approach.

"One of my first games for England was in the Nehru Cup, that's how long ago it was, and this young lad strode out with pads on that I'd never seen before, and his name was Sachin Tendulkar," Hussain recalled.

"And I was in complete awe and



I've noticed Sachin putting out some tweets about Sooryavanshi's bat swing and if you can impress Sachin Tendulkar and if you can impress Virat Kohli and the rest, he's impressed everyone. What an unbelievable talent," he added. Hussain believes a talent as special as Sooryavanshi cannot be overlooked and feels India must find a place for the youngster in their playing XI. "So anywhere else in the world you would say get him in. But usually at the toss you just have to name 11 players. In international cricket, who do you leave out for him? India have a list of batters they could play and should play, but in the end, someone makes such a case, such a consistent case, and such an incredible case for being picked. In the end, you have to say, I don't care who we're leaving out, this lad has to play," Hussain said.

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TENNIS

It's Zverev vs Cobolli in the French Open final



Germany's Alexander Zverev in action during his semi-final against Czech Republic's Jakub Mensik at the French Open in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Paris, France

Alexander Zverev moved to the verge of a long-awaited first Grand Slam title as the second seed saw off Jakub Mensik in four sets yesterday to set up a French Open final against Flavio Cobolli.

The German will face 10th seed Cobolli tomorrow after securing a 7-5, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 victory over Mensik.

Cobolli did not even have to play his first Grand Slam semi-final, as his last-four opponent and fellow Italian Matteo Arnaldi withdrew from the tournament shortly before the match due to illness.

Zverev has endured several near misses at the majors, with three previous final defeats, including against Carlos Alcaraz at Roland Garros two years ago.

"This is a Grand Slam, it's best of five, things are going to happen, opponents are going to play better. I managed it," said Zverev.

"I hope to play another great match on Sunday."

Zverev will be a strong favourite when he faces Cobolli, against whom he holds a 3-1 winning record, to finally get over the line and lift a Slam trophy.

The world number three was playing in his 11th Grand Slam semi-final and his experience showed against Czech youngster Mensik.

The 20-year-old, in the last four of a major for the first time, tired as the match went on as his previous exertions in Paris, including two five-set matches, took their toll.

Zverev has dealt well with the pressure of being the tournament favourite since the early exits of Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic, in the second and third rounds respectively.

He will face one last test of his mental strength on Court Philippe Chatrier in two days' time, but should at least be fresh physi-



Italy's Flavio Cobolli speaks during a press conference after advancing to the final following the retirement of Italy's Matteo Arnaldi yesterday. (Reuters)

cally after reaching the final having only lost two sets in six matches.

"Pure emptiness, there's absolutely nothing in my head," insisted a smiling Zverev in his on-court interview.

"We're athletes, very few of us have anything in our heads. Sometimes it's easier to be stupid and not to think too much."

The 29-year-old has been within one set of victory in two of his previous three Slam finals, when facing Alcaraz in Paris in 2024 and when he blew a two-set lead against Dominic Thiem at the 2020 US Open.

Zverev is also aiming to end a 14-month title drought dating back to a clay-court event in Munich in April last year.

MENSIK BRIEFLY THREATENED COMEBACK
Zverev took a closely-fought first set courtesy of a break in the 11th game, having earlier saved three break points to deny Mensik a 5-3 lead.

The 26th seed could not keep pace at all in the second set, as Zverev broke twice and only dropped four points on his own serve.

Mensik called for a medical time-out just three games into the third set, appearing to struggle with a neck injury.

But he dragged himself back into the contest seemingly out of nowhere, breaking to take a 4-2 lead in the third set as his use of the drop shot started to make a greater impact.

That shot wrapped up a hold to love and the set - only the second Zverev had lost in the tournament.

Mensik could not keep up his momentum, though, falling 2-0 behind in the fourth set as consecutive backhand unforced errors gifted Zverev a break.

The three-time Grand Slam runner-up powered into the final from there, despite drawing the ire of some spectators for disputing two line calls and also receiving a warning for a time violation. Zverev wrapped up victory on his first match point as Mensik netted a backhand.

ARNALDI WITHDRAWS

World number 104 Arnaldi had spent the most amount of time on court for a player en route to a Grand Slam semi-final, winning marathon matches in the third and fourth rounds.

His quarter-final opponent Matteo Berrettini retired injured in the second set of their last-eight tie.

But Arnaldi's dreams of a remarkable Slam title were ended by a virus.

"It's tough - for how the tournament was, for how many hours I spent on court, I felt pretty good," said Arnaldi.

"Every time I get up I feel dizzy and not the best... so that was the right decision for me."

Cobolli has dropped just two sets in the event so far and impressed in his quarter-final victory over Canadian fourth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime.

"It's tough for me to speak also. When he came to me an hour ago I almost cried," said Cobolli of his friend Arnaldi. "At the same time I'm happy with the result this week."

PREVIEW

Power meets guile as Andreeva faces qualifier Chwalinska

Reuters
Paris

If the French Open women's final appears on paper to be a mismatch between a teenage prodigy and an unheralded qualifier, Poland's Maja Chwalinska has spent the past fortnight proving appearances can be deceiving.

Russian eighth seed Mirra Andreeva arrives at today's showpiece as the overwhelming favourite after bulldozing her way through the draw, dropping only 12 games in her last three matches and looking every inch a future Grand Slam champion.

Yet across the net will stand a player whose improbable run has become one of the stories of the tournament.

Chwalinska travelled to Paris ranked 114th in the world and had to win three qualifying matches to reach the main draw. Nine victories later, the 24-year-old finds herself one win away from one of the most unlikely Grand Slam titles of the Open Era.

Andreeva, who reached the Roland Garros semi-finals as a 17-year-old two years ago, believes her growing maturity has helped transform her from a precocious talent into a genuine title contender.

"I'm getting closer, I'm getting older, a little bit more mature every match I play, a little bit more experienced," Andreeva told reporters.

"So I think that now I'm able to approach every match differently and try to really focus on the opponent that I'm going to play against and the game plan that I'm going to have to use on the court."

The Russian's relentless baseline power and ability to dictate rallies have overwhelmed opponents throughout the tournament and she has looked increasingly comfortable with the expectations that accompany her rapid rise. But Chwalin-



Russia's Mirra Andreeva celebrates after winning her semi-final against Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. (Reuters)

ska offers a completely different challenge.

CHWALINSKA CAPTIVATES SPECTATORS

In an era dominated by power hitters, the left-handed Pole has captivated spectators with a game built on variety, touch and tactical intelligence. Against Russian Diana Shnaider in the semi-finals, Chwalinska struck 33 winners while committing only 17 unforced errors in more than two hours on court.

Her performances have earned rave reviews from some of the sport's biggest names.

"What fascinates me about Chwalinska's game is her creativity, her joy for playing, her feel for the ball," six-times Grand Slam champion Boris Becker said after her semi-final victory.

"Tennis can still be played, not just worked at. Nobody demonstrated that better than Chwalinska today."

Former world number one and three-times French Open champion Mats Wilander has been equally impressed.

"She played so intelligently. It's very refreshing to see someone with this style of play," the Swede said. "Most players rely primarily on power, but Chwalinska uses spin, drop shots and understands the game incredibly well."



Poland's Maja Chwalinska reacts after a point as she plays against Russia's Diana Shnaider during their semi-final match. (Reuters)

Late surge allows Tyrrell Hatton to seize lead at LIV Golf Andalucia

Valderrama, Spain: Tyrrell Hatton carded a 2-under-par 69 yesterday to secure a two-stroke lead after the second round of LIV Golf Andalucia in Valderrama, Spain. Hatton recorded an eagle on the par-5 17th hole to highlight a round in which he also collected three birdies and three bogeys at Real Club Valderrama, home of the 1997 Ryder Cup. The 34-year-old Englishman is at 6-under par for the tournament and holds a two-shot lead over Thomas Detry of Belgium, who shot a 70 yesterday.



Legion XIII's Tyrrell Hatton in action during the second round of the LIV Golf Andalucia - Real Club Valderrama, Sotogrande, Spain, yesterday. (Reuters)

"Yeah, certainly if you'd have said to me on Wednesday that I'd have a two-shot lead going into the weekend, I probably wouldn't have believed you, to be honest," Hatton said. "As I said (Thursday), I feel like I had a good warmup and allowed me to - I simplified a few things and just kind of went out with that feeling, and I feel like I hit some really good golf shots."

"Tried to do the same thing again today. It was a tricky day, so even if you did hit some good shots, it was pretty easy to miss the greens. Yeah, I'm happy with how it feels, and hopefully I can keep going with that this weekend." Hatton admitted that the front nine proved "pretty frustrating" and his bogey on No. 10 did him no favors before it began to turn around at the 11th hole.

"Yeah, obviously making birdie on 11 and then a really good up-and-down on 12, and then a bonus putt on 13 kind of really got me going momentum-wise," he said.

"The eagle on 17 was clearly a highlight and definitely a bonus, as well."

Hatton also has helped Legion XIII claim a two-shot lead in the team competition. Legion XIII shot 5-under yesterday to rest at 3-under for the tournament, with Ripper GC and 4Aces GC each at 1-under.

Detry saw his string of bogey-free holes end at 32 to start the tournament before recording two over his final four holes yesterday.

"It's a grind out there," Detry said. "Bit of a shame to have leaked two more shots there on 15 and 18. But I feel like my game is in a pretty good spot for my fifth week in a row."

Scott Vincent, from Zimbabwe, shot a 72 yesterday to fall into a four-way tie for third place at 3-under for the tournament. Defending champion Talor Gooch shot up the rankings with a 67 yesterday to pull even with Vincent. Sergio Garcia (70) of Spain and Australia's Cam Smith (70). Gooch recorded an eagle on the 11th hole to highlight a round in which he also had five birdies and three bogeys.

FORMULA 1

Revived Hamilton steals the show with top speed, leads Ferrari 1-2 in Monaco practice

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton rolled back the years yesterday when he outpaced Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc to clock the fastest time in second practice for tomorrow's Monaco Grand Prix.

The 41-year-old Briton, a three-time winner at the unforgiving Mediterranean street circuit and chasing his third pole at the event, clocked a best lap in one minute and 13.026 seconds to beat the local hero by 0.111 seconds.

After his strong second-place finish at the Canadian Grand Prix, this was proof that Hamilton has rediscovered his mojo and will seek a record-enhancing 105th pole position and 106th win this weekend.

He won in Monaco in 2008, 2016 and 2019 and is one of six former winners in the field.

Four-time champion Max Verstappen was third fastest for Red Bull, 0.168 adrift, ahead of the Mercedes of George Russell and championship-leading Italian teenager Kimi Antonelli, three-tenths and five-tenths off the pace.

Hamilton will also seek an eighth Monaco podium tomorrow to draw level with Ayrton Senna's record of eight.

Isack Hadjar recovered from a crash during opening practice to finish sixth in the second Red Bull ahead of Oscar Piastri of McLaren,



Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton, seven-time world champion, during practice at Monaco Grand Prix at Circuit de Monaco, Monaco, yesterday. (Reuters)

whose team-mate world champion Lando Norris suffered battery failure and wound up down in 19th place.

The two Audis of Nico Hulkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto were eighth and ninth ahead of Oliver Bearman of Haas while it was another dismal day for Aston Martin with two-time champion Fernando Alonso 20th and Lance Stroll 22nd.

The session began with Hadjar's car still up on axle stands, as Russell led the way, under a blue sky with a mild 22 degrees Celsius. Verstappen set an early time before the Ferraris took over with Leclerc in front by a whisker

ahead of Hamilton until Verstappen took over.

Everyone, bar the Aston Martins on softs, ran on mediums as the track ramped up, providing more grip and faster lap times as Hamilton proved by going top in 1:13.729, 0.279 clear of Verstappen.

Hadjar joined the fray after 14 minutes. "Thank you, guys," he said as he pulled out shortly before a Virtual Safety Car (VSC) was deployed briefly when Norris pulled up at the Nouvelle Chicane with a battery-related electrical failure.

On resumption, Leclerc regained control, edging Hamilton

by 0.058 seconds in 1:13.613 before Verstappen took softs and clocked 1:13.467. Both Mercedes men also took softs, too, but were unable to catch the top trio until Russell rose to second.

Ferrari finally took to softs with 26 minutes to go, Leclerc soon clocking 1:13.137 to take command by 0.057 before Hamilton, clearly in the mood, trimmed that in 1:13.026.

In the final minutes, Sergio Perez came to a halt in Casino Square in his Cadillac, the American marque racing in Europe for the first time, with smoke filling his cockpit from the front-right brake ducts.



FOOTBALL

Defence and Kane key for England: Shearer

Former captain feels Tuchel's side may struggle against stronger teams

Reuters
Manchester

England captain Alan Shearer believes the current side can compete with the best at the World Cup but does not expect them to win it, saying key factors must fall into place for a serious challenge.

Shearer, who led England at the 1998 World Cup and remains the Premier League's all-time top scorer, said the squad had the talent to compete but might fall short against stronger teams in the latter stages.

"I think with the talent that we have... success, I guess, is winning," Shearer told reporters. "But when you think about who you're going up against, Spain or France or Brazil or Argentina, maybe Portugal, I just think as you go deep into the tournament, (there will be) squads better than England."

He said England's hopes would hinge on defensive strength and the form of captain Harry Kane.

"If we defend really well and Harry can do what he's done, then we have got a live chance of winning it," he said of the Bayern Munich striker, who topped the Bundesliga scoring charts for a third straight season with 36 goals. "If we're going to go deep, then Harry has to fly."

Shearer also urged patience with manager Thomas Tuchel, saying he must be allowed to shape the squad in his own way and make big decisions, even if they proved unpopular. "He might have left some better players out but in terms of harmony, he felt he was better off going with the players that he chose," Shearer said. "He has to be allowed to do that."

He pointed to the controversy around Paul Gascoigne's omission from the 1998 squad as an example of how selection debates could dominate build-up, stressing that performances on the pitch were what mattered most.

Squad management would also be crucial, particularly in what are forecast to be soaring temperatures. "When you go back to (the 1994 World Cup in the U.S.), you used to see players baking," he said, noting improved awareness of player welfare, including water breaks, larger squads and increased substitutions.

"I don't expect Harry Kane to play every



England's Harry Kane, Anthony Gordon and Ethan Nwaneri train in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. (Reuters)

minute of every game," Shearer added. "If England are winning comfortably, I don't think our manager will care about Harry getting a hat trick. He'll get him off and try and wrap him in cotton wool for the next game."

The expanded World Cup will feature 183 Premier League players, up from 133 in Qatar, with 40 of the 48 nations represented by players from England's top flight.

Asked about the impact of the Premier League season, Shearer said "it probably doesn't help," citing the number and intensity of games, as well as climate differences at the World Cup.

However, he added that England's recent experience in reaching the latter stages of

major tournaments, including finishing runners-up to Spain at the 2024 Euros, could be beneficial.

He said the scale of the Premier League's influence would again be evident at the tournament.

"Because of the finances involved, the players involved, the coaches involved, the stadiums, the atmospheres," he said. "I've been lucky enough to travel around the world and I do think everyone looks at our league and is very jealous... that's why we're so very well represented in terms of the number of players."

"We're fortunate we've got the best league in the world here in the Premier League in England."



Alan Shearer led England at the 1998 World Cup and remains the Premier League's all-time top scorer.

Spain's coach De la Fuente pleased with injury-free friendly

Madrid: Coach Luis de la Fuente was happy Spain came through their final home friendly without injuries and used the opportunity to hand debuts to several youngsters, but said the intensity would step up a notch once they arrived in North America for the World Cup.

Spain, one of the favourites to lift the World Cup, were held to a 1-1 draw by Iraq in a warm-up match in La Coruna on Thursday, fielding a heavily rotated lineup.

"Today was about sensations and giving opportunities to other players. No injuries - that's important," de la Fuente said.

"Now we enter a new phase with more intensity and more players contributing.



Tomorrow we're in the United States, and that puts our focus exactly where it needs to be."

Spain, who will be based in Chattanooga,

Tennessee during the World Cup, face Peru in their final friendly in Puebla, Mexico on Monday before their Group H campaign against Cape Verde, Saudi Arabia and Uruguay. De la Fuente rested several key players, including Lamine Yamal, Nico Williams, David Raya, Victor Munoz, Marc Cucurella, Pedri, Fabian Ruiz, Martin Zubimendi, Rodri and Mikel Oyarzabal due to fitness concerns.

Meanwhile, Marc Bernal, Jon Martin, Gonzalo, Turrientes, Javi Guerra, Marc Pubill, Javi Rodriguez and Leo Roman were handed senior debuts against Iraq. "They all earned it. The match allowed us to give debuts to players who deserved the

chance. They helped us a lot," the 64-year-old said. "They're players for the future, and we'll see them with the senior team soon. Another objective accomplished."

Spain will face Cape Verde in their opening match on June 15, though doubts remain over Yamal's fitness.

The Barcelona forward is recovering from a left hamstring injury that cut short his season in April, and de la Fuente said on Wednesday that the 18-year-old could be ready for the opener, though there were no guarantees. "The plan is to stick to what we'd planned, and that schedule gave us confidence that he could be ready by the 15th," he said.

Injured Germany starlet Karl may miss World Cup, says Nagelsmann

Berlin: Teenage Germany forward Lennart Karl may miss this summer's World Cup after sustaining an injury in training, coach Julian Nagelsmann said.

Speaking in Chicago ahead of today's friendly against the United States, Germany's final warm-up match, Nagelsmann confirmed the 18-year-old was in doubt for the tournament after an injury in training.

"To be honest, it didn't look good. He's going to the hospital now to get a scan done. We need to process the situation first, and so does he. We need a diagnosis in order to do that. Then we'll see whether or not we call up a replacement," Nagelsmann said.

The coach did not reveal the nature of Karl's injury. The Bayern Munich forward made his top-flight debut this season and quickly established himself as part of Vincent Kompany's Bundesliga-winning side.

Karl started his first match for Germany in Sunday's 4-0 win over Finland in Mainz, setting up a goal. Nagelsmann also confirmed that veteran goalie Manuel Neuer would not be fit in time to face the US, but hoped he would return for Germany's first World Cup match against Curacao on June 14.

Neuer, a 2014 World Cup winner, was surprisingly recalled for the tournament in May almost two years after announcing his international retirement.

"At his age, he doesn't need a warm-up phase," Nagelsmann said of Neuer. "He knows how to handle high-pressure situations. He's on his way to peak fitness. However, we don't want to take any risks tomorrow."

The four-times champions have set their sights on winning the title after shock first-round exits at the previous two tournaments, in 2018 and 2022.

Germany have not tasted international success since winning their last World Cup title in Brazil in 2014. They are in Group E and kick off their campaign against Curacao on June 14 before facing the Ivory Coast and Ecuador.

FIFA CANCELS MISPRICED FREE WORLD CUP TICKETS AFTER WEBSITE ERROR

FIFA has cancelled World Cup tickets for about 60 fans who were able to mistakenly purchase them for free due to a website error, and world governing body is now asking for them to be paid in full.

The affected fans were notified on Wednesday about tickets that were "allocated at no charge (0 USD) due to a prior payment issue during the checkout process", FIFA said on X.

"The tickets requested by these fans remain reserved, and the affected fans have been invited to complete payment of the correct amount. FIFA regrets the error and any inconvenience caused."

Last week the attorneys general of New York and New Jersey said they had issued a subpoena to FIFA over its ticketing practices amid concerns about fans' seat locations at the World Cup.

SHOWJUMPING

Al-Suwaidi steals the spotlight at Al Shaqab League Finals

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shaqab League Finals continued at the Longines Indoor Arena in Al Shaqab yesterday, attracting a strong field of riders from across the region and a large crowd of spectators who witnessed another exciting day of competition in the season-ending event.

The second day of the finals featured the 60cm Introductory class, the Amateur 100cm class, the Future Champions 110cm class and the Junior Champions 120cm class, with riders competing for valuable league points.

In the Junior Champions 120cm class, contested over one round against the clock, Khalid Jassim al-Suwaidi delivered an outstanding performance to claim victory aboard E.T's QueenyZ in 44.77 seconds. He also secured second place with Isis du Genet in 47.15 seconds. Amer Hamad al-Mansori and Just In Time were third in 47.27 seconds, followed by Abdulaziz Saoud al-Fakhroo on Falou (47.96s), Tamim Joaan al-Thani aboard I'm A Special Lady Van'T Ravennest (53.16s) and Mohammed Hamza al-Kuwari riding Irshi (56.14s).

Majid al-Hasani, Head of the Riding Academy at Al Shaqab, presented the trophies to the winners.

The Future Champions 110cm class saw Ali Omar al-Ansari and Nikita Eideken Z take top honours with a faultless second-



In the Junior Champions 120cm class, Khalid Jassim al-Suwaidi delivered an outstanding performance to claim victory aboard E.T's QueenyZ in 44.77 seconds. He also secured second place with Isis du Genet in 47.15 seconds.

phase time of 23.24 seconds. Abdulaziz Jassim al-Thani and Gabbana M followed in 24.82s, ahead of Abdulla Faisal al-Mana on Kontiki Dice (25.16s). Abdulla Ahmad Al Musafri riding Gringo finished fourth in 25.88s, while Sharida Nasser al-Kaabi claimed fifth and sixth aboard Ni-Lou van de Kranshoeve (26.41s) and Extra Pam (26.45s) respectively. Khalid Sanad al-Nuaimi, Event Director of the, Al Shaqab league awarded the winners.

In the Amateur 100cm class, Moza Hamza al-Kuwari riding Haneen topped the standings in 23.57 seconds. Layan

Sultan al-Thani on Dino Bb Z was second in 23.80s, narrowly ahead of Sultan Jassim al-Suwaidi aboard Cat Ballou 27 (23.86s). Roudha Hamza al-Kuwari and Haneen finished fourth in 23.98s, followed by Alanoud Rashid al-Hajri on Beyonce (24.00s) and Mariam Abdulkarim Abed of Iraq riding Jumbo (24.99s).

Earlier, the Introductory 260cm class was decided by the closest of margins, with Sara Hussain al-Marri and Rose D'en Hue finishing just 0.01 seconds under the optimum time. Qassem Mohammed al-Emadi aboard Kroat Van Orchid's was second at 0.03



Top six finishers of the Amateur Class pose with Ahmed Khaled al-Hemaidi, Legacy and Heritage Specialist at Al Shaqab

seconds over, while Meshael Mohammed al-Thani and Malaga placed third at 0.10 seconds under. Jassim Ali Darwish on Cur-rabawn Shadow (0.15 under), Tamim Misfer al-Qahtani riding Carnelian (0.21 over) and Dana Mabrouk Alsada aboard Chapuisat (0.26 under) completed the top six.

Ahmed Khaled al-Hemaidi, Legacy and Heritage Specialist at Al Shaqab, presented the trophies to winners of Amateur and Introductory class.

The final day of competition today will feature the Youth Champions class (135cm) alongside the Amateur (105cm), Future Champions (115cm) and Junior Champions (125cm) divisions. The season will conclude with the prestigious Al Shaqab

Champions class (145cm), which will once again offer QR70,000 in prize money.

With league standings determined through a cumulative points system, final is expected to play a decisive role in crowning this season's champions after a series of closely contested stages throughout the campaign. Organised by Al Shaqab the league has established itself as one of the region's leading platforms for showjumping development. By bringing together riders across multiple age groups and performance levels, it provides a professional competitive environment that helps refine skills, identify emerging talent and promote equestrian culture while preparing the next generation of champions.