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GULF TIMES

SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

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DAYS TO GO

TRIVIA

Of the countries that have won a World Cup, which has the longest active drought since winning?
Uruguay with a 76-year drought (last won in 1950).

FOOTBALL

Pressure builds on Lopetegui as Qatar face daunting task

Qatar have managed just one win in eight games under Lopetegui since he took charge in May 2025

By Sports Reporter
Los Angeles

Coach **Julen Lopetegui** was left with plenty to reflect on after Qatar were held to a goalless draw by El Salvador in their final friendly before facing Switzerland in their World Cup opener on Saturday, June 13 in San Francisco.

Qatar, ranked 57th in the world, controlled long spells of possession against 101st-ranked El Salvador but once again struggled to convert dominance into clear-cut chances, particularly in the final third. El Salvador grew into the game after the break and carried a greater attacking threat without finding a breakthrough.

The draw extends a difficult run of form under Lopetegui, with Qatar managing just one win, three draws, and four defeats across eight official international matches since his appointment in May, 2025.

The result follows Qatar's narrow 1-0 defeat to Ireland in Dublin last month, further highlighting inconsistency in the final phase of preparation.

Lopetegui started with the same XI that faced Ireland, with Mahmoud Abunada in goal in a 4-3-3 formation. Pedro Miguel, Boualem Khoukhi, Ayoub Alawi and Homam AlaAmin formed the defence, while Jassim Gaber, Ahmed Fathy and Issa Laye operated in midfield.

The attack was led by Akram Afif in a central role, with Edmilson Junior and Youssef Abdulrazzaq deployed on either flank.

Lopetegui also used the opportunity to rotate his squad and assess depth, handing minutes to a total of 19 players, although none were able to make any impact.

Based on recent performances, Qatar



will need a significant step up in North America if they are to banish the memories of their World Cup debut at home four years ago, when they became the first host nation to lose all three group matches.

After 2022 debacle, Qatar have rebuilt momentum, retaining the Asian Cup in 2023 and qualifying for the World Cup on merit for the first time. But on current form, Lopetegui faces a major task in



Ahmed Alaaeldin (left) of Qatar battle for the ball with Julio Sibrian of El Salvador during the friendly match at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles, California. (AFP)

shaping an ageing side capable of reaching the knockout stage.

Speaking after the match, head coach Lopetegui reflected on the conditions, the performance, and the final stages of preparation. "It was a tough game. The conditions were very humid, but that is exactly what we will face in a week's time when the World Cup begins. It was important for us to experience that environment and get

used to it as quickly as possible," the Spaniard said.

"We played against a team that faced Republic of Korea four days ago and they only lost 1-0. They competed very well and are much more accustomed to these conditions. Even so, I think we put in a very good effort. There were plenty of positives to take from the match. We have improved, and that is one of the reasons we are here.

These final few days are about reaching our best physical and tactical level and being mentally ready for our first major challenge."

Asked about his consistent use of a similar line-up across the two friendlies, Lopetegui was cautious about drawing conclusions ahead of the match against Switzerland.

"No, not necessarily. We can still make changes. We made a few adjustments at half time as well. We have to analyse many details over the coming week before making the best decisions. Our first opponents will be one of the strongest teams at the World Cup. I know what I am saying about Switzerland national football team. They are a very, very good team and we have to be ready to compete against them and perform at our best. That is why we are working so hard," the former Spain and Real Madrid coach said.

"Today's match will give us plenty to analyse so we can improve the small details that still need attention. Above all, it was important to adapt to the environment, the humidity and the kick off time. We will play at 12 noon, so we have to be fully prepared."

Looking ahead to the opening game, Lopetegui underlined the scale of the challenge. "My concern is everything. We are going to face a very, very good team, physically, technically and tactically. Switzerland has many players who compete in the Champions League, so we have to be ready. For us, it is a huge challenge. We must understand the difficulties we will face and know exactly what we need to do to compete with them. That is our objective."

After their opener against Switzerland, Qatar travel to Vancouver to face co-hosts Canada on June 18 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in Seattle on June 24.

SPOTLIGHT

Abunada draws strength from personal loss

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada has described his road to the FIFA World Cup 2026 as a deeply personal journey shaped by loss and resilience, as he prepares to lead his country's challenge on football's biggest stage.

The 26-year-old revealed that the death of his father last year marked a turning point in his life and career, adding emotional weight to his rise in the national setup. "Maybe the stage I have reached today is thanks to my parents' prayers," he said. "My father, may Allah have mercy on him, passed away last year. I wish he could be with me in these moments."

Despite the grief, Abunada has continued to progress steadily. He still recalls his first senior call-up in 2020, when he was 20 years old and learned of his inclusion while sitting with his family.

"I remember my first call up in 2020. I was 20 years old. My family and I were sitting together when suddenly the squad list was posted on social media. It was an indescribable feeling," he said. "Representing the national team is a major milestone in my career."

Since then, Abunada has developed into a key figure for Qatar team, earning trust through steady performances and growing maturity between the posts.

His early development came at Al Arabi, where he progressed through the youth system before moving on to establish himself among the country's leading goalkeepers. He later featured for Al Rayyan, where he enjoyed a strong season that helped elevate his standing.

The 26-year-old heads towards North America on the back of a breakthrough campaign, having helped Al Rayyan lift the QSL Cup and Gulf Club Champions League titles. He also collected the Qatar Football Association's Best Goalkeeper of the Season award, further strengthening his claim as Qatar's first-choice custodian.

He has retained that status under coach Julen Lopetegui, whose demands for intensity



Goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada (also inset) has developed into a key figure for Qatar team, earning trust through steady performances and growing maturity between the posts.

and focus have kept competition high within the squad. "The coach always tries to keep us out of the comfort zone so that the player or goalkeeper stays motivated," Abunada said. "I always keep in mind that the most important thing in every training session is to treat it as if it were my last."

Abunada also reflected on Qatar's emotional qualification journey, particularly the decisive playoff victory over the United Arab Emirates last October, which secured their place at the tournament. "To qualify for the World Cup is an indescribable feeling, a national pride and joy," he said.

He stressed that Qatar's ambition goes beyond participation, highlighting the importance of representing the country with discipline and pride. "Our goal is to appear in a respectable manner and show the develop-

ment of Qatari football," he said.

At the World Cup, Qatar team will face Switzerland, Canada and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the group stage, with Abunada insisting there is no room for fear at this level.

"There is nothing easy in the World Cup," he said. "When you reach this stage, it means you are among the best in the world. In football, there is no such thing as an easy group or a difficult group."

For Abunada, the journey from his first call-up in 2020 to a potential World Cup starting role carries a deeper meaning rooted in sacrifice, memory and national duty.

"When you grow up as a fan and become a footballer, you dream of playing even for one minute for your country," he said. "I hope I can represent my country in the best possible way."

Record prize fund as 2026 FIFA World Cup ushers in new era

2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

RECORD-BREAKING PRIZE MONEY FOR A GLOBAL SHOWPIECE

The 2026 FIFA World Cup, hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico from June 11 to July 19, 2026, will feature record-breaking prize money and a historic expansion to 48 teams and 104 matches.

HOSTED BY: UNITED STATES, CANADA, MEXICO

WORLD CUP 2026

JUNE 11 - JULY 19, 2026

Performance	Prize Money (USD)
World Champions	50 MILLION
Runners-up	33 MILLION
Third Place	29 MILLION
Fourth Place	27 MILLION
Quarterfinals	19 MILLION
Round of 16	15 MILLION
Round of 32	11 MILLION
Group Stage	9 MILLION

Prize money increases progressively as teams advance deeper into the knockout stages.

BEYOND PRIZE MONEY

FIFA's financial package goes far beyond performance-based rewards.

- Participation Fee: USD 2.5 MILLION per participating team
- Qualification Reward: USD 10 MILLION per qualified team

TOTAL FINANCIAL PACKAGE APPROXIMATELY USD 871 MILLION

This immense figure underscores that the tournament has entered a global economic and commercial era of unprecedented scale.

THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP AT A GLANCE

- 48 TEAMS: A historic expansion from 32 to 48 teams.
- 104 MATCHES: A record number of matches.
- 40 DAYS: The tournament will run over 40 days.
- 16 VENUES: Across 16 host cities in 3 countries.
- ONE GLOBAL SHOWPIECE: Featuring football's biggest stars on the world stage.

TOURNAMENT FORMAT

- 12 groups of 4 teams each. The top 2 teams from each group, plus the 3 best third-placed teams, advance to the Round of 32.
- 24 hours advance to the Knockout Stage.

A HISTORIC TURNING POINT

Since its inception in 1930, the FIFA World Cup has grown into the most prestigious and commercially successful tournament in the world.

1930 → 2026

From 32 to 48 teams. From 16 to 104 matches. A new era begins.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is set to redefine global football with record-breaking prize money and unprecedented scale. Hosted across the United States, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19, the expanded 48-team tournament will feature 104 matches and a total financial package of around \$871mn. FIFA has allocated \$655mm in performance-based prize money, the largest in the competition's history. World champions will receive \$50mn, with \$33mn for runners-up, while every stage offers increasing rewards from the group phase through to the final. Every qualified team will also receive participation and qualification payments, underlining the tournament's growing commercial impact. With more teams, more matches and higher stakes than ever before, the 2026 edition of the World Cup is set to mark a major turning point in the competition's modern era.

CRICKET

England romp to win in first Test against New Zealand

'I don't have words to describe what I felt but it was one of the highlights of my career'



England's Gus Atkinson celebrates his five-wicket haul after dismissing New Zealand's Matt Henry during the fourth day of the first Test at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)



England's Gus Atkinson celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Matt Henry. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

England exploited to the full a Lord's pitch once again offering erratic bounce and lateral movement yesterday to win the rain-interrupted first Test against New Zealand by an impressive 115 runs with a day and two sessions to spare.

New Zealand, set a daunting 254 to win the opening game in the three-match series, were dismissed for 138 before lunch on the fourth day after resuming on 55 for five in the 150th Test at the home of world cricket.

The Marylebone Cricket Club issued a rare public apology after the milestone

Test turned into a bowler's paradise as wickets tumbled every 25 balls on average.

The first wicket of the day fell after only seven deliveries when paceman Josh Tongue jagged the ball late into wicket-keeper Tom Blundell (4) who was hit low on the back pads and given out lbw by the umpire.

Tongue then had opener Devon Conway dropped on 24 by Harry Brook at second slip in his next over when the ball flew through the fielder's outstretched hands as he reached in vain over his head.

Left-hander Conway battled his way to 41 from 91 balls when he was brilliantly caught low in the gully by Jacob Bethell off captain Ben Stokes's bowling and Nathan Smith was then caught behind by Jamie Smith for four off Gus Atkinson.

PHILLIPS RUNS OUT OF PARTNERS

Glenn Phillips, as he had in the first innings when he scored 34 in his team's meagre 113, opted to play his shots, but soon lost his new partner Kyle Jamieson caught by Ben Duckett at short mid-wicket for six off Atkinson, who finished with five for 30 while man-of-the-match Ollie Robinson took two for 38.

Robinson, 32, who endured two years in the cricketing wilderness after the England management questioned his fitness and conditioning, made a sensational return to Test cricket when he took three wickets in the opening over of New Zealand's first innings on Thursday.

"The Lord's crowd was amazing," Robinson told *Sky Sports*. "I don't have words to describe what I felt but it was one of the

highlights of my career. We bowled well and hit the stumps a lot. Our plans were clear."

Stokes, who endured a stressful stretch when his team lost the Ashes series in Australia in only 11 days of cricket, paid tribute to debutant opener Emilio Gay, who scored one of only two half centuries in the match on the unpredictable Lord's surface.

"That's as tough as it gets in Test cricket," Stokes said. "The 50 runs he got were priceless."

MCC ISSUES APOLOGY FOR LORD'S PITCH

The MCC said the weather was to blame for the condition of the pitch.

"We recognise that the pitch for this Test has shown more variable bounce than

we would have wanted," it said in a statement after what was the second shortest Test match at Lord's.

"We hold ourselves to the highest standards and are naturally frustrated when a surface falls short of those expectations."

The MCC blamed the challenging conditions on "unusually hot and dry weather" last month, followed by wetter conditions in the lead-up to the Test which presented challenges in preparing the pitch.

The second Test will start on June 17 at the Oval.

BRIEF SCORES

England 140 (Brook 56, Jamieson 5-62) **and 226** (Gay 57, Smith 6-70) **beat New Zealand 113** (Robinson 5-39) and 138 (Atkinson 5-30) **by 115 runs**

ONE-OFF TEST

Suthar takes three wickets as India maintain firm grip

AFP
India

Debutant spinner Manav Suthar took three wickets to dent Afghanistan's reply after India declared their innings on 564-8 in their one-off cricket Test yesterday.

Afghanistan were 113-5 at stumps on day two after Suthar had Afsar Zazai caught and bowled for three. Rahmat Shah was unbeaten on 43, with Afghanistan still trailing India by 451 runs at New Chandigarh.

Afghanistan pace bowler Mohammad Saleem earlier took six wickets before India ended their first innings in the second session with Washington Sundar unbeaten on 52.

A fourth-wicket stand of 169 between captain Shubman Gill, who made 126, and Rishabh Pant (81) was the highlight of the Indian innings after the hosts resumed on 368-3.

Afghanistan started on a shaky note when left-arm spinner Suthar dismissed opener Abdul Malik for 16 with his fourth ball in Test cricket on the stroke of tea.

"My focus was to bowl in the right areas and back my strengths," said the 23-year-old Suthar. "There was help from the surface, so my idea was to get the landing right."

His efforts drew praise from fellow spinner Sundar.

"We as players who have been playing with him (in domestic cricket) know what he brings to the table and the amount of skills he has. It was a genuine treat to watch," Sundar said.

Pace bowler Prasidh Krishna dismissed Sediqullah Atal for 17 before Suthar had Rahmanullah Gurbaz caught at second slip for 12.

Shah then attempted to steady the innings with Hashmatullah Shahidi, who was trapped



India's Manav Suthar bowls during the second day of the one-off Test against Afghanistan on the outskirts of Chandigarh yesterday. (AFP)

leg before by Krishna for 20. Saleem, 23, struck twice in the morning session and then dismissed Suthar for 28 after lunch to claim his first five-wicket haul in Tests.

He consistently bowled at speeds above 140 km/h (86.9 mph) to impress in just his second Test.

"What I enjoyed about him was his consistency today," Afghanistan coach Richard Pybus told reporters. "He was just fantastic and held his length."

Left-hander Sundar and Mohammed Siraj went on the attack to boost India's total.

Siraj hammered debutant left-arm spinner Nangeyalia Kharote for a four and two sixes in one over before he was bowled by Saleem.

Saleem earlier broke the stand between Gill and Pant when he had the Indian captain caught behind with a delivery that held its line.

Wicketkeeper Pant added 31 runs to his overnight score.

BRIEF SCORES

Afghanistan 113 for 5 (Rahmat 43*, Suthar 3-21, Prasidh 2-27) **trail India 564 for 8 dec** (Gill 126, Rahul 100, Saleem 6-140) **by 451 runs**

SPOTLIGHT

beIN SPORTS unveils coverage plans for FIFA World Cup 2026

beIN SPORTS, one of the world's leading sports broadcasters, has unveiled its extensive trilingual coverage plans for the FIFA World Cup 2026 in 24 countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The network will deliver comprehensive live studio coverage of all 104 matches, supported by a bouquet of six dedicated MAX channels alongside beIN SPORTS 4K HDR.

Viewers can expect up to 17 hours of daily live coverage in Arabic, English, and French, with expert analysis from some of the highest profile names in football.

The tournament kicks off on 11 June in Mexico City and culminates on 19 July in New York City. Featuring 48 teams across three host nations, the 23rd edition promises to be the biggest World Cup in its 96-year history.

The opening ceremony and curtain-raiser between Mexico and South Africa will be presented directly from inside the Estadio Azteca, while the closing ceremony and final will be broadcast live from inside the MetLife Stadium in New York New Jersey.

Meanwhile, four dedicated state-of-the-art studios at beIN's headquarters in Doha will harness the latest production technology, advanced virtual and augmented graphics, and seamless digital integration to deliver the most immersive viewing experience ever for a FIFA World Cup.

beIN SPORTS' Arabic live coverage will run daily from 17:00 to 09:30 MECCA on beIN SPORTS

MAX 1-4, delivering all 104 matches. Comprehensive English language studio coverage will also be provided for every match, with beIN SPORTS MAX 5 broadcasting live for 15 hours daily from 18:00 to 09:00 MECCA.

To enhance the viewing experience, two dedicated English-language reporters will travel across the United States, Canada, and Mexico, delivering on-the-ground coverage throughout the tournament. In addition, beIN SPORTS MAX 6 will broadcast exclusively in French, mirroring the coverage of beIN SPORTS France, the official broadcaster of the FIFA World Cup in France. All six MAX channels will offer full-day programming, featuring live match coverage, daily Arabic studio shows, The Last Word at 15:00 MECCA, and World Today, beginning the continuous live coverage at 17:00 MECCA. Viewers can also enjoy original team-specific documentaries, dedicated previews and reviews, in-depth studio analysis, and live on-the-ground reporting from the host cities.

Mohammed al-Bader, Managing Director of beIN Channels - MENA, said: "As the exclusive home of the FIFA World Cup™ in MENA since 2014, and with the legacy of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, beIN SPORTS will once again bring audiences unparalleled access to football's largest stage. The FIFA World Cup 2026 is set to be larger, longer, and more logistically complex than any other tournament before it - yet we are fully prepared to deliver unrivalled coverage of this global spectacle."



FOCUS

Tamim is elected BCB's youngest cricket chief



AFP
Dhaka

Former Bangladesh captain **Tamim Iqbal** became the country's youngest cricket chief yesterday, weeks after he was appointed interim president and vowed to repair the sport's damaged reputation in the country.

Tamim was elected after topping a board election with 73 votes from 75 councillors, and led a 16-candidate field competing for 12 director positions.

Fahim Sinha, who received 66 votes, was named vice-president at the board's first meeting.

"We all have to keep one thing in mind, which is that the reputation damage that Bangladesh cricket has suffered worldwide, I

alone cannot fix this," Tamim told reporters after the first meeting.

"I will need everyone's support here," he added.

Under the previous board, Bangladesh refused to play in India at this year's T20 World Cup, citing security concerns after fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman was dumped by Indian Premier League team Kolkata Knight Riders.

FORMULA 1

Antonelli wins fifth straight in interrupted Monaco GP

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Teenager Kimi Antonelli extended his lead in the drivers' world championship with a commanding and nerveless victory for Mercedes ahead of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton in a protracted, incident-hit Monaco Grand Prix yesterday.

It was the 19-year-old Italian's record fifth consecutive victory this season, making him the first Italian to achieve that feat since Alberto Ascari in 1952. It hoisted him 66 points clear of Hamilton in the title race. "The car was a peach today," he said after becoming the youngest winner of Formula One's classic blue ribbon event.

"An incredible day - one of those when we had incredible pace to give me confidence to push." In a stoppage-strewn race

punctuated by crashes, retirements and a series of penalties, Antonelli came home 6.271 seconds clear of seven-time champion Hamilton with Red Bull's Isack Hadjar third ahead of Oscar Piastri of McLaren.

Racing Bulls' Liam Lawson and Arvid Lindblad finished a career-best fifth and sixth respectively, while Sergio Perez in 10th scored the new Cadillac team's first point.

Hamilton equalled Ayrton Senna's record total of eight Monaco podiums.

Four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull suffered an engine failure at the start and retired, as did world champion Lando Norris when his McLaren had battery problems. Antonelli made a perfect getaway. Behind him, Verstappen had a power failure as he attempted to start.

"What can I do?" asked Verstappen. "Just bring it home,"

came the Red Bull reply. His problem was diagnosed as engine failure. It was his eighth first-lap retirement.

For Antonelli, the youngest-ever pole sitter in Monaco, his dream start enabled a run in clear air to establish a lead of 5.4 seconds by lap 10. Norris had a lap one setback when, after squabbling with Piastri for sixth, he was passed by Pierre Gasly on the outside of St Devote.

In the first round of pit stops, Hamilton was one of several drivers given a five-second penalty for speeding in the pit lane.

After reavelling in his supremacy, Antonelli came in a second time after 37 laps, easily retaining his lead before Norris's problems ended with a call to retire on lap 46.

The young Italian was racing with such ease that race engineer Peter Bonington told him: "Kimi,

fastest lap! No, we don't need them."

On lap 60, Lance Stroll smacked the barriers at Antony Noghes to prompt a safety car. The race restarted on lap 66 and, as Antonelli pulled clear with Hamilton in pursuit, the luckless Leclerc crashed at the same spot. "I'm not taking the blame for that," he said. "It's like I had no rear brakes at all!"

That lifted Hadjar into third place before a second red flag suspended the action, with the field called back to wait in the pit lane as the track was repaired and Russell was given a drive-through penalty for failing to serve an earlier time penalty correctly.

After a 40-minute hiatus, the action resumed from a standing start. Antonelli held his nerve to lead again with Hamilton second ahead of Russell, who promptly pitted for his penalty and fell to 14th.



Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli celebrates on the podium after winning the Monaco Grand Prix yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Zverev ends wait for Grand Slam title with French Open triumph

Zverev is first German man to win a major tournament since Boris Becker at the 1996 Australian Open

AFP
Paris, France

Alexander Zverev finally secured his maiden Grand Slam title with a dramatic five-set victory over Italy's Flavio Cobolli in the French Open final yesterday.

The second seed became the first German man to win a major tournament since Boris Becker at the 1996 Australian Open with a 6-1, 4-6, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1 victory after four hours and 16 minutes.

"This court is so special to me in so many ways... but now finally, it's a happy end," said Zverev, who suffered a season-ending ankle injury in the 2022 semi-final against Rafael Nadal on Court Philippe Chatrier, where he was also edged out in five sets by Carlos Alcaraz in the 2024 final. It was Zverev's fourth Grand Slam final and second at Roland Garros after some heart-breaking near misses in his career.

"We've been through losses, we've been losers at times as well in the most important moments," he said during the trophy presentation, turning to his team.

"But at the end of the day, we're Grand Slam champions now, and that's what counts."

Cobolli, the 10th seed, was bidding to become the first Italian man since Adriano Panatta to win the French Open in 50 years.

The 24-year-old had never even played a Slam semi-final before,

let alone a final, after his last-four opponent Matteo Arnaldi withdrew from the tournament through illness.

Both players appeared to struggle with nerves at various points in the match, especially Cobolli during an error-strewn first set. But Zverev's greater experience showed in a deciding set that was far tenser than the scoreline suggested, as he managed to get over the line. The 29-year-old was handed a golden opportunity to break his Grand Slam duck by the injury-enforced absence of reigning champion Alcaraz and surprise early exits for Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic.

The world number three was not always in control, making 54 unforced errors, but did enough to finally shed the tag of being one of the best players to have never won a major. Zverev had previously also lost in six Slam quarter-finals and seven semi-finals, alongside his three final defeats.

The most agonising miss of all was his first major final when he blew a two-set lead and failed to serve for the championship against Dominic Thiem at the 2020 US Open. The now-retired Thiem was watching on from the stands at Roland Garros as Zverev belatedly put the memories of that match to bed six years later.

Cobolli made a nervy start and appeared to be struggling to deal with the occasion as the first set quickly got away from him in 39



Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates with the trophy after winning the French Open final against Italy's Flavio Cobolli at Roland Garros in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

minutes, making 16 unforced errors. He managed to settle into the match with three successive holds of serve in the second set and then made his move out of nowhere to break in the seventh game.

Zverev had been completely untroubled on serve previously, but produced a scrappy game featuring two double-faults and a wild forehand on break point before turning to gesticulate angrily towards his coaching staff. Cobolli started to grow in confidence and served out the set to breathe life into the final.

A higher-quality third set dis-

appeared from Cobolli's grasp in the 10th game, though, as from 30-0 up, he lost four points in a row, including a poor forehand that flew well wide on set point.

The world number 14, who will climb into the top 10 for the first time next week, hit straight back with a break in the opening game of the fourth set.

He could not pull away in the set, though, as both players ended up being broken twice, including Cobolli when he served for it at 5-4. But the Italian rallied himself to push it into a tie-break, which he took to force a decider with a

blistering forehand winner on his second set point.

Following a delay before the start of the final act after Cobolli left the court, Zverev struck first blood with a break in the first game. Cobolli's hopes were finally all but extinguished when he missed a break-back point and then dropped serve again to slip 3-0 down. Zverev staved off three more break points in the fourth game and eased to victory from there, falling to the clay in celebration after Cobolli shanked an overhead on his second championship point.

RECENT CHAMPIONS

- 2026 Alexander Zverev (Germany) beat Flavio Cobolli (Italy) 6-1 4-6 6-4 6-7(5) 6-1
- 2025 Carlos Alcaraz (Spain) beat Jannik Sinner (Italy) 4-6 6-7(4) 6-4 7-6(3) 7-6(10-2)
- 2024 Alcaraz (Spain) beat Alexander Zverev (Germany) 6-3 2-6 5-7 6-1 6-2
- 2023 Novak Djokovic (Serbia) beat Casper Ruud (Norway) 7-6(1) 6-3 7-5
- 2022 Rafa Nadal (Spain) beat Ruud 6-3 6-3 6-0
- 2021 Djokovic beat Stefanos Tsitsipas (Greece) 6-7(6) 2-6 6-3 6-2 6-4
- 2020 Nadal beat Djokovic 6-0 6-2 7-5
- 2019 Nadal beat Dominic Thiem (Austria) 6-3 5-7 6-1 6-1
- 2018 Nadal beat Thiem 6-4 6-3 6-2
- 2017 Nadal beat Stan Wawrinka (Switzerland) 6-2 6-3 6-1
- 2016 Djokovic beat Andy Murray (Britain) 3-6 6-1 6-2 6-4
- 2015 Wawrinka beat Djokovic 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-4
- 2014 Nadal beat Djokovic 3-6 7-5 6-2 6-4
- 2013 Nadal beat David Ferrer (Spain) 6-3 6-2 6-3
- 2012 Nadal beat Djokovic 6-4 6-3 2-6 7-5
- 2011 Nadal beat Roger Federer (Switzerland) 7-5 7-6 5-7 6-1
- 2010 Nadal beat Robin Soderling (Sweden) 6-4 6-2 6-4
- 2009 Federer beat Soderling 6-1 7-6 6-4

MOTOGP

Marc Marquez claims Hungarian Grand Prix

AFP
Balatonfokaj, Hungary

Reigning world champion Marc Marquez won on a Sunday for the first time this season as he held off young Spanish compatriot Pedro Acosta to take the Hungarian MotoGP.

Francesco Bagnaia finished a distant third while the top two in the standings, Aprilia pair Marco Bezzecchi and Jorge Martin, crashed out on the first corner. In a battle of the generations, 33-year-old Marquez, who also won Saturday's sprint, and Acosta, 22, exchanged the lead a couple of times before the veteran pulled away in the closing laps.

Marquez beat Acosta by just over 1.343 seconds. It was the veteran's 100th victory across all categories, and Ducati's 100th win in the sport.

"I'm super happy," said Marquez who rushed back after undergoing surgery on his right shoulder and a broken foot after a crash at the French Grand Prix in early May.

"The price was expensive, but happy to have another comeback."

The 4.8km Balaton Park circuit, which hosted its first MotoGP last year, is narrow, twisty, and not conducive to overtaking. Most riders do not like it, but Marc Marquez feels right at home. Last year, the Spaniard swept the board taking pole position, sprint race, fastest lap, and overall victory.

An additional advantage for Marquez is that Balaton Park is one of the six circuits this season that run counter-clockwise. The Spaniard has always preferred left-hand corners but they were even more helpful this weekend because he was nursing his right shoulder.

"I don't know if I'll have chances like this again in the upcoming races. I wasn't feeling



Ducati's Marc Marquez celebrates with the trophy after winning the Hungarian MotoGP at the Balaton Park circuit in Balatonfokaj, Hungary, yesterday. (AFP)

great on Friday, but I made a good step forward on Saturday," he said. Bagnaia finished 11.632 seconds behind Marquez on a matching factory Ducati, a ride that Acosta, who is with KTM, is widely expected to take over next season. At the start, bikes tumbled like bowling pins going into at the first corner.

Martin, who is second in the standings, locked up coming out of the short starting straight, lost control and he, and his bike, flew into the tightly-bunched pack hitting Bezzecchi. Fermin Aldeguer of Ducati Gresini, Raul Fernandez of Trackhouse and Fabio di Giannantonio on a VR46 Ducati also went down.

Bagnaia said he saw Martin coming out of the corner of his eye. "When I started to break, I just saw something arriving so fast, and it was Martin arriving at double speed." "Maybe he was too inside and locked the front, because the new tarmac on corner one was very slippery"

Di Giannantonio remounted and collected

four points as he trailed in 12th. Marquez had sped off from pole position and was already clear of the chaos behind him. Only Acosta, who narrowly outpaced the wave of crashing bikes, was able to give chase and quickly closed and shot past.

By halfway, the leading pair had pulled six seconds clear of Bagnaia

Marquez overtook on lap 14 and held off 22-year-old Acosta's instant counter-attack pulling clear before relaxing in the final lap.

"We tried everything, it was a really good battle, I hope that everyone at home in enjoyed it," said Acosta who is still chasing his first MotoGP victory. "The pace was good, qualifying again was good. Back-to-back podiums, I'm quite happy."

Ai Ogura on a Trackhouse was fourth and Luca Marini fifth for Honda.

Bezzecchi, Martin and Di Giannantonio stayed in the first three places in the standings. Acosta jumped to fourth and Marquez into fifth.

Future Riders Summer Programme to begin on June 28

The Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF) will launch its Future Riders Summer Programme on June 28, with the initiative running for two months at the Future Riders School located within the federation's premises.

The programme is open to boys and girls aged between 4 and 17 and will be delivered by a team of highly qualified and experienced equestrian instructors in a safe and supportive learning environment. Each training session will last 40 minutes. The programme aims to teach equestrian skills in an engaging and enjoyable manner while incorporating a range of recreational, sporting and cultural activities. These activities are designed to develop participants' abilities, enhance their self-confidence and provide a well-rounded summer experience. QEF President Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish said the summer programme is one of the Federation's key annual initiatives, aimed at making productive use of the school holidays while strengthening young people's connection to equestrian sport.

"The programme provides a safe and stimulating environment under the supervision of a select group of qualified trainers, allowing participants to develop their skills and gain valuable experience in equestrianism," he said. Al-Darwish added that the programme offers participants the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of riding while devel-

oping their physical and mental abilities and embracing values such as discipline, responsibility and self-confidence. "These qualities help prepare a promising generation of riders capable of carrying forward the tradition of excellence in this prestigious sport," he said.

He noted that equestrianism remains an integral part of Qatar's identity and heritage, and that the Federation is committed to instilling these values in younger generations while expanding the sport's presence within the community. Al-Darwish also highlighted the Federation's ongoing efforts to enhance the programme each year through improvements to its training content and teaching methods, in line with international best practice and the expectations of participants and their families. "This continuous development reflects the Federation's commitment to providing a comprehensive educational experience that nurtures talent and fosters a lasting passion for equestrian sport," he added.



Future Riders Summer Programme is open to boys and girls aged between 4 and 17 and will be held at Qatar Equestrian Federation's Future Riders School.



FOCUS

England labour to win over NZ as Germany defeat USA

'IT IS A GOOD PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD CUP, WE KNOW THIS TEAM CAN DO GREAT THINGS'

Reuters
Brussels

Harry Kane's first-half header earned England a 1-0 World Cup warm-up win over New Zealand in Tampa on Saturday, while there were also victories for Scotland, Germany, Portugal and Belgium as teams fine-tune ahead of the tournament's kickoff next week.

With England manager Thomas Tuchel rotating his entire team at halftime and handing minutes to 22 players in the scorching 32 degrees Celsius (89.6 degrees Fahrenheit) heat, the result was secondary to the process.

But Kane's clinical finish with a glancing header into the bottom corner from Djed Spence's cross offered a timely reminder of the skipper's importance to their hopes in the tournament. The match was designed to test the squad's readiness for the World Cup conditions as England showed flashes of cohesion without ever fully settling into a rhythm.

There was a debut for 17-year-old Rio Ngunzwa, who is training with the team but not part of the World Cup squad, while England's four Arsenal players Declan Rice, Bukayo Saka, Eberechi Eze and Noni Madueke were scheduled to join the team later on Saturday, having been given time off after playing in last weekend's Cham-



Harry Kane of England scores his team's first goal past Max Crocombe of New Zealand during the international friendly at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. (AFP)

ions League final. Four-time world champions Germany secured a ninth win in a row with a 2-1 victory over World Cup co-hosts Uni-

ted States in Chicago. Kai Havertz headed in Joshua Kimmich's free kick to give them a second-minute lead, but the Americans snatched

a stunning equaliser when Antonee Robinson thundered in a volley after defender Jonathan Tah had headed away a corner. But

Leroy Sane rifled in from 12 metres to restore Germany's lead in the 57th minute. Portugal defeated Chile 2-1 in an ill-tempered clash

in Oeiras where both teams finished with 10 men as Rafael Leao and Ivan Roman received their marching orders.

Goncalo Guedes gave the home side the lead before Bruno Fernandes added a second from outside the box. Lucas Cepeda scored a late consolation for Chile.

"We were superior in the 90 minutes, we managed to control the game very well, especially having a lot of the ball in the last third," Fernandes told RTP.

Striker Romelu Lukaku continued his comeback from injury for Belgium with 25 minutes off the bench as they enjoyed a 5-0 victory over 10-man Tunisia in Brussels. Leandro Trossard, Charles De Ketelaere, Kevin De Bruyne, Dodi Lukebakio and Nicolas Raskin scored the goals as Lukaku grabbed an assist.

"We wanted a good performance in front of our fans," Belgium coach Rudi Garcia said. "It is a good preparation for the World Cup, we know this team can do great things."

A much-changed Scotland scored all their goals in the first half as they romped to a 4-0 success over Bolivia in New Jersey. Che Adams bagged two to go with strikes from Lawrence Shankland and Scott McTominay in an impressive performance. Switzerland and Australia drew 1-1, while Bosnia and Herzegovina were held to the same scoreline by Panama.

SPOTLIGHT

Denmark's Eriksen collapses during Ukraine friendly

AFP
Paris

Christian Eriksen collapsed during Denmark's friendly against Ukraine yesterday, five years after suffering a cardiac arrest during the European Championships.

"Christian Eriksen is conscious and doing well under the circumstances," the Danish football association wrote on social media.

The 34-year-old has worn a pacemaker on his heart since he collapsed during the group stage game against Finland at Euro 2020, which was played in 2021.

That led to him spending more than six months away from football. Yesterday, he fell to the ground in the 64th minute of the match, with Denmark leading 2-1 at the time.

"There was a throw-in and walked calmly to the touchline. Then I turned around and I saw Christian collapse," Denmark captain Pierre Emile Hojbjerg told Danish station TV2.

"We know very well what that means and the reaction was extremely rapid and respectful."

Medical staff rushed onto the pitch to give Eriksen assistance, while players gathered around him to shield the scene from television or smartphone cameras.

The referee called off the match a quarter of an hour later.

"It's an extremely shocking experience for everyone, the staff, the players and the opponents,"

said Danish coach Brian Riemer, who previously worked with Eriksen at Brentford.

"He's someone who counts a lot for me. You're closer to certain players than others and he was one of the ones I got close to at Brentford."

Eriksen was subsequently taken to hospital in Odense, where the match was played.

"The main thing is that he was able to walk off by himself, because that makes you think he's doing ok given the circumstances," former player Niklas Bendtner told TV2.

"But these are terrible images that outweigh the rest of the evening... It's the second time it's happened and as a friend of Christian's... it's really awful."

Denmark's team doctor Morten Boesen said Eriksen was "doing well".

"As I see it, the pacemaker responded as it should."

"He was briefly unconscious, but regained consciousness very quickly, and we were quickly in contact with him."

"He will now undergo further examinations at the hospital to determine what caused the incident. We are in ongoing contact with him and the doctors at the hospital."

"But Christian is doing well and he asked me to send his regards to all the players and tell them that he was ok."

He said he had been in contact with Eriksen's cardiologist in Denmark, who would be able to

analyse the data from the pacemaker. When Eriksen suffered his cardiac arrest at Euro 2020, the match resumed, with Finland winning 1-0.

European football's governing body UEFA had told the team they had to either resume the match there and then or do so at midday the following day, a stance which came in for much criticism, including by Denmark great Peter Schmeichel, whose son Kasper was in goal for the national side, who called it "absolutely ridiculous".

He also accused UEFA of showing a lack of "compassion".

Denmark's then-coach Kasper Hjulmand said afterwards: "We should not have played."

Denmark also lost their following match to Belgium but then won three in a row to reach the semi-finals, where they were beaten by England.

Eriksen resumed his career seven months later at Brentford in the Premier League having been forced to leave Inter Milan due to Italy's rules against playing with a pacemaker. He went on to join Manchester United, where he won the FA Cup and League Cup, and now plays for Wolfsburg in Germany, where he has another year to run on his contract.

He also resumed his international career, playing for Denmark at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and Euro 2024 in Germany.

Denmark have not qualified for the World Cup in North America, which starts next week.

WARM-UP

Champions Argentina stroll to 2-0 win over Honduras



Argentina's Thiago Almada and Honduras' Dereck Moncada vie for the ball during their friendly at Kyle Field in College Station, Texas. (AFP)

AFP
College Station, United States

Argentina eased to a 2-0 victory against a lacklustre Honduras in the reigning champions' penultimate World Cup warm-up game in Texas on Saturday.

Lautaro Martinez and Giuliano Simeone scored the goals in a game dominated by Argentina in College Station.

Lionel Messi was on the bench but not used by coach Lionel Scaloni as he nurses the superstar back to fitness for the World Cup group games after he suf-

fered a hamstring injury on May 24. A lethargic game burst into life on 37 minutes when Nicolas Tagliafico was fouled in the penalty area by Cristopher Melendez and Inter Milan forward Martinez drove home the spot kick low to his left to make it 1-0 on 37 minutes.

The lively Martinez was the creator when Argentina doubled their lead on 54 minutes as his intelligent backheel set up Atletico Madrid's Simeone to fire past Honduras goalkeeper Edrick Menjivar.

In other highlights, Giovanni Lo Celso hit the crossbar with a superb curling shot from out-

side the area in the first half and Tomas Aranda's second-half attempt was well saved by the Honduras' keeper.

Honduras barely crossed the halfway line in the second half as Argentina exerted their dominance.

Argentina face Iceland in their final friendly match in Auburn, Alabama on Tuesday before the three-time winners begin their World Cup group games against Algeria on June 17 in Kansas City.

Scaloni has indicated that Messi could play a small part in one of the friendlies, meaning an appearance against Iceland is likely.



Denmark's and Ukraine's players huddle to accompany Christian Eriksen to a waiting ambulance during their friendly at Odense Stadium in Denmark yesterday. Eriksen collapsed during the friendly, five years after he suffered a cardiac arrest during the European Championships. (AFP)

Brazil tabs Ederson to replace Wesley on WC roster

Brazil called up Atalanta midfielder Ederson yesterday to replace the injured defender Wesley for its World Cup squad. Ederson, who has made three caps for Brazil, will join his teammates today. Wesley will miss the tournament due to an injury to the adductor muscle in his left thigh, per the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) on Sunday. The AS Roma defender was injured during Saturday's 2-1 friendly win over Egypt in Cleveland. "The CBF regrets the injury," the CBF said in a statement. "Wesley is a player much loved by the squad and will always be considered part of this team as it seeks to win its sixth World Cup title." Brazil plays its Group C opener against Morocco on Saturday in East Rutherford, N.J. It also will face Haiti on June 19 in Philadelphia and Scotland on June 24 in Miami.

