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Suthar makes dream debut in India's biggest Test victory



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SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

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DAYS TO GO

TRIVIA
Of the 48 teams that qualified, how many are making their first appearance in the FIFA World Cup?
Four: Curaçao, Uzbekistan, Cape Verde and Jordan.

SPOTLIGHT

Give Brazil the respect we deserve: Guimaraes

'Nobody else has five stars on their chest. We have players who play for top teams'

AFP
New Jersey, United States

Brazil midfielder Bruno Guimaraes insisted his team should get "the respect they deserve" as they get ready to kick off their bid to win a record-extending sixth World Cup.

The Selecao won the last of their five titles in 2002 and have gone out in the quarter-finals four times in five World Cups since then.

Brazil come into this year's tournament in North America ranked sixth in the world and arguably lacking the kind of superstar names who have stood out in the past.

"Nobody else has five stars on their chest. We have great players who play for top teams, like Vini and Raphinha. We need to give our players the respect they deserve," Newcastle United midfielder Guimaraes told reporters at the Brazil team's base in New Jersey.

Carlo Ancelotti's side, who finished fifth in the 10-team South American qualifying group, 10 points behind first-placed Argentina, begin their World Cup bid against Morocco on Saturday at the MetLife Stadium just outside New York City.

They completed preparations for the tournament with back-to-back friendly wins, hammering Panama 6-2 in Rio de Janeiro and then defeating Egypt 2-1 in Cleveland, Ohio on Saturday.

"We couldn't be feeling better. We won and played well in the two friendly matches. We have another few days to work on things but we feel ready," said Guimaraes, who scored his team's opener against Egypt.

"Once the World Cup begins, everyone will forget what has happened before. Hopefully we can start with a victory, and that will give us something to build on."

Brazil will also play Haiti and Scotland in Group C and are currently waiting to see if Neymar will be able to play any part in their group games. The former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain forward, now 34, is currently playing for Santos in his homeland and has not been capped by his country since 2023.

Despite that, Ancelotti took a gamble by including Neymar in his squad, and he has since been hit by a calf problem.

Brazil have already been forced to make a change to their squad, with Roma full-back Wesley being ruled out of the tournament at the weekend. He suffered a thigh in Saturday's 2-1 friendly win over Egypt before leaving the field in tears.

He has been replaced by Ederson, the 26-year-old midfielder with Atalanta in



Brazil's Bruno Guimaraes controls the ball during the friendly against Egypt in Cleveland, Ohio, on Saturday. (AFP)

Neymar 'recovering well' after injury ahead of opener

Morristown, United States: Neymar is "recovering well" from the calf injury that has made him a doubt for the start of Brazil's World Cup campaign, the team said in a statement.

Brazil's all-time record scorer underwent an MRI scan on Monday which showed he is "making good progress in his treatment" amid hopes that he will be able to play a part for Carlo Ancelotti's side in the United States.

"He will continue to follow the recovery schedule and fitness programme as planned by the Brazil team medical staff," the Brazilian Football Confederation said. Neymar was diagnosed with a calf injury

late last month and has since been in a race to recover fitness for the tournament, with Brazil kicking off their campaign against Morocco in New Jersey on Saturday.

Now 34, the former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain superstar has been an integral part of Brazil's last three World Cup campaigns but there was some surprise at his inclusion this time as injuries have prevented him from playing for his country at all since 2023.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti insisted last week that the player, now with Santos, would be ready for either Brazil's first or second game and added that he was "in no rush" to bring him back.



Italy who is expected to join Manchester United after the World Cup. Ederson made the last of his three international appearances in March 2025.

"Playing at a World Cup is the apex of our careers as footballers. We hope Wesley recovers quickly," said Guimaraes. Five-time World Cup winners Brazil

start their campaign on Saturday against Morocco at the New York New Jersey Stadium before facing Haiti in Philadelphia and Scotland Miami in Group C.

Somali referee denied entry to US for World Cup



Mogadishu: Award-winning Somali referee Omar Artan, set to be the first from his country to officiate at the World Cup finals, was denied entry to the United States, a sports ministry official said.

It was not immediately clear why Artan was barred from entering the US at Miami International Airport, but Somalia is one of several countries on a travel ban list introduced by President Donald Trump's administration.

"Omar Artan is among Africa's most respected referees and deserves the support of the entire football community," Ciise Aden Abshir, a senior advisor to Somalia's Ministry of Youth and Sports and a former national team captain, told AFP.

Artan had a valid visa for the US, Abshir said. He has flown back to Istanbul, where he has been staying.

"Denying him entry to the United States and preventing him from officiating scheduled matches harms not only him personally but also undermines football's commitment to fairness, merit, and the spirit of fair play," Abshir added.

Artan was among the 52 referees announced by FIFA to officiate at the June-July World Cup finals in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

He has been officiating in the Somali national football league championships since he became a FIFA referee in 2018.

He has also officiated at the 2023 African Cup of Nations (AFCON) finals in Algeria, and in 2025 he was named by the Confederation of African Football as men's referee of the year.

Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud praised Artan in April after he made history as the first Somali to be selected to officiate at the World Cup finals. "I commend the effort, professionalism, and integrity shown by referee Omar, as he has become a symbol of inspiration for the new generation of Somalis," said Mohamud.

FOCUS

Bellingham must fight for starting spot: Tuchel

Reuters
Miami

England manager Thomas Tuchel said Jude Bellingham faces stiff competition to secure a starting place at the World Cup, describing the Real Madrid midfielder as one of several contenders in a deep squad ahead of the tournament.

The 22-year-old featured in just four of England's qualifying matches, while Aston Villa's Morgan Rogers appeared in all eight, underlining the selection dilemma facing Tuchel in the number 10 role.

Asked if Bellingham had a fight to make the starting lineup, Tuchel was unequivocal. "Yes, he has," Tuchel told reporters. "He knows he is one of the starters, but we have 14 or 15 potential starters. These roles can always change, but at the moment I think there are 14 or 15 proper starters and Jude is one of them," he added.

England are preparing for their World Cup campaign in Florida, where they opened their warm-up schedule with a 1-0 victory over New Zealand in

Tampa on Saturday. Harry Kane scored the only goal.

Bellingham captained the side for the first time during the second half of that game, with Tuchel rotating his lineup in the hot and humid conditions.

Despite the competition for places, Tuchel said he had been encouraged by Bellingham's recent form following injury. "He looks good in training," the German said. "I think he is at the moment in a sweet spot because he has had his break and has the hunger to be back on the pitch."

Tuchel has emphasised squad depth and flexibility ahead of the tournament, indicating that several players are capable of starting while others may be used to impact matches from the bench.

Tuchel would not confirm whether Bellingham is part of his leadership group, but said on Sunday that midfielder Declan Rice will serve as England's vice-captain during the World Cup.

England face Costa Rica in a friendly on Wednesday before kicking off their World Cup campaign against Croatia on June 17 in Dallas.



Netherlands' Timber out of World Cup

Paris: Arsenal defender Jurrien Timber has been replaced in the Netherlands World Cup squad by Sunderland's Lutsharel Geertruida, the Dutch football federation (KNVB) announced.

Premier League winner Timber, 24, has suffered a groin issue to add to Ronald Koeman's injury list before their final pre-tournament friendly against Uzbekistan. Attacker Xavi Simons as well as centre-backs Matthijs de Ligt and Stefan de Vrij have already been ruled out of the tournament. Koeman's side begin their campaign against Japan on Sunday before facing Sweden and Tunisia in Group F.

ARGENTINA TEAM CLOSER TO FULL HEALTH

Argentina's national team seems to be trending up health-wise ahead of its World Cup opener on June 16. Star Lionel Messi is recovering from left hamstring muscle fatigue which forced him to prematurely exit his final Inter Miami match before the World Cup break on May 25. He might see some playing time in Ar-

gentina's final tune-up friendly against Iceland on Tuesday in Auburn, Ala. Whether or not he plays this week, the 38-year-old still is expected to become one of the first two players to play in matches at six World Cups alongside Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo.

Even beyond Messi, the health of the team is improving. Midfielder Nico Paz, as well as defenders Nahuel Molina and Gonzalo Montiel, all fully participated in Sunday's training session at Kansas City, Kan.

Paz, set to make his World Cup debut at 21, has been sidelined since sustaining a left knee injury May 10 with his club team Como in Italy.

Molina and Montiel have a combined 96 appearances for Argentina at right back, both representing the country at the 2022 World Cup, where Molina scored his only international goal on the way to Argentina's third World Cup title.

Argentina begins its title defense against Algeria on June 16 at Kansas City.

SPOTLIGHT

England 'hopeful' Archer returns soon

AFP
London

England could face a tricky decision over **Jofra Archer's** return, with coach **Brendon McCullum** "hopeful" that the fast bowler will be available for next week's second Test against New Zealand.

Archer, despite having an England central contract, was not considered for the series opener at Lord's following a lengthy stint in the Indian Premier League.

The 31-year-old rested up instead in his native Barbados as England, who are looking to recover from a humiliating Ashes series loss in Australia, started their international season with a comprehensive 115-run win over the Black Caps.

England's pace attack made the most of excessively seam-friendly

conditions in what was the 150th Test staged at Lord's, the most of any ground, with Ollie Robinson and Gus Atkinson taking seven wickets each and Josh Tongue bagging five.

The trio will all expect to feature at the Oval, where England will bid to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Express quick Archer, however, has long been regarded as a first-choice selection when fit and available.

Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir did not send down a single over at Lord's but, with improved batting conditions expected at the Oval, England may decide they still need a specialist slow bowler.

Archer is due back in England later this week and could be added to the squad.

"In the next couple of days we'll probably drill down on that but we're hopeful he will be avail-

able for the second Test, then we'll work out conditions-wise where we're at," said McCullum.

"He's following a plan (in Barbados)."

"He's bowling. "We completely trust Jof and he's shown us in the past what he does, which is get himself ready based on the plans we get together and come up with. He's always turned up in the condition we wanted from him."

England captain Ben Stokes is the fourth seamer in the pace attack and the all-rounder was more of a support act at Lord's, a ground where he often has been the star of the show.

He only bowled himself for seven overs in the match, taking one wicket on Sunday's fourth and final morning, and was dismissed for 12 and nought.

Batsmen on both sides struggled on a pitch of sharply uneven

bounce, but Stokes has been light on runs for England for a couple of years.

Since the start of 2024 he has averaged a modest 27.09, with just one hundred in his past 48 innings.

Stokes has just moved down a place in the batting order to number seven and McCullum believes his skipper, who turned 35 during the first Test, has the experience to succeed in the new role.

"Stokes obviously hasn't got the runs that he wanted of late but I'm confident with the work he's been doing," said McCullum. "I feel like he's moving a lot better. I feel like his fluency is starting to come back."

"Number seven is quite a nice role for him. With his experience and cricketing nous, he's able to operate and guide the tail quite nicely, plus he's got the raw power if you're eight or nine wickets down."



ONE-OFF TEST

Suthar makes a dream debut as India post big win

Hosts India register their biggest Test victory on the third day



India's Manav Suthar (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Afghanistan's Rahmat Shah during the third day of the one-off Test at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium on the outskirts of Chandigarh yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
New Chandigarh

Manav Suthar's dream debut concluded with India registering their biggest Test victory - by an innings and 300 runs against Afghanistan - inside three days of the one-off Test in New Chandigarh yesterday.

The hosts piled up 564-8 before declaring their first innings and unleashing their spin-heavy attack on Afghanistan.

Left-arm spinner Suthar claimed 6-33 as India bundled out Afghanistan for 152 in the first innings before enforcing the follow-on.

India off-spinner Washington Sundar (4-36) did most of the damage in Afghanistan's second innings as the visitors folded for

112. Sharafuddin Ashraf did not bat with a quad injury.

"A complete win from our side, ticked all the boxes, so very happy," India captain Shubman Gill said after the win.

"It was very hot. We decided that if we bowl them out by lunch or around the first drinks break in the second innings we will ask them to bat again," Gill said of his decision to enforce the follow-on.

"For the spinners it was more about getting the experience of how to set up the batters."

Earlier, Afghanistan lost their last five wickets in the morning session of the third day itself after resuming their first innings on 113-5.

Rahmat Shah (60) led their resistance in the first innings with a composed knock that included nine fours and a six.

Player-of-the-match Suthar,

who had already removed Ashraf caught behind, bowled Rahmat round the legs to complete a five-wicket haul.

He also sent back Mohammad Saleem in the same over. Afghanistan wilted after barely crossing the 150-mark but their openers had to walk out to bat again after Gill enforced the follow-on.

Seamer Mohammed Siraj trapped opener Abdul Malik for eight but Sediqullah Atal (42) and Rahmanullah Gurbaz (24) decided to counter-attack.

Kuldeep Yadav (3-30) cut short Gurbaz's run-a-ball knock and Rahmat (13) also threw away his wicket trying to go after spinner Sundar.

Yadav removed Nangeyalia Kharote and Saleem off successive deliveries - both batters fell to rash strokes - to seal India's magnificent victory on a frenetic

day when 14 Afghanistan wickets tumbled.

"The reality is we don't have that much experience in this format," Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi said.

"I think we learned a lot from this game because we don't get enough opportunities to play this format."

"Everybody knows India is a tough team playing in their own conditions."

"But a lot of lessons to us and hopefully that we learn from this," he added.

BRIEF SCORES
India 564 for 8 dec (Gill 126, Rahul 100, Saleem 6-140) **beat Afghanistan 152** (Rahmat 60, Suthar 6-33, Prasidh 3-37) **and 112** (Atal 42, Sundar 4-36, Kuldeep 3-30) **by an innings and 300 runs**

REVIEW

Spinner Suthar savours 'unreal' Test debut after tormenting Afghanistan

Reuters
New Chandigarh

India's new spin weapon Manav Suthar said his Test debut felt "unreal" after he bowled his team to their biggest Test victory in the one-off match against Afghanistan yesterday.

The left-arm spinner claimed a match haul of seven wickets as India triumphed by an innings and 300 runs within three days of the match in New Chandigarh.

Suthar, who claimed 6-33 in Afghanistan's first innings, was adjudged player of the match.

"It has been my dream from the very beginning to play for India and to play Test cricket. So it was an incredible moment for me and honestly felt quite unreal," the 23-year-old Rajasthan player said after the Test.

Suthar, who troubled batters with his accuracy and turn, denied being jittery in his debut.

"Even when I went out to bat, I felt quite comfortable," he said. "As I settled in and faced a few deliveries, I realised there was a bit of

assistance for the spinners on the wicket.

"When I came on to bowl and delivered my first over, I got the same feeling. After that, my only focus was to keep using the right line, length and pace."

"Once I understood that the wicket was a little slow and required some variation in pace, I started making those adjustments," he said. "But the main idea was always to make my stock ball as effective as possible."

The spinner said the test taught him the virtue of consistency.

"You have to keep bowling in the same area over and over again. I think that's the most important thing in test cricket. It's a format that demands a lot of patience."

Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi conceded his batters struggled against Suthar's accuracy.

"He bowled stump to stump and he was really disciplined in his bowling," Shahidi said.

"That's why we struggled against him...the pitch condition was changing and I think he was very disciplined."

COMMENT

Afghanistan need more Tests, says coach Pybus

AFP
New Chandigarh

Coach Richard Pybus said Afghanistan's Test team were "rusty" in their heavy defeat to India yesterday and needed more Test fixtures to help them improve.

Afghanistan have played only 13 matches since gaining Test status almost nine years ago, winning four, losing eight and one draw.

Yesterday's defeat by an innings and 300 runs inside three days in New Chandigarh was their second against India.

"We were rusty, we showed our naivety, and there's plenty of work to be done," Pybus told reporters.

"I think... in the same way that the white ball side has developed, you only develop through fixtures."

Afghanistan had a bruising introduction to Test cricket in 2018 when India hammered them by an innings and 262 runs inside two days in Bengaluru.

England-born Pybus replaced Jonathan Trott as coach early this year and the one-off Test in India was his first assignment in the longer format.

"I was with Pakistan when we played Bangladesh... the game was over in two-and-a-half days and that was part of Bangladesh's learning curve," Pybus said. "Now we see that Bangladesh are beating Pakistan. That's the evolution of the game. Fixtures need to be built out."

Afghanistan were outclassed by third-ranked India, who posted an imposing 564-8 declared after electing to bat first. India then bundled Afghanistan out for 152 and 112. "They played really good, solid Test cricket and, as an all-format team, India is the powerhouse in world cricket now," he said. "They've given us a very clear indication... showing us exactly where we are in terms of our skills, game strategy and ability to be able to execute," he said. "We've got a lot to work on."

ANNOUNCEMENT

Stokes, Atkinson under investigation: ECB

Reuters
London

England captain Ben Stokes and fast bowler Gus Atkinson are under investigation following a nightclub incident, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said yesterday.

The incident - the details of which have not been disclosed - occurred in the early hours of yesterday after England's victory over New Zealand in the first Test at Lord's.

"The ECB is currently investigating a breach of team protocols following the conclusion of the first men's test against New Zealand," the board said in a statement.

"Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson were present at a nightclub in the early hours of Monday morning when an incident took place.

"We are currently seeking further information, and an announcement regarding the squad for the second Test will be made in due course."

The episode marks another setback for England, who faced scrutiny earlier this year during their 4-1 Ashes series defeat amid reports of heavy drinking during a mid-tour break in Noosa.

Following that series, England batsman and limited-overs captain Harry Brook also drew attention over a previous altercation with a nightclub bouncer in New Zealand, for which he later issued a public apology.

ECB chief executive Richard Gould said in January that players would be subject to stricter measures, including a midnight curfew.

The latest breach adds renewed pressure on head coach Brendon McCullum, who retained his role across all formats in March following an ECB review, despite lingering concerns about team culture.

AUSTRALIA'S TOP ORDER BATSMEN MARSH AND HEAD OUT OF BANGLADESH ODI SERIES

Sydney: Captain Mitchell Marsh and star batsman Travis Head were ruled out of Australia's one-day international series in Bangladesh yesterday with Josh Inglis to lead the side. Both players also missed Australia's 2-1 ODI series defeat in Pakistan last week, with Marsh nursing an ankle injury and Head on personal leave.

Leg-spinner Tanveer Sangha (hamstring) will also be absent from the three-match series starting in Dhaka today.

Marsh will, however, fly over to be with the team as he prepares for a comeback in the subsequent Twenty20 series in Bangladesh.

Teenage batsman Ollie Peake and big-hitter Matt Short, who were due to head home after Pakistan, will now stay on.

Off-spinner Todd Murray, who has seven Test caps but is yet to play limited-overs cricket for

Australia, will fill Sangha's role. "Unfortunately, Tanveer Sangha sustained a hamstring injury during the second ODI against Pakistan and will take no further part in the tour," said national selector Tony Dodemaide.

"We were hopeful Mitch Marsh would be available for the Bangladesh ODI series however he is still returning to full fitness from an ankle injury. "Travis was initially selected in the ODI and T20I legs of this Bangladesh tour but has subsequently been granted personal leave for both," he added.

Australia squad: Josh Inglis (captain), Xavier Bartlett, Alex Carey, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Matthew Kuhnemann, Marnus Labuschagne, Todd Murphy, Oliver Peake, Matthew Renshaw, Liam Scott, Matt Short, Adam Zampa

SPOTLIGHT

Team Qatar set for historic debut at 24 Hours of Le Mans

Team Qatar will compete in LMGT3, the largest of the three classes, with 25 entries and 75 drivers

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 94th edition of the 24 Hours of Le Mans will be a significant milestone for Team Qatar as they prepare to enter the prestigious endurance race for the first time. Partnering with Iron Lynx, the team will field a Mercedes-AMG in the LMGT3 class at the Circuit de la Sarthe.

It marks a historic next step for Team Qatar as they ambitiously compete on the global stage in one of the most challenging and demanding races in motorsport. The vision for expansion into elite competition forms part of the wider strategic ambitions of the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF), alongside its continued commitment to supporting and developing motorsport within Qatar.

The No. 62 Team Qatar by Iron Lynx entry combines international experience with Qatari representation in the driver line-up. Taking to the wheel for the 24-hour race will be Giuliano Alesi, son of former Ferrari Formula 1 race winner Jean Alesi, alongside Germany Julian Hanes and Qatar's own Abdulla al-Khelaifi.

One of the enduring features of Le Mans is the three separate classes that compete simultaneously on the same track across the 24 hours. The split of the grid into three distinct categories – Hypercar, LMP2 and LMGT3 – creates the multi-class challenge that de-



Team Qatar drivers Abdulla al-Khelaifi, Jean Alesi and Julian Hanes.

fines endurance racing. Each class has its own technical regulations, from cutting-edge manufacturer-designed prototypes to production-based GT machinery.

This year's 24-hour race features 62 cars on the entry list, with 14 major automotive manufacturers set to battle for honors. The Hypercar class features the fastest, cutting-edge prototypes from brands such as Ferrari, Toyota, Cadillac and Aston Martin. The entries below Hypercar compete in the Le Mans Prototype 2 (LMP2) class, which is reserved for pri-

vateer teams independent from manufacturers and engine suppliers.

Team Qatar will compete in LMGT3, the largest of the three classes, with 25 entries and 75 drivers. LMGT3 features race-going versions of some of the world's most recognizable high-performance sports cars with the GT machines modified for competition, featuring aerodynamic upgrades, racing suspension and bespoke electronics.

The key to success is managing traffic, driver rotations, as well

as pit stop strategy. Consistency, and avoiding penalties, can often prove more critical than outright speed.

Manufacturers in the class showcase GT machinery from the likes of Porsche, Ferrari, Corvette, Aston Martin, McLaren, BMW, Ford, Lexus and Mercedes-AMG, with cars weighing around 1,250kg and capable of speeds approaching 300km/h. A defining feature of LMGT3 is the Pro-Am structure, meaning every line-up must include at least one Bronze-rated driver, alongside a Silver-rated

competitor, blending experience with rising talent.

While competing at the iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans on June 13-14 is a milestone moment for Qatari motorsport, it also represents the next chapter in an endurance racing journey which began back in 2023.

In its debut season, Team Qatar secured the Porsche 992 (Am) Teams' Championship in the Middle East Trophy, achieving consistent podium finishes across rounds held in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Kuwait.

The team also expanded into European competition and, in subsequent seasons, became regular front-runners across six, 12, and 24-hour endurance races.

In 2025, Team Qatar continued its success with victory in the Amateur (Am) class for the Porsche 992 Generation at the 24 Hours of Dubai, widely regarded as one of the region's most competitive endurance events and also celebrated success in the 2025 Middle East Trophy, securing the Porsche 992 Teams' Championship, underlining its consistency across an intensely competitive international season.

That momentum continued into the following year with class victories in the 6 Hours of Abu Dhabi and the 12 Hours of Mugello, the latter marking a significant international triumph against established European teams and further highlighting Team Qatar's progress in elite motorsport.

The team further strengthened its endurance racing credentials

at the 12 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps, capturing second place in the Porsche 992 category and victory in the Porsche 992 AM category.

Team Qatar's growing reputation on the international stage was further demonstrated in the opening rounds of the 2026 European Le Mans Series (ELMS).

At the Barcelona season-opener, the team claimed LMGT3 pole position, while al-Khelaifi was named Most Valuable Driver after leading for nearly three-quarters of the race, before securing fourth overall in class.

Team Qatar maintained that momentum into Round 2 at Paul Ricard, securing a second consecutive LMGT3 pole position and reinforcing its competitiveness against some of Europe's most established endurance racing teams.

The 24 Hours of Le Mans is a point-scoring round of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), and since 2024 the Qatar 1812 KM has been part of the calendar, bringing top-level international endurance racing to the Lusail International Circuit (LIC).

The venue is Qatar's premier motorsport and entertainment destination, featuring a 5.38km FIA Grade 1 and FIM Grade A circuit alongside state-of-the-art facilities.

As a reflection of Qatar's wider motorsport ambitions, Lusail International Circuit is one of only two circuits in the world to host all three major championships, with WEC joining the Formula 1 (since 2021) and MotoGP (since 2004).

MOTORSPORT

Title to lose? Antonelli set for Formula 1 history either way

Reuters
London

Kimi Antonelli will either be Formula One's youngest world champion, well before the end of the season on current form, or the first driver to win five races in a row in a single campaign and not take the title.

A place in the sport's history is his either way and while the crown may appear to be the 19-year-old Italian's to lose, the question being asked now is whether it is still Mercedes teammate George Russell's to win.

Antonelli mastered the streets of Monte Carlo on Sunday with a dominant run from pole with fastest lap while Russell failed to score for the second successive race.

The championship leader has moved 66 points clear of Ferrari's seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton - who has now been runner-up in the last two races - after five wins in six starts, and is 68 ahead of Russell.

WOLFF CITES VERSTAPPEN 2025 EXAMPLE

Team boss Toto Wolff's post-race comments, about Russell's ability to bounce back, smacked more of boosting the Briton's morale than total conviction he can rein in the man on the other side of the garage.

"This is a long championship. Last year I remember people saying (McLaren's Oscar) Piastri has won the championship," said Wolff.

"Formula One is about physics, and not mystics. You don't unlearn how to drive, and you don't become a miracle wonder driver. I'm not stressed at all for his (Rus-



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli jumps in the sea after winning the Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix at the Monaco street circuit in Monaco. (AFP)

sell's) performances because we know he's one of the best."

"I have no doubt that George will come back very strong," added the Austrian. Russell has time for an epic resurgence, with the 22-race season only a quarter done and plenty of points to be won, but history is as much against him as Lady Luck has been.

Only 10 drivers, including Antonelli, have ever won five races in a row since the Formula One championship started in 1950.

Not one of them has done so in a single season without going on to win the championship. Past comebacks do not offer Russell a lot of hope either.

While Max Verstappen staged an amazing return from 104 points behind Piastri at the end of August last year to finish just two points adrift of title-winner Lando Norris, the four-time world champion was not fighting a teammate.

Russell is up against a rival with the same car who has dropped points to him only in the three

sprints and one race - Australia - where he finished second.

Mercedes have so far won every grand prix, taken every pole position. And yet Russell is not even second in the standings.

Antonelli has been on pole in four of the six and set the fastest race lap four times. He also has Hamilton's massively experienced former race engineer Peter 'Bono' Bonnington on his side.

Any feeling that the Italian might be riding his luck, or the success prove a flash in the pan, has long gone.

Monaco was a real statement by another generational talent in the line of Hamilton and Verstappen, a measure of how much the youngster has learned and improved since finishing last there in 2025 after starting 15th.

Russell must now come up with some meaningful answers against a driver who is already the youngest ever F1 championship leader, as well as youngest Monaco winner and pole-sitter.

TENNIS

Zverev has turned the page with French Open win, says Becker

Reuters
Paris

Alexander Zverev has finally shown the world what he is capable of, tennis great Boris Becker said after the world number three claimed his first Grand Slam title with victory at the French Open on Sunday.

After coming up short in three Grand Slam finals, including in Paris two years ago, Zverev beat Flavio Cobolli to become the first German man to win a Slam since Becker's Australian Open triumph three decades ago.

"If there is one player at the very top of the rankings who truly deserves this after years of hard work, of despair, of disappointment - it's him,"

Becker told Eurosport. "He has more than earned it. And to achieve all of this while living with diabetes - that should hardly be possible. It's incredible. I'm very proud of him."

Zverev, who also has an Olympic gold and two ATP Finals crowns, said he and his team had been losers at some moments but were champions now.

"He was under a great deal of pressure and, as he himself admitted, he had felt like a loser up to now," six-times Grand Slam champion Becker said.

"He has turned the page. He is a Grand Slam champion. He showed everyone what he's capable of today. He is now part of a very special club - and it feels damn good."

Zverev is the fifth German man to win a Grand Slam after Becker, Michael Stich, Henner Henkel and Gottfried von Cramm.



Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates with ball boys and girls after winning the French Open at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris. (AFP)

Federer to return to US Open for one-night exhibition event

Roger Federer will return to the U.S. Open this year for an exhibition match, seven years after his last appearance at the Grand Slam in 2019, the event organisers said yesterday.

Federer, who is the only player to win five consecutive U.S. Open titles, will headline an event titled "Roger Federer: An Icon Returns to New York" on August 25. The 44-year-old won 20 Grand Slam titles - the first man to reach that milestone - and claimed 103 career titles before retiring in 2022. The Swiss brought the curtain down after 24 years on the tour at the Laver Cup in London.

He will be joined by 2003 U.S. Open champion Andy

Roddick, as well as Andre Agassi and John McEnroe. "The US Open has always been one of the most special tournaments for me," Federer said in a statement.

"So many unforgettable moments of my career happened in New York, and Arthur Ashe Stadium is a place that means a great deal to me. I've missed being part of that atmosphere and feeling the incredible energy that the fans bring every year."

Federer is also set to be inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame, with the ceremony scheduled for August in Newport, Rhode Island.

(AFP)

Charmig beguiles Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes with stage 2 win

Denmark's Anthon Charmig broke clear on the final climb of the long second stage of the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes yesterday to claim the biggest win of his career.

The 28-year-old was part of a 10-man breakaway on the hilly 234km stage from Saint-Martin-Le-Vinoux to Le Puy-en-Velay. But as the breakaway companions attacked each other in the final 50km, Charmig timed his move to perfection, just before the last of five summits, and he soloed to victory.

Frenchman Alex Baudin, who won Sunday's mountainous opening stage, kept the overall leader's yellow jersey as he came home in the peloton

just over three minutes back. Frenchman Henri-Francois Renard-Haquin won a four-man sprint for second 41 seconds behind the winner, with Belgian Vlad van Mechelen taking third.

The overall contenders, including French teenage prodigy Paul Seixas, the pre-race favourite, finished safely in the peloton ahead of Tuesday's crucial team time-trial. The race started to sizzle just before the penultimate climb of the day, the 4.2km-long Cote des Baraques, with Frenchmen Clement Braz Afonso and Baptiste Veistroffer attacking and going clear 47km from the finish line.

(AFP)



SPOTLIGHT

Yamal, Williams on course for opener

The duo missed the end of the club season with hamstring injuries

Reuters
Pubela, Mexico

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said that Lamine Yamal, Nico Williams and Victor Munoz are on track to be available for their World Cup opener against Cape Verde on June 15.

Yamal, 18, has been managing groin issues and a hamstring injury suffered in April, while Williams and Munoz have also been recovering from injuries.

The trio remained at Spain's training base in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to continue their rehabilitation rather than travel with the squad for final warm-up match against Peru.

"If there are no setbacks in the coming days, we expect them to be available on the 15th," De la Fuente told reporters. "I think all three will be in a position to play."

Asked whether the players could be ready to start against Cape Verde, De la Fuente was more cautious. "All three are within the expected timelines to arrive in good condition for June 15," he said. "The most important thing is that those timelines are being met and will continue to be met, so they can be with us and available to be selected at some point in the match."

Yamal was runner-up in the 2025 Ballon d'Or voting for the best player in the world. He also helped Spain win the Euro 2024 title after turning 17 during the tournament. He has six goals in 25 career appearances for the Spanish national team, which enters the tournament ranked No. 2 in the world behind defending World Cup champion Argentina.

Spain face Peru in Puebla before travelling to Atlanta for their World Cup opener and De la Fuente said they would not take their oppo-



Spain's Lamine Yamal trains in Tennessee, United States, yesterday. (AFP)

nents lightly. "For us, this is a very important match," the Spaniard said. "We are not approaching it simply as a preparation game."

Spain arrive at the World Cup among the leading contenders after their Euro 2024 triumph, with a Goldman Sachs model giving them a tournament-high 26% chance of lifting

the trophy. Forward Jeremy Pino said Spain were embracing expectations. "The favourites tag is normal," Pino said. "We've had some very good years and we carry that with a lot of pride. Pressure should not make us play worse. It should make us improve and play better."

FOCUS

Eriksen 'doing well' after collapsing

AFP
Copenhagen

Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen is "doing well" after being admitted to hospital due to collapsing during Denmark's friendly against Ukraine, five years after suffering a cardiac arrest during the European Championships.

The 34-year-old former Manchester United midfielder, who had a type of pacemaker inserted after he collapsed in 2021, fell to the ground in the 64th minute of the match in Odense on Sunday.

Medical staff rushed onto the pitch while players from both teams gathered around him to shield the scene from television or smartphone cameras.

The referee called off the match and Eriksen was subsequently taken to hospital, having been shielded by both sets of players as he walked off the pitch.

"I want to let everyone know that I am doing well and that I am home with my family," Eriksen said in a social media post.

He said that receiving a shock from his ICD (implantable cardioverter-defibrillator) had had a "major impact" on him.

"I want to reassure everyone that this was (a) different situation from what happened in 2021," he said, adding that the device had done exactly what it was designed to do. Eriksen said his "recovery has already started".

"For now, my focus is on recovering, spending time with my family, going on vacation, and playing football with my children," the footballer said.

Denmark's team doctor Morten Boesen said earlier on Monday that Eriksen had been "briefly unconscious" but that "the pacemaker responded as it should". "I spoke to Christian this morning, and he is doing well," he said in comments posted on Instagram.

Boesen said that he and his medical team were in touch with the Danish national side's players. "We are taking good care of the players and staff and are in regular contact with them."

Eriksen has worn the pacemaker 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.

Denmark captain Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg praised the swift help his team-mate received. "There was a throw-in and I walked calmly to the touchline. Then I turned around and I saw Christian collapse," he said.

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

Denmark coach Brian Riemer, who worked with Eriksen at Premier League side Brentford, said it had been "an extremely shocking experience for everyone, the staff, the players and the opponents".

He said: "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 resumed his career at Brentford seven months after his collapse, having been forced to leave Inter Milan because of Italy's rules against playing with a pacemaker.

A guide to 16 World Cup stadiums in the USA, Canada & Mexico

The FIFA World Cup 2026, which begins on Thursday, will take place over three countries for the very first time, with Canada, Mexico and the USA set to share hosting duties in a ground-breaking edition of sport's greatest event. A total of 16 stadiums have been chosen to host the games, the most since Korea/Japan 2002, with some truly spectacular venues - from cutting-edge marvels like Los Angeles' record-breaking \$5.5bn venue to Mexico City's historic Estadio Azteca, the scene of World Cup finals in 1970 and 1986 - set to showcase the best of football. An unprecedented 104 games will be crammed into 39 days, spanning four time zones and three countries, at locations up to 2,800 miles apart.

Arrowhead Stadium (called Kansas City Stadium by FIFA)
Capacity: 73,000
Location: Kansas City, Missouri
Matches: Argentina vs. Algeria (June 16), Ecuador vs. Curaçao (June 20), Tunisia vs. Netherlands (June 25), Algeria vs. Austria (June 27), round of 16 (July 3), quarterfinal (July 11)

What to know: Opened in 1972, the stadium is the home of the NFL's Chiefs since 1972. It is 8.5 miles from downtown Kansas City, Missouri.

AT&T Stadium (Dallas Stadium)
Capacity: 94,000
Location: Arlington, Texas
Matches: Netherlands vs. Japan (June 14), England vs. Croatia (June 17), Argentina vs. Austria (June 22), Japan vs. Sweden (June 25), Jordan vs. Algeria (June 27), round of 32 (June 30 and July 3), round of 16 (July 6), semifinal (July 14).
What to know: The retractable-roof stadium, opened in 2009, is the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. It hosted the 2011 Super Bowl, the 2015 NCAA football championship and the 2014 NCAA basketball Final Four. An NFL record crowd of 105,121 attended a Cowboys game against the New York Giants in Sept 2009, and 108,713 were at the 2010 NBA All-Star Game.

Gillette Stadium (Boston Stadium)
Capacity: 65,000
Location: Foxborough, Massachusetts
Matches: Haiti vs. Scotland (June 13), Iraq vs. Norway (June 16), Scotland vs. Morocco (June 19), England vs. Ghana (June 23), Norway vs. France (June 26), round of 32 (June 29), quarterfinal (July 9)
What to know: Located 29 miles southwest of Boston and 25 miles northeast of Providence, Rhode Island, the stadium opened in 2002 and is home of the NFL's New England Patriots and MLS's New England Revolution.

Hard Rock Stadium (Miami Stadium)
Capacity: 65,000
Location: Miami Gardens, Florida
Matches: Saudi Arabia vs. Uruguay (June 15), Uruguay vs. Cape Verde (June 21), Brazil vs. Scotland (June 24), Colombia vs. Portugal (June 27), round of 32 (July 3), quarterfinal (July 11), third place (July 18)
What to know: Opened in 1987, the stadium is the home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins. It also hosted MLB's Miami Marlins when they started play in 1993



through 2011, before their move to a new ballpark near downtown Miami, and since 2019 has been the site of the Miami Open tennis tournament.

Levi's Stadium (San Francisco Bay Area Stadium)
Capacity: 71,000
Location: Santa Clara, California
Matches: Qatar vs. Switzerland (June 13), Austria vs. Jordan (June 16), Turkey vs. Paraguay (June 19), Jordan vs. Algeria (June 22), Paraguay vs. Australia (June 25), round of 32 (July 1).
What to know: The stadium, opened in 2014, is home of the NFL's San Francisco 49ers and hosted the Super Bowl in 2016 and 2026, and also the 2019 NCAA college football championship. It is in Silicon Valley, home to many technology companies, about 43 miles south of San Francisco.

Lumen Field (Seattle Stadium)
Capacity: 69,000
Location: Seattle
Matches: Belgium vs. Egypt (June 15), United States vs. Australia (June 19), Bosnia-Herzegovina vs. Qatar (June 24), Egypt vs. Iran (June 26), round of 32 (July 1), round of 16 (July 6)
What to know: Lumen Field, a short walk or Sound Transit Link light railway ride from downtown, opened in 2002. It is home of the NFL's Seahawks and MLS's Sounders. It is next to T-Mobile Park, home of MLB's Mariners. The NFL and MLB teams had shared the Kingdom. Grass was installed over the artificial turf.

Lincoln Financial Field (Philadelphia Stadium)
Capacity: 69,000
Location: Philadelphia

Matches: Ivory Coast vs. Ecuador (June 14), Brazil vs. Haiti (June 19), France vs. Iraq (June 22), Curaçao vs. Ivory Coast (June 25), Croatia vs. Ghana (June 27), round of 16 (July 4)
What to know: Known as the Linc and opened in 2003, the stadium is home of the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles. It part of the South Philadelphia Sports Complex, a short SEPTA Metro ride from downtown.

Mercedes-Benz Stadium (Atlanta Stadium)
Capacity: 75,000
Location: Atlanta
Matches: Spain vs. Cape Verde (June 15), Czech Republic vs. South Africa (June 18), Spain vs. Saudi Arabia (June 21), Morocco vs. Haiti (June 24), Congo vs. Uzbekistan (June 27), round of 32 (July 1), round of 16 (July 7), semifinal (July 15).
What to know: Opened in 2017, the downtown retractable-roof venue is home to the NFL's Atlanta Falcons and MLS's Atlanta United. It hosted the Super Bowl in 2019 and is scheduled to again in 2028.

MetLife Stadium (New York New Jersey Stadium)
Capacity: 82,500
Location: East Rutherford, New Jersey
Matches: Brazil vs. Morocco (June 13), France vs. Senegal (June 16), Norway vs. Senegal (June 22), Ecuador vs. Germany (June 25), Panama vs. England (June 27), round of 32 (June 30), round of 16 (July 5), final (July 19).
What to know: Just across the Hudson River from Manhattan in the New Jersey swamplands, MetLife Stadium will be host to the World Cup final on July 19. The home of the New York Giants and New York Jets, it opened in 2010 and replaced next-door Giants Stadium, a

1994 World Cup venue.

NRG Stadium (Houston Stadium)
Capacity: 72,000
Location: Houston
Matches: Germany vs. Curaçao (June 14), Portugal vs. Congo (June 17), Netherlands vs. Sweden (June 20), Portugal vs. Uzbekistan (June 23), Cape Verde vs. Saudi Arabia (June 26), round of 32 (June 29), round of 16 (July 4)
What to know: Opened in 2002, NRG has a retractable roof and is home of the NFL's Houston Texans, who moved from the Astrodome. Grass was installed over the artificial turf. The stadium is about 6 miles from downtown.

SoFi Stadium (Los Angeles Stadium)
Capacity: 70,000
Location: Inglewood, California
Matches: United States vs. Paraguay (June 12), Iran vs. New Zealand (June 15), Switzerland vs. Bosnia-Herzegovina (June 18), Belgium vs. Iran (June 21), Turkey vs. United States (June 25), round of 32 (June 28), round of 32 (July 2), quarterfinal (July 10)
What to know: Opened in 2020, SoFi was built on the site of Hollywood Race Course in a Los Angeles suburb near Los Angeles International Airport and is home of the NFL's Los Angeles Rams and Chargers. While there is a roof, the sides are open to air. Grass was installed over the artificial turf. The Rose Bowl, about 20 miles away in Pasadena, was site of the finals of the 1994 World Cup and the 1999 Women's World Cup.

Estadio Akron (Estadio Guadalajara)
Capacity: 48,000
Location: Guadalajara, Mexico
Matches: South Korea vs. Czech Republic

(June 11), Mexico vs. South Korea (June 17), Colombia vs. Congo (June 23), Uruguay vs. Spain (June 26)
What to know: Opened in 2010, the stadium is home to Chivas, which inaugurated the venue with a friendly against Manchester United. The venue hosted the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2011 Pan American Games.

Estadio Azteca (Estadio Ciudad de Mexico)
Capacity: 83,000
Location: Mexico City
Matches: Mexico vs. South Africa (June 11), Colombia vs. Uzbekistan (June 17), Mexico City vs. Czech Republic (June 24), round of 32 (June 30), round of 16 (July 6)
What to know: Site of this year's tournament opener, Azteca opened in 1966 and hosted World Cup finals in 1970 and 1986. Attendance for the final was 107,412 in 1970 and 114,600 in 1986 but capacity was reduced during a series of renovations. Formerly known as Estadio Banorte. Club América and Cruz Azul are the stadium's current home teams and past home teams include Atlante, Atlético Español and Necaxa.

Estadio BBVA (Estadio Monterrey)
Capacity: 53,500
Location: Monterrey, Mexico
Matches: Tunisia vs. Sweden (June 14), Tunisia vs. Japan (June 20), South Korea vs. South Africa (June 24), round of 32 (June 29)
What to know: Opened in 2015, the stadium is the home of Monterrey. It is in one of the warmest areas hosting World Cup matches this year, with temperatures soaring past 32 degrees celsius. The stadium, which has a futuristic exterior resembling gills, has a view of the Cerro de la Silla mountain range.

BMO Field (Toronto Stadium)
Capacity: 45,000
Location: Toronto
Matches: Canada vs. Bosnia-Herzegovina (June 12), Ghana vs. Panama (June 17), Germany vs. Ivory Coast (June 20), Panama vs. Croatia (June 23), Senegal vs. Iraq (June 26), round of 32 (July 2)
What to know: Built on the site of Exhibition Stadium, former home to MLB's Toronto Blue Jays and the CFL's Toronto Argonauts, BMO opened in 2007 and is home of Toronto's MLS team and the Argonauts. Its capacity of 28,180 was expanded for the World Cup with temporary bleachers.

B.C. Place (B.C. Place Vancouver)
Capacity: 54,000
Location: Vancouver, British Columbia
Matches: Australia vs. Turkey (June 13), Canada vs. Qatar (June 18), New Zealand vs. Egypt (June 21), Canada vs. Switzerland (June 24), Belgium vs. New Zealand (June 26), round of 32 (July 2), round of 16 (July 7)
What to know: Opened in 1983, B.C. is home of MLS's Whitecaps, who are threatening to move, and the CFL's BC Lions. A roof renovation that started in 2010 changed it from fixed to retractable. Grass was installed over the artificial turf. Site of the 2015 Women's World Cup final, B.C. also hosted the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2010 Winter Olympics.