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# GULF TIMES SPORT



MATCH REPORT

## Canada in last 16 after Eustaquio sinks South Africa

Canada will now face the Netherlands or Morocco on July 4



Canada's Stephen Eustaquio (centre) celebrates with team-mates after scoring the winner against South Africa in Inglewood, California. (AFP)

**AFP**  
Los Angeles

Stephen Eustaquio's stoppage-time winner fired Canada to a 1-0 win over South Africa on Sunday in the first match of the World Cup knockout rounds, as the co-hosts advance to the last 16 for the first time in their history.

With both sides making their first-ever appearance in the knockout phase, the game appeared to be heading for extra time, before Eustaquio broke South African hearts with a clinical hit from just outside the area.

Canada - playing in Los Angeles despite being co-hosts, after failing to win their group - will now face the Netherlands or Morocco in Houston in the last 16 on July 4, as South Africa's World Cup adventure comes to an end.

Before the game, coach Jesse Marsch had talked up the "X-factor" of Canada's star Alphonso Davies, available again after a hamstring injury. But the Bayern Munich wing-

back, who was yet to appear at this World Cup, remained glaringly absent from the starting line-up. Still, Canada began on the front foot, racking up chances against South Africa's low block. In the 22nd minute, a pinpoint Eustaquio free-kick found Derek Cornelius wide open on the six-yard line. The Canada center-back utterly mistimed his headed effort.

South Africa threatened sporadically on the counter. But in a frenetic period just before half-time Canada came agonisingly close.

From a corner, Moise Bombito's header was cleared off the line, before Tajon Buchanan's follow-up shot was blocked by goalkeeper Ronwen Williams.

Moments later Khuliso Mudau crashed into the dangerous Richie Laryea, but his penalty appeals were waved away.

That enraged a heavily Canadian crowd, and the jeers grew louder after half-time as South Africa were content to exchange deep passes under little pressure while the clock ticked down. Just past the hour mark, Canada came close again.

Substitute Niko Sigurdsson slid a through ball to Tani Oluwaseyi whose shot was well-saved by the goalkeeper and looped up toward Jonathan David - - but defender Mbekezeli Mbokazi just got there first and cleared brilliantly.

In the 75th minute Davies finally appeared, to a huge roar, and made an immediate impact. From the left wing, Davies found Jonathan David who laid the ball to fellow striker - and no relation - Promise David, but his shot went wide. Moments later Davies found Jonathan David again. This time he shot from a tight angle, but was denied by Williams.

In the second minute of stoppage time, Canada finally broke through, from the other flank. Jacob Shaffelburg raced down the right wing and pinged in a cross which was headed clear to Eustaquio.

The Porto midfielder - on loan at Los Angeles FC - chested the ball down and slammed it first-time into the bottom-left corner.

Canada's bench streamed onto the pitch as the stadium erupted, celebrating a historic victory.

SPOTLIGHT

## Scaloni running out of superlatives as Messi breaks record



Lionel Messi came off the bench to score his sixth goal of the tournament as Argentina warmed up for their World Cup knockout match with Cape Verde by beating Jordan 3-1 on Saturday. (AFP)

**Reuters**  
Dallas

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said he is running out of ways to describe the performances of Lionel Messi after seeing his captain become the first player to score in seven consecutive World Cup matches in their 3-1 win over Jordan on Saturday.

Messi was introduced from the bench on the hour mark at Dallas Stadium and netted an 80th-minute free kick to continue a scoring run that saw him surpass the mark he shared with France's Just Fontaine and Brazilian Jairzinho.

"It's a little bit of an uncomfortable situation when people ask me that and I don't know what to say," Scaloni said when quizzed once again about Messi's performance.

"Today he could've played 90 minutes and, without undermining our opponent, he wanted his team mates to have time on the pitch and to save himself for what's coming up. He doesn't think so much about the numbers that people are talking about. The only word that comes to mind is that I'm surprised."

Messi's strike put the seal on a largely comfortable win for the champions, who took a two-goal lead into the interval following a

Giovani Lo Celso free kick and a penalty from Lautaro Martinez.

Those goals were the first not scored by Messi for Argentina at the current World Cup, before the 39-year-old took his total to a tournament-leading six. Scaloni had made nine changes to his starting line-up and he was pleased with the performances of those who had featured little in the tournament so far.

"It's a very positive opinion that I have, especially as I was able to include all the players, this was a goal we always set for ourselves," he said.

"I believe all of them deserve to enjoy coming to a World Cup and playing at a World Cup and we were able to give them minutes. I think they played quite well in a difficult match. They showed me today that I can count on them."

Argentina next take on Cape Verde in the round of 32 in Miami and Scaloni said he would not underestimate the debutants. "Based on what I've seen, I'm not surprised," he said of their progress to the knockout rounds. "They're a good team, they have made it very difficult for the three opponents they have played.

"Spain couldn't beat them, Uruguay couldn't either. They're a fast team, they play well with a high calibre of play. I can guarantee you they're a team that's going to make it difficult for us!"

PREVIEW

## Japan look to turn tables on mentors Brazil in last 32 clash

**Reuters**  
Dallas

Hajime Moriyasu's quest to lead Japan deep into the World Cup faces a master-versus-apprentice last-32 clash today against Brazil, the country that has done more than any other to shape the game in the four-times Asian Cup-winning nation.

The Japanese squad travelled to North America with ambitions of a run to a first-ever final and the high-profile scalps of Germany, Spain and England over the last four years have added weight to the argument that the Samurai Blue could excel.

Those hopes, however, face a major hurdle in Houston that represents much more than just another opponent given the overwhelming Brazilian influence on professional football in Japan.

Launched in 1993, the J-League not only took much of its inspiration from the multiple World Cup winners but employed plenty of their players too. Zico, the creative lynchpin of Brazil's fabled 1982 World Cup team, was enticed out of retirement to join Kashima Antlers while internationalists Bismarck and Elivelton started a run of Brazil national team players making the move to Japan. By the late 1990s, seven of the Brazil team that won the 1994 World Cup, including captain Dunga, had played or were playing for Japanese clubs and, by



Japan players warm up during a training session in Houston, Texas. (AFP)

extension, lent their influence to a rapidly developing scene.

"Anyone who hasn't been paying attention to Japanese football will be surprised," says Cesar Sampaio, who played for Brazil at the 1998 World Cup while contracted to J-League club Yokohama Flugels.

"I am not. Since I was there I learned that Japanese football is improving, year after year, step by step. Their discipline was something that always appeared to be fantastic. But now they have fantastic players

such as (Daizen) Maeda and (Ayase) Ueda. They have a great lineup, they played well in their three games and facing Brazil will be their ultimate challenge."

Japan have had success against Brazil before, but never at the World Cup. The country recorded a smash-and-grab 1-0 win at the Olympic Games in 1996 that became known as the 'Miracle in Miami' while more significantly Moriyasu's team defeated Carlo Ancelotti's side 3-2 in a friendly in Tokyo in October.



Brazil's forward Vinicius Junior takes part in a training session. (AFP)

The teams have only met once previously at the World Cup when Zico, perhaps the man who has done the most to shape Japanese football, was in the dugout at the 2006 finals as Japan lost 4-1 in Dortmund to exit the tournament.

That side featured Alessandro Santos, one of three Brazil-born players to have represented Japan in the country's eight appearances at the World Cup.

Defender Marcus Tulio Tanaka was the most recent to do so, featuring in South

Africa in 2010 as Japan reached the last 16. "The match between Japan and Brazil holds deep significance," Tulio said.

"Over the years, Brazil has profoundly influenced Japanese soccer, dating back to the early days of the J-League and the arrival of Brazilian players. When I first came to Japan as an exchange student, I used to wonder when the day would come that Japan and Brazil would go head-to-head on equal footing at the World Cup, and that day has arrived sooner than expected.



## ANNOUNCEMENT

# England's Stokes quits international cricket

Reuters  
Nottingham, England

England Test captain Ben Stokes will retire from international cricket after the third Test against New Zealand, bringing the curtain down on a career that included the 2019 World Cup triumph and one of the most famous Ashes innings of all time.

When the news was announced at Trent Bridge yesterday it drew a standing ovation from the crowd.

The timing may have been intended to inspire his teammates to deliver one last win for him, with England's backs to the wall in the deciding third match of the series, and Stokes, playing in his 122nd Test, took a wicket with his first ball afterwards.

Stokes, who had only opened twice before in his England career, then strode out with Ben Duckett to spearhead England's pursuit of a victory target of 373 - through a guard of honour formed by the New Zealand fielders and the umpires.

He got them away to a flying start with two sixes in the first five overs in front of a crowd willing him on to produce one last heroic innings before he holed out for 30 and left the field to one last standing ovation.

Stokes, who will continue to play for Durham, said the responsibility of the England captaincy had burned him out.

"It's the best thing that I've ever been asked to do captaining this team, captaining this country," he told *Sky Sports*.

"It's the greatest honour that can ever be put on your shoulders as a player but there's another side to it that people don't see and don't understand.

"Only the people close to you can really see what you do go through emotionally.

"As good as it is there are bits that do get you, do drain you and do affect you in a negative way but overall for four and a half years, or whatever it's been, I've loved every single moment of it."

In a video shared by the ECB, Stokes told his teammates: "The only thing that I want is to be able

to walk off the end of that field, regardless of the result, knowing that I've had this group... give everything for the last two days.

"All the emotion, all that kind of stuff, please can we just wait for the end of the game?"

## GUARD OF HONOUR

There was another ovation for Stokes as he led England off the field at tea and one more - plus a guard of honour from his teammates and New Zealand's batters - as he led them back on for the final session of the day.

The 35-year-old, who made his international debut in 2011, has captained England's test team since 2022.

Known for his fearless batting and defiant leadership, Stokes helped England win their first 50-over World Cup seven years ago with an unbeaten 84 in the final.

His 135 not out at Headingley the same summer, which guided England to a one-wicket win over Australia after they had been bowled out for 67 in the first innings, is widely regarded as one of the greatest test innings of all time.



England's Ben Stokes reacts as he walks back to the pavilion after losing his wicket off the bowling of New Zealand's Zak Foulkes during the fourth day of the third Test at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground in Nottingham, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

## 'LOSING A TALISMAN'

"We are losing a batsman, a bowler, a captain and a talisman," said ECB chair Richard Thompson in a statement.

"His performances under pressure, his relentless competitiveness and his ability to produce

the extraordinary when it matters most have given me and millions of other fans memories that will endure forever."

Stokes had been dropped from the second Test against New Zealand this month amid an investigation into a nightclub incident

where he and teammate Gus Atkinson were alleged to have broken curfew.

He was later cleared to return to the side.

In 2017, Stokes was arrested over a brawl outside a Bristol nightclub and was indefinitely suspended by the ECB. His court appearances were followed closely in the media, and he eventually accepted a misconduct charge and returned to cricket in February 2018.

Despite the off-field controversies, Stokes has also had a huge on-field influence, helping implement a cultural reset in the England team, partnering with coach Brendan McCullum to introduce an aggressive brand of cricket quickly nicknamed "Bazball."

Adopting this swashbuckling approach, England in 2022 chased down a record target of 378 against India in 76.2 overs and swept a series 3-0 against reigning world test champions New Zealand.

The same year, Stokes delivered a player-of-the-match performance at the T20 World Cup final to help England win the tournament for the second time.

## THIRD TEST

# Mitchell digs in as New Zealand eye series victory

England finish on 103-4, needing 270 runs to win on the final day

Reuters  
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Ben Stokes' hopes of a winning send-off in his final international appearance were hanging by a thread in the third Test with New Zealand on the brink of a series victory over England at the close on the fourth day at Trent Bridge yesterday.

The hosts ended on 103-4, still needing 270 runs to secure a 2-1 victory in the series after New Zealand declared their second innings on 288-9.

On the ground where Bazball was born four years ago with England chasing down 299 to beat New Zealand in 50 overs, the curtain will come down on the Stokes captaincy era at the end of the match.

Led by Stokes, England blazed away in similar fashion in a breathless evening session but the loss of four wickets means New Zealand are in a dominant position heading into the fifth and final day.

Stokes announced his retirement during a lengthy afternoon spell with the ball and promoted himself to opener to launch a dizzying pursuit of a victory target of 373.

He hit Zak Foulkes over his head and into the stands off the 11th



New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell (left) taps England's Ben Stokes (right) on the shoulder as they walk off after declaring, on the fourth day of the third Test at Trent Bridge in Nottingham yesterday. (AFP)

ball of the innings - the earliest any England player has hit a six in a Test.

There was another six in the fourth over off Nathan Smith before Stokes holed out to mid-wicket off Foulkes, for 30 off 20 balls, departing to a standing ovation.

Jacob Bethell went four balls later for a duck and Harry Brook, the favourite to succeed Stokes as Test captain, followed for 21 from

nine balls after hitting his first ball for six, giving concussion substitute Foulkes his third wicket.

The loss of opener Ben Duckett to Ben Sears in the penultimate over left England 103-4 after 15 wild overs.

New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell made a courageous 100 not out off 241 balls, overcoming a series of blows to the head, forearm and hands to complete his sixth test century.

He struck ten fours and one six in a stay of almost seven hours.

Sears retired hurt with a finger injury but returned to the crease at the fall of the ninth wicket to help Mitchell reach his landmark.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
England 354 and 103 for 4 need a further 270 to beat New Zealand 438 and 288 for 9 dec (Mitchell 100\*, Ravindra 94)

## PREVIEW

# Qatar host Saudi Arabia in FIBA World Cup 2027 Qualifiers in Doha



By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's senior national basketball team faces a stern test when it hosts Saudi Arabia at 7:00pm on Monday at Al Gharafa Sports Hall, in the rescheduled fixture from the second window of the Asian qualifiers for the FIBA Basketball World Cup - Qatar 2027. The encounter carries significant weight for both sides amid the fierce battle for the top spot in Group D.

The match holds added importance not only due to the intensity of the Gulf rivalry but also because of the close results within the group, which also includes Lebanon and India.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon are level on five points each, with two wins and one loss apiece, making Group D the most balanced and exciting among the Asian qualifiers.

Although Qatar has already secured progression to the second round as host nation of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027, head coach Hakan Demir views

the clash as a vital opportunity to further develop performance, strengthen team cohesion, and continue building momentum with positive results ahead of the third window.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, enters the contest knowing that victory in Doha would put them on the verge of qualification. A win over Qatar, combined with a Lebanese triumph against India, would guarantee their advancement, adding further competitive edge to the showdown.

Qatar approaches the game with high morale following an intensive preparation program, which began with an overseas training camp in Antalya, Turkey, focused on physical readiness and tactical refinement. The team concluded preparations with two friendlies against Tunisia, giving the coaching staff valuable insights into player readiness before returning to official competition. The Qatari side will rely on home support to sustain its strong run in the qualifiers, having already delivered impressive performances. They opened with a narrow 75-74 loss to Lebanon in Doha, before securing a 86-83 away victory in Beirut. Qatar then beat India 99-73.

## FOCUS

# Ireland shock India again, clinch T20 series 2-0

AFP  
Belfast

Ireland beat 20-over world champions India 2-0 in their two-match T20 bilateral series, as they secured a thrilling one-run win over the white-ball heavyweights yesterday.

Ireland's Jai Moondra and Matt Hollard dismantled the Indian batting line-up with three-wicket hauls as the visitors could only manage 153-9 after Ireland, put in to bat, posted 154-8 on a rain-disrupted afternoon in Belfast.

The hosts, who earned their first-ever victory over India on Friday, handed the visitors their first T20 series defeat since 2023.

"I challenged the lads the other day to show the world that (the first win) wasn't a one-off," said Ireland captain Lorcan Tucker. "We have a lot of lads with very few caps but they showed great character... it is a great time to be a professional cricketer in Ireland."



Ireland players and backroom staff with the series trophy after beating India in a two-match T20 series in Belfast yesterday. (@cricketireland)

Ireland made a shaky start as their openers fell in the first three overs and Prince Yadav (3-22) making his T20 debut for India, helped restrict the flow of runs in the first half of the innings.

But Harry Tector (53) and Ben Calitz (37) helped Ireland recover and post a competitive total.

In reply, player-of-the-series Moondra (3-32) dismissed Indian openers Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma in the very first over, and bowled captain Shreyas

Iyer in the third over, leaving India reeling at 19-3.

Tilak Varma's fighting knock of 55 kept India in the hunt, but Hollard (3-26) got him caught by wicketkeeper Tucker, dealing a crucial blow to the visitors' hopes.

Still, Harshit Rana (21 off 10 balls) got the visitors close, and they needed eight runs to win from the last two balls. But Rana was caught trying to hit Tector for a six off the penultimate delivery to seal Ireland's win.

"Kudos to (Ireland), the way they played. Showed professionalism, they had tremendous idea of how the wicket was going to play," Iyer said. India next visit England for a five-match T20 series starting July 1, followed by three 50-over matches.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
Ireland 154 for 8 (Tector 53, Prince 3-22) beat India 153 for 9 (Tilak 55, Hollard 3-26, Moondra 3-32) by one run

# Roach gets 300th wicket as West Indies beat Sri Lanka



Kemar Roach of West Indies celebrates 300th career Test wicket at the end of the first Test against Sri Lanka at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, Antigua and Barbuda, yesterday. West Indies defeated Sri Lanka by an innings and 217 runs in mid-afternoon on the fourth day of the first Test of the two-match series. Amir Jangoo was declared the Man of the Match for his brilliant 233 for West Indies. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

# Japan's Ogura wins maiden MotoGP as Bezzecchi crashes

AFP  
Assen, Netherlands

Japanese rider Ai Ogura claimed his maiden MotoGP win as Aprilia achieved another 1-2-3 finish but Marco Bezzecchi crashed and surrendered the overall championship lead to Jorge Martin in yesterday's motorcycle Dutch Grand Prix.

At the heart of MotoGP thanks to their riders and manufacturers, Japan had been waiting nearly 22 years for a victory in the premier class. And it was ultimately Ogura, the 2024 Moto2 world champion, who ended that interminable wait with a first Japanese win since Makoto Tamada in 2004.

Ogura delivered a masterful dis-

play in the Dutch heat, despite being hampered by a technical issue early in the race. Initially trailing and holding third place for much of the race, he once again produced a blistering finish.

Ogura finished over two seconds ahead of his Trackhouse teammate Raul Fernandez with another Spaniard Martin in third a further 1.5sec back on a winding and undulating track. "It's fantastic, I don't have much to say but I'm really very happy. Many thanks to my team," said Ogura.

Fernandez, winner of Saturday's sprint, spent two-thirds of the race behind Martin before managing to overtake him only for Ogura, who had been bidding his time, to pass his teammate shortly after and pull away for a scorching victory.

Ogura took pole last week in the Czech Republic but came second. He also finished third at Le

Mans in France in May to become the first Japanese rider to finish on a MotoGP podium since Katsuyuki Nakasuga at the Valencia Grand Prix in 2012. In the championship, Martin takes the lead seven points ahead of Bezzecchi with Italian Fabio Di Giannantonio 16 behind the leader.

Bezzecchi crashed heavily on lap three at over 200kph.

The Italian Aprilia rider was fortunate to separate from his bike early in the fall and was transferred to hospital, conscious but suffering "intense pain".

Ogura moved up to fourth position, 25 points behind the leader, while Marc Marquez, the reigning world champion, is 40 points behind his compatriot in fifth.

"It's incredible to lead the championship; the important thing for me is that I've made good progress with this bike and am increasingly adapting my riding

style to this Aprilia," said Martin.

This tenth round of the season at Assen's "Cathedral of Speed" confirmed Aprilia's superiority over Ducati, a manufacturer that had dominated MotoGP for over five years.

Ducati's Marquez, who had won the previous two Grands Prix just a month after undergoing double surgery on his right shoulder and foot, was unable to match the Aprilias in the Netherlands.

Penalised one position for exceeding track limits, the 33-year-old Catalan finished a disappointing seventh and now trails Martin by 40 points.

However, the final round before the summer break, taking place in two weeks at his favourite circuit, the Sachsenring in Germany, where he has won nine times in MotoGP, could allow the seven-time world champion to narrow that gap.



Japan's Ai Ogura reacts after winning the Dutch Grand Prix at the TT Circuit Assen yesterday. (AFP)

FORMULA 1

# Thirsty Russell trims Antonelli's lead with tight win

Antonelli leads by 40 points, Verstappen 2nd at Red Bull's home circuit

Reuters  
Spielberg, Austria

Thirsty George Russell held off Max Verstappen to end his winless streak in Austria yesterday and trim Mercedes teammate Kimi Antonelli's Formula One lead to 40 points.

The top three drivers were separated by a mere two seconds after 71 laps, with Red Bull's Verstappen finishing runner-up, 1.6 behind, at his team's home circuit and chased to the line by Antonelli, who took the chequered flag a further 0.3 adrift.

The win was Russell's second of the season, after he took the opener in Australia, his career seventh and Mercedes' seventh in eight rounds so far.

"Incredible to be back on the top step. It's been a little while, so I am definitely going to enjoy this one this evening," said Russell, who started on pole position and can now head to his home race at Silverstone next weekend on a high.

The Briton revealed over the radio after taking the chequered flag that his drinks system had failed during the race, the first of the season to be declared a "heat hazard". "Nice race for it to do so, I'm a little bit thirsty," he said.

Antonelli has 171 points to Russell's 131 with Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton, fifth on Sunday after running second and battling Verstappen wheel-to-wheel, dropping to third on 125.

In the constructors' standings, Mercedes have 302 points to Ferrari's 204.

Oscar Piastri was fourth for McLaren, ahead of Hamilton, with Isack Hadjar sixth for Red Bull.

Reigning champion Lando Norris, last year's winner in Austria,



Mercedes' British driver George Russell celebrates with his trophy on the podium after winning the Austrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, yesterday. (AFP)

was seventh with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc eighth and Racing Bulls pair Liam Lawson and rookie Arvid Lindblad completing the top 10.

"I was having to push every single lap and when you push those boundaries there's bound to be a small mistake or two," said Russell, who made a clean getaway at the scenic Red Bull Ring while Hamilton passed Leclerc for second in the early jostling for position.

"I knew how quick the guys were behind. Kimi has been extraordinarily quick this whole season, so every lap I was looking at the timing board."

Verstappen had started fifth after crashing in qualifying but Sunday turned out to be the four-time world champion's best race so far this season, with Red Bull's

upgraded car showing a notable improvement. "To be second and that close to a win is extremely positive," said the Dutch driver.

"I knocked my knees in qualifying, that was not nice, but today was okay."

Antonelli returned to the podium after a non-finish at the previous race in Barcelona but he felt he had paid the price for not being calmer on the opening laps.

"I was a bit too excited on the first few laps. Definitely didn't drive well," said the 19-year-old Italian, who caught up with Verstappen on the last lap.

"I did too many mistakes and on the first stint on the medium (tyre), I lost three or four seconds with the mistakes. I was struggling with the brakes. After I changed tyres, I reset and the pace

at the end was very strong. It was a shame I joined the party a bit too late."

Ferrari's early promise, with Leclerc and Hamilton second and third on the grid after the Briton's breakthrough first win for the team in Barcelona, faded as the afternoon wore on and they struggled for straight-line speed.

"The cars didn't agree with any of the tyres today. It was a very, very hard race, a really tough race," said Hamilton, who made three stops including a short stint on soft tyres while most others stuck to two.

"We are going to have to push very hard to see when we can get the next power upgrade. That won't come for a while. Hopefully the car will be in a better place at Silverstone."

TENNIS

# Serena blasts drug test rules ahead of Wimbledon return

AFP  
London

Serena Williams has slammed the drug test rules that force tennis stars to declare their location to doping officials, claiming the "unprofessional" system stopped her coming out of retirement sooner.

Williams will play her first singles match since 2022 when the American legend faces Australia's Maya Joint in the Wimbledon first round on Tuesday.

The 44-year-old has made a sensational comeback after four years in retirement, far playing doubles at Queen's Club and Berlin before deciding to step up her return at Wimbledon, where she will also compete with sister Venus in the doubles.

Williams' stunning decision to pick up a racquet again has brought unwanted stress off the court however. The 23-time Grand Slam champion had to enter the anti-doping testing pool several months before being allowed to officially return to the women's tour. Tennis' "whereabouts rules" require players to give a location and time slot when they can be tested for each day of the year. Refusing one, or failing to update whereabouts three times within 12 months, can lead to a player being sanctioned. Players can also be randomly tested at any time. Williams is unimpressed by the testing system, which has changed since she last played.

"It's gruelling. They changed the rules now. I didn't know some of the rules. So apparently if you miss a test outside of your window, it still counts as missed. I'm like, I guess I can't go pick up my kids," she told reporters at Wimbledon on Sunday.

"It's unprofessional. I hate it. It's necessary, but I think a lot of the stuff, if I want to go places outside of my window, I should be able to go without having it count as a missed test. There has to be a different way to make it reasonable because that's just unreasonable. That was a big reason why I didn't want to come back either, because it's just so hard." Williams' blast comes just days after the International Tennis



Integrity Agency (ITIA) handed a four-year ban to former Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova. The Czech refused an anti-doping test in December, saying she was scared to let a doping official into her house.

Williams is a mother of two young daughters and the drug test demands are an awkward addition to her daily schedule. The seven-time Wimbledon winner knows testing is necessary to keep the sport clean, but adapting to the routine is a work in progress. "My life is busy. I run a venture capital company, I travel the world. I have children. I could be in so many different cities so many different times," she said.

"But just getting that discipline of reporting. Obviously I don't mind because I always have been very clear about what I do. I guess now for 24 hours where I'm going to be is just different - at least for me. I don't know if that works for everyone else."

Williams' remarkable career looked to be over after she said she was "evolving away" from tennis in 2022 after a third round defeat against Ajla Tomljanovic at US Open. Even now, Serena is not quite sure she made the right decision to return to compete in singles after so long away. "I had until Monday to decide. I think it was like Sunday. I just wasn't sure up until then. Honestly, I'm still not even sure, but we'll see," she said. Motivated to return by a desire to play in front of her children, Williams added: "My expectations are definitely different for the first time in my career. I feel like I'm really going to enjoy being out there."

"I expect to be nervous. I was also nervous every single match I ever played in my life. I think that showed the passion and the love and the care. I've always had some nerves. But I just dust 'em off, then I move on."

ATHLETICS

# Bromell upsets Lyles, Duplantis shines at Paris Diamond League

AFP  
Paris

Trayvon Bromell upset fancied US teammate Noah Lyles to win the 100m at the Diamond League in Paris yesterday as Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis dominated the pole vault in a high-quality meet.

Lyles, the reigning Olympic champion, suffered a disastrous start and could not make up the difference as Bromell, a two-time world bronze medallist, stormed to the win in 9.91 seconds from lane eight.

"I'm good. The feeling at the start was not what I expected," said Lyles, who finished second, a hundredth of a second off Bromell.

Switzerland's Audrey Werro continued her dominant form over 800m as she scorched to another

victory, in a Diamond League record of 1min 53.80sec.

Femke Broeders-Bol, the convert from 400m hurdles, was second in a personal best of 1:55.60 as she continued her transformation into a true two-lap competitor.

Werro's time was the third fastest ever run, bettering her previous best set in Stockholm earlier this month by 0.18sec. The 22-year-old Swiss runner's performance saw her edge closer to the oldest world record in athletics - the 1:53.28 for the outdoor 800m set by Jarmila Kratochvilova of the then-Czechoslovakia in 1983.

"I was not expecting to run this fast this season," said Werro, who credited her improving time to becoming a professional athlete no longer also juggling university studies.

"These recent performances have really given me hope and

built my confidence to what is coming next."

In the pole-vault, Duplantis, like Emmanouil Karalis, entered in a personal best of 5.63m, both skipping 5.73m.

The Greek cleared 5.83m without a problem, Duplantis opting to sit that height out as the competition moved to the business end. The US-born Swede cleared 5.93m, along with France's Baptiste Thiery.

Karalis failed once at that height before passing as the bar was set for 6.03m. Duplantis went over that to set a new meet record, bettering by 2cm the previous best he set back in 2021.

That proved too high for Thiery and Karalis, Duplantis going on to easily clear 6.13m. The Swede then had three unsuccessful world record attempts at 6.32m.

Botswana's world champion



From Left: First-placed US' Trayvon Bromell, fourth-placed South Africa's Akani Simbine and second-placed US' Noah Lyles during the men's 100m race at the Diamond League meeting in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

Busang Collen Kebinatshipi timed his finish to perfection to claim the win in the 400m in a stunning meet and Diamond League record of 43.54sec.

There was also an impressive performance in the men's 110m hurdles, American Jamal Britt clocking a personal best of 12.89sec.

It was the joint eighth fastest time ever run over the high hurdles. A third Diamond League meet record was set in the women's 400m, won by Marileidy Paulino of the Dominican Republic in 48.79sec.

Canada's 2023 world champion Marco Arop, the Olympic silver medallist, burst from the field to win the men's 800m in an impressive 1:41.84, the fastest time over the distance this season.

"I know I am in really good shape now, but if I can finetune for the rest for the season I might be able to break the world record this year," Arop said of David Rudisha's 1:40.91 set when the Kenyan won Olympic gold in 2012.

And on a fast track in perfect conditions, Australia's Cameron Myers ran the 12th fastest time ever to win the 1,500m in an Oceania record of 3:28.00.



## REVIEW

# Rangnick dismisses collusion talk after six-goal thriller

Draw ensured both Algeria and Austria qualified for knockouts

Reuters  
Kansas City

Austria coach Ralf Rangnick scoffed at suggestions his side had played for a mutually beneficial draw against Algeria after Saturday's chaotic 3-3 World Cup thriller.

The dramatic finale that sent both teams through to the knockout stage, he said, was proof there had been no collusion. With a draw enough to send Austria through as Group J runners-up and Algeria into the last 32 as one of the best third-placed sides, the prospect of a convenient result had dominated conversation in the build-up.

But Rangnick said the game's extraordinary finale should silence any conspiracy theories. "In this match, when you have a 3-3, nobody can assume that it was an agreement, and especially what we saw during the last 90 seconds," the 67-year-old said.

The match exploded into life deep into added time. Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez put his side 3-2 ahead in the 93rd minute, only for substitute Sasa Kalajdzic to equalise with virtually the last touch of the game.

"Three minutes to play, if somebody had said this would happen, you would have told them they were mad," Rangnick said.

"I've been a coach for about 40 years and I don't even remember a match that had such a dramatic course and such an unexpected trajectory. Most anticipated 0-0 or 1-1, and now it's 3-3. It's incredible. The locker-room is madness. If Alfred Hitchcock had written such a drama, I probably would have said he was completely mad."

The German rejected suggestions that either side had been content to settle for a draw late in the game, noting that players continued to push for a winner before Mahrez's strike. "All who watched the game during the last 15 minutes must know there is no hint that the players absolutely wanted to have a draw," he said.

"I think they wanted to win. Nobody can tell me that suddenly in minute 93 somebody would plan: 'oh yes, let's score another goal.' I think maybe it was the thought of one or two players in Algeria, but I think in the rest of the squad I don't think it was the case, and not for me."

Austria now face European champions



Sasa Kalajdzic arrowed in a header in the sixth minute of injury time to snatch a draw for Austria against Algeria and spark pandemonium in Kansas City. (Reuters)

Spain in the round of 32 on July 2 in California. Rangnick said he believes anything is possible.

"You saw that during the last couple of seconds (on Saturday). And who would have thought that Turkey would be eliminated after only two matches? So we're very happy that we are in the most difficult of all groups, and we advance in second in this group, and that was definitely not easy."

Rangnick said he was still struggling to process a result that booked his team's first World Cup knockout appearance in 44 years. "I am relieved and incredulous and happy," he said. "I still can't believe it. I need to be pinched to wake up from a dream."

**PETKOVIC PRAISES ALGERIA SPIRIT AFTER 'CRAZY' DRAW**  
Meanwhile, Algeria manager Vladimir Petkovic

described his side's dramatic draw as "a little crazy." "It sort of went beyond the limits of everyone's endurance," Petkovic said.

Algeria will face Switzerland in the round of 32, with Petkovic meeting a side he coached from 2014 to 2021. "Switzerland is a great team... I do know them, even if there are new faces, some of them played with me, so I know these players," Petkovic said.

He added, however, that said his immediate focus was recovery rather than Algeria's next opponent. Reflecting on the draw, he welcomed the outcome, as memories of the 1982 "Disgrace of Gijon" when West Germany and Austria played out a mutually beneficial match that eliminated Algeria lingered in the build-up. "I'm extremely happy that at the end it was football that won, that prevailed. 3-3 as a score says it all," Petkovic said.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Late drama ends Iran's hopes of reaching knockouts

Reuters  
Los Angeles

Iran's hopes of reaching the World Cup knockout phase for the first time came to an agonising end on Saturday after Austria's last-gasp equaliser against Algeria left them outside the tournament's eight best third-placed teams.

Amir Ghalenoee's side completed their Group G campaign on Friday with a 1-1 draw against Egypt, leaving them waiting to discover whether three points would be enough to earn a spot in the round of 32. Iran had already endured one major setback when a stoppage-time winner against Egypt was ruled out for offside.

That left them needing other results in group-stage matches to go their way, and for a few minutes on Saturday it looked as if Iran were going to squeeze through when Algeria struck in stoppage time to lead Austria 3-2.

However, the Austrians equalised with almost the final kick of the game, salvaging a 3-3 draw that sent both teams through and denied Iran a place in the knockouts in their seventh World Cup appearance. Iran leave the tournament unbeaten after draws with Belgium, New Zealand and Egypt in a challenging campaign due to issues off the pitch.

Uncertainty over visas and

Iran's conflict with the U.S. meant the team had to commute from their tournament base in co-hosts Mexico for their three group games in the United States.

US authorities required them to enter within 24 hours of a match and leave the same day, though the restrictions were eased slightly for their final game in Seattle, where they were allowed to arrive two days ahead of the game.

US President Donald Trump had said in March that Iran were welcome to participate in the World Cup but he did not believe it was appropriate for them to be in the United States "for their own life and safety".

After the draw with Egypt, captain Mehdi Taremi described the situation as a logistical "disaster" and questioned whether his team were truly welcome at the tournament. "Who wants to help us?" Taremi told reporters. "If they want us to be out - OK, let's be out. But that's not fair."

Key members of the delegation had been unable to join the squad in the US, and Iran coach Amir Ghalenoee said his team were being "oppressed".

Ultimately, Iran's campaign came down to moments. Had Taremi scored a first-half penalty against Egypt, or had his header hit the net instead of the crossbar later on, Iran might have been looking forward to a knockout match for the first time.



Iran leave the World Cup unbeaten after draws with Belgium, New Zealand and Egypt in a challenging campaign due to issues off the pitch.

## Asia's World Cup falls apart with just two teams remaining

**Arlington, United States:** The gap between Asia's best teams and the rest has been laid bare by the region's disappointing World Cup as just two AFC sides reached the knockout rounds.

A record nine countries from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) reached the finals in North America after the tournament was expanded to 48 teams.

But with the group phase having concluded on Saturday, only Australia and Japan remain. Of 27 group games contested by AFC teams, they won only three.

In contrast, it has been a success story for African football, with nine of their 10 sides reaching the last 32. "Where we need to improve is in Asian football (as a whole), not only Uzbekistan," said Fabio Cannavaro, the Italian 2006 World Cup winner and now Uzbek coach.

Uzbekistan, playing at a World Cup for the first time, finished bottom of their group with zero points and a goal difference of minus nine. Although they had good moments going forward and were in a hard group, they were ultimately well beaten in all three matches, including being thrashed 5-0 by a Cristiano Ronaldo-inspired Portugal.

"Other than Japan, Australia and maybe Iran... every (Asian) team needs to improve," said Cannavaro, who previously managed in China including a short stint as national coach.

Fellow AFC sides Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Asian champions Qatar all finished last in their groups. Also gone at the first hurdle were Iran - whose tournament was overshadowed by war and politics - and most surprisingly of all, South Korea.

## FOCUS

## Wissa proud to deliver joy to war-torn Congo

AFP  
Atlanta

**Yoane Wissa** dedicated his goals that sent the Democratic Republic of Congo into the knockout stages of the World Cup for the first time to those suffering back home from a humanitarian crisis caused by war.

Newcastle striker Wissa scored twice in a 3-1 victory over Uzbekistan to give the African side their first ever World Cup win and set up a meeting with England in the last 32.

Eastern Congo has been plagued for three decades by conflict involving a litany of armed groups. DR Congo is also fighting an Ebola outbreak that has claimed more than 300 lives.

But backed by thousands from the Congolese diaspora in Atlanta, the Leopards roared back from a goal down on Saturday to make history. "We are a proud country. We are proud people. We love our country. We love our national team. We love what we represent!" Wissa told reporters. "I think tonight we just



showed that what it means for us is just to fight no matter what. It's not easy in our country. There's a war in East Congo. Every day, every time we wear this shirt, we think about them. That's why tonight, what we show is just to say that guys, no matter what, we need to keep going. Because we want peace and for them,

I just say 'thank you'. Thank you because we came from far. We came from nothing to be here. Now we write our story with a black pen and we need to be proud."

Wissa's double took his tally for the tournament to three goals after also netting in an impressive 1-1 draw against Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal. The 29-year-old struggled for form and fitness following a £55m (\$73m) move from Brentford in September and said his recovery made goals on the global stage all the sweeter.

"That's why I'm even prouder than everyone else in this room," Wissa said on his battle with injuries during his first season on Tyneside. "I didn't show my best face at Newcastle, but I knew that my time would come. This time is now. I just show to everyone now I'm in a good place. I'm good physically, I'm good mentally. So that's why I'm proud today to show that I'm a good player."

Next up is a clash with England, who remain among the favourites for the competition despite an unconvincing start to their quest to win a first major tournament in 60 years.

## BOTTOMLINE

## Qatar to host fourth season of eFIBA World Finals from July 3 to 4

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The eFIBA World Finals Qatar season 4 will take place at the Mall of Qatar from July 3 to 4, FIBA and the Organising Committee confirmed yesterday. The event brings together eight national teams from across the globe, in a development that reflects Qatar's growing prominence on the international digital sports map.

During a press conference at the Qatar Olympic Committee headquarters Abdulla Ali al-Mawlawi, Executive Director of Communications & Guest Relations at the Local Organising Committee - FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 provided the details of the event. The press conference was also attended by Predrag Bogosavljev, FIBA World Basketball Cup Qatar 2027 Director, Albert Huguet, eFIBA World Finals Project Manager and Jassim Ahmed al-Mohammed, spokesperson of the Qatar Sports Federation.



FIBA and Organising Committee officials pose after a press conference to announce the details of eFIBA World Finals Qatar.

The meeting opened with a short film showcasing the global evolution of e-basketball, followed by a detailed presentation by al-Mawlawi outlining key aspects of the eFIBA World Finals Qatar Season 4 on the NBA 2K platform.

The participating teams have been divided into two groups. Group A consists of Algeria, France, Germany and the Philippines, while Group B features hosts Qatar, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon and Türkiye. Each national team will be represented by five players, bringing the total number of participants to 40.

The tournament offers a total prize pool of \$50,000, distributed across both team and individual awards. The champions will receive \$20,000, while the runners-up will earn \$10,000. The third-placed team will receive \$6,000, with \$4,000 awarded to the fourth-placed team.

The tournament will also feature several individual awards, including the Defensive Player of the Tournament, Finals MVP, and the All-Star Five Team. Prize money for the individual awards will be distributed as follows: \$2,500 each for the Finals MVP and Defensive Player of the Tournament, while each player selected to the All-Star Five Team will receive \$1,000.

The international event reflects Qatar's vision to support sporting innovation and strengthen basketball's presence within the esports ecosystem. It also serves as a strategic milestone on the road to the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, reinforcing Qatar's ambition to further consolidate its position on the global sporting stage.

eFIBA is the official international championship organised by the International Basketball Federation (FIBA), where national teams compete via NBA 2K, with players representing their countries through national federations, delivering a digital extension of official basketball competition.

The eFIBA World Finals serves as a strategic and marketing platform aimed at expanding basketball's reach within esports, engaging younger audiences, enhancing national competition in the digital space, and blending sport with interactive entertainment in a global format.

The Organising Committee emphasised that the event reflects Qatar's commitment to innovation in sport and contributes to building a sustainable legacy for e-basketball through talent development and competitive growth.

Al-Mawlawi described the event as a key milestone in Qatar's sporting journey, highlighting its alignment with sustainability principles and its role in developing future generations of esports players.