

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2
New Zealand thrash England to deny Stokes a fairytale finish



TENNIS | Page 3
Sinner survives scare and fall to reach Wimbledon second round

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Tuesday, June 30, 2026
Muharram 15, 1448 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT



MATCH REPORT

Martinelli's stoppage-time strike sends Brazil into last 16

The five-time champions will face either Ivory Coast or Norway in New Jersey on Sunday



Brazil survived a scare when they fought back to beat Japan 2-1 after substitute Gabriel Martinelli squeezed in a shot at the far post deep in stoppage-time in Houston, Texas, yesterday. (Reuters)



Gabriel Martinelli is mobbed by team-mates after scoring against Japan. (AFP)



Brazil's Gabriel Magalhaes consoles Japan's Kento Shiogai after the match. (Reuters)

AFP
Houston

Substitute Gabriel Martinelli scored deep in injury time as Brazil beat a stubborn Japan 2-1 on Monday to roll into the World Cup last 16.

Arsenal winger Martinelli struck in the 95th minute in Houston to break Japanese hearts in the most dramatic fashion.

The five-time champions will face either the Ivory Coast or Norway in New Jersey on Sunday after edging a captivating knockout encounter.

Japan midfielder Kaishu Sano scored a classy solo goal after 29 minutes following a Brazil mistake to stun the huge numbers of fans decked out in yellow.

Carlo Ancelotti's men hit back 11 minutes after half-time with a header from veteran Casemiro as Brazil dominated the second period. Then up popped Martinelli right at the death to settle it and send the Brazil fans wild.

History was against Japan: they had never won a knockout game at the World Cup while Brazil were record five-time champions. But this is not a vintage Brazil side, even with Ancelotti at the helm, while Japan have been talked of as dark horses. With the Brazil fans' drums providing a constant rhythmic backdrop, Ancelotti's side were on top early on in front of a crowd of 68,777.

Images of Neymar on the bench popped up on the big screens, the noise from the Brazil fans going up another notch. Defensive midfielder Sano was booked for crunching in on Vinicius Junior, then Brazilian attacker Matheus Cunha forced goalkeeper Zion Suzuki to turn the ball wide. Japan, who beat Brazil 3-2 in October in a home friendly for their first victory over the South Americans, then enjoyed a spell in the ascendancy.

Just before the half-hour mark Hajime Moriyasu's team took the lead, and it stemmed from an error by Danilo as he gave the ball away with a sloppy pass.

Sano, one of four changes from Japan's 1-1 draw with Sweden at the end of the group phase, picked the ball up in the centre circle and got away from the 34-year-old Casemiro – who was on a booking – with ease.

Sano, who plays for Mainz in Germany, drove upfield before sweeping the ball past goalkeeper Alisson. It was his first goal for his country. Now the Brazil supporters were edgy, groaning when a move broke down or a pass went backwards.

Brazil, whose last World Cup triumph was in 2002, looked unconvincing at the back and ineffective in attack. Ancelotti was forced into a change at the break, an emotional Lucas Paqueta limping off in distress with the attacking midfielder replaced by 19-year-old striker Endrick.

Japan, who thrashed Tunisia and held the Netherlands and Sweden to reach the last 32, had Brazil where they wanted them. Brazil ramped up the pressure to start the second half and Japan defender Takehiro Tomiyasu twice kept the ball off

the line, not that he knew much about it. Brazil were soon level, Arsenal defender Gabriel sending in an inviting cross for midfielder Casemiro to head in unmarked at the back post.

The danger man Vinicius, well stifled up until then, turned the Japan defence inside

and stabbed the ball towards Suzuki, who directed it onto the post.

It was all Brazil as they pushed for a late winner, with Vinicius – who scored four times in the group stage – increasingly in the thick of it. Then came Martinelli's late intervention.

PREVIEW

France wary of Sweden side with 'nothing to lose'

AFP
East Rutherford, United States

France coach Didier Deschamps has warned his team to be wary of a Sweden side with "nothing to lose" when the nations meet in the last 32 of the World Cup on Tuesday.

"Sweden are not playing for their survival. Obviously they will do everything to win the game, but they have nothing to lose," Deschamps told reporters at the MetLife Stadium outside New York City, where the tie will be played. "We need to stay humble, maintain our determination and concentration. In the group stage winning the first game gave us some margin for error, but now we have no second chances."

Deschamps returned to the France team's base in Boston on Saturday after missing the 4-1 win against Norway to fly home to attend his mother's funeral. France came into the World Cup as one of the leading contenders to win the trophy, following their triumph in 2018 and defeat on penalties to Argentina in the 2022 final.

They were impressive in the group stage, at least after a shaky first half in their opening game against Senegal. After winning that match 3-1 in New Jersey, they eased to a 3-0 victory over Iraq in a storm-interrupted contest in Philadelphia, and then hammered a second-string Norway in Boston.

Les Bleus were one of only three teams to take the maximum nine points in the group



France's coach Didier Deschamps highlighted Sweden's athleticism, pace on the counter and threat from set pieces ahead of today's last 16 clash in New Jersey. (AFP)

stage, along with reigning champions Argentina and co-hosts Mexico. Their tally of 10 goals scored was also the joint-highest in the first round along with Germany and the Netherlands.

"We just need to stay confident, but now we wipe the slate clean," said Deschamps about the start of the knockout phase. "We

are confident but we know that the quality of the opposition will go up as well."

Sweden made it to the World Cup via the backdoor, finishing bottom of their qualifying group but parachuting into the play-offs thanks to their performances in the UEFA Nations League. A comprehensive 5-1 win over Tunisia and a draw with Japan, either

side of a 5-1 loss to the Dutch, took them through to this stage as one of the best third-placed teams in the group phase.

"They are a good team, very athletic, but also with (Viktor) Gyokeres, (Alexander) Isak and (Anthony) Elanga, they have lots of quality in attack," said Deschamps.

The only previous meeting of the teams at a major tournament came at Euro 2012, just before Deschamps took charge of France. Sweden won that group-stage encounter 2-0 in Ukraine with Zlatan Ibrahimovic among the scorers. He is now working as a World Cup pundit.

Deschamps revealed that Marcus Thuram is unlikely to be an option in attack for the game due to a minor muscle injury, while veteran midfielder N'Golo Kante is a doubt. William Saliba is expected to return in central defence after resting against Norway due to back pain. Meanwhile, France midfielder Adrien Rabiot said the squad were relieved to have Deschamps back again after his quick return trip home.

"It was quite difficult when he announced to us the death of his Mum and said he had to leave. It was a shock," admitted Rabiot. "We are pleased to have him back. It is not easy to be mourning someone in these circumstances, but I think he has come back with a real desire to do well and go as far as possible in the competition."

The winners will advance to a last-16 showdown in Philadelphia on Saturday against the winners of match between Germany and Paraguay.

Sweden happy with underdog tag

New Jersey: Sweden's players are unbothered that few pundits see them beating France in their World Cup last 32 clash in New Jersey today, saying the pressure will be on the French.

The Swedes trained on Sunday and practiced their penalties ahead of the game, which will likely see them setting up to defend in a low block and trying to hit France on the break.

"I don't think so much about whether we're favourites or not, to be honest, I'm mostly thinking that we're going to do what we've been talking about all this year - we're going to do our best, and if we do that, we have a great chance to beat them," midfielder Daniel Svensson said.

"They're one of the favourites to win the whole thing, so of course they're favourites (against us)."

"They are my favourites. It's hard to say exactly how big of a favourite they are, but of course they're favourites."

France's feared offence will take some containing, but the Swedes boast a potent forward line of their own, with Viktor Gyokeres and Alexander Isak both capable of getting on the scoresheet against any team in the tournament.



CRICKET

Brook has Stokes backing for captaincy

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Ben Stokes backed Harry Brook to succeed him as England's Test captain after bowing out of international cricket, saying the gifted batsman had his "100 percent support".

Stokes dramatically announced he would be retiring from England duty on Sunday's fourth afternoon of the third Test against New Zealand at Trent Bridge, saying he was "burnt out" after four years as skipper.

The 35-year-old all-rounder, normally a middle-order batsman, then opened the innings as England tried to attack a stiff run chase of 373.

But he was out before Sunday's close, with Stokes reduced to a spectator on his last day of England duty in Nottingham on Monday as New Zealand won by a thumping 160 runs to seal a 2-1 victory in a three-match series.

Brook is already the captain of England's white-ball teams and the gifted 27-year-old batsman is also the official vice-captain of the Test side.

But when Stokes was omitted

from the second Test against New Zealand for breaking a midnight team curfew, it was former skipper Joe Root who led England at the Oval.

Brook was denied the role after he was involved in an altercation with a nightclub bouncer in Wellington, New Zealand, ahead of England's woeful 2025/26 4-1 Ashes series loss in Australia - an incident that led to the imposition of the curfew.

'NATURAL PROGRESSION'

Stokes, speaking to reporters at Trent Bridge after yesterday's stumps, said: "I know with all the controversy over the last couple of weeks, decisions were made. They were decisions I was not part of making."

"You are asked to be vice-captain for a reason, and I was vice-captain under Joe for a long time. It's the natural progression, if the captain is not there you step up."

"There is absolutely no reason why Harry shouldn't be asked to do that."

Stokes said there was no way of knowing for sure if captaincy would boost or hinder Brook, who has an impressive batting average of over 53 in 38 Tests.

But with England's three-Test

series at home to Pakistan starting in August, Stokes had no doubts about the identity of the new red-ball skipper.

"If I was to be asked who I think should do it, I would be throwing my 100 percent support behind Harry Brook," he said.

Stokes, however, was less enthusiastic about England head coach Brendon McCullum and managing director Rob Key, the other two architects of a 'Bazball' era seemingly now at end.

Yesterday's reverse was England's seventh defeat in their last nine Tests and also sealed a rare series loss on home soil.

Stokes, asked if McCullum and Key were still the men to take England forward, replied: "What me, Brendon and Rob have managed to do over four-and-a-half-years, I'm not going to lie, it's been an interesting ride."

"We've had incredible highs and some pretty low lows as well. It's always worked and connected pretty well in terms of what we've wanted to achieve. It doesn't always work out the way you want it to work out."

McCullum, in a separate press conference, was asked if he had tried to talk Stokes, whose personality he said "almost transcends"



England's Ben Stokes (fifth right) with teammates during the post match presentation ceremony at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, Nottingham, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

cricket, out of his decision to quit international cricket.

"Yes but you know Ben, with no success whatsoever actually," replied McCullum.

"When he grabbed me yester-

day (Sunday) morning when we arrived at the ground, he said 'Baz I'm done'."

Stokes intends to play on for county side Durham, but he denied suggestions he could yet face arch-

rivals Australia during next year's Ashes in England.

"I'm done," said Stokes, adding: "I know it's the Ashes but I'll probably be watching it in a hospitality box somewhere."

SPOTLIGHT

New Zealand beat England to clinch Test series 2-1

NEW ZEALAND WRAP UP 160-RUN WIN IN THIRD AND FINAL TEST



New Zealand's Glenn Phillips celebrates with the trophy alongside teammates during the trophy ceremony after the third and final Test against England at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, Nottingham, Britain, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Nottingham

New Zealand wrapped up a crushing 160-run victory over England in the third Test at Trent Bridge to secure a 2-1 series victory, in a game marked by England captain Ben Stokes' stunning mid-match retirement announcement.

It was England's first home series defeat since 2021 and their first in a series of three Tests or more on home soil for 14 years.

"When you lose it's disappointing," said England coach Brendon McCullum.

"For a lot of this Test we played some good cricket but we were outplayed by a New Zealand side that were just relentless in everything they did. New Zealand do simple things really well for a long period of time. They also seize key moments."

England's faint hopes of pulling off an unlikely run chase were undone in the fourth over of the morning with the loss of two wickets in the space of five balls.

Emilio Gay, batting at number

six after Stokes' decision to promote himself to opener, was the first man to go, edging a good ball from Smith to wicketkeeper Tom Blundell for 10.

Four balls later Joe Root was run out for 18 by Henry Nicholls at backward point. It was a brilliant piece of fielding by Nicholls, hitting one stump off balance as he fell to the ground, but an ill-judged run to take on as Jamie Smith tried to get off the mark.

Smith, back in the England side after missing the second Test on paternity leave, dug in with Surrey teammate Gus Atkinson, putting on 75 for the seventh wicket.

However, Atkinson was trapped lbw for 19 by spinner Mitchell Santner just before lunch and, after Jofra Archer had been caught behind, there was another run out - this time a direct hit from Santner that removed Josh Tongue. Smith was the last man to go, caught at long-on off Santner for 60 from 91 balls as England were bowled out for 212 at a half-empty ground.

ENGLAND'S POST-ASHES RESET IN TATTERS

The reset England craved after a harrowing Ashes defeat has not

materialised. Instead, the hole they are in has deepened.

They have lost their captain Stokes, whose final day as an international cricketer after his retirement announcement was spent watching on from the pavilion. Pakistan will arrive soon for a three-match series with England having lost seven of their last nine Tests.

England looked to be back on course after victory in the first Test at Lord's but were blown off course by the controversy that followed with Stokes and Atkinson left out for the second Test at the Oval after a late-night incident at a London nightclub.

They were subsequently cleared of anything more serious than breaking a team curfew and returned for the third test but by then New Zealand had squared the series and gathered momentum.

Without the injured Matt Henry and Glenn Phillips, as well as the rested Kyle Jamieson, and with their bowling resources hit further during the decider, they outplayed England at Trent Bridge.

Blair Tickner was taken out of

the game on day two with concussion symptoms after being struck in New Zealand's first innings by Jofra Archer, while Will O'Rourke's test also ended early with a hamstring injury sustained mid-over after 35 minutes of play on day five.

The rest of the New Zealand attack rose to the occasion with Smith and Zak Foulkes, the concussion substitute who was also nursing a sore hamstring, taking six wickets apiece.

"I guess a lot of New Zealand teams have come here in the past and haven't been in this position. I'm very proud of the guys," said New Zealand captain Tom Latham. "We've been faced with a bit of adversity through the game in terms of injuries but it was a really good team performance where guys stood up when it was required."

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 438 (Conway 157, Latham 151, Stokes 4-70) **and 288 for 9 dec** (Mitchell 100*, Ravindra 94, Archer 4-53) **beat England 354** (Duckett 113, Bethell 74, Brook 58, Smith 4-9) and 212 (Smith 60, Foulkes 3-52) **by 160 runs**

REVIEW

'Disbelief' in India camp after Ireland debacle



India players in a huddle during the second T20 against Ireland in Belfast on Sunday.

Reuters
Belfast

A sense of "disbelief" hangs over the India camp after the double 20-overs world champions suffered a 2-0 series white-wash against Ireland with assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate blaming the debacle on their failure to adapt to conditions in Belfast.

Few gave Ireland a chance in the two-match series, but Lorcán Tucker's side humbled India twice in three days, spoiling Shreyas Iyer's debut series as India's 20-overs captain.

"There's a little bit of disbelief," ten Doeschate told reporters after Ireland edged them out by one run on Sunday. "It's also very hard to be critical of guys who have just won a World Cup. We've been out-done or outsmarted by a team who just did the basics very well."

The former Dutch player hailed Ireland's inspired display but felt the Indian batters failed to get used to conditions at Stormont.

"Firstly, credit to Ireland and

secondly the learnings for us in terms of being able to adapt to different conditions," he said. "That's probably the biggest takeaway from this."

Coming off the flat pitches and short boundaries in the Indian Premier League, Iyer and his men struggled on a spicy pitch with bigger square boundaries.

Ten Doeschate acknowledged his batters failed to make the transition.

"That was essentially our undoing," he said. "It's something we spoke about before, but we just didn't address it well enough out in the middle."

"We're probably too used to a tempo and style where you can hit sixes more freely. I think this will be the case when you go to England as well, you know, maybe slightly quicker wickets, maybe slightly less wind, but we're going to have to adapt and be a lot smarter about how we'd like to play if we're going to get wins there."

India's next assignment is a tour of England featuring five T20 and three one-day internationals, starting July 1.

US men's team to play in LA Games but women set to miss home Olympics

Dubai: Reigning world champions India, Britain, South Africa and hosts United States are set to feature in the men's Twenty20 competition when cricket returns to the Olympics at the 2028 Games in Los Angeles following a qualification pathway approved by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). One team each from Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania will be picked based on the International Cricket Council (ICC) rankings at a cut-off date on December 31, 2026, according to a decision approved by the executive board of the IOC. Australia and New Zealand will vie for the one spot from Oceania, while the US will carry the flag for the Americas provided it does not slip out of top 15 in the ICC rankings. The sixth team will come from a global qualifier featuring the next eight highest-ranked teams, who have not yet qualified. The mix will include West Indies - a composite ICC member representing multiple Caribbean nations but not recognised as National Olympic Committee by the IOC. "If the West Indies is ranked among the eight highest-ranked

teams not yet qualified, the ICC shall organise a West Indies Nations Regional Tournament to determine which NOC will represent the region at the final global Olympic qualification tournament," the IOC said. They will then join seven other teams - the highest-ranked sides not already qualified - in a global qualifier with the winner completing the six-team competition at Los Angeles. England's ranking has been used to select Britain. The women's competition will also feature six teams. Australia, Britain, South Africa and India have secured spots by virtue of being the four best-performing continental teams in the ongoing World Cup. Neither the US nor any team from the Americas features in the ICC's top 15. After the Champions Trophy next year, the unused host country's place will be awarded to the highest-ranked T20 team outside the four who have already qualified. As in the men's pathway, the Caribbean winner will enter an eight-team global qualifier, with the winner claiming the final spot for LA 2028.

WIMBLEDON

Sinner survives scare and fall to reach second round

Sinner taken to five sets by Kecmanovic, defeats for Rublev and Ruud as Sabalenka through



Italy's Jannik Sinner returns the ball to Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic during their first-round match at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. (AFP)



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates beating Serbia's Teodora Kostovic in the first round yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters Wimbledon

Men's defending champion Jannik Sinner and women's top seed Aryna Sabalenka both arrived at Wimbledon with question marks hanging over them but answered the doubters yesterday with contrasting first round victories.

Italy's Sinner, playing his first match since his shock collapse to defeat in the second round of the French Open on a boiling day in Paris, was stretched to the limit by Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic but survived, winning 6-4 6-3 6-7(6) 6-2 6-3.

Sabalenka, who left Paris in a "deep, dark place" after losing the last 10 games of her quarter-final against Diana Shnaider, followed Sinner on to Centre Court

and breezed past Serbian qualifier Teodora Kostovic 6-2 6-3.

While world number one Sinner, the overwhelming favourite in the absence of Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, lived to fight another day, there were some early seeded casualties.

Norway's 11th seed Casper Ruud was handed a tough draw in the shape of big-serving Pole Hubert Hurkacz and duly lost 6-4 6-2 7-6(7) while 12th seed Andrey Rublev was edged out in a five-set battle against fellow Russian Roman Safullin, losing a deciding set tiebreaker 14-12 after missing two match points.

There was heartbreak too for surprise French Open runner-up Maja Chwalinska as she lost 2-6 7-5 6-2 to Thai qualifier Mananchaya Sawangkaew yesterday after the Pole fell and hurt herself while on match point.

Several women's seeds moved

through on a day mercifully cooler than the heatwave that gripped London last week.

Japan's Naomi Osaka once again dressed to impress, walking on court in a "Kill Bill" inspired white kimono and her tennis shone too as the 14th seed beat Elsa Jacquemot 6-1 7-5.

American fourth seed Jessica Pegula beat Darja Vidmanova 7-5 6-3 while newly crowned French Open champion Mirra Andreeva, seeded five, beat Magda Linette 7-5 6-4. Andreeva will face 2024 Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejckikova in a fascinating last-64 clash.

The 19-year-old reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals last year - her best run in three appearances at the All England Club.

Swiss 11th seed Belinda Bencic had far too much experience for young wildcard Mika Stojsavljevic whose defeat was one of many on

a miserable day for home players. It was a grim day for the home nation who failed to celebrate a single victory.

Twenty-one players, including 12 wildcards, were in the first-round draw but after Emma Raducanu withdrew with an injury on the eve of the tournament, she was followed on Monday by Jack Draper who announced he was also pulling out with an arm injury.

Ten British players lost including British number one Cameron Norrie, seeded 26, beaten in five sets by inspired American qualifier Michael Zheng.

Sinner's meltdown in the Roland Garros furnace against Juan Manuel Cerundolo raised questions about his durability in long matches but he answered those, albeit in relatively cool conditions, against Kecmanovic.

Sinner racked up his 94th Grand Slam match-win, equalling the

Italian record of Nicola Pietrangeli, but shed plenty of sweat and a little blood in reaching that mark, his white shoe stained red after injuring a nail in a fall.

"It was a little tight in the beginning, I didn't play at my best but I tried to get into it," he said. "I'm happy I turned it around because the third set was very tough to swallow."

Sinner had a point to go two sets to one ahead but lost it and Kecmanovic pounced.

Sinner was in danger of becoming only the third defending Wimbledon men's champion to lose in the first round but dominated from then and later said his foot injury was not serious despite the pounding it took during his third-longest match at Wimbledon at three hours and 30 minutes.

"I'm actually surprised that they let me keep playing because my all white outfit turned into a

little red," he added. Court One fans expecting to see Raducanu in action were left disappointed as the replacement match saw home hope Harriet Dart beaten by Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko.

Next up was a duel between two more former U.S. Open champions Daniil Medvedev and Marin Cilic but that fell flat as Cilic was made to look all of his 37 years as eighth seed Medvedev romped to a 6-1 6-2 6-4 win.

Two of the new men's generation lit up the opening day.

Brazil's Joao Fonseca, cheered on by a large contingent of fans in yellow soccer shirts, beat Spanish veteran Roberto Bautista Agut 7-6(4) 6-4 6-3 before heading off to watch Brazil beat Japan to reach the last-16 at the World Cup.

Rising Spanish teenager Rafael Jodar, also aged 19, made an impressive debut, beating British wildcard Felix Gill 6-3 6-3 7-5.

SWIMMING

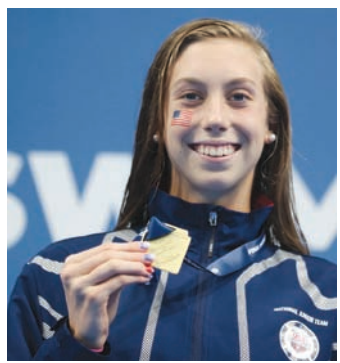
Walsh sets new 50m freestyle world record days after Douglass mark

Reuters Rome

Grethen Walsh broke the women's 50 metres freestyle world record on Sunday at the Sette Colli International Trophy in Rome, lowering a mark that had already been beaten this month.

The 23-year-old clocked 23.55 seconds, breaking the previous record of 23.59 set by fellow American Kate Douglass earlier this month at a U.S. Pro Swim Series event in Indianapolis.

In May, Walsh bettered her own 100 metres butterfly world record for the third time in a year, posting 54.33 seconds in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. With the 50m freestyle mark, Walsh has now broken



a world record 21 times. She also got two relay gold medals at the 2024 Paris Olympics and won her first individual long-course world title in July last year at the World Aquatics Championships in Singapore, where she took gold in the women's 100 metres butterfly.

"I would feel a lot of regret if I left the time like this on the table and never was able to go (at) it again, so I say the more the merrier," Walsh told swimming news outlet SwimSwam after breaking her newest record.

"I'm going to keep trying to break world records in everything because that's what it takes to be at the level that I'm at."

Walsh is viewed as a top contender for the U.S. heading into the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, with multiple world records and a world championship already to her name.

"Maybe some eyes will be on me more so than ever now and I'm ready for the challenge to handle that pressure especially at a home Olympics, so I'm here, bring it on!" she added.

GOLF

Hovland beats Scheffler in playoff for PGA Travelers title

AFP New York

Viktor Hovland defeated top-ranked Scottie Scheffler with a par on the first extra hole to win a sudden-death playoff yesterday and capture the Travelers Championship.

It was the eighth career PGA Tour triumph for the 28-year-old Norwegian, who sank a birdie putt from just outside nine feet at the 18th hole. Scheffler then missed from just beyond two feet to seal Hovland's victory at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut.

"It has been stressful, but yeah, it's unbelievable, especially after Scottie hits it so close there," Hovland said.

"I knew I had to bring in my best to have a chance to beat him and he certainly brought it out of me. Couldn't be happier."

Scheffler, a 30-year-old American and four-time major winner, settled for his fourth runner-up result of the year.

"I played solid over the course of four days," Scheffler said. "A little bit disappointed with the finish but overall I think my game is in a good spot."

Hovland took the \$3.6mn top prize from the \$20mn PGA signature series tournament. It was the eighth career PGA Tour title for Hovland and his first since last year's Valspar Championship. He won his only other playoff to capture the 2023 Memorial.

Scheffler sank a clutch par putt from just inside nine feet on the 18th hole Sunday to force the playoff after both completed 72 holes on 21-under par 259.

Scheffler fired a two-under 68 in the final round while Hovland shot 69 after a late-afternoon storm halted play for 83 minutes,



Viktor Hovland of Norway poses with the trophy after winning the Travelers Championship 2026 in a playoff at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut, yesterday. (AFP)

leading to play being suspended for darkness before the playoff could begin. The playoff began with both players finding the fairway. A Scheffler 8-iron approach landed just outside two feet from the hole while Hovland dropped a 9-iron shot to just outside six feet. Hovland's pressure birdie putt dropped in on the right side and Scheffler's putt lipped out off the left edge.

"I hit it on my line. I think it was just a little bit firm," said Scheffler. "It was one of those putts you had to make and I hit it firm. Was a bit disappointing."

"Just one of those weeks where I was close but just not quite good enough." Hovland won for the first time

with his mother Galina watching. "I'm glad my mom got to be here and we get to share this moment together," Hovland said.

Hovland was cheered by Norwegian World Cup supporters, dressed in football attire and chanting his name.

"It helps when you've got people like this cheering you on as well," Hovland said. "I know how good I can get and I keep pushing myself and I want to get better."

Scheffler, who won the 2024 Travelers title in a playoff, took his season opener in the California desert but has not won since. This is his fourth runner-up finish this year, he also came second at the Masters, Heritage and Doral.

TOUR DE FRANCE 'READY TO ADAPT' AMID EXTREME HEATWAVE

Tour de France organisers said yesterday they were ready to adapt amid scorching conditions days before the world's most famous cycling race rolls out of Barcelona.

The most severe heatwave ever recorded in Europe is currently gripping the continent with concern for riders and the public during the three-week race which finishes on the Champs-Elysées in Paris on July 26.

"We will obviously experience high temperatures during the Tour de France. Protecting the riders and the public is paramount for us. The watchword is adaptation," race director Christian Prudhomme told AFP.

"For the riders, there is an extreme temperature protocol established by the International Cycling Union (UCI) that applies based on temperature, humidity levels, wind, and rider speed," he said.

"It is possible to have additional refreshment zones. Time limits for elimination can be relaxed significantly to prevent riders who have fallen behind from having to exert excessive effort."

Prudhomme pointed out that "riders are used to intense heat" with temperatures hitting up to 42

Celsius in The Tour Down Under in Australia in early January.

"That said, I am not talking about ten consecutive days at 40 degrees, of course," he added.

Regarding the spectators lining the route Prudhomme said they are "in constant contact" with officials in the regions the race passes through.

"The Tour caravan distributes 2.5 million hats and 550,000 cans, and we also carry 400,000 litres of bottled water."

"Naturally, prevention and common-sense advice are crucial, and we will repeat them tirelessly: people should come with a hat, have water with them, and pay special attention to children and the elderly."

The Tour de France will feature shorter stages - a maximum of 205 km this year.

Organisers are also favouring more shaded routes, such as the ascent of the Haag in Alsace during the July 18 stage.

"(A climb) emblematic of what the Tour de France of the future might look like," said Prudhomme, "bearing in mind that there is, of course, no question of saying there will be no more Ventoux, Alpe d'Huez, Galibier, or Tourmalet."



FOCUS

Canada's Marsch praises history-making 'heroes'

Co-hosts Canada reached the last 16 thanks to a 1-0 victory over South Africa

AFP
Los Angeles

Coach Jesse Marsch hailed his "Canadian heroes" for making history by reaching the World Cup last 16 on Sunday, describing their upcoming clash with either the Netherlands or Morocco as a "free hit."

Co-hosts Canada entered this tournament having lost all six games across two previous World Cup appearances, but are now the first team to reach the second knockout round thanks to a 1-0 win over South Africa.

Marsch gathered his squad on the pitch straight after the last-gasp win to tell the players "you are Canadian heroes" in a bombastic team talk that quickly went viral online.

Speaking to reporters after the game, American Marsch said he had wanted to "voice to them how important a moment this will prove to be for the sport in the country."

"There are people who like to say it's performative to meet on the pitch, and frankly, I don't give a shit what people have to say," said Marsch. "Like, all I care about is our own team and what we do together."

Canada came second in their group after losing to Switzerland. It was enough to progress to the knockout stages for the first time in the history of a country more known for ice hockey.

But failing to top the group deprived Canada of the chance to stay in Vancouver

for the tournament's next phase. "We were disappointed to have to leave Canada, given the fanfare and passion around everything for the World Cup and our team," admitted Marsch. "But the guys quickly refocused and knew that this was a massive opportunity."

Marsch said his team was very familiar with playing in the United States, which has hosted recent editions of the CONCACAF Gold Cup and Copa America, as well as Canadian friendlies.

Large parts of Los Angeles' SoFi stadium were a sea of red. The team's next stop is Houston for the round of 16. Canada's opponents will be the winners of a clash between Morocco, who reached the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, and three-time finalists the Netherlands.

Marsch, who sent out his team to attack against South Africa, said he would need to adjust his tactics given the higher quality of each of the next potential opponents. But he said he was relishing the chance to face "one of the giants" of world football, dubbing Morocco a "modern giant" for their recent success, and the Netherlands "a traditional giant."

"I feel like it's a free hit, and we're going to go after it and do everything we can to see if we can find a way to get a win," he said.

Canada will be boosted by the return of their biggest star, Alphonso Davies, who made his first appearance of the World Cup late from the bench against South Africa. The Bayern Munich wing-back had been suffering from a hamstring injury, but made an instant impact on the game.



Canada's coach Jesse Marsch reacts as Stephen Eustaquio celebrates with teammates after scoring against South Africa in Inglewood, California. (Reuters)

PREVIEW

Haaland holds centre stage but Ivorians look to steal his thunder

Reuters
Dallas

Erling Haaland will be the centre of attention in Dallas on Tuesday, but the Ivory Coast will be hoping to highlight some attacking talent of their own when they take on Norway in their World Cup Round of 32 clash.

Norway's one-man wrecking ball has four goals in his two appearances at the tournament and is set to return after being rested in the last group game against France, as were most of the Norwegian first-choice players.

Haaland scored twice against Iraq in Norway's return to the World Cup after a 28-year absence and was at his predatory best as they beat Senegal to secure their progress after only two group games. Ivory Coast's planning will concentrate on how to stop Haaland in what is sure to be a thorough examination of the West African team's defence, which includes the highly rated Ousmane Diomande, the 22-year-old who is expected to depart Sporting Lisbon for the English Premier League before next season.

But coach Emmerse Fae will also be looking to have his side on the

front foot and take the game to Norway - and keep Haaland off the ball.

The Ivorians have an exciting array of forward talent, led by teenager Yan Diomande, who is another dominating the club pre-season transfer market speculation, and former Arsenal record signing Nicolas Pepe, who scored twice in their last match against Curacao and is reviving his reputation.

There are nine attacking players in the Ivorian squad that Fae can pick from, including Inter Milan's Ange-Yoan Bonny, who only switched his allegiance from France before the tournament.

"I think that spreading the goals around is a real strength of ours, which we can use to catch our opponents off guard and be a threat from all over the pitch, including players coming off the bench to make a telling contribution," said Fae.

Norway's coach Stale Solbakken said his decision to rest 10 first-team players against France was a "no-brainer" because fatigue had affected several of them.

"This is simple. We did a summary after (their second game against) Senegal, and the entire defence and some midfielders were very affected," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

South Africa's coach blames lack of power and speed after exit

Reuters
Inglewood, California

South Africa coach Hugo Broos offered a brutally honest assessment that his team lacked the pace and power to compete after their World Cup run came to a halt on Sunday as they lost 1-0 to Canada in the last 32.

South Africa conceded a stoppage-time goal to lose the opening game of the tournament's knockout stage and Broos felt Canada were the better side. "I think we have to be honest that today, we lost the game because there was a lack of power and speed in our team," he said at the post-match press conference.

"When I compare us with our opponent, we lost a lot of duels and the speed in our team ... not only the running speed, but also the speed of execution ... was not the same. When you see how quickly Canada play and also their build up, it took long sometimes before we took a decision."

Broos had preached about the domestic game in South Africa, from where most of his squad are drawn, not offering players enough exposure to the rigours of the modern game. "These are things we have to work on, and this is also what I said already many times in South Africa, but nobody believes me," he said. "Modern football is more than technique. Modern football is power and speed. If you don't have it in your team, and you play against a team who has it, and that was a big quality of Canada, then it's difficult. And we had a difficult game, certainly."

But the 74-year-old said South Africa had exceeded expectations by reaching the knockout stage for the first time. "When we look back, I think we can be very satisfied with what we did. It was 24 years ago that South Africa last qualified for the World Cup.



South Africa coach Hugo Broos consoles Oswin Appollis after their loss to Canada in the round of 32 of the World Cup on Sunday. (Reuters)

"Everyone hoped, but only some expected, that we should achieve (a place in) the second round. So, okay, we are disappointed, because we wanted to win, and it should be really a little miracle if we got through to the last 16, but we don't have to be too disappointed.

"What we did was good, and I'm very happy. I'm very proud of my team," he added.

Saudi football chief resigns after World Cup exit

Jeddah: The president of Saudi Arabia's Football Federation has announced his resignation after the Green Falcons were knocked out of the World Cup in the first round. Saudi Arabia finished bottom of Group H with two points, after two draws against Uruguay (1-1) and Cape Verde (0-0), and a heavy 4-0 defeat to Spain.

"The failure of the national team to qualify for the next round of the World Cup is a result that falls short of all our ambitions, and I bear full responsibility for it. I offer my apologies to everyone who hoped to see our team in a better position," Yasser al-Misheal wrote on X. "A sense of responsibility requires giving the opportunity to open a new chapter, and I have decided not to continue until the end of my current term," he added.

At the head of the federation for seven years, Misheal played a central role in Saudi Arabia's successful bid to host the 2034 World Cup, a cornerstone of its strategy to diversify an economy heavily dependent on oil.

Saudi Arabia was playing in its third consecutive World Cup this year. A series of poor results in friendly warm-up matches in March had already cost French coach Herve Renard his job, bringing a second spell by Renard to an end after he returned to replace Italian Roberto Mancini.

The wealthy Gulf monarchy has invested nearly two billion dollars in football over the last three years, luring Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Karim Benzema to the Saudi Pro League, now one of the most lucrative competitions in the world.

DUTCH RALLY AROUND GAKPO AFTER LOSS OF UNBORN SON

Netherlands have rallied around striker Cody Gakpo after he and his partner lost their unborn son during pregnancy with coach Ronald Koeman and captain Virgil van Dijk hailing the couple's fortitude. Gakpo's partner Noa van der Bij posted about the loss on social media on Saturday and Gakpo has been given time off to spend with family who are staying near the team base in Kansas City as the Netherlands compete in the World Cup.

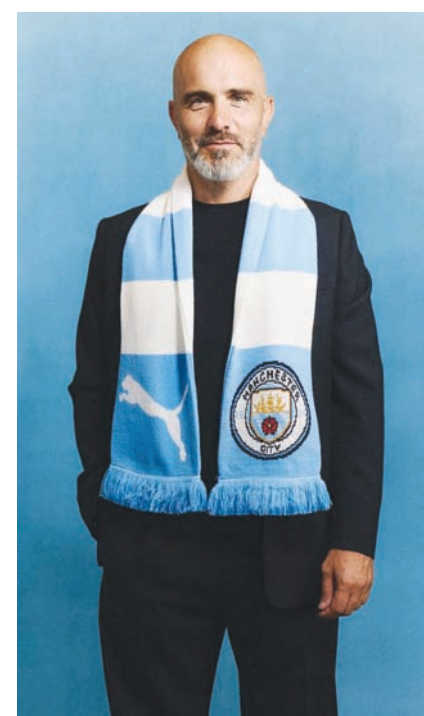
PSG IN TALKS WITH LEIPZIG TO BUY IVORY COAST STAR DIOMANDE

Paris Saint-Germain are in talks with Bundesliga side RB Leipzig to buy Ivory Coast forward Yan Diomande, a source close to the dossier told AFP. The 19-year-old has told the German club he wants to join the French giants and the two clubs opened negotiations after Diomande, who is under contract with Leipzig until 2030, told PSG management he was "very keen" to sign for the reigning European champions this summer, the source added.

His arrival would also likely involve the departure of Portuguese forward Goncalo Ramos to AC Milan with PSG having reached a deal with the Italian outfit. Born in Abidjan, Diomande spent a few months in 2025 at Spanish club Leganes, then in La Liga, and has played for Leipzig for one season, scoring 12 goals in the Bundesliga. The arrival of the forward, who is preparing for the Ivory Coast's World Cup last 32 match with Norway today, would mark PSG's first major move of this summer transfer.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City hire Maresca to start new era after Guardiola



AFP
London

Manchester City yesterday hired former Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca to lead the club into a new era after Pep Guardiola stepped down at the end of last season. Maresca agreed a three-year contract with City after being forced to wait several weeks to seal his move to the Etihad Stadium.

"Manchester City is a club I know very well and to have the chance to manage this team is a brilliant opportunity for me," said Maresca, who previously coached Leicester in the Championship and Chelsea in the Premier League.

"City is an incredibly well-run football club. Everything they do is innovative, planned and purposeful. For a manager, that is a dream situation. It provides the consistency I need to do my job effectively."

The 46-year-old Maresca had been strongly linked with the City job once reports emerged of Guardiola's potential exit. But Maresca's arrival in Manches-

ter was held up by Chelsea's demand for a reported £17m (\$22m) compensation package for the Italian, who was still contracted to the Blues until 2029 when he departed in January.

Chelsea took the unusual step of issuing a statement, on the announcement of Maresca's appointment, to explain he had informed them earlier in the season "there might be an opportunity for him to succeed Pep Guardiola at the end of the season."

"In December 2025, our head coach unexpectedly and abruptly resigned from his position," the club added. "Obviously, we felt let down."

Maresca will be tasked with restoring City to the summit of English football after two years without the Premier League title. He has experience of life at City after spending the 2022-23 season as one of Guardiola's assistants, helping them win the Premier League, Champions League and FA Cup treble.

The former Juventus and West Brom midfielder also coached City's elite development squad to the 'Premier League 2' title in 2020-21. Maresca added: "This will be my third spell here. I know this club, I

know the demands and I know the expectations. The quality of the people who work here is what makes it so special, and I want to thank them for showing faith in my ability. I cannot wait to start coaching the players. I want us to win, play good football and enjoy the pressure of representing Manchester City."

Maresca is back in management after leaving Chelsea under a cloud on New Year's Day. His spell at Chelsea started promisingly as the Blues finished fourth in the Premier League and won the UEFA Conference League and Club World Cup in his first season.

The intensely driven and detail oriented Maresca had a good relationship with Chelsea players and Enzo Fernandez and Marc Cucurella, who has since joined Real Madrid, both expressed frustration at his departure.

Maresca, who joined Chelsea after leading Leicester to promotion from the Championship in 2023-24, is a disciple of Guardiola, using the Spaniard's possession-based philosophy as the template for his own style of play.

Replicating Guardiola's success will be a daunting task for Maresca, who will

find a squad that had been significantly overhauled over the last 18 months as the club moved on from several of the pillars of their dynastic title-winning era.

After months of speculation over his future, Guardiola quit in May, bringing the curtain down on an iconic decade in charge of City. He won the FA Cup and League Cup in his final season, but second-placed City finished seven points behind Premier League champions Arsenal.

It was the second successive year that City had failed to win the Premier League after Guardiola led them to the title in six of his first eight seasons in England.

The 55-year-old Spaniard, who lifted 17 major trophies with City, said he no longer had the energy to lead the club after 10 years in Manchester.

City hope Maresca can emulate Arsenal's success with Mikel Arteta, another of Guardiola's former assistants. Maresca will look to make a big splash in the transfer market to herald his arrival.

City have reportedly agreed a club record deal with Nottingham Forest for England midfielder Elliot Anderson, whilst they are also reported to be chasing Bournemouth forward Eli Junior Kroupi.