

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



MOTORSPORT | Page 2

Antonelli is far ahead, says Hamilton of his title chances



WIMBLEDON | Page 3

Superb Swiatek, Rybakina and Zverev cruise into last 32

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Friday, July 3, 2026
Muharram 18, 1448 AH

GULF TIMES
SPORT

MATCH REPORT

Spain sweep aside Austria to reach World Cup last 16

Oyarzabal scored twice and now has four goals in the World Cup, Spain have yet to concede a goal



Spain's Mikel Oyarzabal scores their third goal during their FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 32 match against Austria at Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood, California, yesterday. (Reuters)



Spain's Pedro Porro celebrates scoring their second goal with Marc Cucurella and Alex Baena. (Reuters)

AFP
Los Angeles

Mikel Oyarzabal scored his third and fourth goals of the World Cup and Spain eased into the last 16 with a 3-0 victory over Austria yesterday afternoon in Inglewood, Calif.

Pedro Porro added his first-ever goal for Spain after halftime, a header that, for all intents and

purposes, ensured victory against an opponent that rarely threatened.

Fullback Marc Cucurella assisted both of Oyarzabal's goals for La Roja, which outshot Das Team 23-5 overall and led 10-0 in efforts on target.

That was more than enough to secure a round of 16 meeting with the winner of Portugal and Croatia, who play later on Thursday in Toronto.

Spain have now outscored their

opponents 8-0 while continuing their run as one of two teams yet to concede at this World Cup, alongside Mexico.

Austria remain in search of their first knockout stage World Cup victory since their third-place finish in 1954.

They last advanced beyond the initial group stage in 1982, when there was a second group phase before the semifinals and finals.

Spain's 18-year-old star Lam-

ine Yamal played 85 minutes in his longest outing since mid-April following a hamstring tear that ended his club season early.

And while he had some frustrating near-misses in attempting to add his second goal of the tournament, it ultimately didn't matter.

Spain had an earlier apparent goal waved off for a foul on Austrian goalkeeper Alexander Schlager before taking the lead through Oyarzabal in the 36th minute.

Pedri made the run up the middle before playing the ball wide to Cucurella on the left.

Cucurella dragged his cross low toward the penalty spot where Oyarzabal met it with a simple low finish. Porro made it 2-0 in the 66th minute on arguably Spain's best attack of the match.

This time it was Cucurella in the middle winning a 50-50 ball following an Austrian tackle and playing the ball wide to Alex Baena, who curled in a tempting short cross.

Porro may not have scored a national team goal before, but he certainly looked the part, arriving in the box at the right time to guide an easy header across the line.

Cucurella connected with Oyarzabal again in the 89th minute and the Real Sociedad forward became the fourth player at the tournament to score multiple goals in multiple games.

The others? Argentina's Lionel Messi, France's Kylian Mbappe and Norway's Erling Haaland.

SPOTLIGHT

Egypt coach 'not sure' if Salah will start knockout clash

AFP
Arlington, United States

Egypt coach Hossam Hassan cast doubt on whether talisman Mohamed Salah will start their World Cup last-32 showdown with Australia today in Texas following a hamstring problem.

Salah took part in training with the rest of the squad in Dallas yesterday, albeit a lighter session in front of the cameras.

The 34-year-old former Liverpool superstar was forced off the pitch in the 57th minute of Egypt's final group game, a 1-1 draw with Iran a week ago. The striker placed an icepack under his left thigh, throwing his participation against the Socceroos in doubt.

"We tried to introduce him to partial training yesterday only," Hassan said on Thursday, the eve of the match at the home of the Dallas Cowboys.

"He is very much looking forward to making his own contribution tomorrow.

"On the other hand, I am not going to run any risk unless I am 100 percent sure he is fit and raring to go tomorrow.

"Not so sure if he will be in the starting line-up."

Egypt are looking to make more history for their country in Texas.

They earned the first World Cup win in their history by beating New Zealand 3-1 in the group phase. Hassan said he was wary of the height and pace of Tony Popovic's Australia, especially when it comes to set-pieces. Neither Australia nor Egypt have ever won a World Cup knockout match.

"We are well prepared to deal with everything we will face," said Hassan.

"We have been working hard for more than two years now with our style and personality.

"It is more than one player, it is a collective, and we aim to showcase this tomorrow.

"We aim to bring joy to our people, to Africa and to the Arab world."

Powerhouses of African football with a record seven continental titles, Egypt struggled to make a dent on the global stage in three previous World Cups.



Mohamed Salah of Egypt participates in the training session yesterday ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 32 match against Australia at SMU in Dallas, Texas. (AFP)



FORMULA 1

Hamilton admits Antonelli is far ahead in title race

Mercedes have won seven of eight Grands Prix this season

Reuters
Silverstone, England

Lewis Hamilton jokingly suggested he might have to sneak into the Mercedes garage and sabotage their cars to have a realistic hope of winning a record eighth Formula One title.

The Ferrari driver is third in the standings after eight rounds but 46 points behind Mercedes's Kimi Antonelli.

"Other than me going into the Mercedes garage and undoing the bolts..." said the Briton yesterday when asked what he had to do to make it a championship-winning year and whether it was realistic to consider him a title contender.

"I mean, Mercedes is a phenomenal team. You're seeing them perform at such an amazing level.

"It's really beautiful to see when a team is fully in synergy and what they've brought and what they've done this year is mighty. I think it's going to take a huge amount for anyone to close them down," added the Briton, who won six of his seven titles with Mercedes.

Mercedes have won seven of eight Grands Prix this season and started every race on pole position.

Italian Antonelli, 19, won five in a row - a sequence ended by Hamilton's first Ferrari win in Spain last month.

That win, and two second places in the races immediately before that, revived talk of Hamilton challenging for a record eighth title.

"We as a team have to just continue to believe, continue to just stay calm," said Hamilton, also a record nine-time British Grand



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli signs autographs in the paddock ahead of the British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone, central England, yesterday. (AFP)

Prix winner, ahead of his home race at Silverstone on Sunday.

"We just have to extract everything we can from each weekend and even, if possible, a little bit more than what performance-wise is possible.

"It's also too early (to talk about the title). I mean, Kimi is far ahead, there is still a lot of points ahead and he pulled some more points ahead in the last race. But it's not over till it's over. Every single person is so geared up and pushing as much as they can, so that's all I can ever ask for."

Antonelli finished third in Austria last Sunday, a race won by Mercedes teammate George Russell, while Hamilton was fifth.

Meanwhile Hamilton yesterday said he planned to boycott a

Formula One sponsorship stunt involving Lego cars in a parade ahead of Sunday's British Grand Prix, his home race.

"I'm not going to do it," the British Ferrari driver said, with a laugh. "It's the most dangerous part of the weekend!"

All 22 drivers are set to be involved in the stunt, 90 minutes before the race driving replica cars made of 28,000 Lego bricks that will have a maximum speed of 25 kph.

Hamilton avoided driving at a previous Lego event in Miami.

"I let Charles drive last time and it was just hilarious watching everyone crashing into each other," said Hamilton. "So yeah, I don't know whether or not I'll be in the Lego car this year."

Reports suggested that Hamilton was disgruntled on behalf of the drivers because they do not receive a fee.

Hamilton refused to comment when asked whether safety was his only issue.

"There's not really much to say," he said. "It's something I need to take offline."

Hamilton was not alone in lacking enthusiasm for the event, one of a series of stunts organised by Formula One, owned by the American Liberty Media group, and the Danish toy manufacturer.

"I'm indifferent," said Aston Martin's Lance Stroll.

"I'm not gonna lose sleep over it or wake up early excited about it. It's just another drivers' parade."

COMMENT

Hamilton cools fans Ferrari fervour

AFP
Silverstone, United Kingdom

Lewis Hamilton yesterday dampened his fans' enthusiasm and downplayed his chances of winning his home British Grand Prix for a record-increasing 10th time and, with it, his hopes of a record eighth drivers world title.

The 41-year-old seven-time champion, who secured his first Ferrari victory and the 106th of his career in Spain three weeks ago, warned that despite his team's great progress this year it was unlikely that they could overhaul leaders Mercedes.

The Silver Arrows, with Italian teenager Kimi Antonelli leading the drivers' title race after claiming five straight wins, have won seven of this year's eight races ahead of this weekend's Silverstone showdown.

"Mercedes is a phenomenal team," he said, after joking that his only means of winning another title could see him "going into the Mercedes garage and undoing all the bolts!"

In light-hearted mood ahead of his second home race with Ferrari, he added: "You see them perform at such an amazing level. It's really beautiful to see when a team is fully in synergy - and what they've brought and done this year is mighty.

"I think it is going to take a huge amount for anyone to close them down."

His compatriot George Russell, winner of last weekend's Austrian Grand Prix, goes into the race on a wave of relief and rising confi-

dence after leaping ahead of Hamilton into second place, 40 points behind Antonelli in the title race.

'MAX A BIG CONTENDER'

Most neutrals expect one or the other of the two drivers from Hamilton's former team to win Sunday's race, but Hamilton warned that Red Bull should also be considered as contenders.

"Red Bull have taken a really big step," he said, referring to last Sunday's Austrian race where four-time champion Max Verstappen was a very close second behind Russell.

"I imagine, undoubtedly, Max is going to be a big contender and he's got the power to match the Mercedes' so I think they're going to be really strong.

"We have to continue to believe, as a team, and continue to stay calm and keep working. We have to extract everything we can from each weekend and possibly a little more than what, performance-wise, we think is possible."

Hamilton said there will be tracks other than Silverstone that will suit him and Ferrari better as the long fast straights at the British track clearly favour the power of Mercedes and Red Bull.

"There are some places where it neutralises a bit, like I imagine Budapest might and may deliver a little bit of a closer battle because there are no long straights. We need more of those!"

Asked about the drivers' title, he added: "Kimi is far ahead... There's still a lot of points ahead too, but he pulled some more in the last race so it was, for us, a little bit of a reality check, but, of course, it's not over 'till it's over."



Racing Bulls' British driver Arvid Lindblad (left) and Ferrari's British driver Lewis Hamilton (centre) attend a press conference ahead of the British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

ETPL 'best thing' ever for European cricket: Waugh

AFP
New Delhi

Former Australia captain Steve Waugh said yesterday the new European T20 franchise competition would benefit from the presence of top stars and fast-track the growth of cricketers in the region. Waugh is among the owners of the Amsterdam Flames in one of the league's six franchises based in Dublin, Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

"We have just seen how strong European cricket is. I mean (Ireland) just beaten world champions India 2-0 in a T20 series and that shows potential for cricket in Europe," Waugh told Indian reporters in a video call after the conclusion of the ETPL player draft.

"There are excellent players all throughout Europe, particularly



Netherlands, Scotland and Ireland, and they will showcase their skills in this league."

The former batter said: "We have got some world-class players in Mitchell Marsh, Steve Smith and Tim David, and they will be rubbing shoulders with these guys for five or six weeks."

"They are going to be fast-tracking their success with their knowledge, their mental application. This will be the best thing for European cricket that has ever happened," he added.

Thirty-six players from Ire-

land, Scotland and the Netherlands have been selected across the franchises. India's Ravichandran Ashwin will be captain and mentor of Dublin Guardians, who are co-owned by Indian batting great Rahul Dravid.

Ashwin, an off-spinner who ended his career with 537 Test wickets, said the ETPL will be key in spreading the sport globally.

"There is an Olympics that's going to happen in a couple of years and if cricket as a game is serious about making it a global affair, I think the teams in this

league will play a very crucial part in enabling that," said Ashwin.

"This is a really really exciting prospect. It is about Scottish players, about Dutch and about the Irish players and that is something we were very clear from the first day."

Los Angeles 2028 will see cricket returning to the Olympics for the first time since 1900, with a six-team T20 event in both the men's and women's game.

The ETPL's inaugural edition will feature 32 matches from August 26 to September 20.

FOCUS

England beat South Africa by 40 runs in World Cup semi-final

AFP
London

England beat South Africa by 40 runs in a Women's T20 World Cup semi-final at the Oval yesterday.

Tournament hosts England collapsed to 23-3 before a stand of 133 between returning captain Nat Sciver-Brunt (75) and former skipper Heather Knight (58) took their side to 169-5.

South Africa were never truly in the hunt, the Proteas finishing on 129-8 to send England through to a final against arch-rivals Australia at Lord's on Sunday.

Earlier England captains present and past combined to telling effect as Sciver-Brunt and Knight rescued the hosts from a top-order collapse with a century stand.

The Proteas, who won the toss, reduced England to 23-3 inside four overs. But Sciver-Brunt and Knight, two survivors from the last England side to win a major international trophy - the 2017 50-over



England's Nat Sciver-Brunt celebrates after taking a catch to dismiss South Africa's Tazmin Brits yesterday. (Reuters)

World Cup - turned the tide with a partnership of 133 that took their side to a total of 169-5.

In the final, England will take on mighty Australia at Lord's.

Australia thrashed the West Indies by eight wickets in Tuesday's first semi-final at the Oval.

CYCLING

Tour de France is my childhood dream, says Seixas

Reuters
Barcelona

French cycling prodigy Paul Seixas said yesterday that he is ready to live his childhood dream when he makes his Tour de France debut tomorrow.

The 19-year-old rider was not certain of a place in Decathlon CMA CGM's team selected for the Tour at the start of the season.

However, his brilliant start to 2026, with seven wins, including the Tour of the Basque Country and the Fleche Wallonne, made his inclusion inevitable.

His participation was revealed in early May,

a few days after being beaten only by Tadej Pogacar in Liege-Bastogne-Liege, giving France its biggest hope in a generation of a first home champion since Bernard Hinault in 1985.

"I approach this like any other race, with the maximum of seriousness and dedication. There's obviously that little something extra because it's the Tour, a childhood dream," Seixas told a press conference yesterday.

"The Tour has another dimension. A new experience is beginning for me, and I hope it will be a good one."

Seixas will be the youngest rider to start the Tour since 1937, and doubts remain over whether he can last three weeks.

"We will see how my recovery is going after

10 or 15 days - these are more questions than fears," Seixas said.

"If there are any mistakes or if it's tough, it'll be a learning experience for the future - that's a positive thing. We can't be perfect, especially over three weeks, it's long."

Alberto Contador, Spain's twice Tour winner, has been impressed by Seixas.

"I'm especially interested to see how he recovers from week to week because that's what will tell us whether he has what it takes to become a genuine Grand Tour contender. I think he certainly has a chance of finishing on the podium," Contador told Eurosport.

Pogacar and Jonas Vingegaard have won the last six Tours between them.



Decathlon CMA CGM Team's French rider Paul Seixas leaves after attending the teams briefing prior to the team presentation ceremony of the 113th edition of the Tour de France, in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Swiatek and Zverev cruise into Wimbledon last 32

French Open champion Zverev was on top form in a 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Valentin Royer

AFP London

Iga Swiatek put a stuttering start to her Wimbledon title defence firmly behind her by powering to a statement second-round victory over Karolina Pliskova, while Alexander Zverev also eased through yesterday.

Reigning champion Swiatek, who struggled to hold back tears after battling past Taylor Townsend in the first round, was back to her ruthless best in a 6-1, 6-3 dismantling of former world number one Pliskova in 70 minutes.

"For sure the first round was really emotional but today I felt like it's another day at the office, I need to be ready, be sharp," said Swiatek.

The Pole, who has been inconsistent since winning her sixth Grand Slam title at the All England Club 12 months ago, will next face the Philippines' Alexandra Eala, who beat Serena Williams' first-round conqueror Maya Joint. Pliskova, who returned to the tour this year after a long-term injury absence, was no match for the third seed.

The 25-year-old Swiatek has reached at least the third round on each of her past 26 Grand Slam appearances since losing in round two at the 2019 US Open.

Eala, the 29th seed, became the first woman from the Philippines to reach the third round of a Grand Slam, defeating Joint 3-6, 6-2, 6-0 on a raucous Court Three.

"I think the atmosphere today was amazing, it was electric, respectful and all that I could have hoped for," said the 21-year-old.

Last year's runner-up Amanda Anisimova came back from a break down in the third set to beat Sofia Kenin in a deciding tie-break.

Former Australian Open champion Madison Keys ended home



Poland's Iga Swiatek (left) shakes hands with Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova after winning their second round match on the fourth day of the Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, southwest London, yesterday. (AFP)

interest in the women's singles, beating Britain's Katie Swan in straight sets.

Last on Centre Court, 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, bidding to take the world-number-one ranking from Aryna Sabalenka next week, beat American Caty McNally 6-1, 6-2. Britain's future queen Princess Catherine attended the tournament yesterday, greeting fans before watching some of the action on Court 18.

ZVEREV POWERS ON

Zverev was on top form in a 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Valentin Royer, raising hopes the German can finally master the grass courts.

He ended his long wait for a maiden Grand Slam title at the French Open last month but has never performed well at Wimble-

don, failing to get past the last 16 in nine previous appearances at the All England Club. The second seed has a golden opportunity to go further this time around, with Yannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic in the other half of the draw, and fourth seed Ben Shelton already out of the tournament.

"If I keep playing like this I definitely think it can happen this year," said Zverev. "In tennis you need to have a short-term memory, whether it's good or bad."

Zverev made short work of Royer, banishing some of the memories of last year when he was dumped out in the first round by another unseeded Frenchman, Arthur Rinderknech. American sixth seed Taylor Fritz continued his strong recent record at the All England Club, seeing off compatriot Patrick Kypson 6-2, 6-2, 7-5 to reach the

third round. Fritz has made at least the quarter-finals at Wimbledon in three of the past four years and lost to Carlos Alcaraz in the semis 12 months ago. Fifth-seeded Australian Alex de Minaur also breezed through with a dominant straight-sets victory over French veteran Adrian Mannarino.

Rising Spanish star Rafael Nadal returned to court in a match delayed by darkness on Wednesday, winning the last two sets to complete a comeback victory over Pablo Carreno Busta.

The Wimbledon debutant had never played a Tour-level match on grass before this week, but has flown up the rankings this year and reached the French Open quarter-finals. Arthur Fery kept British hopes alive for another couple of days, beating Finland's Otto Virtanen in four sets.

Eala's dream run blooms at Wimbledon as she makes history for Philippines

London: Etched on to the back of Alexandra Eala's sun visor at Wimbledon yesterday was a phrase in Tagalog that roughly translates as "once it grows, it cannot be stopped". Those words proved prophetic as she stormed back against Australia's Maya Joint to become the first player from the Philippines to reach the third round of a Grand Slam. The 29th seed will face defending champion Iga Swiatek tomorrow but after the way she recovered from a slow start to win 3-6 6-2 6-0 against Serena Williams' first-round conqueror, the Polish six-time Grand Slam champion will hold no fear. "I think it's going to be tough for me. I'm going to try to make it tough for her, as well," the 21-year-old from Quezon City told reporters after breaking new ground for her nation. "I'm expecting a great challenge. But I think I'm ready for it."



on court," Eala, who trains at the Rafa Nadal Academy in Mallorca, said. "It's a huge reason as to who I am. I think where I come from is a big part of who I am and a big part of who I want to become in the future. For me to be able to represent the Philippines in Wimbledon, I guess, and in the biggest stages in the world, it means so much to me."

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Eala broke into the top 50 last year and has continued on an upwards trajectory this year and seems particularly comfortable on grass, winning the title in Birmingham last month and reaching the semi-finals in Berlin. She is the only player from the Philippines in the main draw at Wimbledon but is flying the flag with pride.

"It sounds super impactful when you say it like that," she said, when told of her milestone moment for Philippines tennis. "It's an amazing thing for me to be able to do that for my country. But I guess it's also very emotional every time I'm able to pass a new step or break new ground, just because it's also personal goals and personal achievements."

CARRYING CULTURE ON COURT

Eala, who is contesting only her sixth Grand Slam tournament said she was proud of her heritage and that her sponsor Nike had worked with her to have the slogan "Kapag lumago, hindi na hihinto" imprinted on some of her kit. For her Wimbledon debut last year Nike supplied her with a custom hair tie adorned with a single sampaguita bloom - the national flower of the Philippines. "I think it's so sentimental to be able to wear things or I guess to carry parts of my culture with me

Judge grants prosecutors access to Woods' medical records

NEW YORK: Prosecutors in Tiger Woods' DUI case have been allowed to obtain hospital records connected to the golfer's medical treatment following his rollover crash in Jupiter Island, Florida. Court documents revealed that prosecutors and Woods' defense team agreed to allow the State of Florida to request records from Clinic Martin South Hospital related to his hospitalization on March 27.

Per *Golf Digest*, the State Attorney's office filed a notice of its intent to subpoena Woods' medical history from the hospital, specifically seeking "any and all reports documenting statements of the patient regarding alcohol or chemical substances use" and "any and all drug screen results." Martin County Judge Darren Steele signed the order on June 23, with the prosecutors and defense agreeing to limit the disclosures to only the State, their designated law enforcement officers and prosecution experts. The records must remain confidential and cannot be shared beyond those parties, per the order.

Woods' attorney previously challenged a request from prosecutors to subpoena the golfer's prescription drug records in April.

Woods, 50, has pleaded not guilty to misdemeanor DUI charges following the two-vehicle crash.

Following the arrest, the 15-time major champion announced that he



was stepping away from golf to seek treatment.

Charlie Woods unravels to miss cut by 6 at Pinehurst amateur

Charlie Woods finished poorly and missed the cut at this week's North & South Men's Amateur tournament at Pinehurst.

The son of golf legend Tiger Woods finished at 7-over-par through 36 holes at the North Carolina resort. Woods, a rising senior at Florida's The Benjamin School, was one shot below the projected cut line with four holes remaining in the second round Wednesday.

He finished with three bogeys and a triple bogey to fall six shots short of advancing to match play yesterday. The top 31 players made the cut.

Woods, 17, has committed to play at Florida State as part of the 2027 recruiting class. He currently is No. 172 in the Rolex American Junior Golf Association rankings.

SPOTLIGHT

eFIBA World Finals 2026 on the starting line for the first time in the Middle East

By Sports Reporter Doha

The Qatari capital today marks the official tip off of the eFIBA World Finals Qatar Season 4, a joint collaboration of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Local Organizing Committee with the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and the Qatar Esports Federation.

The competition will take place at the Mall of Qatar on July 3 and 4, 2026.

The event forms part of a broader program of promotional activities and preparations for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, scheduled to be held in Doha from August 27 to September 12, 2027, featuring some of the world's top national teams and basketball stars.

The eFIBA World Finals Qatar Season 4 brings together eight national teams from across the globe, divided into two groups. Group A includes Algeria, France, Germany, and the Philippines, while Group B features hosts Qatar, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon, and Türkiye. Each team will be represented by five players, bringing the total number of participants to 40 athletes.

Day 1 action tips off today morning, July 3, with a packed schedule of group-stage encounters, as France face the Philippines, Türkiye meet the Dominican Republic,



Germany take on Algeria, and Lebanon play hosts Qatar. The action intensifies with further matchups including Germany against France, Lebanon versus Türkiye, Algeria against the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic facing Qatar, before the group stage concludes with France versus Algeria, Türkiye against Qatar, Germany meeting the Philippines, and Lebanon facing the Dominican Republic.

Later today, the competition moves into the knockout stage, while tomorrow, is dedicated to the final phase of the tournament, featuring decisive encounters leading to the grand finale, where the Season 4 eFIBA World Finals Qatar 2026 champion will be crowned.

The total prize stands at \$50,000, distributed among the top four teams across both team and individual categories. The champions will receive \$20,000, the runners-up \$10,000, the third-place team \$6,000, and the fourth-place team \$4,000.

A range of individual awards will also be presented, including Defensive Player of the Tournament, Finals MVP, and the All-Star Five selection.

The prize allocation includes \$2,500 each for the Finals MVP and Defensive Player of the Tournament, while each member of the All-Star Five will receive \$1,000.

The tournament reflects the nation's vision to support sporting innovation and expand basketball's presence within the esports ecosystem, serving as a strategic milestone on the road to Qatar's hosting of the FIBA World Basketball Cup Qatar 2027, reinforcing the country's growing global sporting profile.

The first in-person event was held in 2023, the eFIBA Season 2 World Finals, in Jonkoping, Sweden, on November 25-26, featuring eight national teams: Brazil, France, Lebanon, Morocco, New Zealand, the Philippines, Türkiye, and the United States.

The United States claimed the first-ever in-person world title, defeating France in the final, while Türkiye secured third place against the Philippines.

The 2024 Season 3 World Finals took place in Clark, Philippines, on December 11-12, featuring Algeria, Brazil, New Zealand, the Philippines, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and the United States.

The USA retained its world title after defeating Türkiye in the final

BASKETBALL

Qatar beat India 65-56 in Asian Qualifiers for the 2027 FIBA World Cup

By Sports Reporter Doha

The Qatar men's national basketball team secured a valuable victory over India with a score of 65-56 in their matchup yesterday evening, at Veer Savarkar Hall in Ahmedabad, India.

The game marked the opening of the third window of the Asian qualifiers for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, within Group D, which also includes Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

India, playing at home, started strongly and took the first quarter 12-7, then extended their lead

in the second quarter 18-15. Qatar responded with improved performance, claiming the third quarter 20-14, before dominating the fourth quarter 23-12 to seal the win.

Qatar's Abdulrahman Saad was the game's top scorer with 24 points, while Pranav Prince led India with 13 points.

With this result, Qatar raised its tally to 8 points, while India remained at 5 points, having lost all five of its group matches without a single victory. This was Qatar's second triumph over India, following their earlier 99-73 win in Doha during the third round.

Qatar had opened its qualifying campaign with a narrow 75-74 loss

to Lebanon in Doha, before bouncing back with a crucial 86-83 win against Lebanon. In their previous outing, Qatar fell to Saudi Arabia 80-86 in Doha.

The team now prepares to continue its qualifying journey, traveling to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, for an away clash against Saudi Arabia on July 5, 2026.

The Qatari delegation is headed by Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, Secretary General of the Qatar Basketball Federation and Director of National Teams, assisted by Team Manager Jassim Ibrahim Ashkani and Assistant Manager Nabil Jumaa.

The squad is coached by Turkish head coach Hakan Demir, support-

ed by assistants Cengiz Karada, Miroje Mimetic, and Abdou Sow, with Mohamed Vural overseeing fitness preparation. The medical staff includes Dr. Adel Harmiyeh, Dr. Adel Salim and Nikasio Sagaino.

Qatar's roster features 12 players: Abdulrahman Saad, Mostafa Fouda, Omar Saad, Zeineddine Badr, Mohamed Hashem, Mostafa Nado, Babacar Dieng, Ousmane Dieng, Aladji Bobo Magassa, Alen Hadzibegovic, Dante Grantham, and Mahmoud Darwish.

Qatar, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia have already secured qualification to the second round of the Asian qualifiers for the FIBA World Cup Qatar 2027.



Action from Qatar-India match in Ahmedabad yesterday. Qatar won the match 65-56.



FOCUS

Belgium late show floors Senegal at World Cup

Despite a 2-0 lead till the 86th minute, Senegal could not hold on as Belgium win with extra-time penalty

AFP
Seattle

Youri Tielemans scored the latest winner in World Cup history as Belgium mounted an incredible comeback from two goals down to beat Senegal 3-2 and qualify for the last 16 of the World Cup on Wednesday.

Senegal appeared on course for a first win in a World Cup knockout match since their 2002 debut after taking a 2-0 lead through strikes from Habib Diarra and Ismaila Sarr in Seattle.

However, Belgium forced extra time as Romelu Lukaku and Tielemans scored in the final five minutes, before the Aston Villa midfielder completed a remarkable turnaround by converting a penalty in the 125th minute. "In football, anything is always possible as long as you believe in it," said Belgium coach Rudi Garcia.

Belgium go through to a meeting with the United States, who defeated Bosnia and Herzegovina later on Wednesday, but it will be a bitterly painful pill to swallow for Senegal.

"We're out - it hurts. We must congratulate the team, who gave it their all, but unfortunately we weren't able to hold on to our two-goal lead," rued Senegal coach Pape Thiaw.

A defeat would surely have signalled the end of the road for the last remnants of Belgium's golden generation - Lukaku, Kevin



Youri Tielemans of Belgium celebrates after the team's 3-2 victory in the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round Of 32 match against Senegal in Seattle. (AFP)

De Bruyne and perhaps Thibaut Courtois - but instead they live to fight another day.

After a 5-1 win over New Zealand that clinched top spot for Belgium in Group G, Garcia named an unchanged side with Atalanta forward Charles De Ketelaere leading the attack and Lukaku on the

bench. Thiaw made three changes to the Senegal side that thrashed Iraq 5-0, which allowed them to squeak through as the last of the eight best third-place teams.

Pape Gueye started after scoring twice as a substitute in that match, while Pathe Ciss and Everton winger Iliman Ndiaye came

into the line-up. Senegal nearly went ahead through the in-form Sarr, who hit the post after Courtois inadvertently diverted a cross into the Crystal Palace forward's path.

The Lions of Teranga did take the lead, however, when Sarr's header from Sadio Mane's cross

came back off the same post, with Diarra reacting quickest to turn the rebound home.

Belgium's best chance of the half fell to Maxim De Cuyper, whose curling effort from outside the area drew an outstanding full-stretch save from Mory Diaw.

Diaw was again filling in for

Edouard Mendy, who returned to Saudi Arabia for tests on a knee injury he suffered in Senegal's second game of the tournament.

Belgium unsurprisingly turned to their all-time leading scorer at the interval, with Lukaku having already proven his value as a substitute against Egypt and New Zealand in the group phase.

But Belgium fell further behind six minutes into the second half when Sarr chested down Moussa Niakhate's long pass over the defence before firing an emphatic finish beyond Courtois.

De Bruyne and Jeremy Doku were hauled off as Belgium appeared to be heading out, but Lukaku - limited to barely an hour's play with Napoli this season - grabbed his team a lifeline in the 86th minute.

He swept home from a Thomas Meunier cross and, just three minutes later, Belgium were level. Diaw failed to deal with Leandro Trossard's delivery into the box and Tielemans held off two defenders to nod into an empty net.

Belgium substitute Dodi Lukebaki clipped the crossbar late in the second period of extra time as the match appeared destined for a penalty shootout.

But there was one final twist when Tielemans went down under a challenge from Lamine Camara, prompting referee Said Martinez to award a penalty after a VAR review. Tielemans stepped up and dispatched with aplomb to cap a stunning fightback and break Senegalese hearts.

SPOTLIGHT

US keep dream alive with gutsy 2-0 win over Bosnia

Reuters
Santa Clara, California

Ten-man United States moved into the last 16 of the World Cup with a 2-0 victory over Bosnia on Wednesday, ending a 24-year wait for a knockout-stage win to keep alive hopes of an American dream run in soccer's global showpiece.

In a dramatic high-tempo game in the San Francisco Bay Area, Folarin Balogun scored near half-time then was sent off after the break, with Malik Tillman converting a free kick late on to spark euphoria in a partisan arena of red, white and blue.

Victory brought an end to a dismal U.S. run of 10 consecutive defeats by European opposition, and set up a last-16 tie in Seattle with Belgium, who had earlier rallied from two goals down to beat Senegal 3-2 after extra time.

"I felt we put on such a good performance and didn't deserve the red card," said Christian Pulisic.

"But for us to dig in deep like that and just to get another goal and to defend the way we did, it took a real team effort, but we're proud of that."

It was a physical encounter in the Golden State where luck was not always on the side of the hosts, with Balogun and Pulisic having goals ruled out and Bosnia crowding out their defence to stifle a succession of U.S. attacks.

Balogun was always a threat, coming close a few times early on before seizing his chance, slotting home a loose ball to put the hosts ahead for his third goal of the



Nikola Vasilj of Bosnia and Herzegovina fails to save a freekick from Malik Tillman of the United States during the FIFA World Cup Round Of 32 match at San Francisco Bay Area Stadium in Santa Clara, California. (AFP)

tournament.

He was stunned when he was dismissed after the break for a serious foul on Tarik Muharemovic that appeared accidental.

Playing in their first-ever World Cup knockout round match, Bosnia had barely threatened and looked content defending compactly and hoofing long balls upfield towards Edin Dzeko, who forced a save early on from goalkeeper Matt Freese.

In a match full of patriotic fer-

our that got under way with a fly-over by fighter jets, the Americans started with attacking verve and silky one-touch moves, spurred on by the reverberating roars of U.S.-A by a crowd with high expectations. And the U.S. delivered, showing speed, grit and intensity, with talisman Pulisic back in the team and intoxicating the crowd with a few blazing runs for goal.

U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino was certain Balogun's foul was not intentional and hailed his team's

ability to battle on. "The team showed the qualities, the capacity to compete, to fight for each other," he said. "Yes, I am so proud, so proud about the players. They are the heroes."

Bosnia's coach Sergej Barbarez was disappointed they did not create more chances but praised his players for getting this far in the tournament.

"We should hold our heads up high and we can really improve and build on this," he said.

US COACH POCHETTINO '200% ARGENTINE' BUT EMBRACES AMERICANA

Mauricio Pochettino may be "200 percent Argentine" but the US coach has thrown himself into American culture, joyfully belting out "Take Me Home, Country Roads" as his team celebrated their World Cup win over Bosnia.

"When that song starts to sound in the stadium, it's impossible not to sing. It's impossible!" Pochettino told a press conference in Santa Clara, California after Wednesday's 2-0 victory.

"Because it's an amazing song, no? It's very emotional. And after winning again, no?" said the coach.

Though he hails from the tiny, dusty town of Murphy in Argentina's Santa Fe region, some 5,000 miles from West Virginia, the US appears to be a perfect cultural fit for Pochettino.

"Poch" has been rapturously embraced by US soccer fans, and reciprocated the love-in by leaping over advertising barriers to embrace supporters after reaching the round-of-16.

Pochettino's players say he has dived into his new team's culture too. "I'm in his office yesterday, he's listening to country music and things - it's funny to see," chuckled star US forward Christian Pulisic recently. "It feels like he's really in tune with it."

US striker Folarin Balogun, also something of an outsider having been raised in London by British-Nigerian parents, has noticed too.

"He's come in and really wanted to understand it from the player's point of view, what it means and what it feels like to be American. He's always asking questions," said Balogun.

"He might be watching a basketball game or something, and he's intrigued, and he wants to learn more," said Balogun, who emulated NBA star LeBron James's "Silencer" celebration after scoring on Wednesday.

'Gives you chills'

An elite manager who took Tottenham Hotspur to the Champions League final, and coached Lionel Messi and Neymar at Paris Saint-Germain, Pochettino has gamely engaged with the more playful duties of his new gig. Before the US opening game against Paraguay, he sat down for an interview with Sesame Street's Grover.

"I am 200 per cent Argentine... But you feel part of something bigger. Things that we are building. I enjoy being part of the amazing project," said Pochettino.

He added: "I love to be involved and be part of the party."

As for "Take Me Home, Country Roads," the John Denver classic has become an unofficial team anthem. After a 2-0 victory over Australia in Seattle, footage of Pulisic and other players singing along with 70,000 fans went viral. "They played a song that we all know, and I can't explain it - it just gives you chills, you know?" said Pulisic.

It was one of the songs US soccer officials picked when asked by FIFA to submit two victory tracks for post-match stadium celebrations. The other is "Livin' on a Prayer" by Bon Jovi. Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" was considered but had been snapped up by England. While Pochettino is now fully aboard the "Country Roads" bandwagon, his players recognize the boss is still Argentine first and foremost.

"He brings his Argentinian culture," said Pulisic. "The American culture is very unique. Sometimes when someone will say something to him in a meeting... super American slang, he's like, 'huh?'"

"I just find it so funny."

KLOPP POISED TO REPLACE NAGELSMANN AS GERMANY COACH: REPORTS

Julian Nagelsmann is reportedly set to be sacked as Germany coach, tabloid *Bild* reported yesterday, with former Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp the favourite to take over in the dugout. Nagelsmann, 38, has been under fire since Germany's last 32 exit from the World Cup after a shock loss to Paraguay. Showing pictures of Nagelsmann at German FA (DFB) headquarters

in Frankfurt, *Bild* reported yesterday the coach had been offered a severance package of seven million euros (\$8mn) to leave the position in a three-hour meeting. Last renewed in January 2025, Nagelsmann's contract is set to run until 2028. Figures on his annual salary have not been made public, although German media reports he earns roughly seven million euros per

year. Germany's loss on penalties to Paraguay marked the third straight early World Cup exit for the four-time champions, after group stage eliminations in Russia and Qatar. Monday's defeat was Germany's first knockout match since winning the World Cup in Brazil in 2014. On Tuesday, DFB president Bernd Neuendorf announced an immedi-

ate investigation into the World Cup failure. A decision on Nagelsmann is expected "by the beginning of next week at the latest", AFP sports subsidiary SID reported yesterday. Several German media outlets, including Sky and Munich daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung, have said Klopp is the overwhelming favourite to succeed Nagelsmann. Klopp stepped away from man-

agement after leaving Liverpool in 2024 and has since been engaged as the head of global football for energy drink brand Red Bull, over-seeing a multi-club network which includes clubs in Austria, Germany, Brazil, the United States and Japan.

Anderson closes in on record Man City move
England midfielder Elliot Anderson

will move to Manchester City from Nottingham Forest following his return from the World Cup after the two Premier League clubs agreed a deal worth a reported £116mn (\$155mn). Such a fee would represent a club record for City and a statement of their intent under new manager Enzo Maresca after Pep Guardiola stood down at the end of last season.