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SPOTLIGHT | Page 2

Qatar to host
2026 and 2028
editions of padel
World Cups



TENNIS | Page 3

Britain's Fery
to face Zverev
in Wimbledon
semi-finals

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Muharram 24, 1448 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT

Sheikh Joaan chairs Doha 2030 Asian Games Organising Committee meeting



Qatar's preparations for hosting the Doha 2030 Asian Games gathered pace as the Organising Committee's Board of Directors held its second meeting yesterday, chaired by HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the Organising Committee. The meeting reviewed progress and discussed the latest operational and strategic plans for staging the continent's premier multi-sport event.

PREVIEW

France must be sharper in attack, says Deschamps

FRANCE, MOROCCO KICK OFF BLOCKBUSTER WORLD CUP QUARTER-FINALS TODAY

Reuters
Foxborough, Massachusetts

France have scored a tournament-leading 14 goals in the World Cup so far but coach Didier Deschamps urged his players yesterday to achieve even greater attacking efficiency when they take on Morocco in today's quarter-final.

The meeting is a rematch of the 2022 World Cup semi-final, when France ended Morocco's historic run in Qatar, but this time the North Africans are no longer the surprise outsiders but a confident side aiming for the title. "We have to be efficient, offensively speaking," Deschamps told a press conference.

"In all the areas both teams have strong assets."

"We are efficient but we could have done better on this front. Sometimes you have six chances and score two goals and sometimes you have two chances and score twice. It is more important to be efficient."

France edged past Paraguay in the round of 16 with a scrappy 1-0 win courtesy of a Kylian Mbappe penalty. The France captain has seven goals in the tournament, second behind Argentina's Lionel Messi, who has eight. Mbappe,



Didier Deschamps, Head Coach of France, speaks to the media at Boston Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, yesterday. (AFP)

Ousmane Dembele, Michael Olise and Bradley Barcola have given France one of the most dangerous forward lines at the World Cup. Morocco eased through their group stage, before knocking out Netherlands and co-hosts Canada, and confirming their status as serious title contenders.

"Morocco's profile is not the one of Paraguay. We met them four years ago in the semi-finals," Deschamps said.

"They played the AFCON (Africa Cup of Nations) final. They have top individuals. They are not here to play. They are here to win. We have to be ready and perform and deliver against this great team."

Deschamps will need to wait and see whether midfielder

Aurelien Tchouameni, who has been nursing a muscle injury, will be fit in time for the game.

"He feels better but I left early from the hotel this morning. I cannot say more. He might take part in training today. All other players they are available," Deschamps said.

As for France's appeal to have Michael Olise's yellow card in the game against Paraguay rescinded, Deschamps said FIFA had informed them the caution stood.

Olise, who has been one of the tournament's standout stars, was booked in the final minutes of the bad-tempered clash in Philadelphia after an altercation with Matias Galarza.

"The yellow card has not changed. We were notified by FIFA this morning, it has been maintained," Deschamps said.

Replays showed there was little contact between the two players. Bayern Munich star Olise put his finger in front of his mouth and the Paraguayan player dropped to the ground, claiming he had been hit in the face.

The decision by world football's governing body to uphold the booking means Olise is now walking a tight-roped - if he is cautioned again against Morocco, he will be suspended for a potential semi-final against Spain or Belgium.

Bradley Barcola and Manu Kone are at risk of a ban too after they were also booked against Paraguay.

France's forward Michael Olise takes part in a training session at Bentley University in Boston. France lost an appeal against Olise's booking at the World Cup. (AFP)

Morocco coach Ouahbi proving doubters wrong

When Mohamed Ouahbi was a student a professor told him he lacked the necessary skills to become a physical education teacher. In coaching Morocco to the World Cup quarter-finals with an attractive brand of football, Ouahbi has comprehensively proved him wrong.

The 49-year-old Belgium-born coach is yet to lose a match at the tournament and Morocco have an enticing quarter-final date with two-time World Cup winners France in Foxborough, Massachusetts today.

"I remember (the professor) very well my first year of studying," Ouahbi told French football magazine Onze Mondial this month. "A professor told me that in his opinion I was not made for teaching, to giving lessons, or communicating."

Ouahbi has made him eat humble pie ever since.

What he failed to achieve on the pitch as a player he has delivered as a coach, although the bulk of his experience has been in developing young talent.

Until he was named Morocco coach just three months before the World Cup to replace Walid Regragui, he had never coached senior players, apart from one season as assistant coach at storied Belgian club Anderlecht.

He had earned his spurs in coaching under-age players, spending 17 years at Anderlecht where Belgium World Cup stars Youri Tielemans and Jeremy Doku were among his proteges.

His years of labour with the youngsters paid off when he guided Morocco to the World Under-20 title last year. Morocco beat France on penalties in the semi-finals and overcame Argentina in the final. Obviously the task today in facing a vibrant France side led by superstar Kylian Mbappe is a tougher challenge but Ouahbi has gained the confidence of former international players.

"There were question marks over his ability to coach a side full of stars, but what we saw in the friendlies was promising," ex-Morocco international midfielder Abdelaziz Bennij told AFP.

"He arrived at a time when everyone was worried ... it was a huge gamble and he has succeeded."

Ouahbi's background with the under-age players will have served him well in dealing with the prodigiously talented 18-year-old midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi, a former France Under-21 star who pledged his allegiance to Morocco shortly before the World Cup.

He has also gained praise for adding élan to the team he took over from Regragui.

Ouahbi's predecessor's counter-attacking style, although hugely successful - Morocco reached the 2022 World Cup semi-finals before losing to France and won the controversially-hit Africa Cup of Nations final this year - had become increasingly unpopular.

His more crowd-pleasing style - with new Bayern Munich signing Ismael Saibari to the fore - was on show in the 1-1 draw with Brazil in the group stage and then the last 32 win on penalties over the Netherlands.

"He has imposed his style on two footballing giants, notably against the Netherlands," Moroccan great Aziz Bouderbala told AFP.

"He knew how to control the match and came up with an imaginative offensive strategy without losing the defensive solidity."

"Ouahbi has brought added value, and has not been content to just carry on in the same style as before."

It is not only former players who have been impressed but also those closer to home.

"My father is very proud of me," said Ouahbi, who has three children. "My papa wears suits the whole time and in the Brussels neighbourhood where they live he is called 'Al Pacino'."

"He is always in a suit and tie but now when I give him my track-suits he wears those instead!" Ouahbi, though, is not one for soaking up the praise all for himself - he prefers a more collegiate approach.

"I try always to include everyone in the project," he told Onze Mondiale.

"I never ever express myself in the first person: I always use 'one' or 'we'."

"The moment I speak in the first person I will put distance between myself and this collective logic."

"It is a staff above all else. Someone who thinks he will succeed alone will not do so... well neither for long nor in the correct manner."

"He arrived at a time when everyone was worried ... it was a huge gamble and he has succeeded."

Morocco coach Mohamed Ouahbi during a training session. (Reuters)





PADEL

Qatar to host FIP World Cup in 2026, 2028

The International Padel Federation and the Qatar Padel Federation are proud to announce Doha, Qatar, as the host city for the 2026 and 2028 editions of the FIP World Cup, the most prestigious international competition for national teams.

Both editions will be held at the iconic Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex, a venue that has hosted some of the world's most important international Padel events in recent years – including the Qatar Major Premier Padel four times, and the last World Team Championships – and has established itself as one of the sport's leading destinations.

FIP's flagship biennial event will see 16 men's national teams and 16 women's national teams compete for the world title in the two editions awarded to Qatar. As confirmed in the official FIP calendar, the 2026 edition will take place from November 2 to 7, 2026.

The decision to award the hosting rights for the 2026 and 2028 FIP World Cups to Doha was based on a series of key criteria, including the high quality of sporting infrastruc-



Luigi Carraro, President of International Padel Federation



Tareq Zainal, Secretary General of Qatar Padel Federation

ture, the conditions offered to athletes and national delegations, proven experience in staging major international events, high safety standards, financial guarantees, and the strong sporting legacy developed by Qatar in recent years.

A further element reflecting the growth and ambition of the FIP World Cup is the prize money, which will reach unprecedented levels in the history of Padel and will be distributed equally between

the men's and women's competitions.

The 2026 edition will offer a record prize fund of €1.2mn, rising further to €1.35mn in 2028. This represents the highest prize money ever awarded in an official Padel competition and underlines the commitment of FIP and the Qatar Padel Federation to further enhance the prestige of the event and showcase the highest level of competition among national teams.



"The awarding of the 2026 and 2028 editions of the FIP World Cup to Doha is a decision that looks to the future of our sport," said FIP President Luigi Carraro. He continued: "Qatar has consistently demonstrated that it possesses all the necessary qualities to host world-class events, and awarding two consecutive editions of the World Cup to the country will provide continuity for the tourna-

ment's growth, ensuring an outstanding experience for players, federations and fans."

"Doha is one of the global homes of Padel. On more than one occasion it has demonstrated its ability to deliver exceptional standards of organisation and hospitality, and it holds a special place in the history of international Padel. We are confident it will once again help write new and historic chapters in

the story of our sport, with the invaluable contribution of the Qatar Padel Federation, whom I thank for its commitment and passion in supporting the growth of Padel worldwide."

Tareq Zainal, Secretary General of the Qatar Padel Federation, said: "We are honoured by the International Padel Federation's decision to award Doha the hosting rights for both the 2026 and 2028 FIP World Cup. Having previously hosted the championship on two occasions, we are proud that Qatar continues to be entrusted with one of the sport's most watched events."

"This confidence reflects the dedication of the Qatar Padel Federation and all our partners to delivering world-class tournaments that meet the highest international standards. Hosting two consecutive editions presents a unique opportunity to build on our experience, further enhance the event, and create an exceptional experience for players, teams and fans from around the world. We look forward to welcoming the global Padel community back to Doha and contributing to the continued growth and success of our sport!"

CRICKET

West Indies win series after draw with Sri Lanka

A total of 1,408 runs were scored in the Test that ended in a draw

Reuters
Barbados

West Indies sealed a 1-0 victory over Sri Lanka on Tuesday, their first Test series win in three years, after the rain-affected second and final Test in North Sound ended in a draw.

Sri Lanka won the toss and elected to bat, piling up 549-9 before declaring their first innings, with opener Lahiru Udara top-scoring for the tourists with 188. West Indies replied with 499, built on centuries from player-of-the-match Justin Greaves (180) and Shai Hope (112).

Sri Lanka then declared their second innings on 251-9, but repeated rain delays denied either side the chance of forcing a decisive result in a high-scoring contest. The 1,408 runs scored in the match are the most in a Test match involving West Indies and Sri Lanka. Having already won the opening Test at the same ground by an innings and 217 runs, West Indies claimed their first Test series triumph since 2023.

"We sit down and we plan for this Test Championship and we said last year it was going to be



West Indies celebrate winning with the Sobers and Tissera trophy at the end of the fifth and final day of the second Test against Sri Lanka at Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, on Tuesday. The Test ended in a draw. (AFP)

tough and it was tough," home captain Roston Chase said after West Indies' first victory in the current World Test Championship cycle. "But we said this year we think that the two series at home especially, these are series that we'll be looking to dominate and to win. So I just want the guys to continue from this and let this be a stepping stone."

"And not just leave it there and

think, 'oh, we won one series and that's enough! I think we need to just have that consistency. I think winning games consistently, that would be great for us in terms of growth."

Sri Lanka captain Dhananajaya de Silva conceded his spinners had drawn little help from the pitch.

"How to take 20 wickets, that's the only thing in my mind when

playing Test cricket. For that we have to have that x-factor, to take wickets at anytime," he said.

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 549 for 9 dec (Udara 188, Dinusha 92, Seales 2-98, Shamar 2-98) **and 251 for 9 dec** (Chandimal 71, Alzarri 2-44) **draw with West Indies 499** (Greaves 180, Hope 112, Asitha 5-130) and 109 for 0 (Campbell 51*, King 51*)

FOCUS

Retired MacGill loses his appeal against cocaine conviction

AFP
Sydney

Former Australia Test cricketer Stuart MacGill lost an appeal yesterday against his conviction and sentence over a cocaine deal.

The 55-year-old retired leg-spinner was found guilty in 2025 of taking part in the supply of the drug.

He was spared jail and sentenced to an "intensive corrections order" of one year and 10 months that included 495 hours of community service.

MacGill's appeals on conviction and sentence were both dismissed by the New South Wales Court of Criminal Appeal.

MacGill was found guilty last year after a court heard he had introduced his personal dealer to another drug supplier and that

the pair went on to organise a Aus\$330,000 (\$200,000) drug deal.

MacGill claimed he knew nothing about the subsequent deal.

In his appeal, MacGill said the judge had erred in allowing evidence about him having introduced other acquaintances to his dealer for small cocaine purchases.

But the appeals court found this evidence was relevant to rebut MacGill's claim that he had "nothing to do" with his personal dealer's drug activities.

It also dismissed his submission that the jury had been misdirected by the judge.

MacGill played 44 Tests for Australia between 1998 and 2008.

He may have made many more international appearances had his career not coincided with that of Shane Warne, widely recognised as the best leg-spin bowler of all time.

FOCUS

MLB teams up with cricket's Suryakumar to reach fans in India



Reuters
New York

Major League Baseball said yesterday it has joined forces with cricket's Suryakumar Yadav as part of an effort to bring America's favourite pastime closer to Indian sports fans.

In his role as an MLB Ambassador, the captain of the 2026 Twenty20 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team will participate in a series of events and initiatives in both India and the US highlighting the similarities between baseball and cricket beyond the bat and ball.

Suryakumar will be on hand during MLB All-Star week in Philadelphia from July 10-14.

"I'm excited to partner with Major League Baseball and be part of its journey in India," Suryakumar said.

"I look forward to learning more about the game myself and helping more fans discover the energy, excitement and culture that make baseball something else."

MLB also said Suryakumar would curate a wide range of content designed to connect with sports fans in India.

The India team led by Suryakumar etched their name deeper into cricketing history in March when they became the first side to lift the men's T20 World Cup for a third



time with a ruthless demolition of New Zealand.

MLB also announced a renewal of its broadcast agreement with JioStar to bring live games and content to fans across the country.

"India is home to one of the most vibrant sports cultures in the world, and these partnerships allow us to connect with fans in a meaningful way," said Jeremiah Yolcut, MLB's senior vice president of global operations.

"Suryakumar is one of the most recognized athletes in India, with an ability to connect with millions of fans across the country. Combined with our renewed partnership with JioStar, we are building a powerful foundation to further expand baseball's reach throughout the country," he added.

CYCLING

Debutant Kooij wins Tour de France stage five

Reuters
Pau, France

Dutch rider Olav Kooij claimed his first Tour de France stage victory on his race debut yesterday, sprinting to victory on stage five after a late crash fractured the peloton in the closing kilometres.

The Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale rider powered to victory at the end of the 158.3-km route from Lannemezan to Pau, finishing ahead of Germany's Max Kanter of XDS Astana, with Belgium's Tim Merlier of Soudal-Quick Step taking third place.

"After a couple of hard days here already I had to wait to get this first chance and to immediately win is unbelievable. It means quite a lot," Kooij was quoted as saying by TNT Sports.

"It was quite an easy day until the final, so you know it will be hectic and the first sprint in the Tour everyone is still really eager. I just managed to find my way, a bit on my own in the end that I managed to find the right wheel.



Decathlon CMA CGM Team's Olav Kooij celebrates winning stage 5 at Tour de France from Lannemezan to Pau, France, yesterday. (AFP)

I just wanted to sprint today and when I saw the line I went as hard as I could."

Norway's Torstein Traeen of Uno-X Mobility retained the yellow jersey despite being caught behind the late incident, while Dane Mads Pedersen, who began the day in the green jersey after

winning stage four, finished seventh.

Traeen crossed the line in a group 14 seconds behind Kooij alongside defending champion Tadej Pogacar and other leading general classification contenders, including Jonas Vingegaard, Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel and French teenager Paul Seixas. The Norwegian continues to lead the overall standings by 28 seconds over American Sean Quinn, with Czech rider Mathias Vacek third, three minutes 50 seconds off the pace.

A largely uneventful stage appeared destined for a routine bunch sprint, with Frenchman Baptiste Veistroffer of Lotto Intermarche the only rider to spend significant time off the front after launching a solo breakaway.

But the complexion of the race changed dramatically with 5.3 km remaining when a crash split the peloton and disrupted several teams' lead-out trains ahead of the finish.

Kooij capitalised on the chaos, emerging from the reduced lead group to secure the biggest victory of his career, while many of the race's overall favourites were left in pursuit.

The split ultimately created a 14-second gap between the front group and the chasing pack but had little impact on the battle for the yellow jersey, as the main general classification contenders all finished together.

TENNIS

Zverev cracks Fritz code, to meet British wildcard Frey

ZVEREV REACHES MAIDEN SEMI-FINAL AT WIMBLEDON AS FERY CRUSHES COBOLLI IN THREE SETS



Germany's Alexander Zverev celebrates after winning his quarter-final match against Taylor Fritz of the US at Wimbledon yesterday. (AFP)



Britain's Arthur Fery celebrates winning against Italy's Flavio Cobolli during their quarter-final. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

Alexander Zverev cleared one of the biggest hurdles in his bid for the Wimbledon title by snapping a lengthy losing run against Taylor Fritz with a 6-4 6-4 6-2 win to make the semi-finals and stay on track for back-to-back Grand Slam triumphs. Having come up short in his last seven clashes with Fritz, including at the All England Club in 2024, French Open champion Zverev finally turned the tables with an assured display for a last-four meeting with Arthur Fery, who beat Flavio Cobolli.

By reaching his maiden Wimbledon semi-final, Zverev became the fifth German man to achieve the feat in the professional era that began in 1968, joining Boris Becker, Michael Stich, Rainer Schuettler and Tommy Haas.

"It sounds great. I hope to play two more matches here, so we'll see how it goes, but for now I'm extremely happy to be in the semi-finals especially after beating Taylor, who I hadn't won against in more than two years," Zverev said.

"He's been beating me for two years straight, and yeah, I played a fantastic match."

The German second seed rode an early break to a 5-4 lead and let out a roar of relief after fending off a late fightback from Fritz in the 10th game to win the opening set under the blazing sun on Court One. Zverev turned up the heat again in the next set after Fritz received a med-

ical timeout for a niggling right knee issue after three games, and the 29-year-old celebrated emphatically after seizing a crucial break that left his opponent on the ropes.

The crowd erupted in cheers a few moments later when news trickled in that Briton Fery had gone ahead two sets to love on Centre Court and Zverev soon followed suit with a comfortable hold to move further clear as Fritz's hopes began to fade.

"Nothing on a tennis court is ever easy. If I would play my 5-year-old daughter, then it would maybe be easy ... for her, but I knew I had to focus from the first moment," Zverev said.

"The first game on my serve, I had three breakpoints against me and I knew that it's going to be a difficult match, no matter what, since it's in the back of your mind that you haven't beaten an opponent for more than two years.

"I knew that I had to play an almost perfect match to have a chance, and I feel like I did that today."

BRITAIN'S FERY EXTENDS WINNING STREAK

British wildcard Arthur Fery extended his sensational Wimbledon run into a semi-final yesterday.

Fery, the world number 114, dismantled Roland Garros runner-up Flavio Cobolli 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), 6-0 to become the first Wimbledon wildcard to reach the men's last four since Goran Ivanisevic won the 2001 title. Incredibly, Fery is just two victories away from emulating Ivanisevic and becoming the first British man to win

Wimbledon since Andy Murray in 2016.

"It gets better and better every match. It's incredible. I just can't believe it," Fery said to his adoring new fans, who created a partisan atmosphere on Centre Court.

He is the third-lowest ranked man since 1985 to reach the Wimbledon semis, after world number 237 Vladimir Voltchkov in 2000 and world number 125 Ivanisevic in 2001.

"I was very nervous beforehand but I just kept going until the finish line. In that last game I felt emotions I have never felt in my life.

"I beat Flavio earlier this year. It was a boost of confidence, even though this was my first time in the quarter-finals," he said.

"I'm so happy. I'm just going to keep going and see where that takes me."

Fery's jaw-dropping rise comes after he had won just two matches at Grand Slams in his career prior to this year's Wimbledon. He had never been past the second round of a Grand Slam in his four other appearances at the majors. Fery's run is all the more remarkable as he was unable to play singles for part of 2025 because of a bone stress injury in his arm that hindered him for 18 months.

Injury issues aside, Fery has been to the manor born in the plush surroundings of Wimbledon. Fery's wealthy father Loic is the president of French football club Lorient, while his mother Olivia enjoyed a distinguished tennis career, winning two singles titles and playing at the French Open.

Fery moved from France to London as a young child and went to school in the Wimbledon area.

Kostyuk makes quick work of Paolini to take semi-final slot

LONDON: Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk made quick work of Italy's 2024 runner-up Jasmine Paolini on a sweltering Centre Court to speed into her first Wimbledon semi-final 6-3 6-2 yesterday. The 12th seed was a woman in a hurry from the start as she took the opening set in 36 minutes, breaking Paolini to go 3-2 up and then again at 5-3 as temperatures soared over 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit). The 24-year-old, appearing in the Wimbledon singles quarter-finals and on Centre Court for the first time, had lost her last two meetings with her 13th seeded opponent but used her powerful forehand to telling effect in an impressive victory. She broke Paolini again to take a 3-1 lead in the second set, with the Italian not getting a sniff of a break point, and then held serve. With Britain's Queen Camilla watching from the Royal Box, the crowd cheered for the Italian underdog but Kostyuk closed out remorselessly on 69 minutes with a second match point on her opponent's serve.

NEW CENTRE COURT MEMORIES

Kostyuk, who will now play ninth-

seeded Czech Linda Noskova in the last four on the same court today, said it was all a dream come true.

"Winning here was not even in the plans today. I just wanted to go out, enjoy and put on a good show," she told the crowd after shaking Paolini's hand and then doing a pirouette on court to celebrate the win.

The semi-final will be the second of her career in a Grand Slam tournament after this year's French Open, where she lost to eventual winner Mirra Andreeva of Russia. Kostyuk took a sneak peek of Centre Court on Tuesday, her coach making her do so to help her adjust. "I was on this court as a spectator once nine years ago watching Roger (Federer) and it was super special," she said. "To be back here as a player ... I sat beside it and took a moment, soaking it all in." Paolini made 26 unforced errors to Kostyuk's 19 but where the Ukrainian won 90% of her first serve points, the Italian's figure was only 60%.

"My legs were a little bit slower than usual. That's, I think, the worst part, because I couldn't hit the ball as I wanted, more mistakes," said the Italian.



Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk celebrates after winning her quarter final match against Italy's Jasmine Paolini. (Reuters)

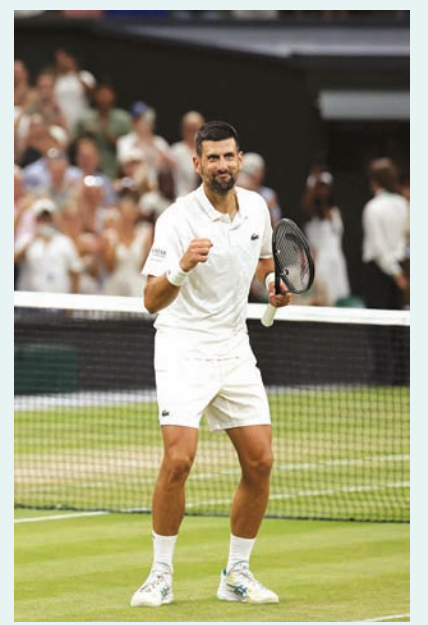
'A NICE SURPRISE': MARATHON MAN DJOKOVIC REVELS IN WIMBLEDON EPIC

LONDON: Novak Djokovic admitted even he was surprised by his ability to outlast Felix Auger-Aliassime in a five-set epic that ranked as the longest quarter-final in Wimbledon history. Djokovic is 14 years older than Auger-Aliassime and had to battle a calf injury throughout a Centre Court classic lasting five hours and 15 minutes in sweltering temperatures. The 39-year-old Serb somehow summoned up the energy, focus and willpower to beat the Canadian third seed 7-6 (12/10), 3-6, 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (10/4), booking a blockbuster semi-final against defending champion Jannik Sinner. Djokovic appeared out on his feet at times in the final set, which was only settled in a nerve-shredding tie-break that finished just minutes before the 2200 GMT curfew that would have halted play for the night. Refusing to accept defeat, the indefatigable Djokovic delivered one of the most tenacious performances of a glittering career that has brought him a record-

equalling 24 Grand Slam titles. Djokovic has often tested the limits of his endurance with marathon victories in the past, but he conceded this was an extra special effort at an age when most of his contemporaries have retired. "I guess yes, at this stage that I'm still able to battle these young guys that have 15 years less than me, that I'm able to beat them at the tightest possible scoreline. Of course, in a sense, it is really a nice surprise," he said. "I try to also enjoy the moments like this. I think it was a really thrilling experience for us players, but also the crowd. I'm sure also a lot of people watching on TV. Glad to be part of another historic match." Djokovic rated his astonishing victory alongside his 2019 Wimbledon final against Roger Federer, which the Serb won in five sets over four hours and 57 minutes, as among the best of his career. "It's exciting to be part of such an epic match that was played over five hours, whatever it was," he said.

"Just one of the best matches I was honestly part of in Wimbledon. Maybe the Wimbledon final in 2019 comes close in terms of time. "The crowd was up on their feet, particularly the last 30 minutes. They recognised how special the moment was. Just very proud to come out as a winner." Djokovic had spoken earlier in the tournament about his use of cutting edge technology to keep his body in condition to compete against younger opponents. He has used hyperbaric and cryo chambers, cold immersions and red light and pulse therapies to stop father time ruining his bid for a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon title. The treatments have clearly done their job as Djokovic is the oldest man to reach a Wimbledon semi-final since Ken Rosewall in 1974. He has advanced to a 15th Wimbledon semi-final and 55th at the Grand Slams. Djokovic is into the Wimbledon last four for an eighth consecutive time, setting a

new record for the longest streak of men's semi-final appearances at the All England Club. But the only question that matters for Djokovic now is whether he can recover in time to beat Sinner. "I don't know what tomorrow brings. To be honest, let's see. I'm still in the tournament," he said. "I still want to go at least one more step further. "But this was as good as a final for me. I gave it all that I had." Djokovic, who last won Wimbledon in 2022, beat Sinner in five sets in the Australian Open semi-finals in January, but was thrashed by the Italian in the last four at Wimbledon 12 months ago. "Now I have Sinner. Another great, historic run for me at the Grand Slams. This is what counts the most, honestly," Djokovic said. "I still try to prove to myself and others that I'm able to compete with the best players in the world and beat them in the biggest stage."



GOLF



Players practice ahead of the Scottish Open which is being staged at The Renaissance Club in North Berwick, East Lothian, Scotland.

McIlroy welcomes Rahm in Scottish Open field

Reuters
Glasgow

Rory McIlroy spent the majority of the past seven weeks in Europe, heading "home" for a combination of rest and prep for the links golf double that begins today at the Scottish Open.

McIlroy didn't exactly keep a low profile during the break in tournament golf. He wore his Masters champion green jacket to the Royal Box at Wimbledon alongside Ryder Cup captain Luke Donald and played a round at Royal Birkdale, where next week's Open Championship will be staged.

"Birkdale was definitely just a scouting trip for The Open for sure. I would have liked to have not have it known that I was there but (Nick) Faldo couldn't put his phone away, so," McIlroy said with a chuckle. "I love Nick. In fairness, he's great. I had a good time with him. He walked a few holes with me."

McIlroy said he's warming up to Renaissance Club in North

Berwick, his home base this week at the Scottish Open. It helped to sweep the national opens in 2023, when he followed up the Scottish title with a victory in the Open Championship.

He settled in Monday at the same house he's used the past several years, with Tommy Fleetwood and family next door, in a rapid shift out of holiday mode.

"When I first came here, I wasn't enamored with the course or the place. But as time has went on and I've played it more, I've started to like it more and appreciate the golf course a little bit more," McIlroy said. "It's definitely become a great venue for this tournament."

The links will be loaded with the top-ranked golfers in the world this week, where the weather forecast for the first round - 71 degrees, no precipitation - is anything but Open-like.

World No. 3 Cameron Young, who has played the Scottish Open only once, in 2022, when he missed the cut, and No. 6 Collin Morikawa are exceptions among top-ranked players entering the event. World

No. 1 Scottie Scheffler, McIlroy (second), No. 4 Matt Fitzpatrick (England) and No. 5 Russell Henley bring plenty of star power to Scotland. In 2025, Morikawa missed the cut after rounds of 68 and 76 and finished 123rd overall at 4-over.

McIlroy and Scotland's Robert MacIntyre, who won the tournament in 2024, are paired with 2025 champion Chris Gotterup today.

Gotterup held off McIlroy - who tied for second with Marco Penge at 13-under - last July. The trio of past champions go off around 3:30 a.m. ET today. They'll start on No. 10 one group behind Shane Lowry, a local favorite who was on a four-day junket with McIlroy and Donald last week.

They should be in the clubhouse by the time Spain's Jon Rahm - ranked No. 11 in the OWGR - hits the track. Rahm, a two-time major winner, is back at the Scottish Open for the first time since 2022 and is one of seven LIV golfers in the field. That's a topic McIlroy hasn't backed away from in recent years.

"I've talked about wanting to

have just all of the best players in the world play together," McIlroy said yesterday. "Yeah, I guess this is a good - and it's not as if this hasn't been open to them before. It's just because Valderrama (on the LIV Golf circuit) was always this week. Having Jon in this event is better for the event than him not being here, and obviously everyone else that's here, as well. That's a good thing."

Meanwhile Brooks Koepka is definitely competing in this week's Scottish Open, no matter what you might have heard.

The five-time major winner was as surprised as anyone when news broke over the weekend that he had withdrawn from the tournament.

The confusion only lasted a few hours until organizers confirmed Koepka had been granted a sponsor's invitation, but not before he spent Sunday scrambling to find out what was happening.

"Yeah, there was a bit of a panic ... I called my agent, Blake Smith, in a bit of a panic. Because I got a few text messages that I had withdrawn," Koepka, 36, said at a press conference yesterday.



FOCUS

Yakin's tactical tweak powers Swiss into quarter-finals

Switzerland beat Colombia 4-3 in a penalty shootout, Manzambi missed the match with a knee injury



Switzerland coach Murat Yakin and his players celebrate after Switzerland qualified for the quarter-finals of the World Cup beating Colombia in. (Reuters)

Reuters
Vancouver

Shorn of one of the tournament's breakout talents, Switzerland boss Murat Yakin reshuffled his deck and performed a tactical overhaul before reaching the World Cup quarter-finals via a 4-3 penalty shootout victory over Colombia having ground out a 0-0 draw.

Yakin's World Cup has been full of tactical tweaks, turns and twists, but on Tuesday he had no choice but to tear up the script after Manzambi suffered a knee injury in training the day before the game, and the coach was not

found wanting. Despite starting the opening game against Qatar on the bench, the 20-year-old Manzambi made the most of his chance when it came, scoring twice against Bosnia and going on to notch a total of three goals and two assists heading into Tuesday's clash.

More importantly, he made himself indispensable to Yakin's tactical plans, allowing the Swiss to sit deep and offering them a dangerous outlet for counter-attacks, as well as the ability to hold the ball up when needed.

The injury forced Yakin to tear up his original game plan and once the game started it quickly became apparent that the Swiss would be

happy with a stalemate, sitting back and controlling the tempo and seldom throwing players forward in attack. With Switzerland's Ruben Vargas also benched due to injury worries, Brel Embolo was left to forage on his own for much of the game against Colombia's miserly defence - unit that had conceded just one goal coming into the match.

"I think it's natural that it kind of goes that way in the way the game played out," Swiss goalkeeper Gregor Kobel told reporters.

"We knew they were very physical, we knew they were a very good team, and they had the crowd on their side, obviously, so it was a tough game for us."

The Colombians had their chances but they lacked an Embolo-like figure up front, a target man who could keep a defence busy and attract defenders to open up spaces for others, and though the game statistics showed they created 15 chances, only three were on target.

"We knew we probably had some stretches in the game where we had to defend and stay strong mentally, and I think we did a really good job with that. And yeah, obviously we had a few players who were missing so it was a big challenge, but I think everybody did a really good job and yeah, we executed it very well," Kobel said. Switzerland's progress



Switzerland's goalkeeper Gregor Kobel blocks a shot on goal during a penalty shootout during the 2026 World Cup round of 16 match against Colombia in Vancouver. (AFP)

Lorenzo rues Colombia's missing spark

Colombia manager Nestor Lorenzo said his side paid the price for failing to turn pressure into goals after they were knocked out of the World Cup on penalties. In a press conference lasting little more than three minutes, Lorenzo said Colombia had done enough over 120 minutes to merit more from a match he described as tight, tactical and evenly balanced. "What we lacked, without doubt, was scoring a goal," Lorenzo told reporters. "We knew it was going to be a very closed (down) match, very tactical, very even. Even so, I think we deserved a little more in the 90 minutes because of the intentions we had and the shots we took." Lorenzo said the game lost rhythm as it went on, with both

teams tiring before the stalemate led to penalties. The Colombia coach also defended his decision to replace midfielder Jhon Arias, saying it was prompted by fatigue and the risk of a second yellow card after he was booked in the last 32 win over Ghana and could have missed a potential quarter-final. Lorenzo also took off Luis Suarez late on, with the forward having already picked up a yellow card on the hour mark. "We were afraid that with one late challenge we could be left with one less player. And energy too," he said. "We had 15 attempts. That is a lot, and not scoring, you pay for it. There is nothing to reproach. Sometimes the ball goes in and sometimes it doesn't."

means that Colombia and their noisy, colourful, passionate fans leave the tournament after playing some superb football. "Fortunately, God, football and life have brought us this far, and I simply want to thank the whole country

and everyone who filled the stadium here," forward Luis Suarez said.

"Let's hope this is a major turning point, because what this team showed at this World Cup has to be viewed in a positive light."

REACTION

Egypt file complaint against referee after controversial exit



Egypt's Hamdy Fathy is shown a yellow card by referee Francois Letexier during their World Cup match against Argentina in Atlanta. (Reuters)

AFP
Atlanta

The Egyptian football federation said on Wednesday it had asked for the officiating team who handled the Pharaohs' loss 3-2 last-16 to Argentina to be thrown out of the World Cup. "Hany Aburida, President of the Egyptian Football Federation, filed a complaint with FIFA, demanding an investigation into the French referee Francois Letexier... after the serious refereeing mistakes committed by the team of referees and double standards, which caused the Egypt team to lose the match and leave the World Cup," said a statement from the federation.

On Tuesday evening, Letexes ruled out a Mostafa Ziko goal ruled out when they were leading 1-0 after VAR intervened to spot a foul

on Lisandro Martinez much earlier in the move.

A few minutes later, Ziko did put Egyptian 2-0 up and on the brink of a place in the last eight for the first time but there was further controversy in added time, after Cristian Romero and Lionel Messi had brought the champions level.

In the build-up to Argentina's winner scored by Enzo Fernandez, Egypt believe they should have instead been awarded a penalty for a pull by Alexis Mac Allister on Hamdy Fathy.

"Aburida demanded the investigation of the entire team of referees, including the video technology referees, because of the blatant errors and insisting on not reviewing some of the footage that we believe are in favour of the Egyptian national team, and we see in it the Pharaohs' right to a correct goal and a penalty," said the Egyptian statement.

It added that the president

had also "demanded the exclusion of the referee and the entire crew from the World Cup after investigating these mistakes and proving the crime of discrimination against the Egyptian national team".

The statement echoed remarks by Egypt coach Hossam Hassan immediately after the game.

"I do not want to put it nicely and talk about hard luck. We have been cheated unfairly today, we have suffered injustice," Hassan told journalists. "We haven't seen respect or fair play. There has not been respect or fair play."

Hassan told BeIN: "Perhaps they wanted to keep the world champions in the competition. Perhaps they wanted Messi to stay in the running."

"In football, there are sometimes external factors that go beyond the technical aspects. The world champions received support at every level."

SPOTLIGHT

Messi World Cup magic masks familiar penalty frailty

AFP
Atlanta

Lionel Messi once retired from international football after blasting a penalty into the American sky to lose a Copa America final 10 years ago.

A decade on, Messi's problems from the spot persist on US soil, but his magic is more than masking that flaw as he continues to lead the Argentina quest for World Cup glory at the age of 39.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner's latest penalty miss left the world champions staring at a shock exit to Egypt in the last 16 on Tuesday. Either side of seeing his spot-kick saved by Mostafa Shobeir, goals from Yasser Ibrahim and Mostafa Ziko put Egypt into a 2-0 lead with just 11 minutes remaining.

It was already the second time Messi had failed to net a penalty at this tournament - he fired wide against Austria in the group stages - becoming the only player to miss more than one in any World Cup. Adding to misses against Iceland in 2018 and Poland four years ago, Messi's failure to score four World Cup penalties is another record, but an unwanted one. His overall career conversion rate of 116 goals from 150 attempts (77 percent) from the spot is bang on the global average. What stands out is such a frailty for a player who is anything but average.

When he missed in a shootout against Chile in the final of the Copa America Centenario in 2016, a devastated Messi

Argentina's Lionel Messi reacts after missing a penalty against Egypt in Atlanta. (AFP)



broke down in tears and promptly announced a shock retirement from international football.

At the time he had yet to win a major tournament with Argentina and, despite his brilliance for Barcelona, back home he had been unable to follow in the footsteps of Diego Maradona by winning the World Cup. Within a few months he reversed that retirement. A decade on those doubts are long forgotten with Messi the figurehead for two Copa America triumphs and Argentina's long-awaited third World Cup four years ago in Qatar.

In Atlanta, there were more tears, happy ones this time, with Messi overcome with emotion at a remarkable turnaround.

His cross for Cristian Romero to head in, started a remarkable fightback as the champions dragged themselves off the canvas to remain in contention.

Messi drilled in the equaliser himself, scoring for an eighth consecutive World Cup game and taking his tally to eight goals in five games at this tournament.

Enzo Fernandez added the final blow as Lionel Scaloni's men remain in the running to defend the title.

"To the guys on the bench, the ones watching him in disbelief; I want them to take him as an example. It is truly something wonderful," said Scaloni.

"Look at his attitude! After the penalty he could have given up - 'we're done, it's 2-0' - but instead, he asked for the ball again and went for more.

"It gives me goosebumps, honestly, and it's not just him, I don't want to focus solely on him because his teammates supported him incredibly well. That is part of what defines this group."

DALIC QUILTS AFTER 'INCREDIBLE ERA' AS CROATIA COACH

Croatia's most successful football coach, Zlatko Dalic, resigned yesterday, ending a tenure that included taking the team to the 2018 World Cup final. "As much as I still feel the ambition and desire to achieve new successes with Croatia, I feel that this is the right moment to bring this incredible era to a close," he said in a statement.

"I am leaving with a full heart and proud that I have made my contribution to the greatest achievements in the history of Croatian football," the 59-year-old added.

Dalic took over as coach in October 2017. Apart from their final defeat in Russia, where Croatia, led by Luka Modric, lost to France, Dalic guided the nation to the 2022 Qatar World Cup

semi-finals and the Euro 2020 last 16. "Zlatko's name will remain forever written in golden letters in the history of Croatian football," Croatian Football Federation (HSN) head Marijan Kustic said. Croatia failed to move into the last 16 of this year's World Cup, losing 2-1 in a gripping match against Portugal earlier this month.

Local media are tipping former national coach Slaven Bilic as Dalic's likely successor. Bilic, 57, led Croatia from 2006-12. He recorded a higher winning percentage than Dalic, with 42 victories, 15 draws and eight defeats in 65 matches but his best performance in a major tournament was to reach the quarterfinals of the 2008 Euros where Croatia lost on penalties to Turkey.