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FOOTBALL

Zidane lands dream France job for 4 years

‘THE FRENCH TEAM WAS THE ONLY THING I WANTED TO DO’

Reuters
Paris

France great Zinedine Zidane's long-held ambition to coach the national team became reality yesterday when the French Football



Federation appointed the former captain and World Cup winner as Didier Deschamps' successor on a four-year contract.

The appointment of former Real Madrid manager Zidane comes two weeks after Deschamps' tenure as coach ended following France's fourth-place finish at the World Cup. His final match in charge was a 6-4 defeat by England. "The French team was the only thing I wanted to do," Zidane told reporters.

"I've always looked at this team through

the eyes of a future manager. I didn't take a club job for that reason. The only thing I wanted to do after Madrid was manage the French national team. I could have taken on a three-year role because Deschamps was there. He made that

Zinedine Zidane waves to fans as he leaves after a press conference at the FFF headquarters in Paris yesterday. (AFP).

decision in January 2025, and the very next day I knew I wanted to be the next one. We met with the president and the deal was sealed."

The 54-year-old Zidane is expected to begin his reign with an away Nations League game against Turkey before France host Italy at the Stade de France on October 2.

Deschamps, who left the role after 14 years at the helm, oversaw 185 matches and 120 victories, guiding France to the 2018 World Cup title, the 2020-21 Nations League trophy, and the Euro 2016 and 2022 World Cup finals. The two share a long association, having been teammates in France's 1998 World Cup-winning side on home soil.

Zidane played a pivotal role in that triumph and won the Ballon d'Or that year. He made 108 appearances for the national side, scoring 31 goals and contributing 29 assists.

"You'll see my style soon," Zidane said. "I'm driven by the game. I was a number 10, and what drives me is scoring goals."

"I lived in Spain for 25 years, you know what that means. On the pitch, I was a leader. Now I'm becoming a leader through my experience."

"Winning in '98 is the best thing that's ever happened to me, winning with my teammates. I spent those four or five years waiting for that day. I'm emotional; you can't see it, but I'm so excited. I'm happy."

At club level, Zidane made 212 ap-

pearances for Italian side Juventus before joining Spanish giants Real Madrid in 2001.

He went on to play 227 matches for Real across five seasons, scoring 49 goals and providing 67 assists, while winning the Champions League in his first season with the club.

Following his retirement, Zidane returned to Real Madrid as assistant coach in 2013 before taking over as head coach in 2016.

He enjoyed unprecedented success during his first spell in charge, leading the club to three consecutive Champions League titles between 2016 and 2018, a feat that remains unmatched.

Zidane returned for a second stint as Real Madrid manager in 2019 and added another La Liga title to the club's trophy cabinet before leaving again in 2021.

He follows Laurent Blanc and Deschamps as the third member of France's 1998 World Cup-winning squad to become national team coach, with the task of leading Les Bleus into the 2030 World Cup.

"Les Bleus' campaign was magnificent, the football was magnificent. I had a great time, and so did everyone else," Zidane added.

"The fans have no cause for complaint. We're going to do things differently. Deschamps is Deschamps, Blanc was Blanc, Zizou is Zizou. I'm going to do what I know how to do. I'm going to ensure continuity so that the French team keeps winning."

QFA Executive Committee approves key decisions ahead of new season



DOHA: The Executive Committee of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) held a key meeting yesterday, approving a series of decisions ahead of the 2026-27 football season, including leadership changes, the creation of a new third division league and measures aimed at strengthening domestic football.

The meeting also discussed the mechanism for completing the current term of the QFA Board of Directors, which runs until 2027. The discussion followed an Executive Committee meeting held on Sunday, during which members agreed to nominate two candidates to fill the board's vacant seats after the resignations of former QFA President Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain and Vice President Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi, in accordance with the federation's regulations.

The executive office approved Minister of Sports and Youth HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani taking over as president, with Sheikh Tamim bin Mohammed al-Thani stepping in as deputy, both set to finish out the term through 2027.

The appointments remain subject to ratification at the QFA General Assembly, which is scheduled to convene in September.

The meeting also reviewed the latest developments and activities of the federation, including a report on the Qatar national team's campaign at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Among the key decisions, the executive office approved the establishment of QSL 3 as the country's new third division league. The competition will operate below the Doha Bank Stars League and QSL 2, expanding Qatar's domestic football pyramid. The meeting also approved allowing Al Riffa Club to participate in age-group competitions starting from the current season.

FOCUS

Mancini returns as coach of crisis-hit Italy

AFP
Rome

Roberto Mancini has been named the head coach of Italy's national team for a second time, tasked with revitalising the Azzurri who have missed out on the last three World Cups, FIGC president Giovanni Malago said yesterday.

Technical director Roberto Maldini, who reportedly threatened to resign if Mancini was appointed, has been replaced by Claudio Ranieri. "Today we have a new coach and a new technical director," Malago told reporters, announcing another press conference with Mancini and Ranieri today.

"I felt that the person who should be and become the Italian national football team's head coach was Roberto Mancini, for a whole series of considerations for which, as always, I honestly take responsibility."

Gennaro Gattuso resigned as Italy coach after their World Cup qualification play-off final defeat by Bosnia and Herzegovina in March. The 61-year-old Mancini was previously Italy boss from 2018 until 2023, leading them to the Euro 2020 title. He has been preferred to another ex-national team coach in Antonio Conte.

Maldini had also apparently said he would resign if Conte was chosen, reportedly wanting Brazil-born former Italy midfielder Thiago Motta to be given the job. Andrea Pirlo, who had been tipped to take charge, announced on Monday that he was no longer a candidate. The former midfielder had come under heavy criticism over



his controversial ties with a Russian sports-betting company and what detractors viewed as a limited coaching resume. Mancini's first match in charge will be a Nations League match against Belgium on September 25 in a group which also includes Turkey and France.

"The new coach will have two training sessions to prepare for the first game," Malago said of journalists saying Italy would have to change coach again if they are relegated in the Nations League. "Since Italy lost the play-off to Bosnia, I don't think we gave passports to Yamal, Mbappe and Kane... So are we being serious here?"

"(We) must try to do the best with what we have, also safeguard our European ranking in a group against teams that were all at the World Cup, Turkey, Belgium and France. If you want to be objective and serious, finishing fourth in that group is logical."

Mancini's appointment, however, remains divisive despite leading Italy to the Euro 2020 title and a 37-match unbeaten streak.

His abrupt resignation as Italy coach in the summer of 2023 to take charge of Saudi Arabia reportedly damaged his standing with many senior FIGC officials, particularly as the Azzurri were struggling in their qualifying campaign for Euro 2024. Mancini left his job with the Saudi side just 14 months later.

He was most recently coach of Qatar's Al Sadd, with whom he signed a two-year deal last November. Now he will turn his attentions to the job of taking Italy back to the top of the international game. The four-time world champions have not reached a World Cup since 2014, and have not even played a knock-out stage match at the tournament since winning the 2006 final against France on penalties.

The one success in that time was the European Championship victory, also secured in a shoot-out against England five years ago. Their title defence, with Luciano Spalletti at the helm, ended with a last-16 loss to Switzerland in 2024.

SPOTLIGHT

FIFA hopes to sell \$4.2bn stake in its tournaments

AFP
Paris

FIFA said Tuesday it plans to sell a stake in the business operations of the World Cup and its other competitions through the creation of a semi-private subsidiary.

World football's governing body said it would retain a majority share in FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) but hoped to raise \$4.2bn later this year by "carefully selecting long-term investors who will purchase minority, non-controlling interests".

FIFA's statement was a rapid response to a story in British newspaper *The Times* based on leaks of the plan from two sources.

The Times reported that FIFA president Gianni Infantino, 56, stood to profit from the scheme by becoming commissioner of the FFE after his expected next term expires in 2031.

The article also said discussion had started with potential investors. It named Joshua Kushner, brother of US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared, as well as an arm of JP Morgan Chase, the US bank that attempted to finance the failed breakaway European Super League. European football's governing body UEFA, which has been critical of Infantino, was also quick to respond to the article.

"This crosses a line that football's governing institutions should never cross. UEFA takes it extremely seriously," said UEFA's statement.

"The soul and governance of football are not assets to trade - especially with zero transparency as to who gains financially. None of us are the owners of football. It is not FIFA's to sell."

FIFA said in its statement that it "would retain sole control of FFE and exclusive authority over football governance, competitions, match calendar, and all regulatory and sporting decisions".

It said it believed FFE would achieve an "initial equity valuation of \$20bn".

FIFA said each its 211 member associations (MAS) would be given the chance to take a one-off stake of 20mn dollars in FFE.

That represents only 0.1 percent of the total, but would be a significant sum for the leaderships of FIFA's poorer or smaller members.

"Together with other existing FIFA programmes, these investments could bring FIFA's total planned



development funding to more than \$10bn over the next four years," FIFA said.

In June, ahead of the World Cup, FIFA, which folds competition income into revenue for the whole year, anticipated record revenues exceeding seven billion euros (\$8bn) for 2026.

It was the first World Cup with 48 teams. At the start, Infantino said, "we have had discussions about expanding to 64 teams" for 2030.

The *Times* quote an unnamed "senior football figure" calling the plan "potentially much worse than the European Super League", as it would have an impact on all levels of football across the globe.

Another anonymous source told the British paper that the plan would create "unacceptable" conflicts of interest for FIFA and Infantino.

In 2019, a FIFA stakeholders' committee rejected an Infantino-backed plan for a \$25bn private investment in an expanded Club World Cup. Reported backers included SoftBank of Japan and Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund. FIFA did expand that competition from seven teams to 32 clubs in 2025.

The *Times* speculated that the creation of FFE could have an impact on the World Cup and the Club World Cup.

"It could lead to pressure for both events to be further expanded or played more regularly than the present once every four years," it wrote.

FIFA has previously found itself in trouble with deals spinning off commercial activities to private partners. Estimates for its losses when ISL, which negotiated World Cup rights deals, went bust in 2001 were anywhere between \$30mn and \$115mn.

FIFA, which as a not-for-profit organisation effectively owned by the MAS, enjoys tax-free status in Switzerland.

SPOTLIGHT

McEvoy eyes home glory at Brisbane 2032

Reuters
Melbourne

World record holder Cameron McEvoy believes Australian swimming is gearing up for a golden era that will peak in the home pool at the 2032 Brisbane Olympics after seeing the nation's talent on show at the Commonwealth Games.

Australia has won 23 of the first 35 swimming events in Glasgow, putting the 'Dolphins' on course for their most successful Com-

monwealth Games campaign in the pool.

Olympic champion McEvoy, who won the men's 50 metres freestyle in 20.97 seconds on Monday, said the team's progression boded well not only for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics but also when Brisbane plays host four years later.

"Every year as a team, we go incredibly well. I think we peak every year - and then we come back the year after and we just take one step forward," McEvoy told Australian media. "So it's a really good spot for LA, but even better for Brisbane 2032. "Our team right now is in-

credible, but there's a lot of youngsters at the national age-group level, or ones who just missed this team, who will come through in their prime by Brisbane 2032. So the runway's looking pretty red-hot."

The 32-year-old is aiming to defend his Olympic 50m freestyle title at Los Angeles and even swim at a sixth Olympics at Brisbane if able. He said his second 50m freestyle swim under 21 seconds had given him belief he could continue competing at the highest level. He remains the only swimmer to break the 21-second barrier in the post-'Supersuit' era.

"Knowing it's not a one-off makes me very confident going into the future," he said. "By the time LA comes around, it's not so much about doing the best time, it's about getting your hand on the wall first. But if the ceiling is high enough, I'll have good confidence to know that I don't have to do a super-human performance to be in a good shot to medal or to win it."

Gold medalist Australia's Cameron McEvoy celebrates on the podium after winning the men's 50m freestyle final at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. (Reuters)



CRICKET

Seales seals the deal as Windies stun Pakistan

Babar's 58 not out in vain as hosts win first Test by 90 runs

AFP
Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago

Pakistan crumbled for the second consecutive day to the West Indies pace attack, losing the first Test of a two-match series by 90 runs on the fourth day in Trinidad yesterday.

Set a tricky target of 211 on a deteriorating surface, the tourists were never in contention and were all out for 120 off 40.2 overs just after tea.

It could have been worse. When they subsided to 71 for nine, Pakistan seemed doomed to their lowest Test innings total against the West Indies.

Bowling hero Mohammad Abbas hung around with captain Babar Azam to put on 49 runs for the last wicket before Jayden Seales ended the match by trapping Abbas leg-before for 23, finishing with figures of five for 20.

Babar remained unbeaten on 58.

Pakistan will go into the second and final Test a few miles away at Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, starting Sunday, on the back of four consecutive defeats and an extended abysmal run of 13 losses in their last 17 Tests.

This was also the eighth consecutive Test loss away from home.

Their capitulation was a repeat of events of the third day when they lost seven wickets for 38 runs, sliding from 244 for three to 282 all out to concede a 29-run first innings deficit.

Pakistan fought back with the ball late on day three, but West Indies rallied to a second innings total of 181, adding 55 runs on the fourth morning on the back of an adventurous 38 off 27 balls (four sixes and one four) from Shamar Joseph.



Jayden Seales of West Indies celebrates the dismissal of Salman Ali Agha of Pakistan during the fourth day of the first Test at the Brian Lara Cricket Stadium in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago, yesterday. (AFP)

Even after the innings was wrapped up by Abbas - who finished with the excellent figures of five for 22 - the Pakistan players' body language in the field increasingly suggested the target well beyond their reach, especially with former captain Shan Masood hampered by a fractured finger sustained during his first innings century.

He bravely came out with the innings in ruins at 58 for six only to become one of Seales' victims, taken a backward point by Joseph.

On the day when the late, great all-rounder Garfield Sobers would have turned 90, the latest follower in his footsteps, fellow-

Barbadian Justin Greaves, picked up two wickets to finish with match figures of seven for 39 and earn the "Player of the Match" award.

"It was just about being disciplined," said Greaves. "From watching Mohammad Abbas in both the first and second innings, we tried to mimic that and it pretty much worked out well for us."

Babar was honest about his team's batting frailties.

"This surface is good. We have to expect it to be a bit up and down at this stage and also the movement with the new ball. We prepared for this," he said. "But they bowled very well, using the con-

ditions, and we just couldn't get a partnership going." West Indies captain Roston Chase enjoyed his second Test win in three matches after going more than a year without success after his appointment. I love what this team is going," he said. "We're not depending on one or two guys solely. Everyone is chipping in at crucial times."

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies 311 (Hope 92, Hodge 84, Ali 4-50) **and 181** (Joseph 38, Chanderpaul 35, Abbas 5-22) **beat Pakistan 282** (Masood 109, Imam 63, Greaves 5-27) **and 120** (Babar 58*, Seales 5-18) **by 90 runs**

ANNOUNCEMENT

India hand maiden Test call-up to all-rounder Jain for Sri Lanka series

Reuters
Mumbai

India handed a maiden Test call-up to off-spinning all-rounder Saransh Jain yesterday after the country's cricket board (BCCI) announced the squad for next month's two-Test series in Sri Lanka.

The 33-year-old comes in place of Washington Sundar, who was unavailable for selection for the first test after sustaining a hamstring injury during the one-day series against England this month.

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has returned to the squad, although his availability, along with batter Sai Sudharsan's, remains subject to fitness clearance.

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja has recovered from a tennis elbow injury and returns to the side, while

Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna and uncapped seamer Gurnoor Brar bolster the pace attack.

Shubman Gill will captain the side with KL Rahul as his deputy in the series which marks India's first assignment in the World Test Championship cycle following their 2-0 home defeat to South Africa in November.

India sit fifth in the WTC standings, one place above sixth-placed Sri Lanka. The first Test will be played in Galle from August 15, with the second beginning in Colombo on August 23.

SQUAD: Shubman Gill (c), KL Rahul (vc), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant (wk), Sai Sudharsan, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Manav Suthar, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Gurnoor Brar, Devdutt Padikkal, Saransh Jain.

English amateur team under investigation for finger-snapping dismissal ruse

An amateur cricketer has become a viral sensation online after allegedly using finger clicks to mimic the sound of bat-on-ball edges, fooling umpires into giving batters out.

The North Yorkshire and South Durham league has launched an investigation into a Division Two match between Saltburn Cricket Club and Norton, where the Saltburn fielder was caught on camera clicking his fingers as deliveries passed the bat.

The player, who fields at slip or silly point, appears to have perfected the art of creating fake edge sounds just as batters make tentative prods at deliveries subsequently caught by the wicketkeeper.

Videos circulating online show the fielder's alleged finger-

snapping antics, earning him the nickname "Clicky Ponting", a pun on the name of former Australia captain Ricky Ponting.

"The League have received a formal complaint regarding alleged incidents in a Division Two game on Saturday 25th July 2026," the league said. "A full investigation has been initiated and until such time as the formal processes are complete no further comment will be made."

Saltburn crushed Norton by 159 runs. Their wicketkeeper Josh Bowes also took eight catches in a 22-run victory over Shildon Railway the previous weekend.

The record in test cricket is seven catches by a wicketkeeper in one innings.

Reuters has contacted Saltburn for comment.

FOOTBALL

Tunisia appoints Chaabani coach after World Cup disaster

AFP
Tunis

The Tunisian Football Federation (FTF) confirmed yesterday that **Moine Chaabani** was taking over as national team coach, after a disastrous World Cup in which two different coaches oversaw three losses.

"His contract is for a period of four years," the FTF said in a press release, confirming reports that had been circulating for several days. Chaabani won the African Champions League twice and five Tunisian league titles with Esperance Tunis and has also coached in Egypt and then in Morocco, where he won the league title with RS Berkane.

Berkane had already said Chaabani was taking over Tunisia.

The 45-year-old Tunisian is his country's fourth coach this year and eighth since January 2024.

Ahead of the World Cup, Tunisia raised hopes as they qualified without conceding a goal, even though they started the process under Jalel Kadri and ended it under Sami Trabelsi, with Montasser Louhichi coaching two qualifiers



as an interim. Faouzi Benzarti and Kais Yaakoubi also came and went quickly during a break for AFCON qualification.

After Tunisia were knocked out of AFCON in the round of 16 in January, Trabelsi was replaced with Sabri Lamouchi.

When the team opened the World Cup by crashing 5-1 to Sweden, the former France star was axed and French veteran Herve Renard brought in. He led Tunisia to two more heavy group-stage defeats. Chaabani was under contract at Berkane until 2027, but the club said it had decided to show "understanding" because of "the particular importance of the role of managing the national team".

FOCUS

Evans ends journey with gold, Dolci gets 6th medal

AFP
Glasgow

Ruby Evans said anger fuelled her successful end to a tumultuous Commonwealth Games as she won gold for Wales while Canada's Felix Dolci took his medal haul to six, on the last day of gymnastics in Glasgow.

Evans had arrived in Scotland as a multiple-medal contender but cut a frustrated figure after a plunge from the beam cost her any chance in the all-around competition on Sunday.

The 19-year-old's sixth-placed finish followed Wales narrowly missing out on a medal in the team competition and she opted to withdraw from Monday's uneven bars final to focus fully on her favourite discipline.

That decision paid off as a high-risk routine earned her a score of 13.500 and eclipsed England duo Abigail Martin and Shantae-Eve

Amankwaah, who took silver and bronze with 13.333 and 13.300 respectively.

"I feel like I came out here angry," said Evans, part of the British team that just missed out on a medal at the Paris Olympics two years ago.

"I knew I wanted to do a good floor; whether it was third, second or first, I clearly knew I wanted to medal - but I got a gold and I'm really happy for myself," she added.

Dolci has been one of the Games' breakout stars and added to his golds in the team and rings finals with more joy in the vault and horizontal bar.

The 24-year-old, who appeared in the Canadian version of Celebrity Big Brother earlier this year, also picked up a bronze in the parallel bars.

Australia's Jesse Moore won the men's parallel bars, while Breanna Scott secured more gold for the runaway leaders in the medal table in the women's beam.



Gold medalist Wales' Ruby Evans takes a selfie on the podium after winning the Floor Exercise Final with silver medalist England's Abigail Martin and bronze medalist England's Shantae-Eve Amankwaah during the medal ceremony at the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow, Scotland, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

LIV Golf to cancel season finale in Michigan: Report

It would be the second tournament removed from 2026 schedule

Reuters
London

LIV Golf is preparing to announce the cancellation of next month's season-ending team championship in Michigan, *Flushing It Golf* reported yesterday.

The announcement is expected to come today, raising more questions about the future of the rival league.

The Michigan event is scheduled for Aug 27-30 at The Cardinal at Saint John's Resort in Plymouth, Mich.

It would be the second tournament removed from the 2026 schedule since Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund announced in April that it will stop funding the league at the end of this season.

LIV New Orleans originally was set for June 25-28.

If the Michigan tournament is nixed, there will be only two tournaments left on the LIV Golf calendar: LIV Golf New York from Aug. 6-9 at Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, New Jersey; and LIV Golf Indianapolis from Aug 20-23 at The Club at Chatham Hills in Westfield, Indiana.

LIV Golf played its first tournament since early June last week, with Australia's Lucas Herbert winning the title at LIV Golf United Kingdom on Sunday in Rochester, England.

LIV golfer Martin Kaymer, the captain of Cleeks GC, said last week that there was only a 5%



Crushers GC's Bryson DeChambeau hits his tee shot on the 1st hole during the final round of LIV Golf - United Kingdom at JCB Golf and Country Club, Uttoxeter, Britain, on July 26, 2026. (Reuters)

chance that the finale in Michigan would take place.

PGA TOUR ROOKIE KOIVUN ROCKETS IN RANKINGS

One win has put Jackson Koivun on the map. It might also be enough to get him a spot in the FedEx Cup playoffs.

Koivun won the 3M Open on Sunday in Minnesota in his third start since turning pro. The 21-year-old, a former college star and No. 1-ranked amateur in the

world, went 25 under par at TPC Twin Cities and beat World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler by three shots.

Not only did it secure Koivun a two-year exemption on tour and an invitation to the Masters, it also put him in the playoff hunt.

Koivun jumped 124 spots in the FedEx Cup points race to No. 70, the final spot that will qualify for the first leg of the playoffs, the FedEx St Jude Championship, with two weeks to go in the regular season.

Koivun is ahead of recognizable names such as Australia's Jason Day (No. 74), Keegan Bradley (No. 76), Brooks Koepka (No. 84) and Tony Finau (No. 87), who would miss the playoffs were the season to end Monday. The 3M Open victory also vaulted Koivun from No. 206 to No. 73 in the Official World Golf Ranking. When Koivun entered the US Open for his final start as an amateur, he was ranked No. 260; by making the cut and tying for 23rd there, he moved up to No. 217.

GOLF

Korda and Ryu lead Women's Open field after sharing major spoils



Nelly Korda of the US



South Korea's Ryu Hae-ran

Reuters
London

The 50th Women's British Open is teed up as a decider between American Nelly Korda and South Korea's Ryu Hae-ran after they shared the silverware from the year's first four majors, but plenty of other players will be seeking to end the duopoly at a parched Royal Lytham this week.

World number one Korda won the Chevron Championship and the US Open to double her major haul before Ryu won the PGA Championship and became the first golfer to shoot 60 at a major to claim the Evian title this month.

If either wins on the Lancashire coast, they would equal the record for most major wins in a calendar year.

A fast and furious Lytham links may well open the field, though, and English duo Charley Hull and Lottie Woad will be expected to go close as they both seek their first majors while Japan's Miyu Yamashita will be determined to defend her title.

All eyes will be on Korda, though, as she seeks to land the major that has often proved problematic for her. The 28-year-old had a relatively disappointing 2025 with no titles but has hit back in stunning fashion with one of the most dominant seasons in recent history. She romped to victory at the Chevron to return to the top

of the rankings and won the Riviera Maya Open to become the first player since Annika Sorenstam in 2001 to start a season with top-two finishes in her first six events.

Korda became the first American since Pat Bradley in 1986 to win the year's first two majors by triumphing in thrilling fashion at the US Open - watching a three-foot winning putt circle the hole on the 18th at Riviera before dropping.

She missed the cut at the Evian though - her first missed cut in 35 events - before tying for 16th at the Scottish Open.

Korda's best finish at the Open was at St Andrews in 2024 when she was tied for second behind Lydia Ko.

Ryu, 25, will be making only her fourth appearance in the Women's Open but England's Hull will be making her 15th attempt to land her home major.

There has been a lot of pain down the years for the 30-year-old with missed cuts and disappointing finishes but she was second in 2023 and tied for second last year and home fans will hope that her time has finally arrived.

Woad, 22, arrived at Royal Porthcawl last year as favourite despite it being her first major since turning professional and finished a disappointing 49th.

A full year out on the Tour means she will arrive battle-hardened as she tries to become the first home winner since Georgia Hall at Lytham in 2018.

FOCUS

Open champ Fox welcomed home by thousands after 'whirlwind few days'



AFP
Auckland

Ryan Fox received a hero's welcome in Auckland yesterday as thousands flocked to see the new British Open champion and the famous Claret Jug after "a whirlwind few days" since the New Zealander won his maiden major.

Fox triumphed at the 154th Open at Royal Birkdale in England just over a week ago, holding his nerve over a knee-knocking 12-foot putt on the final green to finish 10-under par and win by one stroke.

The only other New Zealander to lift the Claret Jug was Bob Charles in 1963, at Lytham and St Annes just along the English north-west

coast from Birkdale. Only two other New Zealanders have ever won golf majors.

Michael Campbell triumphed at the 2005 US Open at Pinehurst and Lydia Ko won three women's majors, including the 2024 British Women's Open at St Andrews.

"It's been a whirlwind few days since winning the Open," Fox told the crowds who turned out to see him and the famous Claret Jug winner's trophy, which dates back to 1872.

"To be fair, my head is still spinning as I take in what I've achieved and what's to come.

"One of the first things I wanted to do was come home and share this incredibly special time with my family, friends and all the Kiwis who have supported me through-

out my career," Fox told reporters yesterday.

People spilled onto a nearby street as they tried to catch a glimpse of the 39-year-old, who received boisterous cheers when he hoisted the trophy for his fans.

Fox, renowned for taking little time over his shots, raised another ovation when he spoke of becoming the "face of the pace of play movement" in golf.

AUSTRALIAN MAJOR?

Fox started his professional career on courses such as Royal Auckland, before playing on circuits in Australia, Europe and the PGA Tour in the United States.

Fox was asked by reporters if the Australian Open should become a fifth major, hosted by the famous

links-like sandbelt courses in Melbourne.

Fox said it would be "hard to break the tradition" but added it would match the women's circuit which already has five majors.

"International golf is huge. I think golf in Australia is huge. The Australian Open at Royal Melbourne last year was incredible," Fox told a media conference.

"They have the quality of golf course to be able to do it.

"But that's for people a whole lot smarter than me to figure out."

Fox received a call after winning the Open from fellow New Zealander Ko, who had been in tears watching the closing holes.

Ko won gold at the 2024 Paris Olympics but has said she intends to retire and not play at Los Ange-

les in 2028. But Fox, with an eye on the new mixed tournament at the 2028 Games, said he might have a gentle conversation with Ko about rethinking her decision.

"It's amazing to see her achieve what we all thought she could," Fox said of Ko, who also has silver and bronze Olympic medals from Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

"I know she's been pretty vocal about wanting to retire early, and motherhood is calling.

"She's been in the public eye since she was 15 years old, she's got the right to do whatever she wants," he said.

"Selfishly for me, it would be really cool to be able to do that in '28 with her, but if she's retired by then, that's cool. She deserves everything."

TENNIS

Djokovic and Sabalenka team up for all-star US Open mixed doubles

AFP
Paris

Serbian tennis legend Novak Djokovic and women's number one Aryna Sabalenka top the list of pairings entered for the US Open mixed doubles.

However, both men's world number one Jannik Sinner and second-ranked Carlos Alcaraz have not entered the competition which was heavily revamped last year.

Reforms featured a shorter scoring format in the earlier rounds and a new scheduling slot - played over two days - before the singles draws in an attempt to encourage the top players to enter.

Italian doubles specialists Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori, who criticised the changes, will defend the title they won last year, which came with a \$1 million winners' cheque. Djokovic, 39, and 28-year-old Sabalenka are certain to feature among the initial six pairings selected according to world rank-



ings when the deadline for entries closes on August 17.

"We are proud to again bring the world's top players together in a format that will provide exciting entertainment for our fans."

Wimbledon champion Sinner - who did not enter last year's mixed doubles - is "prioritising" his health ahead of the final Grand Slam of the year and is also bypassing the Canadian Open, which runs from August 2-13.

Alcaraz, who did play last year

with Emma Raducanu, is recovering from a wrist injury that ruled him out of both the French Open and Wimbledon.

Eight teams will be determined via wild card and announced on a date to follow. Two teams will earn a main draw spot by advancing through the eight-team qualifying draw played on August 24.

The two-day tournament gets underway on August 25, five days before the men's and women's singles competitions begin.

RESTED CAMERON YOUNG TAKES AIM AT NEW-LOOK ROCKET CLASSIC

Cameron Young feels refreshed after taking one week off following a runner-up finish at the Open Championship. No. 3 in both the FedEx Cup standings and Official World Golf Ranking, Young hopes a little bit of rest goes a long way this week when he returns to action at the Rocket Classic in Detroit.

"Yeah, I'm going to play from here through the end of the season," Young, 29, said yesterday. "So I'm going to play here at the Rocket Classic and then Wyndham next week and then the playoffs. I had my time off. I was two off before the (Open Championship) and then off last week. Yeah, did my best to catch up on some rest and get some practice in to kind of prepare for a long stretch at the end of the year."

While Young came close at the Masters (T3) and the Open Championship, he did capture two big wins this season at The Players Championship and the Cadillac Championship.

In order to secure win No. 3 this weekend, he'll have to navigate a new-look North Course at Detroit Golf Club. The course underwent a \$16mn renovation project that was completed in time for this week's event, playing as a par 70 at 7,328 yards after being a par 72 in the past.

All in all, bunkers were added and deepened, and a pair of par-5 holes (Nos. 7 and 17) on the course were altered to long par 4s.

"Yeah, 17 never struck me as a really easy par 5," Young said. "That tee shot, it's one of those that it's awkward almost in the sense that it's so straight. There really wasn't a ton visually out there, it was kind of just fairway as far as you could see. There's



that pole in the distance that's kind of a good target. "Yeah, I played it (Monday). I hit a really good tee shot and I had 5-iron in, so it's going to be a beast of a hole.

"... I haven't seen No. 7 yet, but that between the two of them was more a hole that I feel like I should make 4. So I'm curious to see. I was looking at the yardage book yesterday and I'll be curious to see how it plays. I think that the scoring will certainly see a shift, just those two holes are turned from relatively not easy par 5s but gettable par 5s and they're going to be difficult holes in relation to par."

It didn't take too much prying for Young to recall fond memories of playing at the Rocket Classic. "Yeah, it's been a great place for me to come," he said. "I finished second, I think, my first year and sixth the second year, so I've played some nice golf here. I have good memories of it."

Al Shamal continue preparations for new season with camp in Netherlands

Al Shamal are continuing their preparations for the 2026-2027 season with an intensive training camp in the Dutch city of Mierlo until August 6, as part of a preparatory programme developed by the coaching staff led by Spaniard David Prats. The team is undergoing intensive daily training sessions focusing on physical, technical and tactical aspects. They are also playing a series of friendly matches against strong teams like Al Wasi (UAE), Al Khaleej (Saudi Arabia), PSV Eindhoven (the Netherlands), Genk and Crossing Schaarbeek (both Belgium), with the aim of raising their readiness level and reaching peak performance before the start of season. The European camp follows the first phase of preparations in Doha. The coaching staff are working on enhancing team cohesion, integrating new signings and building

upon the team's impressive results last season, with high ambitions to keep competing for domestic titles and making a strong showing in AFC Champions League Elite. Al Shamal had an exceptional last QSL season, finishing second with 40 points (12 victories, four draws and six defeats). They scored 39 goals and conceded 28 goals, securing their first-ever AFC Champions League Elite qualification after a fierce title race that went down to the wire. The club got good recognition at the Qatar Football Association Awards, as Prats won Best Coach Award, ace striker Baghdad Bounedjah was shortlisted for Best Player Award and Mohamed Manai was nominated for Best Under-23 Player Award. In terms of recruitment, Al Shamal have strengthened their squad with several new players, such as



Wesley Said, Mohamed Rabie Hrimat, Ibrahim Coulibaly, Abdelkarim Hassan, goalkeeper Saoud al-Khater, Ali Asad, Ahmed Sayyar

and Adel Badr. They join a group of prominent players that includes Bounedjah, Jeison Murillo, Alex Collado, Akram Tawfik, goalkeeper



Babacar Seck, Michael Termanini and Mowafak Awad. Al Shamal will kick off their QSL campaign against Al Arabi at the

Al Thumama Stadium on August 21 with aspirations to continue positive results and build on the achievements of previous season.

FOOTBALL

Pedro bags three in Chelsea's win over Sydney Wanderers

NEW COACH ALONSO GOT HIS REIGN OFF TO A WINNING START

AFP
Sydney

Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso got his reign off to a winning start yesterday in a dramatic 6-4 victory over Western Sydney Wanderers, with Brazilian striker Joao Pedro scoring a late nine-minute hat-trick to ensure victory.

The former Real Madrid coach, who took over on July 1, is without many of his big guns for their pre-season tour and played 60 minutes with a side full of youth at Stadium Australia.

It was a see-sawing affair, with Chelsea coming from behind three times. Kazakh 17-year-old Dastan Satpaev lashed home on his debut in the sixth minute, but Chelsea then conceded twice with their defence run ragged before Portugal youth international Dario Essugo made it 2-2.

The Sydney side then went 3-2 and 4-3 ahead in the second half before Pedro's heroics. "I think it has been a very useful friendly that we can learn a lot from," Alonso said. "There were moments that we were struggling to find solutions, and we need to have this. The positive is that we corrected them."

"And there were moments where the game management is something that we can learn from."

"But useful for the future, and as well for minutes for everyone, and no injuries. The young ones got good experience, and the senior ones they came on with good impact." Alonso faces a huge task to get Chelsea back in the running for major honours after their 10th-place finish last season and failure to make Europe. An even tougher



Chelsea's Joao Pedro scores their fifth goal against Western Sydney Wanderers in the pre-season friendly Sydney Super Cup in Sydney yesterday. (Reuters)

test will come on Saturday when they meet London rivals Tottenham Hotspur at the same venue before further friendlies in Hong Kong, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Chelsea have made four key summer signings so far as they rebuild - attacking midfielder Morgan Rogers, winger Geovany Quenda, defender Marco Palestra and striker Emmanuel Emegha.

Only Italy's Palestra, who arrived from Serie A side Atalanta, is on the tour, with World Cup players including England's Reece James and Argentina's Enzo Fernandez also absent. Alonso deployed a 4-2-3-1 formation with

Josh Acheampong, Liam Delap and Tosin Adarabioyo - who began as captain - providing experience to a team featuring several youngsters who came through the Chelsea academy.

They got off to a flyer when Satpaev raced clear after a lovely through ball by Ryan Kavuma-McQueen and finished powerfully.

But it was a fleeting lead, with the Wanderers' Anthony Pantazopoulos nodding home from a corner eight minutes later with Chelsea guilty of poor defending.

It sparked the home team into life and Aydan Hammond made it 2-1 with a cool side-footed finish

after Chelsea were sliced open again at the back. Essugo's goal was quality, finishing off a flowing move with a one-two off Reggie Walsh before stroking into the far corner to send them to the break all square. Once again Chelsea went to sleep, and a lovely turn and finish from Dylan Scicluna put the Sydney side 3-2 ahead in the 62nd minute with Alonso making nine changes immediately after.

Cole Palmer came on and the intensity lifted to set up a sensational finale that included five more goals as Pedro staked his claim to be Chelsea's first-choice striker.

MOTORSPORT

FIA WEC withdraws Qatar 1812 KM from 2026 calendar



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC) confirm that the Qatar 1812 KM, rescheduled for October 22 to 24, has been withdrawn from 2026 calendar following a decision by the Federation Internationale de L'Automobile (FIA) & FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC).

Abdulahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, President of the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation and Lusail International Circuit said, "We fully respect the decision taken by the FIA and WEC to call off this year's Qatar 1812 KM. Our commitment to this partnership remains as strong as ever, and we look forward to working closely with both organizations to deliver an exceptional event when the championship returns to Lusail International Circuit. We are grateful to our fans, partners, teams and the wider motorsport community for their continued

support, understanding and confidence. We look forward to welcoming everyone back to Lusail in the near future."

Frederic Lequien, CEO of FIA WEC stated, "I would like to warmly thank Lusail International Circuit and their team in Qatar for their understanding in these times. We have been in constant dialogue with LIC and QMMF, and are proud of the close, long-standing relationships we have built. Qatar 1812 KM is a hugely important and well-established event on FIA's WEC calendar and will return in the future."

The process of issuing full refunds for all purchased tickets for the Qatar 1812 KM - FIA World Endurance Championship will begin immediately. Ticket holders will receive a full refund, which will be processed automatically to the original payment method.

QMMF and LIC remain committed to supporting the FIA World Endurance Championship and its long-term presence in Qatar, reinforcing the nation's position as a key destination on the global motorsport calendar.

COMMENT

Spurs' Maddison says De Zerbi is the right coach for his game

AFP
Sydney

Tottenham midfielder James Maddison on Tuesday praised Roberto De Zerbi as the type of attacking coach that suited his game and said he was "excited" by what lay ahead.

Italy's De Zerbi took over from sacked interim boss Igor Tudor in March when Tottenham were winless in the Premier League in 2026.

He steered them to 17th place and survival with a tense 1-0 win over Everton on the last day of the season and has begun building a new squad with an aggressive summer of spending.

England international Maddison, who missed the majority of last season with a serious knee injury, said in Sydney he was pumped up for the next chapter.

"The manager is very clear, the goal is to be better, to play better football, to be passionate, to be proud to play for this club," said Maddison, who is reportedly set to be named Spurs' new captain.

"I'm still learning the way he plays. But as a player, he's a coach you want to play for because he loves everything with the ball. He's very at-

tacking, and I'm really excited."

The club opened their pre-season tour with an entertaining 2-0 win over A-League champions Auckland FC in New Zealand on Sunday with goals from Dane Scarlett and Richarlison.

They face Sydney FC on Wednesday then meet London rivals Chelsea in Sydney three days later. "First game of the season, Brentford. It's a big season for us under a new manager. We want to have a successful season," added Maddison of their opening Premier League game on August 22.

"We need to be better than the last couple of seasons. So it's kind of all just preparation leading to that first game."

"We're just stepping up what we've been working on and creating the team, how we want to play and the style we want to play."

De Zerbi's big-money signings so far include midfielders Mateus Fernandes from West Ham and Sandro Tonali from Newcastle. He also raided his old club Brighton for centre-back Jan Paul van Hecke.

Full-back Andy Robertson, centre-back Marcos Senesi and goalkeeper Martin Dubravka have all arrived on free transfers as the squad takes on a new look.

City's Rodri sidelined for 'short period' following back surgery

Spain's World Cup-winning captain **Rodri** will be sidelined for a short period following minor back surgery, Manchester City said yesterday.

The midfielder, who was named player of the tournament after the World Cup final in the United States earlier this month, has been heavily linked with a move to Real Madrid. "Manchester City can confirm Rodri has undergone successful minor back surgery," the Premier League club said in a statement.

"The midfielder had been feeling discomfort for some time but has now undergone a procedure to address the issue and will now begin a short period of rehabilitation."

It is another setback for the 2024 Ballon d'Or winner, who has endured a series of fitness problems since suffering a serious knee injury almost two years ago.

The former Atletico Madrid player, 30, has one year remaining on his contract with City but speculation over his future has intensified since Spain beat Argentina 1-0 in the World Cup final.

Speaking at a press conference last week, new City manager Enzo



Maresca said he was "not worried" about the situation. "He needs to recover and then he will be back here with us," the Italian said before Rodri's operation. City face Arsenal in the season-opening Community Shield on August 16 before their first Premier

League match against Bournemouth the following week. Meanwhile, Josko Gvardiol has signed a new five-year contract at Manchester City, the Premier League club announced yesterday. The Croatia international, whose previous deal had two years left to run, is now committed until 2031, with the option of an additional 12 months. The central defender, who has made 122 appearances since arriving from RB Leipzig for £77mn (\$102mn) in 2023, had been linked with Real Madrid and Bayern Munich.

"As soon as I knew City wanted to renew my contract, I felt straight away it was what I wanted," said the 24-year-old.

"The City fans have been unbelievable with me from day one, and the club provide absolutely everything for players. It's the best club in the world to be at."

Gvardiol, a Premier League winner in 2024 who has played at centre-back and left-back, returned to action in May after more than four months out with a broken leg.