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FOCUS

SPOTLIGHT

FIFA's \$20bn plan catches regional bodies by surprise

Asian confederation says 'disappointed' by the investment plans

Reuters
London

FIFA's proposal to sell stakes in a \$20bn commercial subsidiary has drawn strong criticism from soccer's regional confederations, which said they were blindsided by the world governing body's plan to bring private investors into the sport.

The Confederations of North America, Central America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF) and Asia (AFC) delivered stinging rebukes yesterday, saying they learned of FIFA's equity sale proposal through media reports rather than official channels.

FIFA said on Tuesday that it plans to create a \$20bn subsidiary to run the World Cup and its other events, offering stakes of up to 20% in it to external investors.

Under the plan, FIFA would establish FIFA Forward Enterprise to oversee commercial and event operations. FIFA, which this year held a 48-team World Cup across the U.S., Canada and Mexico that was the biggest in the tournament's history, would retain control of the enterprise, but offer minority stakes to private investors to raise up to \$4.2bn.

'LACK OF DUE PROCESS'
"CONCACAF was only made aware of this matter through media reports and, subsequently, via a media release. We are deeply concerned by the lack of due process," it said in a statement.

"We share the disappointment of many within our region and the game that this level of detail has been designed and shared publicly before any discussion with the relevant governance bodies and stakeholders has taken place.

"As leaders within football, we are the custodians of the game. Collectively, FIFA, the confederations and every member association have a responsibility to always act in the best interests of the sport.

"Every decision we make must be guided by good governance, robust processes and long-term stewardship," Former FIFA President Sepp Blatter said the World Cup should not become an investment product for private equity with investors seeking returns.

"The FIFA World Cup is not a commercial asset that belongs to a handful of executives. It is part of the cultural heritage of world



football," Blatter told Reuters. "FIFA is the guardian of the World Cup, not its owner."

Czech Football Association President David Trunda, however, said he saw "pragmatic benefits" from working with FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

"Of course, we need more details, but my personal point of view is that I can see the positive impact of FIFA's intentions," Trunda told Sky News.

"I was elected a little more than a year ago. For me, personally, all the projects I have experienced in cooperation with FIFA have been very positive for the development of European football."

AFC DISAPPOINTED
The AFC said it recognised the importance of "exploring innovative approaches" but was disappointed that such a significant proposal was announced before the confederation had the opportunity to examine the plan.

"Such initiatives should be founded upon the principles of good governance, transparency and meaningful consultation," it said.

"Decisions that may reshape the commercial and financial future of the game require comprehensive prior engagement with confederations, member associations and other relevant stakeholders before any proposal is made to the appropriate decision-making

body(ies)," the AFC added.

INFANTINO'S DEADLINE
The Times reported that Infantino had sent a letter to all member associations saying they would receive \$40mn each if they agreed to the proposal by September 19.

However, if they rejected the package totalling \$10bn, which would be available from January 1 next year, it would be reduced to the \$2.7bn that was previously on offer. Infantino added that the proposal would only be implemented if more than half of FIFA's member associations participate by the deadline and the FIFA Council formally approves the necessary changes.

"Today we have learned of FIFA's deadline to associations to support their proposals or have the one-off payout offer withdrawn. This says everything you need to know about this plan," UEFA said in a statement.

"FIFA cannot continue to use our sport to enrich themselves and their friends. We can grow the game correctly. It's time to prioritise associations, clubs, leagues, players and fans."

While the AFC has 47 member associations, CONCACAF has 41. Together with UEFA's 55 members, that brings the total to 143 of 211 member associations whose confederations either criticised the proposal or had concerns about it. Reuters has contacted the

confederations of South America (CONMEBOL), Africa (CAF) and Oceania (OFC) for comment. FIFA did not respond to a request for comment.

'RAISES MANY QUESTIONS'
The backlash also extended to individual country ruling bodies with French Football Federation chief Philippe Diallo saying his organisation had not been informed either.

"Given its direction - specifically, as I understand, bringing investment funds into a commercial entity alongside FIFA - it obviously raises many questions," he said on French Inter radio station.

England's Football Association (FA) said it was "completely unaware" of the proposal and had no substantive details.

"Based on the limited information, we are deeply concerned about the lack of process and governance to get to this point, and the apparent substance and principles involved," the FA said.

FIFA's move had provoked a furious response from UEFA, which accused world soccer's governing body of putting the game's "soul" up for sale.

A UEFA official said the idea of holding an emergency meeting to discuss FIFA's proposal was put forward on Tuesday. Another source said virtual meetings were taking place to talk about the situation.

AFP
Rome

Newly-appointed Italy coach Roberto Mancini said yesterday he was dreaming of bagging a major trophy, the Azzurri having missed out on the last three World Cups.

Mancini was speaking at his first press conference since being unveiled as successor to Gennaro Gattuso, who 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.

"I hope to win another trophy, maybe two," Mancini said.

"My goal is to make sure the team immediately gets back to winning ways."

Mancini's first period at the helm of the Italy side ended suddenly when he took up the Saudi Arabia job.

Leaving the Italy setup at the time, he said, was "a bit like losing the woman of your life".

But the former Manchester City and Inter Milan coach, who has signed a four-year deal, vowed "to make sure the team is so good that the fans fall in love with it all over again".

Mancini added: "I believe there are young, talented players in Italy. I simply believe we need to trust them and let them play."

Mancini's first game in charge is a Nations League match against Belgium in Rome on September 25, before facing Turkey three days later.

Then comes a trip to Paris when Italy take on France, with Zinedine Zidane at the helm.

"These will be important matches," he said. "We'll im-

mediately see our strengths and the areas in which we'll need to improve."

Mancini was appointed on Tuesday, along with Claudio Ranieri as technical director in place of Paolo Maldini, who reportedly threatened to resign if Mancini was appointed.

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 officials at the Italian federation, particularly as the Azzurri were struggling in their qualifying campaign for Euro 2024.

Mancini left his job with the Saudi national side just 14 months later.

He was most recently coach of Qatari club 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.

Mancini also won three consecutive Serie A titles as Inter Milan boss between 2005 and 2008.

He then led Manchester City to their first English league title since 1968 with a famous last-day victory over QPR in the 2011-12 Premier League season.



Newly appointed Italy head coach Roberto Mancini poses before a press conference in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

F1 confirms Qatar GP for now, decision due by mid-September

AFP
Paris

The Formula One season will finish in Europe if the planned races in Qatar and Abu Dhabi are cancelled due to the Middle East war, the sport's CEO Stefano Domenicali said yesterday.

The Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Grands Prix were scrapped earlier this season due to the start of

Israel and the United States' war with Iran.

The Bahrain Grand Prix was eventually rescheduled and will now be held in Malaysia on October 4.

Domenicali said F1 would decide whether or not to go ahead with the race in Qatar, scheduled for November 29, and the season finale in Abu Dhabi on December 6, by mid-September.

"That moment will be not be before the middle of September.

For us today, the races in Qatar and Abu Dhabi are confirmed," he told reporters.

"But of course, if the situation will not be cleared the way that we believe it should be, before the middle of September, we will take the decision.

"And in that respect, I just want confirm to you that if this will not be possible, that the end of the season would be in Europe."

There have been persistent rumours in the paddock suggesting

an extra Grand Prix could be held at the Circuit of the Americas in Texas, or that a second successive race may be staged in Las Vegas, the week after the one already slated for November 21.

But Domenicali said that idea had been shelved.

"There was a possibility of having two races in Las Vegas but we don't want to ruin a jewel that is growing by undervaluing what we are doing there," he said.

"And of course, we don't have

to forget that in that period of the year, we are fighting in the US against the NFL."

Domenicali did not say which tracks in Europe could step in if needed, although the Imola circuit is reportedly the front-runner to host the finale if the Middle East conflict is still ongoing.

The World Endurance Championship announced Tuesday it would conclude its season in Spain and Italy after cancelling planned events in Qatar and Bahrain.



F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali.

ATHLETICS

Russia's exile 'causing decline in standards'

Reuters
Yekaterinburg, Russia

More than a decade after Russia's athletics exile began, the country's athletes are losing motivation and falling behind international rivals, federation chief Boris Yaryshevsky said.

Russia's isolation from international sport began with athletics, whose governing body suspended the federation in 2015 after revelations of state-sponsored doping. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 led to sports bodies across the world barring Russian teams and athletes from international competition.

Although the International Olympic Committee (IOC) provisionally lifted its suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee this month, clearing the way for a return to the fold before the 2028 Los Angeles Games, World Athletics has reaffirmed the ban it imposed in 2022.

"Of course, the lack of competition and the absence of opportunities to take part in events of this kind have, in some cases, reduced motivation and, in others, left athletes stuck at the same level, with performances no longer improving," Yaryshevsky told Reuters at last week's National Athletics Championships.

"So overall, there has naturally been a general level decline."

SANCTIONS REMAIN

World Athletics President Sebastian Coe said this month that the sanctions remained to protect the integrity and fairness of competitions with "no tangible movement towards peace negotiations having materialised".

Yaryshevsky remained upbeat, however, on Russia's chances of competing in athletics at Los Angeles. "I assess our chances with confidence. I believe that, as a federation, we are doing a great deal to ensure that our athletes have the opportunity to compete at the Los Angeles Olympics," he said.

"If we are talking about our national team and our senior athletes, six of them currently rank first in the world in their respective disciplines. So I am confident that these athletes would have delivered top results and brought medals to Russia." Russia last competed at an Olympics under its own flag at the 2016 Rio Games, although track and field athletes were still banned by the IAAF following the doping revelations.

Defending the IOC's provisional lifting of the suspension on Russians competing at the Olympics, President Kirsty Coventry said this month: "We don't want to hold athletes accountable for the actions of their government." In response, nine European Union nations called on Brussels to stop funding sports bodies that have re-admitted Russian and Belarusian athletes.



CRICKET

Litton roped in as ODI captain for the second time

EXPERIENCED WICKETKEEPER BATSMAN REPLACES MIRAZ

AFP
Dhaka

Wicketkeeper-batter **Litton Das** has replaced Mehidy Hasan Miraz as captain of Bangladesh's one-day international team, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

Miraz's captaincy exit comes after Bangladesh ODI series defeat against Zimbabwe earlier this month. Najmul Hossain Shanto will continue in his role as Test captain.

The appointment of Litton, who is already the T20 skipper, as the white-ball leader comes as Bangladesh's move of split captaincy ahead of next year's ODI World Cup in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

"I and the board believe we should have two captains - a white-ball and a red-ball captain," Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Tamim Iqbal told reporters in Mirpur.

Tamim praised Miraz's tenure, which included victories in four of his last five series in charge, but said his dip in batting form prompted the move.

"Miraz as a cricketer for Bangladesh is more important than anything else...probably the level we're accustomed to, we're probably not seeing that right now, especially with his batting," Tamim said.

"I had a discussion with Miraz, (and) he understands the point."

Miraz was handed the ODI captaincy on a 12-month basis in June last year, taking over from Shanto, who had briefly led the side across



LIST OF BANGLADESH ODI CAPTAINS

Gazi Ashraf	Mohammad Ashraful
Minhajul Abedin	Shakib Al Hasan
Akram Khan	Mashrafe Mortaza
Aminul Islam	Mushfiqur Rahim
Naimur Rahman	Tamim Iqbal
Khaled Mahmud	Litton Das
Habibul Bashar	Najmul Hossain Shanto
Rajin Saleh	Mehidy Hasan Miraz

all formats. Under Miraz, Bangladesh won 10 of 20 ODIs they played, following a difficult start that saw them lose five of their

first six matches and drop two consecutive series.

The team later rallied with four straight series wins at home

I and the board believe we should have two captains - a white-ball and a red-ball captain

against the West Indies, Pakistan, New Zealand and Australia, before losing an away series to Zimbabwe. Litton has previous captaincy experience, having led Bangladesh in seven ODIs, including a 2022 series win over India. Tamim also addressed the uncertain status of Bangladesh's proposed series against India in September at home.

"I am very hopeful that they will come. Bangladesh is an extremely safe country," he said.

Tamim said talks with the BCCI had been "very positive" so far and clarity was expected "very soon".

"Whatever steps need to be taken from our side, we are trying from our end," he said.

"But one thing we all need to understand - I am BCB, and then I am the BCB president, and there is also a line that I should never cross."

Under the previous board, Bangladesh refused to play in India at this year's T20 World Cup, citing security concerns after fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman was dumped by Indian Premier League team Kolkata Knight Riders.

"There are certain things that are beyond my control. They (government) also have to make a decision, I'm sure. Very soon, perhaps, we will find out whether the series is happening or not," said Tamim.

SWIMMING

Dressel wins 100m free at US championships, Moesch sets record



Caleb Dressel celebrates his first place finish in the men's 100m freestyle final 1 of the Toyota National Championships at William Woollett, Jr Aquatics Center in Irvine, California. (AFP)

AFP
Los Angeles

Nine-time Olympic champion Caeleb Dressel won the 100m men's freestyle and Anna Moesch broke her own women's 100m freestyle American record on Tuesday's opening night of the US National Championships. Dressel won the 100m final in 47.70sec, his fastest

time since the 2024 US Olympic trials, touching 0.11 ahead of Brooks Curry.

The 29-year-old Floridian won the 100m freestyle at the Tokyo Olympics and is a two-time world champion in the event.

Moesch won in 51.88sec to lower the national mark of 51.94 she set on May 25 in London.

Junior world champion Rylee Erisman was second in 52.92 with Liberty Clark third in 52.97.

Kennedy hails golden age for Australia after smashing national 100m record

MELBOURNE: Sprinter Lachlan Kennedy has hailed a new golden age in Australian athletics after he and Torrie Lewis broke 100m national records in clinching Commonwealth Games medals in Glasgow. Kennedy ran a personal best 9.85 seconds to beat Patrick Johnson's mark of 9.93 set in 2003 to claim a silver medal behind Cameroon's Emmanuel Eseme (9.83) in the Games' fastest 100m final on Tuesday. Lewis improved on her own 100m national record in the semi-finals and raised the bar again in the final, taking bronze in 10.99. "Far out ... we got a medal in every event we competed in," 22-year-old Kennedy told Australian media. "Aussie track is clearly in, I think, the best spot it's ever been and our team is so strong. "We're in a real golden age with a lot of youngsters and a lot of good veteran talent as well."

IPL VALUE SOARS TO \$20.6BN AFTER FRANCHISE SALES, SAYS REPORT

NEW DELHI: The Indian Premier League's value has surged to an estimated \$20.6bn, boosted by ownership deals involving two of its biggest franchises, according to a report yesterday by investment bank Houlihan Lokey.

The T20 competition's value rose 10.3 percent over the past year, underlining its position as one of the world's most valuable sports brands, it said.

"On a per-match basis, only the NFL ranks ahead of the IPL globally," it added.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru, IPL champions for the last two seasons and home to superstar Virat Kohli, retained their status as the league's most valuable franchise with a brand value of \$312mn.

The team was recently acquired by a consortium including US asset management giant Blackstone in a deal worth nearly \$1.8bn, the most expensive franchise transaction in IPL history.

Rajasthan Royals also changed hands in a deal valued at \$1.65bn, with Indian steel tycoon Lakshmi N. Mittal and his family joining vaccine billionaire Adar Poonawalla in taking control.

"Cricket's evolution into a globally owned, institutionally backed asset class has accelerated further in 2026, with the IPL continuing to redefine the global sports landscape," Houlihan Lokey's Harsh Talikoti said.

"These latest transactions further demonstrate the confidence investors continue to place in the long-term value creation opportunity," he said in a statement.

The league, which began in 2008, has become a top



Royal Challengers Bengaluru is IPL's most valuable franchise estimated at \$312mn.

revenue earner for the Board of Control for Cricket in India and was estimated to generate more than \$11bn a year for the Indian economy in 2020.

It has inspired copycat cricket tournaments around the world and India domestic franchise competitions in sports as diverse as boxing, badminton, poker and kabaddi.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Ten Doeschate rejoins Kolkata Knight Riders as cricket strategy chief

AFP
New Delhi

Former India assistant coach **Ryan ten Doeschate** has returned to the IPL's Kolkata Knight Riders franchise as its head of cricket strategy, the team announced yesterday.

The 46-year-old ten Doeschate, a former Netherlands all-rounder, ended his two-year contract with the Indian men's senior team after the white-ball tour of England earlier this month.

"In his new role, Ryan will lead the strategic direction for scouting, player recruitment, squad planning and performance evaluation across the Knight Riders network," the franchise said in a statement.

"He will work closely with the coaching teams to help build a consistent cricketing philosophy and approach across all Knight Riders franchises."

Three-time Indian Premier



League winners Kolkata are co-owned by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan.

The Knight Riders sports group also has teams in the Caribbean Premier League (Trinidad Knight Riders), the International League T20 (Abu Dhabi Knight Riders), and US Major League Cricket (Los Angeles Knight Riders).

McDermott is Afghanistan assistant and fielding coach

Shane McDermott, the former Australian wicketkeeper-batter,

has been appointed the new assistant and fielding coach of Afghanistan, *Cricinfo* reported yesterday. McDermott, 45, will link up with the team on August 1, ahead of their five-match ODI series against Ireland.

McDermott will work with head coach Richard Pybus, who replaced Jonathan Trott in February earlier this year.

McDermott has held several fielding-specific coaching positions in a number of countries, serving as assistant fielding coach in Bangladesh for three years and another three with Sri Lanka. His most recent assignment was with Pakistan as their all-format fielding coach from July 2025 to July 2026.

Rahmat Shah will lead Afghanistan's ODI team for the first time when they play Ireland on August 5. Afghanistan will begin their series against Ireland in Breda with the first two ODIs on August 5 and 7, before moving on to Belfast for the remaining three games on August 10, 12 and 15.

SPOTLIGHT

Doha strengthens status as top training hub

QNA
Doha

Doha continues to reinforce its position as a leading global destination for sports training camps, supported by world-class facilities and comprehensive infrastructure that meet the highest international standards. These strengths have made Qatar a preferred choice for teams and clubs from around the world.

The Qatar Gymnastics Federation (QGF) is hosting a training camp for the artistic gymnastics team of Al Ittihad Saudi Club at the QGF training hall. The camp forms part of the team's preparation program for upcoming competitions and championships.

The camp features an intensive training program that includes joint sessions with members of



Ali al-Hitmi, President of Qatar Gymnastics Federation and First Vice President of the International Gymnastics Federation, is seen with young group of athletes in Doha for a training camp.

Qatari teams. The competitive and focused training environment supports the exchange of technical expertise, helps raise athletes' skill levels, and reflects the depth

of sporting cooperation between the two sides.

QGF President and First Vice President of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) Ali Al

Hitmi said hosting training camps aligns with the Federation's vision to strengthen Qatar's position as a regional and global sports hub. He noted that the QGF remains

committed to expanding cooperation with Arab and international federations and clubs, raising the technical level of gymnastics, and promoting the exchange of expertise among athletes and technical staff.

Al-Hitmi added that Qatar's world-class sports facilities, organizational expertise, and advanced logistical capabilities make it an ideal destination for training camps and sporting events. He said these strengths support the country's broader vision of establishing itself as a global sports capital.

For his part, Director of the Artistic Gymnastics Team at Al-Ittihad Saudi Club Mohammed Al Sumairi expressed his appreciation for the warm welcome and excellent organization the team received upon arriving in Doha.

He praised Qatar's advanced sports facilities and the world-class standards of the QGF training

hall, noting that its modern equipment and comprehensive facilities helped provide an ideal environment for the success of the camp and the achievement of its technical objectives.

Al Sumairi also thanked the QGF, led by al-Hitmi, for its warm reception and strong cooperation. He emphasized that the camp offers an important opportunity to prepare the athletes for upcoming competitions while strengthening sporting ties between the Qatari and Saudi federations.

The camp reflects continued confidence in Qatar as a host for international sports training camps, supported by its advanced infrastructure and strong organizational expertise.

It further reinforces the country's position as a premier destination for teams and clubs seeking an ideal environment for preparation and development.

MOTORSPORT

Domenicali hails Antonelli as big crowds delight F1

Sold-out races, booming viewing figures seen in first half of season

Reuters
London

Formula One boss Stefano Domenicali heaped praise on teenager Kimi Antonelli yesterday as the sport gave itself a glowing half-term report, with sold-out races and booming viewing figures in key markets.

Liberty Media-owned Formula One said all 11 races this year had been sold out and six circuits had broken attendance records, with Britain's Silverstone recording by far the biggest weekend crowd of 564,000.

Nearly 3.7 million people had attended race weekends compared to 3.4 million at the same races in 2025, with Japan showing an increase of 18% and Britain 13%.

Television audiences in Italy, home of Mercedes' championship leader Antonelli as well as a resurgent Ferrari, were up 27% on 2025 over the nine rounds through the British Grand Prix.

19-YEAR-OLD A SIX-TIMES WINNER

Antonelli, 19, has won six of 11 races this season while Ferrari, winless last year, have triumphed with both Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc.

"I think that for the sport, he's really great," Domenicali told reporters about a compatriot who hails from the same region around



Mercedes' Formula One driver Andrea Kimi Antonelli celebrates with the trophy after winning the Belgian Grand Prix last week. (Reuters)

Bologna. "He's fresh, he's still very new and very open to any kind of thing that is happening to him. He has brought a lot of new fans connected to him because the nature of his way of engaging is fantastic...he's added a new dimension. He's an incredible asset for the future of what we're doing together."

Television audiences in Brazil on race weekends were up to five times greater than a year ago, with a record 18 million watching the British Grand Prix on TV

Globo and SportTV3. The Monaco Grand Prix, won by Antonelli, reached nearly 80 million viewers globally.

Formula One said its Fan Voice polling forum, which gathers responses from 60,000 fans, showed 66% of fans voting the racing good or excellent - despite driver complaints about the new engines - compared to 60% last season.

The British Grand Prix, which ended controversially with the safety car deployed and Ferrari's

Leclerc winning after Antonelli took pole position, drew a 69% good or excellent rating - down 20% on 2025.

The Silverstone drivers' parade in cars made of Lego led to more than 70 million views across social platforms. Women made up 42% of the sport's audience, and three-quarters of new fans, while 43% of the total fanbase was under 35 years old.

Formula One's next race is the Dutch Grand Prix at Zandvoort on August 23.

GOLF

Ko aims to channel 'inner Foxy' for Open bid

Reuters
London

New Zealand's Lydia Ko hopes to channel her "inner Foxy" and win the Women's Open for the second time at Royal Lytham this week.

Ko watched enthralled from afar as Ryan Fox won the men's British Open at Royal Birkdale this month, becoming only the second New Zealander to win golf's oldest major.

Now, a few miles along the north-west England coast, Ko is hoping to emulate her compatriot and break the domination of this year's majors by American world number one Nelly Korda and South Korea's Ryu Hae-ran.

"I would love to kind of keep the dice rolling. Super excited for Foxy and the whole of golf New Zealand for his win just up the road at Birkdale," Ko told reporters yesterday.

"I don't think I've been that nervous and that excited watching somebody else play. Just his whole back nine and the way he played over the weekend was incredible. "Yeah, it would be cool to channel my inner Foxy, his fearlessness, out there for me these next few days."

FOUR MAJOR CHAMPIONS FROM NEW ZEALAND

The 29-year-old Ko is one of only four New Zealanders to win a golf major along with Bob Charles, who won the 1963 Open at Lytham,

2005 US Open champion Michael Campbell and Fox. The most recent of her three majors was the Women's Open at St Andrews two years ago, the same year she won the Paris Olympic gold medal.

Ko, who has been to three Olympics as a team mate of Fox, said she used to marvel at the way he could hit the "easiest 65s" despite not always finding the fairways. By contrast, her game relies on laser-straight hitting and she knows that will be necessary around a Lytham course littered with pot bunkers.

"I think this is the toughest Women's Open championship venue I have ever played," she said. "I don't know what I thought when I played in 2018. I might have been in a lot of bunkers that are on the golf course that are in my memory bank."

"Even on a pretty perfect day like today it's playing hard. So when you win on that kind of caliber of golf course, I think it's always something that you come off feeling extra proud."

After missing the cut at the year's first two majors, Ko finished tied 15th at the PGA Championship and tied seventh at the Evian Championship - her best major finish since winning at St Andrews in 2024. Korda and Ryu have won two majors apiece this season.

TORREY PINES ADDED TO NEW PGA TOUR TOP-LEVEL SERIES FROM 2028

The US PGA Tour's annual tournament at Torrey Pines in California will be added to

the top-tier Championship Series starting in 2028, organizers announced yesterday.

The new elite PGA series set to feature 23-24 events for the sport's best players is part of a major shake-up of men's golf unveiled last month, and its roster of tournaments is beginning to take shape. Golf's four major tournaments, The Players Championship, playoff events and the Ryder and Presidents Cups had already been confirmed to be part of a schedule from February through August.

So too had the Travellers Championship, which takes places each June at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut, and an event sponsored by Japanese corporation Sampo at a yet-to-be-announced venue.

Now the Torrey Pines tournament, which will be known as The Sentry from this coming January's edition under a new sponsorship deal, has been added too.

Known until this year as the the Farmers Insurance Open, the tournament began life in 1952 as the San Diego Open. It has been played annually at Torrey Pines since 1968.

Justin Rose won the most recent edition, storming to a wire-to-wire victory with a record 23-under to win by seven strokes, for his 13th career PGA TOUR victory and his second at Torrey Pines. Torrey Pines has also hosted two US Opens, including the memorable 2008 edition in which Tiger Woods defeated Rocco Mediate in a 19-hole playoff despite playing with a broken leg.

WIMBLEDON BROKE ATTENDANCE RECORD DESPITE WORLD CUP CLASH

LONDON: Wimbledon enjoyed a record attendance and generated nearly 5bn social media "impressions" despite competition from the soccer World Cup, the All England Club said yesterday. A cumulative 550,151 fans passed through the gates during the fortnight, slightly up on 2025, with many purchasing tickets on the day via Wimbledon's famous queue. Daily attendance records were set on three separate days during the championships. Organisers credited the bumper figures to the first rain-free Wimbledon since 2019 and the unexpected semi-final run of British wildcard Arthur Fery, which helped offset potential viewer

losses to the World Cup. The tournament's commercial appeal was evident in retail figures, with a record 117,995 hats sold across the fortnight. Broadcasting numbers were also high, with ESPN reporting it was the second-most-viewed Wimbledon championships of all time. The tournament's social media following grew by 11% across all platforms. The all-Czech women's singles final between Linda Noskova and Karolina Muchova proved particularly popular in the Czech Republic, where Eurosport sub-licensed coverage to free-to-air broadcaster Prima. The match attracted a 38.5% audience share and peaked at 900,000 viewers.

TENNIS

Hewitt's son Cruz earns first ATP Tour win in Washington opener

AFP
Washington

Cruz Hewitt, the 17-year-old son of former world number one Lleyton Hewitt, captured his first ATP Tour victory on Tuesday to reach the second round of the Washington Open.

The Aussie teen, ranked 612th in the world, ousted fellow qualifier Marcos Giron of the United States 6-3, 6-4 in 74 minutes in his ATP main draw debut.

Among his father's 30 career ATP titles was the 2004 Washington crown, four years before Cruz was born.

"It's a pretty special moment," Hewitt said. "Seeing my dad play this tournament and to get my first tour win, it feels really cool."

Hewitt plays for a quarter-final berth against the winner of a scheduled later match between Greek wildcard Stefanos Tsitsipas and top-seeded defending champion Alex de Minaur, a newlywed from Australia.

Hewitt copied a celebration from his father after the victory, holding up his bent right arm with his hand curled back toward him.

"He just always did it and when I was little I've just always seen it," Hewitt said. "It's cool to be able to do that now because obviously my dad has been a huge part of where I am today."

Hewitt was uncertain he could copy his father, who won his first ATP match at Adelaide in 1998 on the way to his first tour title.

"I'll try my best," he said. "I'm just playing one match at a time."

Hewitt saw his father's name on the ring of champions at center court during his qualifying wins.

"It's very surreal," he said. "Pretty special to play my first two qualies matches on center court and my dad's name being in the back. Kind of inspirational to look up at it as well. Super special to be back here."

France's 47th-ranked Adrian Mannarino eliminated American fifth seed Learner Tien 7-5, 6-4 to book a second-round match against American Alex Michelsen, who ousted US lucky loser Mackenzie McDonald 6-4, 7-5.

French eighth seed Arthur Fils was defeated, falling to Spain's 19-year-old Rafael Jodar 7-6 (7/5), 6-3. The Spaniard reached a second-round match against Japan's 36-year-old Kei Nishikori.

Rain halted US third seed Ben Shelton's match with US qualifier Martin Damm in the second set.

EALA ADVANCES

Filipino 21-year-old left-hander Alexandra Eala rallied to defeat China's Zheng Qinwen 4-6, 6-4, 6-1 after two hours and 26 minutes.

Eala, ranked 28th, was down a set and a break but broke six times in all to oust the reigning Olympic champion.

"Just being patient and being brave, waiting for my opportunities," Eala said. "It was a very difficult match. I was at some difficult points but I'm happy with how I was able to turn it."



Cruz Hewitt of Australia during his Mubadala Citi DC Open match against Marcos Giron of the United States in Washington, DC. (AFP)

Al Rayyan continue preparations for new season with training camp in Spain

Al Rayyan are continuing their preparations for the 2026-2027 season with a training camp in Spain from July 15 to August 5, the main focus being on fine tuning the technical and physical aspects as well as fostering cohesion between new and existing players in the squad. Following the first phase of preparations in Doha, the Spanish camp has intensive daily training sessions aiming to sharpen the players' technical and physical readiness ahead of a long and challenging season. The preparatory programme, developed by Spanish coach Vicente Moreno and his technical staff, also feature friendly matches against Rochdale AFC of England, Albacete of Spain, Diriyah of Saudi Arabia and CD Leganes of Spain.

Al Rayyan finished the 2025-2026 season Doha Bank Stars League in third place with a tally of 38 points (11 wins, five draws and six defeats). They scored 46 goals and conceded 32. During the season, Al Rayyan also won the Gulf Club Champions League winners, their first-ever title in the competition's history, by beating Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia in the final. At the Qatar Football Association Awards, Al Rayyan bagged two honours. Star striker Roger Guedes won the Mansour Mufthah Award for top scorer for the second consecutive season with 21 goals in Doha Bank Stars League, while Mahmoud Abunada claimed the Best Goalkeeper Award. Abunada went on to represent Qatar at FIFA

World Cup 2026. Al Rayyan have bolstered their squad with new recruits such as Daoud Diakite, Diogo Amaro, Yousef Ayman, Ahmad Al Janahi and Jassim Al Sharshani. They will join the likes of Guedes, Julian de Sart, Aleksandar Mitrovic, David Garcia, Gabriel Pereira, Wesley Ribeiro, Abunada, Abdelaziz Hatem and Ahmed Alaaeldin. Al Rayyan, who recently appointed Luca Cattani as their Technical Director, will begin their 2026-2027 Doha Bank Stars League campaign against Lusail on August 20 at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium with renewed ambitions and greater goals in the new season. The Kings are also readying for their Gulf Club Super Cup match against Duhok of Iraq away on August 13.



FOOTBALL

Tottenham clinch penalty shootout against Sydney FC

'We worked hard and we fought to the end, even in a friendly game'

AFP
Sydney

Tottenham striker Mathys Tel scored a stunning freekick as the London club were held to a 1-1 draw by Sydney FC yesterday in a setback to their pre-season momentum.

Frenchman Tel produced a glorious strike on 29 minutes but Roberto De Zerbi's team failed to capitalise and Sydney's new Japanese signing Takahiro Sekine levelled early in the second half.

They played a penalty shootout, which Spurs won 4-2.

"It was a good goal. I also want to congratulate the team because we worked hard and we fought to the end, even in a friendly game. We just keep going all the time," said Tel.

"Sydney played very well on the ball, they played also very well off the ball and it wasn't that easy against them."

De Zerbi used a host of youngsters and gave his top stars a rest after a long trip to New Zealand in their 2-0 win over Auckland FC on Sunday.

It was a similar scenario at the Sydney Football Stadium, although first-teamers Archie Gray, Richarlison, Tel, Ben Davies, Man- or Solomon and Martin Dubravka all started.

So did Swedish midfielder Lucas Bergvall, who has been heavily linked with a move away with Newcastle and Nottingham Forest reportedly interested.

Among those getting a second-half run was record signing Sandro Tonali after missing the first tour game with a niggles, but he made



Tottenham's Mathys Tel shoots the ball during the Sydney Super Cup match against Sydney FC at the Allianz Stadium in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

little impact. Lively fellow new recruit Andy Robertson was given 25 minutes, making his debut.

But there was no appearance from Mateus Fernandes, who moved from West Ham last month.

He played the last half an hour in Auckland but British media suggested he may have suffered an injury and the Portuguese midfielder was not among the match-day squad.

James Maddison was another absentee along with Destiny Udogie, Micky van de Ven, and Jan Paul van Hecke.

With 20-year-old Gray captaining the side for the second match running, Tel and Conor Gallagher both had early opportunities as they dominated possession and moved the ball quickly.

Tel got the reward with a wonderful curling free-kick into the top corner after Solomon was hauled down on the edge of the box. Gallagher almost got another when he hit the post soon after and they went to the break with a 1-0 lead.

Spurs substitute Luca Williams-Barnett rattled the crossbar soon after the restart, but the

hosts hit back against the run of play when Kota Takai's pass was deflected into the path of Sekine, who rifled home on 55 minutes.

Tottenham winger Yang Min-hyeok missed a sitter from close range after a Robertson assist and again with a header not long after, and the winner never came.

Spurs, who narrowly avoided relegation on the final day of last season, next face Chelsea in Sydney on Saturday.

Chelsea kicked off new manager Xabi Alonso's reign with a 6-4 win over Western Sydney Wanderers on Tuesday.

BASKETBALL

Qatar seal FIBA Asia U-18 Championship berth with third straight victory

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's secured qualification for the FIBA Asia U-18 Championship 2026 after defeating Oman 80-67 in the fourth round of the Gulf qualifiers at Al Gharafa Sports Hall yesterday.

The victory marked Qatar's third consecutive win in the qualifying tournament, taking the hosts to six points and guaranteeing one of the two available Gulf qualification spots for the continental championship, scheduled to take place in Ahmedabad, India, from August 13-23.

Bahrain also confirmed qualification after matching Qatar's perfect record of three wins from three matches. The two unbeaten sides will now meet in the final qualifier to decide the Gulf champions and top spot in the standings.

Qatar continued its impressive campaign with another composed performance despite a competitive challenge from Oman. After trailing 19-18 at the end of the opening quarter, the hosts responded by taking the second period 23-20 before Oman edged ahead in the third quarter 14-9.

Qatar, however, dominated the final quarter 30-14 to pull away and secure a comfortable 13-point victory. Abdul-

lah Yassin delivered a standout display for Qatar, finishing with a game-high 38 points, while Adam Suleiman led Oman with 17 points.

The victory completed a flawless run for Qatar in the qualifiers. The hosts opened their campaign with an 80-76 win over Saudi Arabia before producing an emphatic 81-53 victory against Kuwait in the second round. The win over Oman sealed qualification and highlighted the team's growing confidence ahead of the continental championship.

In the day's other fixture, Saudi Arabia earned their first win of the tournament with a convincing 75-46 victory over Kuwait. Saudi Arabia raced to a 21-5 first-quarter lead, shared the second period 13-13, lost the third 19-14, and finished strongly with a 27-9 final quarter.

Saudi Arabia had previously suffered defeats to Bahrain (62-54) and Qatar (80-76), while Kuwait remain without a victory after losses to Oman (62-59), Bahrain (106-51), Qatar (81-53), and Saudi Arabia.

Following four rounds, Qatar and Bahrain sit jointly atop the standings with six points each and have both secured qualification for the Asia championship. Saudi Arabia and Oman are tied on four points, while Kuwait remain at the bottom after four consecutive defeats.



Qatar's Abdullah Yassin scored a game-high 38 points in the hosts' 80-67 win over Oman yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Neuer 'very likely' to retire at end of season

AFP
Munich

Veteran Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said it is "very likely" he will retire at the end of the upcoming season.

Speaking at a training camp in southern Bavaria yesterday evening, the 40-year-old Bayern captain said he was almost certain this campaign would be his last.

"It certainly looks very likely I'm going to retire," Neuer told reporters.

In May, Neuer signed a one-year contract extension.

Neuer said the potential of the current Bayern squad convinced him to keep playing.

"In 85 percent of cases, I probably would have retired, but being part of this squad -- along with the staff and the coaching team -- is just fun."

Bayern won the Bundesliga and German Cup double in 2025-26 but were eliminated by eventual winners Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) in the Champions League



semi-finals. Neuer has continued to impress despite battling a series of muscle injuries.

He missed Bayern's 3-0 German Cup final win over Stuttgart in May and sat out a number of games last season, with back-up Jonas Urbig stepping in.

Bayern are again strong favourites to win the Bundesliga and are

among the top contenders for the Champions League, but Neuer said he did not consider the coming campaign to be a farewell tour. "I'm not playing these matches just to say, 'This is my last game.' It doesn't matter if I might have visited a particular stadium for the last time."

The 2014 World Cup winner

retired from international football after Euro 2024 but returned for the recent World Cup, only for Germany to crash out with a last-32 loss to Paraguay.

Neuer moved to Bayern from Schalke in 2011 and has since won 13 Bundesliga titles, six German Cups and two Champions League crowns.

My time playing for Brazil is over, says Neymar

Neymar has confirmed his international retirement, tearfully declaring he was done playing for the Brazil national team following their World Cup defeat by Norway.

"My time with the national team is over. I made history, I was very happy, I gave my blood and my life... but now I don't want it anymore," Neymar told journalists after his club Santos defeated Venezuela's UCV 4-2 in the Copa Sudamericana on Tuesday. Brazil's record goalscorer was included in the World Cup squad almost three years after he last played for the national team, and played only 37 minutes across two matches. His only goal - a penalty - was not enough to prevent an early exit for Brazil after a 2-1 defeat to Norway in the last 16 and he tearfully declared: "It ends here."

Neymar, 34, remains under contract with Santos - fighting to avoid relegation - until the end of the year. He scored twice in his first match upon his return, responding to his critics with a tongue-in-cheek goal celebration. Neymar celebrated with a card-dealing gesture - after facing criticism for taking part in a poker tournament while his team-mates were playing a Copa Sudamericana match in Venezuela. He started on the bench Tuesday for the return game against the same team, as Santos comfortably sealed a spot in the last 16.

