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FOOTBALL

Infantino adviser quits amid FIFA's stake plan backlash

FIFA not to create subsidiary without majority support, governing body to proceed with consultations

Reuters
Paris

A senior adviser to FIFA President Gianni Infantino resigned in protest at plans to sell a stake in the World Cup yesterday, as European football threatened a boycott and regional confederations united in opposition to the controversial proposal.

Carlos Cordeiro resigned with immediate effect, calling the plan "a bad deal for football".

Cordeiro, who was appointed in 2021 by Infantino to help shape FIFA's future, said the body was "mortgaging football's future without any compelling justification".

"It is a bad deal for FIFA's Member Associations, a bad deal for football, and a bad deal for the long-term future of the game," Cordeiro said in a statement.

A former banker and ex-U.S. Soccer Federation vice president, Cordeiro added that he had no involvement in the proposal and opposed it "unequivocally".

Despite the mounting opposition, Switzerland-based FIFA said "incorrect media reports" this week had disrupted its planned consultation process but that it would press on with putting the proposal in front of its 211 national football associations.

"We will proceed with this consultation process to ensure that each MA (Member Association) has the ability to express its vote based on facts," it said in a statement issued in the middle of the European night.

FIFA has proposed creating a \$20bn subsidiary, FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), to run the World Cup and its other events, with a stake of up to 20% to be offered to external investors.

Thrive Eternal, a fund run by Thrive Capital, founded by Joshua Kushner, was expected to lead the proposed investor group, FIFA said. Joshua is the brother of Jared Kushner, U.S. President Don-



A file photo shows the then former president of the United States Soccer Federation Carlos Cordeiro looks on as FIFA President Gianni Infantino presents US President Donald Trump with a gift in the Oval Office of the White House during a visit by members of Italian soccer club Juventus in Washington, DC, on June 18, 2025. (AFP)

ald Trump's son-in-law. British Prime Minister Andy Burnham, who had been critical of FIFA's plan when it was announced earlier this week, told reporters yesterday that Infantino was "the wrong man to lead the organisation".

Infantino is up for re-election next year and North American football chief Victor Montagliani is reportedly looking to challenge him for the FIFA presidency.

UEFA LEADS OPPOSITION TO FIFA WORLD CUP PLAN

The European football association, UEFA, has led the widespread opposition to the proposal, accusing FIFA of putting the sport's "soul" up for sale.

On Thursday, UEFA's 55 member nations voted unanimously to boycott all FIFA tournaments, less

than two weeks after Spain were crowned World Cup champions.

FIFA's next major event is the women's Under-20 World Cup in September. Hosts Poland said on Friday they had not received any information about the potential withdrawal of any team from the tournament.

"Nobody is selling football. This is not something FIFA would ever entertain," FIFA said in yesterday's statement.

"Everyone has the right to express their opposition and to seek further clarification but no single entity can claim to represent all 211 MAs around the world. "Each MA should be allowed to review the proposal and have a say in shaping their own future. These are the democratic principles of FIFA."

CONCACAF, the regional fed-

eration for North America, Central America and the Caribbean, rejected the proposal during a meeting on Thursday but the 41-member body did not follow UEFA with a boycott threat.

The Asian Football Confederation, which has 47 members, issued a statement yesterday saying it "stands in solidarity" with UEFA and CONCACAF, but also stopped short of threatening a boycott.

The AFC, which has not historically been as frequent or vehement a critic of FIFA as its European counterpart UEFA, questioned the viability of the proposal and raised doubts about FIFA's decision-making processes in a thinly-veiled attack on Infantino.

Stuart Dykes, the director of European and Institutional Affairs at Football Supporters Europe,

FAN GROUP CALLS FOR FIFA REFORM

Non-profit fan network Football Supporters Europe (FSE) has opposed FIFA's proposal to sell a stake in the World Cup and called for reform in the world soccer body amid widespread criticism of the plan.

UEFA nations have unanimously voted to boycott the World Cup and other FIFA tournaments over the proposal and the Asian and North-American confederations expressed solidarity with the European countries, while FIFA president Gianni Infantino's senior adviser Carlos Cordeiro resigned in protest.

Stuart Dykes, FSE's director of European and Institutional Affairs, said the fans were also outraged by FIFA's proposal.

"Football is not for sale. It's a social good. Its value is created by the fans and the players and everyone else who go to make it such, you know, go to create that value in the first place," Dykes told Reuters on Friday over Zoom.

"And that value is not for FIFA to extract in the interest of private investors."

Dykes hit out at the lack of transparency behind an initiative that would have a far-reaching impact on the sport.

"Decisions of this nature... cannot be taken behind closed doors by a small number of people. Many of them aren't even involved in football. They're private investors. FIFA has to reform itself," he said.

Dykes said UEFA had sent out a strong message by getting all 55 European nations to agree on the decision to boycott FIFA competitions.

"I think the whole of the football community stands behind UEFA on this," he added.

said such decisions could not be taken behind closed doors by a small group of people.

"The national associations should be demanding proper governance, proper consultation, proper stakeholder involvement," Dykes told Reuters.

"Football is not for sale. It's a social good. Its value is created by the fans and the players... That value is not for FIFA to extract in the interest of private investors."

FIFA SAYS PROCESS IS A DEMOCRATIC ONE

Infantino said in a letter to all member associations that they would receive \$40mn each if they agreed to FIFA's proposal by September 19.

Yesterday, FIFA said it would not go ahead with the plan without the support of the majority of its member associations.

"These principles underpin the FFE proposal: unprecedented development funding, truly global ownership of the commercial

opportunities of our sport, and full self-determination through a democratic process for all MAs," FIFA said. UEFA, CONCACAF and the AFC combined have 143 associations, well over half of FIFA's 211 members.

However, not all individual member nations would be certain to follow their federations' line.

Czech Football Association President David Trunda told *Sky Sports* that he could see the "positive impact of FIFA's intentions", while the Mexican Football Federation said it would study the proposal before deciding its position, despite CONCACAF's rejection.

As the hue and cry over the proposal continued, Danish brewers Carlsberg, who have a sponsorship deal with UEFA, trolled Infantino with a social media post.

"Time for a hydration break, Gianni? Probably," Carlsberg wrote, referencing the mandatory pauses introduced at this year's World Cup which critics had called a vehicle for extra advertising slots.

FIFA STUDYING IMPACT OF EXPANDING WORLD CUP TO 64 TEAMS FOR 2030 EDITION

FIFA is studying whether to expand the World Cup from 48 to 64 teams for the 2030 edition, according to a document seen by Reuters, in a move that could reshape soccer's showpiece tournament when it celebrates its centennial.

World soccer's governing body wants to appoint an independent agency to assess the ambitious expansion plan, which would add another 16 nations to a tournament that had already grown from 32 to 48 teams in 2026.

"FIFA wishes to appoint an independent agency to determine whether and how expanding the FIFA World Cup from 48 to 64 participating national teams, starting with the 2030 edition, would impact on the tournament proposition," it said in a research brief. South American confederation CONMEBOL had officially proposed hosting the 2030 World Cup with 64 teams last year, allowing more countries the opportunity to join in the celebrations for the tournament's centennial edition.

The 2026 edition in the U.S., Canada and Mexico was the first since 1998 to move away from the 32-team format, adding four more groups and an extra knockout round in the process, resulting in 104 matches over more than five weeks.

The accelerated study comes on the heels of FIFA's plan to create a \$20bn subsidiary to run the World Cup and its other events with external investors, a move that has attracted criticism and a UEFA decision to boycott FIFA events.

Reuters has contacted FIFA for comment.

'NOT A GOOD IDEA'

UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said last year

that expanding the World Cup to 64 teams was not a good idea.

The European governing body's position has not changed since then, while Asian Football Confederation President Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa had also voiced opposition, questioning last year where further expansion might end.

FIFA's proposed analysis is meant to assess whether the proposed expansion can strengthen the tournament or whether concerns such as competition dilution, calendar congestion, operational complexity and market saturation outweigh the potential benefits.

The study will examine the potential impact of expanding the tournament to 64 teams, including the effects on the competition, competitive balance, qualification, player welfare and the international calendar.

It will also estimate the revenues that could be generated from ticket sales, sponsorship and media rights under the proposed format.

"The final recommendation should demonstrate not only whether a 64-team tournament can generate incremental value, but whether that value is sustainable," the document added.

The governing body said a decision on selecting the agency would be made on August 14 and they would have only four weeks to deliver their analysis by September 11.

The 2030 World Cup is being jointly hosted by Morocco, Portugal and Spain, while Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay will host one match each to celebrate the tournament's 100th anniversary.

(Reuters)

OPINION

World Cup must be kept out of private hands, says Alonso

AFP
Sydney

Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso said yesterday football must be kept out of private hands and remain "for the people" after FIFA proposed selling a stake in the business operations of the World Cup.

The Spanish World Cup winner backed UEFA's staunch opposition to the plan to create a commercial subsidiary to run FIFA's biggest events and allow private investors to acquire stakes in the company.

"I think that football has to be for the people, not in private hands," Alonso said in Sydney, where the London club are on a pre-season tour.

"And I think that's the way we love it. We have seen a great World Cup, and some things they (should) stay the same way. So it's good to defend the interests from other people."

European football's governing body UEFA said it was ready to boycott the World Cup over the proposal, saying that the sport "cannot be dictated by the expectations of those whose first duty is to maximise financial return".

FIFA vowed yesterday to press ahead and conduct an "open and democratic" consultation with stakeholders, arguing that it could raise up to \$4.2bn.

Alonso, a key cog in Spain's 2010 World Cup-winning team, said "hopefully it won't happen".

Chelsea's manager Xabi Alonso reacts during a press conference in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

"I think that it's the common feeling of football people that we want something that we keep in the hands of everyone, that it's for all the people. So hopefully it won't happen," he said.

"Hopefully, we'll keep the game as attractive and as authentic as we like it, and that's why it creates these emotions, these passions we've seen in the World Cup, in the Champions League, you see in the Premier League, because it's for everyone."

FOCUS

Davies completes CWG double in Glasgow

AFP
Glasgow

Australia's Rose Davies completed a 5,000 and 10,000 metre double in Glasgow as Olympic triple jump champion Thea LaFond finally landed gold in her fourth Commonwealth Games on Thursday.

Davies outgunned teammate Jessica Hull in a shootout over the final 400m after the Australian duo pulled away from Scotland's Megan Keith, who held on for bronze to the delight of the home crowd.

In adding the 5,000m title to her 10,000m crown earlier in the week, Davies becomes the first woman to complete the long distance double in Commonwealth Games history.

LaFond arrived at Glasgow's last Commonwealth Games in 2014 as a teenager.

After bronze in the Gold Coast in 2018 and silver in Birmingham four years ago she finally delivered

a first Commonwealth gold medal for the tiny Caribbean island of Dominica.

"It feels so bittersweet. The sweet part is that I've really been waiting for this. I've now won every colour of Commonwealth Games medal there is, and it feels amazing to be a trailblazer for Dominica," said the 32-year-old.

"The bitter part is that this is probably my last Commonwealth Games. This is where it all started for me, and this is probably where it will end."

Jamaican duo Ackelia Smith and Shantae Foreman completed the triple jump podium.

Devyne Charlton won the women's 100m hurdles gold for Bahamas, beating Jamaican Megan Simmonds into silver with Nigeria's defending champion Tobii Amusan third.

But there was Jamaican joy in the women's discus as Samantha Hall took gold.

There will be no sprint double for 100m men's champion Emmanuel Esem after the Cameroo-



Australia's Rose Davies celebrates after winning the women's 5000m final during the athletics event at the Scotstoun Stadium in Glasgow. (AFP)

nian failed to qualify for the 200m final.

Chukwuebuka Enekwechi of Nigeria won the men's shot put with a throw of 21.07m to dethrone New Zealand's defending champion

Tom Walsh, who was second with England's Scott Lincoln winning bronze.

Zachary Shaw of England won the para-sport T12 100m in 10.89. Canada's Sheriauna Haase won the

women's event in the T47 category.

England savoured a long-awaited win over Australia in the men's 4,000m team pursuit final on the opening day of track cycling at the Sir Chris Hoy velodrome.

Charlie Tanfield was part of the Great Britain team pursuit team nudged into silver by the Australians in the Paris 2024 Olympic final.

The England team of Tanfield, Henry Hobbs, William Tidball and Ethan Vernon trailed at the half-way stage but hauled back to claim gold by over a second.

"I feel like my whole career has been about the team pursuit and it being us versus the Aussies," said Tanfield.

"It feels great. It's a good rivalry and it's really motivating. We've got some young guys coming through now so it's really exciting for the future."

Australia did reign supreme in the women's team pursuit with victory over New Zealand in the final.

The world record went three

times in barely a few minutes in the women's para C4-C5 individual pursuit.

New Zealand's Nicole Murray set a new C5 world record to take bronze before England's Morgan Newberry promptly took almost half a second off that mark to win silver in a new C5 record of 5 mins 05.764 secs.

Tara Neyland of Australia, in the C4 class, then took gold in her own world record time of 4:46.614.

"It took a lot of patience and a lot of perseverance," said Neyland.

"To come away with a world record as well is really special," said Neyland.

Scotland's Neil Fachie is now the hosts' most successful Commonwealth Games athlete of all time after securing his sixth gold medal in the men's tandem B1000m time trial.

England edged a shootout against South Africa 58-54 for a place in the netball semi-finals.

The Red Roses will take on New Zealand in the last four, while Australia face Jamaica.

CRICKET

ECB chief Key refuses to rule out Stokes return

'I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED. ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE WITH BEN'

AFP
London

England cricket chief Rob Key has left the door open for a dramatic international comeback by former Test captain Ben Stokes, who announced his shock retirement in late June.

Key, the managing director of men's cricket for the England and Wales Cricket Board, was speaking a day after the ECB confirmed Stephen Fleming as the new head coach of the Test team.

The appointment of the former New Zealand skipper, alongside a return to the Test captaincy for Joe Root, comes after a turbulent few weeks for England.

First, Stokes announced he was quitting international cricket during play in the third Test against New Zealand - the visitors won the match to clinch the series 2-1.

The Durham all-rounder, 35, had been dropped for the second Test after breaking a team curfew at a London nightclub, the latest in a series of off-field incidents involving England players.

Two weeks later coach Brendon McCullum was axed as the red-ball coach, bringing the curtain down on the "Bazball" era of ultra-attacking Test cricket he had led alongside Stokes.

McCullum, another former New Zealand captain, remains in charge of England's white-ball



teams. Speaking at Lord's yesterday, Key said he would not rule out a headline-grabbing return for Stokes, with a home Ashes series against Australia looming in 2027.

Asked if Fleming had floated the idea, he said: "We haven't got round to that at the moment, but it would be a great story."

Pressed on Stokes giving any indication of a change of heart, Key added: "No, he hasn't but I wouldn't be surprised. Anything's possible with Ben."

Key added: "No (bridges have

been burned)... not at all. Not as far as I'm concerned." Fleming will not arrive in Britain until September, meaning he will not take charge of the three-match Test series against Pakistan, that starts in August. But Key played down concerns over Fleming's delayed start with the Test side.

"My job is to get the best person," he said. "It wasn't a stipulation for any of the candidates that you had to be there for Pakistan."

"Had that been the case, that would have limited the field drastically."



Rob Key

SPOTLIGHT

Britain's Scotney eager to start from scratch

Reuters
London

Ellie Scotney is relishing the prospect of building from the ground up and showing her best at featherweight, after having won everything there was to win at 122 pounds.

The 28-year-old became Britain's youngest undisputed champion in the four-belt era when she beat Mayelli Flores by unanimous decision in April, after which she quickly vacated her belts and announced she would be moving up a division. "It was a weird one because before I even went into that fight I knew that as soon as that was done, I would be moving up," Scotney told Reuters by video call.

"Holding on to 122 pounds was hard but it was for the sole purpose of being undisputed. The fact that I had to go champion to champion to champion to champion, it was like 'once I've done that, what else was there to chase?'"

"I've always been a person that prides themselves on integrity and challenges themselves... I just knew as soon as I stepped out of that ring that it's time to start all over again. That feeling excites me just as much as becoming undisputed."

Scotney said making the weight at 122 pounds had become an increasingly gruelling ordeal, even getting to a point where she required an emergency haircut.

"It should always be hard to make the weight but this time was probably the hardest," she added.

"It came to the last bit where I had to cut my hair. I used to have long hair which got cut, and I'd end up a skinhead if I stayed there I reckon. Now I'm stepping up to featherweight, I believe that will be where you will see the best of me, for sure."

Scotney's first assignment at featherweight is set to come against American Tiara Brown, who defended her WBC title against Hannah Rapp last month.

Pressed on who she might target down the line, Scotney had



no hesitation in naming WBA and WBO champion Amanda Serrano - her Most Valuable Promotions (MVP) stable-mate and a central figure in the trilogy of bouts that helped to propel women's boxing into the mainstream.

"All my focus is on Tiara but of course Amanda Serrano is the name of the division," Scotney said. "That's someone I would love to share the ring with because of who she is. Not just in the ring of course, she's accomplished so much, but she's changed the sport of women's boxing. To share the ring with someone like that, it's about creating legacy, and those are the fights that do that."

WORKING WITH MVP

Scotney, who signed with Jake Paul's MVP in April last year, said the move had restored her self-belief following a testing few years.

"I was told women's boxing is not what it is, and that made me look at getting a job," she said.

"I went from being in that place, to meeting MVP, chatting with (co-founder) Nakisa Bidarian, Jake and realising that no, this is my journey." Paul, the social media star turned prize-fighter and promoter, even pledged to buy Scotney a car should she see off Flores - a promise he honoured.

"I said about getting two trains, a tube and a bus to training and that's just one way," she said.

"I do that twice a day, and he's like 'why can't you drive'? He said if you win, I'll buy you a car, so the whole fight week no one was talking about winning undisputed, they were talking about winning the car. I've got the car but the licence is still to come."

ANNOUNCEMENT

World Boxing lifts restrictions on Russia, anthem to be allowed

AFP
Paris, France

World Boxing has lifted sanctions on Russian athletes, allowing them to compete under the country's flag and with its national anthem played, the sport's Olympic-recognised governing body announced yesterday.

Banned from global sport following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian and Belarusian athletes have been gradually reinstated in certain sports under neutral status.

In early July, the IOC announced it was lifting the suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee and easing some of the restrictions imposed on Russian athletes, who will now be eligible to attempt to qualify for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

"The ExCo (executive committee) accepted that Russian athletes would now take part in World Boxing competitions like boxers from any other national federation," said World Boxing.

"However, World Boxing will strictly monitor the behaviour of Russian delegations during events as



well as compliance with anti-doping protocols," the world body added.

In April, World Boxing had already said it would allow Russian fighters to compete under a neutral banner.

Founded in 2023 by Kazakhstan's Gennady Golovkin, World Boxing is currently recognised by the IOC as the global governing body for the sport.

"Russian boxing is returning to the international stage," Russian Sports Minister Mikhail Degtyarev said in a message posted on Telegram.

"World Boxing has authorised our athletes - across all age categories - to compete in all international events with the national flag and anthem."

US GRAND PRIX PROMOTER EXPECTS RECORD CROWD DESPITE NEW F1 RULES

NEW YORK: The US Grand Prix in Austin, Texas, is set for a record crowd this year despite criticism of Formula One's new rules from some fans and drivers, according to circuit founder and race promoter Bobby Epstein.

The race at the Circuit of the Americas is scheduled for October 25 as the 18th round of the championship.

"It hasn't hurt our ticket sales this year," Epstein told reporters when asked about the new engine era. "We're actually on pace for a record year. We are seeing massive demand and could easily break our prior year record."

"I think a lot of our fans are fans of our event as much as they are of the sport itself, so some of that (criticism) is probably anticipated noise that you have from a year where you have a major overhaul in the rules."

"You're going to have that noise and it'll level itself out. I think most fans are aware of that... I think what we're seeing is mas-



sive interest in the event and so I'm not as focused on the rules and regs that affect the competition."

The official weekend attendance at last year's race in Austin was a sell-out, with an attendance figure estimated at more than 400,000.

Epstein said road improvements and additional lanes to make it easier to get in and out of the track could allow an extra 15,000 to 30,000 people per day. Formula One said this week that six of the 11 rounds held so far this season had drawn record crowds around the world.

TENNIS

De Minaur beats teenager Hewitt in all-Aussie clash

Americans Shelton and women's top seed Pegula advance

AFP
Washington

Defending champion Alex de Minaur powered into the Washington Open quarter-finals with a clinical 6-2, 6-3 victory over fellow Australian Cruz Hewitt.

Men's second seed Ben Shelton also advanced, as did women's top seed Jessica Pegula and No. 2 Elina Svitolina.

Top-seeded De Minaur was always likely to prove too much for 17-year-old qualifier Hewitt - son of Aussie great Lleyton Hewitt - who had only captured his first ATP victory in Tuesday's first round.

The first set threatened to become a demolition as De Minaur raced to a 5-0 lead.

But Hewitt found his feet, breaking back in the sixth game and holding serve before succumbing 6-2.

Cheered on by a crowd that included his famous father, Hewitt started the second set brightly.

But he was broken again on his second service game and could not reel in De Minaur, who warmly embraced the youngster at the net after taking the match.

It was the first head-to-head ATP Tour match between the two, who have known each other for years.

"It was definitely weird," said De Minaur. "I knew I was going to play him on the tour someday, but I didn't actually expect it to be this week.

"It was an amazing feeling. Even all the lead up, seeing all the incredible pictures that we have together and how we've both



Alex de Minaur of Australia returns a shot against Cruz Hewitt of Australia on day four of the DC Open in Washington, DC. (AFP)

grown up. I'm glad I managed to get through, but I'm sure we're going to have many battles in the years to come."

De Minaur next faces American Brandon Nakashima, who upset Czech seventh seed Jakub Mensik 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 6-4.

US home hope Shelton advanced with a gritty 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-4, victory over France's Ugo Humbert.

After handing Humbert the first set with a double fault on set point, Shelton dominated the second.

But the third set was a tense af-

fair and after seizing a break for a 5-4 lead Shelton had to fend off a break point before polishing off the match with a sharply angled serve that Humbert smacked into the net.

"For me, it was all about heart tonight," Shelton said after lining up a meeting with Chile's Alejandro Tabile, a 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) winner over France's Terence Atmane.

Pegula also had to rally from a set down, saying she started her first set with a double fault on set point, Shelton dominated the second.

"I wasn't quite attacking the

ball, and I felt like once I did that, then everything else kind of started to click together," said Pegula, who finished with 42 winners and won 12 of the last 15 games to triumph 3-6, 6-3, 6-0.

Pegula next plays fifth-seeded Anna Kalinskaya, who saved two match points to beat Indonesia's Janice Tjen 1-6, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7).

Ukraine's Svitolina booked her quarter-final berth with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 victory over Uzbekistan's Polina Kudernetova. She'll face rising Philippines star Alexandra Eala for a place in the semi-finals.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Wimbledon champion Noskova leads Czech team in BJK Cup Finals

Reuters
London

Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova and runner-up Karolina Muchova will spearhead Czech Republic's challenge in the Billie Jean King Cup Finals, while hosts China will look to reigning Olympic gold medallist Zheng Qinwen to carry their hopes this year.

Italy will be bolstered by world number 15 Jasmine Paolini as they continue their title defence against China. Italy are eyeing a third consecutive title.

Twice Grand Slam champion Elena Rybakina will be among the big names in action when Kazakhstan take on Spain.

Ukraine, led by Elina Svitolina and Marta Kostyuk, will face Belgium, while the Czechs play Britain in the quarter-finals of the premier women's team tournament.

All ties will be played as best-of-three matches, with two singles matches followed by a doubles.

Matches will be best-of-three tie-break sets. The Finals will be held in the Shenzhen Bay Sports Centre from September 22-27.

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP FINALS TEAMS

Italy: Jasmine Paolini, Elisabetta Cocciaretto, Lucia Bronzetti, Sara Errani, Tyra Grant.

China: Zheng Qinwen, Wang Xiyu, Zhang Shuai, Guo Hanyu, Jiang Xinyu.

Ukraine: Elina Svitolina, Marta Kostyuk, Oleksandra Oliynykova, Dayana Yastremska, Lyudmyla Kichenok.

Belgium: Hanne Vandewinkel, Jeline Vandromme, Greet Minnen, Magali Kempen.

Kazakhstan: Elena Rybakina, Yulia Putintseva, Anna Danilina, Zhibek Kulambayeva, Sonja Zhiyenbayeva.

Spain: Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, Kaitlin Quevedo, Marina Bassols Ribera, Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Czech Republic: Linda Noskova, Karolina Muchova, Marie Bouzkova, Katerina Siniakova.

Britain: Katie Boulter, Harriet Dart, Mika Stojsavljevic, Jodie Burrage.

FOOTBALL

Al Duhail's Dutch camp gathers momentum



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail are continuing their preparations for the 2026-2027 season with a camp in Amsterdam, the capital city of Netherlands (July 20-August 10) as they gear up for domestic and regional competitions.

The team is undergoing intense training sessions both on and off the field under Algerian coach Djamel Belmadi and technical staff to be ready physically, tactically and technically for the long and challenging season ahead.

During the camp held as part of the team's preparatory programme, Al Duhail will also be playing friendlies against Wooter Academy of the Netherlands, and Saudi Arabian clubs Al Taawoun FC and Al Fayha SC.

Al Duhail finished the 2025-2026 Doha Bank Stars League with a tally of 33 points (nine wins, six draws and seven losses), securing

them a berth in Gulf Club Champions League. They scored 40 goals and conceded only 27 goals to have the best defence in the tournament.

At the season-ending Qatar Football Association Awards, Al Duhail's Mubarak Shanan was nominated in the Best Under-23 Player category.

Al Duhail have strengthened their squad for the new season with the addition of goalkeeper Fahad Younis and forward Oumar Sekou.

They join a group of prominent players such as Almoez Ali, Assim Madibo, Boubakary Soumare, Adil Boulbina, Lucas Silva Melo (Tuta), Jean Castelletto, Edmilson Junior, Karim Boudiaf, Ibrahima Bamba, Sultan Al Breik and goalkeeper Salah Zachariah.

Al Duhail will open their 2026-2027 Doha Bank Stars League campaign against Al Saliya at the Al Bayt Stadium on August 21, aiming for a strong performance and a return to the top in the new season.

SWIMMING

Kharun tops Dressel for 100m butterfly US title

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

Ilya Kharun ran down world record-holder Caeleb Dressel on the final lap to win the 100m butterfly in 50.05sec at the US Swimming Championships in Irvine, California, on Thursday.

Kharun clocked the fastest time in the world this year to seize his second straight victory over Dressel this week, having bested the nine-time Olympic gold medallist in the 50m butterfly on Wednesday.

Dressel, who set the 100m fly world record of 49.45 on the way

to Olympic gold in Tokyo in 2021, led at the turn but couldn't hold off Kharun - a bronze medallist for Canada at the 2024 Paris Olympics who is changing his swimming allegiance to the United States this year.

"I knew Dressel was going to be always up there, but I knew that if I stuck with him I could get him at the end," Kharun told broadcaster NBC.

Ilya Kharun (right) celebrates after winning the men's 50 meter butterfly final with Jake Llyod at the Toyota National Championships in Irvine, California. (AFP)



GOLF

Ryu recovers from bad start to take halfway lead at British Open

Reuters
Royal Lytham, Lancashire

Favourite Ryu Hae-ran moved into the halfway lead at the Women's British Open after recovering from a rocky start to her second round to post a two-under 69 and reach seven under for the tournament at a sun-baked Royal Lytham yesterday.

The world number three Ryu, bidding for her third successive major triumph after winning the PGA Championship and this month's Evian Championship, bogeyed her third hole and double-bogeyed the fifth to slip back.

But the South Korean responded superbly and was flawless after that with five birdies, including one on the 18th that gave her the outright lead heading into the weekend.

Ryu leads by a stroke from Japan's Shiho Kuwaki who went out early and carded a solid one-under 70 to be the long time clubhouse leader on a day marked by extremely slow play with the afternoon groups taking well over five hours.

Defending champion Miyu Yamashita was packing her bags for home after a quadruple bogey at the par-four 18th meant she missed the cut with a second-round 77.

Overnight leader Jeeno Thitikul of Thailand went round in nine more shots than her stunning first-round 64 as a two-

over 73 left her tied with American Yealimi Noh, two shots back.

"I didn't hit close to the pins as I did yesterday. Maybe the pin positions were kind of hard," she said by way of explanation for her relative struggle.

"Just going to have to be patient at the weekend."

World number one Nelly Korda, like Ryu bidding for a third major this season, hit back after an opening-round 73 with a six-birdie 68 putting her in the mix for the weekend at one under along with 2024 champion Lydia Ko of New Zealand.

England's world number five Lottie Woad maintained her steady progress with a level-par 71 although a bogey at the 18th, only her third in two rounds, where she drove into a deep pot bunker, left her five shots adrift of Ryu.

Woad is trying to become the first home winner since Georgia Hall, also at Lytham, in 2018.

She was in a group of eight players packed together on two-under, including compatriot Charley Hull.

Japan's Minami Katsu and American duo Lucy Li and Jing Yan are also on two-under after all shooting three-under 68s.

ZACH JOHNSON GRABS FIRST-ROUND LEAD AT PORTUGAL INVITATIONAL

PGA Tour Champions rookie Zach Johnson carded an 8-under-par 64 yesterday to take the first-round lead at the Portugal Invitational in Algarve.



South Korea's Haeran Ryu watches a drive from the 4th tee on the second day of the British Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, England, yesterday. (AFP)

Johnson posted nine birdies and one bogey at The Els Club Vilamoura to build a one-shot lead against Slovakia's Rory Sabbatini, who is in solo second place after a bogey-free round with seven birdies.

Alex Cejka of Germany, Charlie Wi of South Korea, Padraig Harrington of Ireland and Mikael Lundberg of Sweden are tied for third place at 6-under-par, with

six golfers another shot behind in a tie for seventh place.

Johnson, 50, already has won three times on the senior tour this season, including two of his last three tournaments at the Principal Charity Classic and Kaulig Companies Championship. He finished T7 at last week's Senior Open.

"I would argue it's the best tour in the world," he said. "I'm enjoying it. I would

love to have my family out more, but I know my wife's enjoying it as well. She likes to watch golf and take a nap, so that works out well."

Johnson opened with birdies at the first three holes, suffered his only bogey at the par-4 13th hole and grabbed the clubhouse lead with another birdie at the par-4 18th. He birdied all five par-5s on the course.

"It was just solid," Johnson said. "There were very few stressful situations. I hit an errant tee shot on 13, just complete brain meltdown, just lack of focus on the tee shot, and it cost me a bogey. But other than that, it was a very simple day."

Sabbatini started on the back nine and also played the par-5 holes in 5-under.

"The par-5s are scoring opportunities but you still have to be very cautious because if you try and be overly aggressive on them, they tend to bite you pretty hard," Sabbatini said.

"So you've got to try and remain within yourself on those holes and give yourself opportunities, but be prepared that if you try and take off a little bit more than you should, it's probably going to result in either a par if you're lucky and sometimes some bogeys."

This is the first PGA Tour Champions tournament ever held on Portuguese soil.

Sixty-four of the 78 golfers shot even par or better yesterday. In addition to Harrington, the field includes World Golf Hall of Famers Retief Goosen, Bernhard Langer and Colin Montgomerie.

LOSS

AC Milan ‘in tears’ at death of legend Baresi

AFP
Rome

Italian defender Franco Baresi, the captain of AC Milan in the 1980s and 1990s when they won three European Cups and six Italian league titles, has died at the age of 66, the club announced yesterday.

“Milan is in tears following the passing of Franco Baresi. His example and integrity will be forever etched into the Club’s DNA, just as his iconic number 6 shirt is,” AC Milan, of which Baresi became honorary vice-president in 2020, wrote on X.

“We must be strong and gather every bit of energy, even at this saddest of times.

“We lost Franco only a few months after his last public appearance in a packed San Siro, at the Milan Winter Olympics opening ceremony, an event on the world stage he helped make unforgettable.

“In memory of Franco, we stand united, knowing he’ll guide and

push us throughout our Rossoneri journey. Forever. Because Baresi is forever.”

A World Cup winner with Italy in 1982 and a finalist at the 1994 World Cup, Baresi is regarded as one of the greatest sweepers in football history.

AC Milan did not specify the cause of Baresi’s death. He had undergone surgery in August 2025 to remove a lung nodule.

“It will take me a little time to get all my strength back,” he said shortly afterwards.

Born in Lombardy in May 1960, Baresi joined AC Milan’s youth teams in 1974, before moving up to the first team in 1978 ahead of his 18th birthday.

He then became a starter at 18 and captain at 22, noticed for his technique, anticipation and tackling skills, as well as his notable leadership qualities.

Baresi went on to form, alongside Paolo Maldini, Mauro Tassotti and Alessandro Costacurta, a defence feared by every striker in Europe.

He retired in 1997 after 719



A file photo shows AC Milan’s Italian honorary vice-president and former player Franco Baresi arrives for the draw ceremony for the UEFA Champions League in Istanbul on August 25, 2022. Baresi died at the age of 66 yesterday. (AFP)

matches with the Rossoneri, a record surpassed only by Maldini.

“Today I feel the same thing as

to when for one reason or another you were unable to be on the pitch with us,” said Maldini.

FOCUS

Maresca aims to bring new concepts to first City match

Maresca will lead City in a pre-season friendly against Inter today

AFP
Hong Kong

Manchester City manager Enzo Maresca said yesterday people may be quick to judge his side, as he prepared for his first game in charge since succeeding Pep Guardiola.

The Italian formally took over last month following the departure of the legendary Catalan, who steered the club to 20 trophies during a supremely successful decade at the Etihad Stadium.

Maresca will lead City out for the first time in a pre-season friendly against Inter Milan in Hong Kong today.

“We’re going to be judged, always - not just tomorrow,” the former Chelsea and Leicester boss said at a news conference.

“We started 10 days ago, all together, we are introducing some new concepts, so it’s also important tomorrow to see something.

“I don’t believe in copy and paste. I think every manager (is) different... so it’s my target, my duty, to try to introduce some new ideas.”

Several of City’s World Cup stars have not travelled with the squad to Hong Kong, the first stop on an Asia tour that will also include two games in Seoul.

Among them are striker Erling Haaland - last season’s Premier League top scorer - and Rodri, who captained Spain to World Cup victory this month.

The midfielder is recovering from minor back surgery and has been rumoured to be a transfer target for Real Madrid. Maresca dismissed the links as “speculation” and said he and the club hierarchy had not had “any conversations just focused on Rodri”.



Manchester City’s manager Enzo Maresca gestures during the open training session ahead of their friendly match against Inter Milan for the Asahi Super Dry Trophy at Kai Tak Stadium in Hong Kong. (AFP)

tion” and said he and the club hierarchy had not had “any conversations just focused on Rodri”.

“The main focus for him when the season finished was the World Cup. Now he is enjoying some rest. Every manager in the world wants Rodri because he’s a top player, so it’s important for me, for the club, for everyone, but now he needs

his holiday.” Inter announced the signing on Thursday of former City defender John Stones on a two-year deal.

The 32-year-old left the Manchester club when his contract expired at the end of last month, and helped England to a third-placed finish at the World Cup. “For us, having the possibility to get John

Stones (as) a free agent, it’s important,” Inter head coach Cristian Chivu said on Friday. “It’s important for the quality he brings, it’s important for the personality, for the charisma he has, for the experience that he has shown.

“It’s one defender added to our group of defenders who will definitely improve the department.”

SPOTLIGHT

Chelsea’s Palmer says World Cup snub has motivated him

AFP
Sydney

Chelsea playmaker Cole Palmer said yesterday he has a point to prove this season after missing out on England’s World Cup squad, while hailing new manager Xabi Alonso as a “breath of fresh air”.

Palmer was a high-profile omission from Thomas Tuchel’s World Cup line-up, despite playing a major role in England’s run to the final of Euro 2024.

He ultimately paid the price for a poor season at Chelsea and said being overlooked hurt.

“It’s like anything, if someone tells you’re essentially not good enough to get in the squad, then you’re going to think, ‘all right’ and try and go extra harder,” he said in Sydney on Chelsea’s pre-season tour.

Painful as it was to miss out on England’s run to a third-place finish, Palmer enjoyed a rare seven-week summer break, which has him “fresh” and itching to get going again.

After a disappointing 10th-

place finish last season, Chelsea has a new manager in Spanish great Alonso who Palmer is excited about.

“Him and his staff have been good. You know, a breath of fresh air for us players with his ideas and stuff. So yeah, we’re enjoying it,” he said.

Palmer is also ecstatic about Chelsea signing attacking midfielder Morgan Rogers from Aston Villa for a British record £117mn (\$157mn).

The two are close friends and Alonso said this week he expected the pair to “link really well”.

“Everyone knows how good he is, and obviously he’s one of my best friends. So I’m very happy about it,” said Palmer of Rogers.

“I think we’re two different players. He’s more physical than me, on and off the ball. He likes to drive with it. I like to play passes, so I think we can play well together.”

Chelsea began Alonso’s reign on Tuesday by beating Western Sydney Wanderers 6-4, and will meet fellow English Premier League side Tottenham in Sydney yesterday.



Chelsea’s player Cole Palmer reacts during a press conference in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

HOWE RESIGNS AS NEWCASTLE BOSS TO ‘RECHARGE’

Eddie Howe confirmed yesterday he had stepped down as Newcastle manager to “recharge and take a break” following a turbulent end to his five-year spell at St James’ Park. Howe revitalised a club that had struggled for decades, securing a first major trophy in 56 years by winning the League Cup in 2025.

The former Bournemouth boss also led Newcastle to Champions League qualification in 2023 and 2025. But the Magpies struggled to a 12th-place finish in the Premier League last season and have endured a difficult summer transfer window.

Howe oversaw Wednesday’s 4-1 pre-season friendly defeat at Bristol City and it emerged hours later that he was set to leave.

Newcastle announced the Englishman’s departure on Friday, saying they had accepted his decision to step down and thanking him for



his “extraordinary contribution”. “After a period of personal reflection, I have decided that now is the right time for me to step away from my role as head coach of Newcastle United,” Howe said in a club statement.

“After nearly five years of giving my life, heart and soul into the club with unrelenting energy, I feel that it is in the best interests of both myself and the club to step away, recharge and take a break.” Howe, 48, said managing Newcastle had been the “privilege of my lifetime” and that leaving had been a tough decision to take. German manager Matthias Jaissle, currently in charge of Saudi club

Al-Ahli, is favourite to take over from Howe at St James’ Park. Howe replaced Steve Bruce in November 2021 and won the League Cup in March last year - beating Liverpool in the final to clinch the club’s first major silverware since 1969. But hampered by star striker Alexander Isak’s protracted move to Liverpool at the start of last season, Howe came under pressure as his team lost 17 of their 38 Premier League games. Newcastle reached the Champions League last 16 but were humbled 8-3 on aggregate by Barcelona.

The club have since been depleted by the close-season departures of Italy midfielder Sandro Tonali to Tottenham and England forward Anthony Gordon to Barcelona. Speculation continues over the future of Newcastle captain Bruno Guimaraes, who has been linked with a move to Premier League champions Arsenal.

MUDRYK CLEARED TO PLAY AFTER DOPING BAN APPEAL

Chelsea winger Mykhailo Mudryk has been cleared to resume his career after the Football Association and the World Anti-Doping Agency “resolved his appeal” against a ban for failing a doping test.

Mudryk was suspended for four years after failing a 2024 drug test that revealed the presence of a low concentration of meldonium, a prohibited substance. The Ukraine international filed an appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport and changes to WADA procedures in the interim mean that had his failed test produced the same result now, charges would not have been brought. “Changes have been made, which, while not retroactive, mean that if Mr Mudryk’s sample was collected today, the concentration of meldonium in the sample would not have been reported and no anti-doping rule

violations would have resulted,” the FA said in a statement.

“Further to that development and to other circumstances of the case, the FA and Mr Mudryk have now - with the agreement of WADA - resolved the appeal proceedings.

“As a part of the agreement, Mr Mudryk accepted that he had committed the ADRVs charged and acceded to a period of ineligibility equal to the time served at the date of the agreement.

“Mr Mudryk is no longer ineligible and may return to competition with immediate effect.”

Mudryk, who hasn’t played since November 2024, joined Chelsea from Shakhtar Donetsk for £62mn (\$83mn) in 2023.

The 25-year-old struggled to make an impact for the west Londoners prior to his ban, but will now have a chance to impress new Blues boss Xabi Alonso.

“From the outset, this has been an extremely difficult period for Misha, both professionally and personally, and we are pleased that the matter has now reached a conclusion which allows him to return to football with immediate effect.” Chelsea said in a statement. “Misha has consistently maintained that he never knowingly or intentionally used a prohibited substance and did not know how traces of the substance entered his system.

“Throughout this process he has conducted himself professionally and with resilience during what has undoubtedly been one of the most challenging periods of his career.

“We know how much this opportunity to return means to him. Our focus now is on supporting Misha’s reintegration into the squad and helping him resume his career.”