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FOCUS

Infantino faces crisis as UEFA, CONCACAF lose confidence

FIFA scraps plan to sell a stake in World Cup, Asian body chief urges transparent consultation on initiatives

Reuters
Paris

FIFA President Gianni Infantino is under unprecedented fire after regional confederations UEFA and CONCACAF said yesterday they had lost confidence in his leadership following his abandoned plan to sell a stake in World Cup commercial rights.

The dramatic fallout from Infantino's scrapped \$4.2bn proposal has exposed growing unease within world soccer over his leadership style, with European governing body UEFA leading a chorus of criticism that could complicate his re-election hopes.

FIFA's proposal had triggered a fierce backlash from regional confederations who said they were blindsided by Infantino's plans to sell stakes to private investors in a new unit that would run FIFA events, including the World Cup.

Football officials are now demanding greater oversight of decisions that could reshape the governance and commercial future of the sport.

UEFA, whose 55 members had unanimously rejected the proposal earlier this week, declared FIFA's retreat a "victory for the whole game" while adding that the "task of rebuilding trust in FIFA" had only just begun.

"The current FIFA leadership has not only lost UEFA's confidence but also that of many other members of the football family," UEFA said in a statement.

"UEFA thanks all the fans, leagues, clubs, players, individuals, associations and confederations that opposed the scheme, alongside the many Prime Ministers, Heads of State and commentators who have demonstrated to the FIFA President that football is not for sale," it said in a statement.

"We cannot keep going on like this with secret schemes on fast-track timescales, cooked up by



faceless individuals and of dubious benefit to the game. We must identify those responsible and hold them to account."

North America, Central America and the Caribbean confederation CONCACAF said the proposal was advanced outside all established governance processes, with no transparency, consultation or due process. "A proposal of this magnitude does not reach that stage by accident. It is a symptom of leadership that has stopped putting football first," it said.

"This recent unilateral and egregious act of poor governance and leadership follows a pattern of missteps and similar behaviour. A comprehensive reckoning with this presidency is imperative."

'SHABBY, BACK-ROOM OPAQUE DEAL'

The backlash raised questions about Infantino's political capital as he prepares to seek another term in office.

UEFA reminded Infantino about the promises he made when he was elected FIFA president in 2016, including pledges to run the governing body transparently and to treat FIFA's funds as belonging to its member associations. "On both these promises, he has failed to deliver. The shabby, back-room, opaque deal he hatched and tried to force through was anything but transparent," UEFA added.

"And with reserves standing at over \$5bn, he has also failed to use associations' money for the benefit of the game.

"UEFA will begin work immediately with partners and stakeholders all over the world and right across the game to propose a new way of distributing resources through the existing FIFA Forward programme"

FIFA and Infantino declined to comment on UEFA's statement.

The Dutch FA said the process had led to a "fundamental breach



of trust" in Infantino, while German football president Bernd Neuendorf said the Swiss official had "acted unilaterally and without transparency", failing to operate in the sport's best interests.

Norwegian Football Federation President Lise Klaveness said the "framework of international football cooperation was unnecessarily put at risk in pursuit of individual interests"

STORM OF OPPOSITION

Infantino's plan, announced on Tuesday, quickly ran into a storm of opposition from regional confederations, who complained they had not been consulted on a move that could alter the commercial structure of world football. Following the backlash, Infantino said world soccer's governing body had abandoned the plans after listening "carefully to all the views".

Asian Football Confederation President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa yesterday wel-

QFA backs Infantino's decision to drop World Cup investment plan

The Qatar Football Association (QFA) has expressed its full support for FIFA President Gianni Infantino's decision not to proceed with the proposed FIFA Forward Enterprise initiative, describing the move as one that serves the best interests of the global football community.

In a statement, QFA President HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani said the decision reflects a commitment to safeguarding the stability of world football and preserving the unity of FIFA's member associations.

While noting that the proposal contained ideas worthy of further examination, Sheikh Hamad stressed that the immediate priority is maintaining the cohesion of national associations. "Despite the proposal including ideas that deserve consideration, ensuring the continuity and unity of all FIFA member associations must remain the immediate priority during this period," he said. The QFA reiterated its backing for Infantino's continued efforts to develop football globally.

(QNA)

comed FIFA's reversal. Bahrain's Sheikh Salman said he expected that "any initiative that has the potential to impact global football will be presented and discussed with the Confederations, the FIFA Council, Member Associations and other stakeholders in a timely, transparent and meaningful manner."

"The future of global football must always be shaped through proper consultation, collective dialogue and respect for the established governance structures of our game."

Football Australia Chairman Anter Isaac struck a similar note, backing innovation while warning against bypassing core principles such as integrity, independence, good governance, transparency, meaningful consultation and due process.

INFANTINO'S RE-ELECTION HOPES DAMAGED, SAY EXPERTS

The controversy comes at an awkward moment for Infantino, who said in April that he intended to seek re-election for a fourth term as FIFA president.

Since taking over from Sepp Blatter in 2016, he has been re-

elected unopposed twice and appeared firmly in control of the organisation. While his re-election for the 2027-31 term had appeared a formality, experts told Reuters the backlash against the failed proposal had exposed dissatisfaction among some FIFA members and could complicate his path ahead of next March's FIFA Congress in Morocco.

"He's obviously been kind of egomaniacal in everything that he's done. I know that he's rubbed many of the member associations the wrong way with some of his decisions," Bob Dorfman, a sports marketing analyst, said.

The speed of the turnaround has been particularly striking, coming less than two weeks after Infantino was toasting the most commercially successful World Cup in history.

"As close as two weeks ago, he's riding on top of the world, the most successful sports mega event in the history of this planet," said economist Victor Matheson, a sports business expert at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts.

"And just two weeks later, he's fighting for his political life."

SPOTLIGHT

Sarabia hails rising standards of QSL

Al Arabi's international star **Pablo Sarabia** has highlighted the Qatar Stars League (QSL) continued progress and the importance of maintaining that momentum.

"I think the league is constantly raising its level, in terms of the quality of the players and coaches. Everything is moving in the right direction and improving all the time, and I think that's the key to football in Qatar. We can't stop, we have to keep working in the right direction. That's why I'm very happy to be here and to be part of this project," he said in an interview with Portugal Football Summit Podcast, presented by Pedro Pinto.

The Spaniard explained that adapting to the QSL was a smooth process and praised the welcoming environment both on and off the pitch.

"It was very easy to adapt to Doha Bank Stars League because everyone is very welcoming and always tries to help us, whether it's with training, the gym, or family life. Everything was very easy from the moment I arrived. I recommend that anyone who has the opportunity to come here and experience the country. It's a special place with a new culture for me, and my family and I are very happy



to be here with the team," he said.

The Spanish international also underlined the positive impact that Spanish players and football culture can have on the development of the competition.

"I think the Spanish players and the Spanish culture in sport, in general, are at a very high level. Because of this, we can help build very good things in the Doha Bank Stars League and in football in general. The concept that we had when we grew up with the Spanish teams and the culture in Spain is very helpful for football in general. Because of this, it is one of the keys to

the success that we have had so far."

Looking ahead, he praised the work being done to strengthen Qatari football.

"They are working very hard with the federation and the national team and I think that's the key to success in the future. It's not just about the people who were born abroad, but also the Qatari people. You have the example with the foreigners, but we have to increase the level of the Qatari people. I think the mix of those two things is the key to success in the next three, four, five, or even ten years in Qatari football."

BASKETBALL

Qatar drawn in Group C with China, and Iran for FIBA U-18 Asia Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The draw for the FIBA U18 Asian Cup placed Qatar in Group C alongside China, Iran, and Sri Lanka, setting up a challenging campaign for the young Qatari team in the continental tournament scheduled to take place in Ahmedabad, India, from August 13 to 23, 2026.

The draw presents Qatar with a major test in the opening round, facing three teams of diverse styles and traditions. China and Iran stand out as two of Asia's traditional basketball powerhouses, while Sri Lanka enters the competition aiming to achieve positive results.

Qatar will open its campaign against Iran on August 14, followed by a clash with China on August 16, before concluding the group stage against Sri Lanka on August 18.

All teams will rest on August 19 ahead of the knockout rounds.

Qatar's participation comes after securing qualification



through the Gulf U18 Championship held in Doha, where the team finished second with seven points and claimed the silver medal, booking its ticket to the Asian finals behind Bahrain, who topped the standings with a perfect record of eight points.

The Qatari team impressed in the Gulf qualifiers, recording three consecutive victories: defeating Saudi Arabia 80-76, overcoming Kuwait 81-53, and sealing qualification with an 80-67 win over Oman. In the final match to determine first place, Qatar fell to Bahrain 45-77, finishing runner-up and earning silver in a performance that highlighted the progress of Qatari youth basketball.

Group stage matches will run from August 13 to 18, followed by the knockout rounds. The quarterfinal qualification stage begins on August 20, with the quarterfinals on August 21, semifinals and classification matches on August

22, and the final and third-place playoff on August 23.

Beyond the continental title, the championship serves as a qualifier for the 2027 FIBA U19 Basketball World Cup in the Czech Republic, with the top four teams earning direct berths.

Qatar enters the Asian Championship with ambitions to build on its Gulf success and showcase its talent against the continent's elite.

QATAR SQUAD: Abdullah Yassin, Tamim Ashraf Abu Issa, Mishal Khalid Al-Mughni, Muath Omar Mousa, Azzam Mohammed Yakin, Ziyad Tamer Al-Johari, Mohammed Saeed Badri, Mahmoud Tamer Ibrahim, Amer Ibrahim Mousa, Owen Ikina, Youssef Walid Abdelqader, and Shahi Mohammed.

THE GROUPS:
Group A: Australia, Chinese Taipei, Philippines, Thailand
Group B: New Zealand, Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria
Group C: Qatar, China, Iran, Sri Lanka
Group D: Korea, Japan, India, Kazakhstan

CRICKET

Captain Root won't 'rip up' England's Bazball blueprint

'THERE'S SO MUCH GOOD STUFF THAT BEN AND BRENDON DID'

AFP
London

England Test captain Joe Root plans to keep faith with the aggressive 'Baz-ball' tactics used by his predecessor Ben Stokes as he starts his second spell in the role. Root was appointed as skipper following Stokes' shock retirement from international duty during England's Test series defeat to New Zealand in June.

The 35-year-old previously captaining England between 2017 and 2022 and took the role on an interim basis when Stokes was dropped for one Test against New Zealand.

The Yorkshire batsman is planning to tweak the approach of Stokes and Brendon McCullum, who was sacked as England's Test coach after the New Zealand matches, rather than start from scratch.

Root will lead England in the forthcoming Test series against Pakistan, with former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming arriving to replace McCullum later this year.

"It'll be trying to continue some of the good things we have done over that period (since 2022) and not finding ourselves back to where we were before Baz and Ben took over," Root said in an ECB interview yesterday.

"Evolving and tweaking things to get us to where we want to be and really competing against the top nations consistently over a long period of time.

"The wrong thing to do would



England's Joe Root looks to the sky as rain stops play on the second day of the second Test against New Zealand at The Oval in London on June 18, 2026. (AFP)

be to completely rip everything up that we've done over the last four years.

"There's so much good stuff that Ben and Brendon did and changed the way we look at the game and see the game."

McCullum inspired Stokes to make England play with flair and power, but that approach did not work against Australia and India.

England failed to win a Test series against either of their main rivals in the Stokes-McCullum

era, a dismal run culminating in an Ashes thrashing in Australia.

That series and England's recent clash with New Zealand were both marred by issues involving players drinking, with Stokes and Gus Atkinson left out of the second Test against the Black Caps after breaking a team curfew in a nightclub incident.

Root, a more conservative figure than the brash Stokes, plans to be stricter in his time as captain, without indicating if that will include

off-field behaviour. "I've benefited hugely from that as a player so to think we have to start all over again would be wrong. But there are areas we want to sharpen up a little bit and become a little bit sterner with," he said. "The last four years is the most fun I've had in cricket and most of that is down to the way they got me to see the game. Clearly the last little while is fresh in everyone's minds but you're looking at a four-year period where we did a lot of good things."

COMMONWEALTH GAMES

Bell cruises to gold medal, Pathirage tops javelin field



Winner England's Georgia Hunter Bell celebrates with relatives following her victory in the women's 800m final during the athletics event at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland. (AFP)



Sri Lanka's Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage celebrates after winning the men's javelin throw final at the Commonwealth Games being held in Glasgow, Scotland, on Saturday. (Reuters)

AFP
Glasgow

Georgia Hunter Bell made the most of the absence of Keely Hodgkinson to cruise to 800m Commonwealth gold Friday as Sri Lanka's Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage stunned India's Neeraj Chopra to win javelin gold.

World indoor champion and an Olympic bronze medallist at 1500m, Hunter Bell was in a class of her own at the shorter distance in Glasgow to claim gold for England.

Olympic 800m champion Hodgkinson was one of a number of high-profile athletes who decided to skip the Commonwealths in favour of next month's European championships in Birmingham.

Kenyan world champion Lilian Odora took silver ahead of Australia's Sarah Billings.

"My first ever Commonwealth Games, it's my first ever Commonwealth Games gold, first outdoor gold medal as well. It really means so much to me," said Hunter Bell.

"I had a really good attitude today. It's really strange being an athlete because you can doubt yourself a lot, like through the rounds you've got to stay focused, you've got to be aware but you've also got to be confident."

The javelin was billed a showdown between Chopra and Pakistan's Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem.

But it was Pathirage, who honed his javelin power as a prodigious young cricket bowler,



Winner Jamaica's Sanique Walker celebrates after competing in the women's 400m hurdles final in Glasgow. (AFP)

who stormed to victory by nearly four metres with a best effort of 89.75.

Chopra took silver ahead of compatriot Yash Vir Singh, but Nadeem was well down in ninth.

South Africa's Sinesipho Dambile broke the 20-second barrier to take 200m gold ahead of Nigeria's Udodi Chudi Onwuzurike and Jamaican Christopher Taylor.

Adaejah Hodge of the British Virgin Islands stormed to gold in the women's 200m.

Grenada's Lindon Victor made it three consecutive Commonwealth golds in the decathlon, matching English great Daley Thompson who won three golds between 1978 and 1986.

Nigeria's Ezekiel Nathaniel, the third-fastest athlete in the world this year, won the men's 400m hurdles title.

Jamaica's Sanique Walker needed a new personal best of 54 seconds flat to win women's 400m hurdles gold.

New Zealand's Eliza McCartney upset Australia's Nina Kennedy to win the women's pole vault.

Both women successfully cleared 4.65 metres, but the Kiwi took the title having made fewer failures at the previous heights.

TUVALU'S BIZARRE FIRST MEDAL

Australia picked up three more golds on the second day of track cycling.

Oliver Bleddyn won the men's 4,000m individual pursuit, Blake Agnoletto edged the elimination race, while Georgia Baker took the women's 10km scratch race for her fifth Commonwealth gold medal. There were also two more golds for Wales at the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome.

Anna Morris won the women's individual pursuit, while Emma Finucane outgunned England's Sophie Capewell in the women's sprint final.

The tiny Pacific Ocean island of Tuvalu secured their first ever Commonwealth medal in bizarre circumstances.

Tarona Taafaki lost her first fight in the women's 75kg division to India's Lovlina Borgohain on Friday, losing every round on all three of the judges' cards.

But because there were only five entrants, Taafaki had received a bye to the last four, meaning she was automatically guaranteed at least a bronze medal.

CYCLING

Wiebes claims Tour de France Femmes yellow jersey in opening stage



Lorena Wiebes celebrates as she crosses the finish line to win stage 1 of the Tour de France Femmes in Lausanne yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Lausanne

Lorena Wiebes sprinted to victory on the opening stage of the Tour de France Femmes in Lausanne yesterday to claim the race leader's yellow jersey.

The 27-year-old Dutch rider beat Mauritian Kim Le Court into second with European champion Demi Vollering third.

Sprint specialist Wiebes, a two-time former European champion, leads the overall standings by four seconds from Le Court and six seconds to Vollering thanks to bonus seconds on the line.

This was Wiebes' 10th Tour stage victory overall and the 132nd victory of her career.

Amongst the likely overall contenders, Vollering stole a march on

some of her rivals by taking four bonus seconds on the line.

That gave her an advantage over the last two winners of this race, Pauline Ferrand-Prevot and Kasia Niewiadoma, who finished eighth and ninth respectively in the same time as the stage winner.

Other potential contenders, Paula Blasi and Anna van der Breggen conceded an extra eight seconds to Vollering, coming home in 12th and 13th.

Four riders had escaped up the road early on in the 138km stage around Lausanne.

Czech Nikola Noskova, Spaniard Idoia Eraso, Dutch rider Maud Rijnbeek and Frenchwoman Oceane Mahe built up a maximum lead of six minutes but they were reeled in 6km from the finish.

Today's second stage remains in Switzerland and is a hilly 147.9km from Aigle to Geneva.

FOCUS

Evenepoel wins record 4th Clasica San Sebastian

AFP
San Sebastian, Spain

Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel powered back from a late puncture to beat Richard Carapaz in a two-man sprint yesterday to win a record fourth Clasica San Sebastian.

Evenepoel was forced to switch bikes on a climb 50km from home but showed all the power that brought him the world and Olympic time-trial titles to rejoin the leaders with 33km remaining.

The Belgian then attacked his fellow leaders on the final short Murgil climb, with only Carapaz able to follow.

Evenepoel had enough left in the tank to win by a bike length in downtown San Sebastian as he made history in the 221km Basque one-day classic.

"It was the most difficult one of

all four," said the 26-year-old, describing it as a beautiful day.

"I had to be patient. I have to thank my team for all the work, of course," he said of his Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe teammates and their efforts to shepherd him to the final hill.

Carapaz won the King of the mountains polka-dot jersey at the recent Tour de France while Evenepoel finished second overall to Tadej Pogacar at the Grand Boucle.

Time-trial specialist Evenepoel is also the reigning Olympic road race champion and said he would now turn his attention to trying to reclaim the world road race title he won in 2022.

"First, what is on my mind is some recovery, some rest, and then I'm going to build up to try and become world champion," he said.

Reigning two-time world champion Pogacar will also be in Canada to defend his title on September 27.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Fit-again skipper Litton boosts Bangladesh squad for Australia Tests

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh received a boost yesterday as experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Litton Das joined the squad for two Tests in Australia after recovering from a calf injury.

Litton was added to the squad for the first Test in Darwin on August 13-17, the Bangladesh Cricket Board said.

The 31-year-old had been sidelined since June with a left calf injury and was initially ruled out of the opening Test of the two-match series.

His return provides timely reinforcement for Bangladesh, who have been hit by injury ahead of their first Test tour of Australia in 23 years.

Fast bowler Nahid Rana has been ruled out of the series with a side strain, while left-arm seamer Shoriful Islam was not selected for the opening Test because of a hamstring injury.

Bangladesh will warm up for the Tests with match against a Cricket



Australia XI in Darwin from August 6-8. The second and final Test will be played in Mackay from August 22-26. This will be the first series between the two teams in Australia in 23 years.

SQUAD

Najmul Hossain Shanto (Captain), Soumya Sarkar, Shadman Islam, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Mominul Haque Showrab, Mushfiqur Rahim, Amite Hasan, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz (Vice Captain), Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Syed Khaled Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain Chowdhury, Musfik Hasan, Litton Kumer Das.

GOLF

Noh opens 3-shot lead at Women's British Open

The young American on the brink of maiden major triumph

Reuters
Royal Lytham, Lancashire

American Yealimi Noh moved to the brink of a breakthrough major title after carding a two-under-par 69 to take a three-shot lead after the third round of the Women's British Open at Royal Lytham yesterday.

Noh produced a composed display down the stretch, playing the back nine in three under par before closing with a par at the last to finish at seven under overall.

The 25-year-old will take a three-shot advantage into today's final round as she chases her maiden major championship.

A group of five players share second place on four under, including Japan's Shiho Kuwaki and South Korea's Haeran Ryu, who both closed with pars despite difficult rounds.

World number two Jeeno Thitikul, American Lucy Li and Germany's Esther Henseleit are also three shots off the lead.

Li recorded one of the rounds of the day with a two-under 69, while Thitikul stayed firmly in contention after parring every hole on the back nine in a one-over 72.

Ryu, the overnight leader, endured a dramatic reversal. The South Korean briefly stretched her advantage to five shots after reaching nine under early in her round, but six bogeys saw her slump to a three-over 74 and fall back into the chasing pack.



US player Yealimi Noh plays a shot from the 18th fairway on the third day of the Women's British Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, north-west England, yesterday. (AFP)

WOAD IN CONTENTION

England's Lottie Woad remained firmly in the hunt after a third-round 70 left the amateur at three under overall, four shots behind Noh.

Charley Hull, Minami Katsu, Chanettee Wannasaen and Ayaka Furue were another shot back at two under.

"Yeah, that back nine was playing very tough with that wind. Probably the strongest it's been all week and playing long, so definitely

pars were good on that," Woad told reporters.

"Then eventually knew that 16 would be a good chance and managed to capitalize on that."

Hull also kept her hopes alive with a level-par round. Roared on by the home crowd, the Englishwoman produced a superb approach to the final green before settling for a closing par and a share of eighth place.

Noh's surge contrasted sharply with a frustrating finish for

former world number one Nelly Korda.

The American birdied the 17th to climb the leaderboard before a wayward tee shot on the final hole led to a costly double-bogey six. Korda ended the day tied for 17th on even par, seven strokes behind the leader.

With Noh holding a three-shot cushion but five players within striking distance, the championship is poised for a compelling final-round battle today.

FOCUS

Stewart Cink surges into three-way tie for lead at Portugal Invitational

Reuters
Algarve, Portugal

Stewart Cink surged into a three-way tie for the Portugal Invitational lead yesterday with an 8-under-par 64 that included a pair of eagles.

Cink eagled the par-5 third and par-4 12th holes at The Els Club Vilamoura in Algarve, Portugal, moving to 13 under through two rounds.

The eight-time winner on the PGA Tour Champions enters today's final round level with Padraig Harrington of Ireland (65 yesterday) and Slovakia's Rory Sabatini (66).

First-round leader Zach Johnson slipped into solo fourth place at 12-under after an eventful round of 68 with four birdies, one eagle and two bogeys.

Tim O'Neal surged into a tie for fifth place at 10-under with a bogey-free 66 to join Sweden's Mikael Lundberg (68). They are one stroke ahead of South Korea's YE Yang (67) and Australia's Cameron Percy (67).

Cink started fast and was 6 under through five holes en route to the lowest round of the day.

"Well, it's weird to come off a round like that with that kind of score and be a little dejected because I shot minus-8, but I was 6-under par like 3 1/2 hours ago for the day," Cink said.

"I settled back into normalcy after that.

"The start was just like laser fo-

cused. I mean, it was almost perfect shot after perfect shot for the first really six holes. I didn't birdie the sixth hole, but, you know, par-3, including an eagle from short range and another almost eagle on the par-5. Just really kind of fun. Then came back down to earth a little bit and got, like I said, a little bit more normal. All in all, a really good day."

Cink, who leads the Charles Schwab Cup standings, is looking for his fifth victory on the tour this season.

Harrington began his bogey-free, 7-under round with an eagle at the par-5 opening hole. He capped the round with his fifth birdie at No. 18.

"I'm obviously very happy to have birdied the last," Harrington said.

"Hit a very nice second shot, hit a very nice putt. In golf you get some great breaks. Mikael Lundberg puttied it pretty much on the same line before me. I thought the putt had a little bit of break and Michael's broke a lot ... (otherwise) I would never have holed mine. You get good breaks like that at times in golf and it's nice I took advantage of it."

Sabatini eagled the par-5 third hole but squandered his chance for the outright lead with a bogey at the par-3 17th.

"All things considered, I think that score today with the wind, the greens were getting a little firmer, faster at the end there, I'm pretty excited about it," Sabbatini said.

This is the first PGA Tour Champions event ever held in Portugal.



SPOTLIGHT

Young posts 61, joins three-way lead with Cantlay and Fishburn



Cameron Young of the US follows a shot on the 17th hole during round two of the Rocket Classic 2026 at Detroit Golf Club in Detroit. (AFP)

Reuters
Detroit

It was Cameron Young's turn to fire a 9-under-par 61 at the Rocket Classic. The World No. 3 ended Friday tied with Patrick Cantlay and Patrick Fishburn for the lead in the Rocket Classic at Detroit Golf Club.

After Peter Malnati kicked off the tournament with a 61 on Thursday, Young began the second round eight shots off the pace. But his back-nine 28 (seven birdies, two pars) propelled him to a low score and helped him reach 10-under 130 at the halfway mark.

Young tied the tournament' single-round scoring record set by Jake Knapp last year and matched by Malnati on Thursday.

"It felt like I had a 10-footer for birdie on pretty much every hole," Young said. "Yeah, I made a bunch of them in a row on the ... the back nine, my first nine. Then the putter kind of went cold a little bit for my second nine. Just really solid golf all the way through."

To his point, Young began on the back nine and birdied six in a row at Nos. 12-17. While he kicked off that stretch with a 27-foot birdie, no other putt

he sank was longer than 14 feet. He cooled off from there, making just two birdies on the front nine.

Cantlay and Fishburn each shot 66 after firing 64 in the first round. The leading trio are one stroke ahead of Rickie Fowler (second-round 68) and Englishman Matt Wallace (64).

Young, who has already won The Players Championship and the Cadillac Championship this year, is No. 3 in the FedEx Cup points race angling for even better position to start the playoffs in two weeks. Cantlay also could make a significant move in the standings, as he entered the week No. 43 and is projected to jump to No. 21 if results hold.

"I think you just have to stay patient and keep working on the fundamentals in your game," said Cantlay, who hasn't won since the 2022 BMW Championship. "Like I said, wins can happen fast. You can get on a run and start playing well. So, I think you've got to believe that that's right around the corner. With the momentum I feel like I've been having in my game the last few months, it wouldn't surprise me."

Fishburn, meanwhile, is making a last-minute push to crack the top 70 that will qualify for the first leg of the playoffs. The 34-year-old journeyman, who has made seven cuts in his last eight starts after a cold start to the year, is 145th

in points for now but is projected to jump to 61st. "I'm pretty far down on the list. I've got a long ways to go to get where I need to," Fishburn said. "But it's good. Still a lot of events left for me to play in, but just the daily process of doing what I need to to get better."

Fowler won this event in 2023 and is searching for his first victory since. He recovered from three bogeys on the back nine by birdieing No. 18. "Bogeys are going to happen," Fowler said. "I mean, one three-putt and then two spots where I got out of position off the tee. One was off the tee and one was coming into the green there on 17 ... Nice to finish with birdie on 18. A lot of good stuff today and nice to be in a good spot for the weekend."

Malnati struggled to a 1-over 71 and slipped to 8 under. He is tied for sixth with Davis Riley (second-round 64), Xander Schauffele (66), Michael Brennan (67), Michael Kim (67), Chris Kirk (67), Doug Ghim (67) and Ryan Gerard (69).

The cut line wound up at 3 under par. Notables who missed the cut included Knapp (2 under), Ben Griffin (2 under), Akshay Bhatia (1 under), Chris Gotterup (1 over), Webb Simpson (2 over), defending champion Aldrich Potgieter of South Africa (3 over) and US Open champ Wyndham Clark (5 over).

TENNIS

Nakashima ousts top seed de Minaur, Osaka advances in Washington



Brandon Nakashima of the US celebrates after winning against Alex de Minaur of Australia at the Mubadala DC Open in Washington, DC. (AFP)

AFP
Washington

Defending champion Alex de Minaur and second-seeded Ben Shelton were bounced out of the Washington Open as upsets marked the quarter-finals of the combined ATP and WTA event.

Top-seeded Aussie de Minaur was left to rue his missed chances in a 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 loss to 33rd-ranked American Brandon Nakashima.

Chile's 30th-ranked Alejandro Tabilo recovered an early break in the third set to beat US home favorite Shelton 4-6, 7-5, 6-4.

Women's top seed Jessica Pegula and third-seeded Naomi Osaka made it safely into the semi-finals, but second-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina was sent packing by rising Philippines star Alexandra Eala.

Nakashima, chasing his first ATP 500-level title, avenged a loss to de Minaur in last year's Washington quarter-finals and followed

Naomi Osaka of Japan returns a shot against Elisabetta Cocciaretto of Italy at the Mubadala DC Open in Washington, DC. (AFP)



up a win over the Aussie at Queen's Club in London this year.

"He came out with some great serving; a lot of first serves," de Minaur said. "I played at a high level. I just threw in two pretty awful games on my serve."

"It's a little bit frustrating, but you live and you learn."

Nakashima booked an all-American semi-final against 10th-ranked Taylor Fritz, who saved a match point in a 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (8/6) victory over compatriot Alex Michelsen.

Nakashima, whose only ATP

title came at San Diego in 2022, saved six of the seven break points he faced and fired 10 aces - including one to take the first set.

"He's a very quick and explosive player," Nakashima said. "I knew I had to serve well at the crucial moments and try to be aggressive."

Tabilo needed two hours and 23 minutes to subdue the hard-hitting Shelton, pulling out an array of shots that included an impressive "tweener" lob and a string of crisp volleys.

He saved four break points in the second set and broke Shelton in the

12th game to force the third. After Shelton broke for a 3-2 lead, Tabilo broke back immediately to keep the pressure on.

He was rewarded for his perseverance with a break in the final game, an increasingly frustrated Shelton firing a forehand into the net on match point.

Tabilo next faces 19-year-old Spaniard Rafael Jodar, who ousted fourth-seeded Italian Lorenzo Musetti 1-6, 6-1, 6-4.

By reaching his third semi-final of the season, Jodar is assured of breaking into the top 20 in the world rankings for the first time.

World number three Pegula, who won her first WTA title at Washington in 2019, eliminated 20th-ranked Anna Kalinskaya 6-3, 7-5, to reach her sixth WTA semi-final of the year. The American will play for a berth in the final against fourth-seed Diana Shnaider, who beat Russian compatriot Liudmila Samsonova 6-3, 6-4.

Japan's third-seeded Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam winner, rallied to eliminate Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.

FOCUS

Richarlison, Tonali fire 10-man Spurs to 2-1 win over Chelsea

‘Very happy, especially for the first half because we played very well’



Tottenham Hotspur's Richarlison (right) celebrates scoring a goal during the Sydney Super Cup match against Chelsea at Stadium Australia in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Sydney

Brazil striker Richarlison scored a 90th-minute winner and club record signing Sandro Tonali got his first goal as 10-man Tottenham beat London rivals Chelsea 2-1 in a feisty pre-season friendly in Sydney on Saturday.

Both sides fielded strong line-ups and Spurs struck first on 19 minutes through Tonali's deflected shot before Estevao levelled the scores barely two minutes later.

Tottenham defender Kevin Danso was given a straight red card just three minutes after coming off the bench at the break for bringing down Joao Pedro, with Chelsea dominating second-half proceedings.

But in front of 80,363 fans at Stadium Australia, they failed to capitalise and Spurs stunned them with a late winner.

“Very happy, especially for the

first half because we played very well,” said Spurs manager Roberto De Zerbi.

“The red card was no good for us, but also (not) for Chelsea because with the condition of the pitch, all players behind the line of the ball, it was tough for them.

“But we won a good game, a good test.”

The loss means new Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso will head to Hong Kong for a clash with Juventus on Wednesday on the back of his first defeat, following a 6-4 victory over Western Sydney Wanderers in midweek.

“It was a really competitive game,” said Alonso.

“The second half was really tight, after the red card we had a few very good chances to score.

“We missed them and at the end, very silly to concede that late goal, but I think that has been a good test for everyone.”

The Spaniard has overseen a string of high-profile signings since being appointed, headlined

by Morgan Rogers from Aston Villa, as he bids to rejuvenate the club after their disappointing 10th in the Premier League last season.

PLAYERS MISSING

Spurs, who fared even worse, coming 17th to narrowly miss relegation, have also been on a spending spree with Matheus Fernandes arriving from West Ham and Tonali from Newcastle.

They fly home after a 2-0 win over Auckland FC and 1-1 draw with Sydney FC.

Most of Chelsea's close-season signings have yet to link up with the squad, including Rogers.

But right-back Marco Palestra, who joined from Atalanta, got his first minutes while Cole Palmer and Estevao started.

Tottenham midfielder Fernandes, who missed the Sydney game with “fatigue in his calf muscle”, was again absent, as was James Maddison with a “small problem”.

But Tonali made his maiden

start along with fellow new recruit Andy Robertson.

After a cagey start, tempers flared when Conor Gallagher hacked down Chelsea's Dario Essugo in the 10th minute with players pushing and shoving each other.

Gallagher was shown a yellow card and Essugo continued.

Spurs broke the deadlock after a nice break down the right from Manor Solomon, who fed Tonali on the edge of the box with his shot taking a deflection.

But it was a short-lived lead as Estevao headed home at the far post after Romeo Lavia broke free from midfield and they went to the break at 1-1.

Danso's brain-fade allowed Chelsea to dominate the second-half with Estevao rattling the crossbar among a slew of chances.

But, in a worry for Alonso, they failed to make the most of the extra man and Spurs stole their thunder when Richarlison side-footed home at the death.

SPOTLIGHT

Chelsea sign Brighton striker Welbeck

AFP
London

Chelsea signed Brighton's veteran striker **Danny Welbeck** in a deal worth a reported £5mn (\$6.7mn) yesterday.

Welbeck agreed a two-year contract with the Blues and will link up with Xabi Alonso's squad on their pre-season tour.

The 35-year-old's move to Stamford Bridge is a break from Chelsea's habit of signing younger players with the potential to be developed into stars or sold at a profit.

It is the first time Chelsea have paid a transfer fee for a player over the age of 26 since they signed Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang from Barcelona in 2022 when the striker was 33.

“When you hear of the interest from Chelsea, it's something that fills you with such immense pride. Knowing the history of Chelsea, it's a club that wants to win trophies and is pushing to do that every single season,” Welbeck said.

“I'm really honoured to come to a club of this stature at what feels like a really exciting time. I know a few of the boys already and I've had fantastic conversations with the manager and already feel that connection.

“I've got that fire in my belly and I'm ready to give it everything for this club to make everyone at Chelsea, and the supporters, proud.”

New Chelsea manager Alonso was keen to add experience to his squad after last season's disappointing 10th-place finish in the Premier League.

He opted for Welbeck after the former Manchester United

and Arsenal forward enjoyed a memorable campaign with Brighton.

Welbeck, who has 42 caps for England, scored 13 goals in 37 Premier League games last term after netting 10 times in 2024-25.

Welbeck's arrival in west London will raise questions about the future of Chelsea striker Liam Delap, who flopped last season after signing from Ipswich, as well as fellow forwards Nicolas Jackson and Marc Guiu.

Welbeck is the latest player to move from Brighton to Chelsea in recent years after Joao Pedro, Moises Caicedo, Robert Sanchez and Marc Cucurella, who joined Real Madrid earlier this summer.

The Blues spent a British record £117mn to sign England forward Morgan Rogers, 24, from Aston Villa in July.

They also landed France defender Maxence Lacroix, 26, from Crystal Palace for £52mn earlier this week and signed Atlanta defender Marco Palestra, 21, for £43mn.

Chelsea have also been linked with a move for Brentford's 36-year-old England midfielder Jordan Henderson.

Welbeck spent six years at Brighton after joining from Watford in 2020, scoring 51 goals and contributing 18 assists, while becoming the Seagulls' all-time leading top-flight goalscorer.

“Danny has made an incredible contribution to Brighton. His performances, goals and experience played a key role in some of the most important moments in our recent history, while his character and leadership made him a hugely respected figure within the club,” Brighton chairman Tony Bloom said.



Brentford sign Mali midfielder Sangare in club record deal

Brentford signed Mali midfielder Mamadou Sangare from Lens in a club-record deal worth a reported £39mn (\$52mn) yesterday.

Sangare agreed a five-year contract with the Premier League side, including a club option for a further year.

The 24-year-old helped Lens finish second in Ligue 1 and win the Coupe de France last season.

“He fits everything we want from a Brentford player, on and off the pitch. He'll be a player that I think will become very, very popular with the fans,” Brentford manager Keith Andrews said.

“Last season was a huge season for him following a couple of loan spells during which he developed.

“At Lens, he performed at such a consistently high level for a team that finished second in the league.

“Added to that was his form for Mali, where he became a really key player for them.”

Brentford's England international Jordan Henderson looks set to join Chelsea and Sangare will fill the void in midfield.

Sangare, who has won 16 caps with Mali, joined Lens from Rapid Vienna last year and made 29 appearances in the French top tier.

FRIENDLY

Maresca ‘happy’ after first Man City game

AFP
Hong Kong

Enzo Maresca said he was “very happy” yesterday after his first game in charge of Manchester City, despite a defeat on penalties to Inter Milan after the sides drew 1-1 in a pre-season friendly in Hong Kong.

Matteo Lavelli netted the decisive spot-kick for a 3-1 shootout win for the Italian champions as Maresca led out City for the first time since taking over from legendary Pep Guardiola in June.

“I'm very happy with the performance,” the former Chelsea and Leicester boss told reporters.

“Many positive things, including minutes for the legs, that's very important.

“Like always, there are things we can do better, but slowly, slowly, we're going to improve.”

An open first half saw the Premier League side take the lead in the 14th minute when Antoine Semenyo jinked towards the byline and crossed for youngster Divin Mubama to tuck in from a few yards out.



Manchester City manager Enzo Maresca (right) and Inter Milan coach Cristian Chivu look on during the penalty shootout during the pre-season friendly in Hong Kong yesterday. (Reuters)

Semenyo was a constant menace and almost scored a wonderful solo goal soon afterwards when he weaved through several Inter defenders but could not squeeze the ball past goalkeeper Josep Martinez.

Within minutes Inter equalised when City failed to clear a Jamal Idrissou cross and the ball fell for Benjamin Pavard to slot home from near the penalty spot.

Both sides missed golden chances soon after the restart but the game drifted as the substitu-

tions piled up. City's Vitor Reis sliced a shot against the crossbar while young winger Ryan McAidoo hit the post as the Manchester club pushed for a late winner that never came.

“We were pressing in the wrong way, we conceded some switches of play... because we were late in the pressing,” Maresca said of the first half performance.

“At half-time we adjusted something, and I think, second half, in terms of pressing, we were much, much better.”

Maresca took over in June and faces a tough task to succeed Guardiola, who won 20 trophies in a glorious decade at City. Many clubs have struggled after the exit of serial title-winning managers, with local rivals Manchester United notably falling from the pinnacle of the English game after Alex Ferguson retired in 2013.

Nearly 43,000 fans converged on Hong Kong's Kai Tak Stadium for the match, though patches of unsold seats left the atmosphere subdued at times.

Several of City's World Cup stars, including Norway striker Erling Haaland and Spain captain Rodri, have not travelled.

Maresca has confirmed the pair will not join the squad in Seoul for the two remaining games on the club's Asia tour, against a K League all-star team and Spanish giants Atletico Madrid next week.

City face Arsenal in the Community Shield against Arsenal on August 16 before starting the new Premier League season at home to Bournemouth a week later. Inter round off pre-season with a derby against AC Milan followed by another all-Italian clash with Juventus in Perth, Australia.

Hearts suffer more misery as Aberdeen snatch late victory

Hearts crashed to a shock 2-1 defeat at Aberdeen yesterday in a calamitous start to their bid to make amends for last season's agonising failure to win the Scottish Premiership.

Aberdeen striker Kevin Nesbit struck twice in the closing stages at Pittodrie to give Hearts a painful flashback to their late collapse in the title race in May.

The Edinburgh side were just 10 minutes away from being crowned Scottish champions for the first time since 1960 on the final day of last season. But their do or die clash with title rivals Celtic ended in a devastating defeat that allowed the Glasgow club to extend the Old Firm's four-decade dominance of the Scottish title.

Much has changed at Hearts since that miserable day, with boss Derek McInnes joining Rangers and taking Jambos stars Lawrence Shankland and Cammy Devlin with him to Ibrox.

Hearts' new boss Wouter Vrancken presided over a dismal Champions League qualifying round exit against Sturm Graz in July. It has been an ominous introduction for the Belgian, who previously managed Sint-Truiden.

And Vrancken faces more pointed questions after Hearts slumped to a dismal loss at the start of the domestic campaign.

Oisín McEntee put Hearts ahead in the 35th minute, slotting home from close-range after Aberdeen failed to deal with Amadou Ba-Sy's low cross and Blair Spittal's initial effort.

But in the 90th minute, Dan Happe headed Stuart Armstrong's free-kick across the face of the Hearts goal and Nesbit bundled home. There was worse to come for Hearts in stoppage-time when Stuart Findlay was sent off for halting Toyosi Olusanya's burst into the penalty area with a crude foul.

Nisbet stepped up to slam a nerveless spot-kick into the corner as gleeful Aberdeen fans chanted “Hearts are falling apart again”.

McInnes started his Rangers reign with a disappointing 1-1 draw at Dundee United on Friday.

Champions Celtic open their campaign at home to Dundee tomorrow. St Mirren manager Craig McLeish said his team's 2-0 win at Falkirk can set the tone for a successful season.