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CRICKET | Page 2

England recall batsman Lawrence for Pakistan series



TENNIS | Page 3

Top seed Zverev and Medvedev exit Montreal Masters

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FOOTBALL

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Page 4

SPOTLIGHT

Egypt star Salah signs two-year deal with Trabzonspor

Reuters
Trabzon, Turkey

Mohamed Salah has signed a two-year deal with Trabzonspor, under which the Egypt forward will receive 17mn euros (\$19.6mn) a season, the Turkish club said.

The announcement came as Trabzon's fans prepared to head for the club's stadium in the eastern Black Sea city for a ceremony to mark the former Liverpool player's signing on a free transfer.

Thousands of supporters cheered in Trabzonspor's stadium, waving club flags, holding torches and chanting songs. "The last couple of days, it's an experience I've never had in my life. I just want to thank every one of you for being here today. I am feeling so much love here I never expected that reception," the 34-year-old Salah said during the signing ceremony. "I am here to

win, I wanna win something with this club because you showed me so much love. I appreciate that."

The club's statement to the Turkish stock exchange said Salah will receive a 20% share from products sold under his name, plus conditional bonuses each season. The statement did not say how high the bonuses could go and what the bonuses are tied to.

Salah left Liverpool in the close season after nine years, having scored 257 goals in 442 appearances and having won the Premier League twice and the Champions League. He also scored 193 Premier League goals, 191 of them for the Reds, putting him fourth in the all-time list behind English trio Alan Shearer, Harry Kane and Wayne Rooney.

His output waned last season and he was left on the bench in Champions League games, leading to a public spat with Liverpool's then-manager Arne Slot.

Salah started his career in Europe at Swiss side Basel in 2012 and later joined Chelsea. He also had stints at Fiorentina and AS Roma between 2015 and 2017 before joining Liverpool.

He last played at the World Cup, helping Egypt reach the last 16 for the first time since 1934 before they blew a two-goal lead to suffer an agonising loss to eventual runners-up Argentina.

Salah had also been linked with Trabzonspor's Super Lig rivals Besiktas.

Trabzonspor - generally considered to be the fourth-biggest team in Turkey after Istanbul sides Fenerbahce, Galatasaray, and Besiktas - finished third in the Super Lig last season to qualify for the Europa League playoff round. The club's last domestic league championship was in the 2021-22 season. Salah has scored 66 goals in 119 international appearances for Egypt and is one of the most successful African players in history.



FOOTBALL

UEFA turn up pressure on FIFA chief Infantino

European football's governing body reiterate their threat of boycotting World Cups

AFP
Paris

Pressure built further on FIFA president Gianni Infantino over his handling of the now shelved private investment plan with European football's governing body UEFA reiterating their threat of boycotting the World Cups.

Infantino may have thought he had bought some time when he received the "full support" of senior FIFA directors following an emergency meeting in Morocco on Wednesday but he was to be disabused of that by UEFA's blunt statement.

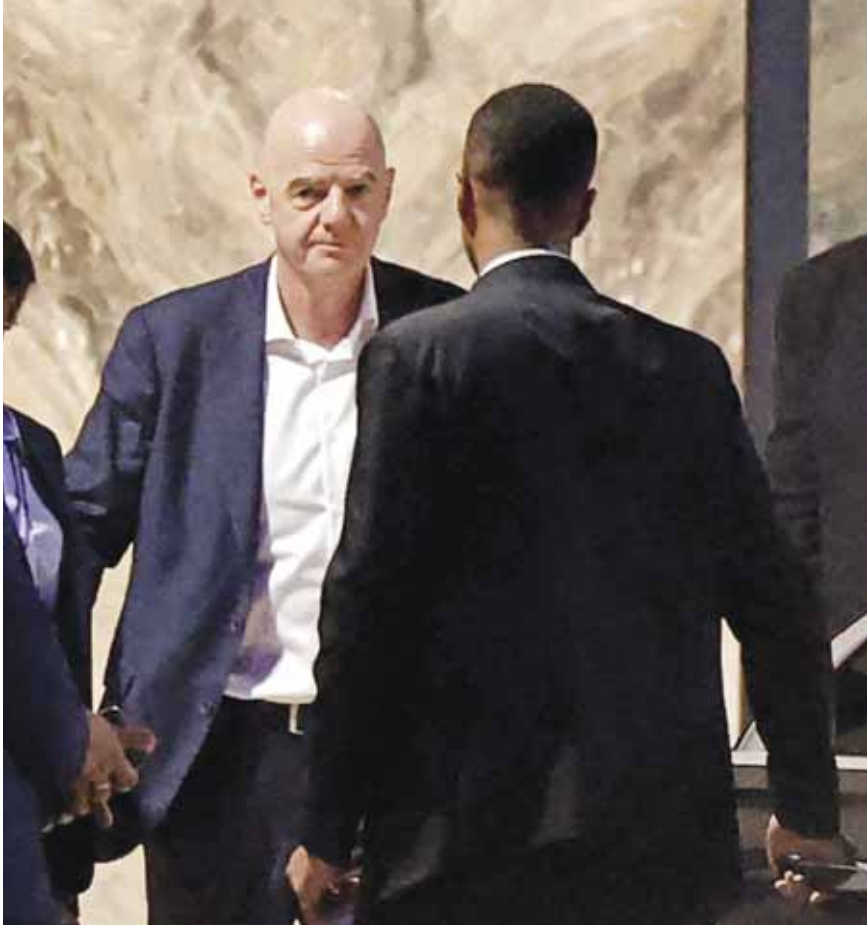
UEFA's initial threat issued last Thursday to boycott FIFA competitions is widely credited to being pivotal in the plan being shelved. Infantino has come under increasing pressure, even from within his organisation, over his handling of the proposal, and calls for him to step down had grown since he abandoned it last Saturday.

FIFA floated the plan, saying it could raise up to \$4.2bn based on a valuation of \$20bn for a new commercial subsidiary, called the FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), which it proposed would run events such as the World Cup and Club World Cup. Although the abandonment of the proposal was one of UEFA's conditions for them to withdraw their threat, they said the second one had not been met.

"UEFA's associations were very clear about the conditions attached to their non participation in FIFA competitions," read their statement. "First, the proposals to sell off the major competitions had to be withdrawn and secondly, assurances have to be made that such attempts to disfigure the game in this way will never be made again. These conditions have not been met."

Whilst UEFA had welcomed the withdrawal of the plan last Saturday they had slammed Infantino and his "shabby, back-room, opaque deal".

Their tone had not changed in yesterday's statement. "UEFA made it abundantly clear in its statement on Saturday that it has lost confidence in Gianni Infantino's presi-



FIFA President Gianni Infantino leaves Al Madina Stadium in Rabat following the Women's Africa Cup of Nations match between Malawi and Zambia. (AFP)

dency. That position holds," they said.

Several of UEFA's member associations have withdrawn their support for him in his bid to be re-elected to a fourth and final term in Rabat next March. A prominent critic of his Norwegian football chief Lise Klaveness is likely to pour more fuel on the fire when she holds a press conference today.

She has like UEFA president Aleksander

him, was also criticised by usually supportive South American governing body CONMEBOL.

"The Council also unanimously expresses its concern regarding the repeated unilateral actions taken without resorting to dialogue or to the institutional mechanisms established to address situations of this nature," read their statement.

CONMEBOL, though, said regarding Infantino's future they would not countenance anything other than a straight contest - if a challenger comes forward by November 18 when nominations close - in Rabat.

There is a mechanism whereby an extraordinary FIFA congress can be called and a vote of no confidence in Infantino held. North and Central American football's governing body CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) have both been critical of Infantino, but were yet to react to the latest developments.

CONCACAF - whose president Victor Montagliani is seen as a potential challenger 2 had called for "a comprehensive reckoning with this presidency".

Fifpro, the players union, piled into Infantino over the plan calling it "a profound abuse of presidential power". "Fifa Forward Enterprise (FFE) is gone," they said in a statement. "The abuse of power that produced it is not."

Infantino, 56, will hope for better news later on Thursday as the African Football Confederation (CAF) is holding a meeting. Several of their members have already expressed their support for the Swiss lawyer, who has been in power for 10 years.

South Africa's sports minister Gayton McKenzie has urged African football to resist what he called the "public lynching" of Infantino. CONMEBOL said it was a shame the hugely successful staging of the World Cup - the first with 48 teams and spread over three countries - had had its thunder stolen by the events over the past week.

"The CONMEBOL Council calls for preserving the unity of the football family," it said.

Its plea seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

FIFA delivers overdue prize money after Jordan FA chief's 'blackmail' remark

Jordan's players and staff have received outstanding reward money for their participation in the 2025 Arab Cup, Jordan Football Association's President Prince Ali bin Hussein said, two days after he accused FIFA of blackmail.

Prince Ali criticised FIFA President Gianni Infantino after he backed out of his proposal to sell a stake in the World Cup and found himself under pressure from confederations and national associations, saying FIFA had offered to help solve the kingdom's problems in exchange for his endorsement.

One of the problems he listed was that the association had been waiting since December for prize money for reaching the Arab Cup final in Qatar. "Thank you to the FIFA administration for suddenly this morning delivering what was owed to our players and coaching staff, for the Jordan National team's accession to the final of the FIFA Arab Cup in Qatar last December," Prince Ali said on X. "This was funding that should have been received eight months ago."

Prince Ali had alleged FIFA verbally communicated during the World Cup that backing the president "would go a long way to helping our FA out".

FIFA did not respond to requests for comment on the allegations. Prince Ali added that receiving the money was a welcome development but that it would not change the concerns his organisation had about FIFA's leadership.

"It is symptomatic of those exact difficulties that we all face and that are usually linked to the FIFA presidential elections," he added. "And it does not change my clear position concerning the leadership of FIFA: my FA and I will not endorse President Infantino, nor will we vote for him." FIFA apologised to its members for mistakes made over its abandoned proposal to sell commercial rights to the World Cup but the body's leadership reaffirmed its support for Infantino after a crisis meeting in Morocco.

Formula One to have more sprint races in 2027, says chief executive Domenicali

London: Formula One will have more sprint races in 2027 than the current six but will maintain the scarcity value, chief executive Stefano Domenicali said.

The 2027 calendar has yet to be published, with the Iran war casting lingering uncertainty over Middle Eastern races, but Domenicali said it will again be 24 rounds next year after a likely 23 in 2026.

"Our sprint format continues to drive higher Friday attendances and stronger

daily attendances through our race weekend... we expect to expand the number of sprints for next year and to provide further details soon," Domenicali told analysts after F1 owners Liberty Media published the company's second quarter 2026 results.

"We want to do (it) in the right way because of course this will allow us also to make sure that the scarcity is a value. So if commercially we would go everywhere, of

course that's not anymore a value."

Reduced distance sprint races, with eight points to the winner, are held on Saturday mornings with qualifying replacing the usual second Friday practice. The main grand prix remains on Sunday after Saturday qualifying.

Flavio Briatore, the boss of Renault-owned Alpine, told www.the-race.com this week that Formula One should have a sprint at every race weekend.

"I'd do it every race. Because we need to give something more to the spectator. Because we do nothing for the spectator," said Briatore. "Friday morning is only technical. You go two laps, you come back, and the people, OK. After Saturday in the morning, after you have the qualifying, and that's the finito, you have the race. With the sprint race, at least you have two races, two starts, and the driver is driving for something. He's not driving only for

the engineering. And for me, we need to have the sprint race. For me, 24 races, 24 sprint races."

Formula One reported a 38% decrease in revenue to \$764mn for the three months to end-June 2026 due to there being four fewer races.

Domenicali also said, without providing figures, that the U.S. broadcast partnership with Apple had led to a 13% rise in viewership and total hours watched.

FOCUS

How Blundell's old school tactic ended England's 'Bazball' era

AFP

Wellington

Wicketkeeper **Tom Blundell** believes his standing up to the stumps in England - a move that helped kill off the "Bazball" era - was a case of New Zealand shelving their egos for the good of the team.

Blundell's heroic efforts in fearlessly standing close behind the stumps to his fast bowlers enabled New Zealand to fight back from 1-0 down and win the series 2-1 in June.

England captain Ben Stokes retired during the third Test and, soon after, coach Brendon "Baz" McCullum was sacked, bringing down the curtain on the pair's attacking style of Test cricket, widely dubbed "Bazball".

Blundell managed to avoid serious injury from fielding so close to New Zealand's speed merchants, a tactic that is fraught with danger, but described how he woke every

morning with swollen and aching hands.

"It was just a constant sort of barrage, but I was fortunate not to get hit on the end of a finger or anything," Blundell told AFP.

Blundell began standing up in 2023 in Wellington to keep England's attacking batsmen quiet during a home series, after a request by seam bowler Matt Henry.

"We were the first ones to try it out," Blundell said.

"We used it for Ollie Pope initially. He was getting a long way out of the crease, and it happened quite organically.

"Matt Henry was the one to ask me to come up. I was quite reluctant at the time.

"Usually a fast bowler doesn't want you to come up, it hurts the ego a little bit, but Matt Henry is such a team guy, he'll do anything for the team."

The players noticed the move kept England's batsmen stuck in the crease and slowed the scoring rate. It led to the run-out of dan-



ger man Harry Brook for a duck in the second innings of the second Test - a match New Zealand won by a single run.

Australia wicketkeeper Alex

Carey employed a similar strategy for Australia in their 4-1 Ashes series win in 2025-26.

Blundell said he was surprised, when he tried it again in June, that

England's batsmen still struggled to adjust. "Even Harry Brook, who dances down the wicket so well, he's a totally different player when the keeper's up," said Blundell.

"I thought he would run at it, and I was just waiting. But it never happened. He never did.

"I was surprised. I remember he snicked off to first slip, and that's just not him. That's not how Harry Brook gets out."

For all of England's talk of a new ultra-positive style of Test cricket, it was an old-school tactic that finally killed off Bazball.

That and what Blundell said was the way that Stokes announced his retirement during play in the third Test.

"It was just bizarre," he said of the fourth day at Trent Bridge, when New Zealand effectively sealed the series as Stokes tried to finish his career in a blaze of glory, only to suffer a rapid defeat.

"We saw on TV that Ben Stokes had retired, and we were like: 'What's going on here?'" he said of the retirement bombshell that

dropped just before tea. "Then when we declare and (Stokes) comes running out to open the batting.

"They actually got a great start but then they just kept coming so hard.

"We had the whole field out, they could have worked it around, surely that's what you want, but they kept picking fielders out."

New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra was heard asking, "What are they doing?," as England collapsed to 212 all out to hand New Zealand a 160-run win and the series.

Blundell described it as a "laugh-off", rather than a traditional send-off for Stokes.

"It was just so bizarre, honestly."

McCullum has been replaced with another former New Zealand captain, Stephen Fleming, as England turn a new page with Joe Root reinstalled as captain.

As for Blundell, he said he may be back up to the stumps when New Zealand play Tests against India and Australia later this year.

CRICKET

England recall batsman Lawrence for Pakistan series

Cox handed No 3 position due to Bethell injury, Pope also recalled

AFP

London

England have recalled Dan Lawrence from two years of Test exile to face Pakistan, with the batsman pencilled in to fill the middle-order vacancy created by the retirement of captain Ben Stokes.

National selector Marcus North, announcing a 16-man squad for the first two matches of the three-Test series yesterday, confirmed Lawrence would bat at number six.

Jordan Cox, who replaces the injured Jacob Bethell, will bat at number three.

Joe Root leads the side after being appointed for a second stint, with the first Test starting at Headingley on August 19.

Lawrence has been in the international wilderness since he made his 14th Test appearance in September 2024, playing out of position as an opener against Sri Lanka. The Surrey batsman, 29, has been in impressive form in the County Championship this season, averaging more than 65, with five centuries.

Cox, 25, made his debut against New Zealand in the second Test at the Oval in June, when he replaced Stokes, who was omitted after he broke a team curfew.

Fast bowler Brydon Carse is included after missing the 2-1 series loss to New Zealand because of an injury to his right hand.

Marcus Trescothick will be the hosts' interim head coach before former New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming replaces compatriot Brendon McCullum as England's red-ball supremo.

Former England vice-captain



Dan Lawrence has returned to the England Test squad two years on from his last appearance. (Reuters)

Ollie Pope has also been recalled, having been discarded after a run of low scores during England's 4-1 Ashes series loss in Australia.

Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir has been retained, although it remains to be seen if England will deploy a specialist slow bowler in Leeds.

England have lost seven of their past nine Tests and are without a series win since December 2024.

"We have selected a squad for the first two Tests that balances rising talent with the experience

needed against a quality Pakistan team," said former Australia batsman North.

"Dan Lawrence returns following an exceptional season so far with Surrey and we believe he has the right level of experience, maturity and skill to complement our middle order.

"Jordan Cox is well regarded as one of the most exciting talents in English cricket and will have the opportunity to bat at three in place of Jacob Bethell, who sadly misses

this series through injury."

Pakistan will arrive off the back of drawing a two Test series, 1-1, with the West Indies.

England squad for the first two Tests: Ben Duckett, Emilio Gay, Jordan Cox, Joe Root (capt), Harry Brook, Dan Lawrence, Jamie Smith (wkt), Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse, Jofra Archer, Josh Tongue, Shoaib Bashir, Sam Cook, Matthew Fisher, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson.

CYCLING

Le Court sprints to stage six Tour de France Femmes win

Reuters

Paris

Kimberley Le Court of Mauritius overcame earlier difficulties to emerge victorious in a reduced sprint and win stage six of the Tour de France Femmes yesterday, as Swiss rider Marlen Reusser held on to the overall lead with three stages remaining.

Le Court (AG Insurance-Soudal) joined a small breakaway group 10 km from the finish, launched her sprint with 300m to go and held off French rider Cedrine Kerbaol (EF Education-Oatly) on the line, with Puck Pieterse of the Netherlands coming in third.

The 30-year-old Le Court suffered a mechanical before the final climb and had to change bikes, but, thanks to her teammates, made it back in time to launch her telling move.

"They brought me back slowly but surely to the bunch, and I got back on top of the last climb, which was a really big effort," Le Court said.

"Then I just tried to stay patient, try to recover from this big effort. Riejeanne Markus and I bridged to the breakaway, and we got to the front."

There was no change at the top of the standings after the 153.4-km ride from Montbrison to Tournon-sur-Rhone, with Reusser (Movistar Team) holding a 12-second lead over Dutch

rider Demi Vollering. Poland's Katarzyna Niewiadoma-Phinney is third, one minute and 17 seconds off the leader.

A group of three riders built an early lead of over two minutes but were brought back with 54-km remaining.

World champion Magdeleine Vallieres set a blistering pace at the front on the penultimate climb of Col de Lalouvesc, which split the peloton, leaving a reduced bunch of around 30 riders to go for the stage win.

A group of six then got away, before they were joined by Le Court and Markus. The breakaway managed to hold off the chasing pack, and Markus made a move with one kilometre left.

The Dutch rider was unable to make her attack count and it was left to Le Court to claim an almost carbon copy victory of her stage win last year when she outfought Vollering and Niewiadoma-Phinney in a seven-rider sprint to the line.

"When Riejeanne made an attack from the back, I knew it was going to happen because that's the only way she can win a race like this," Le Court said.

"I had to close the gap myself, and I was really, really dead. I was on the limit. I can't believe I still had the legs to sprint.

Friday's stage seven takes the riders 146.8 km from La Voulte-sur-Rhone to the summit finish at Mont Ventoux, when Vollering and Niewiadoma-Phinney will be expected to make their move to overtake Reusser.



AG Insurance-Soudal Team's Mauritian rider Kim Le Court celebrates as she crosses the finish line to win the 6th stage of the Women's Tour de France in Tournon-sur-Rhone, France, yesterday. (AFP)

England selector North not 'hung up' on Stokes absence

England selector Marcus North said he would not get "hung up" on the retirement of captain and talisman Ben Stokes as the team prepare for their first series since the end of the "Bazball" era.

North, announcing a 16-man squad for the first two Tests against Pakistan yesterday, confirmed Surrey's Dan Lawrence would bat at number six, effectively replacing all-rounder Stokes in the middle order.

Jordan Cox will bat at three in the first Test on August 19 in the absence of the injured Jacob Bethell. Former vice-captain Ollie Pope and paceman Brydon Carse have also been recalled to the squad.

The three-match series comes just weeks after the retirement of Stokes and the sacking of head coach Brendon McCullum, who teamed up in 2022, launching an ultra-attacking brand of cricket.

McCullum was fired from the Test role last month following England's 2-1 series defeat by New Zealand but remains the white-ball boss. Joe Root will captain the side after being reappointed to the role, with Marcus Trescothick serving as interim head coach.

McCullum's replacement, fellow New Zealander Stephen Fleming, will start his tenure as head coach against South Africa in December.

North, previously director of cricket at county side Durham, where Stokes plays, praised the former skipper, who this week ruled out any chance that he would rethink his decision to quit international cricket. "We've been very fortunate to have someone like Ben as a world-class all-rounder in our set-up," said the Australian. "I think it would be very easy to get hung up on the fact that we've lost Ben. He's made that decision to retire, and like I said, it gives us an opportunity to look at some different structures."

North said in-form Lawrence, who has not played Test cricket for two years, would be part of a powerful middle order including Harry Brook and Jamie Smith. "We feel he's an advanced, better player than he was when he last played for England," he said. "We feel that going into these first two Test matches with our six best batters available shows some conviction and strength around the way we want to play and to score heavily."

North played 21 Tests for Australia but now

finds himself working for their arch-rivals ahead of next year's Ashes series in England. But he insisted he had long been "incredibly invested" in English cricket.

"I've lived here for 12 years now with my family and I've worked as director of cricket at Durham for nearly eight years," said North. "And being part of that professionally, for me to see England do well has absolutely always been kind of at the forefront of my mind."

North played down the lack of English coaches in the national set-up, saying Fleming was passionate about developing both players and coaches. And he said the former New Zealand captain had been consulted about the squad for the Pakistan series even though he is yet to begin his England role. England, who have lost seven of their past nine Tests, are looking to climb from fifth in the rankings. "Certainly, he (Fleming) is looking at having depth within our Test squad that is enabled to sustain success," said North. "Our ambition is very clear - that there's a process and a journey to go on, but our focus is being the best Test team in the world. There's no question about that."

Pogacar teammate Del Toro gets new UAE deal after Tour podium

Young Mexican rider Isaac Del Toro was rewarded with a new UAE contract yesterday after finishing third in the Tour de France won by superstar teammate Tadej Pogacar. The Emirati outfit said the 22-year-old would ride in their colours until the end of the 2031 season. Pogacar, who turns 28 next month, is under contract with UAE until 2030. "The extension represents another significant investment in the future by UAE Team Emirates-XRG, securing one of cycling's most promising young riders through what are expected to be the prime years of his career," the team said in a statement. Pogacar may go on dominating the sport for many more years after winning a record-equalling fifth Tour de France title but he is likely to face some stiffer opposition from younger rivals.

"Signing long-term gives me a lot of confidence because I know I'm in the right place for my future," said Del Toro who joined UAE in 2024. "We've already achieved some amazing victories together, but I honestly believe the best is still to come. I'm excited to keep growing with this team and fighting for the biggest races in the world."

Alongside team leader Pogacar, the Mexican impressed during the Grande Boucle, winning the second stage in Barcelona and finishing on the final podium behind "Pogi" and Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel. He also claimed the white jersey for the best young rider ahead of 19-year-old Frenchman Paul Seixas. Del Toro had won several races this season notably the UAE Tour, Tirreno-Adriatico and Tour Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

TENNIS

Top seed Zverev, Medvedev exit Montreal Masters

THIS WAS PROBABLY THE WORST MATCH OF THE SEASON'

AFP
Montreal

The ATP Montreal Masters lost its top two seeds in the space of a few hours on Wednesday as Germany's Alexander Zverev and Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime both exited the field.

Top seed and world number three Zverev, this year's French Open champion and Wimbledon runner-up, was toppled by Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor, who rallied for a 6-7 (3/7), 6-2, 6-4 second-round upset.

"I didn't expect to play well," Zverev said. "I also didn't expect to play this bad, to be honest."

Montreal native Auger-Aliassime had to withdraw before his scheduled night match after injuring his back during training on Monday. "It was quite sudden. I was training here for two weeks and I had zero problems," Auger-Aliassime said. "Just the timing is tough."

"I thought that day by day things would get better, but I tried to go on court today, I tried to warm up, and then I basically couldn't serve really, so it was impossible for me to think about even competing."

Joining his fellow elites on the sidelines was fourth seed Daniil Medvedev, the 2021 champion, who went out 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) to Botic Van de Zandschulp, another Dutch spoiler.

Medvedev missed out on achieving his 100th career victory at the Masters level as he lost in his Canada opener, weighed down by 40 unforced errors.

Tournament officials already were fuming at an event in which world number one Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic were both high-profile absentees even before the start.

"I'm not going to lie, we were hoping that Felix was going to win at least a few matches," tournament director Valerie Tetreault said. "He's definitely the player everybody was talking about and people wanted to know when he was going to play."

Zverev was competing for the first time since his Wimbledon final loss to Sinner and began to fade in the second set against world number 69 Griekspoor.

"This was probably the worst match of the season," Zverev said.



Alexander Zverev of Germany walks off the court after his loss to Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands in the second round match of the Montreal Masters at Stade IGA in Montreal. (AFP)



Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada forced out of the Montreal Masters with back injury. (AFP)

"This one was up there as the worst."

"Tennis comes with ups and downs. I'm very happy with how the last couple of months were. Now it's about getting back to that form."

The Dutch winner came within a point of a 5-2 lead in the third set, but found himself square at 4-all as he lost serve.

But the underdog broke the seed straight back and served out the match in one of his biggest vic-

tories a game later. "This is one of the most special wins I've ever had," he said. "I've had a tough season. I was close to throwing in the towel a few times. But I've been working harder in practice and reaching a good level."

"I felt it was about time for a big win."

Fifth-seeded defending champion Ben Shelton rallied from 4-1 down in his second set to overhaul US compatriot Jenson Brooksby 6-3, 7-5, winning six of the last seven games for his 28th victory of the season.

The son of a former ATP pro has won seven straight matches in Canada, taking 96 minutes to go through to the third round. He's 15-3 against countrymen since the start of 2025.

"Defending is tough. I had to get over pre-tournament nerves but I got my first straight-set win of the summer season," Shelton said.

"Jenson is a nightmare match-up for me. To win it is a huge positive."

Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas fell 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 to 19-year-old Brazilian Joao Fonseca in the second round.

Fonseca, who fired nine aces among his 31 winners, next plays ninth seed Casper Ruud.

FOCUS

Steiner sees huge potential for MotoGP with Liberty Media

Reuters
London

MotoGP has immense potential for growth under new owners Liberty Media and can be compared to the Formula One of 20 years ago, KTM Tech3 owner and former Haas F1 team boss Guenther Steiner said yesterday.

Speaking to Reuters ahead of this weekend's British Grand Prix at Silverstone, an event that has a fraction of the attendance of the F1 grand prix at the same circuit, Steiner said the two-wheeled sport had an amazing show with commercial opportunities waiting to be tapped.

"MotoGP doesn't have to look exactly at what F1 is doing, they can write their own story," he said. "You don't have to copy-paste the racing."

"F1 was good before Liberty, (former supremo) Bernie (Ecclestone) did a fantastic job, but Liberty gave it another spike. I think Liberty can do that (for MotoGP), maybe not at the scale like F1 - not every sport can be F1 - but it can be very big."

"MotoGP doesn't need help with the racing, leave it alone. But the rest of it, just (on) the presentation of everything, Formula One is top. MotoGP are good but they can need the help of Formula One."

Liberty Media acquired the F1 commercial rights in 2017

and took over MotoGP's parent company Dorna in 2024. Steiner led a consortium that took over the KTM Tech3 team from the start of this year, assuming the role of CEO.

The Italian, who still attends Formula One races as a television pundit and spends much of his time in the United States, said the U.S. market could sustain more than the one current race. Formula One now has three U.S. rounds, after none as recently as 2011.

"I moved to the United States in 2006. I came from F1, people knew what F1 was but nobody could care about it," Steiner said. "Now everybody knows what F1 is and cares. I think MotoGP has got the potential...it can be bigger than it is."

MotoGP is dominated by Spanish and Italian riders - with both countries also hosting multiple races - and Steiner, whose team currently have Spaniard Maverick Vinales and Italian Anea Bastianini, said that needed to change with more talent brought in from elsewhere in the world. Vinales will be missing from this weekend's race due to shoulder surgery and has been replaced by 35-year-old Spanish test rider Pol Espargaro.

Separately, Silverstone announced an extension to its contract that will keep the British Grand Prix - which has had 11 different winners in the last 11 editions - at the circuit through 2028.



British Grand Prix stays on MotoGP calendar until 2028

The British Grand Prix will remain on the MotoGP World Championship calendar until at least 2028. MotoGP has extended its agreement with Silverstone, which stages the race, to cover the 2027 and 2028 seasons. The British Grand Prix returned to Silverstone, which also hosts Formula One races, after a 24-year absence in 2010. This year's British race will take place on Sunday - the 12th of 22 races in the MotoGP season. "This extension underscores our commitment to two-wheel racing," said Silverstone chief executive Stuart Pringle. "This renewed partnership secures our place as the undisputed home of elite international racing." Carmelo Ezpeleta, chief executive of MotoGP Group, added: "The UK has a rich motorcycle racing heritage and remains one of the most important markets for MotoGP. "Silverstone provides a fantastic stage for MotoGP, 11 different winners in the last 11 Grands Prix hosted at the circuit is a testament to the quality, competitiveness and unpredictability of racing at the circuit."

Rookie Koivin having dream season, and it could get even better

Jackson Koivun is not so different from any other 21-year-old in that in his free time he goes to movies - like the new Spider-Man blockbuster - and does some fishing, not always successfully. "I did not, unfortunately," Koivun responded Wednesday when asked if he caught any fish. "Yeah, I tried, I definitely tried. I think I used all my luck on the golf course." It's a good thing Koivun is better at his day job, golfing, having won in his third PGA Tour event since turning professional at the 3M Open on July 26. He did it with flair, closing with a bogey-free 66 to reach a tournament-record 25-under 259, holding off world No. 1 Scottie Scheffler by three strokes at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minn. "Growing up, it's just a lifelong dream to become a PGA Tour winner," Koivun said Wednesday at Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro, N.C., where play begins Thursday in the Wyndham Championship. "Just that feeling when the final putt drops and they hand you the trophy, it's quite special because you work so hard for that moment. Just indescribable feeling." Koivun, who celebrated that early victory in his young career by fishing - more like trying - the ponds at the Minnesota golf course, has vaulted into contention for a FedExCup playoff berth going into this week's regular-season finale. With the victory, he rose 124 spots to No. 70, the final qualifying berth for the first leg of the playoffs, the FedEx St. Jude Championship. Koivun also is No. 70 in the Official World Golf Ranking, up from No. 206 before the triumph in Minnesota. That doesn't mean he has become instantly recognizable to the public. "Here and there," Koivun said. "Sometimes at the airport when I'm carrying some golf clubs around, but nothing too crazy." His success might at first seem a bit crazy, but it's hardly overnight. Koivun entered the professional ranks with immediate PGA Tour status after completing a decorated career at Auburn and qualifying through PGA Tour University Accelerated. Koivun was a three-time Southeastern Conference Player of the Year, a three-time All-American and a two-time national champion at Auburn. He turned pro ahead of the John Deere Classic in early July. The former No. 1-ranked amateur in the world, Koivun tied for fifth at the Wyndham Championship at 14 under par. Now he's back, a year later, and "not quite sure" that he would have success this quickly as a pro. "It's like there's no lack of faith in my mind that I can come out here and win, but doing it in three events, I wouldn't say it's surprising, it's just like it hasn't quite set in. It's like kind of shocking almost," said Koivun, a native of San Jose.

SPOTLIGHT

Rybakina, Gauff reach Toronto third round

AFP
Toronto

Second seed Elena Rybakina, third seed Jessica Pegula and fourth-seeded Coco Gauff all advanced to the third round of the WTA 1000 tournament in Toronto on Wednesday.

Australian Open champion Rybakina, of Kazakhstan, began her hardcourt run ahead of the US Open by outlasting Australian Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in 2hr 33min.

World number two Rybakina began the match by hitting six consecutive winners but also made 58 unforced errors.

"I want to see better serve, the percentage," Rybakina said after coughing up 16 double faults against 15 aces. "Today in key moments it worked, but still the percentage is quite low."

"I'm still adapting a bit to the jet lag and everything, so maybe my energy level could be better."

Rybakina hit back-to-back double faults to drop the second set and three double faults while serving for the match before advancing to face 28th-seeded American Ann Li, who eliminated Canadian wildcard Kayla Cross 7-6 (7/2), 6-3.

"For the first match it wasn't too bad, but of course I want to improve," Rybakina said. Pegula,



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan returns a shot to Daria Kasatkina of Australia during day four of the WTA 1000 tournament in Toronto. (AFP)

who lost in a rain-delayed Washington final on Monday, was also extended in a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 win over Poland's Magdalena Frech.

"I was just happy with the way I was able to mentally stay in there," said Pegula, who also beat Frech in the second-round in Washington a week ago.

"It was more of a mental battle just for me figuring out what to do and not get too frustrated."

"Having to face an opponent like that back-to-back is never easy, especially with a quick turnaround this week."

Pegula faces a third-round match against Uzbekistan's Ka-

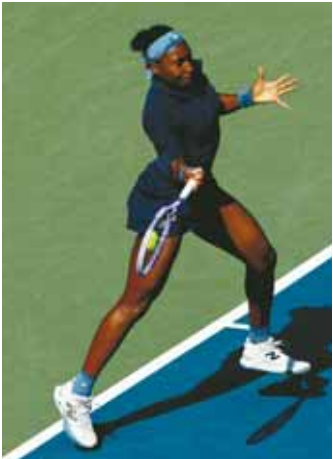
milla Rakhimova, whose opponent Katerina Siniakova retired when trailing 6-7 (1/7), 6-0, 5-2.

Two-time Grand Slam winner Gauff cruised into the third round by dispatching fellow American Kayla Day 6-2, 7-5.

"The goal is to peak at the US Open, so I know maybe this first week I'm not going to be feeling 100 percent," said Gauff, who will face Greece's Maria Sakkari next.

"I feel like by tomorrow I'll be good. I think it was just a long couple of weeks for me training."

World number five Russian Mirra Andreeva, the French Open champion, cruised past Czech



Coco Gauff of the United States returns a shot to Kayla Day of the United States in Toronto. (AFP)

Karolina Pliskova 6-0, 6-2.

Andreeva will play Canada's 30th seed Leylah Fernandez, who beat Mexico's Renata Zarazua 6-2, 6-2.

Japan's Naomi Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam winner, won 6-2, 6-4 against Hungary's Panna Udvardy and will play Belgian Elise Mertens next. Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova was knocked out by American Caty McNally 7-6 (7/5), 6-1.

McNally will meet Alexandra Eala, fresh from the Filipina's maiden WTA title in Washington. Eala beat Alycia Parks 6-1, 4-6, 6-2.

LA LIGA

Real Madrid extend Vinicius deal and sign Diomande

The 26-year-old Brazilian had one year left on his previous deal

AFP
Madrid

Real Madrid announced a new six-year deal for star forward Vinicius Junior and the signing of teenage sensation Yan Diomande in a major boost to their quest to end a two-year trophy drought.

The decision by Brazil hero Vinicius to extend his contract quells speculation linking him to Arsenal and is a win for Real as they rebuild their squad in Jose Mourinho's second spell in charge.

"Real Madrid FC and Vinicius Jr have agreed the extension of the contract of our player, who is tied to the club until June 30, 2032," Los Blancos said in a statement.

The 26-year-old had one year left on his previous deal and media reports said Arsenal had made him a transfer target while his future at Real seemed uncertain.

Vinicius has become a core member of Real Madrid's squad since arriving eight years ago aged 18 and has made decisive contributions to the club's success in that time.

He has scored 128 goals in 375 games and lifted multiple trophies, including two Champions League titles and three La Liga crowns. But the Spanish giants have fallen on fallow times in the past two seasons, picking up no major trophies while eternal rivals Barcelona secured back-to-back La Liga titles.

Vinicius, French superstar Kylian Mbappe, England midfielder Jude Bellingham and Rodrygo are set to be accompanied by Diomande in a bolstered Real attack next season.

The club unveiled the signing of the 19-year-old Ivory Coast winger from Leipzig for what Spanish media reported was a club-record fee of 140mb euros (\$161mn) in-



The decision by Vinicius to extend his contract quells speculation linking him to Arsenal.



Yan Diomande

cluding bonuses. Los Blancos said in a statement that the deal with the Bundesliga side would keep Diomande in the Spanish capital

"for the next seven seasons, until June 30, 2033".

"Moving to Real Madrid is a childhood dream come true for me," Diomande was quoted as saying in a Leipzig statement.

The young star said he was "incredibly grateful" to the German club, which "placed their trust in me and gave me the opportunity to prove myself at the highest level".

Madrid, who did not disclose the transfer fee, beat Paris Saint-Germain and Liverpool to the signing of Diomande, who played at the World Cup with his country.

PSG pulled out of the running because of concerns over the size of the transfer fee, while Liverpool reportedly had a bid rejected in June.

Diomande spent one season in the German top flight with Leipzig following a switch from Spanish side Leganes in 2025.

He was the Bundesliga young player of the season, netting 12 goals and laying on eight assists.

Diomande is Madrid's sixth signing this summer, following Marc Cucurella, Bernardo Silva, Ibrahima Konate, Denzel Dumfries and Carlos Espi.

Los Blancos have also been linked with a move for Manchester City and Spain midfield talisman Rodri.

But a Barcelona source said that Rodri had authorised the Catalan giants to begin talks with City about a potential transfer, although no move was guaranteed.

SPOTLIGHT

Kompany hopes new signings can push Bayern to Champions League triumph

AFP
Hong Kong

Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany said it would be "really tough" to improve on last season's performances but was hopeful new signings could help power the German giants to a first Champions League title since 2020.

The Bavarian side won a league and cup double last season but went out of Europe's top competition in the semi-finals to eventual champions Paris Saint-Germain.

The thrilling 6-5 aggregate defeat extended the wait for continental glory at Germany's wealthiest and most decorated club, where domestic success is often taken for granted.

"Right now, I will say our goal is to win the Champions League," Kompany told reporters in Hong Kong ahead of friendly against Aston Villa. "During the season, I will tell you we have to focus on the next game, because you cannot win the Champions League in September, you cannot win it in October.

"I think we have improved a little bit as well on the squad, with some of the transfers. Hopefully this gives us a chance to achieve our goal. It's tough to do better than last year, really tough, but it has to be our goal."

Bayern have made two major signings this summer, bringing in Moroccan midfielder Ismael Saibari from PSV Eindhoven and German defender Nathaniel Brown from Eintracht Frankfurt.

Several of their World Cup stars, including French attacker Michael Olise and England captain Harry Kane, have not travelled with the squad to Asia.

Kompany echoed Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen's insistence last week that Olise would remain at the club, despite rumours that he has been a target for Real Madrid. "The topic (of a transfer) was never open for me," the former Manchester City captain said.

He also shrugged off a question about a report by German newspaper Bild that Olise is in

a dispute with a former partner over allegedly unpaid child support. "Private life is private life," Kompany said. Olise has not commented publicly on the report.

A few thousand fans filed in to watch Bayern's open training session at Hong Kong's Kai Tak stadium, where the match against Villa will take place. Villa are adjusting to life without Morgan Rogers after the England midfielder moved to Chelsea last month for a reported British record fee of £117mn (\$157mn).

The Europa League champions have signed Swiss midfielder Johan Manzambi for a club-record fee, as well as Joao Gomes from Wolves and Alejandro Garnacho on loan from Chelsea. Roday's game rounds off a pre-season tour that also took Villa to Indonesia and Thailand, ahead of their European Super Cup clash with PSG on Wednesday.

Villa travel to Brighton for their opening Premier League fixture on August 23. Bayern kick off the new Bundesliga season at home to Stuttgart on August 28.



Rodri approves Barcelona transfer talks with Man City: Report

Madrid: Spain midfield talisman Rodri has authorised Barcelona to start talks with Manchester City for a potential transfer, a source from the reigning La Liga champions told AFP. "Today Barcelona is closer to being able to consider this transfer than yesterday. We have now secured the player's agreement to open negotiations with Manchester City," the source said, confirming Spanish press reports.

Barcelona's move could hijack eternal rivals Real Madrid's reported interest in the 30-year-old as Los Blancos seek to strengthen their midfield under new manager Jose Mourinho.

However, Rodri's green light for the talks offers "no guarantee" about a transfer to Barcelona, the club source added. Catalan media said Rodri was convinced by a phone call from Barcelona

manager Hansi Flick, who has reportedly demanded from club management the recruitment of an experienced defender or midfielder.

Defensive solidity has been identified as an area of weakness at Barcelona and a serious knee injury looks set to keep usual captain Frenkie de Jong out of the Blaugrana's midfield for months.

Rodri picked up the Golden Ball award for best player of the tournament as he captained Spain to their second World Cup crown at this year's competition in North America.

The 2024 Ballon d'Or winner amassed trophies in Manchester under Pep Guardiola, including four Premier League titles and the 2023 Champions League, scoring the winning goal against Inter Milan in the final.

FOCUS

Forlan named new Uruguay head coach

AFP
Montevideo

Former striker **Diego Forlan** has been appointed head coach of the Uruguay national team following their disastrous World Cup campaign, the country's football association (AUF) announced.

Forlan will take over, reportedly on an interim basis, from Marcelo Bielsa who stepped down following Uruguay's group-stage exit from the World Cup. "Diego Forlan is coming home (to take charge of) the Under-20 national team and the senior national team," the AUF said in a short statement.

The agreement with Forlan, who won the Golden Ball award for player of the tournament at the 2010 World Cup, was finalised after weeks of negotiations.

The 47-year-old will take over as interim coach but his contract keeps the door open for an extension, AUF sources recently told AFP.

He will be in charge of the team for friendlies in September, October and March.

Two-time world champions Uruguay are reeling after failing to get out of their group



for a second successive World Cup. Back-to-back draws with Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde put them in unexpected danger of crashing out, before their elimination was confirmed

by a loss to eventual champions Spain. The 71-year-old Bielsa was widely criticised for his tactics and for the decision to coax Fernando Muslera out of international retirement, with the veteran goalkeeper then making a string of errors.

Forlan has little coaching experience despite enjoying a stellar playing career. He made his coaching debut during the 2020 season with former club Penarol but left the post after just 11 matches due to poor results.

Forlan's only other managerial stint came in 2021, when he spent 12 games in charge of Atenas in the Uruguayan second division.

He is highly regarded, though, in Uruguay after scoring 36 international goals, including five during their run to the 2010 World Cup semi-finals, in 112 appearances. Forlan, alongside strike partner Luis Suarez, was also a key member of Uruguay's 2011 Copa America-winning side.

He enjoyed prolific spells at both Villarreal and Atletico Madrid in Spain, winning the European Golden Shoe award with both clubs.

Forlan endured a difficult stint at Manchester United between 2001 and 2004, despite winning the Premier League in 2002/03.

Qatar's Saif rewrites pole vault record with 5.83m clearance



Qatar's Saif Mohammed produced a personal best clearance of 5.83m to finish runner-up at the 30th International Pole Vault Meeting in Jockgrim, Germany. The effort saw Saif set new Qatari, Gulf, West Asian and Arab records, marking the best performance of his career. The Qatari vaulter cleared 5.83m on his third attempt, matching the winning height of Filipino star EJ Obiena, who secured gold after clearing the mark on his first attempt. Turkiye's Ersu Sasma finished third with a clearance of 5.77m. Saif, Obiena and Sasma all attempted 5.93m but failed to clear the height after three attempts.

PSG sign France midfielder Akliouche from Monaco

Paris: Paris St Germain have signed French attacking midfielder Maghnes Akliouche from fellow Ligue 1 club Monaco, the French champions said. Financial details were not disclosed. French media reported that the 24-year-old France international cost around €50mn (\$57.6mn).

Akliouche made his senior debut for Monaco in 2021 and went on to make 139 appearances for the principality club, scoring 23 goals. "Having grown up in the Paris region, joining such a prestigious club means so much to me and my family," Akliouche said in a statement.

"I can't wait to wear this shirt, continue my development at this great club and give everything I have to represent PSG in front of our supporters."

Akliouche helped France win a silver medal at the Paris Olympics in 2024 and was in their squad at this year's World Cup. At PSG, he will link up with fellow forwards including 2025 Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Desire Doue.

EVERTON SIGN DENMARK MIDFIELDER NORGAARD FROM ARSENAL

Everton have bolstered their midfield with the signing of Denmark international Christian Norgaard from Arsenal for an undisclosed fee. The 32-year-old, who has signed a two-year deal with the Toffees, joined the Gunners from Brentford last summer but was limited to just seven league starts as the north London club won the Premier League title.

Norgaard, Everton's fourth signing of the summer transfer window, told his new club's website on Wednesday: "I felt I needed a change and to play a bigger football role. When I spoke to (Everton manager) David Moyes and others at the club involved in the transfer, I heard about the whole project and I was very intrigued. Coming here just makes that feeling even stronger.

"Also, my past experience of playing against Everton: the whole atmosphere, the fans, is something I really look forward to experience as an Everton player. It's a big, big honour for me."

MESSI SCORES TWICE TO SET LEAGUES CUP RECORD IN MIAMI VICTORY

Lionel Messi scored twice on Wednesday to become the Leagues Cup's record goalscorer as Inter Miami beat Atletico San Luis 4-2 at home in the 2026 edition's opening group matches.

Messi, who helped Miami win the 2023 crown in his first weeks with the Florida club, took his tally in the competition for Major League Soccer and Mexican Liga MX sides to a record 14 goals.

David Rodriguez gave San Luis the lead in the fourth minute but Messi equalised seven minutes later. Venezuelan midfielder Telasco Segovia edged Miami ahead in the 26th minute.

Messi struck again just before half-time with Brazilian defender Micael making it 4-1 deep into first-half stoppage time. Atletico's Rafa Llorente scored a second-half consolation. Other Leagues Cup matches on Wednesday saw Dallas beat Queretaro 2-0 and Leon won 1-0 at Nashville.