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FOOTBALL

UEFA, AFC, CONCACAF hit out at embattled Infantino

Three bodies call for fully independent review to FIFA chief's failed plan to bring private investment

AFP
Lausanne

FIFA president Gianni Infantino came under renewed fire as a joint letter from three confederations – UEFA, CONCACAF and AFC – declared football “belongs to no individual”. Infantino has been the butt of scathing criticism ever since launching, and then withdrawing within days, a plan to bring private investment into FIFA competitions, including World Cups. FIFA had hit back on Saturday at “a concerted and ongoing effort by some to undermine” football’s governing body and Infantino. However, yesterday’s letter from the governing bodies of European football (UEFA), North and Central America (CONCACAF) and Asia (AFC), showed his critics are unbowed. “Leadership in football is not a possession. It is not about holding – or demanding – power to be held,” they wrote. “When trust is broken through deception, when an individual places himself above the collective that entrusted him with authority, that duty has been abandoned,” the confederations added. The three confederations had been vociferous in their condemnation of Infantino’s plan and had not let up after it was shelved. CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani is viewed as a potential challenger to Infantino, who will seek a fourth and final term at the FIFA presidential election in Rabat next March. Candidates have to be declared by November 18. UEFA’s threat to boycott World Cups if the private investment plan went ahead – in theory depriving the competition of teams including reigning men’s champions Spain and 2026 semi-finalists France and England – proved pivotal in Infantino withdrawing his plan.



FIFA President Gianni Infantino has been the target of scathing criticism ever since launching, and then withdrawing within days, a plan to bring private investment into FIFA competitions, including World Cups. (AFP)

Prior to this debacle Infantino had looked likely to be unopposed, after overseeing a successful World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada. The 56-year-old Swiss, who has been in situ for 10 years, has received the backing of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) while South American governing body CONMEBOL are largely supportive. The confederations do not vote as blocs and there have been some supportive voices for Infantino from CONCACAF, Mexico, and two AFC members – Kuwait and 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar, where he has a house. Although the proposal has been dead in the water for over a week now – UEFA had termed it “a shabby, opaque, backroom deal” – the confederations hanged him for a lack of judgement. “FIFA’s recent letter to its Vice-Presidents and 211 Member Associations acknowledges that mistakes were made in the process,” they said. “It treats this as a failure of communication, when what foot-

ball witnessed was a failure of judgment.” Although Infantino had received the “full support” of senior FIFA directors last week in an emergency meeting he called in Morocco, the confederations said it was meaningless. “This recent meeting, where a select number of members of the FIFA Management Committee – not the full Committee – were summoned abroad, rather than leadership going to Zurich to address the heart of FIFA, its staff, only reinforces these concerns and represents a continuation of the very pattern of conduct that brought us to this moment,” they said. “It is not the conduct of a custodian of the game, but of one who believes the game is answerable to him.” Infantino had been basking in the afterglow of a hugely successful World Cup – the largest ever involving 48 teams. However, the confederations made clear in the letter that it was not just Infantino who had made this possible. “The growth over the past decade has been real,” they said. “But that progress was never the work of one individual. It was the product of FIFA, the Confederations, the Member Associations, and the thousands of people who dedicate their lives to the game. “The expanded tournaments, the awarding of the 2030 and 2034 FIFA World Cups, the distribution of resources to associations. These were shared achievements, agreed together, delivered together” The confederations signed off their letter by claiming that under Infantino’s leadership “there is silence where there should be accountability, distance where there should be openness”. They added: “That is why we have taken this stance: not lightly and not alone, but together, and out of duty to the game we serve. Football’s strength has always been its unity.”

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool loan Araujo from Barca to bolster injury-hit defence

Reuters
Liverpool

Liverpool have signed Uruguay defender Ronald Araujo from Spanish champions Barcelona on a season-long loan, the Premier League club announced, as they moved to strengthen an injury-ravaged defence. British media reported that the deal includes an option to buy the 27-year-old for about £47mn (\$63.48mn). Araujo arrives at a time when Liverpool are facing mounting defensive problems. Joe Gomez suffered a muscle injury in the club’s opening pre-season match, while teenage centre back Giovanni Leoni is recovering from an ACL injury. Young centre back Jeremy Jacquet is also nursing an injury, leaving captain Virgil van Dijk, 35, as Liverpool’s only fully fit senior central defender. “I think it was the ideal move for me at this stage in my career. I think it was a move that was necessary for me to take,” Araujo said in a statement. “As soon as I heard that interest from Liverpool, everything went into action really, really quickly.” The club’s options at right back have also been depleted. Conor Bradley is still recovering from a significant knee injury, while Jeremie Frimpong endured an injury-hit campaign last season and struggled for form. Capable of playing both at centre back and right back, Araujo provides Liverpool with much-needed cover in two areas where they are currently short of options. Araujo joined Barcelona B from Uruguayan side Boston River in 2018 and made his senior debut the following year. He has since won three LaLiga titles, including back-to-back championships in 2024-25 and 2025-26, as well as two Copa del Rey trophies and three Spanish Super Cup titles.



Barcelona did not specify the details of the deal, but according to reports, Liverpool will cover Ronald Araujo’s wages and will have an option to buy him for £47mn.

Araujo was named in the LaLiga Team of the Season in 2021-22 and 2023-24. However, he found opportunities harder to come by last season, making only 11 league starts as Pau Cubarsi and Gerard Martin established themselves as Hansi Flick’s preferred central defensive pairing. One of Barca’s captains, Araujo also saw his involvement reduced after taking an indefinite leave of absence from the club

Amazon founder Bezos nears deal to buy stake in Liverpool: reports

London: A consortium including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is close to agreeing a deal to acquire a stake of about one-third in Premier League club Liverpool, multiple media outlets reported. The investor group also includes Eduardo Saverin, the Facebook co-founder, the reports said. Sky News reported that the consortium is being led by Amit Bhatia, the son-in-law of steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal and a former shareholder in English Championship (second-tier) club Queens Park Rangers, and that Liverpool owner Fenway Sports Group could announce a deal as early as this week. “An investment consortium led, managed and represented by Amit Bhatia has expressed interest in making a strategic minority investment in Liverpool Football Club,” an FSG spokesperson said last month. The investment would reportedly value the club at approximately £4.4bn (\$5.9bn), making it one of the biggest valuations ever achieved in a football club deal. FSG, which acquired Liverpool in 2010, has explored outside investment in recent years while retaining control of the club. A deal at the reported valuation would underline the substantial increase in Liverpool’s worth during FSG’s 16-year

ownership. The investment comes at a time of significant change on and off the pitch at Anfield. Liverpool finished a disappointing fifth in the Premier League last season despite spending about £446mn on new players. The club subsequently parted ways with Dutch manager Arne Slot and appointed former Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola in a bid to revive their fortunes, while their talismanic Egypt forward Mohamed Salah has also departed. Michael Edwards, widely credited with helping build the squad that won Liverpool’s first domestic league title in 30 years in 2020, left his role as chief executive officer of football at Fenway Sports Group in July. Liverpool, one of world football’s most successful clubs, are also among the sport’s most valuable and widely supported teams, with their iconic Anfield stadium at the heart of a global fan base. They won a joint-record 20th English league title in the 2024-25 season. Their honours also include six European Cups, eight FA Cups, a record 10 League Cups and one FIFA Club World Cup. Liverpool open their new Premier League season at Newcastle United on August 23. injury. Liverpool finished fifth in the Premier League last season despite spending about 446mn pounds on signings. The club subsequently parted ways with manager Arne Slot and appointed former Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola in a bid to revive their fortunes. Liverpool open the Premier League season at Newcastle United on August 23.

and excited to get started. I’m glad about the interest and it was the right move at the right time,” Araujo added. He is under contract with Barca until 2031. Liverpool have signed Jacquet and forward Victor Munoz during the close season, but have also lost talisman Mohamed Salah, Andy Robertson and Ibrahim Konate. Forward Hugo Ekitike is

EUROPEAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Tentoglou keeps alive bid for fourth Euro title

'I have defended so many titles, so I don't feel the pressure, I feel excited'

AFP
Birmingham

Greek long jumper Miltiadis Tentoglou kept his bid for a fourth European title on track at the opening day of the 2026 championships in Birmingham yesterday. Double Olympic champion Tentoglou sailed into the final of the men's long jump with an effort of 8.26m at the Alexander Stadium that secured automatic qualification. "Tomorrow I want to jump 8.50m, 8.60m and win," said the 28-year-old Greek. "I'm good, so I should be able to. I have defended so many titles, so I don't feel the pressure, I feel excited."

Italian Francesco Ettore Inzoli, with a wind-assisted 8.34m, and Serbian Luka Boskovic (8.33) led the way into Tuesday's final.

The world outdoor and indoor champion from 2025, Italy's Mattia Furlani, missed out on qualification with one effort of 7.73m on his comeback from injury.

Like Tentoglou, Poland's Wojciech Nowicki is also a serial European gold medallist, having won the last three men's hammer throw titles, in Berlin in 2018, Munich in 2022 and Rome two years ago. But Nowicki, Olympic champion in Tokyo in 2021 and who also has five world medals to his name (two silver, three bronze), missed out on qualification for today's final. He managed a best of 74.49m, which saw him finish 13th, 73cm off the 12th and final qualifier spot.

Nowicki's teammate Pawel Fajdek, the five-time world gold medallist who also won an European title in 2016, will ensure Polish interest in an event the country has dominated in recent times.

Czech Volodymyr Myslyvcuk (79.61m) and Hungary's Bence Halasz (79.58) led the qualifiers, the only two athletes comfortably beyond the automatic qualification standard of 78.00m.

The Netherlands' Jessica Schilder looked comfortable in qualifying for the women's shot



Greece's Miltiadis Tentoglou competes in the men's long jump qualifier during the European Athletics Championships at Alexander Stadium in Birmingham yesterday. (AFP)



Poland's Wojciech Nowicki competes in the men's hammer throw qualifier in Birmingham yesterday. (AFP)

put, the final of which will be held later Monday.

The two-time defending champion comes to Birmingham in fine form, having made history at the Shanghai Diamond League when she threw 21.09m to not only break the Diamond League record, but also became just the third woman in the world to break 21 metres since the turn of the millennium.

Schilder, seeking to become just the second woman to win the event three or more times, will face stiff competition from Germany's Yemisi Mabry, formerly Ogunleye. Olympic champion Mabry topped qualifying with a best of 19.25m, while Schilder progressed with a first-round effort of 19.00m.

"I'm really not a huge fan of qualifying sessions in the morning

if I'm completely honest. I really don't like it," said Schilder.

"The first step was to get through qualifying and that's done, so now it's about focusing on tonight."

Max Burgin and Ben Pattison delighted the British crowd by qualifying for the semi-finals of the men's 800m. France's Yanis Meziane ran the fastest heat, in 1min 45.10sec, but teammate and defending champion Gabriel Tual only just snuck in.

Tual, the sixth-fastest man and the second-fastest European in the two-lap race, was the 13th and final qualifier in 1:46.33.

The evening session at the 18,000-capacity Alexander Stadium features five finals. Golds will be up for grabs for both men and women in the shot put, while Amy Hunt will be vying for a British victory in the women's 100m.

Jakob Ingebrigtsen is gunning for a seventh European title in the men's 5,000m, while there are also bragging rights to claim in the mixed 4x400m relay.

CRICKET

Scotland, Netherlands criticise ICC's World Cup format changes

Reuters
London

Cricket Scotland and the Royal Dutch Cricket Association (KNCB) have criticised the International Cricket Council (ICC) for changing the format of the 2027 Men's ODI World Cup less than 18 months before the tournament.

The ICC introduced a new Super Series phase under which the teams ranked 12th, 13th and 14th in the qualification process will contest a tri-series, with only one progressing to the second round, where 12 teams will be split into two groups.

The two Associate Member boards described the lack of communication as "disappointing and disrespectful".

"These changes represent a setback to Associate Member cricket and risk undermining the progress made in recent years to grow the global game," they said in a joint statement yesterday.

"At a time when cricket is seeking to expand its reach, attract new audiences and strengthen its position on the international sporting landscape, reducing meaningful opportunities for emerging nations sends entirely the wrong message."

Associate Members are nations that belong to the ICC but do not hold Full Member status, which is reserved for the game's leading countries.

The 2027 World Cup will be co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

WCA welcomes formation of Sri Lanka players' body

The World Cricketers' Association (WCA) said the formation of a players' body in Sri Lanka was a landmark development for the professionalism and growth of the game in the country.

The Sri Lankan Professional Cricketers' Association was officially launched on Saturday, with white-ball captain Kusal Mendis named its inaugural president. Its creation comes as Sri Lanka Cricket undergoes a reform process led by a government-appointed committee.

"A strong game and strong player representation go hand in hand," WCA Chief Executive Tom Moffat said in a statement.

"Cricket thrives when players have a genuine voice in its future, and by coming together with a unified voice, the Sri Lankan players have demonstrated a deep commitment to the long-term health, integrity and professional progression of the game." Women's team captain Chamari Athapaththu has also backed the association, which will give players a stronger voice, particularly in negotiations with the cricket board over permission to take part in franchise cricket. Players in 17 of the top 19 cricket-playing countries are now affiliated with the WCA, with India and Pakistan the exceptions.

Golden relay double for Britain as Marchand settles for silver



Great Britain swimmers pose with their gold medals after the men's 4x200m freestyle relay final during the European Aquatics Championships in Saint-Denis. (AFP)

Britain won both the men's and women's 4x200m freestyle relays on the opening day of the European swimming championships yesterday as French swim star Leon Marchand took silver with his team as he returns from injury. The four-woman British team of Freya Colbert, Abbie Wood, Leah Schlosshan and Freya Anderson crushed their rivals and narrowly missed out on the continental record with their time of 7min 45.93sec. Behind them, the battle for the podium was tight between Hungary, Germany and Russia. Ultimately the Hungarian women took silver in 7:49.09, ahead of Russia, competing under a neutral flag (7:49.13). The German women missed the podium by a hundredth of a second.

Moments later, the British men emulated their compatriots winning gold in 7:01.52, thanks to Matthew Richards, Jack McMillan, James Guy and Duncan Scott. France were spurred on by the home crowd and four-time Olympic champion Marchand, but finished second in 7:02.23. The bronze medal went to Germany (7:02.28). Earlier Russia's Ilya Borodin took the men's 4x200m freestyle gold as Olympic and world champion Marchand skipped that event. Borodin clocked 4:08.17 with Italy's Alberto Razzetti taking silver in 4:10.40. Britain's Max Litchfield won bronze in 4:11.58. The 23-year-old Borodin, competing as a neutral athlete as a result of the invasion of Ukraine, had won bronze at the world championships in Singapore last year. A major rival of Marchand during their junior careers, Borodin would undoubtedly have welcomed the chance to face the world record holder (4:02.50) in the event.

Russia launches new challenge to World Athletics sanctions

Russia's athletics federation said yesterday it had lodged a new claim at the Court of Arbitration for Sport to challenge the sanctions imposed by World Athletics.

The global body for track and field announced in July it was keeping in place a ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes that was imposed in March 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Russian federation, Russian Athletics, claims the sanctions are "selective and politicised".

"The current restrictions infringe on the organisation's rights and prevent it from fully representing the interests of Russian athletes on an international level," it added in a statement. The International Olympic Committee (IOC)

has announced that Russian athletes will be allowed to compete in team events and qualifying competitions for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The stance of World Athletics, headed by Briton Sebastian Coe, is in contrast to the federations of other Olympic sports - World Gymnastics and the International Skating Union, for example, have eased restrictions on Russian competitors.

"The sanctions against Russian Athletics are unprecedented. No other sports federation faces such severe restrictions," Boris Yaryshevskiy, Chief Executive Director of Russian Athletics, said.

"They not only hinder the federation's normal

operation but also hold back the development of athletics in Russia, particularly among young athletes, preventing us from properly representing our sport in the international arena.

"That is why we will consistently defend our rights, pursue the lifting of the sanctions through the courts, and continue our work in this direction. We are already preparing our next steps to restore justice."

World Athletics said it would be "strenuously defending" its stance.

"As we have said before in reference to the Russian Athletics Federation's request for arbitration to CAS, we will be strenuously defending our position," said World Athletics in a statement to AFP.

MOTORSPORT

Fast sport slow to change as F1 marks 50 years since last female racer

Reuters
London

Alexia Danielsson was 14 when she first drove a Formula One car, a modified 2007 Williams owned by a family friend.

Now 17 and competing in the Central European F4 series where rivals include 15-year-old Ella Hakkinen, McLaren-backed daughter of retired double F1 world champion Mika, the Swede hopes one day to be on the grand prix starting grid for real.

"I don't think anything is impossible, you just have to really go for it. How long? I have no idea," Danielsson, currently 26th of 49 in the standings, told Reuters.

The youngster is one of many chasing a dream that only a vanishingly small number will ever realise. And for the past 50 years, only men have managed to make it all the way. This weekend marks half a century since a woman last

raced in the Formula One world championship, and the wait looks far from over. Italian Maria Grazia "Lella" Lombardi finishing 12th in the Austrian Grand Prix at Spielberg's old Osterreichring on August 15, 1976. F1 chief executive Stefano Domenicali said in 2024 he could not see it happening in the next five years.

MORE THAN EQUAL SEEKS CHANGE

Danielsson, whose father Alx won the 2006 World Series by Renault, is already an elite racer - one of a select cohort being helped by More Than Equal, an initiative set up in 2022 by former F1 racer David Coulthard and Czech billionaire Karel Komarek. The non-profit global programme's founding aim was "to identify, develop and support the first female Formula One world champion".

"We're not a race team, we don't have shiny cars with shiny stickers, we're not a race series," chief executive Tom Stanton told Reu-

ters. "What we do is build drivers, and that's how we fit into the ecosystem."

There is no doubting the commitment of those selected, or awareness of how difficult the chosen path will be as the sport's popularity explodes. These are not starry-eyed converts to the sport, lured in by the appeal of Netflix docu-series "Drive to Survive".

Danielsson started karting at six, switching to cars at 13. Others have moved way from home, some to other continents just as some current F1 drivers did at a similar age, to progress. Stanton said that when More Than Equal started the driver development programme those involved knew there was a mountain to climb. Two years later it looks more like Everest, but at least the Base Camp has been clearly established.

The Formula One-backed all-female F1 Academy series, which effectively replaced a previous W Series and with whom More Than Equal has a partnership, has also



More Than Equal's chief executive Tom Stanton.

raised the profile with races during selected grand prix weekends on the support programme.

Britain's Abbi Pulling won F1 Academy in 2024 as well as a British F4 race. She has also been a winner in the GB3 championship this year. Frenchwoman Doriane Pin, last year's champion, has since tested a Mercedes F1 car. "There are starting to be more

female drivers out there," said Stanton. "Also, they are performing better. I think that's one of the things, that as female drivers start to be more consistently towards the top of the field, more people will notice. And that's a blessing and a curse because there becomes an expectation then."

PLATFORM TO IDENTIFY EMERGING TALENT

More Than Equal has created FutureLap, a platform that crunches data from karting and junior single-seater championships to identify emerging talent, male and female, that might otherwise struggle to be noticed.

A study has also been launched with the University of Portsmouth to advance understanding of female ergonomics in Formula Four.

"What we do see is that there are more female drivers coming through," said Stanton. "And it's not that they weren't there. It's just that we couldn't see them because the results are not gen-

der marked. Andrea in the UK is a girl's name. In Italy it's a boy's name." The first group of six selected by More Than Equal was whittled down from 1,000 applicants. The second intake of eight came from 1,500.

"The ambition is still that we want to see the first female driver win that F1 Championship, I think that we also should acknowledge that there are a number of firsts along the way that are of really equal importance," said Stanton. "I'm not saying that the first female F1 Champion wouldn't be an absolutely meteoric event, but actually the first female to sit on the grid in some ways will have equal importance because it legitimises the notion that it can be a mixed sport."

"I think that what we're doing is unique. I also think that it will take a village to raise this child. It's going to be a combination of us and teams and other support systems, and we are all going to have to work in concert to make it work."

MONTREAL MASTERS

Shelton sweeps past Fonseca to reach quarters

‘It was tough. With the wind I struggled to find footing on a lot of balls’

AFP
Montreal

Defending champion Ben Shelton kept a clean slate at the ATP Montreal Masters on Sunday, holding off a challenge from Joao Fonseca to power 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) into the quarter-finals.

World number 10 Shelton has not dropped a set in reaching the last eight.

The 23-year-old American left-hander will play for a semi-final berth against 13th-seeded Czech Jakub Mensik, who beat Botic Van De Zandschulp 6-4, 7-5, claiming victory on a winning lob.

Van De Zandschulp served for the second set but was broken, with Mensik seizing the momentum as he won 12 of the final 14 points.

Brazilian teenager Fonseca, billed as one of the faces for the future of the sport, might have compromised his own chances when he landed badly on his ankle after missing a smash while leading 3-1, 40-30 in the second set.

The youngster was plagued by 32 unforced errors as his opponent mastered an annoying evening wind to earn the victory.

“It was tough today, not easy conditions,” Shelton said. “With the wind I struggled to find footing on a lot of balls.

“It all came down to grit. The tennis was not clean. Beating a high-quality player like that is huge for me.”

Shelton secured his ninth straight victory in Canada on the second of four match points as Fonseca hit the net with a return after leading in both sets.

Daniel Merida smothered Tal-



Ben Shelton of the United States celebrates his victory against Joao Fonseca of Brazil in the Montreal Masters. (AFP)

lon Griekspoor 6-3, 6-1 as the Spaniard continued his rapid adjustment to hardcourt tennis in Canada.

The world number 63 joins compatriot Rafael Jodar in the Canada quarter-finals and will break through to a career-best spot inside the top 50 as a result of his fourth-round victory.

Prior to making his Montreal debut, clay-courtier Merida had never won a tour-level match on hardcourt.

He will try to extend his streak of cement success to five in a row when he plays a first Masters

quarter-final against US 12th seed Learner Tien, who wore down Argentine Thiago Tirante 6-4, 6-4.

Tien saved the first eight break points he faced in the second set in a battle of big hitters and secured victory in his fifth match point, with his opponent handing over the final game with four unforced errors.

“Today was humid, conditions are always tough,” Tien said. “I’m happy with how the match worked out.

“This was one of those days where I was making good contact with the ball. I was seeing the ball

well and returning well.”

Against Griekspoor, Merida was deadly with his backhand, leaving the Dutchman flat-footed in the 69-minute triumph.

Spain’s title-winner last month on clay in Umag has now claimed 16 victories this breakthrough season.

“This is a dream come true. I’m feeling really great,” Merida said. “I’m happy with the level during all the week.

“I was playing great for the last year and the beginning of this year so I just starting to believe more in myself.”

TENNIS

Rybakina survives scare as Gauff, Osaka race into quarters

AFP
Toronto

World number two Elena Rybakina survived a huge scare to battle into the Canadian Open quarter-finals on Sunday in Toronto while fourth-ranked Coco Gauff cruised through.

Kazakhstan’s Rybakina recovered from 0-3 and two breaks down in the final set to beat Liudmila Samsonova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 before American Gauff swept aside Russian teenage qualifier Alina Korneeva, 6-3, 6-1.

Rybakina will face four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka, who eliminated home hero Leylah Fernandez 6-4, 6-4.

Gauff reached the last eight in Canada for the first time since 2023 and next meets 14th-ranked Swiss Belinda Bencic, who won 6-4, 6-0 in 73 minutes over 20th-ranked Alexandra Eala, a Filipina who won her first WTA title last Monday in Washington.

“My main focus today was let me try and close it out,” said Gauff, who has not dropped a set in Canada. “Probably not the way I should be thinking but it worked today.

“I’m proud of how the last three matches have gone and

just knowing if I have to go the distance I’m ready, but obviously would prefer to cut it short if I can.”

Osaka broke in the seventh game of each set to advance in 82 minutes.

“It was all pretty good for me,” the 13th-ranked Osaka said. “She has a great attitude. She’s consistent and she will fight. She’s kind of like a bulldog.”

The Japanese star, who has never faced Rybakina, said sound groundstrokes were key.

“When I feel comfortable or at least confident in myself knowing I can run things down, I loosen up a lot,” Osaka said.

“I was catching my service toss a couple times. Hopefully in the next match I don’t do that as often.

“I need to be confident in myself, execute what I can and at the end of the day just try my best and whatever happens happens.”

Bencic connected on 64.4% of her first serves and won 72.4% of those points in a 73-minute victory, her 10th win in a row over left-handed opponents.

“I hate to play against lefties so I’m surprised by this statistic,” Bencic said. “Very tricky.

“Maybe helped me I played a lefty the round before against Taylor Townsend. I got used to the serve a little bit. I wish I was a lefty too.”



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan returns a shot to Liudmila Samsonova during their Toronto Masters match. (AFP)

GOLF

Brennan captures Wyndham crown

AFP
Washington

Michael Brennan fired a six-under par 64 to win the Wyndham Championship on Sunday, taking his second PGA Tour title in the final regular-season event before the FedEx Cup playoffs.

The 24-year-old American closed with a 13-foot birdie putt at the 18th hole to finish on 22-under 258 and defeat compatriot Beau Hossler by three strokes.

Brennan, whose other PGA title came last October at the Bank of Utah Championship on a sponsor’s exemption, took home \$1.53 million from the \$8.5 million purse on offer at Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro, North Carolina. Brennan reeled off five birdies in a row Sunday to seize command, a run that began with an eight-foot birdie putt at the fourth hole and included a birdie at the par-three seventh where he missed an ace by six inches.

He made bogey at 11 after a tee shot into the right rough but sank a testy five-foot par putt at the par-three 12th and answered with an eight-foot birdie putt at 13.

“I did it great for nine holes,”



Michael Brennan celebrates after winning the Wyndham Championship in Greensboro, North Carolina. (AFP)

Brennan said. “I felt really good on the front nine, just playing my game. I was really staying within myself, hitting good shots. I felt like I was really in control.

“Got a little nervous around 10, 11. I made a nice par putt on 12 and that steadied me a little bit going through and just glad to make a few putts coming in.”

Hossler birdied 16 and 17 to pull within two shots on the final tee, setting the stage for Brennan’s clinching birdie. Brennan began the week 105th in the season points rankings with only the

top 70 after this week advancing to the playoffs. The victory lifted Brennan to 47th in the points and a berth in the postseason showdown. “I don’t want to be done playing golf,” Brennan said. “I feel like I played the best golf I have all year the last couple weeks. This is my sixth week in a row. Seven is a lot but I think I’m going to be perfectly happy running on fumes next week.”

The playoff field will be trimmed from 70 to 50 players after next week’s event in Memphis.

Hossler shot 67 to take second by one stroke over fellow American Ben James, who had a closing 61. Hossler jumped 50 places in the points race but missed out on the playoffs, finishing 72nd. “Disappointed but very proud of how I fought on the back nine, particularly at the end,” Hossler said. “Stings a little bit but very proud of my commitment. Pretty valiant effort.”

Jackson Koivun, a 21-year-old American who turned professional last month and won the 3M Open two weeks ago, started and finished the week 70th on the list to capture the final playoff spot.

Brennan was the only golfer who began the week out of the playoffs and charged into the postseason at the last event.

FOCUS

Qatar drawn with Iran, Chinese Taipei and Jordan at Asian Games basketball

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar has been drawn alongside Iran, Jordan and Chinese Taipei in Group B of the men’s basketball competition at the 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

The Asian Games are scheduled to take place from September 19 to October 4, with athletes from across Asia competing in a wide range of sports. Basketball is among the major team events on the Games program.

The men’s basketball tournament will feature 12 teams divided into three groups of four, according to the organizers.

Group A comprises hosts Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, while Group C includes China, the Philippines, Bahrain and Kazakhstan.

Qatar will begin its group campaign against Iran on September 10, before playing Jordan two days later. Its final preliminary-round match will be against Chinese Taipei on September 13.



The group stage is scheduled to run through September 14, with the quarterfinals beginning on September 16. The semi-finals are set for September 18, followed by the bronze-medal game and championship final on September 20. Qatar enters the tournament with a history of success in Asian basketball.

The national team qualified for the FIBA Basketball World Cup for the first time in 2006, when Japan hosted the tournament. The qualification represented a landmark moment for Qatari basketball and elevated

the team onto the global stage.

Qatar also won bronze at the FIBA Asia Cup in 2003 and 2005, while claiming the Asian Challenge Cup title in 2004.

At the regional level, Qatar has regularly competed in the Gulf Championship and the West Asia Championship, collecting several titles and establishing a longstanding presence in regional basketball.

The team will now look to build on that record when it takes on three familiar Asian opponents in the preliminary round in Nagoya.

RAHM THREE-PEATS AS LIV SEASON CHAMP, NIEMANN CLAIMS NEW YORK TITLE

Jon Rahm captured his third consecutive LIV Golf season crown on Sunday while Chile’s Joaquin Niemann took a wire-to-wire victory at LIV Golf New York for a record ninth series title.

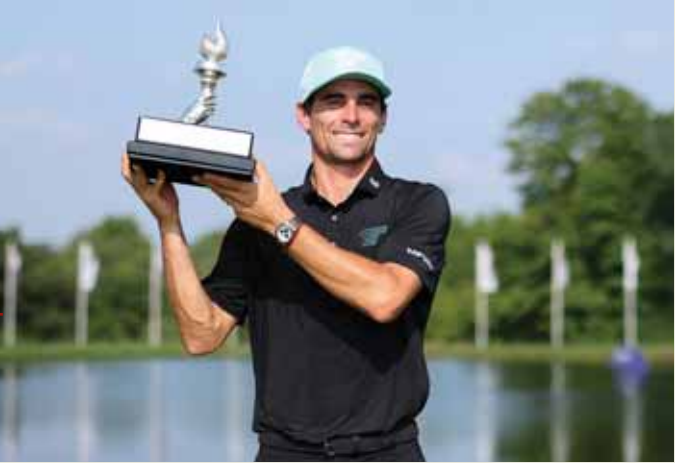
Niemann fired a two-under par 69 to finish 72 holes on 16-under 268 and defeat American Harold Varner III by three strokes at Trump National Bedminster in New Jersey. “The more they push me the better golfer I became from every experience,” Niemann said. “I was just hoping to be able to hit the shots I did and make the putts that I did coming down the stretch. I put the credit on myself.” England’s Lee Westwood and Scott

Vincent of Zimbabwe shared third, both seven off the pace. Rahm finished tied for 41st after firing a closing 76 Sunday, but clinched the season trophy with an unassailable 219-point lead over Bryson DeChambeau going into the finale in two weeks at Indianapolis. Rahm, whose 2025 season crown came despite no victories, won this year at Hong Kong in March and Mexico City in April. He also had runner-up efforts in Riyadh, Adelaide, South Africa and Andalucia. “It has been a great year,” Rahm said. “A little sour taste in my mouth because of how badly I played this week but it has been something to be proud of. “And af-

ter last year not getting a win and possibly having a question mark over the season-long race to win twice effectively and win it again, definitely feels good.” Rahm was proud of his early season performances, with two wins, three seconds and a fifth in the first six tournaments of 2026. “Proud of earlier in the season. I think to start off as well as I did with a few second-places and not getting in the way,” Rahm said. “Then going to Hong Kong and getting it done when I needed to, having a lead and then losing it and then birdieing four in a row in the last few holes was probably the most proud moment.”

Niemann, who opened with a bogey at the first hole but birdied the par-three seventh, sank a 56-foot birdie putt at the 13th hole and a long eagle putt at the 15th to seize a four-stroke edge on Varner. A bogey at 17 only trimmed his victory margin. Crushers, with DeChambeau as captain, won the LIV Golf New York team title on six-over par, defeating Legion XIII and Torque by two strokes.

Joaquin Niemann of Chile poses with the individual champion trophy after winning the LIV Golf New York in Bedminster, New Jersey. (AFP)



SQUASH

Gohar's returns as Asal hunts for elusive Qatar Classic title

Qatar's al-Tamimi ruptured his achilies tendon at last year's event but is back in action this season

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Former World Champion and World No 1 Nouran Gohar is set to make her highly-anticipated return to the PSA Squash Tour after a year away from competitive action at this year's QTerminals Qatar Classic, following the birth of her first child in April this year.

The draws for the first Platinum event of the new season have been released with Hania El Hammamy and Mostafa Asal topping the draws. El Hammamy is a two-time champion of the event, whilst Asal has never won in Qatar, falling in the final in each of the last two seasons.

The event, which will take place from September 12 to 18, will once again take place at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex in Doha, an iconic venue in the professional squash world.

The 2023 & 2025 champion El Hammamy will be looking to move to outright second in the most decorated female players in the event's history with three titles with a win this season.

She's seeded to face Gohar in the quarter-finals, reigniting a rivalry that has produced some of the most intense and memorable matches in women's squash history. El Hammamy will also be desperate to defend her title to hold off the advances of World No.2 Amina Orfi who is chasing down the World No.1 spot.

Orfi, the reigning World Champion, found the form of her career at the end of last season, winning the World Championships and British Open back-to-back. Orfi has won all levels of title from Bronze up to the World Championships but has never won a Platinum level event.

She will be looking to change that at the first opportunity in Doha and give herself a chance at becoming the No.1 ranked player in the world.

Four-time finalist Nour ElSherbini and USA No 1 Olivia Weaver occupy the third and fourth seeding positions this year.



Egypt's Nouran Gohar will return to the circuit for the first time following the birth of her first child in April this year.

ElSherbini is situated in the bottom half of the draw, therefore seeded to play Orfi in the semi-finals, which would see a repeat of the World Championships final, a final that will go down in history as one of the best ever.

The top-half semi-final is seeded to see Weaver take on El Hammamy, a repeat of the Tournament of Champions final, in which the Egyptian recovered from 9-3 down in the fifth game to steal a first major title away from Weaver.

On the men's side, top ranked Mostafa Asal once again leads the field as he targets the one major title that has so far eluded him. The Egyptian has finished runner-up in each of the last two editions of the Qatar Classic and will be determined to go one

step further in 2026 as he bids to lift the prestigious trophy for the first time.

Defending champion Paul Coll also returns to Doha looking to retain his title, but the New Zealander faces one of the toughest opening assignments in the draw.

Coll has been handed a first-round clash with four-time Qatar Classic champion Mohamed ElShorbagy, setting up one of the standout matches of the opening round between two of the sport's biggest names.

Former champions Diego Elias and Karim Gawad pose direct threats to the world's No 1 and No 2.

After missing a large portion of the 25/26 season, Elias still managed to win the El Gouna International Platinum event as well as a first Squash Tour Finals title.



Top ranked Mostafa Asal has finished runner-up in each of the last two editions of the Qatar Classic.

He's seeded to play top seed Asal for the fifth time this year if the pair progress to the semi-finals.

The four matches played in 2026 have an average match time of 93 minutes, meaning that the Doha crowd are likely to be in for another monumental clash.

The 2016 champion Gawad features in the bottom half of the draw with No 2 seed Coll. However, to face Coll, Gawad will need to get past a potential meeting with World Junior Champion and World No 7 Mohammad Zakaria.

The Egyptian has got the better of Gawad in their last three meetings and will be confident of scoring another victory over the former World Champion to reach another major event semi-final.

MEN'S DRAW

[1] Mostafa Asal (EGY) vs Nicolas Muel-ler (SUI); Yannick Wilhelmi (SUI) vs Greg Lobban (SCO); Juan Vargas (COL) vs Baptiste Masotti (FRA); Declan James (ENG) vs [8] Jonah Bryant (ENG); [7] Marwan ElShorbagy (ENG) vs Yahya Elnawasany (EGY); Curtis Malik (ENG) vs Mohamed Abouelghar (EGY); Miguel Rodriguez (COL) vs Gregoire Marche (FRA); Timothy Brownell (USA) vs [3] Diego Elias (PER); [4] Karim Gawad (EGY) vs [WC] Abdulla al-Tamimi (QAT); [WC] Salem Al-Malki (QAT) vs Melvil Scianimanico (FRA); Youssef Soliman (EGY) vs Eain Yow Ng (MAS); Aly Abou Eleinen (EGY) vs [6] Mohammad Zakaria (EGY); [5] Victor Crouin (FRA) vs Fares Dessouky (EGY); Kareem El Torkey (EGY) vs Noor Zaman (PAK); Abhay Singh (IND) vs Dimitri Steinmann (SUI); Mohamed ElShorbagy (ENG) vs [2] Paul Coll

WOMEN'S DRAW

[1] Hania El Hammamy (EGY) vs Hana Moataz (EGY); Lucy Turmel (ENG) vs Tinne Gillis (BEL); Aira Azman (MAS) vs Malak Khafagy (EGY); Kenzy Ayman (EGY) vs [6] Nouran Gohar (EGY); [5] Sivasangari Subramaniam (MAS) vs Mariam Metwally (EGY); Farida Mohamed (EGY) vs Anahat Singh (IND); Melissa Alves (FRA) vs Salma Hany (EGY); Sana Ibrahim (EGY) vs [4] Olivia Weaver (USA); [3] Nour ElSherbini (EGY) vs Nada Abbas (EGY); Zeina Mickawy (EGY) vs Rachel Arnold (MAS); Jasmine Hutton (ENG) vs Lucy Beecroft (ENG); Nele Gillis (BEL) vs [8] Georgina Kennedy (ENG); [7] Fayrouz Abouelkheir (EGY) vs [WC] Nadien Elhammamy (EGY); Marina Stefanoni (USA) vs Aifa Azman (MAS); [WC] Nour Heikal (EGY) vs Nardine Garas (EGY); Hana Ramadan (EGY) vs [2] Amina Orfi (EGY)

Palestinian club football to restart in September after Gaza war stoppage

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories: The Palestinian football association announced that it would resume activity in September after a nearly three-year pause due to the Gaza war.

"We announce the resumption of sports activities and the football association's league beginning September 4," association president Jibril Rajoub said at a Ramallah press conference. Palestinian sports leagues, including professional football, came to a halt with the war, which was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

The association has named the first tournament back the "Thousand Martyrs' Cup", to honour the 1,014 Palestinian athletes killed by Israel during the war according to the association's data.

More than 200 clubs will compete in the tournament, including 146 from the Israeli-occupied West Bank, 44 from Gaza, and 36 from Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The tournament will kick off simultaneously in the three locations.

Rajoub said the war "created difficult conditions for all Palestinians that led to the suspension of our competitions and activities". "But we have not lost our Palestinian national will, nor have we lost

our belief that sport will remain a symbol of hope and life."

Rajoub said the association and Palestinian clubs faced tough financial circumstances. During the press conference, he called on FIFA and other federations to stand by Palestinian sports and to protect the rights of players, clubs and children to enjoy sports in "freedom and dignity".

The association previously issued a statement regarding FIFA president Gianni Infantino's now-withdrawn plan to open tournaments to private investors, saying "many today are questioning FIFA's commercial direction".

"But for Palestine, the issue is more fundamental... Our question is whether FIFA still has the courage to apply its regulations to everyone equally... without succumbing to political pressures."

The association has called on FIFA to impose sanctions on Israeli clubs that operate in West Bank settlements and to suspend Israel's FIFA membership over the country's conduct in Gaza.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law. "We are not asking for privileges; we are demanding legitimate rights guaranteed by international sporting laws and charters," Rajoub said.

FOOTBALL

Barcelona turn down PSG offer for Torres

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona rejected an initial offer from Paris Saint-Germain estimated at 40mn euros (\$46.2mn) for Spanish World Cup winner **Ferran Torres**, a source within the Catalan club said.

"Negotiations are ongoing" between Barca and PSG, the same source added, confirming reports from the daily Mundo Deportivo. According to Spanish media reports, Torres, scorer of the winning goal in the 2026 World Cup final, has agreed to join PSG and his former national team coach Luis Enrique.

Out of contract with Barca in June 2027, the 26-year-old forward remained vague about his future in recent interviews he gave during a promotional tour in the United States. "I have a contract with Barcelona, but in football you never know. I'm just waiting to make the right decision," he said. When asked if he had a "dream" destination in mind, Torres answered that he did, without revealing it: "I just want to be happy," he replied.

Torres, signed in 2021 from Manchester City for more than 55 million euros, has been used as a centre-forward, backing up Polish striker Robert Lewandowski, since Hansi Flick took over on the Barca bench in the summer of 2024. Often decisive as a substitute, Torres, who came through Valencia's youth system, has scored 40 goals in 94 matches in all competitions over the last two seasons.

Torres scored Spain's winning goal in extra



time of the World Cup final against Argentina last month, giving La Roja their second world title.

SOMALI REFEREE URGES OFFICIALS TO DREAM BIG AHEAD OF UEFA SUPER CUP
Somali referee Omar Artan urged aspiring officials to "never stop dreaming" ahead of making history as the first non-European to referee the UEFA Super Cup tomorrow in Salzburg, reports Reuters.

The 34-year-old has emerged as one of African football's leading referees, becoming

the first Somali to officiate a Confederation of African Football (CAF) Champions League final and being named CAF Men's Referee of the Year. UEFA said Artan's appointment was made under a cooperation agreement signed with CAF this year aimed at strengthening collaboration.

"This is a great honour for Omar Artan and for African referees," CAF president Patrice Motsepe said in comments published by UEFA.

Artan was selected for this year's World Cup but was barred from entering the United States by U.S. Customs and Border Protection despite having a valid visa. "It was a very tough period," Artan said. "A lot of people have sympathy for me, because when someone has been working a lot of years and is supposed to do something, and then can't do it, it's very challenging."

US President Donald Trump's strict immigration policies were a point of concern at the World Cup, with Washington imposing a sweeping travel ban last year on citizens of 12 countries, including Somalia.

An administration official said that Artan was denied entry because of his links to "suspected members of terror organisations". Added to FIFA's international list of referees in 2018, Artan became the first Somali official at the Africa Cup of Nations in 2024.

"I believe that if I can succeed, anyone can," he said. "Don't ever stop dreaming."

Tomorrow's match in Salzburg pits Champions League winners Paris St Germain against Europa League holders Aston Villa.

HORSE RACING

Fakhira impresses again in Group 1 PA Liwa International Stakes

Fakhira, a four-year-old Purebred Arabian filly, recorded another major success by winning the Group 1 (PA) Liwa International Stakes - Wathba Stallions over 2000m in La Teste, France. The race was reserved for fillies and mares aged four and older and attracted a field of five runners.

Trained by Thomas Fourcy, ridden by Alexandre Gavilan and carrying the colours of Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari, the four-year-old filly, Fakhira confirmed her position among the leading fillies and mares of her generation with another impressive performance.

She came into the race after winning the Group 1 (PA) Criterium des Pouliches - Yas Racing over the same course last month. This latest success gave Fakhira her second Group 1 (PA) victory and took her career record to four wins from only five starts.

Fakhira broke well and was quickly positioned on the outside, racing just behind Labwa Al Cham, who led that part of the



field while staying away from the inside rail. El Bnoud (Azadi), meanwhile, headed the group racing closer to the rail, with Shagaf just behind her.

The positions remained much the same approaching the final turn, with Labwa Al

Cham still leading Fakhira on the outside.

As they entered the turn, the runners on the outside moved across towards the horses racing near the rail, bringing the field together. Fakhira was still travelling very comfortably at this stage while most



Connections of Fakhira celebrate with the trophies in La Teste, France.

of her rivals were already being asked for an effort.

Inside the final 300m, the race quickly developed into a battle between Fakhira and El Bnoud. But approaching the final

200m, Fakhira clearly had more to offer.

She changed gear again and pulled away strongly from her rival to score by four lengths. El Bnoud finished second while Labwa Al Cham held on for third place.