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CRICKET | Page 2

Anderson set to mentor England's quicks after Test exit



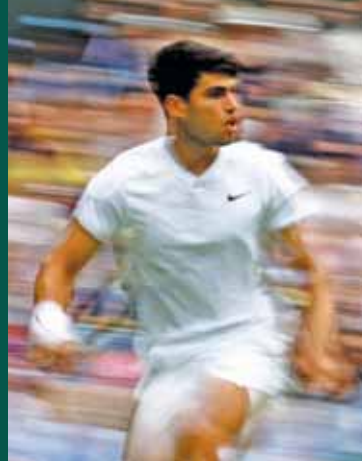
FOOTBALL | Page 4

Under-fire Dutch not hitting panic button, says coach Koeman

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TENNIS

Alcaraz starts Wimbledon title defence as Sinner, Osaka, Raducanu and Gauff advance

Page 3

EURO 2024

Late own goal gives France 1-0 win over Belgium

'IT'S A SHAME TO CONCEDE A GOAL IN THE WAY WE DID'

AFP
Düsseldorf, Germany

Jan Vertonghen's late own goal took France into the quarter-finals of Euro 2024 yesterday as they edged Belgium 1-0 in a tense tie in Dusseldorf.

France had dominated the last-16 clash but their profligate finishing looked set to force extra time until they finally found a way through with five minutes left.

Substitute Randal Kolo Muani collected the ball inside the Belgian penalty area and hit a shot that was going wide until a deflection off the unfortunate Vertonghen took it past goalkeeper Koen Casteels. The lucky break sent the 2022 World Cup runners-up into a last-eight tie in Hamburg on Friday as they remain on course to become European champions for the third time. "We are so proud to once again be in the quarter-finals. We are expected to get there but we must appreciate it and not think that it is something that is just normal," said France coach Didier Deschamps.

France are yet to score from open play in four matches at the tournament - captain Kylian Mbappe netted once from a penalty against Poland, while their other two goals have come from opposition defenders. Crucially, however, they are rock solid in defence, having conceded only one goal, from a penalty, so far.

Their back line was outstanding against Romelu Lukaku and his fellow attackers, and Belgium bow out after what will go down as a disappointing tournament for them. "It's



Belgium's defender Jan Vertonghen (left) deflects a shot from France's forward Randal Kolo Muani (centre) into goal to give France a 1-0 victory in the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 match in Dusseldorf yesterday. (AFP)

a shame," said captain Kevin De Bruyne. "We had a plan. We knew they were strong. It's a shame to concede a goal in the way we did."

Both of these sides were looking for revenge, in Belgium's case for their 1-0 defeat against France in the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup, a result that still hurts six years on. France, meanwhile, had a point to prove at the Euros after going out in the last 16 three years ago on penalties to Switzerland, a deeply disappointing result in between runs to consecutive World Cup finals.

The French were widely seen as the favourites to win this tournament before arriving in Germany, but they were below par during the group phase. The broken nose suf-

fered by Mbappe in their opening game against Austria did not help, and the uncertain form of Antoine Griezmann has been a problem too. Griezmann was dropped for the last group match against Poland but returned here in one of two changes, with Marcus Thuram also coming in as wingers Ousmane Dembele and Bradley Barcola made way.

Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco responded to his side's unconvincing group stage displays by giving starts to Yannick Carrasco and Lois Openda, while De Bruyne played a more withdrawn role. The Belgians were happy to sit deep and did not test Mike Maignan in the first half other

than from an awkward De Bruyne free-kick which the France goalkeeper blocked with his knee.

France had lots of the ball, yet often looked untidy, imprecise and rather flat, with Griezmann appearing lost on the right wing.

But they had chances in the first half, with Thuram heading just wide from Jules Kounde's inviting cross just after the half-hour mark and Aurelien Tchouameni twice firing off target. Tchouameni then tested Casteels with a deflected long-range strike as France upped their game at the beginning of the second half. Mbappe accelerated inside and smashed a shot just over, and there was a sense a goal might be coming.

SPOTLIGHT

QMMF president al-Mannai elected trustee of Board of FIA Foundation



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, president of the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC), has been elected as trustee of the Board of the FIA Foundation. The appointment not only recognises al-Mannai's contributions to the motorsport industry in Qatar and beyond but also reflects Qatar's continuous growing presence in the world of motorsports.

As trustee of the FIA Foundation, al-Mannai will play a vital role in guiding the foundation's efforts to enhance safety for FIA races, such as the Formula 1 and World Endurance Championship, through research and innovation.

Through the foundation's efforts, the races have seen drastic improvements in safety measures, including the implementation of advanced crash barriers, the introduction of the halo device to protect drivers' heads, and continuous advancements in car and track design to minimize the risk of accidents. These efforts have significantly reduced the number and severity of injuries, contributing to a safer environment for drivers, teams, and spectators alike dur-

ing races such as the Formula 1, World Endurance Championship and others. Moreover, the foundation also plays an important role in driving initiatives for road safety and supporting environmental sustainability.

Under al-Mannai's leadership, the QMMF and LIC have achieved significant milestones, including hosting high-profile international motorsport events such as Formula 1, and World Endurance Championship. His vision and dedication have elevated Qatar's status as a global motorsport hub and have set a benchmark for excellence in the region.

The election of al-Mannai to the FIA Foundation Board of trustees underscores the recognition of his expertise and leadership within the international motorsport community. His appointment aligns with the Foundation's mission to champion initiatives that improve lives through safer and more sustainable mobility solutions.

Established in 2001, The FIA Foundation, an independent charity established by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), works to advance safe, clean, and fair mobility for all through research and the implementation of its findings for drivers competing at an international level and for road safety of the general population.

FOCUS

Portugal beat Slovenia on penalties to enter quarters

Reuters
Frankfurt

Bernardo Silva struck the winning spot kick and Diogo Costa made three saves as Portugal won a penalty shootout 3-0 against battling Slovenia to reach the quarter-finals at Euro 2024 where they will meet France.

After a scoreless 90 minutes, Cristiano Ronaldo had a chance to put Portugal ahead from the penalty spot in the first half of extra time, but Jan Oblak saved brilliantly to leave the Portuguese captain in tears.

The 39-year-old stepped up to take the spot-kick after a foul on Diogo Jota, but his effort was superbly saved by Jan Oblak. After scoring his previous 29 penalties, Ronaldo was visibly stunned to see Oblak keep out his shot and held his head in disbelief.

Neither side could fashion a goal and the game went to penalties, with Josep Ilicic having the first kick saved for the Slovenians before Ronaldo put his side ahead, and when Jure Balkovec's spot kick was saved the writing was on the wall.

Costa then saved from Benjamin Verbic, setting Silva up to confidently slot home the winner to put Portugal through to the last eight and a meeting with the French in Hamburg on Friday.



Portugal's Diogo Costa saves a shot from Slovenia's Benjamin Verbic during the penalty shootout in their Euro 2024 Round of 16 match in Frankfurt yesterday. (Reuters)

CRICKET

Rohit hails Cup win as 'dream come true'

AFP
New Delhi

World Cup-winning skipper **Rohit Sharma** said his team's victory was a "dream come true" for India, as he awaited his return home to a hero's welcome. The T20 triumph ended more than a decade of heartache after India's previous World Cup win came in the 50-over version in 2011.

"The team and I are very proud to be able to bring the cup home and are truly touched by how much happiness it has brought everyone back home," Rohit said in a post on social media yesterday.

He also posted a picture of himself lying flat on his back with his eyes closed, wearing his blue team kit.

"This picture epitomises how I'm feeling right now," he said.

"Right now I'm basking in a dream come true for a billion of us."

India won a thrilling final by seven runs in Barbados on Saturday to clinch their first global tournament since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

It was not clear when the Indian team would arrive home, with Indian media yesterday reporting they were stuck in Barbados, delayed by Hurricane Beryl.

Jay Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, announced

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around 25 people in the team, coaching and support staff would share nearly \$15mn in prize money, a reward for their "talent, determination, and sportsmanship".

The bonus announced on Sunday is in

addition to a record prize pool of \$11.25mn for the tournament, of which India will receive \$2.45mn.

The cricket-obsessed country erupted in midnight celebrations as India won,

with fans in blue India shirts taking to the streets across cities including the capital New Delhi.

Hurricane delays triumphant return as India set to name new coach

India will name their new coach after the World Cup-winning team makes its triumphant return from the Caribbean - but it is unclear when that will be because of a hurricane.

The frontrunner appears to be Gautam Gambhir, 42, a former batsman who scored over 10,000 international runs across three formats.

He most recently coached Kolkata Knight Riders to the IPL crown.

Indian media reported yesterday the other man in the running to replace Rahul Dravid is W V Raman, 59, also an ex-Indian cricketer, and former coach of the national women's team.

Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), said the two candidates had been "interviewed and shortlisted" by the board's Cricket Advisory Committee, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

"After reaching Mumbai, whatever they have decided, we will go by that," Shah said.

Shah spoke in Barbados, where he told Indian reporters the team were stranded because flights were delayed by Hurricane Beryl.

"Like you we are also stuck," he told reporters.

Shah has also said that "seniors will be there" in next year's Champions Trophy and the World Test Championship final, if India qualify for it, while a decision on whether Hardik Pandya succeeds Sharma as the next T20I captain will be taken solely by the selectors.

"The transition has already happened with three greats retiring," Shah said when asked about the team's next phase following the T20I retirements of Virat Kohli, Rohit and (Ravindra) Jadeja.

"The way this team is progressing, our target is to win the World Test Championship final and Champions Trophy. There will be a similar squad playing there. The seniors will be there."

This means that the senior players, fitness permitting, are likely to be available for the nine ODI matches that India will play before the Champions Trophy scheduled for February-March 2025 in Pakistan.

The T20 World Cup final was the final match in charge for former skipper Dravid, 51, who was bounced in the air by the team during the celebrations.

Former batsman V V S Laxman will coach the team for their tour of Zimbabwe for five T20 internationals from July 6-14, Shah said.

The new coach will take over for India's tour of Sri Lanka, made up of three T20s and three ODIs, which begins on July 27.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Anderson set to mentor England's quicks after exit

Veteran English bowler currently preparing for his final Test

AFP
London

England great James Anderson will join the team's backroom staff as a fast-bowling mentor when he retires from Test cricket following next week's series opener against the West Indies at Lord's.

The 41-year-old is the first seamer and only third bowler to have taken 700 Test wickets after spinners Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan.

Anderson, however, has decided to end his Test career after England made it clear they wanted to move on ahead of the 2025/26 Ashes.

But England managing director Rob Key told reporters yesterday: "After the Lord's Test, Jimmy will continue in our set-up, and he'll help a bit more as a mentor."

Key added: "He has got so much to offer English cricket. We don't want to see that go."

"When we asked him, he was keen. He is going to have a lot of options. English cricket would be very lucky if he chooses to stay in the game."

Anderson is currently playing for Lancashire against Nottinghamshire in the County Championship at Southport, but his first-class future remains uncertain.

"What he does with Lancashire will probably work out after the Lord's Test," said Key.

England have included three uncapped players in their squad for the first two matches of a three-Test series against the West Indies, with Jamie Smith selected



James Anderson will play his 188th and final Test against West Indies this month. (@jimmy9)

to keep wicket ahead of both Jonny Bairstow and Ben Foakes.

The 23-year-old Smith averages over 50 in the County Championship this season and celebrated his Test call-up by making exactly 100 for Surrey against Essex on Sunday.

He usually plays as a specialist batsman for Surrey with Foakes keeping wicket for the reigning county champions.

"Sometimes you're selecting people for what they're going to be as well, and where you think they can progress to," said Key.

"It's very much the start for Jamie Smith. We feel he's going to

be a fantastic international cricketer."

Key, asked how Smith would cope with the demands of keeping wicket for 90 overs a day in a Test match when he is not a regular behind the stumps, said he had consulted several former England wicketkeepers in Chris Read, James Foster and Alec Stewart - Smith's boss at Surrey.

"Some of the guys have been the best keepers in the country... We use them a lot really and we trust a lot of their opinions," Key explained.

Key added Bairstow, 34, "needs to get back to what he was a cou-

ple of years ago", when the Yorkshireman hit six Test centuries in 2022. Bairstow, however, has struggled lately after nearly a year out of the game following a horrifying leg break in a freak accident on a golf course.

"Generally his form, in all formats, has just been going slightly in the wrong direction," said 45-year-old former England batsman Key. "It's an arduous task being a keeper and you want someone who can back up series after series. We weren't convinced that Jonny would be able to do that, especially at the stage of his career that he's at."

CYCLING

Girmay dedicates Tour de France stage victory to 'continent of Africa'



Intermarche - Wanty team's Eritrean rider Biniam Girmay cycles to the finish line ahead of second-placed Movistar Team's Colombian rider Fernando Gaviria (second right) and third-placed Lotto Dstny team's Belgian rider Arnaud De Lie (second left) to win the 3rd stage of the 111th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 230.5km between Piacenza and Turin, in Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Turin, Italy

Eritrean Biniam Girmay dedicated his stage three win at the Tour de France to "the continent of Africa" as Richard Carapaz took the overall race lead in Turin.

Intermarche rider Girmay, 24, who gave the Belgian team its first success on the Tour, is the third African to win on the Grande Boucle after South Africans Daryl Impey and Rob Hunter.

Multiple tour winner Chris Froome was born in Kenya but competed for Britain.

"It means a lot personally for me for the continent of Africa," Girmay said.

"There are many obstacles for African riders.

"I had to come to Europe, learn English, learn the cycling language, it takes time and support.

"I should thank my team because with them I have grown every season."

Carapaz became Ecuador's first ever yellow jersey wearer, taking it from overnight leader Tadej Pogacar of Slovenia with the pair level on time.

Belgian Remco Evenepoel and Danish two-time defending champion Jonas Vingegaard are third and fourth respectively.

"I can't remember much about it," said an emotional Girmay at the line.

"I just closed my eyes and hoped for the best at the end."

Girmay pipped Colombian Fernando Gaviria and Belgian Arnaud De Lie after a chaotic finale marked by a late fall as the riders hit speeds of around 65kph in the dash to the line.

The crash, in which the big favourite for the sprint Belgian Jasper Philipsen was involved, created a break in the peloton.

Two-time race winner Pogacar, gunning for a historic Giro-Tour double, did not fall but was delayed.

Carapaz came third on the Tour in 2021 but was overlooked in the build up to this Tour after falling on day one last time out.

The Olympic road race champion was not selected by the Ecuadorian team to defend his title at the Paris Games.

Now the 31-year-old Carapaz has gatecrashed the Fab Four favourites with Primoz Roglic dropping off the pace.

"I was sick after the Tour of Switzerland and I know you need to be in optimal shape here," said former Giro d'Italia winner Carapaz.

"For the first time yesterday I felt much better. Whatever comes after this is a victory, but we will defend the jersey with everything as long as we can."

After two sweltering stages, the skies were shrouded grey entering the northern Italian industrial city with thunder shortly after the race ended.

Girmay is a strong sprinter and modelled his style on Peter Sagan.

He was aided in his win at Turin by the absence of stage favourite Philipsen, who fell in the run in.

The stage winner spoke about his childhood in Eritrea, where cycling is a major sport.

"After lunch in July my dad always used to say 'come on guys, let's watch the Tour de France'."

"One day, after Sagan won and I asked my dad if he thought I could win one day and he said if I worked hard I could."

"But I was inspired too by Daniel Teklehaimanot when he got the polka dot jersey in 2015," he recalled of his compatriot.

"But this is for everyone, they all inspired me, all the Eritrean cyclists."

Girmay signalled his coming of age in 2022 when he became the first African to win a one-day classic at Gent-Wevelgem, aged 21.

It was his second Grand Tour stage win after the Giro d'Italia in 2022 where he injured an eye opening a bottle of beverage on the podium.

China badminton player, 17, dies after collapsing on court

Indonesia: An "outstanding" 17-year-old Chinese badminton player died of cardiac arrest after collapsing on court during a tournament in Indonesia, officials said yesterday. Zhang Zhijie was suddenly taken ill during a match late Sunday against Japan's Kazuma Kawano at the Asia Junior Championships in Yogyakarta.

The score was 11-11 in the first game when Zhang fell to the floor between points. The teenager received treatment at the venue and was rushed to hospital by ambulance, but passed away later that night after repeated efforts to resuscitate him failed. "Medical conclusions...indicated that the victim experienced sudden cardiac arrest," Broto Happy, spokesman for the Badminton Association of Indonesia (PBSI), told a press conference in Yogyakarta. Zhang's parents were heading to the city to

retrieve his body, he said. The spokesman defended the actions of medical staff and local organisers after footage showed what appeared to be a hesitant response to the teenager falling face down on the court. He said that medical teams had to wait for the referee to let them on the court.

"The world of badminton has lost a talented player," Badminton Asia and the PBSI said in a statement.

Zhang started playing badminton in kindergarten and joined China's national youth team last year. Earlier this year he won the singles title at the Dutch Junior International, a prestigious youth tournament. China's badminton association said it was "deeply saddened".

"Zhang Zhijie loved badminton and was an outstanding athlete of the national youth badminton team," the CBA said in a state-

ment. The team tournament held a moment's silence yesterday and the Chinese team wore black armbands as a mark of respect before the competition carried on. China beat Taiwan 3-0. India's P V Sindhu, who has won Olympic silver and bronze, called Zhang's death "absolutely heartbreaking".

"I offer my deepest condolences to Zhang's family during this devastating time," Sindhu, who was not at the tournament, wrote on X. "The world has lost a remarkable talent today."

Governing body the Badminton World Federation said it was "saddened by the loss of emerging badminton talent Zhang Zhijie. "We offer our deepest condolences to his family, his teammates, to the Chinese Badminton Association, and the entire Chinese badminton community," it said in a statement yesterday.

WIMBLEDON

Raducanu, Osaka and Gauff win as Wawrinka advances

'IT TOOK A LITTLE BIT OF ADJUSTING TO FIND MY FEET. IT WAS AN INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT MATCH'

Reuters
London

Emma Raducanu snapped a dispiriting sequence of first-round defeats for British players at Grand Slams as the wildcard beat Mexico's Renata Zarazua 7-6(0) 6-3 on Centre Court yesterday.

The 21-year-old got an unexpected boost when Russian 22nd seed Ekaterina Alexandrova, her scheduled opponent, withdrew because of illness on the morning of the match with Zarazua, a loser in qualifying, taking her place.

With former England soccer captain David Beckham watching from the Royal Box, Raducanu looked nervous early on against an unorthodox opponent but eventually contained the unforced errors that littered the first set to move into round two.

It was a welcome win for the former US Open champion who missed last year's Wimbledon because of injury and who has struggled to reach the dizzy heights of her fairytale victory at Flushing Meadows in 2021. It was also a welcome win for the home nation after the first four British players in action yesterday all lost - adding to the tale of woe at the French Open where all six British singles players suffered first-round defeats.

"I found out at 10:30 today (that Alexandrova had pulled out) and for the last three days we were playing with similar opponents. It took a little bit of adjusting to find my feet," Raducanu said on court.

"It was an incredibly difficult match. I've barely played a defender who's landed the ball on the baseline and it took a lot of strength to get the ball back."

Nineteen British players were in the men's and women's singles but earlier in the day there were defeats for Charles Broom against three-times Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka, Heather Watson, Liam Broady and Arthur Fery.

British wildcard Yuriko Miyazaki followed Raducanu's victory as



Britain's Emma Raducanu returns against Mexico's Renata Zarazua during their singles match on the first day of the 2024 Wimbledon Championships in southwest London yesterday. (AFP)

she notched her first Wimbledon win, thrashing Tamara Korpsatsch 6-2 6-1.

Osaka clinches first match at Wimbledon since 2018

Former world number one Naomi Osaka said it felt "like a dream" to claim her first win at Wimbledon since 2018 as she looked forward to celebrating the occasion with her daughter, who turns one today.

Japanese star Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam winner, recovered from a break down in the final set to defeat Diane Parry of France 6-1, 1-6, 6-4 on the back of 34 winners.

"It feels like a dream because I haven't played here many times," said Osaka, whose last appearance at the All England Club was in 2019, when she exited in the first round. "I hope it was fun for everyone to watch. I'm really excited to be here because Wimbledon was the first tournament I watched last year after my pregnancy."

Osaka said she was inspired to victory by casting a glance at her photographs from last year, when

she gave birth to daughter Shai.

"I was looking at my photo album. Like, they have that feature 'this time last year'. I was looking at that. I was looking at photos of myself in the hospital. "It's really cool to be here now. I think my mindset last year was just trying to survive. Honestly, I didn't really know what was going on after I gave birth. Yeah, just trying to piece myself back together."

Osaka will face US 19th seed Emma Navarro or Wang Qiang of China for a place in the last 32.

Gauff wins all-American showdown to bury 2023 demons

There was no need for Coco Gauff to hide away from the spotlight yesterday as she banished memories of her 2023 Wimbledon nightmare with a 6-1 6-2 first-round destruction of fellow American Caroline Dolehide.

On the eve of this year's grass-court championships, Gauff had admitted she had been "in a dark place" following her opening round exit in London last year but armed



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates winning against France's Diane Parr yesterday. (AFP)

with the knowledge that things "couldn't get any worse" this time round, she was simply unstoppable against her 51st-ranked rival.

"Last year I lost in the first round and it was very tough for me, that's why I am a little emotional and that's why I was happy to turn it around," Gauff told the crowd on court.

The 20-year-old, now a Grand Slam champion having won the US Open in September, dropped only



Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka returns against Britain's Charles Broom during their match yesterday. (AFP)

one point on serve during a formidable first-set performance.

Wawrinka, 39, makes flying start at Wimbledon

Wawrinka says he does not want to "go home", revealing his enduring passion for tennis after the 39-year-old beat British wild card Broom in straight sets in his Wimbledon opener yesterday.

The Swiss three-time Grand Slam champion, the oldest man in

the draw, hit 38 winners in a 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 victory on No 2 Court.

Wawrinka, who has slumped to 95th in the world, is just the 10th man in the Open Era to win a Wimbledon singles match aged 39 or older. The Swiss player said the "pressure" of the sport drives him on in the latter stages of his career. "I love playing tennis," he said.

"I love having the chance to play in the biggest tournaments in the world. Of course, I haven't had the best results this year. But as much as I enjoy what I'm doing, I think there is enough reason to keep playing. I don't want to go home. Playing tennis was a dream when I was young. Being a professional athlete was a dream. Now I'm there, there's no way I'm going to just stop because I am bored of it."

"I love what I'm doing. I'm passionate about the sport. I want to keep pushing myself as much as I can and see where I can go."

The two-time former Wimbledon quarter-finalist will face fellow veteran, the 37-year-old Gael Monfils in the second round.

SPOTLIGHT

Sinner subdues feisty Hanfmann as Alcaraz beats Lajal for positive start



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in action during his first round match against Estonia's Mark Lajal at Wimbledon yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

Jannik Sinner wobbled midway through his Wimbledon first-round clash with unseeded German Yannick Hanfmann but the world number one recovered to seal a 6-3 6-4 3-6 6-3 win yesterday and book a meeting with fellow Italian Matteo Berrettini.

The Australian Open champion used his powerful serve and forehand to good effect against Hanfmann as he breezed through the first set on the back of a solitary break and got his nose in front early in the next.

Hanfmann hung on and heaped pressure on Sinner's serve but was unable to find a way through and

the 22-year-old top seed moved two sets ahead.

The world number 110 flipped the script to go 4-0 up in the third set as Sinner appeared to be belatedly hampered by a nasty fall, and the German cupped his ear amid huge cheers after forcing a fourth set with a neat volley.

There was to be no comeback, however, as Sinner rediscovered his rhythm under the lights on Court One to break for a 3-1 lead and held firm from to close out the match.

Sinner, who lifted his first title on the sport's slickest surface at Halle barely two weeks ago, could face another tricky test against Berrettini after the 2021 runner-up beat Hungarian Marton Fucsovics 7-6(3) 6-2 3-6 6-1. Berrettini fired 11 aces.

Carlos Alcaraz defeated 269th-ranked qualifier Mark Lajal at the start of his Wimbledon title defence.

Alcaraz, still only 21, is chasing his fourth Grand Slam title and hopes to become just the sixth man after Rod Laver, Bjorn Borg, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic to win the French Open and Wimbledon back-to-back.

Opening the Centre Court programme, the Spanish star recovered from a break down in each of the first two sets to see off the dreadlocked Lajal 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, 6-2.

"He played a really good match, he obviously surprised me a little bit because I didn't have the chance to see him play a lot," said Alcaraz.

This time last year, Lajal was losing a first-round match at a

second-tier Challenger event in the United States and earning a paltry \$780 - yesterday he banked \$75,000.

Medvedev beats Kovacevic

Russian fifth seed Daniil Medvedev yesterday reached the second round and admitted he was happy not to be playing on the All England Club's famed Centre Court.

Medvedev, a semi-finalist last year, hit 16 aces in his 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 win over Aleksandar Kovacevic of the United States.

"I've still never lost on Court One so hopefully I can play a lot more matches on this court," said Medvedev.

"Last year I said it was unfortunate I had to go to Centre Court for the semis and I lost."

GYMNASTICS

Biles books Paris Olympics spot with emphatic US trials all-around win

AFP
Minneapolis

Four-time Olympic gold medalist Simone Biles is headed to the Paris Games after a resounding all-around victory at the US gymnastics trials.

Biles capped her trials with another electrifying floor routine, her high-flying tumbling bringing the crowd to its feet.

She piled up 117.225 over two days of competition to earn an automatic berth on the five-strong team for Paris later this month.

Three years after a bout of the disorienting "twisties" cut short Biles's Tokyo Games campaign, the gymnast considered the best of all time will return to the Olympic stage looking stronger than ever.

The 27-year-old told an exultant crowd in Minneapolis that in



the immediate aftermath of Tokyo she had "never pictured going to another Olympic Games."

"I never thought I would go back in the gym again, be twisting, feel free," said Biles, who returned to competition in August last year after a two-year break.

She'll be joined in Paris by three other members of the Tokyo Olympics team: all-around gold medalist Suni Lee, floor gold medalist Jade Carey and Jordan

Chiles, who helped the US to team silver. The quartet - who will be joined by 16-year-old Hezly Rivera - have branded the Paris Olympics their redemption tour.

"I feel like we all have more to give and our Tokyo performances weren't the best," said Biles, who withdrew from the team final at the pandemic-delayed Games.

"I feel like we have a lot of weight on our shoulders to go out there and prove that we're better athletes.

"We're more mature, we're smarter, we're more consistent - but don't quote me on that, because not tonight!" she laughed after the closing night of trials saw Biles, Lee and Chiles all fall off the balance beam.

The always-tense trials were turned into an even more nervy affair as three top contenders were forced out of the competition by injury.

LYLES, MCLAUGHLIN-LEVRONE LEAD US OLYMPIC TEAM AFTER IMPRESSIVE TRIALS

Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone's world record run in the 400 hurdles wrapped up the US Olympic trials in style on Sunday in Eugene, Oregon, where Noah Lyles showed he will have a real shot at taking the sprint double in Paris.

McLaughlin-Levrone broke the world record for the fifth time in her career, taking the tape in 50.65 seconds to the delight of track fans at Hayward Field. "There's something really exciting about trying to figure out how to improve upon history," she told reporters.

Three years after the US men failed to collect a single individual track gold in Tokyo, Lyles emerged as his country's brightest hope in both the 100 and 200. He equalled his personal best to win the 100m in 9.83 before posting the fastest time of the year - 19.53 - in the longer sprint, his signature event.

"I definitely thrive off pressure. I thrive off big moments," he told



reporters. "The bigger the moment, the faster I run."

Sha'Carri Richardson dominated the women's 100 with the season's fastest time 10.71, three years after a positive test for cannabis shattered her dream of competing at the Tokyo Games. The world champion and US fan favourite left Hayward Field with a smile despite coming up short in the 200, where she finished fourth.

In the 200, Tokyo bronze medal-

ist Gabby Thomas had the world lead in the semi-finals and the second-fastest time of the year in the final, underlining her claim as the top Paris contender.

"In our sport, especially with the women, there are always going to be some really good contenders on the line and I think I've proven I can line up with anyone and come out on top," said Thomas.

Olympic men's 400 hurdles silver medalist Rai Benjamin cruised to victory in 46.46, the fifth-fastest performance of all time. Three-time world champion Grant Holloway won the 110 hurdles in a blistering 12.86, with Freddie Crittenden (12.93) and Daniel Roberts (12.96) joining him as the only three men to crack 13 seconds this year. The 10-day trials stuck largely to the script but was not without surprises, with Olympic champion Athing Mu missing out on a trip to Paris when she tripped and fell in the 800 final.

SPOTLIGHT

High jumper Barshim to lead Qatar's athletics squad at Paris Games

By Sports Reporter
Doha

High jump Olympic and world star Mutaz Essa Barshim will be leading Qatar's athletics squad at the forthcoming Paris 2024 Olympics, it was announced by the Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF) yesterday.

The Olympics are to be held from July 26-August 11. Apart from Barshim, who won men's high jump gold at Tokyo 2020 and two silver medals in London 2012 & Rio 2016, 800m athlete Abu Baker Haider Abdallah, 400m hurdles star Abderrahman Samba, and 400m runners Bassem Humaida, Ismail Dawood, and sprinter Shahad Mohamed, who will be making her women's 100m debut, form Qatar's athletics team for the quadrennial Games.

Barshim will be looking to add another medal to his rich career tally when he reaches Paris for the Olympics. Already a household name in athletics, Barshim boasts a remarkable collection of medals. He holds the title of Olympic champion, having shared gold at the Tokyo Games in a historic moment of sportsmanship with Italian athlete Gianmarco Tamberini.

Additionally, his trophy cabinet includes two Olympic silver medals from Rio and a recent promotion to silver from the 2012 London Games. This impressive haul, along with his World Championship titles and Asian record, solidifies his place as one of the greatest high jumpers in history. With his sights set on Paris, the anticipation is high to see if Barshim can add to his already dazzling collection.

Qatar have a total of 8 medals in the Olympic Games.



Al Rayyan goalkeeper al-Hajri retires



Al Rayyan football team's goalkeeper Saud al-Hajri has announced his retirement from the game after a successful career that lasted more than 20 years. He will now move to administrative work as vice president of the first team's football staff. Al-Hajri achieved many championship titles with Al Rayyan, where he succeeded in being a part of four Amir Cup titles (2006, 2010, 2011, 2013), the League Championship in 2015-2016, Qatar Cup 2012, and two Sheikh Jassim Cup championships (2011-2012, 2012-2013). Al-Hajri rose through the club's age groups before being promoted directly to the first team to become Al Rayyan's goalkeeper.

EURO 2024

Under-fire Dutch not hitting panic button: Koeman

'WE WILL NEED TO START FIGHTING FROM THE FIRST FEW SECONDS'

AFP
Munich, Germany

Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman yesterday ruled out making wholesale changes for today's last 16 match with Romania in Munich.

The Dutch finished third in the pool stages, behind Austria and France, earning a last 16 clash with surprise group winners Romania.

Koeman's side were beaten 3-2 by Austria but the coach insisted: "I will not make many changes to the line-up, we shouldn't panic because of just one game."

The 61-year-old praised Ralf Rangnick's Austria, saying "sometimes the opponent is just better".

Tuesday's winner will face off against either Austria or Turkey in Berlin on Saturday, meaning a re-match with the Alpine nation could be on the cards.

Koeman was a player when the Netherlands won the 1988 Euros on German soil. "If we have the luck we had in 1988, we'll win tomorrow," he said.

Virgil van Dijk said the Netherlands seemed to lack the "will to win" against Austria but forward Cody Gakpo said yesterday: "We need to be there, give energy, that's our game plan."

"We will need to start fighting from the first few seconds."



Netherlands' coach Ronald Koeman gestures during a training session at the Munich Football Arena in Munich yesterday, on the eve of the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 match against Romania. (AFP)

"We're disappointed, everyone knows it needs to be better and we trained on that basis."

"We're through and now (the tournament) can really start," added the Liverpool forward.

Romania topped their group largely thanks to an opening 3-0 win over Ukraine, having drawn and lost their remaining fixtures.

The win was only Romania's second victory in Euros history, but midfielder Razvan Marin said yesterday his team believed in

themselves. "We knew after we qualified for this tournament the expectations would be very high from everyone, now they're even higher of course because we progressed to the knockout stage," said Marin.

"But we can deal with this pressure and these expectations - and we are ready to do big things."

Romania coach Edward Iordanescu said: "Holland are favourites tomorrow, their players have had great achievements and

their squad is worth about a billion euros, but we have our own strengths. "We've got a good group, both on an athletic and a human level. We have a country behind us who support us."

Romania's best record was a quarter-final appearance at Euro 2000, having defeated England 3-2 in the group stage.

"When you're playing with history in front of you, then you want a lot from this one and you want to give your all," added Iordanescu.

FOOTBALL

Ecuador clinch Copa quarter-final berth as Venezuela sink Jamaica

AFP
Austin

Ecuator ground out a nerve-jangling 0-0 draw with Mexico to book their place in the quarter-finals of the Copa America on Sunday as Venezuela sealed top spot in Group B with a 3-0 win over Jamaica.

Ecuador, needing only a point against Mexico in Glendale, Arizona to advance on goal difference, withstood a furious late onslaught from 'El Tri' to reach the last eight.

Mexico launched wave after wave of attacks in the final quarter, with Johan Vasquez forcing a save from Ecuador goalkeeper Alexander Dominguez in the 71st minute, six minutes after Santiago Gimenez struck the post with a shot from close range.

There was almost a dramatic twist deep into eight minutes of time added on, when Guatemalan referee Mario Escobar awarded what would have been a winning penalty to Mexico after Ecuador's Felix Torres appeared to foul Guillermo Martinez in the area. The Mexican-dominated crowd erupted in delight only for the celebrations to be

cut short when VAR instructed Escobar to review the decision.

Replays showed Torres clearly got a touch on the ball in his challenge on Martinez and the penalty was overturned.

Ecuador will now face Group A winners Argentina in the quarter-finals in Houston on Thursday. Venezuela, meanwhile, will take on Group A runners-up Canada in Arlington on Friday as they chase a place in the semi-finals.

The Venezuelans, who were already assured of a quarter-final place after wins over Ecuador and Mexico, preserved their 100% record against winless Jamaica. Eduard Bello headed Venezuela into the lead after 49 minutes, nodding home at the far post after a perfectly weighted cross from Jon Aramburu.

Veteran striker Salomon Rondon then doubled the Venezuela lead on 56 minutes, latching on to a through ball from Yangel Herrera and then smuggling a low finish into the net past advancing Jamaica goalkeeper Jah-mali Waite.

A decisive victory was sealed in the 85th minute when Eric Ramirez was sent through on goal by Kervin Andrade before coolly finishing past Waite.



Ecuador's defender William Pacheco celebrates advancing to the next stage of the Conmebol 2024 Copa America tournament after Group B match against Mexico in Glendale, Arizona. (AFP)

Messi and Miami teammates among MLS lineup for All-Star Game

Inter Miami star Lionel Messi is joined by teammates Sergio Busquets, Jordi Alba and Luis Suarez on the 30-player lineup announced yesterday for the MLS All-Star Game. The league's top talents will face the Mexican League All-Stars on July 24 at Columbus, Ohio. Eight-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi, a 37-year-old forward who sparked Argentina to victory in the 2022 World Cup, scored 12 goals and added 13 assists in his first 12 matches this season for MLS overall leader Miami. Together with striker Suarez, midfielder Busquets and left back Alba, Inter Miami has a league-best 13-3 with five drawn record and 44 points over 21 matches. The roster was selected through a combination of fan, media and player voting as well as designations by All-Star coach Wilfried Nancy of the host Columbus Crew, the reigning MLS champions. The MLS lineup also includes 2023 MLS Most Valuable Player Luciano Acosta, a midfielder for FC Cincinnati, 2023 scoring champion Denis Bouanga, a striker for Los Angeles FC, Real Salt Lake forward Chicho Arango, forwards Diego Rossi and Juan Hernandez of Columbus and fellow front-liners Christian Benteke of DC United and Federico Bernardeschi of Toronto.



Romania's players attend a training session in Munich yesterday. (AFP)