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FOOTBALL / AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

# Al Sadd down Esteghlal for commanding 2-0 victory

SADIO MANE AND CRISTIANO RONALDO SCORE AS AL NASSR BEAT AL RAYYAN 2-1 IN RIYADH

**Q**atar football giants Al Sadd secured their first win in the AFC Champions League Elite 2024-25 yesterday as an own goal from Hossein Hosseini and a second-half penalty from Akram Afif earned Felix Sanchez's side a 2-0 victory over Esteghlal at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha.

The win takes the Qatari side onto four points from their first two games in the league phase while Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal remain on three points following their opening round victory over Al Gharafa earlier in the month.

Also yesterday, Saudi giants Al Nassr secured a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Qatar's Al Rayyan in their AFC Champions League match in Riyadh last night.

Sadio Mane opened the scoring for Al Nassr (45 +1) before football superstar Cristiano Ronaldo doubled their lead in the 76th minute.

Al Rayyan's Roger Guedes pulled one back in the 87th minute, but Al Nassr held on to claim the three points.

The win strengthens Al Nassr's position in the competition and boosts their chances of advancing to the knockout stages.

Al Sadd coach Sanchez said yesterday: "I am happy to see my team win a difficult match and I congratulate the players on their performance. We will work harder during the upcoming matches to win more points."

Afif said yesterday: "I want to congratulate Al Sadd fans for the victory. We will try to do well in all the matches and our



Al Sadd's Akram Afif celebrates scoring his team's second goal in the Asian Champions League, Group B, match against Esteghlal of Iran at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

best is yet to come, God willing. We must focus on our next League match but my focus first will be on Qatar's World Cup qualifying game against Kyrgyzstan (at Al Thumama Stadium on October 10)".

Hosseini punched the ball into his own goal with five minutes remaining in the first half and Afif netted from the penalty spot in the 68th minute after being hauled down by Rouzbeh Cheshmi to put the seal on a comfortable win for

the hosts. Soon after Ramin Rezaeian was steering a header of his own wide of the home goal while Meshaal Barsham had to be at his sharpest to push Gustavo Blanco's headed effort to safety, throwing himself to his right to deny the Argentinian forward. With five minutes to go to the interval Hosseini quickly turned from hero to villain for the visitors, gifting Al Sadd the lead moments after denying the Qataris with a fine save when he

pushed away Rafa Mujica's effort for a corner. Afif bent his set-piece towards the edge of the six-yard box and, under pressure from Roman Saiss, Hosseini's mistimed punch sliced off his fist and into the Esteghlal goal.

Barsham then ensured Al Sadd took that lead into the interval with a diving save deep into injury time, the AFC Asian Cup winner palming Iman Salimi's header to safety at another corner.



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo shoots at goal during his team's Asian Champions League, Group B, clash against Qatar's Al Rayyan at Al-Awwal Park, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. (Reuters)

Al Sadd started the second half in search of a second, Paulo Otavio shooting straight at Hosseini while the goalkeeper went some way to redeeming himself soon after when he smothered the ball at Mujica's feet as the Spaniard raced in on goal.

But Esteghlal resistance came to an end when Cheshmi cut Afif down in the area to concede a clear-cut spot-kick and the Qatar international stepped up to double the lead with ease.

Al Sadd will welcome Persepolis of Iran for their third encounter on October 21 while Esteghlal will host Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr the following day.

**Saudi side Al Ahli beat Al Wasl** Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli FC continued to shine as they secured a 2-0 win over Al Wasl Club of the UAE in their AFC Champions League Elite match in Dubai yesterday.

First half strikes from Riyad Mahrez and Roger Ibanez sealed an impressive away win for Al Ahli, who have maximum points from their opening two matches while Al Wasl stayed on three.

Al Wasl produced the first attempt of the game when Nicolas Gimenez twisted and turned at the edge of the box to get away from his marker but fired his curling low shot just wide of the post.

The response from Al Ahli was swift and efficient as they went ahead in the third minute when Roger Ibanez's long ball forward was expertly brought down by Riyad Mahrez before calmly slotting past Khaled Al Senani.

Al Wasl could have drawn level in the 20th minute if not for the intervention of Ivan Toney, who raced back to his goal line to head out Fabio Lima's inswinging corner that looked to be going straight in.

SQUASH / QTERMINALS QATAR CLASSIC

# Farag, al-Tamimi reach second round in Doha

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

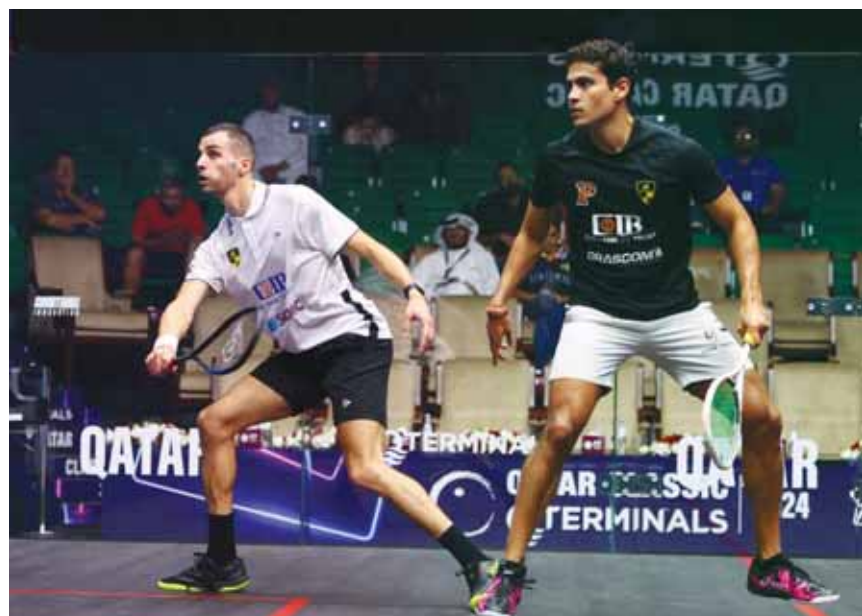
**A**li Farag, the reigning men's champion, yesterday overcame a challenging opening match against Egyptian compatriot Youssef Ibrahim on day one of the QTerminals Qatar Classic.

Despite a close first game, Farag ultimately won 11-7, 11-5, 11-7 at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex where Qatar's number one player Abdulla al-Tamimi delighted home fans by beating Englishman Adrian Waller.

Farag, the World No 1 maintained control throughout the match, setting the pace and leaving Ibrahim struggling. In the third game, Ibrahim's frustration boiled over after a questionable call, allowing Farag to capitalize and secure the victory.

"Youssef is one heck of a player, he's got everything you need, he is explosive and so skillful with the racket," Farag said yesterday.

"When I play with his generation at a fast pace, they absolutely dominate me. I had to be very smart with the way I approached the match today. Youssef has been struggling with injuries for the past year or so and he rolled his ankle at the Egyptian Open. It's his first match back, so I knew he wouldn't be that confident with his movement. I really wish him well in his recovery because we need him on tour. He's so exciting and we don't have anyone like him."



World number one and the defending champion Ali Farag of Egypt and compatriot Youssef Ibrahim in action during their opening round match at the QTerminals Qatar Classic at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex in Doha yesterday. Farag won 11-7, 11-5, 11-7. Right: Qatar's Abdulla al-Tamimi goes for a low retrieve against England's Adrian Waller. Al-Tamimi won 11-9, 11-13, 11-2, 12-10 to advance to the second round.

Al-Tamimi, with the home crowd supporting the 29-year-old, dropped the second set but eventually won 11-9, 11-13, 11-2, 12-10 in 54 minutes on the Centre Court. Tomorrow al-Tamimi will take on Egypt's Karim Gawad who yesterday beat France's Baptiste Masotti 12-10, 11-9, 11-7 in just 26 minutes.

In other matches in the men's draw, No 5 seed Mazen Hesham faced a tough challenge from Malaysia's Eain Yow Ng. Hesham won 7-11, 11-6, 11-3, 6-11, 11-6 (57m). Youssef Soliman also fought hard,

defeating Aly Abou Eleinen in a 3-2 victory. Soliman will now face the defending champion Farag in the second round.

Former World Champion Tarek Momen, a previous winner in Doha, yesterday secured a hard-fought victory over World No 10 Marwan ElShorbagy in what was often a scrappy affair. Momen, drawing on his extensive experience, managed to outlast the determined Englishman. Momen won 12-10, 6-11, 5-11, 11-5, 11-9.

Momen will now face France's Sebastien Bonmalais, with the

winner advancing to the quarter-finals.

"I'm definitely proud of myself for pushing through today because there were so many things that were going on that were just so hard to deal with," Momen said after the match.

**Turmel stuns Elaraby** The biggest upset yesterday came from England's Lucy Turmel. Despite being down two games, Turmel staged a remarkable comeback, defeating No 8 seed Rowan Elaraby in women's draw.

Turmel, who recently re-entered the top 20 of the PSA Women's World Rankings, secured a hard-fought victory with scores of 8-11, 2-11, 14-12, 11-7, 12-10. This win takes Turmel into the second round of the tournament.

Turmel will play Egypt's Amina Orfi - who yesterday became the second youngest female player to reach the top 10 - in the next round, with Orfi defeating Farida Mohamed 13-15, 10-12, 11-5, 11-6, 11-9.

"I was getting chopped really in the first two (games)," said

Turmel afterwards. "It was one of those where I said to myself that it can only get better. Going into the third, I just wanted to try and get back into the match and give a bit of a better account of myself and fight. After the third, I just felt like the match restarted and then the last two were obviously tightly contested, but I just showed a lot of a lot of grit and fight at the end there.

"It was a goal of mine to get back into the top 20, and to do it after the first two tournaments is great," she added.



MOTORSPORT

# Al-Ghuneim, al-Kuwari shine at Qatar Off-Road Championship

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The sixth round of the Qatar Off-Road Championship concluded on a high note on Saturday.

In the Class 1 Motorcycles category, Mishal al-Ghuneim from Saudi Arabia, riding a Husqvarna Rally Replica, secured the top position with a time of 2:04:33. Hanno Geysler from South Africa, came in second on a KTM bike with a time of 2:12:49, just 8:16 behind al-Ghuneim. Philip Horlemann of Germany was third.

In the Quad (Class 2) category, Mansoor al-Suwaidi from the UAE, riding a Yamaha YFZ450R, clinched the top spot with a time of 2:23:45.

His compatriot Abdulaziz Ahli followed in second place, while another Emirati rider, Abdullah al-Falasi, came third. Rafic Eid from Lebanon finished first in the Veteran Class 1.

In the Cars category, Ahmed al-Kuwari and his co-driver Nasser al-Kuwari of Qatar, driving a Yamaha YXZ 1000 R, clinched the top spot in Class 1 with a total time of 2:04:12. Salman Aman from Kuwait and Aleksei Kuzmich of the UAE, finished second, while Abdulla al-Khelaifi and Abdulaziz al-Jabri of Qatar completed the podium.

In Class 2, Alexander Whyatt and Bap-



Podium winners of the Cars categories of the Qatar Off-Road Championship pose with the officials.

tiste Cerrato, driving a BRP Can-Am Maverick, won first place at 2:38:35. Nawaf al-Sowaidi and Ata al-Hmoud finished second. Ahmad al-Muhannadi and Tamer al-Hijazeen rounded out the top three.

In Class 3, Omar Allahim and Fahad al-Amr from Saudi Arabia, driving a Nissan Patrol, secured first place with a time of 3:12:48.

Motab al-Qnon and Mohammed Abu

Hassan, also driving a Nissan Patrol, finished second. Action returns in the seventh round of the Championship, organised by the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation, on November 22-23.



CRICKET

# India's onslaught keeps result alive in rain-hit Test

Hosts declare at 285-9 and then reduce Bangladesh to 26-2

AFP  
Kanpur, India

Blistering half-centuries by Yashasvi Jaiswal and K L Rahul led India's batting onslaught as the hosts tried to force a result in the weather-hit second Test against Bangladesh yesterday, despite two-and-a-half days being lost.

India declared their whirlwind first innings on 285-9 from just 34.4 overs, after Bangladesh were bowled out for 233 on a whirlwind day four in Kanpur. Bangladesh had to face a tricky 11 overs before stumps and reached 26-2, still 26 runs in arrears, after Ravichandran Ashwin trapped Zakir Hasan lbw for 10 and then bowled nightwatchman Hasan Mahmud for four.

Shadman Islam was on seven and Mominul Haque, who made an unbeaten 107 earlier in Bangladesh's first innings, was yet to score. Left-hander Jaiswal smashed 72 off 51 balls including 12 fours and two sixes as India reached 100 off just 61 balls, breaking their own record for the fastest start to a Test innings.

It beat the 74 balls they faced to reach the mark against the West Indies last year. "That was our message this morning, you know, with losing two days of the match... that positive intent was going to be key," India's bowling coach Morne Morkel told reporters. "I thought the way the boys went up with the ball upfront was incredible to see. To show the intent with the bat was awesome," he added. "Our game plan was to see how can we get the winning result."

The former South African fast bowler said the crowds loved the batting show, which had "the T20 feel about it".

Jaiswal put on 55 off 24 balls for the first wicket with skipper Rohit Sharma, who was bowled by Mehidy for 23 in the fourth over. Jaiswal kept up the onslaught, reaching his fifty off 31 balls before he was bowled by Hasan Mahmud. But Virat Kohli, who hit 47 off 35 balls, and Rahul, whose 68 came of 43 balls, kept up the momentum.

Bangladesh spinners Shakib Al Hasan and Mehidy Hasan Miraz took four wickets each. "They played to a plan and I was surprised,"



India's Yashasvi Jaiswal plays a pull shot during the fourth day of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Green Park Stadium in Kanpur yesterday. (AFP)

Mehidy said. "But after two to three overs we knew their plan and we played to our strength. Just tried to do some damage to their innings."

Former captain Shakib, 37, announced his international retirement on Thursday and could be playing his last Test if he is unable to return home for a scheduled South Africa series. Earlier, Ravindra Jadeja, with his left-arm spin, took the final Bangladesh wicket of Khaled Ahmed, caught and bowled, to reach 300 Test wickets.

He became the seventh Indian bowler to reach 300 on a list headed by Anil Kumble with 619 Test victims. "It's special," said Jadeja. "I've been playing Test cricket 10 years and I've finally reached this milestone. Feeling proud of myself."

Bangladesh had resumed at 107-3 under

clear skies after rain and a soggy outfield had washed out the whole of Saturday and Sunday. Only 35 overs had been possible on Friday's opening day. Left-hander Mominul, who began the day on 40, reached his 13th Test hundred before lunch with a boundary off Ashwin.

India lead the two-match series 1-0 after they won the opener in Chennai by 280 runs.

**BRIEF SCORES (Day 4)**

**Bangladesh: 233 all out** Mominul Haque 107 not out; Jasprit Bumrah 3/50, Akash Deep 2/43, Ravichandran Ashwin 2/45, Mohammed Siraj 2/57 and **26/2 in 11 overs** (R. Ashwin 2/14) and **India: 285/9 declared in 34.4 overs** (Yashasvi Jaiswal 71, KL Rahul 68, Shakib Al Hasan 4/78, Mehidy Hasan Miraz 4/41)

SPOTLIGHT

## 'Hurt' Pakistan aim to end win drought against England: Masood

AFP  
Karachi

Pakistan captain Shan Masood yesterday backed Babar Azam to find his batting touch as his side look to end their win drought in the three-match Test series against England starting next week.

Pakistan have gone winless in 10 home Tests since February 2021, the latest humiliation being swept 2-0 by Bangladesh earlier this month. They also lost 3-0 in Australia earlier this year. "It's not acceptable for Pakistan to not win a home Test for that long and we accept the responsibility for that," said Masood at a press conference in Karachi. "As a cricketing nation we all are hurt right now."

Masood was confident that batting great Azam would soon be back to his best after managing just 64 runs in the two Bangladesh Tests. "We all know Babar is one of the top batters in the world and

despite not scoring big runs the good thing is that he is not out of form, we have to back him," said Masood.

Azam has not passed fifty in Tests in 16 innings dating back to December 2022. England arrive in Pakistan on October 2 with the first Test starting in Multan five days later.

The second Test is also in Multan from October 15 while the final match is in Rawalpindi from October 24. "I assure you that everyone is eager to stage a comeback in this series and take Pakistan cricket in a good direction," said Masood.

England swept the series 3-0 when they last visited Pakistan in 2022. "For me, pressure is a thing of privilege because leading your country is a great honour but with it comes responsibility," said Masood, whose captaincy tenure runs until May 2025. "If results are good then I will serve, if not then I will be punished. I don't run away from challenges and this coming series is also very challenging."



Pakistan's captain Shan Masood speaks during a press conference at the National Stadium in Karachi yesterday. (AFP)

## English cricket club Hampshire agree 'dream' takeover by IPL owners

**London:** English County Championship club Hampshire have signed a "dream" takeover deal with GMR Group, co-owners of Indian Premier League cricket side Delhi Capitals.

The club have exchanged definitive agreements with GMR as part of a "significant strategic partnership", making them the first county to be owned by an overseas franchise.

Under the deal, ratified by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), the Indian conglomerate acquires a majority stake and is expected to complete a 100 percent takeover within two years.

Rod Bransgrove, chairman of Hampshire Sport and Leisure Holdings, said in a statement that the deal was the "fulfilment of a dream".

"Becoming the first English cricket club to join an international cricket group will open exciting

new opportunities as we embrace the globalisation of this great sport," he said.

GMR owns a 50 percent stake in Delhi Capitals and in the Dubai Capitals and Pretoria Capitals, as well as investing in US Major League Cricket team the Seattle Orcas.

Kiran Kumar Grandhi, corporate chairman of GMR Group, said: "Our vision is to transform sports into a platform that unites people and cultures, drives global excellence, and nurtures the creation of future world champions."

ECB chief executive Richard Gould said the announcement "demonstrates the global interest in investing in cricket in England and Wales, and underlines the continuing appeal of county cricket".

Hampshire finished second in division one of the just-concluded County Championship.

## South Africa recall Muthusamy as Bangladesh Test tour goes ahead

**Cape Town:** South Africa have recalled all-rounder Senuran Muthusamy to their 15-player squad for next month's two-Test tour of Bangladesh as one of three frontline spin options. Muthusamy, 30, played the last of his three tests in March 2023 and joins Keshav Maharaj and Dane Piedt as the specialist slow-bowling options in the squad.

Batter Matthew Breetzke is the only uncapped player in the squad, though he did tour West Indies in June when South Africa won a rain-affected series 1-0. Cricket South Africa released a statement earlier on Monday confirming the tour would go ahead following a security review.

Bangladesh has seen deadly protests that led to the ousting of prime minister Sheikh Hasina last month. "A security assessment was recently conducted by CSA's Operations Manager, Team Security Manager, Safety and Security Consultant, and a representative of the South African Cricketers' Association,"

CSA said. "CSA has given the series a go-ahead based on the recommendations made by the team post an in-loco inspection visit to Bangladesh."

Temba Bavuma will captain the side with the first test in Dhaka from Oct 21-25 and the second in Chattogram from Oct 29-Nov 2.

**Squad:** Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Matthew Breetzke, Nandre Burger, Tony de Zorzi, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Dane Paterson, Dane Piedt, Kagiso Rabada, Tristan Stubbs, Ryan Rickelton and Kyle Verreynne.

**ADAIR BROTHERS SEE IRELAND TO VICTORY OVER SOUTH AFRICA**

Ross Adair scored a century and his younger brother Mark took four wickets as Ireland beat South Africa by 10 runs on Sunday in the second of their Twenty20 internationals to tie the two-match series. Ross Adair became

the third Irishman to score a century in a T20 international as he hit 100 off 58 balls to help Ireland to 195-6 after being put into bat at the Zayed Cricket Stadium.

Mark Adair took 4-31 in his four overs as Ireland then put the brakes on the reply when the South Africans looked on course to successfully chase down the imposing target. South Africa lost their last six wickets cheaply, with Adair taking three in his last over, to finish on 185-9.

Ireland got off to an impressive start with a 137-run opening wicket partnership between Ross Adair and skipper Paul Stirling, who made 52. Adair's nine sixes in his innings broke Stirling's Irish T20 record of eight.

South Africa's top order were hauling in the target as Reeza Hendricks and Matthew Breetzke both made 51 and Ryan Rickelton 36. But when key batsman Tristan Stubbs went cheaply on 157-4 with four overs remaining, the South African innings collapsed.

## Mayorov and Franklin win a race each in fourth round of FIM MiniGP Qatar



Petr Mayorov and Jake Franklin secured victories in the fourth round of the 2024 FIM MiniGP Qatar at the Lusail track on Saturday. Mayorov won Race 1 with a total time of 13:56.837 and a best lap of 55.197 seconds in the 15-lap event, where Ivan Maiorov finished close behind in second, just 0.233 seconds off. Franklin completed the podium, finishing 11.088 seconds behind Maiorov. In Race 2, Franklin claimed the Mini GP 160 class victory with a total time of 14:08.113 and a best lap of 55.430 seconds to boost his title hopes. Makar Novichkov finished second at 14:08.271, while Marton Belleli secured third place at 14:10.513, extending his Championship lead. With one more round to go, Belleli leads the overall championship standings with 125 points, followed by Franklin with 115 points while Riley Robinson occupies third place with 103 points.

### TENNIS

# Sinner defies doping case to enter semis

Alcaraz sets up showdown with Medvedev after defeating Khachanov 7-5, 6-2

AFP  
Beijing

**T**op-ranked Jannik Sinner defied the controversy surrounding his doping case to join Carlos Alcaraz and Daniil Medvedev yesterday in the China Open semi-finals.

The defending champion will face Chinese wildcard Bu Yunchaokete after defeating Jiri Lehecka 6-2, 7-6 (8/6) for his 14th win in a row. The 23-year-old is under the microscope anew after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said on Saturday it was seeking a ban of up to two years after he twice tested positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March.

The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) cleared the Italian of wrongdoing in August and allowed him to continue playing, and weeks later he won the US Open for his second major title.

The ITIA accepted Sinner's explanation that the drug entered his system when his physiotherapist used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player.

WADA has appealed the case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. "For sure I had sleepless nights during this time. Now again it's going to be not easy," he said yesterday, admitting that "this is a very difficult moment".

On the tennis court, Sinner saved two set points in the second set to clinch victory over the 37th-ranked Lehecka from the Czech Republic. Now in his 10th semi-final of the season, Sinner will be hot favourite over Bu in what will be the biggest match of the 96th-ranked Chinese player's life. The 22-year-old Bu is the lowest-ranked China Open semi-finalist since 2008.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Alcaraz plays last year's runner-up Medvedev after



Italy's Jannik Sinner hits a return to Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka during their quarter-final match at the China Open in Beijing. (AFP)

emerging from a tense first set to defeat Russian seventh seed Karen Khachanov 7-5, 6-2.

Russian third seed Medvedev beat unseeded Italian Flavio Cobolli 6-2, 6-4. "When he's in the zone he's probably the best player in the world," Medvedev said of the second seed Alcaraz. "I feel like now he's in the zone, so it's a great test for me."

In the women's draw, Naomi Osaka set up a last-16 clash with Coco Gauff while top seed Aryna Sabalenka and Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen both sailed through. Four-time major champion Osaka defeated American Katie Volynets 6-3, 6-2 and faces American fourth seed Gauff in a showdown

of former US Open title-holders.

"It's definitely going to be a battle - who wants to take control of the point first," said Osaka, a former number one now ranked 73. "And I think it's going to be me."

Osaka is playing her first tournament under Patrick Mouratoglou, the Frenchman best known for being the long-time former coach of Serena Williams.

The 26-year-old Japanese won four majors from 2018 to 2021 - the US Open and Australian Open, both twice.

She is also a former winner in Beijing and has said she feels at home on the hard courts of the Chinese capital. But Osaka has struggled for consistency since return-

ing to tennis in January after the birth of her daughter Shai. Her best results after becoming a parent have been two quarter-final appearances.

World number two Sabalenka will take some stopping after the US Open champion swatted aside Ashlyn Krueger 6-2, 6-2 for her 14th victory in a row. She plays another American next in Madison Keys.

Zheng, the home hero playing in China for the first time since winning gold in Paris, rolled over Nadia Podoroska of Argentina 6-3, 6-2. Jasmine Paolini became the biggest casualty so far when the third seed was beaten 6-4, 6-0 by 31st-seeded Magda Linette.

### Humbert to face Fils in all-French Japan Open final

**Tokyo:** Ugo Humbert will face Arthur Fils in an all-French final at the Japan Open after both players battled through their semi-finals yesterday.

Humbert, who is unbeaten in all six of his previous finals on the ATP tour, set up a showdown with his Paris Olympics doubles partner after beating the Czech Republic's Tomas Machac 6-3, 3-6, 6-2. Fils edged Denmark's number six seed Holger Rune 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (12/10) to join him in the final.

Today's match will be the first all-French final on the ATP tour in four years. "I think it's super nice. I think it's been a long time that we didn't have any French final," said the 20-year-old Fils. "I'm really happy to play against him, I think we're going to make a great match. Just enjoy the moment and let's see who is going to win it."

Fils came through an epic encounter against defending champion Ben Shelton in his quarter-final and he again had to dig deep against Rune. The Frenchman took the opening set in a tiebreak, with Rune smashing his racquet in frustration.

The Dane's head looked to have gone when his serve was broken at the start of the set but he regained his poise and took Fils to another tiebreak. Fils finally saw off his opponent when he converted his sixth match point. "In the second set I got the break very early and then we played some crazy tennis," said Fils. "It was tough to end the match. Crazy points at the end."

The 26-year-old Humbert has already won titles in Dubai and Marseille this year and he is looking to extend his remarkable perfect record in finals.

Humbert and Fils teamed up in the Paris Olympics doubles competition, losing to Belgium's Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen in the first round. "It's going to be a great final for French tennis," said Humbert.

### LOSS

## Basketball legend Mutombo dies aged 58

AFP  
Los Angeles

**C**ongolese-American basketball great Dikembe Mutombo, renowned as one of the best defensive players in NBA history, has died aged 58, the league announced yesterday.

Mutombo, an eight-time NBA all-star, passed away surrounded by his family after a battle with brain cancer, the league added. "Dikembe Mutombo was simply larger than life," NBA commissioner Adam Silver said of the 7ft 2in (2.18m) Hall-of-Famer in a statement.

"On the court, he was one of the greatest shot blockers and defensive players in the history of the NBA. Off the floor, he poured his heart and soul into helping others," Silver added, noting Mutombo's extensive humanitarian work.

Mutombo, who played 18 seasons in the NBA, worked tirelessly to improve living conditions in his native Democratic Republic of Congo through his personal foundation. Those efforts, which included donating millions of dollars of his personal fortune to help build a hospital on the out-



skirts of Kinshasa, earned him multiple humanitarian accolades including the US President's Volunteer Service Award.

"He was a humanitarian at his core," said Silver, who often travelled alongside Mutombo in his work as the NBA's Global Ambassador. "He loved what the game of basketball could do to make a positive impact on communities, especially in his native Democratic Republic of Congo and across the continent of Africa," Silver said. "I had the privilege of travelling the world with Dikembe and seeing first-hand how his generosity and compassion uplifted people."

### FOCUS

## Griezmann retires from international football

AFP  
Paris

**F**rance's 2018 World Cup-winning star Antoine Griezmann yesterday announced his retirement from international football, bringing to an end a 10-year career with his country.

"It is with a heart full of memories that I am closing this chapter of my life," France vice-captain Griezmann, 33, wrote on X. "It is with profound emotion that I am announcing my retirement as a France player, after 10 incredible years," he added in a video accompanying his message. "It is time for me today to turn a page and hand over to the new generation."

The Atletico Madrid forward made his France debut in March 2014 and won 137 caps, a figure beaten only by his former teammate Hugo Lloris (145) and 1998 World Cup winner Lilian Thuram (142). Griezmann is also fourth in France's list of all-time goal-scorers with 44, behind only record marksman Olivier Giroud, Thierry Henry and current captain Kylian Mbappe.

Griezmann scored in France's 4-2 win over Croatia in the final of the 2018 World Cup in Moscow, having previously helped his country reach the final of Euro 2016, a tournament he ended as top scorer with six goals. Griezmann was also outstanding for Les Bleus on their run to the 2022 World Cup final, which they lost on penalties to Argentina in Qatar.

His last major tournament will be remembered less fondly, as neither he nor his team found their best form at Euro 2024 despite making it to the semi-finals. He also played at the 2014 World Cup and at Euro 2020, as well as helping France win the UEFA Nations League in 2021. Griezmann's final appearance for France

Antoine Griezmann made his France debut in March 2014 and won 137 caps. (AFP)



came in a Nations League win at home to Belgium in Lyon, not far from his hometown of Macon in Burgundy, earlier this month.

The former Real Sociedad and Barcelona player had insisted recently he had no intention to withdraw from the national team. France coach Didier Deschamps said in a message shared by national team staff that he felt "a lot of emotion" on hearing the news.

"After much reflection, Antoine has decided to call time on his magnificent international career. We had a long discussion about this recently," Deschamps said. "It was often said that Antoine was my favourite. We did have a very strong relationship, and that will remain intact."

Griezmann's decision to quit is further confirmation that an era has come to an end for the

French side. Lloris and centre-back Raphael Varane both retired from international duty in the wake of the 2022 World Cup, with the latter quitting football entirely last week at the age of just 31.

Giroud stopped playing for his country in the wake of this year's Euros in Germany. "I am convinced that the future is promising and I can't wait to see the new generation shine," Griezmann added.

Deschamps will name his next France squad this Thursday ahead of Nations League matches against Israel in Budapest on October 10 and Belgium in Brussels four days later. Mbappe will not be involved in those games as the Real Madrid superstar is currently sidelined due to a thigh injury.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Arteta praises Arsenal 'character' as PSG loom

Arteta, who played for PSG as a young midfielder, said he was a 'admirer' of Enrique

AFP  
London

Mikel Arteta said Arsenal's dramatic last-gasp victory against Leicester will help "shape the character" of the team as he prepares for today's Champions League showdown against Paris Saint-Germain.

The Gunners scored twice in injury time to win 4-2 on Saturday and finished the weekend third in the Premier League, one point behind leaders Liverpool.

Arsenal host French champions PSG in a Champions League league-phase match at the Emirates today, seeking their first win in the competition this season after a goalless draw against Atalanta.

Arsenal manager Arteta was asked at his pre-match press conference about the importance of winning games from different positions – either by dominating games or with last-gasp victories.

"It shapes the character and the body of the team, that they have the certainty that they can win in any context and adapt to very different contexts during matches," he said.

"The Champions League demands that, you can pretend to play against this kind of opposition and dominate for 95 minutes. But it does not happen at this level so you have to be really good in other phases as well – to stay in the game, to be comfortable and still always have the belief and intention to win it."

Arteta is expecting a tough match against the French league leaders, who will be without France forward Ousmane Dembele, according to a source close to the club.

Barcola is the leading scorer in the French top flight this term with six goals, two of



Arsenal players train in London yesterday, on the eve of their Champions League match against PSG. (Reuters)

which came in the victory over Rennes. Marco Asensio is in a race against time to be fit after picking up an injury in PSG's Champions League opener against Girona two weeks ago.

Arteta, when asked about the development, said: "We're going to prepare like we always do with every possibility and let's see. They have many other options."

He added: "They're really tough. They are exceptional and they dominate every

phase of play. They have a very clear intention of how they want to dominate the game through the ball and when they don't have it, they want it straight back. They are really aggressive with it and they confront you."

Arteta, who played for PSG as a young midfielder, said he was a "huge admirer" of Luis Enrique, whose team beat Girona 1-0 in their Champions League opener. "An unbelievable personality, huge character, huge

energy, always very supportive with young players," said Arteta. "What I love about him is wherever he's been, as a player or a manager, his fingerprints are all over the place. You can sense it's his team the way his players behave, the way they want to attack and dominate games."

"The spirit, the energy they have, he has this unbelievable power with all the clubs he's been at, with the Spain national team," he said.

## COMMENT

## Dembele dropped for the good of PSG team: Enrique

Reuters  
London

Forward Ousmane Dembele has been left out of the Paris St Germain squad for their Champions League game at Arsenal, after the player failed to meet the needs of the team, manager Luis Enrique said yesterday.

French media had reported that the manager and player had a discussion after PSG's 3-1 win over Rennes on Friday, and that Dembele was omitted from the squad for today's game with Arsenal for disciplinary reasons.

While Luis Enrique said there was no argument between himself and Dembele, he took the decision for the good of the team.

"If someone doesn't comply with the requirements of the team, it means that they are not ready," Luis Enrique told a press



Paris Saint-Germain's Spanish head coach Luis Enrique gives instructions to French forward Ousmane Dembele (left) during the French L1 match against Stade Rennais FC at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on September 27, 2024. (AFP)

conference. "It means in such an important week, with such an important game coming up, we need every player to be fully available," he said.

"My objective is to do the best for the team and that was my decision."

The manager was pressed further on making such an important choice, leaving out a player who has scored four league goals in six games, for such a key European game.

"You think it is easy to create a team. You press a button and the 11 best players play and everything goes well," the manager said.

"No, making a team takes a certain amount of circumstances that can be difficult. Yesterday I had to make a difficult decision but I think it is the best decision without any doubt."

"I would make it 100 more times. That doesn't mean the situation is irreversible. But the best

situation for the team right now is this, in my opinion."

The coach would not give further details on what happened with Dembele, but said that his job is to create a team and that is what he will continue to do.

"I am not going to make a soap opera out of it, there was no argument between the player and me," he said.

There was a problem with the players responsibility to the team. Nothing else," he said. "I signed for PSG last season to create a team. That is something I can guarantee. Until the last day that I am in Paris, I am going to make a team."

"A team that is brave, daring, plays good football or tries to. The first day I cannot do that I will go back home."

PSG won their opening Champions League game 1-0 against Girona while Arsenal were held to a 0-0 draw away to Atalanta.

### Cameroon FA chief Eto'o banned for six months by FIFA for misconduct

Cameroon Football Federation (Fecafoot) chief Samuel Eto'o has been banned from attending the national team's matches for six months after violating FIFA's disciplinary regulations, football's governing body said yesterday.

The former Barcelona striker has been president of Fecafoot since 2021 and will now be barred from all men's and women's games across various age groups. "The sanction was imposed in connection with the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup round-of-16 match between Brazil and Cameroon played in Bogota, Colombia, on 11 September 2024," FIFA said.

Details regarding the incidents were not disclosed by FIFA's disciplinary committee. The statement said Eto'o was deemed guilty of "offensive behaviour and violations of the principles of fair play," as well as "misconduct" involving officials.

The ban follows a fine imposed on the 43-year-old by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) less than three months ago, stemming from an inquiry into purported breaches of its ethical and integrity standards.

### MBAPPE NAMED IN MADRID SQUAD TO FACE LILLE AFTER THIGH INJURY

Real Madrid named Kylian Mbappe in their squad to face Lille in the Champions League tomorrow after he missed one match with a thigh injury. The French forward was expected to be out until after the upcoming international break but appears to have made a quick recovery.

Mbappe sustained the problem last Tuesday in the La Liga win over Alaves and was unavailable for Sunday's 1-1 derby draw at Atletico Madrid. Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti selected Mbappe in his squad on Monday for the trip to France to face Ligue 1 side Lille, where the striker's brother Ethan plays. Los Blancos goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois was not included in the squad after suffering a hip muscle injury against Atletico.

### NEYMAR TRAINS AGAIN WITH SAUDI TEAM AFTER LONG INJURY LAY-OFF

Brazil's Neymar announced his return to team training with his Saudi club Al Hilal yesterday after nearly a year out with a left knee injury. The 32-year-old moved from Paris Saint-Germain in a blockbuster deal in August 2023 but played only five matches before rupturing his meniscus and anterior cruciate ligament on international duty in October. "Happy to be back in the group," Neymar posted on Instagram, with pictures of him running and kicking the ball, watched by Al Hilal's Portuguese coach Jorge Jesus. After surgery, Neymar resumed individual training in July. His return to competitive games will depend on "his technical readiness and the coach's decision".

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Ten Hag on the brink after fresh mauling

AFP  
London

Erik ten Hag is familiar with negative vibes during his turbulent reign at Manchester United but Sunday's embarrassing 3-0 defeat may have changed the mood at Old Trafford irrevocably.

Brennan Johnson's early goal knocked the stuffing out of the home side, who lost captain Bruno Fernandes to a straight red card before half-time. Dejan Kulusevski and Dominic Solanke scored in the second half to underline Tottenham's total dominance against their disjuncted and undisciplined opponents.

It was United's second straight 3-0 defeat at home in the Premier League after Liverpool hammered them earlier in September – leaving them 12th in the table with just two wins from their opening six games. The club's haul of seven points equals their worst record at this stage of a Premier League campaign, and they have scored just five times.

Former United captain Gary Neville, now a TV pundit, tore into his former team, describing Sunday as a "shocking and sobering" day for Ten Hag's men. "It was an absolutely disgusting performance in that first half in effort, quality, everything you would want in a football team," he said on Sky Sports. "There will be a lot of questions to answer for that group (of players) and the manager in the next week."

Former Liverpool and Spurs midfielder Jamie Redknapp said United had "no identity". "It gets to a point where you feel for the manager," he said. "He looks completely out of his depth and is struggling to motivate. It was so easy for Tottenham, they were so comfortable, so calm. Man Utd are going backwards, he can't complain any more. They have spent over £600mn (£800mn) and have his defenders in. They are



Erik ten Hag's Manchester United were outplayed 0-3 by Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday. (AFP)

rock bottom and I don't see where they can go from here."

Last season Ten Hag could legitimately point to a lengthy injury list, especially in defence, as a factor in his team's struggles. But aside from the missing Luke Shaw, they currently have few players missing and Ten Hag strengthened his squad during the summer transfer window – taking total spending during his tenure to more than £600mn. Now into his third season at Old Trafford, the argument that the team are still a work in progress looks increasingly weak. Liverpool, after all, are top of the league just six matches into the Arne Slot era.

Of equal concern for United fans is that the team, as Redknapp points out, show few signs of establishing any sort of identity, often proving less than the sum of their parts. Former England striker Alan Shearer, speaking on The Rest Is Football podcast, said: "Can anyone tell me what Manchester United are? 'What is their system? What is their plan? Do they sit, do they

attack, do they press? I don't know. I don't have a clue what they are. They are a mess."

A defiant Ten Hag, who survived a post-season review by club bosses, partly thanks to a shock FA Cup final win against Manchester City, says he is not worried about his future. "We need some time," said the 54-year-old Dutchman. "We are all on one page or in one boat together, the ownership, the leadership group, the staff and the players group as well. I don't have that concern."

Whether he gets that time or not might depend on whether he can inspire his beleaguered men in tough matches against Porto and Aston Villa in the coming week. United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe shows no sign of immediately pulling the trigger, with reports suggesting the club hierarchy will continue to support their embattled manager in the short term.

Ten Hag may not be "sacked in the morning" as Spurs fans gleefully predicted, but he knows it is now or never as he fights to save his job.

## LA LIGA

## Ancelotti disappointed with 1-1 derby draw

Reuters  
Madrid

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was disappointed that his side allowed hosts Atletico Madrid to snatch a 1-1 draw with a goal deep into added time in their La Liga clash on Sunday.

He said Real deserved better luck after dominating most of the game but was glad his side were able to come away with at least a point from a stadium where they lost twice last season. "It is hard to cope with a draw in which we were very close to winning," Ancelotti told reporters.

"It can happen, the opponents are very strong and have a lot of quality. Their goal was in the last minute, it's a pity. We controlled the game well, we came close. But I always like to think positive. We've won a point away from home and we are a point closer (to leaders Barcelona, who lost 4-2 at Osasuna on Saturday). "The dynamic is good, we are in contention and we don't despair, a draw here can mean a good point for the future..."

Real are second in the standings on 18 points, three behind Barca and two ahead of Atletico in third after eight games. Real opened the scoring in the 64th minute with a close-range strike

by defender Eder Militao but the match was suspended for just over 20 minutes after home fans hurled objects onto the pitch as the visitors celebrated.

After the match resumed, Atletico piled on pressure and finally found the equaliser in the 95th minute, with substitute Angel Correa scoring after a counter-attack.

Ancelotti praised referee Mateo Busquets Ferrer for halting the match until the situation was under control but dismissed the idea that the break had helped Atletico recover momentum following the opening goal.

"I don't think (it helped Atletico), it affected us both equally," the Italian said. "We all wanted to play. The decision to stop the match was the right one. The referee said that lighters were thrown and that he had stopped the match twice, if they threw another one he had to suspend it. I think it was a correct decision by the referee. It had to stop, a few things were sorted out, and we started again. Obviously, none of us liked the situation. Everyone wanted to play. The referee acted well."

Meanwhile, Atletico Madrid manager Diego Simeone said fans that hurled objects onto the pitch should be punished, as well as players who he suggested encourage such action.