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SPOTLIGHT | Page 2

Pakistan cricket
in 'ICU' after
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says Latif



FOOTBALL | Page 4

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TENNIS

Battling Alcaraz
outlasts Sinner
in thriller to win
China Open

Page 3

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Hassan makes a surprise comeback into Qatar's squad

By Sports Reporter
Doha



Abdelkarim Hassan returned to QSL in July after joining Al Wakrah.

Abdelkarim Hassan was a notable inclusion to the Qatar 27-man squad, which was announced by head coach Marquez Lopez for this month's crucial FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifiers against Kyrgyzstan and Iran.

Not long ago, Hassan's return to the Qatar football landscape was deemed impossible. But the defender made a surprise return in July signing for Al Wakrah, days after he and his former club Al Sadd had reached 'an amicable resolution, allowing both parties to move past previous differences.'

The 31-year-old had found himself in hot waters after Qatar's debacle in the 2022 FIFA World Cup at home. He was handed an indefinite suspension by the Qatar football federation (QFA) following an altercation with a fan over social media.

Following the group stage exit at the World Cup, Hassan responded to a complaint on SnapChat about the team's poor show by posting, "Relax, do you think it's war?" Hassan was also deducted 50% of his salary, fined 200,000 Qatari riyals and issued a warning by the QFA.

With Qatar now struggling in their bid to qualify for the World Cup, Lopez has called

while they were held to a 2-2 draw by North Korea in Laos.

Now, Lopez - who also recalled veteran Boualem Khoukhi - will hope the experience in his squad will help his men get their first win of the campaign. After playing against Kyrgyzstan at Al Thumama Stadium on October 10, Qatar will travel to Iran for their toughest match of the group in Mashhad on October 15.

From the previous squad, defender Pedro Miguel misses out due to an injury sustained during Al Sadd's AFC Champions League game against Esteghlal. Al Ahli's Marwan Sherif has been called up to replace Mohammed al-Bakri of Al Wakrah in goal, joining first-choice keeper Meshaal Barsham, along with Saad al-Sheeb (Al Sadd) and Salah Zakaria (Al Duhail).

Al Gharafa's Ahmed al-Ganehi and Al Shahania's Naif al-Hadhrami are also included, as is Duhail's Edmilson Junior, who made his debut against North Korea.

Lopez has remained positive despite Qatar's poor start to their World Cup qualification bid. "Even though we have one point from two matches, we still have eight games ahead of us. We will do our best to achieve victories and gain the points that will enable us to compete strongly for qualification with the teams in Group A," the Spaniard had said after the draw against North Korea.



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

David strikes as Lille end Real's long unbeaten run

Aston Villa beat Bayern thanks to brilliant late goal from Duran

Reuters
Lille, France

First-half penalty earned Lille a shock 1-0 home victory over holders Real Madrid in the Champions League group phase yesterday, ending the 15-times European Cup winners' 14-game unbeaten run in the competition.

Jonathan David converted a penalty three minutes into first-half stoppage time to hand Real, who had not lost in their previous 36 matches in all competitions, their first defeat since January. The result put Ligue 1 side Lille on three points from two games in the new format of Europe's premier club competition. Real, who won their opening match against VfB Stuttgart, are also on three points.

Aston Villa beat Bayern Munich 1-0 in the Champions League thanks to a brilliant late Jhon Duran goal as the hosts celebrated in style their first home game in Europe's elite club competition for 41 years. With the Germans dominating possession but squandering chances, Duran ran onto a high ball in the 79th minute, spotted goalkeeper Manuel Neuer off his line, and scooped the ball over him to send Villa Park into delirium.

It was Duran's fifth goal as a substitute this season. The win was a throwback to one of Villa's most glorious days when they beat Bayern Munich to lift the European Cup in 1982.

Duran's goal came against the run of play after Bayern had enjoyed two thirds of possession and the best chances in both teams' second fixture of the new 36-team league phase of the Champions League. In the first half, Villa's World Cup-winning Argentine goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saved a Harry Kane bullet header brilliantly, though the striker was later ruled offside, then tipped over a shot from Michael Olise.

Benfica's Kerem Akturkoglu, Angel Di Maria, Alexander Bah and Orkun Kokcu scored in a 4-0 demolition of Atletico Madrid to start their Champions League campaign with two consecutive wins.

A mistake by Atletico's defence helped Akturkoglu open the scoring in the 13th minute and another error ended with a penalty which Di Maria converted. Bah extended Benfica's



Lille's Jonathan David scores against Real Madrid during the UEFA Champions League group stage match at the Pierre Mauroy Stadium in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, northern France. (AFP)

lead with a header from a corner in the 75th minute and Kokcu completed the rout against Diego Simeone's side from the penalty spot after Reinildo Mandava fouled substitute Zewki Amdouni.

Alexis Mac Allister and Mohamed Salah got on the scoresheet as Liverpool beat Bologna 2-0 to remain perfect in their campaign. A rousing atmosphere greeted Arne Slot and his team who had beaten AC Milan 3-1 away in their opener, and Liverpool did not disappoint, with Mac Allister scoring in the 11th minute, tapping in Salah's pinpoint cross from close range.

The Argentinian midfielder's first goal of the season came less than two minutes after Bologna's Thijs Dallinga slotted the ball past Liverpool keeper Alisson, but it was disallowed for offside. Liverpool were denied a second goal in the 17th minute when Darwin Nunez sprinted onto a pass before calmly firing home past Lukas Skorupski, but the Uruguayan was flagged

for offside. After narrowly missing several scoring chances, Reds talisman Salah finally connected in the 75th minute for his 49th Champions League goal, touching the ball past Juan Miranda before curling a rocket into the top right corner.

AS Monaco came from two goals down to snatch a 2-2 draw away to Dinamo Zagreb at a rain-soaked Maksimir stadium, with Denis Zakaria equalising with a 90th-minute penalty. Petar Susic put Dinamo ahead in added time at the end of the first half with a delightful chip over the keeper and the home side doubled their lead in the 66th minute when Martin Baturina struck a powerful shot from outside the area.

A powerful strike from Christos Tzolis earned Club Brugge a 1-0 victory at Sturm Graz. The Greek forward netted the decisive goal in the 23rd minute, firing into the far corner off the post from the edge of the area following a neat first touch.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

Dala leads Wakrah to win over Ravshan

By Sports Reporter
Al Wakrah

Gelson Dala's first-half strike earned Al Wakrah a hard-fought 1-0 win over FC Ravshan in their AFC Champions League Two Group A tie yesterday.

The Ghanaian's first-half strike secured Al Wakrah their first points while Ravshan are still in search of a win, having opened their campaign with a draw. It was a scrappy start to the contest as the teams jostled for possession with Ravshan's Samuel Ofori sending his long range effort high, while Al Wakrah Lucas Mendes angled his free-kick just over the bar before Hamdi Fathy failed to find the target after sending his shot from distance wide.

Ravshan came close in the 23rd minute when Muhammadjon Rahimov pulled his effort on the right while David Mawutor could not get his shot from distance on target.

Al Wakrah wasted an opportunity just before the half-hour

mark with Gelson Dala missing the target from above the box following Ricardo Gomes' set-up.

Ravshan's David Mawutor should have done better in the 43rd minute when Azizbek Khaitov freed up space in the centre, only for the Ghanaian midfielder to strike his low effort straight into the arms of Al Wakrah keeper Mohammed Albakri.

The breakthrough finally came for Al Wakrah in the 45th minute after Aissa Laidouni slipped a well-timed through ball to Gelson Dala, who fended off his markers before rounding keeper Yevhen Hrytsenko to slot home.

The onus was on the Tajikistan side to fight back in the second half and they came close in the 59th minute with Albakri needing to pull off a save to parry Kojo Matic's headed attempt off a corner before denying Jamshed Maksumov at the near post after initially coming out early to clear the danger.

Ravshan will next face Iran's Tractor SC, while Al Wakrah meet Mohun Bagan Super Giant of India.



Al Wakrah's Gelson Dala celebrates after scoring against FC Ravshan during the AFC Champions League Two Group A match yesterday.

FOCUS

F1 title race tightens as Qatar GP beckons

In less than two months the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024 will descend upon Lusail International Circuit (LIC) for the highly-anticipated penultimate round of the 2024 FIA Formula One World Championship. Having kicked off in Bahrain in March, this year's F1 season has visited some of the most famous circuits. Together, a total of 20 elite drivers, across 10 teams, are bringing the thrill of open-wheel racing to a new generation of fans.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT DRIVER STANDINGS?

With a season that has so far been defined by moments of huge on-track drama and the finest of margins, F1 devotees are looking ahead to round 19 - the United States Grand Prix - which takes place from October 18-20 in Austin, Texas.

The Netherlands' Max Verstappen, driving for Red Bull, is currently in first place with 331 points,

though his lead has been reduced by Great Britain's Lando Norris for McLaren, now in second place with 279 points, after his storming win in Singapore. In third place is Monaco's Charles Leclerc, driving for Ferrari, with 245 points.

With six rounds still to go, the quest for the F1 World Championship Drivers' Championship remains wide open. Fans will be watching closely to see if Verstappen, who has had an astounding 108 podiums, can maintain his current lead at the Circuit of the Americas on October 20.

With every Grands Prix win bringing its victorious driver a whopping 25 points, there's still everything to race for! What's more, the 100km high-intensity Formula 1 Sprint - which returns to LIC for round 23, the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024 on Saturday, November 30 - will also give the top eight drivers the chance to win precious points.

WHICH TEAM COULD LIFT THE TROPHY?

In the World Championship for Constructors - McLaren is currently in pole position with 516 points, in front of Red Bull in second place with 475 points after a season which has been wildly competitive.

Ferrari is in third place with 441 points, while Mercedes are fourth with 329 points. With just 52 points between first and second place in the driver standings and 41 points separating the top two places in the constructor standings, all eyes will be on the grid for the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024.

With renewed knowledge of who to watch on the grid, be sure to get track side at LIC for this year's weekend racing extravaganza which takes place from Friday, November 29 to Sunday, December 1. Tickets - Day and weekend passes - are still available and can be secured at <https://tickets.lcsc.qa>



COMMENT

Pakistan cricket is in the ICU, says former captain

Rashid Latif paints a grim picture after Babar quits captaincy

AFP
Karachi

Pakistan's limited-overs team was leaderless yesterday after captain Babar Azam resigned, compounding a management crisis experts say has badly affected the team's international performance.

Pakistani cricket is flailing in all formats after a series of stinging losses, with a revolving door of bosses and allegations that nepotism has seeped into the sport.

Azam announced his resignation on his personal social media just before midnight on Tuesday, before an official Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) statement more than 12 hours later.

Pakistan cricket has ploughed through four coaches, three board heads and four captains in the past two years, at the same time sliding down international standings.

"It's a leadership crisis," former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif told AFP. "Pakistan cricket is in the ICU with no specialist for treatment."

Azam's resignation came hours before England touched down on Wednesday for a three-match Test series that follows Pakistan's humiliating 2-0 home series defeat to lowly ranked Bangladesh last month.

It was 29-year-old Azam's second turn as captain after a flip-flop saw him resign in all three formats following Pakistan's early exit from the ODI World Cup in November.

He returned in March to captain white-ball competitions but lasted just six months, leaving Pakistan leaderless with four major series coming up and the Champions Trophy next year.

Azam was captain when Pakistan crashed out of the T20 World Cup after a bruising loss to newcomers the United States.



Pakistan's Babar Azam at the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 in India. (Reuters)

He said he stood down to focus on his playing role as a batsman.

"He should not have accepted captaincy again," Latif said.

"Neither the team was performing nor was he scoring big," he said. "This resignation has come very late and that has not only cost him badly, but also the team."

The PCB said yesterday the national selection committee would begin the hunt for a successor.

"He believes that dedicating himself fully to

his batting will enable him to play a more decisive role in the team's success in the shorter formats," a PCB statement said.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Rizwan is considered the front-runner for the job.

Azam is slated to play in the England Test series starting in Multan on Monday, but red-ball skipper Shan Masood is also facing calls to step down over dire performances.

Pakistan has lost all five matches under his tenure, which began last year.

AA Meghessib's Back 2 Back eSports tournament returns

The highly anticipated AAMeghessib's Back 2 Back eSports tournament is back in Qatar for its fifth edition. As one of the country's premier eSports events, this competition brings EAFC25 on PlayStation 5 to life, giving the country's top gamers the right stage to showcase their skills.

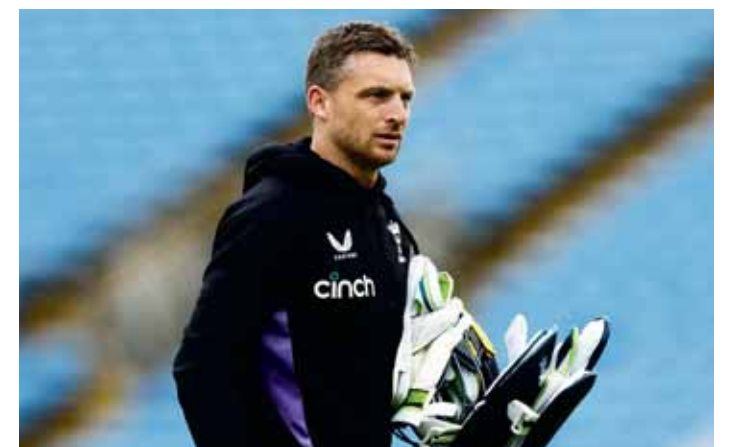
AAMeghessib's Back 2 Back qualifiers will take place at Msheireb Galleria Mall from October 17-19 and the following week at the Gate Mall, from October 24-26, with more teams battling it out to secure their spots in the next stages. For the final qualifying rounds, the competition will move to University of Doha for Science and Technology (UDST) on October 31 and November 1, giving teams another chance to enter the final showdown. Each qualifier will see players battle it out for a spot in the grand finale, to be held on November

22 at Geekdom, at the end of which the very best of Qatar's e-football talent will be crowned champions.

Founded by one of Qatar's top eSports athletes, Ahmed al-Meghessib, this tournament brings a unique take on competitive e-football. Al-Meghessib - who represents the Qatar National eSports team - designed the game to foster teamwork and elevate the competitive spirit. Teams battle it out to score 2 consecutive goals to win in 11v11 Kick Off Mode. The 2v2 players format in 11v11 mode changes the whole game dynamics as well as encourages the players to compete alongside their favourite teammates using strategy, communication, and skills. This lets teams focus on how well they can coordinate with their teammates to score the two goals. To register your team, head to <http://www.redbull.com/aab2b>

SPOTLIGHT

England skipper Buttler declared fit for West Indies white-ball tour



Reuters
London

ENGLAND SQUAD FOR WEST INDIES TOUR:

Jos Buttler (captain), Jofra Archer, Jacob Bethell, Jafer Chohan, Sam Curran, Will Jacks, Liam Livingstone, Saqib Mahmood, Dan Mousley, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley and John Turner.

TOUR SCHEDULE:

1st ODI: West Indies v England; Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua - Thursday, **Oct 31** (1800 GMT)

2nd ODI: West Indies v England; Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, North Sound, Antigua - Saturday, **Nov 2** (1330 GMT)

3rd ODI: West Indies v England; Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados - Wednesday, **Nov 6** (1800 GMT).

1st T20: West Indies v England; Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados - Saturday, **Nov 9** (2000 GMT)

2nd T20: West Indies v England; Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados - Sunday, **Nov 10** (2000 GMT)

3rd T20: West Indies v England; Beausejour Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia - Thursday, **Nov 14** (2000 GMT)

4th T20: West Indies v England; Beausejour Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia - Saturday, **Nov 16** (2000 GMT)

5th T20: West Indies v England; Beausejour Stadium, Gros Islet, St Lucia - Sunday, **Nov 17** (2000 GMT).

ANNOUNCEMENT

Southee quits as captain of New Zealand Test side

Reuters
Auckland

Tim Southee stepped down as New Zealand's Test captain yesterday after their 2-0 defeat to Sri Lanka and handed the reins to opening batsman Tom Latham for the India series.

Veteran pace bowler Southee has struggled for form since the home summer when he took six wickets at an average of more than 70 against a second-string South Africa and Australia.

The Sri Lanka sweep, capped by a humiliating innings and 154-run loss in Galle last week, was the Black Caps' fourth test defeat in succession either side of the washed-out match against Afghanistan.

It left Southee with a record of six wins, six losses and two draws from his 14 tests in charge after taking over from Kane William-



son in late-2022. The 35-year-old said he had resolved to quit the captaincy after a discussion with head coach Gary Stead and was hopeful of getting back to his best without the burden of leadership. "It was my decision to move

aside and it's now Tom's time to keep moving this team forward," Southee told reporters at Auckland airport after arriving home from Sri Lanka.

Asked if the captaincy was behind his decline in form, Southee said: "You look at results and it hasn't been ideal the last wee while. You could probably marry the two up and say that.

"But it was a job I really enjoyed doing."

Latham, who has captained the test side on nine previous occasions, will lead a 15-strong squad including Southee to India.

"He's obviously had a taste over a period of time as well," said Southee, New Zealand's second-highest test wicket-taker of all-time with 382 victims.

"He's a great leader amongst the guys and I wish him all the best. I'll be there to support him along the way."

India, riding a record winning streak of 18 test series on home

soil after a 2-0 defeat of Bangladesh, host New Zealand in three tests starting in Bangalore on Oct 16.

Since winning the inaugural World Test Championship in 2021, New Zealand have been a fading force in the sport's longest format and struggled to regenerate following the international retirements of seasoned campaigners.

Southee was New Zealand's leading bowler with eight wickets on the last tour of India in 2021 when the hosts won the two-match series 1-0.

However, his haul was dwarfed by the tallies of India's leading spinners and underlined New Zealand's dearth of quality slow bowlers.

"My record in the subcontinent's been pretty good over the years," he said.

"I'd like to think that I could still contribute in that part of the world."

SQUASH - QTERMINALS QATAR CLASSIC

Makin, Asal post wins to reach quarters in Doha

'I'M VERY IMPRESSED WITH HIM AND I'M SO HAPPY THAT EGYPT ARE GOING TO DOMINATE AGAIN'

Welshman Joel Makin continued his impressive run at the QTerminals Qatar Classic, defeating Frenchman Auguste Dussourd in the second round. Makin, who reached the semi-finals here last season, had earlier stunned No. 2 seed Paul Coll in the opening round. He carried that momentum into his match against Dussourd yesterday, winning 11-5, 11-6, 11-4 to book his place in the quarter-finals.

"It's so important to pin someone behind you because the court opens up massively," Makin said yesterday after the match.

"Credit to him, it's easy to come out against a higher-ranked player and do the same you did in the first game, but he stepped up, put the ball in short and made it more difficult for me. I'm happy with how I dealt with it.

"The best players can adapt, it's all mental. You have to be the best on the day, I'm happy to win it 3-0, but I've won 3-2 plenty of times and you just have to get on with it.

"I've got a good record against Fares, but he is explosive and can beat plenty of good people. His racket work is as good as anyone. It's all upstairs for him, if he can pull his mentality together then he's a hard man to beat, but my job is to not let him get to that place."

Also yesterday, World No 2 Mostafa Asal made it 12 wins in a row on the PSA Squash Tour after he defeated World Junior Champion Mohamad Zakaria in the penultimate men's match of the day. Asal won 11-6, 11-7, 11-3 (49m).

Asal has been in red-hot form in the opening stages of the 2024-



Joel Makin (left) of Wales in action against Frenchman Auguste Dussourd during their QTerminals Qatar Classic round two match at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha yesterday.

25 season, winning both the CIB Egyptian Open and Paris Squash. Zakaria has also enjoyed a good start to the campaign, winning his biggest title at the NASH Cup last month.

Zakaria, the third youngest man to reach the top 50 of the PSA World Rankings, continued to make life difficult for Asal in the third, who had to work hard to get the ball past the 17-year-old as traffic issues began to creep in.

"I'm very impressed with him and I'm so happy that Egypt are going to dominate again," Asal said yesterday.

"Seeing a talent like Zakaria is great. He is pushing himself and taking the juniors with him as well.

My brother is competing against him and he's having a tough challenge. I'm surprised by how mature he is, he's still 17 years old and he reminds me of myself.

Weaver of the US shines in women's draw

United States' No 1 Olivia Weaver scored a 3-0 win over World No 15 Fayrouz Aboelkheir to reach the quarter-finals of the Qatar Classic for the first time. Weaver won 11-5, 11-0, 14-12 (31m).

"You never know what's going to happen on a squash court," said Weaver. "You have to prepare for everything, but I knew the game plan I wanted to execute. She's coming off an amazing week

in Paris and she is extremely talented. I felt confident that I could take away some of her weapons and I'm pleased to get through that in three."

Belgium's World No 5 Nele Coll earned her spot in the quarter-finals after a routine win over Wales' Emily Whitlock. Coll won 11-4, 11-3, 11-6. In other matches yesterday, 17-year-old Amina Orfi reached the quarter-finals for the first time after beating England's World No.20 Lucy Turmel 11-4, 11-4, 14-12 while World No.2 Nouran Gohar made it five wins in a row against fellow Egyptian Nada Abbas to earn her place in the last eight. Gohar won 11-6, 11-6, 11-7 win after 35 minutes.

GAWAD BEATS HOME FAVOURITE AL-TAMIMI



Egypt's Karim Abdel Gawad (left) in action against Qatar's Abdulla al-Tamimi at the QTerminals Qatar Classic.

DOHA: Egypt's former World No 1 Karim Abdel Gawad beat Qatari No 1 Abdulla al-Tamimi 11-7, 7-11, 11-8, 11-7 to book his spot in the quarter-finals of the QTerminals Qatar Classic.

Gawad, the 2016 Qatar Classic champion, was in fine form at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex as he took the opening game, but al-Tamimi grew into the match in the second to draw level, much to delight of the home crowd. However, Gawad was quickly able to get back on top in the third and took the next two games without reply to earn his last eight spot.

"The Qatari audience is very

aware of good shots," Gawad said after the match. "Abdulla was on fire today and he can hit winners out of nowhere, so it was hard to read him today. Thanks to the Qatari crowd who supported him but also cheered for my good shots. It will be a hard match, Mostafa is in good form and won the last two tournaments. I'm playing better squash now too and I'm moving better on court, so I'm looking forward to it." Gawad will play World No 2 Mostafa Asal next, with Asal making it 12 wins in a row after getting the better of World Junior Champion Mohamad Zakaria earlier in the day. Asal won 11-6, 11-7, 11-3.

TENNIS

Alcaraz edges Sinner in a thriller to win China Open



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (left) celebrates with the title trophy after winning the final against Italy's Jannik Sinner at the China Open in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Beijing

Carlos Alcaraz roared back from a set down to beat world number one Jannik Sinner in a thriller and win his first China Open title yesterday.

The four-time Grand Slam champion edged a captivating final 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) for his fourth ATP crown of the year and 16th overall.

The Spaniard, who is set to return to number two in the world behind Sinner, was 3-0 down in the final-set tie break only to fight back and win in three hours, 21 minutes.

The longest men's singles match in China Open history saw Sinner deposed as the Beijing champion after an almighty fight.

Alcaraz called it "a special win" that was even more satisfying in light of his shock second-round exit at the recent US Open. He hopes it will win the sport more fans.

"When Jannik and I play it's a good thing for tennis because we always show a really intense match, really close match, great points, great rallies," he said.

"I think for people who don't watch tennis, probably thanks to these kind of matches, they will start to watch tennis or even practise it."

US Open champion Sinner reached the final in Beijing under fresh scrutiny.

The Italian has admitted to sleepless nights over his doping case, which was reignited at the weekend when the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said it had appealed against a decision to clear him.

He called it one of the toughest matches he had ever played.

"These kind of matches can really go both ways, but it was not my day," said Sinner.

"He played better in the important moments, that's it."

He added: "Today all three sets, they were very tough physically."

In front of a packed house, Sinner was first to blink, with sec-

ond-seeded Alcaraz breaking for a 3-1 lead in the opening set.

The Spaniard held easily for 4-1 and had his opponent rattled.

Alcaraz, 21, served for the set but Sinner grabbed the break back when he needed it most.

Sinner then saved set point on his own serve to force the tie break, and saved another in the tie break before taking the set at his first opportunity when Alcaraz fired long.

It was the first set Alcaraz had dropped all week.

The second set was just as tight.

Both players saw chances come and go but they went with serve until Alcaraz broke for 5-4, before holding to send the final into a third set.

The decider again went to a tie break, where Alcaraz finally prevailed on his first match point.

"It was a great battle again," said Sinner, 23, who twice tested positive for a steroid in March but was cleared of wrongdoing and allowed to keep playing.

In August, the International

Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accepted Sinner's explanation that the drug entered his system unintentionally when his physiotherapist used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player. WADA said on Saturday it had appealed and was seeking a ban of up to two years.

Zheng survives scare

In the women's draw, China's Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen survived a scare in defeating the 43rd-ranked American Amanda Anisimova 3-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Zheng faces Russian 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva in the quarter-finals.

It kept the home hero on course to meet world number two Aryna Sabalenka in a blockbuster last-four showdown.

The top seed kept up her side of the bargain with a ruthless 6-4, 6-3 victory over another American in Madison Keys.

US Open champion Sabalenka next plays Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic.

COMMENT

McIlroy hopeful golf's civil war will be over by the end of 2024

AFP
London

Rory McIlroy is hopeful golf's civil war will be over before the end of the year as major figures from both camps gather at this week's Alfred Dunhill Links Championship.

PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan and Yasir al-Rumayyan, the governor of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, which bankrolls LIV Golf are both playing in the pro-am event in Scotland.

Monahan and his partner American Billy Horschel will play in the same group as al-Rumayyan and South Africa's Dean Burmester in today's first round at Carnoustie.

McIlroy, who will play alongside his father Gerry, is set to play with both Monahan and al-Rumayyan over the course of the weekend.

LIV has lured away a number of the world's top players to the breakaway tour thanks to the huge signing bonuses and prize money on offer.

The PGA Tour, DP World Tour and PIF have been engaged in talks

since 2023 in a bid to bring the world's best back together on a regular basis.

"It's a great thing and a good sign that Jay and Yasir are playing together on Thursday," McIlroy told the BBC during a practice round at St Andrews yesterday.

"There's no better place than the home of golf to get everyone together and talking."

McIlroy was often the centre of attention as the leading representative of the PGA Tour in the early months of LIV's attempt to lure away big names.

The world number three has since decided to take more of a back seat but hopes negotiations can proceed quickly to start 2025 with clarity.

"Maybe it is going too slow for the people who follow golf.

"But I think in the business world deals of this size take time," added McIlroy.

"It's a pretty complicated deal, but I think we'll know more by the year's end hopefully.

"We are in October, so three months to get something done and start 2025 with enthusiasm and all move forward together."

Bridgestone latest Japanese firm to end Olympics sponsorship

Tokyo: Tyre giant Bridgestone has become the latest Japanese firm to end its Olympics and Paralympics sponsorship, following pullouts by Toyota and Panasonic, saying it wants to focus on motorsport.

The firms have been cryptic about the reasons for their decisions but analysts point to the ill-fated 2020 Tokyo Olympics and declining viewer numbers among young people.

Bridgestone said yesterday that it would not renew sponsorship deals with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for the Olympics and Paralympics, dating back to 2014 and 2018 respectively, that expire this year.

Bridgestone "strongly believes in the IOC's vision of 'building a better world through sport' and... 'an inclusive world through Para Sport'," it said. It will now

concentrate more on motorsport events where tyre products "can directly challenge performance, drive innovation, and create widespread value". Bridgestone said in a statement. Japanese electronics giant Panasonic and auto titan Toyota said last month they had also decided to end their Olympics partnerships. Toyota, the biggest automaker by sales, has reportedly spent some \$835mn since signing a deal with the IOC in 2015. Toyota's chairman Akio Toyoda said on a podcast last month that the Olympics were "becoming increasingly political" and questioned "whether the event is truly putting athletes first". The exit by the three firms leaves no Japanese companies among the IOC's top sponsors, which include brewing giant ABInBev, Airbnb, Coca-Cola, Intel, Samsung and others.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arsenal's Arteta praises 'unbelievable' Havertz

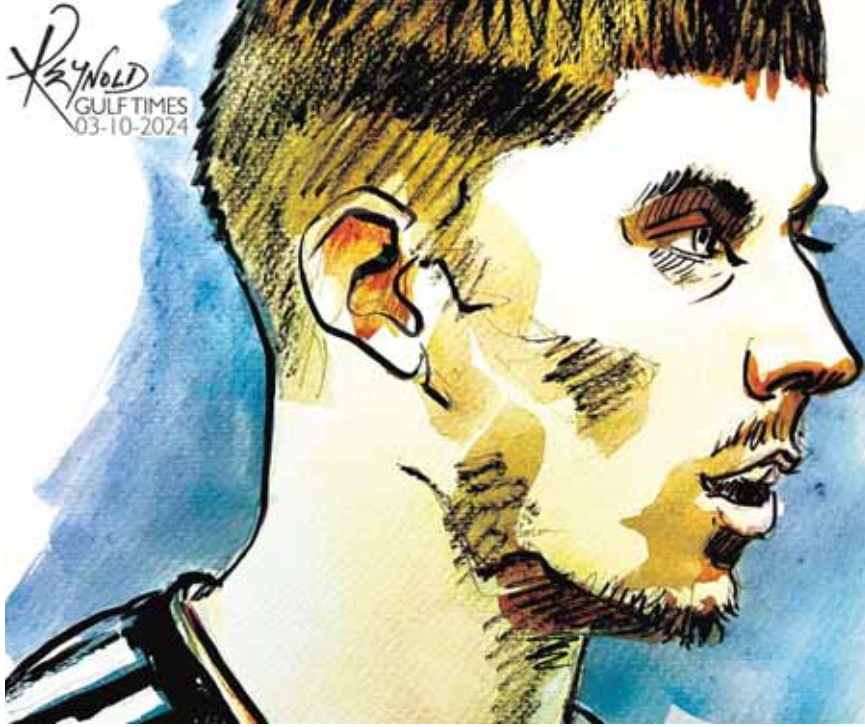
Reuters
London

Twelve months ago Kai Havertz looked like a spare part at Arsenal after his big-money move across town from Chelsea but now the German forward is fully justifying his 65m pounds (\$86m) fee with a sensational start to the season.

The 25-year-old put Arsenal on the path to a 2-0 home win against Paris St Germain in the Champions League on Tuesday with a well-timed run and header in the 20th minute. After taking 10 games to get off the mark for Arsenal last season, it was his fifth goal for the club in the current campaign and he deservedly picked up the man of the match award.

"He has been unbelievable. His football brain, the way he understands space, his timing, he brings people together," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta, who showed great faith in Havertz even when he was struggling last season, said. "His work ethic is incredible and now he is a real threat around the box. He is one of our main players at the moment."

It was a satisfying night for Arteta whose Arsenal team dominated one of Europe's heavyweights in the first half and then comfortably contained them after the break. "Really, really happy with the performance. We played an opponent that has a lot of personality, is really difficult to deal with when you don't have the ball," he said. "The first half was very dominant and we created a lot of chances and then the second half was a different story. We suffered much more than we should have done. The Champions League brings different de-



mands but I think we handled it really well." Victory, following the 0-0 draw away to Atalanta, propelled Arsenal to eighth in the 36-team table and Arteta said it was far too early to start predicting how many more wins his side will need to qualify automatically for the last 16. "I'm not even looking at the table," he said. "But I think it will be a long journey."

Another boost for Arsenal was the sight of new signing Mikel Merino coming off the bench for his first appearance in the second

half after missing the start of the season with injury. On the down side, fullback Jurrien Timber was forced off at halftime with a muscle issue.

ENRIQUE ADMITS PSG WERE NO MATCH FOR ARSENAL

Meanwhile, Paris St Germain coach Luis Enrique said he has no idea how long it will take to turn his side back into a European force after a humbling loss at Arsenal. The French champions, who lost their talisman

Kylian Mbappe to Real Madrid in the summer and look like a side in transition, suffered their first defeat of the season.

PSG hit the woodwork twice against Arsenal but they were comfortably contained by the Premier League side. Enrique, who left out forward Ousmane Dembele for disciplinary reasons, accepted his share of responsibility for the defeat but appeared to question his side's fighting spirit.

"Today we were far away from the standards you need in this kind of match. Arsenal were much better in terms of pressure, intensity, they won every duel," Enrique told reporters. "It's impossible to play for a positive result when you don't win any of your duels on the pitch, their defenders anticipated our attackers and our defenders didn't anticipate their attackers. Arsenal were superior."

The Spaniard led PSG to the semi-finals of the Champions League last season as they beat his old club Barcelona in the quarter-finals with Mbappe scoring twice and Dembele also on target to turn the tie around in the second leg. They are top of Ligue 1 and beat Girona in their opening Champions League group game, but Enrique said Arsenal were a big step up in quality for his side.

"I can't properly evaluate the level of our team, we will have to wait until the end of the season," he said. "This was our first big rival at a higher level. We knew from the first minute they would press us high and they did it aggressively and we couldn't cope with that pressure. (Arsenal manager) Mikel (Arteta) has been here for five years, I've been at Paris for one year and two months. I don't know where we are. I have a clear idea where I want us to be but I don't know how much time I will need."

Doha Diamond league scheduled for May 16

Doha: Doha will host the third leg of the 2025 Diamond League series at the Qatar Sports Club on May 16, the organisers announced yesterday. As in previous years, the Diamond League will see the world's biggest stars compete across four different continents at 14 of the sport's most prestigious one-day meetings, with the most successful qualifying for the two-day Diamond League Final in Zurich on August 27-28.

The series will begin in Xiamen, China on April 26, in a season in which it faces a challenge from a lucrative new US format. Diamond League organisers have already raised the prize money on offer for next season, partly in response to the purses announced by the four-meeting Grand Slam Track series backed by Olympic legend Michael Johnson. The 15-meeting Diamond League has increased its prize money to \$9.24m in 2025, while Grand Slam Track says it will have a prize fund of \$12.6m. **2025 Diamond League calendar:** April 26: Xiamen; May 3: Shanghai/Suzhou; May 16: Doha; May 25: Rabat; June 6: Rome; June 12: Oslo; June 15: Stockholm; June 20: Paris; July 5: Eugene; July 11: Monaco; July 19: London; August 16: Silesia; August 20: Lausanne; August 22: Brussels; August 27-28: Zurich (final)

EUROPA LEAGUE

Man United start no cause to 'panic': Under-fire Ten Hag

United sit 13th in the league after winning just two of six games

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Erik ten Hag said Manchester United's poor start to the season is nothing "to panic about" despite speculation his days in charge at Old Trafford could be numbered. United sit 13th in the Premier League after winning just two of their opening six games of the new campaign, including embarrassing 3-0 home defeats to Liverpool and Tottenham.

The Red Devils also got off to a faltering start in the Europa League with a 1-1 draw against Dutch side FC Twente. Ten Hag began the season under scrutiny after surviving an internal review conducted by new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe and his advisers at the end of last term.

A shock FA Cup final victory over Manchester City was widely credited with saving the former Ajax coach's job despite finishing eighth in the Premier League last season.

According to reports, Ten Hag will be given the chance to turn things around in tough away games against Porto in the Europa League today and Aston Villa in the Premier League on Sunday. "Nothing is easy, but this is nothing for me to panic about because I experienced it so often with my teams during seasons that you are facing those problems," Ten Hag said.

To his credit, Ten Hag does have two trophies to show for his two seasons in charge of United - ending a six-year wait for silverware by winning the League Cup in his debut campaign, then lifting the FA Cup last term.

He was even handed a one-year extension to his contract as recently as July. And Ten Hag believes the club's new football leadership group, spearheaded by Ratcliffe, will not back-track on that decision so rapidly.

"We made in the summer togetherness, the ownership, the leadership, this agreement, and we are all behind it," added Ten Hag. "We know also what the strategy with young players in a transition period was and we know then also in which process you can come. This can hap-



Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag looks on as his players train. (Reuters)

pen but also they know in the end, when we are in May, in all my last six seasons always there were trophies, and that is what we are also now aiming for."

Harry Maguire and Kobbie Mainoo could be available for today's clash in Porto after returning to training yesterday. However, Mason Mount will miss out as a precaution after suffering a head knock in Sunday's defeat to Tottenham.

Tottenham's convincing win over United was their fourth consecutive in all competitions and came without Son Heung-min, sidelined by a hamstring issue picked up in the 3-0 victory over Qarabag when Spurs played almost the entire game a man down.

"Nothing changes," said manager Ange Postecoglou ahead of today's trip to Hungar-

ian side Ferencvaros. "We've just got to keep doing what we're doing. There's still a lot of improvement to do in many areas, but the good thing about the group is they want to keep improving."

Rangers made a triumphant start away to Malmo and will host Lyon in their second game of the expanded league phase format. Lyon beat last season's Conference League winners Olympiakos 2-0 in their opening match.

Jose Mourinho's Fenerbahce visit Twente before United take on the man who led them to Europa League glory in 2017, after the international break. Real Sociedad host Anderlecht and Ajax travel to Slavia Prague, while Lazio are at home to Nice. Roma try to continue their resurgence since the sacking of club icon Daniele De Rossi away to Swedish outfit Elfsborg.

club competition to manage their workloads. Palmer is one of the Premier League's stand-out players this season, scoring all four goals in Chelsea's 4-2 win against Brighton at the weekend but Maresca is not worried about his absence. "It's not about being reliant," he said. "We already played some games without Cole. For sure, for us and any team in the world, Cole is an extra, it's something that you need but also we need to think a little bit that we need to protect some players."

Maresca said Chelsea, who have been through a turbulent spell over the past couple of years under new owners, are on the right track. "We are ahead of my expectations," he said. "We are doing well, we are going in the right direction but we need to improve."

ROUND-UP

Barcelona lure goalkeeper Szczesny out of retirement

Polish goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny has come out of retirement to sign for Spanish giants Barcelona. "Barcelona and the player Wojciech Szczesny have reached a deal for his signing until June 30, 2025," said the La Liga leaders in a statement.

The former Arsenal and Juventus goalkeeper, 34, joins after Barca's first choice stopper Marc-Andre ter Stegen was ruled out potentially until the end of the season with a severe knee injury, sustained on September 22. Szczesny retired this summer after featuring at Euro 2024 for Poland but has now returned to the game to play in La Liga for the first time.

The goalkeeper had said his "heart (was) not there any more" to play football after leaving Juventus by mutual agreement in August. Szczesny has made over 600 appearances for club and country over his career, winning three Serie A titles and three Italian cups with Juventus, as well as two FA Cups with Arsenal. Barca's reserve goalkeeper Inaki Pena started in place of the stricken Ter Stegen in recent matches.

SENEGAL SACK AFCON-WINNING COACH ALIOU CISSE

Senegal have decided to part company with coach Aliou Cisse, who led them to their Africa Cup of Nations triumph in 2022 and the past two World Cup tournaments. The initiative came from Senegal sports minister Khady Diene Gaye, according to the local football association, citing a government request not to renew his contract.

Cisse, a former captain of the national team and Paris Saint-Germain player, took over as coach in 2015 and led the country to their first AFCON title two years ago. Senegal also reached the last 16 of the 2022 World Cup but fell at the same stage of this year's AFCON, where they were eliminated by hosts and eventual champions Ivory Coast.

The Senegalese FA said an interim coaching team would replace the 48-year-old Cisse for the two 2025 AFCON qualifiers against Malawi this month.

Senegal are level with Burkina Faso on four points from two games in a group that also includes Burundi. They are also unbeaten in 2026 World Cup qualifying but trail group leaders Sudan by two points after four matches.

MAN CITY'S NUNES BRIEFLY ARRESTED OVER ALLEGED PHONE ROBBERY

Spanish police briefly arrested Manchester City midfielder and Portugal international Matheus Nunes last month for allegedly stealing a mobile phone, a police source said.

Nunes forced a high-end phone out of the hands of a 58-year-old man in a Madrid night club,



believing that the man had taken a picture of Nunes without his consent in the bathroom, El Mundo said.

Asked about the arrest, a police spokesperson in Madrid said a Portuguese citizen had been arrested on Sept. 8 at 5:30am in a downtown night club for alleged robbery of a high-end phone. After being questioned at a police station, the man was released pending trial. A police source confirmed the arrested person was Nunes, adding that the case was being treated as a robbery and not as theft because the phone's value exceeded 300 euros (\$332).

A spokesperson for Nunes did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Brazil-born Nunes, 26, joined Premier League champions Manchester City from Wolverhampton Wanderers last season. Despite being part of the Portugal squad at Euro 2024 in Germany in June and July, he was not called up for international duty last month.

ARGENTINE COURT AUTHORISES TRANSFER OF MARADONA'S REMAINS

An Argentine court on Tuesday authorised the transfer of football legend Diego Maradona's remains, at his daughters' request, from a cemetery to a mausoleum to be built for him in central Buenos Aires.

Maradona died in November 2020, aged 60, while recovering from brain surgery for a blood clot, and after decades of battling addictions to cocaine and alcohol. He was found dead in bed two weeks after going under the knife, in a rented house in an exclusive Buenos Aires neighbourhood where he was brought after being discharged from hospital.

He was found to have died of a heart attack. His daughters had requested his remains be transferred to a monument that will be known as the "M10 Memorial." The court that granted the request is also investigating possible negligence on the part of Maradona's medical team that may have led to his death.

Maresca says Chelsea on 'right track' as he juggles star-packed squad

London: Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca says he is working hard to keep the players in his huge squad happy but the "feeling is good" ahead of today's Conference League clash with Gent.

The 44-year-old Italian, in his first season at Stamford Bridge, has won his past four games in all competitions, with Chelsea climbing to fourth in the Premier League table. But the club's large roster means big-name players including Christopher Nkunku, Joao Felix, Pedro Neto and Mykhailo Mudryk are short of match time.

"We try to share minutes with all of them," Maresca said. "In this moment, probably, it looks like we have players that are playing in the Premier League and players playing in the cups, Conference, Carabao (League Cup) or FA

Cup. It's not like this, in general it won't be like this. We try to give them the opportunity."

Maresca was asked what Ukraine forward Mudryk, signed last year in a deal worth up to £89 million, could do to get more minutes. "They all want to play from the start but sometimes it is not possible," he said. "You have to take some decisions. Last week against Barrow (in the League Cup) he did very well."

He added: "We can say exactly the same for Christopher Nkunku. The club signed him as a big player and in this moment he is not playing in the Premier League. But in football things change quickly."

Cole Palmer, midfielder Romeo Lavia and defender Wesley Fofana have been left out of Chelsea's squad for Europe's third-tier