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SQUASH

# Elias beats Momen to set up enticing semis with Farag

Three-time Qatar champion Farag wins a tricky quarters against Switzerland's Mueller 14-12, 11-5, 11-6

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**R**eigning World Champion Diego Elias earned his place in the semi-finals of the 2024 QTerminals Qatar Classic after getting the better of former World Champion Tarek Momen at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex yesterday.

Elias, the 2021 Qatar Classic winner, has struggled against Momen in the past, winning just five of their previous 18 matches on the PSA Squash Tour. It was their second meeting of the season after Momen had retired injured during their match at September's CIB Egyptian Open, and Elias came through to seal an 11-6, 9-11, 11-4, 11-4 victory in Qatar today.

Elias will play World No 1 Ali Farag for a place in the final, two weeks after their epic 95-minute battle in the last four of Paris Squash.

Earlier, World No 9 Joel Makin reached the semi-finals in Qatar for the third time after battling past Egypt's Fares Dessouky to set up a match with either Mostafa Asal or Karim Abdel Gawad. The World No 17 made a fast start as he took a 4-1 lead, but Makin soon reeled him in, taking 10 of the next 11 points on offer to go ahead. The second game saw Makin double his lead, but Dessouky came alive in the third.

He began to hunt the front corners more often and used his impressive racket skills to halve the deficit. Makin remained calm though and went toe-to-toe with Dessouky as he ground out an 11-8 win in the fourth to earn his spot in the last four.

Ali Farag navigated a tricky quarter-final against Switzerland's Nicolas Mueller in the day's first men's match winning 14-12, 11-5, 11-6. Farag, a Qatar Classic champion in 2018, 2020 and 2023, almost fell victim to an explosive first game from Mueller, who was appearing in his first Platinum quarter-final in over two years.

After Farag took the second game, there was no let up for Mueller as he continued to



World Champion Diego Elias of Peru in action against former world champion Tarek Momen of Egypt in the 2024 QTerminals Qatar Classic men's quarter-finals at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex yesterday.

be moved into all four corners of the court, and the pressure soon told as the No.1 seed closed out the win to avoid a giant-killing. He will play Elias next.

World No 2 Mostafa Asal made it 13 wins on the bounce after he defeated former World No 1 Karim Abdel Gawad in the last quarter-final match winning 9-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-7.

**WEAVER WINS 5-GAME THRILLER**

Olivia Weaver battled through to semi-finals of the QTerminals Qatar Classic for

the first time with a fighting win over Belgium's Nele Coll.

Weaver hadn't beaten Coll in their five previous matches, but managed to outlast her today in a thrilling 72-minute clash to earn an 11-8, 2-11, 10-12, 11-8, 11-6 victory.

World Champion Nouran Gohar got the better of World Junior Champion Amina Orfi to reach the semi-finals of QTerminals Qatar Classic for the first time.

Gohar, who at 27 is 10 years Orfi's senior, started the better of the two as she varied the pace of her hitting and always put Orfi



American Olivia Weaver in action against Belgium's Nele Coll in the quarter-final.

under pressure, particularly in the back corners.

After taking the opening game, an improved Orfi started to push Gohar back a bit, but Gohar still had the edge in the accuracy department to double her advantage.

**QUARTER-FINAL RESULTS**

Men: [1] Ali Farag (EGY) bt. Nicolas Mueller (SUI) 3-0: 14-12, 11-5, 11-6 (34m); Joel Makin (WAL) bt. Fares Dessouky (EGY) 3-1: 11-5, 11-5, 5-11, 11-8 (59m); [4] Diego Elias (PER)

bt. [7] Tarek Momen (EGY) 3-1: 11-6, 9-11, 11-4, 11-4 (54m); [3] Mostafa Asal (EGY) bt. [6] Karim Gawad (EGY) 3-1: 9-11, 11-6, 11-7 (60m)

Women: [1] Nour ElSherbini (EGY) bt. [6] Georgina Kennedy (ENG) 3-1: 11-6, 7-11, 14-12, 11-5 (40m); [3] Hania El Hammamy (EGY) bt. [7] Tinne Gillis (BEL) 3-0: 11-6, 12-10, 11-5 (30m); [5] Olivia Weaver (USA) bt. [4] Nele Coll (BEL) 3-2: 11-8, 2-11, 10-12, 11-8, 11-6 (72m); [2] Nouran Gohar (EGY) bt. Amina Orfi (EGY) 3-1: 11-7, 11-6, 9-11, 11-7 (60m).

FOOTBALL

# Spurs creep past Ferencvaros in Europa League

AFP  
Paris

**A**much-changed Tottenham side ground out a 2-1 win away to Hungary's Ferencvaros in the Europa League yesterday.

Goals either side of half-time from Pape Sarr and Brennan Johnson were enough to get Spurs their second win in two games in the competition this season despite a late Barnabas Varga consolation for the home side.

An inexperienced Spurs side made a slow start and Ferencvaros thought they had taken the lead in the 18th minute when Varga nodded home, but VAR ruled that there had been an offside in the build-up. Spurs goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario then displayed lightning-quick reflexes one minute later to claw out Varga's stabbed effort from close range.

The Premier League club grew into the match and broke the deadlock in the 23rd minute when Sarr was the



Tottenham Hotspur's Brennan Johnson (left) scores during the Europa League match against Ferencvarosi TC in Budapest. (AFP)

only player in the Ferencvaros box to keep his cool. The home side failed to clear the danger on two occasions before defender Stefan Gartenmann eventually lost his bearings and did not realise the ball was behind him as he ran back towards his own goal, allowing Sarr to pounce and slot home

from inside the six-yard box. The visitors had chances to put the match to bed in the second half, but Timo Werner could only find the side netting after rounding the 'keeper in the 64th minute and Johnson struck the crossbar from distance. As Ferencvaros started to threaten, Johnson

got his fifth in as many games with a left-footed finish that kissed the post on its way into the back of the net in the 86th minute. Spurs needed the two-goal buffer as Varga directed a whipped cross past Vicario in the 90th minute to set up a nervy finale for Ange Postecoglou's charges.

Elsewhere Anderlecht came from behind against La Liga's Real Sociedad to earn a 2-1 win in the Basque country, thanks to first-half goals from Luis Vazquez and Theo Leoni following Pablo Marin's early opener.

Lazio hammered Nice 4-1 under the rain in Rome and Ajax drew 1-1 at Slavia Prague. Latvia's RFS came from two goals down at home to Galatasaray to snatch a 2-2 draw.

In the Conference League, Cercle Brugge cruised to a 6-2 victory at home to Swiss club St Gallen as Legia Warsaw surprised Real Betis 1-0 in the Polish capital. Larnaca became the first Northern Irish team to play in the competition proper of a European competition but succumbed to a 3-0 defeat in Norway against Molde.

## Ticket sales begin for Qatar's World Cup qualifier against Kyrgyzstan

**Doha:** The Qatar Football Association (QFA) yesterday announced the start of ticket sales for Qatar's upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifying match against Kyrgyzstan. The match is scheduled for October 10 (Thursday) at Al Thumama World Cup Stadium, with kick-off at 7pm.

Tickets have been divided into two categories, Category 1: QR30 and Category 2: QR10. Fans can purchase tickets through the official QFA ticketing platform: <http://tickets.qfa.qa>

The QFA said it has also made provisions for fans with disabilities, who can request specially allocated tickets by e-mailing [accessibility@qfa.qa](mailto:accessibility@qfa.qa). The QFA has advised fans to book their tickets early, as the match is expected to attract a large crowd. Fans should also plan their transportation ahead of time to avoid delays or congestion, it added. Additionally, selecting seats based on both budget and desired stadium view is recommended for an optimal experience.

It would be Qatar's third World Cup qualifying match after a defeat to the UAE and a draw against North Korea last month. With a solitary point, Qatar are just above Kyrgyzstan with Uzbekistan and Iran leading Group A with six points each, followed by UAE (3 points) and North Korea (1 point).

The top two teams from the group will earn direct qualification for the World Cup. On Wednesday, head coach Marquez Lopez included Abdelkarim Hassan in Qatar's 27-man squad for the crucial matches against the Maroons before his suspension, cementing his spot as a crucial player in defence since his debut in 2010.

Other inclusions to the side include Al Ahli's goalkeeper Marwan Sherif, Al Gharafa's midfielder Ahmed al-Ganehi, centre-back Almahdi Ali of Al Wakrah, and Al Shahania's young midfielder Naif al-Hadhrami.

## RAYYAN TAKE ON DUHAIL IN QSL CUP TODAY

**Doha:** Al Rayyan and Al Duhail will meet in the third round (Group A) of the QSL Cup 2024-25 at the Grand Hamad Stadium today at 7.45pm.

The match holds significant importance for both teams as it will determine the outright leaders of the group, with each team currently tied at six points from two victories. How-

ever, Al Rayyan hold an advantage due to a superior goal difference.

Group A also features Al Arabi, Qatar SC, Al Shahania and Al Ahli.

The top four teams from each group will qualify for the quarter-finals and all teams in the group appear to have a viable chance of advancing to the next stage.

Al Duhail experienced their first league defeat of the season in the sixth week against Al Shahania, prompting their French coach Christophe Galtier to focus on QSL Cup matches as a means of preparing the team for their return to league, aiming to maintain their lead and avoid further setbacks.

Al Rayyan are returning to domestic competitions after their recent loss to Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia in the AFC Champions League Elite.

Al Arabi will face Al Shahania in the opening match in Round 3 (Group A) match at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium at 5.45pm. Al Arabi hold the third position with three points.

2025 WORLD TABLE TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS

# Aspetar sign agreement with QTTA, ITTF to provide medical services at TT Worlds

Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine, the Qatar Table Tennis Association (QTTA), and the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) yesterday signed a tripartite agreement under which Aspetar will provide comprehensive medical and sports medicine services for the World Table Tennis Championships, to be held in Doha, Qatar in May 2025.

The agreement was signed on behalf of Aspetar by Khalid Ali al-Mawlawi, Chief Operating Officer; Khalil al-Mohannadi, President of QTTA; and Dr Alaa Meshref, Deputy President of ITTF, in the presence of ITTF Secretary-General Raul Calin, QTTA Secretary-General Mohammed al-Saleh, and Aspetar officials.

This co-operation reflects Aspetar's ongoing commitment to supporting major sporting events and ensuring the safety of athletes worldwide. In addition to providing medical support services for



the championship, Aspetar will also host the 17th ITTF Scientific Congress in Doha, a major event that will bring together leading experts in sports science to discuss the latest developments and practices in sports medicine.

Al-Mawlawi, Chief Operating Officer at Aspetar, said: "We at

Aspetar are proud to partner with the International Table Tennis Federation to provide world-class medical care for the 2025 World Table Tennis Championships. Our team of distinguished experts is committed to providing the highest level of care to all participants, from athletes to spectators. We are



confident that our expertise will contribute to the success of this prestigious event.

Aspetar's co-operation with the International Federation also extends to the scientific aspect, where Aspetar and its partners will organise a scientific conference on the sidelines of the tournament, aim-

ing to add scientific value and share expertise in the latest scientific developments in the field of sports medicine and sports science."

For his part, al-Mohannadi, President of the QTTA, said: "Aspetar, with its exceptional facilities and global expertise, has been an invaluable partner in our various

tournaments. Qatar has become a hub for sporting excellence. We are delighted to welcome the world to Doha for the Table Tennis World Championships. The ITTF's confidence in our ability to host a successful event is truly inspiring."

Dr Alaa Meshref, Deputy President of ITTF, expressed his happiness with this partnership, saying: "Aspetar has a well-earned reputation as a leading hospital in the field of sports medicine, and we are excited to benefit from its expertise in ensuring the health and safety of our athletes. Through our co-operation with Aspetar, we demonstrate our commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for all participants."

The 2025 World Table Tennis Championships will be held in Doha from May 17 to 25, 2025, at the modern Lusail Sports Arena.

This prestigious event will feature the world's best table tennis players competing for the ultimate prize in this sport.

CRICKET

# Bangladesh and Pakistan start T20 WC with wins

'I would say that a win after 10 years, we all are very emotional'

AFP  
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Bangladesh ended a 10-year wait to win a Women's T20 World Cup match yesterday as Pakistan warmed up for a mouthwatering clash with India by defeating Asian champions Sri Lanka.

On the opening day of the 2024 tournament, Bangladesh secured a 16-run win over Scotland after posting what appeared to be a flimsy 119-7 in their 20 overs.

Their bowling attack, however, tied the Scots down and restricted them to 103-7.

Later, Pakistan, who have never made it out of the group stages in eight previous attempts, beat Sri Lanka by 31 runs.

Pakistan made 116 in their 20 overs before restricting Sri Lanka to 85-9.

Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana Joty described ending her team's long wait for a World Cup win as "very emotional" and suggested it would create "momentum" for the women's game at home.

"I would say that a win after 10 years, we all are very emotional because we have been waiting for this victory for a long time," said Joty who was playing in her 100th T20I.

"No matter how good the cricket we play, if it doesn't translate into victory, it means nothing. And I would say for women's cricket, after a long time, I feel like we have done something."

"We have always said about Bangladesh that we have to create momentum and then we will move forward with that momentum. Now it seems like we are going to dream of doing something bigger. Similarly, the fans and family who support us in Bangladesh are dreaming that we can do something better than that."

The momentum for women's



Pakistan players celebrate beating Sri Lanka in their opening T20 Women's World Cup match in Sharjah yesterday. Pakistan won by 31 runs. (@TheRealPCB)

cricket in Bangladesh would have had a far bigger boost had they been staging the event as planned.

Instead, weeks of widespread political unrest in Bangladesh, which eventually led to the installation of an interim government, saw the tournament switched to the United Arab Emirates, with Bangladesh remaining as nominal hosts.

"Initially it was very heart-breaking because we always bear in mind that we are going to play in front of our home crowd," said Joty.

"But still, the people who came here today, it was brilliant."

After winning the toss and batting first, Sobhana Mostary top-scored with 36 for Bangladesh.

Their bowlers then strangled newcomers Scotland in spite of Sarah Bryce's 49 not out from 52 balls.

Ritu Moni was named player of the match for her spell of 2-15 from four overs.

Pakistan staged a determined fightback to beat Sri Lanka by 31 runs with left-arm spinner Sadia Iqbal claiming three wickets.

Nashra Sandhu, Omaidha Sohail and player of the match Fatima Sana all took two each for Pakistan against Asia Cup champions Sri Lanka.

Pakistan needed a crucial lower-order knock from their captain Sana to post a competitive total, having slumped to 84-8 after winning the toss and choosing to bat.

"We won the toss and we wanted a lot of runs but we didn't get. We still achieved the target in the game," said Sana.

For Sri Lanka, Nilakshika Silva top-scored with 22 after Pakistan had lost opening bowler Diana

Baig to a calf strain after just one ball. Today, India take on New Zealand while South Africa face West Indies with both games taking place in Dubai.

India and Pakistan will face off on Sunday.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Bangladesh 119-7** (Sobhana Mostary 36, Shathi Rani 29; Saskia Horley 3-13) **v Scotland 103-7** (Sarah Bryce 49 not out, Ritu Moni 2-15)  
**Toss:** Bangladesh  
**Result:** Bangladesh win by 16 runs

**Pakistan 116 all out in 20 overs** (Sana 30; Athapaththu 3-18, Kumari 3-19, Prabodhani 3-20) **v Sri Lanka 85-9 in 20 overs** (Iqbal 3-17)  
**Toss:** Pakistan  
**Result:** Pakistan won by 31 runs

SPOTLIGHT

# Long-time deputy Latham under pressure to lift New Zealand



New Zealand's Tom Latham (left) reacts after dropping England's Ollie Pope during their second Test at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, Britain, on June 14, 2022. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Auckland

A sombre leadership handover decided half a world from home marked Tom Latham's rise to the New Zealand captaincy and provided a stark reminder of the funk the team finds itself in ahead of a daunting assignment in India.

Following a stinging 2-0 series loss away to Sri Lanka, out-of-form paceman Tim Southee decided he was no longer the man to lead a struggling squad while scratching around for wickets to keep his international career alive.

Having stood in as captain on nine previous occasions and with no stand-out candidates among his teammates, Latham was the obvious choice to take the reins from Southee.

However, there was little fanfare greeting the 32-year-old opening batsman's ascension as he returned home from south Asia with a heavy gloom engulfing the team.

Though appearing fatigued from the long-haul flight, Latham praised predecessor Southee while struggling to conjure enthusiasm for his permanent appointment as captain.

"I obviously feel very privileged to be given the opportunity and (with) luck we have plenty of leaders in the group," he told news website Stuff in an interview.

"I'll soon be leaning on them throughout my time, I would say." A solid, if unspectacular, opener

with an average of 39.41 from 82 Tests, Latham has been a fixture at the top of New Zealand's batting order for a decade. His career has coincided neatly with a golden era for New Zealand cricket driven by former skippers Brendon McCullum and Kane Williamson.

**FADING FORCE**

Southee, New Zealand's second-most prolific wicket-taker in Tests, was a key contributor to the Black Caps' success through the period and gamely took the captaincy mantle when Williamson stepped down in late 2022.

But the team he inherited was no longer the juggernaut that claimed the inaugural World Test Championship in 2021, with players retiring and others quitting internationally to focus on the more lucrative T20 franchise circuit.

Latham now takes over with the team at a lower ebb, with four successive test defeats racked up either side of the washed-out Afghanistan match. Though still reliably producing runs at home and away, Latham may be frustrated with his failure to post a century in nearly two years to inspire his team.

Against India, which has now won a record 18 home Test series in succession with their 2-0 defeat of Bangladesh, Latham will be under pressure to lead from the front in the three-match series starting in Bangalore on Oct. 16.

"It's obviously a great challenge that's ahead and I guess it's something to look forward to," he said.

## New Zealand surprised by France player exclusion for All Blacks tests

**Auckland:** New Zealand's rugby union is seeking more information from global governing body World Rugby following France's unilateral decision to exclude some national squad players from next year's test series against the All Blacks.

The French rugby union said this week that players who compete for teams in Top 14 finals will not be selected for July internationals in 2025 and 2026 as part of an agreement with the domestic league on player availability.

The decision is in defiance of World Rugby's Regulation 9 which specifies that players must be available for selection during international windows.

It all but ensures France will bring a weakened squad

to New Zealand for the July tour next year given the prevalence of its leading players in Top 14 which finishes with June playoffs.

New Zealand Rugby said it was aware of the French rugby union's plans to manage player welfare but was "surprised" by the announcement.

"We are seeking further information and clarification from both World Rugby and the French union to better understand the situation," NZR said.

A World Rugby spokesperson said Regulation 9 and its test selection window were "clear" but declined to comment further.

France has previously toured southern hemisphere nations with under-strength squads for mid-year

tests without openly stating its selection priorities in advance. The French rugby union's agreement with Top 14 organisers also included provisions on player availability for the Six Nations. However, the policy prioritises test selection over Top 14 club duties during the northern hemisphere tournament.

**Ex-All Black Kerr-Barlow wants to stay in Top 14 after La Rochelle exit**

Former New Zealand scrum-half Tawera Kerr-Barlow said yesterday he wants to remain in the French Top 14 after his La Rochelle deal finishes at the end of the season. Kerr-Barlow, 34, has won the Champions Cup twice since joining the club in 2017 but is unlikely to

be offered a new contract. Ronan O'Gara's La Rochelle have signed young France scrum-half Nolann Le Garrec for next term as Kerr-Barlow's replacement.

"I think it's going to be my last season with La Rochelle," Kerr-Barlow told reporters.

"After that, I don't know, I'm not in the conversation. Whatever happens, I will continue to play rugby, in the Top 14 for another club," he added. Former Chiefs half-back Kerr-Barlow has missed three of his side's four games this season with a minor thigh injury suffered in round one. He is set to return for tomorrow's game with Lyon. "I've been disappointed with not playing since but I could have made things worse by playing," Kerr-Barlow said.

FOOTBALL

# Messi scores two as Miami clinch Shield

AFP  
Washington

Lionel Messi scored twice as Inter Miami beat the defending Major League Soccer champions the Columbus Crew 3-2 to clinch the Supporters' Shield awarded for the best regular season record.

Messi had been subdued until the 45th minute when he put Inter ahead - chesting down a long ball into the box and getting a lucky bounce off Crew defender Malte Amundsen before poking home.

Minutes later, Messi made it 2-0, taking advantage of a poorly assembled wall to curl a laser-precision free-kick into the corner past the stationary Columbus keeper Patrick Schulte.

Messi, who recently returned from a two-month injury absence, has now scored 17 goals and produced 15 assists in 17 matches.

But 20 seconds after the start of the second half, Columbus pulled a goal back when the ball fell to Diego Rossi just inside the box and he cleverly curled his shot into the far corner. Straight from the restart, Columbus gifted Miami a third when Schulte raced off his line but

with defender Rudy Camacho in his way, he dropped the ball to Luis Suarez who headed into the unguarded goal.

The Crew battled back again though and made it 3-2 through a Cucho Hernandez penalty after Noah Allen handled in the box.

But once again, the momentum Columbus had gained was lost when Camacho was sent off for a second yellow card after a studs up challenge on Federico Redondo.

Seven minutes from the end though, the Crew had a glorious chance to grab a point - and deny Miami their celebration - when a penalty was awarded for handball against Ian Fray after a VAR review.

But this time Colombian Hernandez's penalty was weak and Miami keeper Drake Callender dived to his right and saved to secure the Shield for his team.

"I'm happy to achieve the first goal and think about what's coming. Today was a very tough opponent. We knew it, they are the last champion, of the Leagues Cup. They are a great team," Messi told *Apple TV*. "(Although they were) down a man, we suffered until the end and that shows what this team is," he said.

The champion of MLS is deter-



Inter Miami CF forward Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring his second goal against the Columbus Crew during the first half at Lower.com Field.

mined by the winner of the MLS Cup playoffs - where Eastern Conference rivals the Crew and Miami could meet again.

Inter Miami have 68 points with

two matches remaining, ensuring they'll finish the MLS campaign as the league's best record. If they win both games, they'll establish a new single-season points record.

Inter, the Eastern Conference top seeds, will have home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

Columbus are second in the East with Cincinnati, who lost 3-2 to

New York City, in third place. Orlando, who beat Philadelphia 2-1 are fourth. The eighth and ninth placed teams in each conference will meet in the wild card round. The first round of the playoffs are played on a "best of three" basis with the top four teams given two home games. The conference semi-finals and finals are single elimination games.

Messi said the Shield was a "secondary" prize for his team and said the MLS Cup title remains the main goal for the team.

"The first objective has been achieved and now we have to think about what's next," he said. "The first round is three games but then it's one game and anything can happen. But we have the great advantage of playing all the games at home, which is what we were looking for. We are very strong at home."

Seventh-placed Charlotte, coached by former Aston Villa manager Dean Smith, secured the final automatic place in the East with Karol Swiderski scoring twice in a 4-3 win over the Chicago Fire.

Brazilian Gabriel Pirani scored twice in stoppage time as DC United came from behind to win 4-3 at Nashville and keep their hopes of a wild card spot alive.

TENNIS

# Alcaraz gets set to bid for title at the Shanghai Masters

'I had a really good month of practice after the American swing'

Reuters  
Shanghai

World number two Carlos Alcaraz said playing as part of a team at the Davis Cup and Laver Cup had left him feeling refreshed and ready to go in the Asia swing, where he is looking to add the Shanghai Masters title to his victory at the China Open.

Alcaraz, who won this year's French Open and Wimbledon and took home a silver medal at the Paris Olympics, was not firing on all cylinders during the North American swing, losing in the second round at Cincinnati and the US Open.

Since his loss in Flushing Meadows, Alcaraz has helped Spain seal their spot in the Davis Cup's quarter-finals and inspired Team Europe to victory in the Laver Cup, before beating rival Jannik Sinner to win the China Open.

"I had a really good month of practice after the American swing. The Davis Cup and the Laver Cup helped me a lot to get the energy back, to get motivated again," Alcaraz told reporters yesterday.

"I love playing teams competition, the Davis Cup with the players, with their team, with the Spanish federation as well, all the people who are around just to help me to be better, and feeling great off the court as well, that is really important.

"The Laver Cup, same thing. Those competitions helped me a lot to get the joy back on the court, and being focused on what's next. I came here to Asia with a lot of energy, enjoying every single second that I step on the court, and



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz speaks during a press conference at the Shanghai Masters yesterday. (AFP)

that for me it's really important."

Alcaraz took three hours, 21 minutes to beat Sinner 6-7 (6) 6-4 7-6 (3) in the final in Beijing on Wednesday and faced a tight turnaround to compete in his first match in Shanghai.

Alcaraz said he had no time to celebrate becoming the China Open champion thanks to the gruelling tennis schedule, rushing straight from the stadium to catch a flight to the ongoing Shanghai Masters.

The 21-year-old has previously said that the men's tennis schedule is "going to kill us", and that "we have to do something about it", but on Thursday seemed to rein in his criticism.

"The tennis schedule is so, so tight, we're travelling from tournament to tournament with just one or two days before the tour-

namment begins, so it is difficult, but we have to get used to it," the Spaniard said.

He told reporters he had to take all his luggage to the stadium with him before the Beijing final, and only had time to do a press conference and take a shower before "running" to the airport.

"I just did everything in a rush... we arrived here in Shanghai super late so I couldn't sleep as much as I wanted," he said, adding that it was 4am (2000 GMT Wednesday) by the time he got to the eastern Chinese city.

Alcaraz will play his first match of the tournament tomorrow against Shang Juncheng, who became only the second player from China to win an ATP Tour singles title when he won the Chengdu Open last month.

"I'm going to approach the

match the same way that I approach every match, I'm going to prepare as best as I can," Alcaraz said. "I hope to keep playing the same way that I'm playing and let's see what's going to happen, but I'll be ready."

Sinner will also be playing in Shanghai, with many seeing the rivalry between the two as the new narrative of the men's game.

"We are not close friends, but I think the respect that we have puts us in a position that we have a really good relationship," Alcaraz said.

Also eyeing up the trophy is Novak Djokovic, who has won four times before in Shanghai and is targeting a 100th singles title. Also eyeing up the trophy is Novak Djokovic, who has won four times before in Shanghai and is targeting a 100th singles title.

FOCUS

# Solanke gets England call after seven years as Bellingham returns



Real Madrid's English midfielder Jude Bellingham (right) fights for the ball with Lille's French midfielder Benjamin Andre during the UEFA Champions League match at the Pierre Mauroy Stadium in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, northern France, on Wednesday. (AFP)

AFP  
London

Dominic Solanke has been called up to the England squad for games against Greece and Finland seven years after winning his only cap, with Jude Bellingham back for the first time since Euro 2024.

Manchester United's Harry Maguire and Marcus Rashford miss out while Tottenham playmaker James Maddison is also overlooked by interim manager Lee Carsley for the Nations League fixtures.

England take on Greece at Wembley in Group B2 next Thursday before heading to Helsinki to face Finland three days later.

Solanke's sole international cap came as a substitute against Brazil in 2017 but the 27-year-old has impressed since joining Tottenham from Bournemouth in August, scoring in his past three games.

Real Madrid's Bellingham, in-form Cole Palmer, Phil Foden, Kyle Walker and Ollie Watkins are in the 25-man squad after missing last month's games against Ireland and Finland for various reasons.

But Crystal Palace's Eberechi Eze has been left out after a disappointing start to the season.

"Dom's (Solanke) a player I'm fully aware of having worked with him in the past. He was really close to being in the last squad but got

injured just before selection," said Carsley.

"He did so well at Bournemouth and now he's taken that form into Spurs. He's got a lot of really good attributes."

Palmer withdrew from the last England camp through injury but returns after scoring five times in his past two games for Chelsea.

The interim boss said it was a challenge to juggle the wealth of creative talent at his disposal, with Palmer, Foden and Bellingham all in the mix.

Carsley was announced as interim boss in August following the departure of Gareth Southgate after England's Euro 2024 final defeat to Spain. The 50-year-old oversaw victories in his first two games in charge against Ireland and Finland but said his situation had not changed.

ENGLAND SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Dean Henderson, Jordan Pickford, Nick Pope

**Defenders:** Marc Guehi, Ezri Konsa, John Stones, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Levi Colwill, Rico Lewis, Kyle Walker

**Midfielders:** Conor Gallagher, Kobbie Mainoo, Declan Rice, Cole Palmer, Morgan Gibbs-White, Angel Gomes, Phil Foden, Jude Bellingham

**Forwards:** Jack Grealish, Anthony Gordon, Harry Kane, Noni Madueke, Bukayo Saka, Ollie Watkins, Dominic Solanke

**Interim manager:** Lee Carsley

COMMENT

# Djokovic hopes Sinner doping case is 'resolved'

AFP  
Shanghai

Novak Djokovic has said that he hoped current world number one Jannik Sinner's steroid case would be "resolved as soon as possible" as he again bemoaned the tennis anti-doping system's "inconsistencies".

Sinner failed two doping tests in March but was cleared of wrongdoing and allowed to keep playing by tennis authorities.

But the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said Saturday it had mounted an appeal, and

was seeking a ban of up to two years. Djokovic had previously said he could "understand the sentiments of a lot of players" who were questioning whether Sinner's rank had protected him. Speaking at a press conference at the Shanghai Masters, the former world number one acknowledged it must be "very tough" for the Italian.

"I think it's quite obvious that we have a system that is not working well... There's way too many inconsistencies, way too many governing bodies involved and, you know, just this whole case is not helping our sport at all," the 37-year-old said. "Whatever is going to happen at the end of the day, just I wish for it to be

resolved as soon as possible." The 23-year-old has pushed through the controversy to win the US Open. "It's impressive what (Sinner's) been doing in the whole process of what's been happening, that he's playing on such a high level," Djokovic said. Both Sinner and Alcaraz will also head to Shanghai for the Masters, where they and Djokovic are among the favourites.

The Serbian is aiming for a 100th singles title. "Hopefully I can use that freshness in a way, and also the past experiences and success I had," he said. Asked what the secret to his previous success was, he laughed: "I love dumplings and the Chinese language, I think that helps!"

## Fichardt sets pace at Alfred Dunhill

London: South Africa's Darren Fichardt came close to a course record at Kingsbarns to set the early lead at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship on 11 under par yesterday. The world number 462 at one stage threatened to card just the second ever 59 on the DP World Tour but had to settle for a 61 that featured two eagles and nine birdies.

On a day of low scoring in ideal conditions, that gave the 49-year-old a one-shot lead over Australia's Cameron John, whose 62 also came at Kingsbarns.

Scott Jamieson and Andrew Wilson shot 63 at the same venue, while New Zealand's Daniel Hillier returned a 63 on the Old Course at St Andrews to sit two shots back. Playing alongside his father Gerry in the pro-am event, Rory McIlroy could only manage a three-under 69 at Carnoustie which left him in a share of 73rd place. "It was a perfect day to play Carnoustie," McIlroy said. "I probably didn't quite take advantage of the conditions the way that I wanted to or should have, but a solid round and something to try to build upon tomorrow."

## HORSE RACING

## Races associated with Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe today

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Races associated with the highly-anticipated 2024 Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe weekend will kick off today at Saint Cloud Racecourse. The Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe has been sponsored by the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) since 2008. The existing sponsorship will continue until 2027 as part of the partnership between QREC and France Galop.

The Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, first run in 1920, is Europe's prestigious race. Held annually on October's first Sunday at ParisLongchamp Racecourse, it attracts the best thoroughbreds from around the world. The meeting involves two days of world-class racing at ParisLongchamp.

After contests at Saint Cloud, the races will be run at ParisLongchamp tomorrow and the day after, with several black-type strong and thrilling races, which will receive wide attention from the media and horse racing enthusiasts, especially the Gr 1 Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, which boasts total prize money of €5mn – the highest in the French racing programme, and the Gr. 1 PA Qatar Arabian World Cup with total prize money of €1mn, which is the highest for an Arabian race in Europe. The weekend is, further, an opportunity to promote the 2025 HH The Amir Sword Festival, which will be run at Al Rayyan in February.

## HORSE AUCTION

The Arqana Arabian horse auction was held yesterday in Paris. A large number of



The Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe has been sponsored by the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club since 2008.

horse owners and trainers from various countries, as well as the QREC delegation, were present at the auction.

Today, the focus will be on the Gr1 PA Qatar Arabian Trophy for three-year-old fillies and the Gr1 PA Qatar Arabian Trophy for three-year-old colts and geldings. Each of the two races will be run over 2,000m and will see some of the best three-year-old purebred Arabian generation contesting for honours with their owners and trainers looking forward to a good start

with hopes for glory at ParisLongchamp on Saturday and Sunday.

## QATAR ARABIAN TROPHY DES POULICHES

As per the declarations for the Gr.1 PA Qatar Arabian Trophy des Pouliches, 18 fillies will go under starters orders including four representatives of Al Shaqab Racing: Al Jori, Hajmah, Ihtijaj and Salmah. Ghara, a winner first time out will be running in the colours of Al Wasmiyah Racing.

Chdia, who will defend the interests of Wathnan Racing, is presented by Jean de Mieulle. It was Norma Al Maury, who won the last year's renewal for Al Shaqab Racing, who will seek to keep the title via one of their four fillies.

The race will see Qatari jockey Faleh Bughenaim partnering Hajmah for Al Shaqab Racing and trainer Thomas Fourcy. Other fillies in the race include Alghed for owner Jaber Hamed Jaber al-Ghenaimi, Labwa De Carrere carrying the colours

of Dhafi Rashid Al Ardhi al-Marri, HM Al Zalmaa in the silks of Abdulghani al-Abdulghani, Geneva owned by Abdullah bin Fahad al-Attiyah, Lambada Du Croate in the colours of Khalifa Hassan al-Jehani, Intisar De Monlau for owner Mubarak Ali al-Nuaimi, Lacaro Du Croate defending the colours of Mansoor Khalil al-Shawani, Serena Du Loup for representing the colours of Sheikh Nasser bin Abdullah al-Thani and Wala'a owned by Yas Horse Racing Management.

## QATAR ARABIAN TROPHY DES POULAINS

The official list of the runners and the riders have also been announced for this year's edition of the Gr1 PA Qatar Arabian Trophy des Poulains.

Nine colts and geldings have been declared including Mohntaram in the silks of Al Shaqab Racing. Wathnan Racing will be represented by the Group 2 winner and Group 1 placed Mureb, saddled by last year's winning trainer François Rohaut.

The Group 2 winner Mukatel Al Shania will carry the silks of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani. Mouzaffar De Monlau will represent the colours of Abdulghani al-Abdulghani. Yas Horse Racing Management will be represented by Maqbool and Mutaz.

Last year saw a remarkable double for Al Shaqab Racing in the two trophies with Norma Al Maury saddled by Xavier Thomas Demeulte to win the girls race with Olivier Peslier in the saddle and Afjan proving the best of the boys with an impressive performance under Christophe Soumillon for trainer Francois Rohaut.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## Emery masterminds 'statement' win for Villa

Bayern were stifled by Villa's organisation and hit with sucker punch by Duran goal

AFP  
Birmingham, United Kingdom

Bayern Munich had not lost a Champions League group game since 2017 until a 1-0 defeat to Aston Villa on Wednesday that hinted at a new era of European glory for the English side.

Villa relived the club's greatest ever night, when they beat Bayern to lift the European Cup in 1982, in their first home match at the continent's elite level for 41 years.

The Birmingham club's fortunes have been transformed in less than two years since Unai Emery took charge, catapulting Villa from battling relegation at the bottom of the Premier League to finishing in the top four last season. Now two games into their first ever experience since the European Cup was rebranded to the Champions League, they are one of just seven sides with maximum points. Bayern's previous group stage defeat, 41 games ago, also came at the hands of Emery when in charge of Paris Saint-Germain.

The Spaniard's time in France and as Arsene Wenger's successor at Arsenal did not end well. However, he has a track record of lifting up European football's middleweights to trade blows with the continent's giants. Emery won three consecutive Europa Leagues at Sevilla and lifted the competition for a fourth time with Villarreal in 2021 to deliver the club's first ever major trophy. The next season Villarreal reached the Champions League semi-finals, knocking out Juventus and Bayern along the way. Villa are now reaping the rewards of Emery's shrewd tactical mind and ability to



Aston Villa's fortunes have been transformed in less than two years since Unai Emery took charge, catapulting the Birmingham club from battling relegation at the bottom of the Premier League to finishing in the top four last season. (Reuters)

polish rough diamonds.

Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham were among the sides with bigger budgets that were beaten into fourth place by Villa in the Premier League last season. In doing so, Emery's men beat both title contenders Manchester City and Arsenal

1-0 at Villa Park in December and repeated that trick against a Bayern team that arrived in England in free-scoring form.

Bayern were stifled by Villa's organisation and hit with the sucker punch by super sub Jhon Duran. The Colombian lobbed Manuel Neuer 11 minutes from time to score

his fifth goal this season after coming off the bench. Emi Martinez was then needed to make two huge saves in the dying moments as a Bayern side that had averaged over four goals a game since Vincent Kompany took charge were shut out.

"It's a statement but there are still a lot of games to play. We want to qualify in the top eight," said Argentina's World Cup winner Martinez. "This is the loudest Villa Park that I've heard since I joined the club, that's for sure. It's a club that is moving forward. I love playing here, I love the fans. This is a win for them."

Emery's gameplan even won the seal of royal approval. He was afforded an audience with Villa fan Prince William, who was among the more than 40,000 crowd celebrating a famous night. "I told him the best moment we can pass is days like today," said Emery of his meeting with Britain's future king. "I don't know where (Villa can go) but we are going to try to enjoy the way. Today we (will) remember how we played, who we played and the Champions League final from 42 years ago. It was a special day."

Forward Morgan Rogers was playing in the Championship earlier this year for Middlesbrough, but is another who Emery has moulded into a player now taking the Champions League in his stride. "It's a pinch me moment," Rogers said of his meteoric rise. "We're not here to just compete, we're here to try and win games."

In 1982 Bayern legends Paul Breitner and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge were among those stunned by Villa's upstarts in Rotterdam. Over four decades on, the German giants were left to lick their wounds again on a night that will be long remembered in the Midlands.

## Mbappe left out of France squad for Nations League games

Paris: France captain Kylian Mbappe has been left out of his team's UEFA Nations League matches this month after coach Didier Deschamps yesterday named his squad.

The Real Madrid star returned from a short spell on the sidelines, with a thigh injury, to appear as a substitute in the surprise 1-0 defeat at Lille in the Champions League on Wednesday. However, the 25-year-old will play no part in France's games against Israel and Belgium, a decision clearly made in order to allow Mbappe to rest and work on his fitness. "I had an exchange with Kylian. He has a problem which is not serious. I am not going to take risks, which is why he is not in the squad," Deschamps said. France play Israel on October 10 in an away fixture moved to Budapest due to the security situation in the Middle East. Les Bleus, Nations League winners in 2021, will then take on Belgium in Brussels on Monday, October 14.

France have three points after their first two outings in Group A2, which is topped by Italy with six points. The squad announcement was the first by Deschamps since vice-captain Antoine Griezmann retired from international football at the beginning of this week.

"He had such an impact that we can't play in the same way," Deschamps said of losing Griezmann, who quit aged 33 after winning 137 caps. "I am not necessarily going to change the system, but I am not going to look for an equivalent player."

Chelsea's Christopher Nkunku returns to the squad, from which midfielder N'Golo Kante is also left out.

## FIFA DEFERS DECISION ON CALL TO SUSPEND ISRAEL

Zurich: World football's governing body FIFA yesterday gave no verdict either way on a Palestinian request to suspend Israel, but instead launched an investigation into allegations of discrimination. At FIFA's congress in Bangkok in May, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) called for its Israeli counterpart to be suspended and for Israeli teams to be banned from FIFA competitions.

The PFA claims that the Israel Football Association (IFA) has broken FIFA discrimination rules. The accusation came seven months into Israel's war with Hamas in the Palestinian territory of Gaza. FIFA was initially set to hold an extraordinary session of its ruling council before July 20 to review independent legal analysis and decide how to proceed. However, the deadline was pushed back to give the legal experts more time to complete a report. At the organisation's headquarters in Zurich yesterday, the FIFA Council adopted the recommendations and conclusions reached in the legal analysis.

It decided that its disciplinary committee would be mandated to investigate the alleged offence of discrimination raised by the PFA. Meanwhile the FIFA governance, audit and compliance committee "will be entrusted with the mission to investigate - and subsequently advise the FIFA Council on - the participation in Israeli competitions of

Israeli football teams allegedly based in the territory of Palestine."

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in a statement that "The FIFA Council has implemented due diligence on this very sensitive matter and, based on a thorough assessment, we have followed the advice of the independent experts. The ongoing violence in the region confirms that, above all considerations... we need peace. As we remain extremely shocked by what is happening, and our thoughts are with those who are suffering, we urge all parties to restore peace to the region with immediate effect."

In Bangkok, PFA head Jibril Rajoub claimed that the Israeli FA had broken FIFA rules, adding: "FIFA cannot afford to remain indifferent to these violations." He called for the "immediate" suspension of Israel from FIFA. His Israeli counterpart Shino Moshe Zuares rejected the call as "cynical, political and hostile", insisting that the IFA had not broken any FIFA rules.

Israel has been at war with Hamas militants in Gaza for 11 months. Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,205 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures that includes hostages killed in captivity. Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed at least 41,788 people, the majority of them

civilians, according to figures provided by the Hamas-run Palestinian territory's health ministry. The UN has described the figures as reliable.

Infantino refused to put to a vote the sanctions demanded by the PFA. A group of UN experts yesterday said that at least eight football clubs had developed or had been identified as playing in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, another Palestinian territory, with a ninth playing some home games in a settlement.

The experts said that the activity of those teams amounted to IFA tacitly contributing to "the unlawful presence of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. This is in stark violation of international law," they said. They called on the FIFA Council "to ensure that its decisions are in conformity with non-derogable norms of international law".

They urged FIFA to ensure implementation of its zero-tolerance policy against discriminatory conduct and racism.

The experts included the UN special rapporteurs on cultural rights and on contemporary forms of racism, and members of the working group on human rights and transnational corporations. UN experts are independent figures mandated by the Human Rights Council. They therefore do not speak for the United Nations. (AFP)

## SPOTLIGHT

## Ancelotti makes no excuses after Real's defeat at Lille

Madrid: Defending champions Real Madrid failed to show the best version of themselves in a shock 1-0 Champions League defeat at Lille on Wednesday and must accept the criticism that comes their way, manager Carlo Ancelotti said. Lille pressed relentlessly and took the win courtesy of a Jonathan David penalty in first-half stoppage time to hand Ancelotti's team their first defeat in all competitions since January.

Real Madrid - record 15-times Champions League winners - have three points after two matches following their win over VfB Stuttgart. "Everything was pretty bad. We did badly with the ball, although the team was quite compact in the first half, it was difficult for us to recover the ball, it was

difficult for us to make transitions," Ancelotti said.

"We tried to be a little more aggressive, but it was difficult for us. So... We have to look at things with a cool head, not throw everything away. But obviously we have to improve. I am very sincere. The criticism for today's game is fair, correct and we have to accept it because it is like that. We have not shown a good version in this game."

Ancelotti said Lille "deserved" to win despite Real's improved showing in the second half of the match. "It was difficult for us to get into the game at the level of intensity, at the level of duels, at the level of clarity of play," the Italian added. "Obviously, the game could have been tied because we had opportunities at the end, but it wasn't deserved."

