



Djokovic proves staying power as he progresses to Shanghai semis



FOOTBALL | Page 4 Argentina held, Brazil leave it late in 2026 World **Cup** qualifiers



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CRICKET

England thump Pakistan by innings and 47 runs for historic Test win

FIA WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Attiyah makes it hat-trick of W2RC titles after Morocco win

'The season wasn't necessarily easy for us after our retirement from the Dakar Rally in January'

By Sports Reporter Doha

atar's Nasser al-Attiyah starred in the Moroccan desert, driving his new team Dacia Sandrider to a glorious debut at the Rally of Morocco vesterday.

His seventh triumph at the Rallye du Maroc also secured al-Attiyah his third consecutive FIA World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) title, with wins at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and Rally Raid Portugal making up for his non-finish on this year's Dakar.

In the final stage in Morocco yesterday, al-Attiyah finished eighth behind stage winner Sebastien Loeb but that was enough for him to seal the rally and world title. In the championship table, he tallied 202 points, 42 ahead of his closest rival Yazeed al-Rajhi of Saudi Arabia. Al-Attiyah's navigator Edouard Boulanger also won his first co-driver world title ahead of Timo Gottschalk (Overdrive Racing) and Armand Monleon (Toyota Gazoo Racing).

Al-Attiyah said: "The victory and a third world title for the first race with Dacia, we couldn't have dreamed of better. The season wasn't necessarily easy after our retirement from the Dakar. We corrected the situation well and I'm really happy about that. We will continue the development of the Sandrider to arrive at the Dakar in top shape."

Always a master of bold decisions, alttivah switched vehicles at the end o season and with this risky move he wrote another successful chapter in his career The Qatari driver flew to an impressive victory, with the Sandrider proving to be a machine up to the challenge, which bodes well for the upcoming Dakar Rally.

Al-Attiyah won the shortened opening stage of five of Monday and never looked back, the Qatari star not encountering a single mechanical fault or puncture on his way to victory.

in Morocco, with Guillaume de Mevius, showing strength in taking the helm of the X-Raid Mini ICW. Both teams made Toyota race to keep up the pace, with al-Rajhi securing a respectable third place in the rally. The Saudi driver also took second place

Al-Attiyah's talent was tested to the full



third consecutive FIA World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) title.

in the W2RC championship for the second time, with Lucas Moraes completing the podium. Despite not winning, Toyota Gazoo Racing secured the constructors'

The 2025 season will get off the ground at the Dakar in Saudi from January 3-17, followed by the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge from February 21-27. Next, the championship will make its first foray into the South African Safari Rally from May 18-24 before heading to Europe for the BP Ultimate Rally-Raid Portugal from September 22-28. Last but not least, the caravan will double back to Africa for the finale at the Rallye du Maroc, scheduled for October 10-17.

RALLY DU MAROC - TOP 10 RESULTS 1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Edouard Boulanger (FRA) Dacia Sandrider; Time:

14hr 26min 34sec 2. Sebastien Loeb (FRA)/Fabian Lurquin (BEL) Dacia Sandrider

14hr 31min 44sec 3. Guillaume de Mévius (BEL)/Mathieu Baumel (FRA) Mini JCW Rally 3.0D 14hr 40min 19sec

4. Yazeed Al-Rajhi (SAU)/Timo Gottschalk (DEU) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 14hr 50min 04sec 5. Seth Ouintero (USA)/Dennis

Zenz (DEU) Toyota GR DKR Hilux

14hr 56min 05sec 6. Martin Prokop (CZE)/Viktor Chytka (CZE) Ford Raptor RS 15hr 13min 50sec 7. Ervk Goczal (POL)/Alex Haro (ESP) Taurus T3 Max

8. Denis Krotov (KGZ)/Konstantin

15hr 14min 11sec



Al-Attiyah won the shortened opening stage on Monday and never looked back, the Qatari star not encountering a single mechanical fault or puncture on his way to victory.



Zhiltsov (ANA) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 15hr 21min 19sec 9. Marek Goczal (POL)/Maciei Marton (POL) Taurus T3 Max 15hr 24min 02sec 10. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG)/Daniel Oliveras (ESP) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 15hr 24min 57sec

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Afif and Lopez hail crucial victory as Iran looms

By Sport Reporter

kram Afif, named the best player in Qatar's 3-1 victory over Kyrgyzstan on Thursday, emphasised the importance of securing their first win at this stage of the 2026 World Cup qualifiers.

Almoez Ali put the Qataris in front in the 39th minute at the Al Thumama Stadium before an own goal from Tamirlan Kozubaev 18 minutes into the second half put the back-to-back Asian champions in control of the tie. And while Alimardon Shukurov pulled one back with 14 minutes remaining, Ibrahim al-Hassan restored his side's two goal cushion five minutes later to seal the win for Qatar.

Bidding to qualify for the FIFA World Cup on merit for the first time, Qatar had suffered a shock 3-1 defeat to United Arab Emirates in their opening game and then had to survive a nervy encounter against North Korea, with the tie ending 2-2 under challenging conditions in Laos.

Qatar have four points in Group A, where they sit fourth. Uzbekistan lead the group, having played out a goalless draw against Iran in Tashkent on Friday, with both teams tied on seven points but Uzbekistan

topping the standings on goal difference. "Victory was crucial to correct our course and keep our chances alive for qualifying for the next World Cup," Afif said. He highlighted the efforts of all his



Qatar's Akram Afif goes down after being tackled by Kyrgyzstan's Valerii Kichin during the 2026 World Cup Asian qualification match at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha.

teammates, noting how Qatar imposed its dominance from the start, with a clear determination to earn the three points.

Afif also acknowledged Kyrgyzstan as a challenging opponent, playing with a fighting spirit despite having lost two matches earlier in their campaign.

Qatar play heavyweights Iran next in

Dubai on Tuesday, and Afif stressed the win against Kyrgyzstan will serve as a great morale booster ahead of the crucial tie. "The victory is important motivation before our game with Iran, which will be vital in our journey through the qualifiers,"

Meanwhile, Qatar coach Marquez Lopez



Qatar coach Marquez Lopez.

echoed Afif's sentiments, expressing his satisfaction with Qatar's performance. Lopez was pleased with how his team controlled the game from the beginning. "We entered the match aiming for victory, and the players worked hard to dominate and secure the result we needed," Lopez said during the press conference.

He acknowledged that the three points were pivotal, given the pressure of the qualifiers. "Our objective in every game is not to lose points. We need to approach every match with seriousness, as the road ahead remains tough," Lopez emphasised. He also looked forward to the next match against Iran, stressing that Qatar must continue to push hard to claim one of the two qualification spots in the group.

Asia is assured of eight spots in the expanded 48-team FIFA World Cup 2026, to be co-hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The top two finishers from the three groups will confirm their places directly. The third and fourth-placed teams from each group – six in total – will progress to the Playoff, to be contested in two groups of three teams in a single round robin format, with both group winners qualifying for the 23rd FIFA World Cup.

The two second-placed finishers will face off in a home and away tie to earn the right to reach the Intercontinental Playoff and play for the final available berth.

RASHID STADIUM IN DUBAI TO HOST QATAR VS IRAN CLASH

Meanwhile, The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has chosen Rashid Stadium in Dubai, UAE, to host the Oatar's World Cup qualifying match against Iran on Tuesday. The match will be held at 7pm Doha time.

This decision follows extensive discussions with FIFA and relevant stakeholders, considering the current security situation.

MATCH REPORT

England complete record win over hapless Pakistan

THE VISITORS POST VICTORY BY AN INNINGS AND 44 RUNS

Reuters Multan

ngland, riding on the sublime batting of Harry Brook and Joe Root, became the first team to win a Test by an innings after conceding more than 500 runs in the first stanza, sealing the victory early on the fifth day of the series

opener yesterday.

After a record-breaking day in which the duo helped England post a colossal 823-7 before the bowlers ran through Pakistan's top order, the tourists completed an extraordinary innings and 47run victory well before lunch.

With Pakistan's Abrar Ahmed not batting due to illness, England reduced the hosts to 220-9 after some early resistance as Jack Leach bagged the three wickets needed and sparked huge celebrations among a small but vocal group of travelling fans.

While the bowlers completed the job, it was a stupendous batting effort that set up the win after man-of-the-match Brook scored 317 and Root made 262 in a partnership that ground the hosts

"We knew the way to win this game was to put a mammoth score on the board," England's stand-in skipper Ollie Pope said.

"I think that's credit to (Brook and Root) for the skills they've got with the bat, the determination they had to put the team in a winning position. So it was awe-

Pakistan resumed on a precarious 152-6 and Salman Agha was the first to depart in the morning after a defiant 63, with the introduction of Leach helping England snap his 109-run stand with

Aamer Jamal. England's pace bowlers peppered the two overnight batsmen



Players shake hands at the end of the first Test between Pakistan and England at the Multan Cricket Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

with bouncers earlier and Jamal recovered after being hit on the side of the head by a fiery ball from Brydon Carse to bring up his own half-century.

He was then granted a lifeline when Pope dropped a tough chance at square-leg - England's fifth dropped catch of the innings - and was not out on 55 when he ran out of partners.

Leach pulled off a stunning catch off his own bowling to remove Shaheen Afridi, before having Naseem Shah stumped to finish with figures of 4-30.

England declared after their highest total in 86 years and extracted the most from a lifeless pitch at the Multan Cricket Stadium to rattle Pakistan on Thurs-

The hosts flexed their muscles in the early part of the test with 556 in the first innings, but found themselves under the gun, trailing England by 115 runs at the end of the fourth day and they eventually folded under pressure.

Pakistan's tally was the joint third-highest first-innings total in a losing cause and marked the first time in more than 700 Tests in Asia that a team had lost after making 500-plus runs in the first

Skipper Shan Masood said his team were pained after their sixth straight loss and sought a strong response when the sides meet in the second of three matches next

'We're hurt as a nation, but the beauty of the game is it al-

ways gives you another chance. Life gives you another chance so the quick turnaround might be quite beneficial for us and we're all looking forward to it," Masood said. "We're getting into good positions. You ask your batting side to put up a good score in the first innings, and the onus on us now is to set the game up well so we can finish it off. The trick for us is that we should learn, obviously, from England as well?

BRIEF SCORES (Day 5)

England 823 for 7 dec (Brook 317, Root 262, Duckett 84, Crawley 78) beat Pakistan 556 (Masood 151, Salman 104*, Shafique 102) and 220 (Salman 63, Jamal 55*, Leach 4-30) by an innings and 47 runs

ANNOUNCEMENT

Shami still out as India name team for NZ Tests

ndia pace bowler Mohammed Shami has failed to recover from injury and will miss the three-Test series against New Zealand, team chiefs said vesterday. Shami, 34, has been suffering

quired surgery and last played for India in the 2023 50-over World Cup at home. The hosts will look to extend their lead at the top of the World Test Championship standings when they take on New Zealand in the opener starting

Wednesday in Bengaluru. Rohit Sharma will lead the

Bumrah named his deputy ahead of a much-waited five-Test tour of Australia next month. India did not have a vice-captain in their recent 2-0 Test sweep of Bangladesh at home. India have nearly the same squad for New Zealand Tests with only left-arm pace bowler Yash Daval omitted from the list.

Rohit Sharma (captain), Jasprit Bumrah (vice-captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, K L Rahul, Sarfaraz Khan, Rishabh Pant (wk), Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeia, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Siraj, Akash

Masood says bowlers must be more effective to win Tests

Multan: Pakistan captain Shan Masood said his bowlers had to learn how to take 20 wickets in a test match and their opponents England had shown them the way after sealing an innings victory in the series opener yesterday.

After putting up 556 on the board in their first innings, Masood's side squandered the advantage and allowed the tourists to post a colossal 823-7 declared and complete an innings and 47-run win on day five. Despite no help from a flat pitch in Multan, the tourists bagged 19 wickets to prevail as Abrar Ahmed did not bat on the final day due to illness

"The trick for us is that we should learn, obviously, from England as well. They found ways to get those 20 wickets. You can't win tests without picking up 20 wickets," Masood said.

"As a team, we have that second innings of batting to improve but the most important thing is we must also learn how to pick 20 wickets.

"So that's the challenge the side has going forward." Defeat was Pakistan's sixth on

the trot and they have now gone 11 matches without victory on home soil since beating South Africa in 2021

Masood, who replaced Babar Azam as Test skipper in November and has lost all six of his matches at the helm, said he would not shy away from responsibility in the wake of the

"What hurts is that we're not getting the results that Pakistan deserves.

"We're all trying hard. We're going to give it our all, and we're going to try and turn this around," he said.

"We have to get this right as a squad and as a cricket playing nation."

Pakistan will have a chance to set the record straight when the teams meet in the second of three games starting on Tuesday and Masood welcomed the quick turnaround.

The beauty of the game is it always gives you another chance. Life gives you another chance," he added.

"The quick turnaround might be quite beneficial for us and we're all looking forward to it.'



England's captain Ollie Pope shakes hands with Pakistan's skipper Shan Masood (right) at the Multan Cricket Stadium. (AFP)

Pope lauds batting brilliance of **Brook, Root after victory**

Multan: England's stand-in skipper Ollie Pope hailed the fitness and determination of his team vesterday after they crushed Pakistan by an innings despite conceding 556 runs, singling out batsmen Harry Brook and Joe Root for scripting the historic win. England responded to Pakistan's total with a mammoth 823-7 thanks to Brook's 317 and Root's 262 on a flat pitch before the tourists completed a famous innings and 47-run win early on the fifth day by taking the three wickets needed to prevail. "I think credit to firstly, the bowlers, the way they went about their stuff on day one and the majority of day two," Pope said at the post-match presentation. "The fitness that they showed... and then the same with Harry and Joe. We knew the way to win this game was to put a mammoth score on the board. "And it wasn't just 100 obviously...

I think that's just credit to them, (not just) for the skills they've got with the bat but (also) the determination they had to put it was awesome."

the team in a winning position. So Pope sympathised with Pakistan,

who fell to their sixth straight loss and have not won a test at home since 2021

"Obviously when you bat and make 550, you think you're in the driving seat there," Pope said. "But when you come out to bat again, and you're 260 runs behind, and the pitch is three days older than it was when you first batted, it's never an easy thing

"We felt like we had a lot of different wicket-taking opportunities. The odd ball was staying low, we got the ball reversing a little bit, and got the odd ball to spin as well. It's never an easy position. Fven if you hat as well as you can and make 400 in that last innings, we still would have tried to back ourselves and chase 140 The only bitter pill for Pope in

a game where the runs flowed freely was his two-ball duck. "I mean, that's the game, isn't it? I smoked a pull shot straight to mid-wicket and, unfortunately, I was the one to miss out this

"But it's a team game and what matters is that we're on the right side," he said.

COMMENT

New skipper Latham wants NZ to take the game to India in Test series

New Delhi

ew Zealand plan to take the game to India with a "no fear" approach when they play tests in Bengaluru, Pune and Mumbai over the next month, new captain Tom Latham said yesterday. Latham took over as permanent test captain from Tim Southee last week and said touring India, who have not lost a Test series at home in more than a decade, was a "great challenge"

"Hopefully (we'll) play with a bit of freedom, bit of no fear and try take it to them. And if we do, hopefully that gives ourselves a good chance," he told reporters at Christchurch airport yesterday before his departure for India.

"I think in India, we've seen teams that have done well there in the past have been quite aggressive towards them, especially with the bat," the 32-year-old added.

"They've looked to play a few shots but also put them under pressure, which is really important over there, rather than sitting and waiting for something to happen."

Latham said he did not envisage much of a change to the side's approach under his leadership.



"We've obviously done a lot of good stuff as a Test team over a period of time, and it's about trying to take all the good stuff that we've been doing, try to continue doing that," he said. "And I think for me, it's just about putting my spin on things. And that may look different, it may look slightly the same, but wait and see, it's obviously not going to change overnight."

Latham has already captained the Black Caps on several occasions on a temporary basis, mainly when his predecessor but one, Kane Williamson, was injured.

Williamson has been ruled out of the first Test, which starts in Bengaluru on Wednesday, due to a groin injury sustained against Sri Lanka and did not travel with the squad yesterday.

Injured Bavuma to miss first Test against Bangladesh

South African captain Temba Bavuma will miss the first Test against Bangladesh later this month as he recovers from an elbow injury.

Bavuma will travel to Bangladesh with the team next week but a left triceps muscle strain will keep him out of the first Test starting in Dhaka on October 21.

According to a statement from Cricket South Africa, it is hoped Bavuma will be fit for the second Test starting in Chittagong on October 29.

Aiden Markram will captain the team in the first Test. Markram has captained South Africa in whiteball cricket but it will be his first time in charge of the Test team.

Amended South Africa squad:

Temba Bavuma, Aiden Markram, David Bedingham, Matthew Breetzke, Dewald Brevis, Tony de Zorzi, Keshav Maharaj, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Dane Paterson, Dane Piedt, Kagiso Rabada, Tristan Stubbs, Ryan Rickelton (wkt) and Kvle Verreynne (wkt). Fixtures:

October 21-25: First Test, Dhaka. October 29-November 2: Second Test, Chattogram

FOCUS

Australia thrash 'embarrassing' Pakistan at Women's World Cup

Dubai

efending champions Australia hammered Pakistan by nine wickets to extend their winning streak to 14 in the Women's T20 World Cup and close in on a semi-final

Spinner Ashleigh Gardner finished with figures of 4-21 in Dubai as six-time winners Australia bundled out Pakistan for 82 - the lowest team total in this

Skipper Alyssa Healy hit 37 before retiring hurt as Australia romped home in 11 overs to stay unbeaten against Pakistan in the format.

But Healy injured her leg while going for a second run as she walked off in pain, becoming the second player injured after quick bowler Tayla Vlaeminck dislocated her shoulder while fielding in the first over of the match.

"Calf (injury of Healy), damage to be assessed," said vice-captain Tahlia McGrath. It has been a big day for us and heartbroken for the two girls. We will find out in a few days."

McGrath added: "The thing about this Australian side is how much depth we have got, captaincy-wise and wicketkeeper-wise, yeah, time to use it?

Australia have been clinical in their three matches in Group A to extend their victory run in the tournament since 2020. Pakistan, whose semi-final hopes have been seriously hit with their second loss in three matches, suffered a big blow when captain Fatima Sana flew back home ahead of the match after the death of her father.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Muneeba Ali took charge. Invited to bat first, Pakistan lost regular wickets



Australia's Ashleigh Gardner (left) celebrates with teammate Phoebe Litchfield against Pakistan in their ICC T20 Women's World Cup match in Dubai yesterday. (@AusWomenCricket)

after left-arm spinner Sophie Molineux dismissed Ali, for seven, and pace bowler Megan Schutt had Sadaf Shamas caught behind for three.

"We are not up to the mark in batting. That's not how you approach T20 cricket, it's embarrassing and we need to change that and win games for Pakistan," said Ali. "Everybody needs to step up and we need to have the confidence to win the last game."

Australia next take on India in a much-awaited clash on Sunday in Sharjah.

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 82 all out in 19.5 overs (Aliya Riaz 26; Ashleigh Gardner 4-21) v Australia 83-1 in 11 overs (Alyssa Healy 37 retired hurt, Ellyse Perry 22 not out) Result: Australia won by nine wickets Player of the Match: Ashleigh Gardner (AUS)



TENNIS

Djokovic proves staying power, set for Fritz clash

'OVERALL, BIG BATTLE, IT TOOK THE BEST OUT OF ME TO WIN IT

AFP Shanghai

ovak Djokovic proved his staying power yesterday, beating an opponent 18 years his junior 6-7(4/7), 6-1, 6-4 to claim the last spot in the Shanghai Masters semi-finals.

The 37-year-old's victory over the Czech Republic's Jakub Mensik came a day after one of his greatest rivals and contemporaries, Rafael Nadal, announced he would retire in November.

The Serb, who is aiming for a 100th singles title in Shanghai, will next face world number seven Taylor Fritz after the American beat Belgium's David Goffin 6-3, 6-4 earlier yesterday.

"Overall, big battle, it took the best out of me to win it," said Djokovic after the match.

Both Djokovic and 65th-ranked Mensik brought serious firepower to the court, their hard-hitting rallies driving the stadium wild with tension.

The first set was closely fought, with Djokovic's break in the ninth game matched immediately by Mensik in the next.

The veteran pulled ahead early in the tiebreak, but seemed to lose focus, allowing the 19-year-old to come from behind to win. The 24-time Grand Slam

champion dominated the second set though, breaking in the second and sixth game.

Mensik recovered to pile on the pressure again in the third, but Djokovic got a crucial break in the



fifth game to be crowned winner. Djokovic called his opponent "one of the best players we have on the tour", adding "the future is very bright for him".

"These kind of matches against teenagers is something that really motivates me...and pushes me to really dig deep and to show to the world that I still got it, you know, and my legs can still go the distance with the young guy," he said.

'End of an era'

The fact Djokovic's triumph came the day after the retirement announcement from Nadal - who he called "the greatest rival that I ever had" - was not lost on him.

"I'm a bit overwhelmed, to be

honest, but, you know, I still have the desire to play," the Serb said of being the last man standing from tennis' golden era.

The 26-year-old Fritz, who said he grew up watching Nadal on television, said it was "the end of an era".

The American quickly took charge in the first set of his earlier match, breaking the 66th-ranked Goffin in the second and sixth games.

Underdog Goffin - who knocked out second seed Alexander Zverev in the last round looked stronger in the second set, but ultimately couldn't replicate his feat with another top 10 scalp.

It is the first time US Open fi-

nalist Fritz has progressed past the third round in Shanghai. He has lost to Djokovic at every one of their previous nine en

counters. "We've played a lot of times and I've never gotten him... (So

I'm) waiting for that time that, you know, maybe I can get a first win on him," said Fritz.

"I'm only getting better and better, and I'm excited for the opportunity to play him."

Djokovic said he expected the match-up to be tight.

"It's the final stages of a tournament, anybody can beat anybody. I'm going to need all of my speed, all of my precision, all of my strength," he said.

Pogacar hunting 'perfect' season finale with record in sight

Milan, Italy: Tadej Pogacar is aiming to cap an astonishing year by matching cycling great Fausto Coppi's record of four straight victories at II Lombardia, the last of the four 'Monument' one-day classics of the season

Slovene superstar Pogacar wrote himself into the history books last month when he was crowned world champion for the first time. That triumph in Zurich made him just the third man to win the rainbow jersey, the Tour de France and the Giro d'Italia in the same year, matching Stephen Roche and Eddy Merckx.

Now Pogacar is preparing to match Coppi's quadruple between 1946 and 1949 at the Race of the Falling Leaves in northern Italy, the end of season special which he has won in increasingly spectacular style with each pass-

Pogacar claimed last year's edition with a trademark solo attack, a 32km burst to Bergamo which he has since made look puny in a remarkable campaign.

"It's been the perfect season for us this year. All the team worked really hard and things really clicked for us," said Pogacar. "I'll definitely look back on this

year as a really special time. But it's not over yet and we want to finish it off well and with a strong result in my last race of the season in Lombardia.'

At yesterday's press conference the Team UAE rider, tackled about doping, said suspicions of doping came because "cycling is a victim of it's past"

"There's always jealousy but there is dominance everywhere, in business and sport. It lasts a few years then fresh talent takes its place," Pogacar said.

The 26-year-old began his season in Italy eight months ago by storming to the Strade Bianche with an 81km charge and topped that by nearly 20km on his way to glory in Switzerland less than a fortnight ago.

Between those two wins, Pogacar claimed a second Liege-Bastogne-Liege and six stages in each of his victories at the Tour and Giro, triumphs which have made him the heir to not just the likes of Coppi but Merckx himself.

Evenepoel threat? And Pogacar has a stellar cast of



UAE teammates alongside him for this year's punishing 252-kilometre run between Bergamo and Como which features 4.800 metres of hard climbing Adam Yates and Rafal Majka, who have both been on the podium at II Lombardia, are in his six-man support squad for today's race, which shouldn't be hampered by the apocalyptic weather which caused last weekend's Tre Valli Varesine to be abandoned. The only rider in the peloton who seems capable of denying Pogacar is double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel, who will return to the site of his horror crash from four years ago. Belgian Evenepoel suffered a fractured pelvis after crashing over a low wall at the Muro di Sormano and falling nine metres (30 feet), an injury which keep him out of action until the following year's Giro d'Italia

The 24-year-old has had a superb season of his own, with Paris Olympic golds in the race road and time trial and a successful defence of his world time trial title last month, as a well as an impressive podium finish at the Tour. "He looks good and very motivated," Soudal-Quick Step team manager Davide Bramati told the Gazzetta dello Sport. "He could have just stayed at

home after the worlds given everything that he's won this year, but he's got a lot of determination and he wants to give to it a go." However, he dropped out of last weekend's Giro dell'Emilia inevitably won by Pogacar - with an eye problem and a low placing at the Coppa Bernocchi warm-up race on Monday suggests that he might not be in the right form to stop his rival from adding another major win to a long-and-stillgrowing list.

SPOTLIGHT

Title hungry Sabalenka, Gauff set for semi-final showdown at Wuhan Open



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka after winning her quarter-final match against Poland's Magdalena Frech at the Wuhan Open yesterday. (Reuters)

S Open champion Aryna Sabalenka will face world number four Coco Gauff in the semi-finals of the Wuhan Open after both players earned straight-set wins in the quarter-finals yesterday.

Gauff earned her 50th win of the year in WTA matches as she beat Magda Linette 6-0 6-4, while Sabalenka defeated Magdalena Frech 6-2 6-2.

'We've played a lot of matches in the past, a lot of great battles. I'm really excited," said Sabalenka, who has won three of her seven previous meetings with Gauff.

Three-time Grand Slam win-

ner Sabalenka wielded her powerbroke twice to build a 4-0 lead, then held her own serves to secure the first set.

Poland's Frech tried to fight back in the second set, getting her first break when she was 3-0 down and almost made it 3-3 but Sabalenka saved two break points to retain her lead and broke again to ensure

"I (had) to be on from the beginning. I'm glad I was able to win this match in two sets," Sabalenka said.

Sabalenka's next opponent Gauff was equally dominant earlier in the day, saving four break points and winning 67% of her return points as former Australian Open semi-finalist Linette fell to a bagel in the first set.

Gauff, who made eight double battle in the second set but one of Linette's 22 unforced errors gave the American an edge in the seventh game as she got the only break of the set, which sealed the win.

"I played well...overall, maybe two bad games," 20-year-old Gauff said in the post-match interview after extending her winning streak to nine matches.

Fifth seed Zheng Qinwen of China defeated Italian Jasmine Paolini, winning 6-2 3-6 6-3 in their quarter-final match. The victory sets up an all-Chinese semi-final, where Zheng will face Wang Xinyu, who overcame Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova 4-6 7-5 7-6(6) in a closely contested



Coco Gauff of the US celebrates after beating Poland's Magda Linette in Wuhan. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

World's biggest carmaker Toyota returns to F1 with Haas technical partnership

Reuters

he US-owned Haas Formula One team and Toyota announced a multi-year technical partnership yesterday in a move bringing Japan's biggest carmaker back to Grand Prix racing for the first time since 2009.

The smallest team on the starting grid will continue to use Ferrari power units, and work closely with Maranello as well as chassis design partner Dallara, after agreeing in July a contract extension to the end of 2028.

The partnership with Toyota Gazoo Racing, the carmaker's motorsport division, starts immediately with branding on the cars driven by Nico Hulkenberg and Kevin Magnussen at next week's US Grand Prix in Austin, Texas.

Toyota Gazoo Racing will become Haas' official technical partner with both parties sharing expertise, knowledge and

The Japanese carmaker will provide design, technical and manufacturing services and use the partnership to develop young drivers, engineers and mechanics through a testing of previous car programme.

Toyota, who poured money into For-



Haas team principal Ayao Komatsu.

mula One between 2002-09 with a team that failed to win a race, said there was no plan to build an engine or have a factory outfit again.

"To have a world leader in the automotive sector support and work alongside our organisation, while seeking to develop and accelerate their own technical and engineering expertise - it's simply a partnership with obvious benefits on both sides," said Haas' Japanese principal Ayao Komatsu. "The ability to tap into the resources and knowledge base available at Toyota Gazoo Racing, while benefiting from their technical and manufacturing processes, will be instrumental in our own development and our clear desire

to further increase our competitiveness in Formula One." Toyota are active in the world rally championship and endurance racing but company chairman Akio Toyoda told a press conference at the Fuji circuit that he wanted to open a path for Japanese drivers to drive the world's fast-

He said that "somewhere deep in his heart" he had always regretted having blocked that path by making the decision to quit Formula One.

That said, with the media watching my every step, I dare to add that I still believe my decision as the president of Toyota to withdraw from F1 (in 2009) was not wrong," he added.

Japan's only active F1 driver is Yuki Tsunoda, a Honda protege who races for Red Bull's RB team and whose future is uncertain after next year.

Gazoo Racing president Tomoya Takahashi hoped the partnership could "develop drivers who can secure regular seats in F1 in the future". "And it will not only be drivers taking on challenges this time," he added. "TGR engineers and mechanics will also join MoneyGram Haas F1 Team at the motorsports pinnacle of F1."

Haas, seventh in the current standings, will have an all-new lineup next year of Frenchman Esteban Ocon and British rookie Oliver Bearman.

GOLF

Sei Young Kim breaks 36-hole scoring record in Shanghai

Reuters Shanghai

> ei Young Kim set the 36-hole scoring record at the Buick LPGA Shanghai but saw her lead shrink to one stroke in the second round

The South Korean followed up her sizzling opening round of 10-under 62 with a 70 yesterday to move to 12-under 132. That beat the previous record, set by Brooke Henderson in 2019, by one stroke.

Kim recorded a birdie on No 5 and then parred the next 10 holes before finishing bogey, birdie, birdie.

"I mean, it wasn't like yesterday," Kim said about her round. "Kind of a little struggle with my putting, but trying to keep the - to make the birdie but I wasn't able to couple par-5. But, yeah, I tried to - I made last two holes strong finish. I'm very happy with that. So, yeah, I'll practice a little bit and looking forward to next two Kim has her third 36-hole lead of the

season, just one stroke ahead of Japanese rookie Mao Saigo and Lucy Li. Saigo posted the low round of the day with a 7-under 65 to match Li (68 yesterday) at 11-under.

Australia's Minjee Lee is alone in fourth at 10-under after a second consecutive



round of 67 at the Qizhong Garden Club. Saigo, the current Rookie points leader, carded eight birdies and a lone bogey at the par-4 10th hole. "I'm very happy to have the chance to

play this year, my rookie year," she said. "I focus however on what's ahead of me. Of course, it would be quite an honour to be able to be in the race for Rookie of the Year." Li made the turn at even par for her round before an eventful back nine with five birdies and a bogey at No 18.

"Yeah, I got off to a little bit of a slow start on the front nine. I was hitting it good but the putts just weren't going in," Li said. "So it was nice to get a putt to fall on 10. That was a pretty tough putt. Then hitting some good shots and putts coming in. A little tough putt there on 18 but otherwise I feel pretty good with how I played today."

Yealimi Noh (67) is alone in fifth place at 9-under. Defending champion Angel Yin (69) is another shot back, part of a pack of nine players tied for sixth.

HATHAB

Al-Suwaidi shines in Amateur class, Jumaa claims Medium Tour

By Sports Reporter

Doha

halid Jassim al-Suwaidi won the Amateur class, while Saeed Hamad Jumaa clinched the Medium Tour class at the second leg of the eighth Longines Hathab - Qatar Equestrian Tour yesterday.

At the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena, in the amateur round, featuring a 100cm obstacle height, al-Suwaidi claimed the top spot, finishing with a time of 24.49 seconds on his horse Pepsi.

He edged out runner-up Abdullah Saleh al-Obaidli by just 0.32 seconds, as the latter clocked 24.81 seconds on Valonivada. Faisal Mohammed al-Nuaimi secured third place with a time of 24.9 seconds on Tulipards. Fahad Rashid al-Ameri, Director of the First Equestrian Team, presented the awards to the winners.

The Medium Tour class was won by Saeed Hamad Juma in a time of 43.7 seconds on Amber. Rashid Tuwaim al-Marri was second with a time of 45.78 seconds on Navarone, while Ali Saeed al-Misnad came third, completing the course in 46.31 seconds on Calgary.

In the Medium Tour team competition, featuring jumps at a height of 130 cm, Al Fardan finished first with a total of 130 points and a time of 96.96 seconds. The Wathnan team took second place with 130 points and 101.42 seconds, while the Lekhwiya team finished third with 126 points and a time of 106.5 seconds.

Tournament Director Faisal al-Kahla and Director of the Media and Live Broadcast Committee Abdullah al-Qashouti presented the awards.

Meanwhile, Badr bin Mohammed al-Darwish, President of the Qatar Equestrian



Tournament Director Faisal al-Kahla and Director of the Media and Live Broadcast Committee Abdullah al-Qashouti presented the awards to the winners of the Medium Tour class during the second leg of the Longines Hathab

and Modern Pentathlon Federation, noted the steady improvement in the technical level of riders across the first two rounds.

He emphasised that this progress will positively impact the performance of Qatari teams in regional and international events. "We are witnessing an increasing number of participants across various categories, many of whom are capable of representing our national teams in external competitions," al-Darwish said. He encouraged the public to attend and support local riders throughout the championship's upcoming rounds.

Longines Hathab features 14 rounds, held at the Qatar Equestrian Federation and Al Shaqab's Longines arenas. The championship is a key event in the region's equestrian calendar, offering riders a platform to enhance their skills.



Amateur class winner Khalid Jassim al-Suwaidi receives his award from Fahad Rashid al-Ameri, Director of the First Equestrian Team.



WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Argentina held by Venezuela, **Brazil leave it late**

Second-placed Colombia suffered a shock 1-O defeat to Bolivia

Montevideo

rgentina were held to a 1-1 draw by Venezuela on Lionel Messi's return as Brazil got their 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign back on track with a last-gasp 2-1 victory over Chile on

Messi, who missed Argentina's last round of fixtures in September due to injury, looked to have put the world champions on course for victory after his free-kick helped set up Nicolas Otamendi's 13th-minute opener in the Venezuelan city of Maturin. But a battling performance by Venezuela in front of their home fans was rewarded midway through the second half when veteran striker Salomon Rondon met Yeferson Soteldo's cross with a header that flew past Argentina goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli.

Despite the dropped points, 2022 World Cup winners Argentina remain firmly on course for a place at the 2026 finals, which are being staged in the United States, Canada and Mexico. With the tournament expanded to 48 teams, the top six finishers in South America's 10-team round-robin qualifying competition will earn a ticket to the finals.

Argentina lead the standings with 19 points from nine games, three points clear of secondplaced Colombia, who suffered a shock 1-0 defeat to Bolivia in other qualifying action.

Yet while Argentina look poised to qualify comfortably, rivals Brazil continue to make hard work of their qualifying campaign. Chile, who are one place off the bottom of the standings, rocked Brazil after just two minutes when veteran striker Eduardo Vargas steered a looping header over Manchester City goalkeeper Ederson to make it 1-0.

But Brazil drew level in first-half stoppage time after Savinho worked himself into space before crossing for Botafogo forward Igor Jesus to head home. The match looked destined to finish in a draw until the 89th minute, when Brazil substitute Luiz Henrique arrowed in a low shot from the edge of the area to make it 2-1. The win moves Brazil into fourth place in the standings with 13 points from nine games, six points adrift from leaders Brazil.



Brazil's Luiz Henrique (right) celebrates after scoring against Chile during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying match in Santiago on Thursday. (AFP)

Elsewhere, Bolivia boosted their hopes of a first World Cup appearance since 1994 with their gutsy 1-0 win over Colombia in a game played in the thin air of El Alto, which is situated at around 4,150m (13,600 feet) above sea level. A superb individual goal from Miguel Terceros handed the Bolivians their fourth victory of qualifying and vaulted them up into the automatic qualification positions.

Bolivia's fortunes have taken a dramatic upturn since the team started playing qualifiers in El Alto, which is just over 500m higher than the Bolivians' usual home venue of the Estadio Hernando Siles in nearby La Paz.

Bolivia opted to move fixtures to El Alto after losing two out of their opening three home qualifiers in La Paz last year.

The move has paid off, with Thursday's 1-0 win coming after a 4-0 rout of Venezuela at the same venue in September. After claiming a shock 2-1 win away to Chile last month, Bolivia are now sitting in sixth place in the South American standings with 12 points from nine

Terceros's winning goal arrived in the 58th minute, with the 20-year-old winger who plays for Brazilian club Santos cutting in from the right flank, shimmying past Colombian defenders Jhon Lucumi and Kevin Castano and unleashing a left-footed thunderbolt that flew into the top corner. Bolivia are level on points with Ecuador, who finished the day in fifth place in the table after a 0-0 draw with Paraguay in Quito.

Sanchez strikes as **Arabi beat Duhail**

By Sports Reporter

l Arabi rode on a Rodrigo Sanchez strike to edge Al Duhail 1-0 in Round 4 of the QSL Cup at the Al Khor Stadium yesterday. The hard-fought win saw Al Arabi move into second place in the group A with nine points, behind Al Duhail on goal difference. The result also ended Al Duhail's win-

ning streak. Both sides displayed astute defence throughout the match, but Rodrigo broke past The Red Knights in the 30th minute, striking from well outside the box, with his kick being deflected a bit further left taking the toe-end of a defender's boot to beat goalkeeper Bautista Burke in the left corner.

Al Duhail, however, were unlucky as they came close to scoring twice, but hit the woodwork. First, it was the Mohammed Ibrahim Abdelmajid who struck the crossbar with a powerful kick in the 12th minute, and in the second half (62nd minute), Mubarak Shanan Hamza's fine kick found the bottom of left post.

Ten minutes later, Al Duhail's Luis Alberto's attempt was saved in the left corner by Al Arabi goalkeeper Mohammed Saeed Ibrahim.

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan and Qatar SC played out a 2-2 draw in another Group A match at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. Roger Guedes (60th minute) and Rodrigo Tabata (85th minute) scored for Al Rayyan, while Qatar SC got their goals through Ben Malango (64th minute) and Ali Awad (73rd minute).

With the result, The Lions now have seven points, while Qatar SC, two.

In the other match, Al Shahania and Al Ahli drew 1-1 in at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium. Lotfi Madjer opened the scoring for Al Shahania in the 23rd minute before Oumar Sekou got Al Ahli's equalizer in the 50th minute to move The Brigadiers to four points, while Al Shahania's points tally stood at two.



Al Arabi's Rodrigo Sanchez (left) celebrates after scoring against Al Duhail during the QSL Cup match at the Al Khor Stadium yesterday.

Forest fined 750,000 pounds for social media post targeting VAR

London: Nottingham Forest have been fined 750,000 pounds (\$979,500) and warned for misconduct in relation to a social media post criticising the referee after their Premier League defeat hy Everton last season, the Football Association said.

Forest were angered at being denied three penalty claims in the 2-0 loss and minutes after the game they issued a statement on social media platform X accusing Video Assistant Referee (VAR) Stuart Attwell of being a Luton Town fan. At the time, Forest were involved in a relegation battle with Luton but they eventually finished 17th while Luton went down. Forest said they would appeal the FA's decision.

Soon after the game, Forest said on X: "Three extremely poor decisions - three penalties not given - which we simply cannot

accept. We warned the PGMOL (Professional Game Match Officials Limited) that the VAR is a Luton fan before the game but they didn't change him. Our patience has been tested multiple times. NFFC will now consider its options'

The FA said that no other professional club had ever breached its regulations designed to control the use of social media in such a manner, describing it as a public attack on the integrity of a match official on an "unparalleled scale". "Even the drafters of the rule could not have foreseen a breach of this nature by a professional club," it said.

They also said Forest's concerns before the match "fell well short of a request" for Attwell to recuse himself. Forest had asked for the fine to be suspended but the FA rejected the request.

European Leagues, FIFPRO to file antitrust complaint about FIFA on Monday

Brussels: European Leagues and FIFPRO Europe will formally file a joint complaint about FIFA's international match calendar to EU antitrust regulators on Monday, the sports organisation and players' union said.

The move by the two, announced in July, comes two weeks after Europe's top court ruled that the world soccer governing body's player transfer rules breach EU laws following a challenge by French former player Lassana

Diarra. The complaint also underlines a growing tendency by disgruntled athletes and sports organisations to turn to the EU antitrust enforcer to help secure a level playing field and chip away at the power of governing bodies.

European Leagues and FIFPRO's grievance centres on the international match calendar, which they say has become unsustainable for national leagues and a

health risk for players, with FIFA allegedly abusing its market power.

FIFA in turn has said the current calendar was unanimously approved by its council after a comprehensive consultation, which included FIFPRO and league bodies.

The European Commission, which acts as the competition enforcer for the 27-country bloc, can order companies to stop anticompetitive practices and also fine them.