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Sabalenka's rise to World No 1 sets the stage for thrilling finale



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Mbappe should score more goals, says Real Madrid coach Ancelotti

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# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Rabada fastest to 300th Test wicket, as wickets tumble in Mirpur

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AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

# Sadd edge Persepolis to stay on course for last 16 spot

Uribe's first half stoppage time goal was enough to seal the three points for the Qatari giants

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's Al Sadd boosted their hopes of reaching the AFC Champions League Elite last 16 after edging Persepolis of Iran 1-0 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday. Mateus Uribe's first half stoppage time goal was enough to seal the three points for the Qatari giants, who are on seven points, while Persepolis are six adrift.

"It was a very tough match, and we played well to secure the win. Our defence was outstanding, helping us earn three crucial points," said Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez. "Despite the tight schedule, the team is working hard, and I'm pleased with the performance of my players. They remain focused."

Persepolis came into the tie desperate to get their campaign back on track but it was the home side who threatened first with Boualem Khoukhi sending his free-kick over the bar in the fourth minute.

Persepolis squandered a chance moments later, Lucas Joao squaring the ball for Omid Alishah, whose effort from above the area was easily dealt with by Al Sadd keeper Meshaal Barsham.

A stray back pass from Cristo Gonzalez almost caught Al Sadd off guard in the 10th minute with Wahid Amiri pouncing on the chance, only for Masoud Rigi to shoot just over the bar from distance. Sadd went close in the 17th minute when Akram Afif fed Guilherme off a short corner, whose deflected low effort needed intervention from Persepolis keeper Alexis Guendouz. Persepolis almost took the lead in the 37th minute when Omid Alishah intercepted Tarek Salman's backpass, producing a save from Barsham, before Rigi's follow-up was



Al Sadd's Mateus Uribe (right) and Persepolis' Lucas Joao vie for the ball during the AFC Champions League Elite match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

cleared off the line by Guilherme.

However, it was Sadd who broke the deadlock in first half stoppage time with Uribe turning the ball into the back of the net from inside a packed six-yard-box off Afif's corner. Sadd almost doubled their advantage in the 50th minute but Afif's run was cut short by an alert Guendouz.

Barsham was kept busy, denying Soroush Rafiei's long-range effort in the 68th minute before foiling Isa Alekasir's header in the 88th minute, with Alishah rattling the crossbar in the closing stages as Al Sadd held on to seal the second win

of their campaign. Persepolis will look to revive their campaign when they meet Al Gharafa of Qatar on 4 November, while Al Sadd take on Saudi Arabia's Al Wasl.

## AHLI BEAT RAYYAN

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan went down to Saudi side Al Ahli 1-2 at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday. Strikes from Gabri Veiga and Feras al-Brikan gave Ahli a healthy cushion heading into the break, with an own goal from Fahad al-Hamad proving a mere consolation for Rayyan.

Rayyan missed an early chance to take



Al Rayyan lost to Al Ahli at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

the lead after Trezeguet muscled his way into the left side of the area before cutting the ball across for Hazem Shehata, whose shot was turned away for a corner by Ibanez. The visitors came close to finding a way through in the 12th minute when al-Brikan surged into the box to set up Ivan Toney at the far end, but Rayyan keeper Paulo Victor was quick to intervene.

Ahli's high-pressing approach was rewarded four minutes later when Veiga opened the scoring when he curled the ball into the back of the net directly from the corner. Al-Brikan and Ibanez continued to torment Rayyan with both having their efforts denied by Victor as the Qatari side struggled to contain Ahli's advances. Ahli, however, were not to be denied a second goal in the 38th minute after Riyadh Marez delivered a pin-point cross for al-Brikan to

convert with a glancing header.

Rayyan started the second half much brighter and Roger Guedes went close in the 47th minute after he burst through the centre but fired wide. Ahli wasted a great chance to extend their lead in the 63rd minute when Franck Kessie lobbed the ball to an Toney, who had both his efforts from point blank range saved by Victor.

Rayyan pulled one back in the 65th minute after Murad Naji Hussein's dangerous cross into the box was turned into the back of the net by al-Hamad while keeper Abdulrahman al-Sanbi had to be at his best to deny Guedes' headed attempt in the 84th minute as the visitors held on to seal the win.

Rayyan will face Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor FC on November 5, with Ahli playing Al Shorta of Iraq.

PREVIEW

## Gharafa face Wasl, aim for second win

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's Al Gharafa and UAE's Al Wasl will be keen to strengthen their claims for a spot in the knockout stage when they meet in the AFC Champions League Elite 2024-25 at the Al Bayt Stadium today at 7pm.

Both teams are on three points and a victory today will keep them not only ahead of the teams below them but could also vault them further up the standings.

Gharafa reversed their opening day defeat against Iran's Esteghlal FC with a sensational 4-2 win over AFC Champions League 2023-24 winners Al Ain FC of the UAE. Forward Joselu started with a brace in the win against Al Ain and Al Gharafa will be counting on home ground advantage for victory against Al Wasl, with the two sides meeting for the first time on the continental stage.

Gharafa's Portuguese coach Pedro Martins, while addressing the media ahead of the match against Al Wasl, said: "We played the last match two days ago and began recovery training and preparation to work on our strategy for this match. Everyone is ready to continue the positive results and the Al Wasl match represents an important step for us."

He added, "We are very close to achieving the required balance for the team, and all the players are enjoying what they are offering. Al Wasl are a team who are distinguished by their competitive ability and we must focus on what our team must offer against a very strong rival."

Gharafa's star player Yacine Brahimi pointed to Al Wasl's capabilities, saying: "It is true that Al Wasl did not start at the same level as last season but they can create problems for any team. As far as we are concerned, we are completely focused on this match. We know the value of Al Wasl well and we know the importance of winning this match."

UAE champions Al Wasl opened their campaign with an impressive 1-0 away defeat



Al Gharafa's coach Pedro Martins (right) and Yacine Brahimi address the media yesterday ahead of the AFC Champions League Elite match against Al Wasl.

of Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor but were undone at home by a 2-0 loss against Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli Saudi FC. Their only previous meeting with a Qatari club in the AFC Champions League were two defeats to Al Sadd and they will be seeking to win a second successive game on the continental stage in a single season for the first time.

Al Wasl's Serbian coach Milos Milojevic, said: "We are heading towards a difficult match during which we look forward to presenting our best to get the desired result and recover from our loss in the last round."

He added: "We respect Al Gharafa and they

have very talented players. I expect the game to be tough and the victory will go to the team with the least mistakes, and I hope that tomorrow's game will be better than the game we played against Al Ahli Saudi."

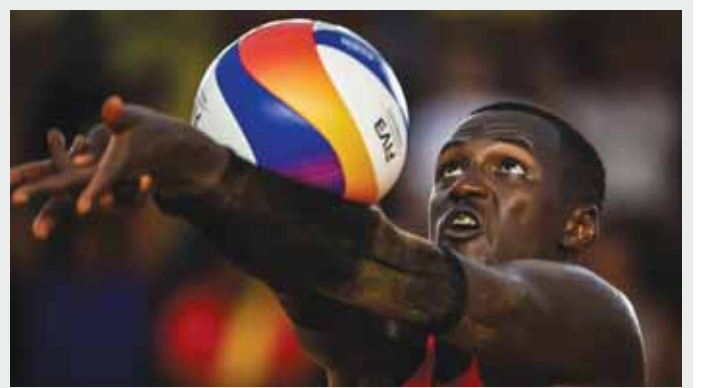
Wasl striker Haris Seferovic emphasised the importance of the match. "I hope to maintain our level in tomorrow's match against Al Gharafa and achieve a result that our fans happy," he concluded.

The best eight clubs from each zone (of 12 teams) qualify for the Round of 16, ahead of the quarter-finals to be played in Saudi Arabia from April 25 to May 4, 2025.

## Younousse, Tijan take runner-up spot at Joao Pessoa Elite16



Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan had to settle for runner-up spot at the Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour Joao Pessoa Elite16 in Brazil on Sunday. The Qatari duo lost to Tokyo Olympic champions Anders Mol and Christian Sorum of Norway 27-25, 17-21, 17-19 in the final after almost seventy minutes of action. Reigning Olympic champions David Ahman and Jonatan Hellvig of Sweden took bronze. Mol and Sorum were just two points away from having to settle for silver when Cherif and Tijan built a 13-10 lead in the tie-breaker, but came back to win the thrilling clash. It was the 14th duel between the teams and the tenth time that a tie-breaker was needed to determine the winners.





## SPOTLIGHT

## Egypt welcomes the Premier Padel family

Against the timeless backdrop of the pyramids, Premier Padel brought a spectacular blend of sport, culture, and heritage to life with an unforgettable exhibition match at the Grand Egyptian Museum.

As the sun set over Cairo, padel stars from around the world took to the court, captivating fans with thrilling rallies and showcasing the sport's rapid global rise.

The event, held ahead of the highly anticipated NewGiza Premier Padel P2, drew together elite athletes including Argentine sensations Franco Stupaczuk (No 7 FIP and former NewGiza P1 Champion), Maxi Sanchez (No 22 FIP), Qatar's Mohamed Saadoun, and local hero Khaled Nagy. On the women's side, Spanish ace Marta Ortega (No 7 FIP) and Portugal's Sofia Araujo (No.9 FIP) joined Egypt's rising stars Mora Hakin and Laila



El Memr, delivering electrifying matches that highlighted the spirit of competition and camaraderie.

The event featured the presence of Dr Ashraf Sobhy Amer, Minister of Youth and Sports; Khaled El Shawarby, Tournament Director; Luigi Carraro, President of the In-

ternational Padel Federation (FIP); and David Sugden, CEO of Premier Padel.

Their speeches underscored the rapid growth of padel, both in Egypt and around the world, as they highlighted how events like this help drive the sport's popular-



ity and build local communities.

**A historic setting for a modern sport**

The Grand Egyptian Museum, which just opened its main galleries on October 16 for a trial run, served as the perfect venue for this

ern sport. As the players battled it out on the court, guests enjoyed an evening that married the elegance of the sport with the grandeur of the Grand Egyptian Museum.

The exhibition matches served as a perfect prelude to the upcoming NewGiza Premier Padel P2, and guests were treated to an evening where skill and spectacle took centre stage.

The exhibition match has set the stage for the main event: the NewGiza Premier Padel P2, running from October 21-26 at the NewGiza Sports Club.

The tournament, now in its second edition, promises to bring more action-packed matches.

In 2022, Franco Stupaczuk, one of the evening's stars, took home the title while battling veteran Pablo Lima.

This year's competition is expected to be even fiercer, with top talents vying for glory in Cairo.

## FIRST TEST

## Rabada fastest to 300 as wickets tumble in Mirpur

Bangladesh dismissed for 106 while South Africa reach 140 for 6

AFP  
Mirpur, Bangladesh

South Africa posted 140-6 yesterday in an action-packed first day of the opening Test, after Bangladesh collapsed to 106 all out with Kagiso Rabada celebrating being the fastest to take 300 Test wickets.

The visitors took the lead, reaching 140-6 in 41 overs in reply at stumps at Mirpur, with Wiaan Mulder and Kyle Verreynne not out for 17 and 18 respectively.

Bangladesh won the toss and opted to bat but four of their top six batsmen failed to reach double figures, with opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy top-scoring with 30 on a lively pitch.

Seamers Rabada, Mulder and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaaj took three wickets apiece for South Africa.

Bangladesh were teetering at 40-4 when Rabada bowled Mushfiqur Rahim on 11, as the South African celebrated reaching the 300-wicket landmark.

He managed the feat in 11,817 balls, the fastest of all time, beating Pakistan's Waqar Younis (12,602 balls).

Rabada soon made it 301 Test wickets, removing Litton Das for one, with Bangladesh crumbling, all out for 106 in 40.1 overs.

Rabada said he was "really surprised at how the wicket played out".

"Test cricket should offer a fair contest between bat and ball, where bowlers get something if they bowl well, and batters can score if they apply themselves," he said.

"With 16 wickets on day one, I'd say it's leaning towards the



South Africa's Kagiso Rabada (centre) celebrates with teammate after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim (right) during the first day of the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, Dhaka, yesterday. (AFP)

bowlers," he added. Right-arm seamer Hasan Mahmud brought Bangladesh the first success in the first over after the innings change, removing South African captain Aiden Markram for six off seven deliveries.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam - Bangladesh's main seamer in the absence of Shakib Al Hasan - then boosted his team after he bagged a five-for, to become only the second Bangladeshi to take 200 wickets in Tests after Shakib.

"Many bowlers have 200, or 300-400 wickets," Taijul said. "But we don't play many Test matches - still, I'm one of the

Bangladeshi bowlers who have 200 wickets, and I'm happy for this."

He kept the team's spirits up, saying it was possible the match was "still in our hands" to win.

The Test is the first international cricket fixture in Bangladesh since a student-led revolution toppled autocratic premier Sheikh Hasina in August.

Bangladesh are missing all-rounder Shakib after security fears forced him to cancel plans to return home.

Shakib announced his retirement from international cricket last month but said that he wanted to play one last red-ball series at home.

The 37-year-old was also a former lawmaker in the government ousted by the revolution, making him a target of public anger.

Bangladesh have never beaten South Africa in a Test. The second Test begins in Chattogram on October 29.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**South Africa 140 for 6** (de Zorzi 30, Ricketton 27, Taijul 5-49) **lead Bangladesh 106** (Mahmudul 30, Mulder 3-22, Rabada 3-26, Maharaj 3-34) **by 34 runs**

## FOCUS

## 'India will have to be careful with Pant injury'

Reuters  
Bengaluru

India captain Rohit Sharma said they will have to carefully manage Rishabh Pant's workload for the remainder of the series against New Zealand after the wicketkeeper-batsman suffered a knee injury in their eight-wicket defeat by the tourists.

Pant left the field when he was struck on his right knee after missing a stumping chance on the second day of the rain-hit test in Bengaluru last Thursday and handed the gloves to Dhruv Jurel for the rest of the match.

The 27-year-old, who had surgery on the same knee after a near-fatal car crash in late 2022, returned to the field to bat in India's second innings but looked uncomfortable while running between the wickets during his defiant 99.

"He's had a massive operation on his leg, we all know what he went through," Rohit told reporters. "It's (important) just to be a little careful about where he is at and what he is to us. Even when he was batting, he was not running comfortably. He was trying to put the ball in the stands. He has had a lot of minor surgeries...and went through a lot of trauma in the last 1-1/2 years."

Pant has been a vital part of India's team since returning to international cricket earlier this year and will be relied upon when they head to Australia for five Tests after matches against New Zealand in Pune and Mumbai.

Rohit said they erred on the side of caution by keeping Pant in the locker room for New Zealand's second innings.

"When you're keeping, you have to bend every ball with your knee going down we thought it is the right thing to do for him to stay in and get 100% ready for the next one," he added.

India added bowling all-rounder Washington Sundar to their squad before the second Test beginning on Thursday.

India are expected to field at least three spinners in the second Test, but the exact combination will depend on the conditions of the pitch. The selectors have made a surprising decision to add Sundar to the squad as the 16th member, even though they already have four spinners in the team: Axar Patel, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, and Kuldeep Yadav.

This will be only the third Test match played at the MCA stadium in Pune. The first Test match there was played in 2016 and was won by Australia by a large margin of 333 runs.



India's Rishabh Pant walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal during the fourth day of the first Test against New Zealand at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Saturday. (AFP)

## ANNOUNCEMENT

## Salt and Pepper could bat together for England after Buttler ruled out

Reuters  
London

Uncapped Essex wicketkeeper-batter Michael Pepper has been called up to the England ODI squad to tour West Indies and, in the absence of injured captain Jos Buttler, could open with Phil Salt, the ECB said yesterday.

Pepper, 26, was Essex's leading scorer in this year's Vitality Blast and hit 32 sixes, the most of any batter.

Salt, who is also a wicket-keeper-batter, averages 32.5 from his 24 ODIs and almost 35 in T20s at a strike rate of 165.

Buttler, who missed last month's series against Australia with a calf injury, will not play in the one-day international series starting later

this month after a setback in his recovery but is expected to feature in the subsequent T20 series.

In Buttler's absence, all-rounder Liam Livingstone will be England's stand-in captain in the three-match ODI series which begins on Oct. 31.

England travel to the Caribbean next week while Buttler will join the team in Barbados ahead of the five-match T20 series, scheduled from Nov 9.

**England men's squad for the white-ball tour of West Indies:**

Jos Buttler (captain) (T20 series only), Jofra Archer, Jacob Bethell, Jafer Chohan, Sam Curran, Will Jacks, Liam Livingstone, Michael Pepper, Saqib Mahmood, Dan Mousley, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, John Turner.

## NEW ZEALAND BASKS IN 'GOLDEN 48 HOURS'

Wellington: New Zealand hailed one of the country's finest weekends in its sporting history yesterday after the triple success of winning the Women's T20 World Cup, a rare Test triumph in India and America's Cup sailing glory.

"This was a weekend that will go down in New Zealand's sporting annals," sports minister Chris Bishop said in a statement.

First, the crew of Emirates Team New Zealand completed a commanding 7-2 victory over Ineos Britannia on Saturday to retain the America's Cup.

The dominant Kiwis lifted the world's oldest international sporting trophy for the third consecutive time after beating their British opponents by 37 seconds in the ninth race off Barcelona to end the best-of-13 series.

On Sunday, New Zealand crushed the mighty India by eight wickets



New Zealand's players celebrate their victory at the end of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup final against South Africa in Dubai. (AFP)

in Bengaluru to record their first Test cricket win on Indian soil for 36 years. Later the same day an outstanding all-round performance by Amelia Kerr led the country to their historic first Women's T20 World Cup crown as they beat South Africa by 32 runs in

Dubai. Throw in a ruthless 64-50 victory over world champions Australia in Wellington in netball, and it had many in New Zealand debating whether the country had ever known a weekend like it. "The best weekend for NZ sport ever?" asked Radio New Zealand.

Jesse Mulligan, a presenter on RNZ, said: "It's been a golden 48 hours for New Zealand sport." The New Zealand Herald ran a poll on its website asking readers which was their highlight, also throwing in Auckland FC's win on their debut in the A-League and Liam Lawson's ninth-placed finish in the Formula One in Austin, Texas.

The T20 World Cup win came out top with 33 percent of the vote, followed by the America's Cup and then the Test victory in India. "Kiwi sports fans can be forgiven if they're caught yawning at work today, after so much sporting excitement packed into one weekend," added Bishop. The news website Stuff called it "a weekend that kept giving, one that will go down as one of the greats." "And the All Blacks weren't even in action."



TENNIS

# Sabalenka's rise sets the stage for thrilling finale

The WTA Finals to be held in Saudi Arabia from Nov 2 to 9

Reuters  
London

**A**ryna Sabalenka's return to top spot in the WTA rankings after leapfrogging Iga Swiatek has set up a thrilling end to the season, with next month's WTA Finals in Saudi Arabia likely to prove decisive in the race to end the year as world number one.

Sabalenka has enjoyed a spectacular season, defending her Australian Open title in January and adding the US Open trophy to her cabinet last month, as well as enjoying victories in Cincinnati and Wuhan.

Players are mandated to compete in six WTA 500 events but Swiatek's decision to skip the tour's Asian swing due to fatigue meant the French Open champion will only manage to play in two this season. The penalties saw her drop below Poland's Sabalenka in the rankings.

Sabalenka spent eight weeks at the summit last year before Swiatek overtook her with a victory at the season-ending WTA Finals and the Belarusian hopes for a longer stay as 'N1'.

"N1... Let's see for how long this time," she posted on X yesterday after the latest rankings were released.

Sabalenka is also not in action this week after her Wuhan success and will lose points for only playing in four WTA 500 events. She currently has 9,706 points while Swiatek has 9,665 ahead of the Finals, which will offer 1,500.

The Finals will be held on hard courts in Riyadh from Nov. 2-9 and feature the top eight singles players and doubles teams.



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates with the trophy after winning her final match against China's Qinwen Zheng at the Wuhan Open on October 13, 2024. (Reuters)

## Coco's US team to face Canada in United Cup group stage

Top seeds the United States will face neighbours Canada in the group stage when Coco Gauff makes her debut in the third edition of the United Cup mixed team tournament in Sydney and Perth at the start of next season.

World number three Gauff will be joined in the US team by Taylor Fritz, Denis Kudla, Robert Galloway, Desirae Krawczyk and Danielle Collins, who recently backtracked on her decision to retire at the end of the 2024 season.

At yesterday's draw, the Americans were also pitted against an as yet undecided nation in Group A, which will be played out in Perth. The 17th and 18th teams will be

decided based on the rankings of Nov. 19, but organisers confirmed that Serbia's Novak Djokovic has decided not to make the tournament part of his preparations for a tilt at an 11th Australian Open title.

Reigning champions Germany, who will be spearheaded by world number three Alexander Zverev, face China, who feature Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen, and Brazil in Group E, also in Perth.

Zverev looks set to be the highest ranked man in the tournament in the absence of Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, while world number five Daniil Medvedev's Russia remains barred by sanctions put in place after the invasion of Ukraine. Belarus is excluded for

the same reason so Australian and US Open winner Aryna Sabalenka will be absent, but five-times Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek headlines a strong Polish team also featuring Hubert Hurkacz. The Poles, runners-up last year, will play their Group B matches against the Czech Republic and Norway in Sydney.

"I think this year's entry list is probably the strongest overall that we've seen in the three years of the competition," said tournament director Stephen Farrow. "We've got six of the seven of the top 10 players in the world on the women's side, six of the top 12 on the men's side. And it is going to be an absolutely brilliant competition."

ANNOUNCEMENT

## Osaka's season over because of injury

AFF  
Tokyo

**N**aoomi Osaka's season appears to be over after she said she will not play at next month's Billie Jean King Cup Finals because of injury.

The four-time Grand Slam singles champion said in Tokyo on Sunday that she had ruptured abdominal muscles.

"I thought I strained my back, but I did an MRI in Beijing and they said that I bulged a disc in my back and I also ruptured abdominal muscles," Japan's Kyodo News agency reported the 27-year-old as saying.

Osaka has been sidelined since she retired from her last-16 match at the China Open against eventual champion Coco Gauff at the start of the month.

She pulled out of the Japan Open in Osaka and this week's Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo. On Monday, organisers of the Hong Kong Tennis Open announced that Osaka's season was over and that she would not participate in the tournament, which starts October 28.

"Naomi Osaka has been forced to withdraw from competing at

the Prudential Hong Kong Tennis Open 2024 due to injury, in an unfortunate end to her tennis season in 2024," said a statement on social media. The Billie Jean King Cup Finals would have been the last event on Osaka's 2024 schedule.

"I've played so many tournaments this year, so it was definitely the toughest decision to not play this and obviously not play BJK," she said.

"I really honestly enjoyed it so much, and I think it helped with my development as a player."

The Billie Jean King Cup Finals take place in Malaga, Spain, on November 13-20.

Osaka helped Japan beat Kazakhstan in April to qualify for the finals in her first Billie Jean King Cup appearance since 2020.

Her appearance at the China Open was her first tournament under Patrick Mouratoglou, the Frenchman best known for being the long-time former coach of Serena Williams.

She has struggled for consistency since returning to tennis in January after the birth of her daughter Shai in July 2023.

Her best results since becoming a parent have been two quarter-final appearances.

COMMENT

## Sinner hopes for long rivalry with Alcaraz

Reuters  
London

**T**he rivalry between Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz, the world's two highest ranked players, brings out the best in both, Sinner said.

Sinner, who won 6-7(5) 6-3 6-3 to bag the \$6mn title in Riyadh last Saturday, said he hoped for a long rivalry with Alcaraz, after Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic faced off for the final time in the third-place match earlier in the day.

"I wake up in the morning trying to understand the ways how to beat him. This kind of rivalries, this kind of players, they push us always to our 100%," world number one Sinner said.

"Hopefully this rivalry will last as long as possible. But there are so many other great players who can jump in ... let's see what's coming in the future," the 23-year-old said.

Italy's Sinner and Spain's Alcaraz have won two Grand Slams each this year, with Alcaraz beating Sinner in closely fought clashes at the French Open semi-finals and the China Open final.

The off-the-court friends have played each other 10 times on the ATP tour, with 21-year-old Alcaraz winning six matches, including the last three.

"I will do everything so that this rivalry gets better and better ... I am happy to share the court with him," four-times Grand Slam winner Alcaraz said.

BASKETBALL

## Al Sadd and Al Arabi register victories in Qatar Cup tournament



Players of Al Arabi and Al Rayyan in action during their Qatar Cup match yesterday.

**A**l Sadd and Al Arabi registered victories in the Qatar Cup basketball tournament at the Qatar Basketball Federation Hall yesterday. Sindou Ismael Diallo's match-high 38 points went in vain as Al Sadd defeated Al Wakrah 103-93. Omar Mohamed Saad also scored 21 points for the losers. For Al Sadd, Skyler Tyrone Flatten and Elhadj Seydou Ndoye netted 25 (2 rebounds, 3 assists) and 24 points

respectively. Babacar Dieng contributed 18 points.

In the first match of the day, Al Arabi defeated Al Rayyan 84-65 as Wael Arakji scored match-high 28 points (3 rebounds, 5 assists) and Victor Rudd netted 20 points. For Al Rayyan, Tyler James Lee Harris and Justin Jamel Wright-Foreman scored 18 and 17 points respectively.

Abdulla Yassin Mousa also chipped in with 11 points.



Action from Al Sadd's match against Al Wakrah at QBF headquarters court in Doha yesterday.

## Rafeeq named silver sponsor of Doha Marathon by Ooredoo 2025

**Doha:** Ooredoo, Qatar's leading telecommunications provider, has announced a new sponsorship agreement with Rafeeq, Doha's premier online food delivery service, making it one of the race's silver sponsors. The agreement was officially signed at Rafeeq's headquarters, with Sabah al-Kuwari, Vice-Chairman of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo Committee, and Abdullah bin Thamer al-Hemeidi, CEO of Rafeeq. Sabah al-Kuwari commented on the partnership, saying: "Rafeeq has established itself as the number one online food delivery platform in Doha, and we are proud to welcome them as a Silver Sponsor for the 2025 edition of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo. This partnership aligns perfectly with our commitment to promoting a healthier, more



active lifestyle in the community. We look forward to a successful event that brings the community together for a great cause, while also promoting Ooredoo's vision

of innovation and connectivity." Abdullah bin Thamer al-Hemeidi, said: "We are thrilled to collaborate with Ooredoo, a company that shares our vision for com-

munity engagement and wellness. The Doha Marathon is a significant event in Qatar's sporting calendar, and we are honoured to contribute to its success while supporting an active, connected lifestyle. We look forward to bringing our platform's support to participants and ensuring that they have a positive, engaging experience."

As a prestigious World Athletics Gold Label Road Race, the 13th edition of the Doha Marathon by Ooredoo is set to be the largest to date, attracting up to 15,000 local and international participants.

As one of the most anticipated events in Qatar's sporting calendar, the marathon will include a wide range of categories to suit all ages and abilities, from professional athletes to amateur runners to even children.

GOLF

## Woods expected to make TGL debut on Jan 14

Reuters  
New York

**T**iger Woods is expected to make his TGL debut on Jan 14, the new technology-infused indoor team golf league announced yesterday along with the full schedule for its inaugural season that will be held entirely in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

The 15-time major champion's first potential match will come in the second week of the season inside a venue that fits 1,500 fans wrapped around a field of play featuring a five-storey-high simulator screen and an adjustable putting surface.

The 48-year-old Woods, who had back surgery in September and played a limited schedule in recent years due to injuries, is a part owner of Jupiter Links Golf Club, a team that features himself, Max Homa, Tom Kim and Kevin Kisner.

Jupiter Links will face the Los Angeles Golf Club team that is

made up of Collin Morikawa, Sahith Theegala, Tommy Fleetwood, and Justin Rose in their first match.

Before every TGL match, teams will name three players each to compete in 15-hole contests that will feature two sessions: nine holes of three-man alternate shots followed by six holes of singles head-to-head play.

The opening TGL match on Jan. 7 will feature a New York Golf Club team made up of Xander Schauffele, Matt Fitzpatrick, Rickie Fowler and Cameron Young face The Bay Golf Club unit of Ludvig Aberg, Wyndham Clark, Min Woo Lee, and Shane Lowry.

**League featuring six squads**  
TGL, a primetime golf league featuring six squads of four players competing in a fast-paced form of team golf, was founded in 2022 by Woods and Rory McIlroy's TMRW Sports in partnership with the PGA Tour. Northern Irishman McIlroy

is part of Boston Common Golf with Keegan Bradley, Adam Scott, and Hideki Matsuyama and their first match is scheduled for Jan. 27 against Woods' Jupiter Links.

Golfers will tee off from real grass tee boxes to play custom-designed, virtual holes that will be projected on a massive screen.

Once teams are inside approximately 50 yards they will transition to live action and finish each hole on a short game complex that transforms between holes.

Technology will help to make each hole unique and includes a 41-yard-wide turntable that rotates the green and bunkers to change approach angles, while motorised actuators embedded under the putting surface can morph its topography.

Two months before its initial January 2024 launch date, a power outage caused deflation and damage to the air-supported dome section of the TGL venue. Organisers have since replaced it with a steel-supported structure.





## SPOTLIGHT

# Mbappe should score more goals: Coach Ancelotti

'I prefer that Mbappe scores goals than he presses'

AFP  
Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday he wants striker Kylian Mbappe to focus on scoring goals over pressing to help the team. The Spanish and European champions have not been at their peak this season and are still searching for the best way to incorporate the former Paris Saint-Germain superstar following his arrival this summer.

Madrid lost on the road at Lille in their last Champions League outing and host Borussia Dortmund today in a rematch of last season's final, which they won to earn a record-extending 15th European crown. "I prefer that (Mbappe) scores goals than he presses," Ancelotti told a news conference. "The central striker position in our team has not changed, I ask him the same I asked of Karim (Benzema, who left in 2023). To be well positioned and to be ready every time we get the ball back to make a rapid transition."

Mbappe has scored eight goals for Madrid in 12 games across all competitions this season, compared to Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski's 14 in 12 appearances. The forward drew criticism in his homeland for not playing in France's recent Nations League games after recovering from a thigh injury.

Swedish media reported he is being investigated over an alleged rape in Stockholm following a trip there during the international break, with Mbappe labelling the reports as "fake news". One of the knock-on effects of Mbappe's arrival at Madrid is a more defensive role for Jude Bellingham, who was Los Blancos' key attacking figure last season.

The former Borussia Dortmund midfielder is yet to score for the club this season in nine games, after netting 10 in his first 10 appearances last year. "We're satisfied with his work... because he works a lot on the pitch, he's always there, he competes, fights, sacrifices himself," said Ancelotti.

"The truth is he hasn't scored the goals he did last year, but the surprise isn't this year, it's last year, he scored a heap of goals that no-one expected... We've always scored goals and we'll always score goals, we have players with great attacking talent up front... so for us at this moment, the work he is doing is much more important for us."

Ancelotti said Madrid's array of attacking stars, also including Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo Goes, means the team enjoy end-to-end matches. "I want (rock and roll football) because I have players with these characteristics," continued Ancelotti.

"We find it harder to play a game based on possession and control because we don't have players with characteristics to play in reduced spaces. A back and forth game suits us well, but we're focussed on defending better as we



French forward Kylian Mbappe (left) has scored eight goals for Real Madrid in 12 games across all competitions this season. (AFP)

did very well last year."

Dortmund trained in Germany before flying to Madrid yesterday, with German media suggesting they were afraid of the Spanish giants watching their session. "We need a strong mentality, the game has to go our way to be able to survive here," Dortmund coach Nuri Sahin told a news conference after arriving at the Bernabeu.

The former Madrid player said his struggling team, seventh in the Bundesliga, needed to work together to stop Mbappe, Vinicius and company. "It's only possible (to succeed)

as a collective, not just against these two, but against all of Real's players," he continued. "Of course, every coach thinks of (a plan) and the lads know what to do, but we also want to be brave."

Midfielder Julian Brandt said the key was closing down Madrid players quickly. "It's about working even more defensively...you probably shouldn't give them any breathing room to get close to our goal," said Brandt. "The defence will be a big factor, but we don't just want to focus on it, we also want to get forward."

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## PSG wary of PSV's impressive domestic results, says Enrique

Reuters  
Poissy, France

Dutch side PSV Eindhoven have yet to win in this season's Champions League but their domestic form makes them a dangerous opponent, Paris St Germain manager Luis Enrique said yesterday.

PSV lost their opening Champions League game at Juventus and drew at home to Sporting, but in their bid to retain their Eredivisie title, they have won all nine league matches this season, scoring 29 goals along the way.

"I think that with the expanded Champions League format there are lots of teams with very high levels," Luis Enrique told reporters ahead of today's home game against PSV. "Last season, they were the best team in their country, and they have had an incredible start to the season when you look at the statistics."

The PSG coach expects a similar challenge to their most recent game, a 4-2 win over Strasbourg on Saturday to put them top of the Ligue 1 standings. "They are a top level team without doubt. I

think it will be similar to the game against Strasbourg," he said. "It will be tough for us because of how they play. They play far away from their goal. They press well and score goals and the two goals they scored were from high pressing. The Dutch teams play very good football and PSV know what to do with the ball."

After PSV, the French side have games against Atletico Madrid and Bayern Munich, but Luis Enrique is not looking beyond the Dutch champions. "The next game is always the most important one because that is the one you can control," the Spaniard said. "With the new format of the Champions League every home game is even more important. That also goes for PSV."

PSG won their opening game 1-0 against Girona before losing 2-0 at Arsenal, but the manager is content with how his team is performing overall.

"I think we played really well against Girona. I understand that we didn't compete in the way that we wanted against Arsenal but I was pleased with what I saw," Luis Enrique said. "That goes for the whole season."



PSG coach Luis Enrique reacts during a press conference. (AFP)

## No Guler joy for Juventus fans as account hacked

Turin: Juventus said one of their social media accounts was hacked yesterday, after fans were taken by surprise with the fake announcement of Real Madrid's Turkish teenager Arda Guler signing for the Italian club.

The transfer window may be closed, but followers of Juve's English account on social media platform X were left scratching their heads when a photo of Real Madrid midfielder Guler at an airport was posted.

"Welcome to Juventus, Arda

Guler," the post said. "The rising star of football is now part of the Juventus family."

Juventus then clarified the situation on their Italian account, much to the disappointment of their supporters, and the highly rated 19-year-old international will not be appearing in Serie A any time soon.

"Our Juventus English account has been compromised. Please ignore the false information being published on this account," the club's official post on X said.

## Van Dijk talking to 'right people' over Liverpool contract

London: Virgil van Dijk said he is in "discussions with the right people" over his Liverpool future as the club captain moves into the final months of his contract.

The Dutchman is one of a number of high-profile players at Anfield whose deals expire at the end of the season, with uncertainty also surrounding the futures of Mohamed Salah and Trent Alexander-Arnold.

As it stands, the trio will be able to discuss pre-contract terms with overseas clubs from January, but Van Dijk said he is in talks over extending his stay at Anfield.

"What the future brings I have no idea at the moment... discussions are ongoing with the right people and when it's time to make a decision or whatever, I think you guys (the media) will know it as well," he said. "But now full commitment and focus is on Liverpool and to be successful this season. So we will see."

Van Dijk, who joined Liverpool in 2018 from Southampton, turned 33 in July but remains an integral part of a defence that has kept five clean sheets in eight Premier League games so far this season. Sunday's 2-1 win over Chelsea meant Liverpool returned to the top of the Premier League table after reigning champions Manchester City's 2-1 win at Wolves earlier in the day.

With seven wins from eight in the league, new manager Arne Slot has made an impressive start to life at Anfield. City and Arsenal were seen as the leading contenders for the title before the season started but the early signs are that

Liverpool will be in the mix.

"Everyone can have their opinion but I know, like I think a lot of people know, opinions can change every three days now in terms of (people saying) someone can win the league and someone can't," Van Dijk said.

"I think there is no point listening to any of that. I don't do that. I focus on one game at a time, I want to be successful, I want to win trophies in every competition we're in, I want to try and win it. We know how difficult it is but I am going to give it a very good go."

Since joining the Merseyside club, van Dijk has helped them win the Premier League, Champions League, two League Cup trophies, the FA Cup and Club World Cup.



## FOCUS

## Arteta urges Arsenal to channel Bournemouth pain into Shakhtar clash

AFP  
London

Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to use the "pain" of their first defeat in six months as motivation in today's Champions League clash against Shakhtar Donetsk. The Gunners suffered a shock 2-0 loss at the hands of Bournemouth on Saturday after defender William Saliba was sent off in the first half.

It meant they lost ground at the top of the Premier League and finished the weekend four points behind leaders Liverpool. But Arteta, speaking at his pre-match press conference yesterday, said there was no need to panic after a first defeat since April. "You have a defeat, that's part of the game, it happens in very specific conditions as well," he said. "Let's move on, take that pain we still have in the tummy and use it for tomorrow night."

The Spaniard added: "It puts a bit of perspective into the situation. Obviously we want to win in any context. The reality is that we have made that context very difficult for ourselves. It was very difficult already with the amount of players that we had out and the schedule and the games that we had to play but that's the reality."

"For that game we didn't get away with it. We could have done and it could have been a very different narrative but the reality is we didn't. Another context is that we have lost one game in six months. Now we have to win again."

Arteta also addressed the issue of red cards, after Saliba became the third Gunners' player to be sent off in eight Premier League games this season, following dismissals for Declan Rice and Leandro Trossard. "Playing with 10 men, obviously that is an issue," he said. "The



Arsenal's William Saliba (right), Riccardo Calafiori (centre) and Gabriel Martinelli during a training session in London yesterday. (Reuters)

truth is when you analyse the three very different actions and the outcome of them, the reasons are very different. Regardless of that, we cannot continue to play with 10 men, especially at this level."

He added: "We need to eradicate that, it's clear. Why, the reason and how, it doesn't matter, we have to focus, it has to happen."

Arteta said Bukayo Saka's fitness would be assessed ahead of today's match at the Emirates after the England winger missed the Bournemouth game. Arsenal are looking for

their second Champions League victory of the group stage against Shakhtar after drawing 0-0 against Atalanta and beating Paris Saint-Germain 2-0.

Arteta said he had "a lot of sympathy" for his Ukrainian opponents, who are forced to play 'home' Champions League games in Germany due to the ongoing war in their own country. "The things they have to put in place to be able to continue to play football matches at this level and compete in the way they do," he said. "It's remarkable."