



TENNIS | Page 3

Austria's Thiem ends career cheered on by home crowd



De Bruyne won't be rushed back, says City's Guardiola



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GULF®TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Verreynne century puts South Africa in driving seat against Bangladesh

Page 2

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Al Wasl stun Al Gharafa with late comeback victory

By Sports Reproter

Al Khor

AE's Al Wasl FC came from behind to defeat Al Gharafa SC of Qatar 2-1 in their AFC Champions League Elite tie at the Al Bayt Stadium yesterday. The sensational win took Al Wasl to six points as they stayed on track for a place in the knockout stage while Al Gharafa stayed rooted on three.

Al Wasl fared better in the opening exchanges, Siaka Sidibe with a long range drive that Sergio Rico had to deal with, with the Malian midfielder then producing a delicate chip for Ali Saleh who nodded it wide. Al Gharafa were limited to shots from distance through attempts from Fabricio Diaz and Jose, with neither troubling Al Wasl goalkeeper Khaled Alsenani.

With 10 minutes left to play in the first half, Joselu found space just inside the Al Wasl box but just when the 2023/24 UEFA Champions League winner was about to pull the trigger, Salem Alazizi slid in to make a crucial block.

Building on that, Al Gharafa opened the scoring in the 44th minute when a short corner saw Florinel Coman drilling in a cross that hit Haris Seferovic and bounced kindly for Ferjani Sassi to guide home past Alsenani.

Al Wasl had a good chance to equalise nine minutes into the second half after Nicolas Gimenez surged on the left before

UAE international to send his header wide.

Next to go close were Al Gharafa -Coman embarked on a mazy run before cutting the ball back to Joselu, only for the Spaniard to send his shot into the wrong side of the post before Sassi headed wide from close range.

Al Wasl were given a lifeline in the 84th minute when Abdallah Yousif was penalised for using his hand to block Lima's shot, with the latter stepping to convert the spot-kick. The turnaround for Al Wasl was completed two minutes into added time when Alexis Fontanilla's cross from the left was turned in by Isaac Success for the winner.

Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said the match was balanced until a decisive penalty shifted the momentum. "We scored first before halftime and started the second half strongly," Martins said. "We created several chances but couldn't convert them before the penalty was awarded."

He acknowledged that the penalty changed the game. "After scoring from the spot, Al Wasl took control and scored again to secure the win."

Martins added, "The penalty had a big impact on the result. Our goal was to win, but it didn't happen. We're still in the competition and need to focus on earning more points in the remaining matches."

Al Gharafa will meet Iran's Persepolis FC on November 4 with Al Wasl hosting Al Sadd SC of Oatar in Dubai on the same day.



Al Wasl's Fabio Lima celebrates after scoring a penalty against Al Gharafa in the AFC Champions League Elite match yesterday.

FOOTBALL/CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Vinicius treble nelps Keal rally to beat Dortmund 5-2

PSG concede home draw against PSV, Arsenal grind out win over Shakhtar

AFP Madrid

inicius Junior scored a sublime hat-trick as Champions League holders Real Madrid came back from two goals down to hammer Borussia Dortmund 5-2 yesterday.

After a shock stumble at Lille in their previous European match, Madrid crushed Dortmund, in a repeat of last season's final, with a superb second half display.

Carlo Ancelotti's side claimed a record-extending 15th Champions League crown at Wembley and, as in that match, struggled in the first half against the Bundesliga side, who went two goals up through Donyell Malen and Jamie Gittens.

However Antonio Rudiger and Vinicius pulled Madrid level with two goals in two minutes and Lucas Vazquez fired home the third after 83 minutes.

Vinicius produced a brilliant solo goal for Madrid's fourth and slammed in the fifth as Los Blancos ended Dortmund's 100 percent start to the competition.

Madrid coach Ancelotti brought Rodrygo into the attack alongside Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius, reverting to a 4-3-3 formation after a brief experiment with three at the back in the narrow La Liga win over Celta Vigo on Saturday.

After midfield maestro Toni Kroos' retirement and while trying to bed Mbappe into the team, Madrid have struggled to find balance and consistency this season.

They were frustrated for the first half an hour of the game by the visitors, unable to create clear



cut openings before the game burst open. Malen opened the scoring with a cool finish after Julian Brandt won the ball back on the edge of the area and Serhou Guirassy squeezed a pass through a tight gap to find the Dutch wing-

Four minutes later Malen created the second, using his explosive pace to escape Ferland Mendy and crossing for Gittens to gleefully finish. Madrid responded by carving open Dortmund before the break but without finding a killer

Bellingham, without a goal in 10 games this season, headed straight at Gregor Kobel when he ran onto a

scooped pass into the area. The England international, facing his former club, then struck

the crossbar from close range on the rebound after team-mate Rodrygo had also hit the woodwork. with Madrid fans barely able to believe they had not scored.

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois made a fine save to thwart Brandt before the break when the midfielder let fly from outside the area.

The hosts turned the screw in the second half and Kobel saved well at the near post from Lucas Vazquez but could not keep out Rudiger's powerful header from Mbappe's cross after an hour.

Two minutes later Madrid were level when Mbappe was tackled in the area but the ball fell invitingly for Vinicius to stroke home with

Madrid's comeback was com-

pleted by Vazquez after Rodrygo did well to keep the ball from go-ing out of play, and Vinicius added

shine with his fine fourth. The Brazilian, expected to claim a first Ballon d'Or on Monday in Paris, carried the ball forward without support and produced a lethal low finish.

Vinicius then added a fifth by bursting into the area and rifling past Kobel, also issuing a warning to La Liga leaders Barcelona who visit the Bernabeu on Saturday in

La Liga. Meanwhile PSG's weaknesses on the biggest stage were once again exposed when they were held 1-1 at home by PSV Eindhoven yesterday. The Ligue 1 leaders salvaged a point when Achraf Hakimi's second-half strike cancelled out Noa Lang's opener, leaving Luis Enrique's side on four points after three games. Eredivisie leaders PSV, who made the most of PSG's mediocre midfield, are still winless with two points in the new format of Europe's premier club competition, which features a single table of 36 teams.

Arsenal needed an own goal to seal a scrappy 1-0 win over Shakhtar Donetsk yesterday to make it two wins out of three in the Champions League and soften the blow of their first domestic league defeat of season at the weekend.

RESULTS: AC Milan 3 bt Club Brugge 1, Monaco 5 bt Red Star Belgrade 1, Arsenal 1 bt Shakhtar Donetsk O, Aston Villa 2 bt Bologna O, Girona 2 bt Slovan Bratislava O, Stuttgart 1 bt Juventus O, PSG 1 drew PSV Eindhoven 1, Real Madrid 5 bt Dortmund 2, Sporting Lisbon 2 bt Sturm Graz O.

SPOTLIGHT

Arabi to face Qadsia in **Gulf Club Champions** League opener today

By Sports Reporter

l Arabi will kick off their Gulf Club Champions League campaign with a Group B match against Qadsia of Kuwait today at Al Thumama Stadium. The match is set to start at 6:15pm. Group B also includes Saudi Arabia's Al Ettifaq and Bahrain's Al Riffa.

Al Arabi aims to put in a strong performance and start the tournament on a positive note, with hopes of reaching the later stages and competing for the title. Coach Anthony Hudson is determined to rectify mistakes from their recent 2-5 defeat to Al Shamal in the Qatar Stars League and help the team bounce back with a win.

Speaking at a press conference vesterday, Hudson stressed the importance of a good start. "We've worked hard to prepare despite the short time between this game and our last league match. We focused on fixing the mistakes from the previous game and aim to perform at our best to get the victory," he said.

The coach added that a win today will be crucial for building momentum. "It's important to get the three points, especially

since we are playing at home, with our fans behind us. Their support will motivate the players to give everything on the pitch," Hudson said.

On the other side, Qadsia coach Zeljko Petrovic acknowledged the challenge his team faces against Al Arabi. "It's a tough match to begin our campaign, but we are focused on putting in a good performance and getting a positive result," Petrovic said during his press conference.

He praised Al Arabi's quality, saying: "They are a strong team with talented players, so we expect a competitive game. We must stay focused and perform at a high level to secure a good

start in the tournament." The Gulf Club Champions League returns this year after a nine-year break. The last edition was held in 2015, when Al Shabab of the UAE won the title. This season, eight teams are competing, divided into two groups. The group-stage matches will be played on a home-and-away basis, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the semi-finals.

The second round of matches will take place on November 5 and 6, with the final group-stage games scheduled for February



Al Arabi players at a training session yesterday.

MATCH REPORT

Bangladesh fight to save Test as SA's Verreynne hits ton

'THIS WAS CERTAINLY MY MOST REWARDING INNINGS

AFP

Mirpur, Bangladesh

angladesh were battling to save the first Test against South Africa yesterday after reaching 101-3 at stumps and still needing another 101 to avoid an innings

Mahmudul Hasan Joy (38) and Mushfiqur Rahim (31) were unbeaten at the end of play in Mir-

Their 42-run stand for the fourth wicket also made Mushfigur the first Bangladeshi to cross 6,000 career Test runs. South Africa were all out for

308 in their first innings, which secured a 202-run lead for the visitors thanks to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne's century.

"It is probably the toughest conditions I have played under in terms of heat and humidity," Verreynne said.

"Ninety percent of that innings was just against spin. Things happen quickly. You don't have much time to reset from a concentration point of view. This was certainly my most rewarding innings."

Bangladesh lost two early wickets to quick Kagiso Rabada in reply with Shadman Islam first to go, caught at short leg for one in the third over.

Three balls later, Mominul Haque edged and Wiaan Mulder took a sharp catch at third slip for naught, leaving the hosts dangling on 19-2 before tea.

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto fell lbw to Keshav Maharaj after

a gruelling 23 off 49 balls. Bangladesh would have lost another wicket off the last of the day when Mahmudul went for a wild



South Africa's Kyle Verreynne plays a shot during the second day of the first Test against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, Dhaka, yesterday. (AFP)

slog and missed the ball, avoiding a stumping in the nick of time.

Verreynne was last man out in South Africa's first innings after scoring eight fours and two sixes

He put on 119 for the seventh wicket with Mulder, who made 54, in reply to Bangladesh's first innings of 106.

It was South Africa's highest seventh-wicket stand against Bangladesh, after the pair resumed at 140-6 at the start of play. Dane Piedt, dismissed lbw for 32 by Mehidy Hasan Miraz, partnered Verreynne in a stand of 66 runs for the ninth wicket

'Sticking to the basics' Bangladesh quick bowler Hasan Mahmud took two wickets in two balls in the 65th over, the only spot of brightness in a morning session where South Africa added

"Test cricket is like that," Hasan said when asked how the hosts had managed to concede 200 runs for the last four wickets.

"In those situations, the focus for bowlers shifts to containing the flow of runs and building pressure on the batsmen," Hassan added.

"It's all about sticking to the basics." Hasan finished with 3-66 and

Mehidy 2-63, finally wrapping up the innings when Verreynne was stumped after facing 144 balls. Rabada on Monday become the fastest to reach 300 Test wickets as Bangladesh collapsed after winning the toss and choosing to

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam passed 200 Test wickets as he finished with 5-122, only the second Bangladeshi to achieve the feat after Shakib Al Hasan.

Bangladesh have never beaten South Africa in a Test and second of the two-match series begins in Chattogram on October 29.

BRIEF SCORES (Day 2)

Bangladesh 106 and 101 for 3 (Mahmudul 38*, Mushfiqur 31*, Rabada 2-10) trail South Africa 308 (Verreynne 114, Mulder 54, Taijul 5-122, Mahmud 3-66, Mehidy 2-63) by 101 runs

COMMENT

India's Shami says he is pain free after surgery

ndia's **Mohammed Shami** is now pain free following heel surgery earlier this year and the pace bowler said he will look to get a couple of domestic matches under his belt to improve his sharpness ahead of the tour of Australia beginning next month.

Shami has not played for the national team since the 50-overs World Cup final against Australia last year.

He had almost returned to full fitness before being ruled out of the ongoing three-Test series against New Zealand due to a separate knee injury.

India will hope to have Shami back in their ranks as they head to Australia for five tests next month and the 34-year-old was bowling during practice on the final day of their first Test against New Zealand on Sunday.

Asked if he was pain free after his surgery in February, Shami told Indian media yesterday: "100%."

"It felt great yesterday because I had been bowling with half a runup on and off since I can't put too much stress on my body," added the fast bowler, who plays firstclass cricket for Bengal in the Ranji



Trophy. "Yesterday, we decided that I would bowl properly, and I gave my 100%. It felt great, (and) the results are good.

"Hopefully, I'll be back on track soon.

"I know what kind of an attack we want for that test series (against Australia), so it's better I spend some more time on the ground before going.

"If I get fit and I get a gap of eight to 10 days, then it's better I play one or two domestic matches before going to Australia."

India's tour of Australia begins in Perth on November 22.

NZ's Williamson is out of second Test against India

Pune: Former skipper Kane Williamson will miss New Zealand's second Test against India starting in Pune tomorrow as he continues his recovery from a groin strain, New Zealand Cricket said yesterday.

The Blacks Caps on Sunday managed a first Test victory in India for 36 years without the master batsman, who has remained in New Zealand to work on his recovery from the injury he sustained in a recent series against Sri Lanka.

"We're monitoring Kane and he's tracking in the right direction, but isn't vet 100% fit, coach Garv Stead said in a news release. "We're hopeful to see further improvement over the coming days and have him available for the third test. We'll give him as much

time as possible to get himself ready, but certainly continue to take a cautious approach." The third and final Test takes place in Mumbai at the start of November.

Meanwhile India's assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate yesterday said Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill are both likely to be available for the second Test against New Zealand. "Rishabh's pretty good," ten Doeschate said. "I think Rohit (Sharma) touched on it the other day. He was having a little bit of discomfort at the end range of his movement with the knee. But fingers crossed he'll be good to keep in this Test as well. "He's batted last week in Bangalore, he had a few nets," ten Doeschate said of Gill.

SPOTLIGHT

Ahmed recalled as England pick spin-heavy XI for third Test against Pakistan



England spinner Rehan Ahmed (foreground) is set to join Shoaib Bashir (background) for the third Test against Pakistan starting tomorrow. (@englandcricket)

Reuters Rawalpindi

Ingland have included three spinners in their team for their third and final Test match against Pakistan in Rawalpindi, with Rehan Ahmed being recalled, the England and Wales cricket board (ECB) said yesterday. England won the first Test by an

innings and 47 runs, before Pakistan levelled the series with a 152-run victory in Multan on a surface that offered plenty of turn - with spin duo Noman Ali and Sajid Khan taking all 20 wickets.

Pakistan are expected to create a similar pitch for the final Test match and Ahmed will feature alongside fellow spinners Shoaib Bashir and Jack Leach, while fast bowler Gus Atkinson was also brought in.

"We know it's probably not going to swing and seam and do all sorts in the first session, so we look at the pitch and work out what the best team is going to be," England batter Harry Brook told the BBC.

Ahmed, 20, played his first Test match in 2022 during England's tour of Pakistan, taking a five-wicket haul on his debut as the visitors completed a 3-0 sweep of the series.

"He's an outstanding cricketer. It's not just his bowling, but his batting and fielding," Brook said.

"He's a young lad so he has a lot of time to come," Brook said.

"He got five-for in the last Test here, so hopefully he can do that again." England quicks Brydon Carse and

England team: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie

Matthew Potts miss out.

Smith, Gus Atkinson, Rehan Ahmed, Jack Leach, Shoaib Bashir,

Afghanistan include uncapped **Atal for Bangladesh ODIs**

Afghanistan selectors yesterday named prolific opener Sediqullah Atal in their 19-man squad for next month's three-match one-day international series against Bangladesh in Shariah.

Atal, 23, has previously played six Twenty20 internationals for Afghanistan and earned his maiden call for the ODIs after scoring consistently in the ongoing Emerging Asia Cup in Oman.

Besides Atal, left-arm spinner Noor Ahmad also staged a comeback after missing Afghanistan's 2-1 series win over South Africa, also in Sharjah last

Afghanistan Cricket Board chief selector Ahmad Shah Sulimankhil described Atal as a future player.

"We have included a promising top-order batter in Sediqullah Atal, who has impressed everyone with his consistent top performances," Sulimankhil is quoted in Afghanistan Cricket Board release. Atal has scores of 52, 95 not out and 83 in the Emerging Asia Cup. The three matches are scheduled for November 6, 9 and 11.

The series will help Afghanistan prepare for the eight-nation Champions Trophy to be held in Pakistan from February to March next year.

Squad: Hashmatullah Shahidi (capt). Rahmat Shah, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ikram Alikhil, Abdul Malik, Riaz Hassan, Sedigullah Atal, Darwish Rasooli, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, AM Ghazanfar, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Bilal Sami, Naveed Zadran, Farid Ahmad Malik

ANNOUNCEMENT

Australian Lawson takes charge of Singapore for World Cup qualifiers

Singapore

ingapore have turned to former Australian cricketer and ex-Pakistan coach Geoff Lawson as their national coach on a temporary basis, aiming for a quick boost ahead of the upcoming Cricket World Cup Challenge League in November.

Lawson, 66, has been contracted until the end of the Nov. 6-16 tournament, a crucial World Cup qualifying event. "We are thrilled to get someone of Lawson's qualities and stature," Singapore Cricket Association president Mahmood Gaznavi told the Straits Times newspaper.

"The last time we had an Australian big name was Trevor Chappell, and he did wonders for us."

The Challenge League, featuring 12 teams divided into two groups, serves as the first step in the



qualification process for the 2027 Cricket World Cup. Singapore will face off against

Bahrain, Hong Kong, Italy, Tanzania, and hosts Uganda in Challenge League B. The top two teams from each group advance to the World Cup qualifier play-off.

Lawson said he was introduced to the SCA by Chappell, who coached Singapore from 2009 to 2012. "The objective is to do well in

November and hopefully put ourselves in a good place to qualify," said Lawson. "I want to pass on my knowledge and help improve this

National captain Manpreet Singh yesterday highlighted the impact of Lawson's appointment: "Even in a short stint, his extensive experience will instil valuable skills, strategies, and a positive

FOCUS

Santner named New Zealand skipper for ODI series in Sri Lanka

ew Zealand have named their ODI and T20I squads for the tour of Sri Lanka next month. Mitchell Santner was named stand-in captain for the whiteball tour of Sri Lanka with a decision on the long-term option to be confirmed later.

Kane Williamson had stepped down as the team's white-ball captain earlier in the year with the Kiwis yet to name his longterm replacement.

Santner will have a good mix of youth and experience in the squad with Nathan Smith and wicketkeeper-batter Mitch Hay being called up to the squad.

Mitchell Santner was the pick of New Zealand bowlers in the World Cup.

Six players from the current



Test touring party in India have been included in the squad.

"This tour is the beginning of the build-up towards the ICC Champions Trophy in February wards the 2027 one-day Cricket World Cup," New Zealand selector Sam Wells said.

"Building depth is of critical important due to the demands of the international schedule and the need to peak for pinnacle events.

"For that reason it's particularly exciting to include a number of players that we believe represent the future of the Blackcaps," Wells said.

The series begins on November 9 and has two T20Is followed by

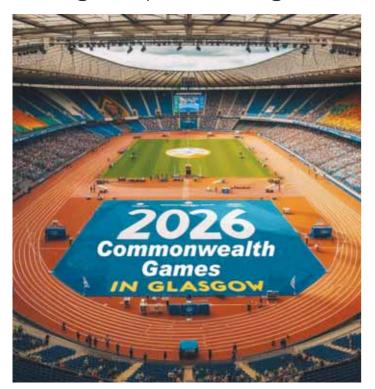
New Zealand ODI and T20I squad: Mitchell Santner (c),

Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Zak Foulkes, Dean Foxcroft, Mitch Hay (wk), Henry Nicholls, Glenn Phillips, Tim Robinson, Nathan Smith, Ish Sodhi, Will Young

ANNOUNCEMENT

Glasgow to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games

Among the sports missing out compared to 2022 Games are triathlon, diving, hockey, T20 cricket, squash



AFP London

lasgow has been confirmed as the host city for the troubled 2026 Commonwealth Games, which will be a slimmed-down version of the multi-sport event.

The future of the 2026 Games was thrown into doubt when the Australian state of Victoria, the original hosts, withdrew last year, citing rising costs.

But the Scottish government effectively gave the green light to Glasgow last month and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) announced vesterday that the 2014 hosts will stage the next Games, from July 23-August

The Games will feature just 10 sports compared with the 19 on show at the 2022 edition in the English city of Birmingham.

Para sport will once again be fully integrated as "a key priority and point of difference for the Games", with six para sports included on are delighted to officially confirm the programme.

The schedule will feature athletics and para athletics, swimming and para swimming, artistic gymnastics, track cycling and para track cycling, netball, weightlifting and para powerlifting, boxing, judo, bowls and para bowls, as well as 3x3 basketball and 3x3 wheelchair basketball.

Among the sports missing out compared to the 2022 Games are triathlon, diving, hockey, T20 cricket, squash, badminton and rugby sevens.

Around 3,000 athletes are expected to compete from up to 74 Commonwealth nations and territories. The CGF said Glasgow 2026 would deliver more than £100mn (\$130mn) of inward investment into the city, with no need for public funding.

Australia will provide part of the finance after Victoria pulled out, citing a projected cost of more than A\$6bn (\$4bn).

"On behalf of the entire Commonwealth sport movement, we

that the 2026 Commonwealth Games will take place in the host city of Glasgow," said CGF chief executive Katie Sadleir.

'Sustainable model'

Britain and Australia have staged five of the past six editions between them, but Sadleir believes a slimmed-down model will increase the potential pool of future

"The 2026 Games will be a bridge to the Commonwealth Games of tomorrow," said Sadleir, Glasgow's"sustainable adding model" would increase "the scope of countries capable of hosting".

Commonwealth Games Scotland chairman Ian Reid said it had not been easy to decide which sports to include.

"I think everybody recognises that these events need to be more affordable, lighter and we would have loved to have all of our sports and all of our athletes competing but unfortunately it's just not deliverable or affordable for this

timeframe," he told the BBC. But Sadleir, speaking at an event in Glasgow yesterday, insisted sports dropped from the Glasgow schedule could return at subsequent Commonwealth Games.

"It's always a very difficult decision when you have to decide which sports are in the programme and which sports are not," she said.

"Every time we run a Games, we only have two compulsory sports, athletics and swimming, and the rest are all up for that discussion and negotiation between the host and the Commonwealth Games Federation.

"To the sports (missing out) it must be incredibly disappointing, but what I must say to you is that because you're not in the programme for 2026 does not mean that you're not a key sport for us in the future."

The Commonwealth Games, held every four years, evolved out of the British Empire Games and is still made up mainly of countries and territories once subject to British imperial rule.

SPOTLIGHT

Austria's Thiem bows out of tennis with home loss

Agencies Vienna

ominic Thiem's tennis career concluded with first-round defeat to Luciano Darderi at the Vienna Open yesterday. The former world number three, who had won the Vienna title in 2019, fell to Italy's Darderi 7-6 (8-6)

Thiem, an Austrian and former US Open champion, had announced his retirement plans the previous week, coinciding with his home tournament

After his loss to world number 42 Darderi, the crowd expressed their appreciation with Austrian flags and signs reading "Danke Dominic" ("Thank you Domin-

Thiem, a former world number three and 17-time tour-level champion, was cheered on by his home fans as he made one final, emotional appearance at his home ATP 500 tournament.

"He means a lot," Thiem fan Petra Höllerl told ATPTour.com when asked what the 2020 US Open champion has done for Austrian tennis.

"He was one of the best, and along with Thomas Muster he is our hero. For our kids and for us, so we are a little bit lost now... It



Austria's Dominic Thiem waves after playing his final match at the Vienna Open at the Stadthalle in Vienna, Austria, yesterday. (AFP)

was his last match, so we supported him and trusted him. We

Thiem enjoyed significant success on home soil throughout his

at both the clay-court ATP 250 tournament in Kitzbuhel and the

wish him all the best."

career. In 2019, he clinched victories Vienna Open.

31-year-old attributes The much of his success to the unwavering support of his home fans.

Thiem's impressive career included victories over all three members of the "Big Three" -Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, and Novak Diokovic.

Unfortunately, less than a year after his US Open triumph, Thiem suffered a wrist injury that sidelined him for 10 months, causing his ranking to plummet to outside the top 350.

Thiem made a comeback to the top 100 last year, but struggled to regain his top form.

In May of this year, he announced that the current season would be his last.

COMMENT

Fritz unhappy with ITF decision to allow off-court coaching

Reuters New York

orld number six Tavlor Fritz said the International Tennis Federation (ITF)'s decision to allow off-court coaching from 2025 would ruin the one v one strategic and mental elements

of the game. The ITF announced on Monday that off-court coaching will be allowed from Jan 1 following a decision made at the governing body's annual general meeting this month.

It said tennis "fairer and, potentially, more entertaining".

Off-court coaching had already been implemented on a trial basis in all four Grand Slams as well as the ATP and WTA tours since 2023.

US Open finalist Fritz had previously been critical of off-court coaching and expressed his displeasure with the rule change in a post on X on Monday, writing: "Can we stop ruining the 1v1 mental/strategic aspect of the sport PLEASE!

Former world number 10 Denis Shapovalov said the decision to allow off-court coaching was "sad to see" as a fan of the sport.

"Tennis is special because you are out there alone. Why are you trying to change the beauty of this

game," the Canadian posted on X. ITF senior Executive Director Stuart Miller said the decision had been made after consulting with key stakeholders including players, coaches and umpires.

"Players felt it was a positive development and makes tournaments more interesting for them. Coaches have said it helps player development and helps to improve the standing of their profession," Miller added.

"Chair umpires have said it improves their ability to focus on monitoring the game and making the right decisions, rather than whether or not a coach is coaching against the rules.

Swiatek announces return at Billie Jean King Cup Finals

Poland's Iga Swiatek will play in the Billie Jean King Cup Finals in Malaga in November, where they face hosts Spain in the opening match, the world number two said

Swiatek has not played since her US Open quarter-final defeat by Jessica Pegula in September and, after deciding to miss the WTA tour's Asian swing due to fatigue, the 23-year-old lost her number one position to Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka.

"See you in Malaga! I'm happy to announce that I will play in the BJKC Finals," Swiatek posted on

Khalifa Open Squash Championship ends



Woods not part of initial Hero World Challenge field

During the closing ceremony, the winners were awarded by Tariq Zainal, the Secretary-General of the Qatar

International Squash Complex in Doha, The tournament featured 60 players across various age groups.

New York: Tournament host Tiger Woods was not listed in the initial player field released yesterday for the Dec 5-8 Hero World Challenge in Albany, Bahamas but could still be added as one of the three exemption spots.

Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation.

The 15-times major champion, who has not competed since he missed the British Open cut in July, had microdecompression surgery for nerve impingement on his lower back in September and has not offered an update on his recovery.

In five events this year the 48-year-old Woods

dropped out of February's Genesis Invitational, another event he hosts, due to illness, finished 60th at the Masters and missed the cut at the next three majors. After missing the British Open cut, Woods said he would take a break and did not plan to play an official tournament the rest of the year and would instead target the Hero World Challenge, which is a limited-field, unofficial event.

At last year's Hero World Challenge, in what was his first tournament in nearly eight months after recovering from ankle surgery, Woods finished 18th.

FOCUS

United Cup is here to stay, says tournament director Farrow

Reuters

Sydney

nited Cup tournament director Stephen Farrow is confident the future of the event is rock solid despite the debate over the crowded tennis calendar and Saudi Arabia's interest in launching an ATP Masters event early in the season.

The \$10mn mixed team tournament, the result of a partnership between Tennis Australia and the ATP and WTA tours, kicks off its third edition in Perth on Dec 27, just 33 days after the Davis Cup finals conclude in Spain.

Farrow has sympathy with players like Carlos Alcaraz who have warned of an increase in injuries and burnout because of the long season but said the field attracted by the United Cup suggested the late December start was not a major issue.

"I think we'd all agree that a longer off-season is a good thing for professional athletes," he told Reuters at the draw for the tournament.

"(But) the players are desperate to come here as soon as they can and start their season. In the back of my mind I thought starting on Dec 27, maybe that would be a challenge for us, but it hasn't proven to

"They want to get here to acclimatise to play these big events before the Australian Open."

Another potential driver to change in the landscape of the game is Saudi Arabia's Public Invest-



Tournament Director Stephen Farrow, former tennis player Casey Dellacqua, Australia team captain Lleyton Hewitt, host Todd Woodbridge, and Sydney General Manager Paul Daly pose with the trophy at the draw for the United Cup in Sydney, Australia. (Reuters)

ment Fund (PIF), which is widely reported to have ambitions of owning a 10th ATP Masters tournament to be played before the Australian Open.

That would clearly play havoc with Tennis Australia's lead-in tournaments to the year's first Grand Slam, which include the United Cup and WTA-ATP

tournaments in Brisbane and Adelaide. Farrow, though, is confident that the current agreements with the professional tours are built on extremely solid foundations.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

De Bruyne won't be rushed back, says City's Guardiola

The 33-year-old was injured against Inter Milan last month

Reuters Manchester

anchester City's Kevin de Bruyne needs to be eased back into action after his lay-off with a muscle injury, manager Pep Guardiola said, adding that the midfielder is a doubt for today's Champions League match at home to Sparta Prague.

The 33-year-old De Bruyne was injured against Inter Milan in the Champions League last month and has missed the English champions' last six fixtures. City are already without midfielders Rodri and Oscar Bobb due to long-term injuries but Guardiola said he would resist the temptation to call on De Bruyne until the Belgian was comfortable.

"Well, except for Rodri and Oscar, the other ones are in training and getting better, but guys like Kevin for example are not exactly fit," the Spaniard told reporters. "It's not a new issue but he doesn't feel completely fine. Kevin is not 22 years old, he has to be fit for his football. He doesn't feel comfortable that he can express his incredible potential at his best. He is training better but he doesn't feel good. He said he doesn't feel good. If you don't feel good, take your time."

Guardiola had a more positive outlook on England midfielder Phil Foden, who last season scored 28 goals for club and country in all competitions and was named PFA Player of the Year but has had a stop-start campaign this time around due to illness. The 24-yearold was instrumental in City's 2-1 Premier League victory at Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday, delivering the corner which led to John Stones' stoppage-time winner.

"He feels much better. The minutes he played last game, for example," Guardiola said. "With Phil, you realise immediately when he is happy and fit and mentally in the right moment. You realise he's getting better and better."

Today, City face Czech champions Sparta, who are level with them on four points after beating RB Salzburg 3-0 in their opener and drawing 1-1 with VfB Stuttgart. "They created a lot of problems (for Stuttgart). I didn't know Sparta until the last two days when I started to watch them and I have a good impression," Guardiola added.

Guardiola also praised the spirit and desire of his players after their last-gasp win against City, unbeaten this season, go into the game against Sparta buoyed by John Stones'



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (right) and Kevin De Bruyne during a training session. (Reuters)

95th-minute winner at Molineux on Sunday, which kept them on the shoulders of Premier League leaders Liverpool.

City, who have won four consecutive Premier League titles, are playing in European football's elite club competition for the 14th straight season. Guardiola said the manner of the win at Wolves and the way his men celebrated showed their enduring hunger.

"How we celebrate when a team now is in the position in the bottom (Wolves), how we celebrate in October, not in May or April like it's happened, I feel the team still have the passion," he said. "How we celebrate in the locker room, I still feel 'OK, they still want it, still we are there' and that means a lot to me, a lot. They know, the team, how difficult it is to be consistent for six seven years. You can be conyears and still now we are there. All the teams go down, still we are in that position."

Guardiola said he was "more than happy" with how his team were coping in the absence of kev midfielder Rodri, who has been ruled out of the rest of the season with a knee injury. The City boss said it was important to make home advantage count against their Czech opponents, with tough away trips to come to Sporting Lisbon, Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain. The new-look league format for this season's competition means only the top eight teams out of 36 automatically qualify for the knockout stages after the initial eight-match

"It is not easy," said Guardiola. "The games we have at home we have to close it, otherwise t'll be difficult to finish in the first eight and sistent for a month, for a season, but six, seven that's the target we want to achieve."

FOOTBALL

Qatar begin U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers against Mongolia

By Sports Reporter

atar will to open their campaign in the AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers as they take on Mongolia in their opening Group F match at Aspire Academy Pitch 7 today. As many as 43 teams divided into 10 groups – seven groups of four teams and three groups of five - are featuring in the Qualifiers, targeting berths in the finals scheduled to take place from April 3 to 20, 2025 in Saudi Arabia.

The top team from each group, along with the five best runnersup, will advance to the tournament. Al Annabi will also face defending champions Japan and Nepal in Group F.

Qatar U-17 coach Ahmed Madouni said the team is focused on the opening match, aiming to start the mission on a winning note. Our preparations have been good for the competition. We respect all the teams in the group and we will do our best to secure victory against Mongolia," Madouni said

Qatar will play their second match against Nepal on Friday before meeting Japan on Sunday in their last match. "All the teams in this group are tough but we are confident of getting the desired results and securing a berth in the finals," said the Qatar coach.

Also today, Japan will take on



Qatar U-17 coach Ahmed Madouni.

Nepal in other match of the group at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium. Meanwhile, Qatar's squad features talent drawn from several top domestic clubs, including Al Duhail, Al Sadd, Al Arabi, Al Gharafa, Qatar SC, Al Rayyan, Umm Salal, Al Ahli, and Al Markhiya.

QATAR U-17 SQUAD Adam Riyad, Saud Khamis.

Mohammed Akram, Muhannad Jameel, Malik Majed, and Yazan Hani (all Al Duhail), Sheikh Ndaw, Sultan Majed, Omar Abdulaziz, Faisal Saeed, Karam Hadi, Mohammed Jihad, Ward Osama, and Tamim al-Qadi (all Al Sadd), Ahmed Saber (Al Arabi), Emmanuel Francis and Zaid Faisal (Al Gharafa), Saif El-Din Ahmed (Qatar SC), Abdulrahman Khaled and Bakri Mohammed (Al Rayyan), Salman Anwar (Umm Salal), Abdul Aziz Younes (Al Ahli), and Youssef Salman (Al Markhiya).



Qatar's U-17 players train at Aspire Academy yesterday.

FOCUS

Flick calm despite Barcelona's dire record against Bayern

Barcelona

arcelona coach Hansi Flick said yesterday he is not worried by the club's recent struggles against Champions League opponents Bayern Munich. The German giants have beaten Barcelona in each of their last six meetings and the Catalans have failed to score in the

last four of those.

they thrashed Barcelona 8-2 in the 2020 Champions League quarterfinals. "The past doesn't matter, the present is what's important," Flick told reporters before today's league phase clash against Vincent Kompany's visiting side. "Whatever happened in the past we can't change, we can only influence what happens tomorrow. Of course we want to try and beat Bayern Munich."

When Flick was coach of Bayern

Barcelona last won the Champions League in 2015 and last reached the semi-finals in 2019. Flick won a remarkable six titles with the Bundesliga leaders in 2020 and has quickly improved revived Barcelona after arriving in Spain this summer. Barca are top of the Spanish league and face their biggest tests of the season this week against Bayern and then at rivals Real Madrid on Saturday in La Liga.

"Bayern are a team in good form with a lot of confidence, they're a top, top team with great players," said Flick. "We want to test ourselves against the best - it's a Champions League game against Bayern Munich, it's going to be great. (I had) a great time there, with great memories, but I'm living a new chapter now at Barca."

Bayern coach Kompany said Flick's time at the club was still spo-



Barcelona's German coach Hans-Dieter Flick (right) looks on during a training session in Sant Joan Despi, near Barcelona. (AFP)

ken about with reverence. "Hansi was not just a coach at Bayern but a very successful coach, a person who represented the club in a way that is still spoken about today," he told a news conference. "(However) the duel is between the two teams. the 11 players on the pitch. Hansi's idea is very clear, I hope that our ideas are clear as well, but tomorrow we will have to see which team is able to win this game."

Kompany said Bayern's 8-2 thrashing of Barcelona was in the past and he was only focussing on the match at the Olympic stadium. "I actually just want to talk about the match tomorrow, that's the only important thing," insisted the Belgian coach. "I do understand the surroundings, all that is around the match, increases the drama of the match tomorrow, but it's just about the 90 minutes and (the match) will have its own history." Kompany praised Barcelona

for being able to replace departed great Lionel Messi so quickly with teenage Spain star Lamine Yamal. The youngster, 17, won Euro 2024 with his country this summer and is already vital for Barca on the right flank.

"Honestly, it's already exceptional for Barca as a club, so shortly after the departure of Messi, who for all the players of my generation, was a key figure in our football era, to so quickly have a player who could potentially replace him, it's unique," said Kompany.

"Full credit to (Barca's youth academy) La Masia, to trust these type of players and give them a chance. We have to try and win a game of football against Barcelona. not just one player, although he is an exceptional player."

SPOTLIGHT

Record attendance expected at the 85th FIG Congress in Doha

record number of national governing bodies and a record number of delegates are registered to attend the 85th FIG Congress, which will be held from tomorrow until October 26 in Doha. Over 500 attendees including delegates from over 150 out of a total of 159 affiliated member federations will be present.

On October 25 the delegates will vote to renew all of the FIG's governing bodies: the President, three Vice-Presidents, seven elected Executive Committee members and 21 Council members (with quotas for continental representation). They will also elect the President and six members of the Gymnastics for All Committee and the President and six members of the Technical Committees for all seven FIG disciplines, with Parkour set to be represented by a new Technical Committee for the first time. Two auditors will also be elected. All elected officials will commence their terms of office on 1 January 2025 for a term of four years.

The FIG is set to welcome five new affiliated national gymnastics federations during the Congress: Antigua and Barbuda, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, and Zambia. If the Congress approves these affiliations, it will increase the total number of FIG affiliated federations to 164.

The approval of the quadrennial plan for 2025-2028 is one of the main responsibilities of the Congress. Approval of this budget will allow the FIG to operate and achieve its objectives, which include managing World Championships in each of its sev-



en disciplines as well as Gymnastics for All events, managing other international events and competitions and supporting the federation's global education and development programmes.

The Congress will hear reports from the independent Gymnastics Ethics Foundation, the FIG Foundation for Solidarity as well as updates on safeguarding, the ASOIF Good Governance report and the results of the new NF-Insights project to gain a better understanding of the FIG's global member-

Furthermore, proposed changes to the FIG Statutes include the addition of Para-gymnastics as a new competitive discipline within the FIG, along with provisions that will help to pave the way for a new, consumer-facing brand for the FIG.

Frustrated Glasner waits for Crystal Palace luck to turn

Nottingham, England: Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner blamed poor decision-making and a lack of confidence for his side's 1-0 Premier League defeat at Nottingham Forest on Monday but praised his side's fighting spirit even though they remain winless this season.

Chris Wood scored the only goal of the game as he profited from a Dean Henderson error when the Palace keeper allowed a shot from 25-yards to squirm past him, summing up what was

another unsuccessful outing for Glasner's team.

"We are all frustrated and disappointed as always one or two situations decide the game. At the moment, it goes against us, but we have to get through it together," Glasner said.

"I saw the team fighting from the first to the last second, we created chances, hit the post

"At the moment we don't score goals and we have to be honest. No goal today, no goal v

Liverpool, no goal v (Manchester) United, and if you play like this it is difficult to win. We make one mistake and we get punished. That is the situation we are in."

Palace struck the woodwork twice and created a few other chances but most shots ended wide of goal, were blocked or too close to the keeper.

Winless Palace are in 18th place in the league with three points from a possible 24 and a home game against Tottenham Hotspur next up on Sunday.