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WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Lopez vows Qatar will fight in high-stakes Uzbekistan clash

Coach acknowledges Qatar's defensive struggles but is confident that his team can rise to the occasion

By **Sahan Bidappa**
Doha

With Qatar's hopes of automatic qualification for the 2026 World Cup hanging by a thread, coach Marquez Lopez insists his players "will fight until the last breath" in a must-win match against Uzbekistan. Today at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, the two-time Asian champions face an unbeaten Uzbekistan side riding high on confidence, as the White Wolves chase a historic first-ever World Cup appearance. The Central Asian team currently sits on 10 points—level with Iran, as both teams hold the two automatic qualifying spots in Group A.

Qatar's position is far more precarious, with just four points from four matches. A six-point gap between them and the top two makes Lopez's task all the more daunting.

A defeat to Uzbekistan today, coupled with an Iran victory against North Korea in Vientiane, Laos, would widen that gap to nine points—a nearly insurmountable distance, even with half of the qualifying campaign still to go. It's a reality not lost on Lopez, who faces immense pressure as his job comes under increasing scrutiny just nine months after leading Qatar to a second Asian Cup title at home.

While Qatar forwards have been in fine form, it's the team's defence frailties that has haunted Lopez. Injuries to key defenders – including Pedro Miguel has not helped his cause as he hopes to bring in fine balance in defence and attack.

Qatar lost both their matches against the United Arab Emirates and Iran after taking the lead. While Lopez has bolstered his side with the inclusion of experienced forward Mohammed Muntari, who makes a return after a long injury layoff, it remains to be seen how Qatar fare against Uzbekistan's forwards.

Lopez acknowledged Qatar's defensive struggles but was confident that his team can rise to the occasion. "Yes, we've conceded 10 goals in the qualifiers, and injuries have often made things difficult. Defensively, we don't have many options, and key players getting injured only adds to the challenge," the Spaniard said in a press conference yesterday.

"That said, we are ready for the match, and we need to give 200%. Players are human, and mistakes happen—football can be unforgiving. We face a lot of challenges when preparing the squad, especially when injuries occur. Our goal is to win and secure the three points that will be key to our hopes of qualification. The players and everyone involved are aware of this, and we hope everything goes in our favour. We will fight until the last breath to win," the Qatar coach added.

Uzbekistan have kept six clean sheets in their last eight World Cup qualifying matches as they even held Iran to a goalless draw. Forwards Oston Urunov and Jaloliddin Masharipov are both fitness concerns but the White Wolves welcome back head coach Strecko Katanec after illness forced him to miss the last two qualifiers.

Uzbekistan's squad features several players playing at a high level of European football, a luxury Qatar do not enjoy. Cap-



Qatar coach Marquez Lopez juggles a ball at a training session.



Qatar players share a light moment during a training session at the Aspire yesterday, on the eve of their World Cup qualifying match against Uzbekistan. **PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil**

tain Eldor Shomurodov represents Serie A side Roma, Abdukhodir Khusanov has been impressive in France at Lens, while Abbosbek Fayzullaev is a key playmaker for CSKA Moscow.

"They are a tough team that doesn't concede many goals and consistently plays with the same group," said Lopez. "They have excellent players, especially their attacking trio. We saw how much we struggled against them in the Asian Cup until it went to penalty kicks. We'll try to impose our style—I won't change my approach. We've studied the opponent closely and trained hard throughout the past week. We'll look to exploit their weaknesses, but it will be a challenging match," he noted.

For Uzbekistan, a win against Qatar today would put them well on course for a historic World Cup appearance in two years' time. Despite some impressive performances in qualification over the years, the closest Uzbekistan came was in 2014, with only goal difference denying them an automatic spot at the tournament before they were beaten in a play-off by Jordan.

There is optimism, however, that they could be about to break their duck and secure a place at the 2026 competition in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Shomurodov was optimistic about his team's chances, with the captain saying a victory today over Qatar will be a pivotal step towards qualification.

"If we manage to beat Qatar, our chances will improve even further," he said. "We're fully focused on getting those three points. Qatar is right behind us in the standings. We must do everything we can to keep



Uzbekistan players train at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

them from closing in. Winning this game is crucial."

Uzbekistan's assistant coach, Vlado Radmanovich said one key moment could prove to be a difference against Qatar. "The match will be decided on small details. One

accurate shot, one dribble, or one mistake can make the difference. Not losing the match will be a good result," he said.

The top two finishers in each group will qualify automatically for the World Cup. The six nations that finish third and fourth

in their respective groups then advance to the fourth round, where a further two automatic berths are available. One additional team will then advance to the FIFA Play-off Tournament, where six sides compete for the last two tickets to the World Cup.

FOOTBALL

Tickets go on sale for FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar



By **Sports Reporter**
Doha

The Local Organising Committee (LOC) of the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 can confirm that tickets for the tournament will go live at 12pm local time today.

Visa cardholders will enjoy an exclusive pre-sale period before tickets go on sale to the general public the following week

(Thursday, 21 November).

Running from December 11-18, spectators will have the chance to see Real Madrid (UEFA Champions League Holders), Al Ahly (CAF Champions League 2024 Winners), C.F. Pachuca (CONCACAF Champions Cup 2024 Winners) and yet to be decided winners of the CONMEBOL Copa Libertadores 2024.

Stadium 974 will host the FIFA Derby of the Americas on Wednesday, December 11 and the FIFA Challenger Cup Qatar 2024

on December 14. Two years after the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, Lusail Stadium will host the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Final on December 18.

A FULL BREAKDOWN OF PRICES CAN BE FOUND BELOW

FIFA Derby of the Americas and FIFA Challenger Cup (Stadium 974):
Category 1 – QR150
Category 2 – QR70
Category 3 & Accessibility – QR40

FIFA Intercontinental Cup Final (Lusail Stadium)
Category 1 – QR1,000
Category 2 – QR600
Category 3 & Accessibility – QR200

Spectators may purchase up to six tickets per person, exclusively via the official FIFA ticketing platform (<https://www.fifa.com/en/tickets>).

An official resale platform will be introduced in due course.

COMMENT

Khawaja to McSweeney: Keep it simple

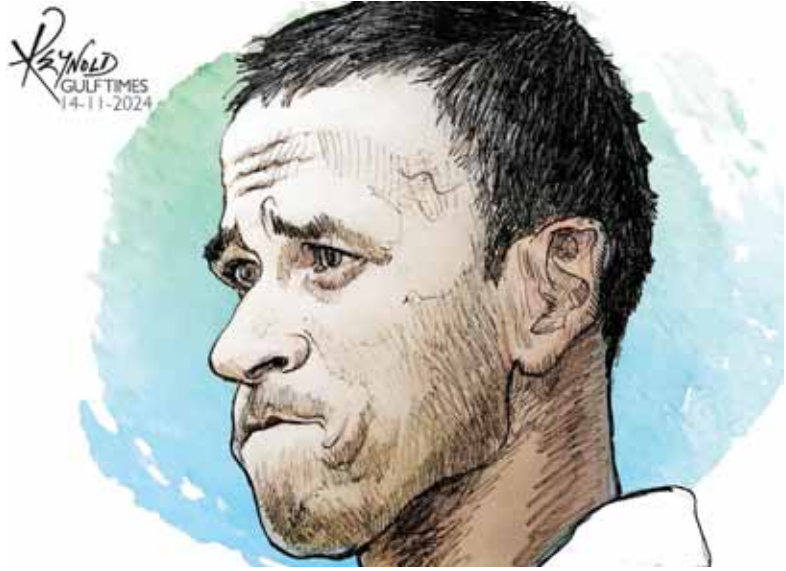
Reuters
Melbourne

Australia's **Usman Khawaja** said his new opening partner Nathan McSweeney should not feel the need to imitate the quick-scoring approach of David Warner in the Test series against India.

McSweeney will make his Test debut in the series opener in Perth next week, the 25-year-old given the chance to make the role his own following Warner's retirement earlier this year.

Steve Smith had first go at replacing Warner but failed to fire in his stint at the top of the order and is returning to his preferred slot at number four.

Warner's 70-plus strike rate in first class cricket is significantly higher than McSweeney's 41.92 but Khawaja said there were other ways a Test



opener can build an innings. "I don't know where this myth started that you need someone to score really fast to do well," Khawaja said. "You've got five days to do it ... I don't know why you need to score fast."

"Opening's as much about scoring runs as it is about being able to absorb."

Warner dominated all three formats of the game with his take-no-prisoners batting, which often put Australia in charge early in a Test match.

"Davey was special, he could score runs while absorbing but he didn't do it (score fast) every time," Khawaja said. "He was consistent, out there and setting a platform, and Nathan does that very well."

South Australia number three McSweeney will have to adapt to a new role in the five-Test series against India but Khawaja expected it to be a smooth transition.

"There's no guarantees in cricket ... but he doesn't have to do anything different," he said. "Just repeat the process. He's been

able to handle the pressure at Shield level. "That doesn't always happen straight away. You always go through ups and downs in cricket, but when you look at Nathan, you look at his demeanour, you look at the way he plays, you feel that over a longer period of time that, yes, this guy will be able to handle the scrutiny of Test cricket and the pressure of Test cricket."

"Even though there are no guarantees, I'm sure the selectors have made a calculated decision with him."

This summer's Gabba Test next month will be tied to the Usman Khawaja Foundation, which helps disadvantaged youth through education and cricket.

Squad: Pat Cummins (captain), Usman Khawaja, Nathan McSweeney, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Alex Carey, Mitchell Marsh, Josh Inglis, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland.

CRICKET

Varma hits ton as India edge South Africa in thriller

The visitors have unbeatable 2-1 lead in 4-match T20I series

Reuters
Pretoria

Tilak Varma scored a maiden Twenty20 International century with a brilliant 107 from 56 balls to help India to an 11-run victory over hosts South Africa at Centurion Park yesterday, a game that was stopped for nearly half an hour by flying ants.

India were sent in to bat and amassed an impressive 219 for six in their 20 overs, boosted by the hitting of Varma and a sprightly 50 from 25 balls by opener Abhishek Sharma.

South Africa were always behind in their chase in the face of some excellent spin bowling from Axar Patel (1-29 in four overs) and the wiles of seamer Arshdeep Singh (3-37), but a late flurry of runs got them close.

They managed 208 for seven in reply and trail India 2-1 in the four-match series with the final game to be played in Johannesburg on Friday.

Varma and Sharma put on 107 from 50 balls for the second wicket to lay the platform for the visitors as South Africa lacked discipline with the ball, conceding 10 wides and three no balls in the innings.

Varma reached his century from 51 deliveries as he struck eight fours and seven sixes.

The South African reply was an over old when the players were forced from the field for almost 30 minutes by a swarm of flying ants.

When they returned, India's spinners squeezed the run-rate in the middle overs, though the home side were kept in the contest by Marco Jansen's career-best 54 from 17 balls and Heinrich Klaasen's 41 from 22 deliveries.

When asked about the head injury Varma suffered after dropping



India's Tilak Varma celebrates after scoring a century during the third T20 international against South Africa at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday. (AFP)

ping a catch in the last over, he said: "I am okay. The catch came through the lights, so a little difficult but happy for the win."

The young Indian batsman was thrilled with his maiden century in T20 cricket.

"I couldn't imagine and I cannot put down in words. It was my dream and it was the right time to score a hundred for my team. A kind of a decider in the series. Under the pressure, it was a good knock. All credit goes to captain Suryakumar Yadav. He has given me an opportunity (at three). Before the game, he told me (that I

would bat there)," Varma said at the awards ceremony.

"I am really, really happy (he gave me that opportunity). I just wanted to express myself and back my basics. Even under pressure, I followed the basics and backed myself."

"The wicket was slightly two-paced at the start. When Abhishek was dismissed, it was not easy for the new batter. I was waiting for one partnership and that is what we were talking about. I always believe in my basics."

"The team management backs every player (to have a positive

approach)," he added.

Aiden Markram, South Africa captain, said: "Proud to get that close with some special contributions from the lower and middle order. Coming to Centurion, we knew it would be a game of really small margins. If you can win a couple of key moments here and there, you definitely give yourself a better chance."

BRIEF SCORES
India 219 for 6 (Tilak 107, Abhishek 50, Simelane 2-34) beat South Africa 208 for 7 (Jansen 54, Arshdeep 3-37) by 11 runs

3X3 BASKETBALL / U-13 LEAGUE

Al Gharafa win second round of matches

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Gharafa has emerged victorious in the second round of the 2024-2025 QBF Under-13 3X3 Basketball League, following a series of thrilling matches that showcased exceptional performances from all teams involved.

The awards ceremony for the champions was graced by Yassin Ismail, Director of the QBF 3x3 Committee, along with Abdullah Sultan al-Jaber and Mishaal Abdullah Yousef al-Malki, both members of the Federation's Board of Directors.

The tournament featured nine clubs organised into three groups: the first group comprised Al Gharafa, Qatar Club, and Al Wakrah; the second group included Al Arabi, Al Khor, and Al Rayyan; while the third group consisted of Al Sadd, Al Shamal, and Al Ahli.

The competition was intense, with clubs striving to demonstrate their capabilities and advance to the later stages, as the ultimate objective was to secure the championship in this significant round of the league.

During the group stage, notable results included Al Gharafa's

decisive win over Qatar SC with a score of 9-1, Al Rayyan's triumph over Al Khor at 12-3, and Al Sadd's overwhelming victory against Al Shamal with a score of 16-0. Other matches saw Qatar SC defeating Al Wakrah 8-3, Al Arabi overcoming Al Khor 14-7, Al Ahli besting Al Shamal 14-2, Al Gharafa winning against Al Wakrah 13-3, and Al Sadd edging out Al Ahli 12-9.

In the semi-finals, Al Gharafa secured a win against Al Ahli with a score of 12-5, while Al Sadd triumphed over Al Arabi 14-9.

In the match for third and fourth place, Al Arabi narrowly defeated Al Ahli 11-10. In the final, Al Gharafa claimed victory over Al Sadd with a score of 13-6, thereby earning the title of the second round of the tournament.

It is noteworthy that Al Gharafa also clinched the title in the first round of the tournament, showcasing a remarkable performance by defeating Al Rayyan Club 18-8 in the final match, thereby solidifying its reputation as a formidable and promising team in the realm of basketball.

Al Rayyan Club came in second place after an honourable performance in the tournament, while Al Sadd won third place by defeating Al Ahli 10-8 in the game to determine third and fourth places.



FOCUS

Pacer Joseph back from suspension but Russell to miss third T20

Reuters
Barbados

West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph returns for the third Twenty20 International against England after serving a two-match suspension but all-rounder Andre Russell will miss today's match with an ankle injury.

Joseph was suspended for storming off the field after a row with captain Shai Hope during the third One Day-International against England in Bridgetown.

"Alzarri Joseph, having completed his two-match suspension, will rejoin the squad in Saint Lucia for the crucial final leg of the series, replacing Shamar Joseph," Cricket West Indies (CWI) said in a statement.

West Indies won the ODI series 2-1 but lost the first two matches in the five-match T20 series against Jos Buttler's team. The hosts will again be without experienced all-rounder Russell, who sustained a left ankle sprain during the opening T20 in Barbados on Saturday.

West Indies T20I Squad: Rovman Powell (captain), Roston Chase,

Matthew Forde, Shimron Hetmyer, Terrance Hinds, Shai Hope, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Brandon King, Evin Lewis, Gudakesh Motie, Nicholas Pooran, Sherfane Rutherford, Romario Shepherd, Shamar Springer

Topley fined for smashing chair after injury frustration

England pacer Reece Topley has been docked 15% of his match fee for smashing a chair in frustration after picking up an injury in the first Twenty20 International against West Indies.

The left-arm quick suffered his latest injury setback on Saturday when he jarred his knee while bowling. He eventually left the field due to the injury and missed the second match. As he walked up the steps of the pavilion at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Topley picked up a chair and smashed it on the staircase handrail.

The governing International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday that Topley had breached the code of conduct article relating to "abuse of cricket equipment or clothing, ground equipment or fixtures and fittings".

In addition to the fine Topley also incurred one demerit point.

Sri Lanka beat New Zealand to go 1-0 up in ODI series

Dambulla, Sri Lanka: Kusal Mendis and Avishka Fernando both slammed centuries to set up a convincing 45-run victory for Sri Lanka in the rain-interrupted first one-day international against New Zealand yesterday. Kusal, 29, struck a career-best 143 and Avishka hit 100 as Sri Lanka posted a commanding 324-5 in 49.2 overs before rain stopped play. New Zealand, chasing a revised target of 221 off 27 overs, were restricted to 175-9 in the day-night game played at Dambulla. The Kiwis started off confidently but then lost five wickets in less than five overs for the addition of just 22 runs.

It was Maheesh Theekshana who triggered the collapse with the wickets of openers Will Young and Tim Robinson, who shared an 88-run stand off just 79 balls. Robinson fell to a sharp stumping by Kusal, and four balls later, Theekshana bowled Young to swing the momentum towards Sri Lanka. From there on, it was downhill all the way for the visitors as the rest of the batsmen failed to live up to the task.

"When you lose two set guys, it can be difficult on these wickets," said Kiwi skipper Mitchell Santner.

"We tried to keep firing shots, but if you lose wickets in clumps, it's a challenge." Earlier, Kusal and Avishka stitched together a 206-run stand off 215 balls for the highest second-wicket partnership in ODIs for Sri Lanka against New Zealand. Their effort eclipsed a 21-year-old record held by Sanath Jayasuriya and Hashan Tillakaratne, who added 170 against the Black Caps in the 2003 World Cup in Bloemfontein.

Sri Lanka batters shine

The stand was also the highest partnership for any wicket at Dambulla in ODIs. "I thought it will be tough for us (with the wet ball) and it also didn't turn too much," said Sri Lankan captain Charith Asalanka. "Avishka and Kusal batted really well and the best thing was that both of them scored hundreds." For Avishka, it was his first century since 2021, breaking a dry spell after a string of

low scores. Avishka's 115-ball knock, including nine fours and two sixes, came to an end when he was caught while attempting a sweep shot off Ish Sodhi. It was his fourth ODI hundred. Kusal's century was also his fourth in ODIs and first this year.

His knock was the highest individual score at Dambulla, surpassing India's Shikhar Dhawan's 132 in 2017. A cameo 40-run knock by Asalanka off just 28 balls capped a fine day with the bat for the islanders. It was New Zealand paceman Jacob Duffy who dismissed Kusal, caught at extra cover by Henry Nicholls.

The ODI action will next move to Pallekele where the remaining two games of the series will be played on Sunday and Tuesday.

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 324 for 5 in 49.2 overs (Kusal 143, Avishka 100, Asalanka 40, Duffy 3-41) beat New Zealand 175 for 9 in 27 overs (Young 48, Robinson 35, Bracewell 34*, Madushanka 3-39) by 45 runs (DLS method)

TENNIS

Ailing Alcaraz beats Rublev to revive Finals bid

'I felt good from the baseline running and felt I had more options'

Reuters
Turin, Italy

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz made light of feeling under the weather as he dispatched Russia's Andrey Rublev in impressive fashion to revive his ATP Finals hopes yesterday.

The Spanish four-times Grand Slam champion has been suffering with respiratory issues in Turin and wore pink nasal tape against Rublev in a resounding 6-3 7-6(8) victory.

Third seed Alcaraz, bidding to win the title for the first time, looked far sharper than during his opening group match which ended in a straight-sets defeat by Norway's Casper Ruud.

"I did surprise myself," Alcaraz, who had to abandon a practice session on Tuesday, said on court. "I just tried to focus on my game and what I had to do and not that I wasn't feeling well. Once you step on court you have to forget that."

"I felt good from the baseline running and felt I had more options today."

After sharing the opening six games, Alcaraz broke Rublev's serve with a scorching forehand winner and reeled off five successive games to seize control of the match.

World number eight Rublev, who also lost his opening match to Alexander Zverev, managed to stay with Alcaraz in the second set and could have earned a couple of break points at 2-2 had he not missed a routine ball after chasing a drop shot.

Both players served well to take the match into a high-octane tiebreak in which Alcaraz forged ahead but had to fend off two set points before sealing victory.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (left) shakes hand with Russia's Andrey Rublev after winning his match in the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. (AFP)

Rublev has now lost six successive matches at the ATP Finals in straight sets since reaching the semi-finals in 2022. Alcaraz is still likely to need to beat world number two Zverev in his last group match tomorrow to qualify. Zverev will face Ruud later on Wednesday with both players seeking their second win. Should Ruud win, he would guarantee himself a semi-final berth while Rublev would be eliminated.

None of the seven singles matches this week have gone to three sets.

BJK Cup action postponed due to extreme weather

The Billie Jean King Cup Finals in Malaga which were due to begin yesterday were postponed after

Spanish authorities issued a red weather alert for extreme rain and flooding in parts of the country, the International Tennis Federation said.

Two weeks after the worst floods in Spain's modern history killed more than 200 people, thousands have been evacuated in the Costa del Sol region of southern Spain as the new weather front is expected to bring torrential rain and low temperatures.

"Due to a severe weather alert issued by local and regional authorities, the 2024 BJK Cup Finals first round tie between Spain and Poland, originally scheduled for today, November 13 at 5 PM, has been postponed. The tie will now take place on Friday, November 15, starting at 10 AM," the ITF said

in a statement yesterday. "This decision has been made based on guidance from the relevant authorities to ensure the health and safety of all participants and attendees. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and appreciate your understanding and co-operation."

Hosts Spain were scheduled to begin the tournament against Iga Swiatek's Poland as twelve teams assembled in Andalusia to battle for the title won last year for the first time by Canada.

The last couple of days of the BJK Cup would overlap with the men's Davis Cup Finals in the same venue next week, when Spanish great Rafael Nadal is expected to play his last tournament before retiring.

PREVIEW

McIlroy aims for glory on happy hunting ground in Dubai

AFP
Dubai

Rory McIlroy gave himself an eight out of 10 for the 2024 season that promised much but delivered only two titles, but on a Dubai course where he has always brought his A-game, things can get a lot better come Sunday.

Only one player in the field - Thruston Lawrence - has enough points to prevent the world number three from winning a sixth DP World Tour Order of Merit crown to match Spanish legend Seve Ballesteros and get closer to Colin Montgomerie's all-time record of eight.

However, the South African's only chance is to win the title and hope that McIlroy finishes tied for 11th or worse.

McIlroy leads Lawrence by 1,785.02 points after finishing tied third last week in Abu Dhabi.

The winner at the season-ending \$10m DP World Tour Championship receives 2,000 points and the runner-up gets 1,335 points.

However, McIlroy rules the Greg Norman-designed Earth course with an iron fist.

He may have won only twice in 13 starts, but he is a combined 179-under-par in 13 starts (3.44-under-par each round), with two wins in 2012 and 2015 and seven other top-six finishes.

In the 56 rounds he has played on the course, he has shot only four over-par rounds. Only one player has a better record than McIlroy on this course - Jon Rahm - and he is not in the field. McIlroy said he was aiming to win the tournament for the third time and not to share the 18th green on Sunday with any other player.

Consistent, but no majors

Last year, he had already wrapped up the Order of Merit before Dubai and had a lacklustre outing, finishing tied for 22nd - his worst result in the tournament. Denmark's Nicolai Hojgaard won the biggest prize on the DP World Tour.

"I think it's a nice time to reflect on the year when you come here and you're on the cusp of doing something that, to me, is still pretty meaningful, and just thinking about the body of work you've

put together over the last 10 or 11 months," said McIlroy, who won the Hero Dubai Desert Classic at Emirates Golf Club in January this year.

"When you get to the business end of things at the end of the year, you start to realise at least I've put together a year that I'm pretty proud of, even if it hasn't culminated in some of the things that I've wanted to achieve."

McIlroy has failed to add to the number of majors under his belt, which is why he said his season was just a pass.

He said he had been "incredibly consistent" but "thinking about the ones that got away. I could be sitting up here with a fifth major title and I am not. So that stings and that's something that I have to come to terms with?"

"You've got two guys at the top of the World Rankings with Xander (Schauffele) winning two majors and Scottie (Scheffler) winning a Masters and a Players and the Olympics.

"They certainly separated themselves from the pack this year. I'm very aware of that, and it only makes me more motivated to try to emulate what they did this year."

Lawrence has his own score to settle with the course. He made three birdies in his final three holes on Sunday of last year's DP World Tour Championship, but that fell agonisingly short by one shot in his effort to secure one of the 10 PGA Tour cards on offer. At least he won't have to worry about that as he is guaranteed to be in the top 10 regardless of his finish this week.

"It's nice to have a chance. It's going to take a lot. I need to win and Rory probably needs to finish outside the top 10," said the 27-year-old world number 47, who has five runners-up finishes this season. "Rory has been an idol for me since growing up as a youngster and being able to clinch it this week would be the cherry on the cake for myself."

"Knowing that I already have my PGA Tour card is a great feeling. That was one of my main targets all year. I have always wanted to play in America."

Only the top 50 players from the DP World Tour's season-long Race to Dubai qualify for the DP World Tour Championship.

COMMENT

Medvedev calls for overhaul of ATP calendar

Reuters
Turin, Italy

World number four Daniil Medvedev said the ATP Tour calendar needs to be refocused around the Grand Slams and Masters 1000 events with the lower-tier ATP 250 tournaments moved to an optional slot later in the year.

Several players have voiced concerns over the calendar, with four-times Grand Slam winner Carlos Alcaraz saying the tight

schedule makes it difficult to stay motivated throughout the year and increases the risk of injuries. From next season, seven of the nine ATP Masters 1000 events will be held across 12 days, a decision which was criticised by Stefanos Tsitsipas last week. "This year I only tried to play big tournaments," Medvedev told reporters after his win over Alex De Minaur at the ATP Finals on Tuesday.

"I think there should be more bigger, important tournaments, which should be like, 'Okay, these are the tournaments where we define who is going to be top 10, like Masters 1000."

"You play good in them, you will be there. The schedule should somehow be around them." Reuters has contacted the ATP Tour for comment.

Medvedev suggested staging the top tournaments earlier in the year, adding: "Then you put all the 250s after for people that want to continue playing."

"If you're good enough, you finish the season in whatever, October, play in Masters. Doesn't matter. Don't count the tournaments after. If you still feel like you need more points for Australian Open or more matches, you do it after."

LIV Golf adds events in South Korea, Indiana to 2025 schedule

NEW YORK: LIV Golf is adding events in South Korea and the Indianapolis area to its 2025 schedule.

The league announced yesterday tournaments to be played at the Jack Nicklaus Golf Club Korea and at The Club at Chatham Hills in Westfield, Indiana. "LIV Golf is growing across the globe in new and returning markets, and our 2025 schedule is a testament to that," said Greg Norman, LIV Golf commissioner and CEO.

"Bringing LIV Golf to South Korea is another significant milestone as we continue to expand throughout Asia, and our inaugu-

gural event in Indy will be a perfect match for a community steeped in sports history and tradition."

The tour will stop in South Korea May 2-4 at the Nicklaus club in Incheon, where the 2015 Presidents Cup was played. It is one of four Asian stops in 2025.

LIV Golf Indianapolis is set for Aug. 15-17 and will be the final individual event on the calendar.

Players will battled for the 2025 LIV Golf League championship there, also looking to secure their positions for 2026. Team-event seedings also will be determined there.



The league also unveiled the dates for four of its returning tournaments: **June 27-29:** LIV Golf Dallas, Maridoe Golf

Club

July 11-13: LIV Golf Andalucia, Real Club Valderrama (San Roque, Spain)

July 25-27: LIV Golf UK, JCB Golf and Country Club (Rocester, England)

Aug. 8-10: LIV Golf Chicago, Bolingbrook Golf Club

Play in the league's third season begins Feb. 6-8 at LIV Golf Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

LIV Golf has released the dates and locations of 10 of its 14 tournaments on the league's 2025 schedule, with further announcements expected soon.

In September, the LIV Golf League completed its second full, 14-tournament

season, won by 2024 Team Champion, Ripper GC (Captain Cameron Smith, Matt Jones, Lucas Herbert and Marc Leishman) and 2024 Individual Champion, Legion XIII Captain Jon Rahm.

The League recently announced details for LIV Golf Promotions, taking place December 12-14 at Riyadh Golf Club, presenting exciting pathways for elite players from across the globe to earn their place in the League and The International Series for 2025. The League's third official campaign tees off February in marquee global markets across Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

FOCUS

Hugely popular Qatar Sand Drag Race Competition set to commence today



Action from last edition of Qatar Sand Drag Race Competition.

Doha
By Sports Reporter

The first round of the Qatar Sand Drag Race Competition will commence today under the patronage of HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Racing Club (QRC), at the club's dedicated sand drag strip opposite Sealine Resort.

Preparations for the two-day competition have been underway since the beginning of the month to prepare the track, set up surrounding facilities, and install

spectator stands, with a strong emphasis on ensuring safety, a fundamental standard for all the club's championships.

According to the competition schedule, the technical inspection is set to begin at 3:00pm today for the categories participating in the first day's events. Competing categories include three types of four-wheeled ATV or quad bikes (modified, pro modified, and open class), along with three categories of UTVs or Polaris vehicles (stock, modified, and open). Additionally, children's Polaris vehicles and two-wheeled motocross bikes will

participate. Tomorrow, registration also begins at 3:00pm for that day's categories, which include two types of buggies and cars equipped with either 6-cylinder or 8-cylinder engines in all classes, along with the pickup category, formerly known as the Hilux class last year. The competitions will start at 5:00pm on both days.

According to the competition structure, each competitor is given two attempts to complete the approximately 300-foot-long strip. The first attempt will be made by all participants, followed by the second attempt. Registration will

remain open until the end of the first attempt for all categories. The best time for each competitor will be recorded to determine the final ranking in each category.

This year, under the direction of Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, Director of Qatar Racing Club, the number of Sealine Sand Drag Competition rounds has been increased to five.

The first round begins today, with the second and third rounds following immediately. After a break, the competition will resume with the fourth and fifth rounds in March and April 2025.

SPOTLIGHT

LIC and F1 Academy launch educational initiative

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail International Circuit (LIC) in collaboration with F1 Academy has successfully concluded an ambitious educational outreach programme in Qatar, during F1 Academy's testing event at LIC, connecting the next generation of motorsport talent with students across multiple prestigious educational institutions.

The F1 Academy testing event, which began on Tuesday and will conclude today, included an engaging programme on the first day where school students in Qatar, aged 13-17, explored diverse career paths and opportunities in motorsport.

LIC and F1 Academy designed a carefully curated series of events

to inspire and educate the school students. On Tuesday, November 12, 60 students participated in an immersive Pit Lane Walk experience for two hours, providing first-hand exposure to the technical and operational aspects of motorsport.

A highlight of the collaborative programme was the karting session yesterday, where 15 students from Qatar Motorsports Academy had the opportunity to experience hands-on motorsport activity under professional guidance at LIC's world-class facilities.

The F1 Academy's full driver roster participated in the programme, demonstrating both organizations' commitment to inspiring the next generation of female talent in motorsport.

Their presence provided students with unique perspectives on professional racing careers and the

evolving landscape of opportunities for women in motorsport.

"What we've achieved here in Qatar goes beyond traditional outreach," said Pilar Harris, F1 Social Impact Lead.

"Through this collaboration with LIC, we're creating tangible connections between classroom learning and real-world motorsport careers. It's about showing young people, especially young women, that there's a place for them in this industry – whether that's behind the wheel, in engineering, or in team management."

Fatima al-Qaedi, Marketing and Communications Manager at LIC, added: "At LIC, we're proud to partner with F1 Academy in this transformative educational initiative. By opening our doors to Qatar's young talents, we aim not to just showcase the exciting world of motorsport – but to also

actively invest in the future of our sport and our nation's youth. This programme aligns perfectly with our commitment to fostering local talent and creating meaningful opportunities in motorsport."

The programme will culminate in a Race Week Career Discovery Program, where selected students will gain unprecedented access to behind-the-scenes operations during the actual race weekend in Qatar.

The F1 Academy returns to Lusail International Circuit during the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024, for their penultimate race of the season on November 30.

Sixty students participated in a pit lane walk experience with F1 Academy drivers at the Lusail International Circuit.



FOOTBALL

Japan, South Korea face away tests on road to World Cup

'We are playing both games away and I think it will be tough'

AFP
Hong Kong

Japan can take a major step towards the 2026 World Cup over the next week if they can negotiate away tests at Indonesia and China in the space of five days.

Son Heung-min's South Korea will also look to close on a spot at the showpiece in North America as they travel to Kuwait today and then face Palestine in Jordan next week.

Meanwhile Herve Renard, who masterminded a famous victory over eventual champions Argentina at the Qatar World Cup, takes charge of Saudi Arabia for the first time since returning to the job.

An estimated 78,000 will pack out the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in the Indonesian capital Jakarta in hope of seeing the hosts pull off a shock on Friday.

Hajime Moriyasu's Japan will then need to face down another hostile crowd when they travel to Xiamen on Tuesday to play China.

"If you look at the FIFA rankings and the games in the World Cup qualifiers so far, you might think that the advantage is with Japan," said coach Moriyasu.

"But we are playing both games away and I think it will be tough."

With the third Asian qualifying round nearing the halfway point, Japan are five points clear at the top of Group C from Australia and



Japan midfielder Wataru Endo trains in Jakarta yesterday, ahead of his team's 2026 World Cup qualifying match against Indonesia.

Saudi Arabia, who face each other today. The top two from each of the three groups go straight to the World Cup.

China and Indonesia occupy the bottom two spots in Group C but are not out of the reckoning as teams finishing third and fourth

will advance to a further qualifying stage.

Moriyasu has called up Celtic's Kyogo Furuhashi for the first time in a year after first-choice striker Ayase Ueda was injured.

Australia host Saudi Arabia in Melbourne with both nations on

five points after four games. The Socceroos then travel to Bahrain the following Tuesday when the Saudis will play in Indonesia.

Frenchman Renard, 56, is back for a second spell with Saudi Arabia following the sacking last month of Roberto Mancini.

Like Japan, South Korea are on course for 2026, three points clear at the top of Group B.

They welcome back captain and talisman Son after he missed victories over Iraq and Asian Cup runners-up Jordan last month with a hamstring injury.

Coach Hong Myung-bo has hinted that he may manage the 32-year-old forward's workload by restricting his playing time against the bottom two teams in the group, Kuwait and Palestine.

"People say the next two opponents are underdogs, but I think these will be extremely tough matches," said Hong.

"I can absolutely say these matches will be even more important than the ones we played in October," he added.

Iran lead Uzbekistan on goal difference at the top of Group A, six points clear of the United Arab Emirates in third. It will be top against bottom when Iran take on North Korea in the Laotian capital Vientiane today.

Uzbekistan visit Asian champions Qatar, who lie fourth following a slow start to the third qualifying stage, while the UAE host fifth-placed Kyrgyzstan.

Qatar archers impress at West Asian Championship



The Qatari national archery team claimed seven medals – one gold, one silver, and five bronze – in an impressive showing at the first-ever West Asian Archery Championship in Buraydah, Saudi Arabia. In the U-18 archery mixed team event, Qatar's Ahmed al-Sada and Reem al-Saei clinched the gold, showcasing their outstanding teamwork and skill. For the U-18 men's archery team competition, Ahmed al-Sada, Omar Larem, and Khamis al-Nasser won silver medal, while the U-18 women's team – Reem al-Saei, Sharifa al-Obaidli, and Fatima al-Amri – claimed bronze. Al-Sada also brought home a bronze medal in the U-18 men's individual category, while al-Saei secured another bronze for Qatar in the U-18 women's individual competition. In the women's individual compound archery, Aisha al-Saai won bronze, adding to Qatar's medal tally. Al-Saei, Aisha al-Azzizi, and Sarah al-Obaidan further contributed to Qatar's success, winning bronze in the women's team compound archery event.



HORSE RACING

Return To Senders clinches Rowdat Rashid Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Return To Senders, in the colours of Nasser Saeed M S al-Eida, won the Rowdat Rashid Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The Jassim Ghazali-trained seven-year-old bay quickened up smartly inside the final strides under Marco Casamento and got up to win with a nose to spare ahead of Salem Fadgam al-Hajri and Sons' Secret Victory.

Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, presented the trophies to the winners.

In the penultimate race of the day, Jassim bin Ali MA al-Attiyah's Keel Bay won the 1,200m race for the three-year-old+ Thoroughbred Fillies and Mares.

Jockey Tomas Lukasek also completed a that-trick of win as he guided Sharida bin Nasser bin Sharida al-Kaabi-owned and Hamad al-Jehani-trained Roma to the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-90) (Fillies & Mares) race for three-year-old+.

Earlier in the day, Lukasek rode



Connections of Return To Senders celebrate after the seven-year-old horse won Rowdat Rashid Cup at the Al Rayyan Park yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim

Khalid Rashid G K al-Mohanna-di-owned and Rashid al-Jehani-trained Blazing Sunset to victory in the 1,900m race for the three-year-old+ Thoroughbred Handicap (55-75).

Lukasek was in the winners' enclosure as he won the 1,200m card-opener - Local Thorough-

bred Handicap (40-60) for three-year-old+ - with Injaaz Stud's Mutamarrid by a margin of five lengths and a quarter.

RESULTS
3rd Al Rayyan Race meeting - Rowdat Rashid Cup
(Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1 - Rowdat Rashid Cup - Thoroughbred Handicap 85-105 (Class 2)
Return To Senders, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento
2 - Thoroughbred (Fillies & Mares) (Class 2)
Keel Bay, Mohammed Ghazali, Faleh Bughanaim



Marco Casamento guided Return To Senders to the Rowdat Rashid Cup win yesterday.

3 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 65-90 (Fillies & Mares) (Class 3)
Roma, Hamad al-Jehani, Tomas Lukasek
4 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 50-70 (Class 5)
Jadal, Ahmed Kobeissi, Ivan Rossi
5 - Thoroughbred Handicap 55-75 (Class 5)

Blazing Sunset, Rashid al Jehani, Tomas Lukasek
6 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6)
Washeek, Hamad al-Jehani, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi
7 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 40-60 (Class 4)
Mutamarid, Jihad El Ahmad, Tomas Lukasek