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Son hits 50th South Korea goal in win, Saudi hold Australia

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TENNIS

Fritz beats De Minaur to eye ATP Finals last four, Sinner through

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**WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS**

# Mendes' last-minute heroics help Qatar edge Uzbekistan

The result moves Qatar up to seven points and to within three of second-placed Uzbekistan

By **Sahan Bidappa**  
Doha

**L**ucas Mendes' stunning stoppage-time strike breathed life into Qatar's 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign as the hosts eked out a crucial 3-2 win against Uzbekistan in a thrilling encounter last night.

Qatar were in familiar territory at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium when they let slip a two-goal advantage – courtesy of a first-half brace from Almoez Ali – as Uzbekistan drew level through twin headers from Abbosbek Fayzullaev.

But Mendes saved Qatar's blushes with a dramatic winner in the dying seconds as the defender's left-footed shot hit the post and sneaked into the net. The result moves Qatar up to seven points from five matches and to within three of second-placed Uzbekistan. However, Qatar are still in fourth place behind on goal difference to United Arab Emirates, who they play next in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday. Iran, meanwhile, have pulled ahead to 13 points to lead Group A after their comeback win over North Korea in Vientiane earlier in the day.

On the eve of the match, Qatar coach Marquez Lopez had rallied his players to 'fight till their last breath'. While they fought till the end, there were glimpses of sloppiness last night which had cost them victories against North Korea, UAE and Iran. Even as Mendes had his hand over his head in disbelief as the ball crashed into the net, sending his teammates, support staff and entire stadium into delirium, Lopez swiftly disappeared into the tunnel shaking his head.

The Spanish coach clearly was not happy with Qatar's performance, when they nearly gifted their opponents the match after surrendering a two-goal lead.

Almoez, who combined beautifully with player of the match Akram Afif for both goals, admitted their performance dropped in the second half. "It was a challenging game. We made it difficult ourselves after taking a two-goal lead. Our performance dipped in the second half but we made a strong comeback and scored a later winner. These are three precious points and we hope to maintain our winning form," the Al Duhail forward said.

Qatar were without Abdelkarim Hassan and Edmilson Junior, unsurprisingly, as neither had featured in training on the eve of the match due to injuries.

Uzbekistan too were dealt a severe blow as captain Eldor Shomurodov limped out of the field in the 21st minute after holding his groin with the Roma striker visibly shaken and in tears.

It was a stop-start game, with neither side creating enough momentum to threaten each other's defence until Asian FC Player of the Year Afif produced a sublime pass in the 25th minute. The Al Sadd star beat at least four Uzbek defenders after a counterattack to find an on-rushing Almoez, whose hit brushed goalkeeper Utkir Yusupov's hand but there was enough pace on the ball to take it over the line.

Meshaal Barsham denied Fayzullaev an equaliser 10 minutes later after the CSKA Moscow shot was saved smartly by the Qatar goalkeeper. The visitors were still ruing that miss, before Qatar doubled their lead four minutes remaining for half time as the Afif-Almoez combination paid off again.



Star striker Akram Afif holds the Qatar flag as he celebrates with teammates after Al Annabi's thrilling victory over Uzbekistan in the 2026 World Cup qualifying match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday. **PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil**



Defender Lucas Mendes (centre) scored in the 12th minute of injury time to breathe life back into the Asian champions' World Cup qualifying campaign.

Afif delivered a low, curling ball to the edge of the six-yard box from a free kick taken 25 yards out, and Ali slipped between two Uzbekistan defenders to finish, leaving Yusupov stranded.

Azizbek Turgunboev almost pulled one

back for Uzbekistan a minute before half-time, unleashing a shot destined for the top corner, but Barsham made a spectacular save, tipping the ball over the bar. Early in the second half, Otobek Shukurov dragged a shot wide with an improvised heel flick



Almoez Ali celebrates after scoring his second goal yesterday.

go, Fayzullaev took advantage of Khojiakbar Alijonov's inviting cross from the right, diving in to halve the deficit. Just five minutes later, Fayzullaev struck again, heading home from Jaloliddin Masharipov's delivery, igniting celebrations on the Uzbekistan bench.

There were nervous scenes in the Qatar camp after a VAR check for a red card on Mohammed Waad for his foul on Fayzullaev in the 88th minute. Boualem Khoukhi too seemed to suffer from muscle strain, while Abdullah al-Yazidi twisted his ankle, which meant 12 minutes were added into injury time. And that set up a dramatic ending, which Mendes won't forget in a hurry. While al-Yazidi made it back to the pitch on a painful limp, Khoukhi too summed up his every last energy to head the ball into the path of unmarked Mendes, who took a shot with his second touch as the ball crashed onto the post.

While Qatar's players and fans celebrated with joy, the Uzbek players sank to their haunches, their comeback effort in vain. Uzbekistan coach Srecko Katanec was not pleased with his team's performance. "Luck eluded us as we lost in the last moment of the match. The match was tough as we expected but we didn't put up a required performance," he said. "We recovered well after conceding two goals but conceded a fatal goal at the last moment. This is what football is."



Qatar's Abdulaziz Hatem (left) and Tarek Salman fight for the ball with Uzbekistan's Jaloliddin Masharipov.



Abbosbek Fayzullaev scored a pair of headers in the space of five minutes to bring Uzbekistan back into the game.



An Uzbekistan player can't hide his disappointment after heart-breaking defeat to Qatar at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

BOXING

# Legend Tyson, 58, back in ring to face YouTuber Paul

Fans divided about the outcome as boxing world turns attention to home venue of the Dallas Cowboys

AFP  
Los Angeles, United States

Nearly 40 years after making his professional debut, and 19 years after being battered into retirement, a 58-year-old Mike Tyson will climb back into the ring today for a Netflix-backed bout that has drawn widespread condemnation across the boxing world.

Tyson, who terrorised the heavyweight division during an imperious reign in the late 1980s, is lacing up the gloves once more to take on YouTuber Jake Paul, 27, in an officially sanctioned fight at AT&T Stadium, the home of the Dallas Cowboys, in Arlington, Texas.

The fight, which will be comprised of eight two-minute rounds, was initially due to take place in July but was postponed in May after Tyson required medical treatment on a flight from Miami to Los Angeles after vomiting blood due to a bleeding ulcer.

That gory mid-air emergency has provided another piece of ammunition for the numerous critics who have condemned today's contest as a macabre circus act that poses an unacceptable level of risk for Tyson, who last graced a professional ring in 2005, when he was beaten via a technical knockout after quitting on his stool against Irish journeyman Kevin McBride.

**'It shouldn't be happening'**  
<!-- closing bold italic -->Twenty years ago, Mike Tyson retired from

boxing, and was shot to pieces, right? I mean, completely shot," the prominent British fight promoter Eddie Hearn said this week.

"If anyone thinks that Mike Tyson should be in a ring at this age, you either have absolutely no emotional feelings toward the man, or you're an idiot. It shouldn't be happening."

Hearn's rival promoter Frank Warren echoed those sentiments.

"Mike Tyson is 58 years of age and he shouldn't be fighting," Warren said after the bout was announced. "It's as simple as that."

"Anyone with an ounce of brains knows that it is ridiculous. You can be on a motorway stuck in a traffic jam and you get to the end of it and all it is people who have stopped to look at a crash - and that's what this is."

Tyson, who US reports say is being paid around \$20mn for today's contest, has brushed off the concerns for his well-being, insisting when critics from the boxing world are motivated by jealousy.

"I'm beautiful, that's all I can say," he said earlier this year. "The people who said that wish they were up here. No-one else can do this."

At an open workout in Texas this week, Tyson declared that a gruelling training camp had left him with the conviction "that I'm tougher than I believed I was. When I agreed to this fight and started training, I thought 'What was I thinking of?' But I've finished the process. The fight is the party. All the hard work is done."



Jake Paul (right) and Mike Tyson pose after the final press conference for their heavyweight fight at Toyota Music Factory in Irving, Texas. (AFP)

At a final press conference in Texas on Wednesday, a stony-faced Tyson pointedly declined to engage in the pre-fight hype. "I'm just ready to fight," he said.

"I'm looking forward to fighting"

**Injury fears**  
A global audience of several million watching on Netflix, and tens

of thousands inside the AT&T Stadium, will be watching today to see whether Tyson's hard work pays off.

His opponent Paul - who was

born six months before Tyson bit off a chunk of Evander Holyfield's ear in their infamous 1997 rematch - rose to prominence as a YouTuber, before turning his attention to boxing.

Since his first fight against a fellow YouTuber in 2018, Paul's opponents have included a basketball player, mixed martial arts fighters and other professional boxers. In 11 fights he has won 10 (seven by knockout) and lost one.

"I feel really good, sharp, powerful and explosive. It's going to be a short night for Mike," Paul said at Tuesday's open workout, where he appeared wearing a bizarre head-dress in the form of a rooster.

It goes without saying that a prime, 1980s-era Tyson would almost certainly have dealt with Paul within a few minutes.

Does he retain enough residue of the talent and destructive power that made him the youngest heavyweight champion in history in 1986, at the age of 20 years and four months?

Bob Arum, the legendary 92-year-old boxing promoter who has seen it all, is unequivocal.

"The answer is no," Arum told *Secondsout.com* last month. "A 58-year-old guy, no matter how good they were, no matter how athletic they were, are not gonna be able to fight."

"You can't throw punches like you're supposed to, you can't do a lot of things."

"I hope Mike doesn't get hurt, but I really give him relatively no chance."

CRICKET

# Australia crush Pakistan in truncated T20 clash

AFP  
Brisbane, Australia

Veteran batter Glenn Maxwell returned to form before quicks Xavier Bartlett and Nathan Ellis claimed three wickets apiece as Australia downed Pakistan by 29 runs in a truncated T20I series-opener in Brisbane yesterday.

The match was reduced to a contest with seven overs per side after a delayed start due to heavy rain and lightning.

After Maxwell's blistering 43 off 19 balls powered a shorthanded Australia to an imposing 93-4, Pakistan's batting-order crumbled under lights to finish well short on 64-9.

Ellis and Bartlett, who both enjoyed successful comebacks to the side after recent injuries, led an aggressive attack.

It was a resounding performance from an Australia side missing several top players, who are preparing for the upcoming blockbuster Test series against India.

"We almost had our bags packed because we thought we wouldn't get a game in," Maxwell said. "We certainly had a lot of fun out there."

The series shifts to the Sydney Cricket Ground tomorrow before the finale in Hobart on Monday.

"It's difficult to keep things normal in this type of match because it went very fast," Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan said.

Under the revised playing conditions, bowlers were not allowed to bowl more than two overs each in a match that started more than



Australia's Glenn Maxwell plays a shot during the first Twenty20 international against Pakistan at The Gabba in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

two hours after schedule due to thunderstorms that have lashed Brisbane in recent days.

Pakistan had been buoyed after a surprising recent 2-1 ODI series victory ended a 22-year drought against the Australians in Australia. But after new T20 captain Rizwan elected to bowl, Pakistan's in-form fast bowlers were under siege against Australia's aggressive batters going for broke.

Openers Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short set the tone by smashing 16 runs off the first over.

Fraser-McGurk (9) fell off the

first ball in the second over by quick Naseem Shah before Maxwell took over with four boundaries in his first six deliveries faced.

Maxwell's trademark inventiveness came to the fore as he smashed in-form quick Harris Rauf, his tormentor in the ODI series, for a huge six over deep mid-wicket.

The 36-year-old appeared headed for a half-century before holing out to paceman Abbas Afridi in the sixth over.

Allrounder Marcus Stoinis finished Australia's innings strongly

with an unbeaten 21 off seven balls.

In reply, Pakistan opener Saibzada Farhan signalled his intent with consecutive boundaries off left-arm quick Spencer Johnson to start the innings.

But he fell two balls later after miscuing a pull short and Pakistan's chase quickly nosedived.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Australia 93 for 4** (Maxwell 43, Stoinis 21\*, Afridi 20\*) **beat Pakistan 64 for 9** (Afridi 20\*, Ellis 3-9, Bartlett 3-13) **by 29 runs.**

EQUESTRIAN

# 2nd edition of Al Shaqab League on December 13-14

Al Shaqab proudly announces the return of the Al Shaqab League, an elite equestrian competition designed to foster young talent and promote excellence in horsemanship. Set to take place at the prestigious Longines Indoor Arena in Al Shaqab from December 13-14, 2024, the league provides aspiring riders under 25 with a supportive, competitive platform to showcase their skills.

This year's edition promises an enriched experience with international competitions, engaging activities for families, and a welcoming environment for all attendees.

The Al Shaqab League offers young male and female riders the opportunity to advance their equestrian careers within an inclusive and equitable framework.

The league's focus on Future Champions, Junior Champions, Youth Champions, Ladies Class, Amateur Class, and Al Shaqab Champions categories ensures that riders at every level have the chance to excel.

In addition, the 2024-2025 season introduces a Team Competition and a new element with the Team Competition Draw, where each team will proudly bear the name of a legendary Al Shaqab Champion Horses.

Teams will compete under names that resonate with Al Shaqab's heritage, including champion stallions like Marwan, Al Adeer, Gazal, Wadi, Farhoud, Kahil, Hariry, Afreen, Siwar, and Shahalel.

This unique feature not only celebrates these iconic champions but also fosters a sense of pride and unity among participants as they compete to honour the legacy of these champions.

For this season please Al Shaqab

welcomed new sponsors: DAAM, Exxonmobil, Al Kass and kobeco concept. Al Shaqab International League Showjumping event qualifies riders for the International Equestrian Federation's Group VII Championship Final, giving young athletes the platform to represent Al Shaqab on the world stage.

With three international competitions included, this season expands the league's reach and impact, reinforcing Al Shaqab's status as a hub for regional and global equestrian talent.

The league's training and competition categories include Introductory Classes: Intro Class 1, Intro Class 2, Intro Class 3 and Main Categories: Future Champions, Junior Champions, Young Champions, and a Ladies' Category specifically for amateur female riders. These young equestrians embody the sportsmanship and excellence that Al Shaqab strives to instil in the community.

In celebration of last season's exceptional talents, Al Shaqab League proudly recognizes the champions of the 2023 League categories: Women's Category - Maryam Jassim al-Suwaidi, Future Champions - Mohammed Faisal al-Kahla, Junior Category Champions - Mohammed Faisal al-Kahla and Amer Hamad al-Mansoori, Youth Category Champions - Amer Hamad al-Mansoori.

Beyond the competitions, the Al Shaqab League will include the Hayakum Festival, featuring a variety of entertaining activities suitable for children and families, along with numerous food and beverage options provided by various cafes and restaurants for the audience, making it an ideal outing for both kids and adults to enjoy and immerse themselves in this unique equestrian event in Qatar.

## ICC in talks with boards over non-payment of T20 World Cup dues to players

**Dubai:** The governing International Cricket Council (ICC) is in talks with several boards which have yet to pay prize money from this year's Twenty20 World Cup to the players, sources told Reuters yesterday. India beat South Africa in the final to win the tournament, which was co-hosted by the US and West Indies in June. The World Cricketers' Association (WCA) said in a statement that some cases of non-payment of the prize money have been paired with "threatening and intimidatory behaviour" by national governing bodies to player groups.

A source told Reuters that the ICC has taken up the issue with five boards of the 20 participating countries to ensure players were paid in a timely manner. Earlier, WCA CEO Tom Moffat said the global players' body was "extremely concerned... with a number of threats made against players who stand up for themselves and their colleagues in some cricket environments." "We appreciate the ICC's efforts to date in ensuring the players involved are paid in full and are certain the ICC will continue to take all appropriate steps against any Boards who do not do so and to enforce their terms of

participation," Moffat said in the statement. "Every player in our sport should receive the benefits they are entitled to in full, and should be provided with a safe environment to play, work, and advocate for themselves and their colleagues off the field, through a players' association if they choose." The WCA released the statement after the board met this week in Singapore for its annual general meeting, where they also launched a Global Player Hardship Fund. The fund was created to support international players in need "who are not covered by the game's existing domestic frameworks for support."



TENNIS

# Fritz overcomes De Minaur test in Turin three-setter

'WHAT I DID A GREAT JOB OF WAS IN THE SECOND SET'

Reuters  
Turin, Italy

**T**aylor Fritz moved closer to the semis of the season-ending ATP Finals after the American beat Alex de Minaur 5-7 6-4 6-3 in their last group game yesterday, but he will have to wait and see if Jannik Sinner can take a set off Daniil Medvedev.

The match also marked the first time a deciding set was played at this year's tournament as Fritz bounced back from a set down with a dominant display in the second before running away with the third set.

US Open runner-up Fritz can qualify for the final four if Sinner takes a set in his match against Medvedev. But the American will be eliminated if Medvedev beats Sinner in straight sets.

Seventh seed De Minaur, meanwhile, goes home without winning a single match in the IIE Nastase group on his tournament debut.

"He was all over me (in the first set). What I did a great job of was in the second set, towards the end of the second set, I really started to find my serve," Fritz said.

"I started serving much better and then that allowed me to just stay with it and create more pressure on his service games... It just gave me a little bit of comfort to just stay in the match and not



Taylor Fritz of the US celebrates winning his singles group stage match against Australia's Alex de Minaur at the ATP Finals in Inalpi Arena, Turin, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)

be under so much pressure all the time."

The two played some entertaining tennis in the opening set, including a 30-shot rally which De Minaur won with a passing shot while Fritz walked back to the baseline with a wry smile.

De Minaur converted the all-important break at 5-5 and served for the set, sealing it with an

ace, which also confirmed world number one Sinner as the first semi-finalist.

De Minaur, however, needed to win the second set comfortably to stand a chance of advancing to the semi-finals and the Australian saw his slim hopes of going through evaporate when Fritz levelled the score at one set apiece.

That was all the motivation a

fired-up Fritz needed as he raced into a 4-1 lead to gain control of the decider while De Minaur crumbled. At 5-3, Fritz had three match points and took the contest with an ace.

"I think all of us are pretty beat up, but if I'm in the semis of the World Tour finals, I've got energy to give it for the semis," Fritz added.

MOTORSPORT

# Bagnaia says he will be happy for Martin if he takes his MotoGP crown



Prima Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin celebrates with his trophy on the podium after finishing second as winner Ducati Lenovo Team's Francesco Bagnaia looks on at the Malaysian Grand Prix at Sepang International Circuit on November 3, 2024. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Barcelona

**R**eigning MotoGP champion Francesco Bagnaia has the odds stacked against him in the championship going into the final race of the season in Barcelona, but said yesterday he would not hold it against title rival Jorge Martin if the Spaniard wins.

Ducati's Bagnaia, who won the riders championship in the past two seasons, sits 24 points behind Pramac Racing's Martin ahead of the Solidarity Grand Prix.

The final race is being held in Barcelona, which already hosted a Grand Prix in May, after catastrophic floods in Valencia forced organisers to move the season finale.

Bagnaia has won 10 races but has also crashed out many times, while Martin's consistency to finish on podiums and also winning several sprint races on Saturdays gave him a healthy lead in the championship.

Martin only needs to win the sprint tomorrow to be crowned MotoGP champion for the first time and Bagnaia said he would be happy for his former Moto3 teammate to win the premier class crown.

"In terms of mistakes, I did a

lot. If you want to be a champion, you have to be more precise, more consistent and Jorge was more consistent than me," Bagnaia told reporters.

"But in terms of race results, it's clear that we (Ducati) did a better job, because I won 10 races on Sunday, six races on Saturday. So in terms of pure results, we did a very good job, but I think both of us are deserving the title.

"But in case Jorge wins the title, I will be happy for him because we've known each other for a long time. I'm happy that a rider I know very well is deserving of the title."

Bagnaia won the Catalunya Grand Prix in May but the Italian had crashed out on the final lap of the sprint when he was leading the race.

The 27-year-old also said he would not resort to mind games, like Martin did in Valencia last year when the Spaniard was behind him in the title race ahead of the final Grand Prix.

"The only thing I will do is if he starts behind me, I will not push because from my side, mind games are not working. So I never did it and I will continue doing my job," Bagnaia said. "I think Jorge understood from the experience last year that he just lost time by doing that. So I think it's better to do your job, prepare perfectly and then decide it in the race."

GOLF

# Gutsy McIlroy shares lead, strengthens Dubai title bid

Reuters  
Dubai

**R**ory McIlroy boosted his bid for a third straight Race to Dubai title and sixth overall by seizing a share of the lead yesterday after the first round of the DP World Tour Championship.

McIlroy, of Northern Ireland, carded six birdies against one bogey to finish with a 5-under 67. The 35-year-old sank a 50-foot putt for birdie on the par-3 17th hole to join Englishman Tyrrell Hatton atop the season-ending event at the Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai. The third-ranked McIlroy would win the year-long points race with at least a 10th place finish at this event.

South African Thruston Lawrence, who needs to win the event and have McIlroy finish outside the top 10, stumbled out of the blocks and shot an opening-round 73 yesterday. He is tied for 37th in the 50-golfer field in the United Arab Emirates.

"Yeah, I'm under no illusions that that was probably Thruston's worst day," McIlroy said. "If he



Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy eyes the ball after playing a shot on the first hole during the DP World Tour Championship at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai yesterday. (AFP)

goes out and has three good ones, I still need to go out there and play some very solid golf."

McIlroy, however, said he has interest outside of the points race.

"I want to go on from here and win the golf tournament," he said.

"I've opened up with a really good score but I need to go out and play similarly over these next three days, not just to try to win the tournament but also to try to get the job done in the Race to Dubai."

McIlroy last hoisted a trophy in May after winning the Wells Fargo Championship. Hatton will have a say in that, even though he wasn't too impressed with his own round yesterday with seven birdies and two bogeys.

"To be honest I feel like the score was better than it felt. I felt I was tinkering over most tee shots and at times, I felt like my misses were bigger than perhaps they have been over the last month

or so, month and a half," Hatton said. "But at the end of the day, to shoot 5-under, you have to, I guess, play fairly solid golf. And in my head, I don't really know what that is. But here we are."

Englishman Paul Waring is one stroke behind the leaders yesterday on the heels of winning in Abu Dhabi last week. Billy Horschel and Australian Adam Scott each shot a 69 to reside in a seven-way tie for fourth place.

He believes the IOC is a movement that needs modernising.

"Change is necessary, but not at the risk of destabilising. We are in a fast-changing landscape and I'm not sure you would call it radical reform," he said.

"It needs change in the way it approaches its commercial partnerships, in its broadcast model and it needs to empower the athletes.

"It certainly needs to do more to engage young people, particularly in wanting to pick up sport and use it as a way of life."

As a long-time politician, Coe is used to how big organisations can stifle innovation and he is desperate to make better use of the "outstanding talent" in the organisation.

"At the moment, I don't think we are utilising the undoubted skills of much of that membership in helping shape that direction," he said.

"And that's where I see a shift and a change in our governance structures, allowing voices not just to be heard, but actually to be acted upon."

When the IOC took over the running of amateur boxing for the Paris Olympics, however, that lack of clarity was thrust into the spotlight by the gold medal success of Algeria's Imane Khelif and Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting, who had previously been banned after adverse sex chromosome tests.

"I felt uncomfortable with that," Coe said.

## F1 to race in Monaco until 2031 with new June date

**Monaco:** Formula One's iconic Monaco Grand Prix will remain on the calendar until at least 2031 after a six-year extension was announced yesterday with a date change to June that also avoids future clashes with the Indianapolis 500.

The race around the streets of Monte Carlo was part of the first world championship season in 1950 and has been present since 1950, with the exception of 2020 during the global pandemic. Formula One said the race would be held on the first full weekend in June from 2026 onwards, moving from the end of May date that has also historically overlapped with Indianapolis.

"I'm delighted that Formula One will continue to race in Monaco until 2031," said Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali in a statement.

"The streets of Monte Carlo are unique and a famous part of Formula One, and the Monaco Grand Prix remains a race that all drivers dream of winning.

"This agreement signals a new era of partnership and innovation between Formula One and Monaco," Domenicali said the agreement "will allow us to cre-

ate an optimised calendar, which reduces pressure on logistics, and to decrease the environmental impact of our global championship, as we continue the path towards our Net Zero goal by 2030."

This year's Monaco Grand Prix was sandwiched between Imola in Italy, which came after the round in Miami, and Canada's race in Montreal with the championship then returning to Europe. Formula One wants a more logical flow of races based on regions.

This year's Monaco Grand Prix was watched by a cumulative audience of more than 70 million fans, according to Formula One, and in the United States was the third most watched F1 race of all time.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc won his home Grand Prix race from pole position.

"The Monaco Grand Prix is the most important sporting event here and continues to attract hundreds of thousands of spectators to the principality and millions of global television viewers worldwide," said Michel Boeri, president of the Automobile Club of Monaco.

FOCUS

# IOC needs clear stance on gender, says presidential hopeful Coe

Reuters  
London

**S**ebastian Coe "soft-launched" his bid to become the next president of the International Olympic Committee on Wednesday, saying it was a role he feels he has been building towards his whole life and that the organisation is ready for change.

The World Athletics president, one of seven people bidding to replace Thomas Bach in what would be the culmination of an extraordinarily successful sporting career, said the IOC needed clearcut policies to protect women's sport to avoid scandals such as the one in

boxing at this year's Paris Games.

A multiple world record holder, Coe won back-to-back Olympic 1,500 metres gold medals and, after a diversion as a Member of Parliament, delivered the hugely successful 2012 London Olympics.

He became WA president in 2015, initiating widespread reforms, and has had a long commercial career in sports marketing.

"I have been in training for this for most of my life. I have a plan and a vision and I think I can make a difference," the 68-year-old Briton told reporters in London in his first formal news conference, ahead of the release of his manifesto next month. "For anyone who joins an athletics club at the age of 11, who spends their whole life in

the Olympic movement, to be entrusted with that role would be an extraordinary honour and a massive moment."

Coe, an IOC member for only four years, has had a somewhat strained relationship with the organisation, despite being the head of its biggest sport.

His decisive action on banning Russian and Belarusians from all athletics, initially due to state-sponsored doping and then after the invasion of Ukraine, was at odds with the views of many IOC members.

He antagonised others with his decision to award prize money to Olympic champions in Paris this year, without consulting the IOC first.

He believes the IOC is a movement that needs modernising.

"Change is necessary, but not at the risk of destabilising. We are in a fast-changing landscape and I'm not sure you would call it radical reform," he said.

"It needs change in the way it approaches its commercial partnerships, in its broadcast model and it needs to empower the athletes.

"It certainly needs to do more to engage young people, particularly in wanting to pick up sport and use it as a way of life."

As a long-time politician, Coe is used to how big organisations can stifle innovation and he is desperate to make better use of the "outstanding talent" in the organisation.

"I think the lesson was that you need clearcut policies and the present framework is not anywhere near clear enough. For me it's a non-negotiable. If you do not protect that category (women's sport), or are in any way ambivalent about it, then it will not end well for women's sport."

Standing against Coe in the March, 2025 election are Kirsty Coventry, Zimbabwe's Sports Minister and former swimmer, Juan Antonio Samaranch - son of the late former IOC president - international cycling chief David Lappartient, Prince Feisal al-Husseini of Jordan, international gymnastics federation head Morinari Watanabe and Olympic newcomer Johan Eliasch.

## FOOTBALL

# Son hits landmark 50th South Korea goal in victory

Late drama as Saudi Arabia hold Australia in World Cup qualifier

AFP  
Hong Kong

**S**on Heung-min scored a landmark 50th goal for his country to put South Korea a step closer to the World Cup yesterday as Australia and Saudi Arabia cancelled each other out.

Spurs and South Korean skipper Son missed last month's qualifiers with injury but celebrated his return with a first-half penalty in a 3-1 win at Kuwait.

Victory left South Korea comfortably top of Group B with four wins and a draw after five matches and on course for the 2026 World Cup in North America.

The top two teams in each of the three Asian qualifying groups will reach the showpiece in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

With this phase of qualifying approaching a halfway point, South Korea took a 10th-minute lead in Kuwait when striker Oh Se-hun rose highest to powerfully head home.

Nine minutes later it was 2-0 to the visitors after Son – playing in his 130th game for South Korea – won the penalty and then picked himself up to bury it with minimum fuss.

Mohammad Daham struck on the hour to halve the deficit with a delicious half-volley.

But substitute Bae Jun-ho, who had replaced Son, made the game safe for South Korea with their third 14 minutes later when he re-filled in at the near post.

In Group C, Saudi Arabia had a goal disallowed in added time in a 0-0 draw against Australia in Melbourne that did neither side any favours in their bid to qualify.

In his first game back in charge following the sacking of Roberto Mancini, Herve Renard thought his visitors had snatched a late winner when Sultan al-Ghannam fired home from just inside the box in the 93rd minute.

But the flag went up with one of his Saudi teammates offside.

"We had some good opportunities but we have to go give our opponent credit. First half we didn't play very well," said Soccerroos coach Tony Popovic.

"We were not very good with the ball while they were sharp and energetic."

"We improved significantly in the second half, which is good," he added.

It left Australia and Saudi Arabia level on six points in their scrap for second place in the group. China joined them with the same number of points after scoring in the 91st-minute for a



Kuwait's defender Hassan Hamdan al-Enezi attempts to cut off South Korea's forward Son Heung-min during the 2026 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification match at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in Kuwait City yesterday. (AFP)



Players from Saudi Arabia react after a goal was disallowed during the 2026 World Cup Asian qualification match against Australia at the Melbourne Rectangular Stadium in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

crucial 1-0 win at Bahrain. Zhang Yuning prodded home just minutes after Bahrain had what they thought was a winner of their own ruled out by VAR for offside. Japan can extend their lead at the top of Group C when they meet Indonesia in Jakarta today.

#### TEN-MAN IRAN HOLD ON

Elsewhere, Iran survived a fight-back from North Korea to win 3-2

and cement their spot at the top of Group A with 13 points from a maximum 15.

Mohammad Mohebi scored twice and Mehdi Ghayedi also netted as Iran went into the break in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, cruising at 3-0 up. Iran went down to 10 men when Shojae Khalizadeh was sent off in the 52nd minute for bringing down Ri Jo Guk as he went through on goal.

North Korea made the extra man count to pull two goals back – one an own goal by Inter Milan's Mehdi Taremi – but Iran held on for a precious three points.

The Koreans are rooted to the bottom of their six-team group and yet to taste victory in the third qualifying stage. Teams finishing third and fourth in their groups in this qualifying round go into a further phase of qualifying.

## PREVIEW

## Japan expect tough Indonesia test with WC spot in reach

AFP  
Jakarta

**J**apan coach Hajime Moriyasu said yesterday he expects a tough test against an Indonesian team filled with European-born players when the two sides clash in World Cup qualifying in Jakarta.

Japan are the leading team in Asia at 15th in the FIFA rankings and top qualifying Group C, with an unbeaten record after three wins and a draw.

A potential victory over Indonesia in front of 78,000 fans in the country's capital puts an eighth straight World Cup berth within reach.

Indonesia are clear underdogs for today's match, sitting in fifth out of six teams in their qualifying group, but they have earned spirited draws against Australia, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

"Tomorrow's game will be very hard because the Indonesian players will be very defensive... so we have to play very aggressively," said Moriyasu.

"Our goal is to be the champion. Tomorrow we will fight very hard."

The top two from the three groups in the third stage of Asian qualifying will automatically reach the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada, with third and fourth going into another qualifying stage.

Japan made it to the last 16 of the 2022 World Cup, where they

lost to Croatia on penalties, while Indonesia has only qualified once when it competed as the Dutch East Indies.

Japan captain and out-of-favour Liverpool midfielder Wataru Endo said there was not an issue with his lack of playing time for his club, despite being used sparingly by new boss Arne Slot. "There is no problem because I try very hard, so my condition is okay," said the 31-year-old midfielder.

"I will do my best 100 percent tomorrow."

Indonesia's South Korean coach Shin Tae-yong said the Red and Whites want to cause an upset against the Asian giants.

"All the players and me are planning for a match without regrets," he said.

"Nobody can anticipate or expect tomorrow's result."

Shin said Australia and Saudi Arabia playing out a 0-0 draw on Thursday gave them extra hope.

"The result is... actually an advantage for us. Except for Japan, all the other teams are just fighting each other," he said.

"So I really think energy and luck is coming to us."

Indonesia hope their new strategy of plucking Dutch-born players for its national team will pay dividends – with recent squads including as many as 10 – after it recently sparked an uptick in their performances.

"The Indonesian national team is very different from before," said Moriyasu.



Japanese coach Hajime Moriyasu attends a press conference yesterday, on the eve of their 2026 World Cup Asian qualification match against Indonesian at Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta. (AFP)

### Ranieri comes out of retirement to lead hometown club Roma

**MILAN:** Claudio Ranieri took charge of his hometown team Roma yesterday, coming out of retirement to become the Serie A club's third coach of a troubled season. Roma said that Ranieri, who won the Premier League title with Leicester City in 2016, has signed a deal until the end of the season. The 73-year-old will then "transition into a senior executive role, where he will be an adviser to the ownership on all sporting matters at the club".

"The search for a future coach will proceed over the next months. Claudio will have input in that decision as well," added Roma. Ranieri agreed to coach Roma for the third time following negotiations in London on Wednesday, after which he was mobbed by fans at Rome's Fiumicino airport. He replaces Ivan Juric, who was hired in September following the dismissal of former club captain Daniele De Rossi, but was sacked after Sunday's 3-2 home defeat at the hands of Bologna. Juric's short spell in charge was a disaster, with four wins from 12 matches in all competitions, and the former Croatia international left Roma 12th in Serie A, just four points above the relegation zone.

## HORSE RACING

# Al-Matwi's Medan claims Umm Bab Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**M**edan in the silks of Hassan bin Ali Hassan al-Matwi won the Umm Bab Cup at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

In the Purebred Arabian Open Race for four-year-old+, Mohammed Hassan al-Matwi-trained six-year-old grey mare came thundering in the final stages of the 2100m run under Soufiane Saadi to land the spoils by two lengths and three quarters. HE Sheikhha Iman MK al-Thani's Haman came second.

Jockey Szczepan Mazur rode Al Jeryan Stud's M.H.K al-Attayah-trained AJS Kabul to victory in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (80-105) – 1400m race for the four-year-old+ – with a margin of a length and three quarters ahead of Hassan bin Ali Hassan al-Matwi's Burkan Zakhir. The victory gave the trio of owner, trainer and jockey a double on the card.



Connections of Medan celebrate after the grey mare won the Umm Bab Cup at the Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim

The trio won the day's opening race – Thoroughbred Handicap (0-95) for three-year-old over 2100m – with Aafoor.

The three-year-old colt defeated Sheikh Mohammed Salman M al-Thani-owned and Jassim Ghazali-trained Loose Cannon.

Expert trainer Jassim Ghazali's ward Mystical Music, won the Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90), a race for three-year-old+, under the guidance of jockey Alberto Sanna. The five-year-old gelding in the colours of Nasser Saeed MS al-Eida defeated Al Jeryan Stud's

Sussex by a length.

**RESULTS**  
4th Al Rayyan Race Meeting - Umm Bab Cup (Div 1) (Horse, trainer, jockey)  
Umm Bab Cup, Purebred Arabian Open Race, 4YO+,



Jockey Soufiane Saadi guided Medan to Umm Bab Cup victory yesterday.

**2100m**  
Medan (FR), Mohammed Hassan al-Matwi, Soufiane Saadi  
**Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (80-105), 4YO+, 1400m**  
AJS Kabul (QA), M.H.K al-Attayah, Szczepan Mazur

**Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90), 3YO+, 2100m**  
Mystical Music (GB), Jassim Ghazali, Alberto Sanna  
**Thoroughbred Handicap (0-95), 3YOs, 2100m**  
Aafoor (USA), M.H.K al-Attayah, Szczepan Mazur