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ATHLETICS | Page 3

Kipyegon targets four-minute mile in Nike 'Breaking 4' project



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Flick's rotation strategy pays off as Barcelona beat Mallorca

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Thursday, April 24, 2025
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GULF TIMES SPORT

CRICKET

Muzarabani takes nine as Zimbabwe celebrate Bangladesh first Test win

Page 2

FOOTBALL

Duhail edge Gharafa to reach Qatar Cup final

The Red Knights will now face bitter rivals Al Sadd in the final on May 10



Al Duhail players celebrate after their win over Al Gharafa in the Qatar Cup semi-final at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail clinched their place in the Qatar Cup final yesterday after edging past Al Gharafa 4-3 on penalties in a tense semi-final showdown at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. The match ended goalless after regular and extra time, with both teams squandering several chances before the shootout. The Red Knights will now face bitter rivals Al Sadd in the final on May 10, in a much-anticipated clash at the same venue. Al Duhail started on the front foot, applying early pressure and dominating pos-

session. Moroccan star Hakim Ziyech delivered a dangerous cross in the 24th minute that narrowly missed the boot of captain Almoez Ali, who was well-positioned in front of goal. Al Gharafa responded ten minutes later with an organised attack down the right flank. A precise cross found Joselu inside the box, but the Spaniard fired wide of the post, leaving the first half scoreless. The second half followed a similar pattern of tight defensive lines and missed opportunities. In the 49th minute, Rodrigo failed to capitalise on a low cross from Ahmed al-Janahi. Al Duhail came closest in the 78th minute when substitute Edmilson Junior's free kick

from just outside the box flew just wide. Despite determined efforts from both sides in extra time, neither could find a breakthrough, sending the match to penalties. Al Duhail kept their nerve from the spot, converting four of their five kicks, while Al Gharafa missed two. Almoez Ali, Edmilson Junior, Benjamin Bourigeaud, and Bassam al-Rawi all converted from the spot for Al Duhail to ensure Sultan al-Brake's miss was eventually of no consequence, while Fabricio Diaz and Yacine Brahimi missed their shots for Al Gharafa with only Joselu, Ferjani Sassi and Rabh Boussafi finding the net. Duhail's Ismail Mohamed, speaking after the win, hailed the victory as a crucial step

forward for his team: "We are happy to win and qualify for the final after a strong and marathon match. Al Gharafa are a tough opponent, and now our focus shifts to the final and the Emir's Cup. After missing out on the league, we are determined to compete for both titles." On the other side, Gharafa's Ferjani Sassi expressed disappointment at the result, praising his side's defensive organisation but lamenting missed opportunities. "It was a close match, full of midfield duels and physical effort. Unfortunately, we didn't take advantage of our counterattacks. We congratulate Al Duhail and apologise to our fans. Now our focus turns to the Amir's Cup," he said.

Pressure on Saudi's big spenders in Asian Champions League knockouts

Jeddah: Saudi Arabia's spending spree in the luxury aisles of the global transfer market will be expected to pay off over the next week-and-a-half as the country's leading clubs look to turn trophy signings into title winners in the Asian Champions League Elite. Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr and four-times Asian champions Al Hilal are joined by Jeddah-based Al Ahli in the continental quarter-finals, with the Saudi Pro League trio favoured to dominate the battle for silverware. Huge sums have been spent since Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund bought majority holdings in the nation's leading clubs in 2023 and, after falling short in last year's competition, expectations are rising once more. Al Nassr have added Colombia's Jhon Duran to a roll-call that features Sadio Mane and Aymeric Laporte in addition to Ronaldo as the Riyadh-based outfit seek to win the Asian title for the first time. Saudi champions Al Hilal, meanwhile, boast the talents of Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Joao Cancelo and Ruben Neves with Al Ahli able to field a side that includes costly acquisitions such as Ivan Toney, Riyad Mahrez and Franck Kessie. The lavish spending required to lure such top-drawer talent ensures the trio are expected to prevail against opposition from East Asia, with the Saudi sides given the added advantage of playing the centralised finals phase on home soil. The quarter-finals, semi-finals and final will all be held in Jeddah, forcing their opponents to travel thousands of kilometres with their own domestic campaigns in full flow. Al Hilal will kick off proceedings tomorrow against South Korea's debutants Gwangju, who rely heavily on the goal-scoring prowess of Albania international Jasir Asani, who has been in prolific form and is the tournament's top scorer with nine goals, one more than Al Hilal's Salem al-Dawsari and Yokohama F Marinos' Anderson Lopes. Lopes' side will take on Al Nassr on Saturday with last year's runners-up still reeling from the dismissal of English coach Steve Holland, who was fired last with the 5-times Japanese champions languishing in the relegation zone at home. Also on Saturday, Thailand's Buriram United take on Al-Ahli looking to score a major upset having qualified for the last eight for the first time since 2013. Kawasaki Frontale will feature in the fourth of the quarter-finals on Sunday when the Japanese club take on Qatar's Al Sadd.

Amir Cup draw for round of 16 matches to be held today



Doha: The stage is set for the draw of the Round of 16 in the 53rd edition of the prestigious Amir Cup taking place today. As the final tournament of the 2024-25 Qatari football season, the Amir Cup brings together the nation's top teams in a knockout format filled with excitement and elite competition. Sixteen teams will enter the draw - twelve from the First Division, joined by four Second Division sides - Mesaimeer,

Lusail, Al Sailiya and Al Kharaitiyat, who advanced after winning their preliminary round matches on Monday. Ahead of the draw, teams are divided into two levels based on their final standings in the recently-concluded Qatar Stars League. The top eight occupy the first level, while the remaining First Division teams and the four qualifiers make up the second level. The Round of 16 will see one team from

each level drawn against each other, ensuring a mix of quality and unpredictability. With a direct AFC Champions League Elite 2025-26 spot at stake for the champion, the Amir Cup takes on even greater importance. Al Sadd, the reigning league and cup champions, lead the field with record 19 titles, while rivals like Al Duhail, Al Arabi and Al Gharafa aim to etch their names in history.

ATHLETICS

Olympic medallists Moon and Newman to clash in Doha meeting

Katie Moon of USA and Alysha Newman of Canada, who won silver and bronze medals respectively at the Olympic Games in Paris, will clash again in a top-quality women's pole vault at the Doha Diamond League meeting on May 16. Moon, a two-time world champion (Eugene 2022 and Budapest 2023), was Olympic champion in Tokyo 2021 and has a best of 4.95m. She was a world indoor medalist in 2022 (silver) and 2024 (bronze) and was crowned Diamond League champion in 2023. "The 2025 indoor season was the best of my life and it was a tough decision to forego the World Indoor Championships," said the 33-year-old who won her fifth US indoor title in February and jumped 4.80m or higher in every meet over the winter. "But my goal for the year is to retain my world title in Tokyo, and with such a long outdoor season ahead I have to make sensible decisions. To return to competition in Doha is a really exciting prospect for me, especially after winning there in 2023. The crowd there is always unbelievable and it's a great opportunity to get the summer off

to a strong start," she added. The 2018 Commonwealth champion Newman gave the performance of her life when finishing third in Paris and in doing so improved her own Canadian record to 4.85m. With her focus on preparing for the 2025 World Athletics Championships in September she chose to wrap up her indoor season after one competition (4.50m for second at the World Athletics Indoor Tour meet in Ostrava in February). She will open her Diamond League campaign in Doha. Moon and Newman will be joined at the Qatar Sports Club by British record holder and 2024 world indoor champion Molly Caudery (PB: 4.92m) who took victory in Doha last year; New Zealand record holder Eliza McCartney (PB: 4.94m), 2016 Olympic bronze medallist and runner-up in the 2024 World Indoor Championships; 2016 Olympic silver medallist Sandi Morris (USA), twice world indoor champion and three-times world outdoor silver medallist (PB: 5.00m); and Slovenian record holder Tina Sutej (PB: 4.82m), world and European indoor silver medallist in 2025.



Unfortunately, Olympic and world champion Nina Kennedy, the Australian record holder with a best of 4.91m, has confirmed that she's had hamstring surgery and will miss the start of the 2025

outdoor season. The Doha meeting is the third leg of the 2025 Wanda Diamond League. The series - which will pay out a record total of \$9.24mn in prize money - comprises 15 of

the most prestigious events in global track and field across four different continents, starting with Xiamen on April 26 and concluding with a single final across two days in Zurich (August 27-28).

CYCLING

Pogacar soars to Fleche Wallonne triumph

AFP
Huy, Belgium

Tadej Pogacar powered up the steepest part of the final Ardennes hill yesterday to reclaim the Fleche Wallonne classic title after a cold and rainy 205km slog over 11 climbs. With a mud-splattered face, the three-time Tour de France champion could barely raise a smile at the finish line, as plucky Frenchman Kevin Vauquelin emerged second and Briton Tom Pidcock third. The 23-year-old Vauquelin was also runner-up last year, proving he will often be a force in races culminating with a short, sharp hill. Pidcock, having quit Ineos in the close season for the second-tier Q36.5 team, can also be proud of a fine finish in a strong field. Winner of the Brabantse Pijl last Friday on his comeback from injury, Belgian hope Remco Evenepoel was right in the thick of the race before fading to ninth over the last 200m as Pogacar switched into a gear nobody else could find.

More than just a warm-up race for Sunday's Liege-Bastogne-Liege raced in the same region, but 50km longer, this race runs through the Ardennes forest but over 11 of the region's steepest climbs. Pogacar, who last won at the Tour of Flanders on April 6, was clearly tired but delighted after his latest efforts. "It's a beautiful place, but as a cyclist you don't like it so much, such a tough finish," said the Team UAE Emirates leader.

'Hardest kilometre in cycling'
"It's a really great feeling, the weather wasn't so good but winning again is all that counts. We worked well as a team today and we'll have a similar one for Sunday at Liege," said the 26-year-old, who won at Liege last year in the absence of the injured Evenepoel. Yesterday's race culminated with the fearsome Mur de Huy, just 1.3km in length but with gradients hitting 19 percent with an average of 9.6. Pogacar said he attacked when he saw Irishman Ben Healy, who finished fifth, draw level with him. "I said 'Okay he looks fast! So I accel-

erated and when I looked over my shoulder, no one was there. But really that's the hardest kilometre in cycling," he added. This was a return to winning ways for Slovenian Pogacar after his second-placed finish to Mathieu van der Poel at Paris-Roubaix, and another second place in the Amstel Gold race behind Mattias Skjelmose on Sunday. Skjelmose had been highly fancied again here but the 24-year-old was one of several riders who slid out of the race on a slick corner around 40km from home on a day of unrelenting rain. His Lidl teammate Thibau Nys had also been touted as a man who could beat Pogacar on the final climb but eventually came eighth, perhaps due to the fact Skjelmose had dropped out. A stubborn escape group clung on until the final ascent, in a sign of how little appetite there was for a long-range bid for glory from one of the race favourites. Many of yesterday's competitors will be back in action Sunday in the same corner of the Ardennes for the Liege-Bastogne-Liege 'Monument' over 252km where an escape is more likely.



UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar (left) and Team EF Education's Irish rider Ben Healy (right) compete during the men's "La Fleche Wallonne" one day cycling race (Waalse Pijl - Walloon Arrow), 205.2kms from Ciney to Huy yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Muzarabani takes nine as Zimbabwe beat Bangladesh

It is Zimbabwe's eighth win over Bangladesh in 19 Test matches

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Blessing Muzarabani's nine-wicket match figures and determined batting helped Zimbabwe stun Bangladesh by three wickets in the first match of the two-Test series in Sylhet yesterday. Mehidy Hasan Miraz recorded his second five-wicket haul for the match but it was in vain as Zimbabwe's batsmen held their nerve to close out the match despite losing quick wickets. Zimbabwe chased down their target of 174 by the third session of the fourth day with three wickets in hand, their first win against Bangladesh since 2018, and their first against any team in four years, to secure a 1-0 lead. Brian Bennett racked up his second fifty of the match to lead the chase on a surface that Bangladesh's bowlers failed to exploit early. Bennett and his opening partner Ben Curran laid a solid foundation with a partnership of 95 runs before Curran fell to Mehidy while attempting to play him over long on. Curran failed to gauge the spin and ended up sending a catch to the mid-off. Mehidy quickly bagged four more wickets, sending tremors through the Zimbabwe camp, while Taijul Islam chipped in with another two. But Wessly Madhevere (19 not out), Wellington Masakadza (12), and Richard Ngarava (4 not out) held their nerve to guide Zimba-



Zimbabwe's Blessing Muzarabani celebrates after taking six wickets during the fourth day of the first Test against Bangladesh at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

bwe home. Bangladesh posted 255 in the second innings, with captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and wicket-keeper-batter Jaker Ali contributing with a fifty each. But the failures of batsmen such as Mushfiqur Rahim and Mehidy prevented them from setting up a more challenging target. The Sylhet pitch is known to assist the fast bowlers but, unlike Muzarabani, Bangladesh's pacemen failed to capitalise on the home conditions. The onus fell on

the spin duo of Mehidy and Taijul but their efforts weren't enough to make the required impact. Zimbabwe earlier responded with 273 to Bangladesh's first innings of 191, with Nahid Rana taking three wickets alongside Mehidy's five. An 82-run first-innings lead put Zimbabwe in a commanding position and they went on to record a big win. It was Zimbabwe's eighth win over Bangladesh in 19 Tests, equalling Bangladesh's number

of victories against them. The second and final Test is in Chattogram from April 28.

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 191 and 255 (Najmul Hossain Shanto 60, Jaker Ali 58; Blessing Muzarabani 6-72)
Zimbabwe 273 and 174-7 (Brian Bennett 57; Mehidy Hasan Miraz 5-50)
Result: Zimbabwe won by three wickets
Toss: Bangladesh
Second Test: Apr 28-May 2

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Rohit and Boult sparkle as Mumbai Indians surge into top four



A field umpire (right) checks the bat of Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma during the IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad yesterday. Mumbai Indians won by seven wickets. (AFP)

AFP
Hyderabad, India

Star batsman Rohit Sharma smashed 76 and pace bowler Trent Boult claimed 4-26 as Mumbai Indians thrashed Sunrisers Hyderabad to move up to third in the IPL table yesterday. New Zealand's Boult, a left-arm quick, and fellow pace bowler Deepak Chahar ripped apart the top of Hyderabad's batting order as they collapsed to 35-5 before managing 143-8. Five-time champions Mumbai achieved their target with 26 balls and seven wickets to spare after Rohit registered his second successive half-century, smacking eight fours and three sixes in his 46-ball knock to lead the chase. It was Mumbai's fourth straight win and propelled them three spots from sixth in the 10-team table led by Gujarat Titans. Hyderabad, who are captained by Australia's Pat Cummins, slumped to their sixth loss in eight matches. Rohit and England's Will Jacks (22) laid the platform for Mumbai in their second-wicket partnership of 64. Jacks got out but Rohit stood firm to raise his fifty in an another key stand of 53 with Suryakumar Yadav, who made an unbeaten 40 off 19 balls. The match began

with a tribute to the victims of the deadly attack in Kashmir as a one-minute silence was observed and teams wore black armbands in Hyderabad. Twenty-six men were killed on Tuesday when gunmen burst out of forests at a popular tourist spot in Pahalgam and raked crowds of visitors with automatic weapons. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) took the decision to remove the cheerleaders and put a halt to the celebratory fireworks and music customary at IPL matches, as a mark of respect for the victims. Boult got Mumbai off to a perfect start by dismissing Australian opener Travis Head for a duck after the left-hander mis-timed a shot to deep backward point. Chahar had Ishan Kishan caught behind for one in the next over, the batter walking off to a timid appeal with ultra-edge technology later suggesting there was no edge. Boult and Chahar continue to do damage and accounted for Abhishek Sharma and Nitish Reddy, leaving Hyderabad five down when skipper Hardik Pandya struck in the ninth over.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 146 for 3 (Rohit 70, Suryakumar 40*) **beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 143 for 8** (Klaasen 71, Manohar 43, Boult 4-26, Chahar 2-12) **by 7 wickets**

ACC MEN'S U16 WEST ZONE CUP - QATAR 2025

Oman beat Saudi Arabia to make winning start

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Oman scored a convincing 7-wicket win over Saudi Arabia as the ACC Men's U16 West Zone Cup - Qatar 2025 tournament got under way in Doha yesterday. The 13-day Asian Cricket Council (ACC) tournament has the participation of six countries and the draw for which was held at Ezdan Palace hotel on Tuesday. The trophy was also unveiled in the presence of Khaled al-Suwaidi, Qatar Cricket Association CEO and Tournament Director, Mohammed al-Kuwari, Asst Tournament Director, Thusith Perera, GM Convenor, GM Finance & Operations, Asian Cricket Council, Muhammad Asif, Logistics & Finance coordinator, and Shivani Mishra, Tournament Coordinator. In the opening match played at the University of Doha for Science & Technology ground, Saudi Arabia opting to bat first were bowled out for 158 runs in 45.5 overs. Ahyan Saleh



Participating team captains and officials pose with the trophy during the draw ceremony of the ACC Men's U16 West Zone Cup - Qatar 2025 tournament in Doha.

(35) and Mohammed Nabeel (27) were the main contributors to the total. For Oman, Vignesh Karthikeyan took five wickets for 27 runs. In reply, Oman attained the target with ease in 23.2 overs

losing three wickets in the process. Kavish Shah was highest run-getter with unbeaten 72 off 38 balls (8x4s, 5x6s) while captain Aryan Joshi made 42 off 43 balls (7x4s).

Australia mourns death of Test opener Stackpole

Melbourne: Former Test opener Keith Stackpole, a key member of the Australia teams captained by Bill Lawry and Ian Chappell in the 1960s-70s, died of a suspected heart attack yesterday at the age of 84. Stackpole played 43 Tests and scored seven centuries from 1966-1974, forming one of Australia's top opening combinations with Victoria teammate Lawry. An aggressive shot-maker with a love for hooking fast bowlers, Stackpole topped the runs list during Australia's successful tour of India in 1969 - the nation's last series win in the subcontinent until 2004. He made a career-best 207 against England at the Gabba in 1970 and often proved a thorn in the side of Australia's Ashes rivals. A handy leg-spin bowler, Stackpole played in the first-ever one-day international against England in 1971, taking 3-40 in the 40-over match to guide Australia

to a five-wicket win at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Named one of *Wisden's* 'Cricketers of the Year' in 1973, Stackpole became a successful broadcaster after retiring from the game in 1974. "Very sad news indeed. Stacky was a fantastic cricketer but more so a great bloke and one hell of a cricket coach," former Australia test bowler Merv Hughes wrote on X. Cricket Australia Chairman Mike Baird said Stackpole would be sorely missed. "Keith was one of the great contributors to the game of cricket and his legacy will live long into the future," Baird said in a statement. "Not only was he an outstanding player for Australia and Victoria, his work in the media, radio and TV commentary and as a mentor to many players who followed in his footsteps demonstrated his enduring passion and influence in the game."

ATHLETICS

Kipyegon targets 4-minute mile in ‘Breaking 4’ project

‘I’m a 3-time Olympic champ. I’ve achieved world titles. I thought, What else, why not dream outside the box?’

Reuters
London

Kenya’s triple Olympic and world 1,500 metres champion **Faith Kipyegon** is to attempt the first women’s, unofficial sub-four minute mile in a Nike “Breaking 4” project following the success of Eliud Kipchoge’s sub-two hour marathon.

Nike said yesterday that Kipyegon, 31, is to attempt the feat on June 26 at Stade Charlety, Paris, where she beat her own 1,500 metres world record last year.

Full details are yet to be revealed but, as with her compatriot’s 1:59:40.2 marathon in Vienna in 2019, she is likely to be aided by “in and out” pacers, new high-tech shoes and kit and other technological, physiological and psychological help that will mean any record would not be officially recognised.

Kipyegon set the current official mile world record of 4:07.64 for the now-rarely run distance in 2023, taking almost five seconds off Sifan Hassan’s 2019 mark, so would need a huge leap forward to achieve the landmark time.

“I’m a three-time Olympic

champion. I’ve achieved World Championship titles. I thought, What else, why not dream outside the box?” Kipyegon said.

“I want this attempt to say to women, ‘You can dream and make your dreams valid.’”

Kipyegon won the Olympic 1,500m title at the 2016, 2020 and 2024 Games and the world title in 2017, 2022 and 2023, when she also took 5,000m gold.

As well as the mile record, she also holds the 1,500m world record of 3:49.04 and barely seemed to take a breath after taking time away from the track to have a baby.

“Becoming a mother has changed my entire mental attitude,” she said. “You have to engage yourself, you have to show your child the way.”

Nike will be applying the lessons learned from Kipchoge’s attempts, where he narrowly failed and then subsequently succeeded in getting under two hours.

Along with carbon-plated “super shoes”, one key aspect was the use of pacers in a v-formation, with a turnover of athletes to ensure fresh legs. Innovative apparel technology and laser pacing lights also played a part, and are likely to do so again for Kipyegon’s attempt.

Key Note
GULF TIMES
24-04-2025



Nike said full details of the attempt, including information on pacers, supporters in the stadium and kit, will be revealed in

the coming weeks. Kipyegon has known Kipchoge for more than 10 years and they share the same coach in Patrick Sang. “Faith

can absorb any goal, she is a big dreamer,” Kipchoge said.

“She is the woman to take on this challenge because she is open

to trying.”

To improve her record mile by at least 7.65 seconds, Kipyegon will need to run each of her four and a bit laps an average of nearly two seconds faster than her previous best.

“Faith is a once-in-a-generation talent, and her audacious goal is exactly what Nike stands for,” said Elliott Hill, Nike President & CEO.

“Breaking4 is the kind of bold dream we will do everything in our power to make real - helping both elite and everyday athletes to believe anything is possible.

“Alongside Faith, our innovators are breaking barriers by combining cutting-edge sport science with revolutionary footwear and apparel innovation to help her achieve a truly historic goal.”

Britain’s Roger Bannister was the first man to go under four minutes in May 1954, with compatriot Diane Leather the first woman to break five minutes later the same month. The current men’s record is the 3:43.13 set by Hicham El Guerrouj in 1999.

Hassan’s 4:12.33 run in 2019 just edged the record of Russian Svetlana Masterkova that had lasted 23 years.

TENNIS

Sabalenka expecting ‘big chance’ to win on Madrid clay

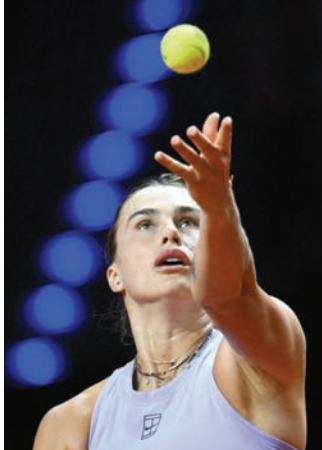
Reuters
Madrid

World number one **Aryna Sabalenka** believes she will have “big chances” to perform well on clay this season, should she recapture the level she showed during last year’s Madrid Open final against Iga Swiatek.

The Belarusian squandered three match points in a heart-breaking defeat by Swiatek in the Spanish capital 12 months ago, in what was a high-quality clash that earned WTA Match of the Year honours at the end of the season.

Targeting a third Madrid Open crown this fortnight at the Caja Magica, Sabalenka reflects fondly on her final against Swiatek, despite coming agonisingly close to victory before falling just short.

“That match was a blockbuster, and I really enjoyed playing, it was very intense, very long. If I can play like that in every match on clay, I think I have big chances to perform well on the clay court season this year,” Sabalenka said



yesterday.

“That was amazing match, even though I lost it.

“Nothing I can be upset with, to be honest. I did my best there, and she just outplayed me.”

Sabalenka arrives in Madrid on the back of a runner-up showing in Stuttgart, where she fell in the final to Jelena Ostapenko.

The 26-year-old, who won the 2024 US and Australian Opens, is still waiting for her first title on clay since her 2023 Madrid triumph.

The top seed will open her campaign against Anna Blinkova or Panna Udvardy in round two.

This season is featuring live electronic line calling on clay for the first time on the WTA and ATP tours - a decision that has been met with mixed reaction.

While some players are happy to avoid arguments with umpires by solely relying on technology, others have questioned the accuracy of the technology, given the replay doesn’t always match the mark visible on the clay court.

“I prefer to have the Hawk-Eye system than the referee, because sometimes referees can be very weak to go there (to check the mark) and confirm that they made mistake, so yeah, I prefer to have the Hawk-Eye system,” said Sabalenka. First-round action in Madrid yesterday saw a returning Petra Kvitova squander a 4-1 double-break lead en route to a 6-4, 6-0 defeat by American Katie Volynets.

Kvitova came back from a 17-month maternity leave two months ago and was contesting her first clay-court match in two years.

BOTTOMLINE

Alcaraz reveals secret of Wimbledon titles - partying hard in Ibiza

Reuters
London

Carlos Alcaraz has lifted the lid on his secret for winning his first Wimbledon title in 2023 and defending the title a year later - partying hard in Ibiza.

In a new Netflix documentary, “*Carlos Alcaraz: My Way*”, the Spaniard describes how he went against the advice of his team to let his hair down on the Mediterranean island.

“I had a friend who had a few days off, going to Ibiza with other friends,” the now four-times Grand Slam champion said.

“I ended up going and they know what I’m going there to do. In Ibiza, I’m not going to lie, it’s pretty much all about partying and going out.

“I basically went there to re-ventar (literally, ‘burst’ in Spanish), I’m not sure if that’s the best way to put it but I went there to go out.”

It might not have been textbook preparation for Wimbledon, and his agent Albert Molina



warned against it, but Alcaraz said he had to let off steam after losing to Novak Djokovic in the 2023 French Open semis having suffered with nerves and cramps.

Ibiza’s tonic paid off spectacularly too, as a few weeks later, aged 20, he beat the Serb in the Wimbledon final.

“I tried to explain to him that it might not be the best idea to go to Ibiza for three or four days on va-

cation when he had Queen’s the following week and then Wimbledon,” Molina said.

Alcaraz repeated the trick in 2024 with another Ibiza trip before the grasscourt season with his fitness coach Juanjo Moreno accusing him of being selfish.

In the documentary his coach Juan Carlos Ferrero even questions whether Alcaraz has the dedication required to emulate the likes of Djokovic and Rafa Nadal.

“He has a different way of understanding work and sacrifice,” Ferrero said, comparing him to Djokovic. “It’s so different that it makes me question whether he can really be the best in history.”

But Alcaraz has no regrets.

“They always want to protect me, but I’m getting older, I’m starting to make my own decisions and that’s what I want,” he said. “I don’t take care of myself as much, I spend a lot of days enjoying life. Maybe more than I should.

“But I want to do it my way.”

Alcaraz, who will be 22 next month, is second seed at this week’s Madrid Masters.

FOCUS

Australia’s Gout on track for World Championships debut at 17

Reuters
Melbourne

Teen sprinter **Gout Gout** has been confirmed on Australia’s team for the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo in September.

The 17-year-old son of South Sudanese immigrants will run in the 200 metres after clocking a wind-assisted 19.84 seconds in Perth this month to win his first national title.

The Queenslander’s rapid rise has raised comparisons with Jamaican great Usain Bolt and made him the poster boy for Australian track and field, seven years before the country hosts the Brisbane Olympics in 2032.

“I’m super excited to be picked to run the 200 in Tokyo at the World Championships,” Gout said in an Australian Athletics statement yesterday.

“That’s what we’ve been aiming



for. I’m looking forward to September and seeing what I can do against the best of the best.”

Gout headlines a talented young contingent on the Australian team which includes 18-year-old Cameron Myers, who took the 1,500 national title in Perth and ran the fastest-ever mile indoors among under-20 athletes (3:47.48) at the Millrose Games in New York in February.

Former high jump world champion Eleanor Patterson, who took

bronze at the Paris Olympics, was also named yesterday among the first tranche of athletes confirmed for the team. Patterson will bid for a sixth medal in major championships, having taken indoor silver at Nanjing in March behind compatriot Nicola Olyslagers.

Peters Bol, who ran fourth in the 800 at the Tokyo Olympics, will return to the Japanese capital in good form after taking the national record (1:43.79) at the Perth championships.

Sinner doesn’t deserve any hate, says Draper

Briton Jack Draper has given his backing to world number one Jannik Sinner over the doping controversy which saw the Italian accept a three-month ban and said he does not deserve any of the hate he gets.

Sinner accepted the ban in February following a deal with the World Anti-Doping Agency, which had challenged a tribunal’s decision to clear him after two positive tests. The 23-year-old three-times Grand Slam champion has not played since winning the Australian Open in January.

“When people ask about him, or anyone, I’ll tell the truth. I think Jannik is a really, really genuine, nice person,” Draper told the *Guardian* and BBC in a joint interview published on Tuesday.

“In this situation I’m sure that he would have absolutely zero idea of anything. That’s just the way life goes - sometimes there’s mistakes.”

“In terms of actually how I feel about him as a person, I think it’s important for people to know and recognise that the guy’s very, very kind-hearted and a good human being. So he doesn’t deserve

any of the hate that he gets.”

World number six Draper, also 23, practised with Sinner at the Tennis Club de Beaulieu in France. Sinner was cleared to return to training from April 13. “If you can train with anyone, it’s got to be probably the best in the world, right? He’s obviously had a bit of time off, but he’s playing at an incredible level still,” Draper said. “I’m looking forward to having him back on the tour, because I think his presence has been missed. It was great to be with him for a few days and get some good sparring.”

SPOTLIGHT

Second edition of Al Shaqab International League from today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shaqab has announced the launch of the second edition of the Al Shaqab International League, a premier showjumping series set to take place from April 24-26 at the Longines Indoor Arena in Doha.

The competition schedule spans three days, with events running today from 4pm-7pm, tomorrow from 2pm-9pm, and Saturday from 10am-10pm. A highlight of this edition is its role as a qualifying event for the FEI Group VII

Final, under the supervision of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI). Riders from across Group VII nations, which includes countries from the Middle East and North Africa will compete for a chance to secure their place in the final, which will also be hosted by Al Shaqab in November 2025.

The league offers a wide range of categories to cater to both local and international participants across different age groups and experience levels. Local categories include Intro 1 (40cm), Intro 2 (60cm), Intro 3 (80cm), and Amateur (100cm). Internationally recognised categories are designed to spotlight emerging

talent and include Future Champions (ages 12-14, 105-110cm), Junior Champions (ages 14-18, 115-120cm), Youth Champions (ages 16-21, 125-130cm), Open Class (115-120cm), and the elite Al Shaqab Champions category (135-140cm). The Future, Junior, and Youth Champions classes serve as qualifying events for the FEI Group VII Final.

Al Shaqab continues to foster a culture of excellence, discipline, and sportsmanship through this platform, which not only nurtures local talent but also contributes to the growth of equestrian sport on a global scale.

HORSE RACING

Siegen cruises to thrilling victory at End Of Season Cup meet

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Siegen, ridden expertly by Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi, clinched a thrilling half-length victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap 0-90, stealing the spotlight on the opening day of the End Of Season Cup meeting yesterday.

The three-year-old gelding, owned by Khalid Hamad M A al-Hajri and trained by Ahmed al-Jehani, overcame a strong challenge from Make Love, ridden by Soufiane Saadi, to secure an impressive win at Al Uqda Racecourse.

Earlier in the day, Messaouda triumphed in the Local Thoroughbred Handicap 45-70 (Class 3) – also by half a length – with jockey Alberto Sanna in the saddle. Trainer Hamad al-Jehani celebrated a rapid double as Ajlaan, under Lukas Delozier, captured the Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate while Washeek powered to victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap 60-80 under Szczepan Mazur.

The meeting began with a confident run from

Husam Al Shahania, trained by Mohammed Hassan al-Matwi and ridden by Salman Fahad al-Hajri, who took the honours in the Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate. The second and final day of the meeting will feature five more races, highlighted by contests for the prestigious Season Finale Trophy, Al Utouriya Cup and the Al Karana Cup.

43RD AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING - END OF SEASON CUP (DIV 1)

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1 - Thoroughbred Handicap 0-90 (3yo Only) (Class 3)

Siegen, Ahmed al-Jehani, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi

2 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 45-70 (Class 3)

Messaouda, Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed, Alberto Sanna

3 - Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate (4yo Only)

(Class 4)

Ajlaan, Hamad al-Jehani, Lukas Delozier

4 - Thoroughbred Handicap 60-80 (Class 4)

Washeek, Hamad al-Jehani, Szczepan Mazur

5 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (Class 6)

Husam al-Shahania, Mohammed Hassan al-Matwi,

Salman Fahad al-Hajri



Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi rides Siegen to victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap 0-90 on the opening day of the End Of Season Cup meeting yesterday. **PICTURE: Juhaim**

LA LIGA

Barca beat Mallorca as Flick's rotation strategy pays off

The win took Barca to 76 points, seven more than Real Madrid

Reuters
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick was delighted that his decision to rotate his side paid off as they kept their La Liga title charge on track with a deserved 1-0 win over Mallorca on Tuesday thanks to a second-half goal by Dani Olmo.

With Saturday's Copa del Rey final against rivals Real Madrid around the corner, Flick made a bold decision to start with Jules Kounde, Raphinha, Pau Cubarsi and Frenkie De Jong on the bench and he was thrilled with his much-changed side's solid performance. The win lifted treble-chasing Barca to 76 points at the top of the La Liga standings with Real, who visit Getafe on Wednesday, seven points adrift with a game in hand.

"I think we played a good game, we had a lot of chances to score more goals and win by a larger margin, but I'm still happy," Flick said.

"Their goalkeeper Leo Roman was really good and put on a show, we have to acknowledge that. Actually, everyone defended well for Mallorca today, they were really good and that makes our win even more important. I think we made fewer mistakes than in previous games and in general we were really good. It's my job (to rotate the squad), I have to do it at a time of the season that everyone is impacted by a relentless schedule. The next game is always the most important and that's how we will manage it."

They will face Real Madrid in Saturday's Copa del Rey final and Inter Milan in first leg of their Champions League semi-final next week without top-striker Robert Lewandowski, who will be sidelined for several weeks with a leg muscle injury. After Saturday's Clasico in Seville, treble chasing Barca will face last-placed Valladolid before hosting Real in a La Liga clash that could decide the title on May 11. "Barca and Real Madrid are great teams and it is normal that titles are decided between the best teams. We have two more games against them and we want to win the cup and the league and we have to beat them. It won't be easy but we have to be focused on them," Flick said.

On Tuesday, Barca dominated proceedings despite coach Flick deciding to rest several key starters, but Mallorca goalkeeper Leo Roman



Barcelona's Dani Olmo (second left) scores during the La Liga match against Mallorca at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys Stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. *(Reuters)*

put on a show between the posts to keep them at bay. Barca finally managed to break the deadlock shortly after the interval thanks to a fine piece of individual skill from Olmo, who took the ball in a tight space inside the box and quickly fired a left-foot shot into the bottom corner before Mallorca's defenders could challenge him.

Mallorca are seventh, in a Europa League qualification spot, on 44 points.

"Their goalkeeper had a great game," Barcelona midfielder Gavi said. "We had the chance to take advantage and took it. It's football. We insisted, worked hard, kept going and the goal finally came. We played a great game overall and I'm very happy for the players who stepped up."

Teenager Lamine Yamal was a constant menace but was denied several times by an inspired

Roman who made three stunning saves to prevent the 17-year-old Spain winger giving the home side the lead.

Ferran Torres and Eric Garcia also had efforts from close-range denied while Gavi's deflected strike from the edge of the box came off the post in the 28th minute, with Ronald Araujo missing a sitter from close range one minute later, firing wide from a corner.

Mallorca created a few chances on the counter with Mateu Morey having a goal ruled out for an offside in the buildup right before the break. After Olmo finally gave Barca a deserved lead in the 46th minute, Mallorca's captain Antonio Riallo almost headed home the equaliser from a free kick in the 55th minute, but his effort went just wide.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Guardiola calls season 'bad' with Champions League within reach

Reuters
Manchester

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola scoffed at suggestions that his team could look back on this season as a special one if they clinch a Champions League berth.

City took a big step towards securing European qualification with their 2-1 Premier League win over Aston Villa on Tuesday thanks to Matheus Nunes's 94th-minute strike.

Guardiola's men climbed two spots to third in the league table, still 18 points behind leaders Liverpool and so will finish well short of their early-season goal of capturing an historic fifth consecutive league title.

"This season has been bad," Guardiola said.

"It doesn't matter whether we reach the (FA Cup) final, or qualification for the Champions League. The reality is that what determines, what makes you feel the season is good is the Premier League, not the FA Cups. It's that consistency in the Premier League. But it happens, sometimes you have bad seasons. The level of the teams (in the Premier League) is outstanding."

Pundit Roy Keane thought Guardiola's summary of the season was unfairly negative. "I think he's been really harsh on his team there," the former Manchester United midfielder said.

"Had a tough start, obviously had a huge setback with Rodri (suffering a torn anterior cruciate ligament), and they've not been at their very best."

"But that was always going to happen. But I still think if they win the FA Cup and get in the Champions League, it's not bad going. But it's just because they set the standards so high over the last few years that any sort of drop-off kind of does look bad."

City travel to Nottingham Forest for their FA Cup semi-final on Sunday, while Crystal Palace host Aston Villa in the other semi on Saturday.

City and Villa looked poised for a draw at the Etihad Stadium on Tuesday after Marcus Rashford's penalty cancelled out Bernardo Silva's goal in the first half. Two weeks after he announced he would leave City at the season's end, skipper Kevin De Bruyne had a solid night, creating six chances with no other player creating more than two.

According to Opta, it was the 60th time that the Belgian created five or more chances in a single league game, the most any player had done so from the 2003-04 season onwards.

De Bruyne, who said on Sunday that he was surprised not to be offered a new contract by the club, did not bother to walk around to City's dugout when he was substituted for Manuel Akanji late in Tuesday's game, instead perching on the advertising board and offering instructions to his teammates.



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola celebrates after his team's win over Aston Villa in the Premier League on Tuesday. *(Reuters)*

Former Brazil coach Tite taking break to take care of mental, physical health

Sao Paulo: Former Brazil coach Tite said he is taking an indefinite career break in order to take care of his mental and physical health. The 63-year-old, who led Brazil to the 2019 Copa America title, was hospitalised due to a heart issue last August. He was sacked by Flamengo the following month and had most recently been linked with the Corinthians job.

"I realised that there are times when you have to understand that, as a human being, I can be vulnerable and admitting that will certainly make me stronger," Tite said in a statement posted on his son Matheus Bachi's Instagram. "I'm passionate about what I do and I'll continue to be so, but after talking to my family and observing the signals my body was giving off, I decided that the best thing to do now is to take a break from my career to look after myself for as long as it takes. As has become public, there was a conversation in progress with Corinthians, but it will have to be paralysed by a difficult but necessary decision."

Tite, who stepped down as Brazil coach after their quarter-final exit from the 2022 World Cup, has previously coached a string of Brazilian sides including Gremio, Atletico Mineiro and Palmeiras.

LIGUE 1

Unbeaten PSG held to 1-1 draw at Nantes



Nantes' Jean-Charles Castelletto and Paris Saint-Germain's Goncalo Ramos (right) fight for the ball in Nantes, western France. *(AFP)*

Reuters
Paris

Paris St Germain had to settle for a 1-1 draw at Nantes on Tuesday, keeping the Ligue 1 champions on course to become the first team to go unbeaten through an entire season in the French top flight.

The stalemate stretched PSG's unbeaten away league run to 39 matches, beating the long-standing record across Europe's top five leagues set by AC Milan between 1991 and 1993. "It's important to talk about this record and the players from that era. We are at Milan's level. We're talking about the record for unbeaten away games," PSG coach Luis Enrique said. "A team of our calibre can't afford to make mistakes. We can still improve and do even better. We should have won the match, and one small detail made all the difference."

In a slow first half the hosts were content to sit back and play on the counter, but Vitorinha struck a low half-volley off a

Lee Kang-in pass to put PSG ahead after 33 minutes. Nantes looked more aggressive after the break as Jean-Charles Castelletto drew a fine save from PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma on the hour mark. Douglas Augusto finally found the equaliser seven minutes from time with a great shot from the edge of the box following an excellent run from Matthis Abline. Goncalo Ramos went agonisingly close to netting a winner for the visitors, but his stoppage-time header hit the crossbar.

"We need to improve our ball retention so we don't lose possession. The team played a great game. We managed the ball well. We need to keep it up. We need to continue like this on Friday against Nice and then in the Champions League," Donnarumma said about their European semi-final tie against Arsenal.

PSG, who wrapped up the title earlier this month, hold a 23-point advantage over second-placed Olympique de Marseille, while Nantes are 14th on 31 points, four points above the drop zone.