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CRICKET

Afghanistan rout debutants Uganda in T20 World Cup opener

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**QATAR CONCLUDE TRAINING CAMP BEFORE MATCH AGAINST AFGHANISTAN**

Qatar wrapped up their training camp in Doha yesterday before their departure to Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, to meet Afghanistan in the AFC Asian Cup 2027 and FIFA World Cup 2026 joint qualifiers. The match will be played at Prince Abdullah bin Jalawi Stadium tomorrow with the Asian champions eyeing their fifth straight victory in Group A. The Marquez Lopez's side has already advanced to World Cup qualifiers and they have also confirmed their berth in the next Asian Cup. Lopez has rested many on the senior players, opting to give a run to the young players. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekkayil

FRENCH OPEN

# Injured Djokovic pulls out, Sinner assured of top ranking

Sinner downs Dimitrov to make last four, Swiatek lines up Gauff showdown in semi-finals

AFP  
Paris

Novak Djokovic pulled out of the French Open yesterday ahead of his quarter-final against Casper Ruud because of a knee injury suffered in the previous round.

"I am really sad to announce that I have to withdraw from Roland Garros," Djokovic wrote on social media. "I played with my heart and gave my all in yesterday's match and unfortunately, due to a medial meniscus tear in my right knee, my team and I had to make a tough decision after careful consideration and consultation."

Tournament organisers had initially announced his withdrawal, saying an MRI scan earlier yesterday had revealed the full extent of the injury.

World number one and 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic was due to play Ruud today for a place in the last four. Djokovic defeated Ruud in straight sets in last year's final at Roland Garros.

As a result Ruud will go on to face fourth seed Alexander Zverev or 11th seed Alex de Minaur in the semi-finals on Friday.

The 37-year-old Djokovic had cast doubt over his fitness following Monday's five-set win over Francisco Cerundolo, admitting he needed anti-inflammatory drugs to get through the match.

Djokovic blamed the "slippery" Philippe Chatrier court for the injury he sustained early in the second set of his 6-1, 5-7, 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over Cerundolo.

"I don't know what will happen tomorrow or after tomorrow if I'll be able to step out on the court and play. You know, I hope so. Let's see what happens," Djokovic said after his record 370th win at a Grand Slam.

"For the last couple weeks I have had, I would say, slight discomfort, I would call it that way, in the right knee, but I haven't had an injury that would be concerning me at all. "I was playing a few tournaments with it, and no issues until today."

Djokovic had already been tested to the limit physically by a gruelling four-hour, 29-minute slog against Lorenzo Musetti in the third round that concluded at 3:07am Sunday morning, the latest finish in French Open history.

He had complained about the state of the clay in the match with Musetti, and did so again in the last 16, calling for the court to be swept more regularly.

"Could have this injury be prevented?



Italy's Jannik Sinner plays a forehand return to Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov during their quarter-final match at the French Open in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

Possibly, if there was just a little bit more of a frequent care of the court," Djokovic said.

His withdrawal from the French Open means that Jannik Sinner will become Italy's first world number one next week.

"It's every player's dream to become number one in the world. On the other hand, seeing Novak retiring (from the tournament) is disappointing, so I wish him a speedy recovery," said Sinner.

Sinner advanced to his first Roland Garros semi-final shortly after Djokovic's exit from the competition, defeating Bulgarian 10th seed Grigor Dimitrov in three sets.

The Serbian star arrived at the tournament with his status at the top under threat from Sinner, who was guaranteed to supplant Djokovic if the latter failed to reach the final in Paris.

Djokovic has spent a record 428 weeks at the top of the rankings. His injury extends his worst start to a season since 2018, when he didn't win an event until claiming the Wimbledon title. It is only the second time this deep into the year he hasn't lifted a trophy since he won his first ATP title as a teenager in 2006.

Adding to his problems, he was accidentally hit on the head by a metal water bottle in Rome last month before suffering stomach problems in Geneva.

Djokovic last retired at a Grand Slam during the 2019 US Open, when a shoulder problem forced him to quit against



Novak Djokovic had cast doubt over his fitness following five-set win over Francisco Cerundolo, admitting he needed anti-inflammatory drugs to get through the match.

Stan Wawrinka in the last 16.

He now faces a race against time to be fit for Wimbledon, which begins July 1. Djokovic is a seven-time winner at the All England Club, one shy of Roger Federer's record.

**RELENTLESS SWIATEK**

Earlier in the day, Swiatek thrashed Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova 6-0, 6-2 to set up a last-four showdown

with American third seed Coco Gauff, the player she beat in the 2022 Roland Garros final. World number one Swiatek improved her career record in Paris to 33-2 and is on course to become the first woman to lift the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen three years in a row since Justine Henin in 2005-07.

After Swiatek's 40-minute rout of Anastasia Potapova in the last 16, the only consolation for Vondrousova was her

snapping the Pole's incredible run of 20 consecutive games won early in the second set.

"Honestly I think everything worked," said the 23-year-old Swiatek. "I felt like I was in the zone today."

Since saving a match point against Naomi Osaka in round two, Swiatek has looked every bit the tournament favourite and goes into her semi-final with Gauff having won 10 of their 11 meetings, all in straight sets. US Open champion Gauff has come up short against Swiatek in four attempts on clay and was beaten by the top seed on her way to the title in Rome last month. "You don't want to change your routines. Not to put too much baggage on your shoulders, just treat it like any other match and not something huge," said Swiatek.

Gauff passed her toughest test of the fortnight as she fought back from a set down to beat three-time Grand Slam finalist Ons Jabeur 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

The 20-year-old Gauff is set for a third straight Grand Slam semi-final, after also making the last four at the Australian Open. "Everybody knows I want to go all the way," said Gauff, who must try to end Swiatek's 19-match French Open winning run. "She's playing great tennis here, so it's going to be a challenge, but I'm going to go into the match with a lot of belief that I can. I have nothing to lose. All the pressure is on her."



COMMENT

# Dravid to bow out as coach after World Cup



AFP  
New York

**R**ahul Dravid said yesterday that he will leave his post as India coach at the end of the T20 World Cup after almost three years in charge. Dravid's contract runs out at the end of the month and he will not re-apply for the job, which has been advertised by India's governing cricket body, the BCCI, since last month. "It is going to be the last one that I am in charge of," the 51-year-old told reporters ahead of India's opening match against Ireland in New York today. "Unfortunately, the kind of schedules and where I find myself at this stage in my life, I don't think I'll be able to re-apply. "I love doing the job. I've really

enjoyed coaching India and I think it's a truly special job to do." The former India captain took over the team from Ravi Shastri after the 2021 T20 World Cup. This year's edition in the United States and West Indies is his last chance to end the country's global trophy drought, which stretches back to the 2013 Champions Trophy. Dravid oversaw India's runs to the finals of both the World Test Championship and their home 50-over World Cup last year, but they came up short against Australia each time. "I enjoyed working with this team and it's a great bunch of boys to work with," Dravid said. "To be very honest, I think we've actually played really well in these tournaments. "The World Test Championship is slightly different in terms of it's

not one tournament but a whole cycle, but playing extremely well in the cycle to get to the final there again. "The 50-over World Cup we had a great run and went into the final. I think we've been right up there with some of the best teams. "We can't say that we've not played good cricket in these tournaments. Yes, we probably haven't been able to get across the line in that one knockout game. The (2023 ODI) final in Ahmedabad or the (WTC final) game at The Oval and then again at Adelaide in the T20 semi-final. So we just probably haven't been able to execute in that last phase. "Hopefully we play good cricket to get ourselves into those positions again. Then maybe play good cricket on the day to get across the line. But the important thing when you start these tournaments is not

to think about that. It is to actually think about getting into those positions again. I think that's as hard as actually winning those games at times. "You have to find yourselves in those positions where you are pushing for glory, and that's all you can do as a group and as a team. Our whole goal will be to try and get ourselves once again into a position where we give ourselves a chance to be able to, um, win a tournament," he added. India have not won the T20 World Cup since its inaugural edition in 2007 and they have not lifted the one-day World Cup since 2011. India face Pakistan on June 9 and tournament hosts USA three days later in New York, before concluding their group fixtures against Canada in Lauderdale, Florida, on June 15.

MATCH REPORT

# Afghanistan beat Uganda by 125 runs in opener

'IT WAS THE KIND OF START WE WANTED AS A TEAM'

AFP  
Georgetown, Guyana

**A**fghanistan produced a dominant bowling and batting performance to thrash debutants Uganda by 125 runs in the T20 World Cup in Guyana yesterday. Afghanistan openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran laid the foundations for the win with an opening stand of 154 in Afghanistan's 183-5. Left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi dazzled with five wickets for just nine runs as Uganda were skittled for 58 in 16 overs. "It was the kind of start we wanted as a team," Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan said. "It does not matter who we play, it is about the mindset. "The hard work we have done in the last few weeks, the way the openers started and the way our bowlers bowled – it was a great overall team effort." Afghanistan had looked poised for a massive total after Gurbaz's 76 off 45 balls which included four fours and four sixes. Zadran was in similarly swash-buckling form, blasting 70 off 46 deliveries including nine fours and a six. Gurbaz and Zadran's opening partnership was the second highest in men's T20 World Cup history, beaten only by the 170 by England's Jos Buttler and Alex Hales in 2022. But when Gurbaz and Zadran fell in the space of four balls, Uganda were able to peg back Afghanistan. Masaba claimed a piece of cricket history for the East African nation after taking his country's first ever World Cup wicket,



Afghanistan openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran during their T20 World Cup match against Uganda in Georgetown, Guyana, yesterday. (@ACBofficials)

bowling Zadran in the 15th over to leave the score at 154-1. Alpesh Ramjani then removed Gurbaz, who was caught by Riazat Ali Shah at deep square leg for 76. Masaba claimed his second wicket, getting rid of Najibullah Zadran, who was caught at deep square leg by Dinesh Nakrani. Cosmas Kyewuta took the other two wickets. Any hopes that Uganda's bowling fightback would spill into their innings were snuffed out by Fazalhaq in the first over. After Uganda opener Ronak Patel creamed a four off Fazalhaq's first ball, the Afghan bowler hit back with two wickets with his next two deliveries, removing Pa-

tel and Roger Mukasa, to leave the Africans reeling at 4-2. Mujeeb Ur Rahman then had Simon Ssesazi caught by Fazalhaq off a top edge for four as Uganda slumped to 8-3. The wickets continued to tumble and Uganda were soon 18-5 in the fifth over. Fazalhaq took the wickets of Masaba and Robinson Obuya, both caught behind, to complete his five-wicket haul before skipper Khan mopped up the tail by dismissing Bilal Hassan lbw and bowling Hendry Ssenyondo. Uganda skipper Masaba took positives from his team's T20 World Cup debut, despite the heavy defeat. "Pretty special moment for

us, hearing our national anthem and seeing our flag at the World Cup," Masaba said. "Something I will cherish for the rest of my life. First game at the World Cup, lot of nerves. Good to get that out of the way. We will look to come out and play better next game."

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Afghanistan 183-5** (Rahmanullah Gurbaz 76, Ibrahim Zadran 70; Brian Masaba 2-21, Cosmas Kyewuta 2-25)  
**Uganda: 58 all out** (Robinson Obuya 14; Fazalhaq Farooqi 5-9, Naveen 2-4, Rashid Khan 2-12)  
**Toss:** Uganda  
**Result:** Afghanistan won by 125 runs

FOCUS

## Netherlands defeat Nepal by six wickets



Netherlands' Max O'Dowd (left) celebrates a half century with teammate Bas de Leede during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup Group D match against Nepal at the Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium in Texas yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Dallas

**M**ax O'Dowd hit an unbeaten half-century to steer the Netherlands to a six-wicket victory over Nepal in their T20 World Cup Group D clash yesterday. Set a target of 107 to win, O'Dowd anchored the Netherlands' run chase with 54 off 48 balls to see the Dutch over the line at the Grand Prairie Stadium in Dallas. The Netherlands finished on 109-4 off 18.4 overs, with Bas de Leede hitting the winning runs with a boundary to seal victory. Vikram Singh supported O'Dowd with 22 runs while Sybrand Engelbrecht was the only other Netherlands batsman to make it into double figures with 14. Nepal, meanwhile, were left running a trio of dropped catches that might have turned the game had

they gone to hand, including skipper Rohit Paudel's missed chance to get rid of O'Dowd in the 18th over. The Netherlands' modest victory target had been set up by a disciplined bowling display which restricted Nepal to 106 all out. "Our bowlers were awesome up top," Netherlands captain Scott Edwards said afterwards. "All five of our bowlers were brilliant. Ideally we would have got the runs a little quicker, but it was great the way Max batted, and Bassie finished it off well. We've got to play consistent cricket right way through this tournament." After losing the toss, Nepal's batsmen struggled to get to grips with moist, overcast conditions after being put into bat following a slight delay of play caused by a wet outfield. "The conditions while batting were really challenging," Nepal captain Paudel said. "Netherlands bowled really well."

### Cummins joins San Francisco Unicorns

**San Francisco:** Australian Test and one-day captain Pat Cummins has signed a four-year deal with Major League Cricket's San Francisco Unicorns, the team announced yesterday. The 31-year-old fast bowler, who is currently part of Australia's squad at the T20 World Cup co-hosted in the United States and Caribbean, joins a franchise which also includes New Zealand's Matt Henry and Pakistan's Haris Rauf. Major League Cricket's second

season will begin in July following the T20 World Cup. The six-team league played its inaugural season in 2023 with New York winning the first title. "I'm very excited to join the Unicorns ahead of the 2024 season," said Cummins. "MLC is developing at a rapid rate, and the US market potential is huge for cricket." Cummins arrival comes after Major League Cricket was recently granted "List A" status by the International Cricket Council.

## Green ready to 'plug holes' for Australia after IPL roles

**Barbados:** Australia all-rounder Cameron Green says he is ready to bat up and down the order at the T20 World Cup after being utilised in several roles during the Indian Premier League. The right-hander had a slow start batting at number three for Royal Challengers Bangalore but thrived when slotted into the middle order after being dropped for a few games. Australia's batting lineup at the World Cup, which is being co-hosted by the United States and West Indies, is well set but Green's versatility could come in handy if selectors opt for a second all-rounder. Green may also be called into action while captain and all-rounder Mitchell Marsh is unable to bowl as he recovers from a hamstring strain. "That's the beauty of what I've been exposed to in the last few years," Green told reporters

in Barbados in the lead-up to Australia's opener against Oman. "It's not always been a consistent spot that I've locked into. But at the same time, I'm also thankful for that. I feel like I can jump in at many different roles. I think that's where I see myself this tournament, maybe plugging holes in the team." Green is not the only Australian player to notice improvement after an IPL spell. Fast bowler Pat Cummins savoured a successful tournament as captain of Sunrisers Hyderabad, helping his team to the final. Cummins said his T20 bowling was probably as good as it has ever been over the last 10 years. Reigning Test and one-day world champions Australia are bidding to become the first team to hold all three of cricket's major global trophies with victory in the T20 World Cup.

BOTTOMLINE

## England-Scotland clash abandoned due to rain

AFP  
Bridgetown, Barbados

**R**ain led to the abandonment of defending champions England's T20 World Cup opener against Scotland at the Kensington Oval in Barbados yesterday. In a Group B match plagued by bad weather, Scotland made 90-0 in an interrupted innings reduced to 10 overs, with George Munsey 41 not out and Michael Jones 45 not out. But before England could begin their pursuit of a revised target of 109 in 10 overs, under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method, a fresh downpour led the umpires to call off the game. Both sides received a point apiece. England take on Australia in their clash on Saturday while Scotland play Namibia tomorrow.



Chris Jordan (left) of England expressed disappointment as George Munsey (right) of Scotland adds to his score during the ICC T20 World Cup match at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, yesterday. (AFP)



MOTORSPORT

# Perez staying with Red Bull for two more years

‘I am really happy to commit my future to this great team’

Reuters  
Monaco

Mexican Sergio Perez will race for Red Bull until 2026 after signing a two-year extension to his contract, the Formula One champions announced yesterday.

Perez, 34, finished second overall to triple F1 world champion teammate Max Verstappen last season - the first time the team had landed a campaign one-two - but is currently fifth after eight races.

The announcement ahead of the Canadian Grand Prix in Montreal this weekend silenced speculation about who would partner Verstappen next year.

It also ended Australian Daniel Ricciardo's hopes of returning to the senior team, after making a comeback with sister outfit RB, and closed another door to Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, who is looking for a seat for 2025.

Perez, who joined the team at the end of 2020, said racing for Red Bull was "a challenge like no other" both on and off the track. "I am really happy to commit my future to this great team," said 'Checo'.

"I am delighted to be staying here to continue our journey together and contribute to this team's great history for two more years. Being part of the team is an immense challenge, and one I love.

"We have a great challenge this year and I have full trust in the whole team that the future is bright here and I am excited to be part of it."



Red Bull's Sergio Perez arrives before the race at the Monaco Grand Prix at Circuit de Monaco in this May 26, 2024 file photo. (Reuters)

Formula One's engine rules are changing in 2026, with Red Bull building their own powertrain and starting a new partnership with Ford.

Red Bull enjoyed the most dominant season in the sport's history last year, winning 21 of 22 races and Verstappen triumphant in 19.

Verstappen has so far won five races this year but Red Bull have been embroiled in controversy with team boss Christian Horner cleared of allegations of misconduct, which he denied, towards a female employee.

Horner has also faced opposi-

tion from Verstappen's father Jos, who said in March that Red Bull would 'explode' if the boss stayed, while divisions have emerged among the team's shareholders.

Star designer Adrian Newey also announced last month that he would be leaving next year.

"Now is an important time to confirm our line-up for 2025 and we are very pleased to continue working together with Checo," said Horner, who stressed the importance of continuity and stability.

"The past few races have been tough, there is convergence on the grid, but we are confident in

Checo and look forward to his return to proven form and performance, that we so often see," added Horner.

"Last year was a unicorn season and we will need to work hard to retain our titles, but we are assured in our line up and with the team as a whole, which is imperative in what is shaping up to be a close fought championship this year."

Perez, winner of six races in his F1 career, has so far finished second three times this season and third in China.

He crashed out of the last race in Monaco.

## MotoGP leader Martin switching to Aprilia next season



Paris: MotoGP championship leader **Jorge Martin** will change teams next season, Aprilia announced on Monday, saying they had signed the Spaniard to a "multi-year contract" starting in 2025.

The 26-year-old is in his fourth season with the Ducati satellite team Pramac.

"Jorge is a building block to reach the goal we are all looking for with great hunger at Aprilia Racing," said team CEO Massimo Rivola.

"We spoke last night and without wasting any time we made the decision."

Martin had been a leading candidate to move up to the Ducati factory team next season to replace Enea Bastianini.

The picture seemed to change at the end of last week when six-time world champion Marc Marquez, who joined another Ducati satellite, Gresini, in January, declared replacing Martin at Pramac next season "was not an

option". Speaking last Thursday, ahead of the Italian Grand, Marquez said he would give priority to offers from factory teams. He was speaking after fellow Catalan Aleix Espargaro had announced he would retire at the end of the season, freeing a place at Aprilia.

This season, Martin leads double defending world champion Francesco Bagnaia by 18 points in the standings with Marquez, resurgent in third after four uncompetitive seasons hampered by severe crashes and his Honda team's struggles to keep up with Ducati. As the signing season gathers pace, Ducati are expected to announce soon the name of the rider who will join Bagnaia in the factory team. On Saturday, KTM announced the recruitment of 20-year-old Spanish prodigy Pedro Acosta, who is fifth in an impressive debut season with GasGas-Tech 3, the Austrian manufacturer's French satellite team.

## Ocon to leave Alpine at end of 2024 season

Paris: Formula One driver Esteban Ocon and constructor Alpine have agreed to part ways at the end of the 2024 season, the French constructor announced yesterday in a statement.

"We would like to firstly thank Esteban for his commitment to the team for the past five years. During his time, we have celebrated some fantastic moments together, the best of which coming at the 2021 Hungarian Grand Prix with a memorable race win," said Alpine team principal Bruno Famin.

Frenchman Ocon won his first, and the constructor's first, Grand Prix in Budapest in 2021.

"We wish Esteban the very best for the next chapter of his driving career when that moment comes," added Famin.

"I've crossed paths with so many inspiring individuals in my time here and there are too many people to thank for their hard work, passion, and dedication to the cause," said the 27-year-old driver. "We had many ups and certainly some downs, but all I can say is that it was an honour racing alongside you, whether you were at the factories or trackside. Still, there is a long way to go this season and my focus and energy is 100 percent dedicated to this team."

CYCLING

# Gee ends run of near misses to take Dauphine lead ahead of time trial today

AFP  
Les Estables, France

Canadian Derek Gee gained his first professional tour victory when he took the third stage of the Criterium du Dauphine yesterday, vaulting into the overall race lead.

When the Israel Premier Tech rider attacked uphill 500m from the finish of the 181.7-kilometre stage to Les Estables, the highest village in France's Massif Central, only Romain Gregoire could keep up.

The Frenchman swept into the lead, but Gee counter-attacked 100m from the line to collect victory. "I've been waiting for a win

in Europe," the 26-year-old told *Eurosport* at the finish. "I've come second enough times. It was nice to finish it off."

Gee, who has won Canadian national time trial titles, came close repeatedly in last year's Giro, placing second in four stages.

He said yesterday's attack was spontaneous.

"I wasn't planning on going there," he said. "It was just a lull and I had to take advantage of it."

Gee collected a 10-second time bonus for winning. He and Gregoire crossed the line three seconds clear of the leading contenders.

"I'm a bit disappointed, I almost believed it when I got in front at 300 metres but he was simply stronger," said the 21-year-old Gregoire, who



Canadian rider Derek Gee celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the third stage of the 76th edition of the Criterium du Dauphine cycling race in central France, yesterday. (AFP)

could console himself with the white jersey of best young rider, even if "it's not what I came for".

Gee moved to the top of the general classification, three seconds ahead of the previous leader Magnus Cort Nielsen. Gregoire climbed to third, a further two seconds back, with Primož Roglic at seven seconds.

"That's pretty special," said Gee.

Today's fourth stage is a flat 34.4km time trial that offers Roglic and Remco Evenepoel, the race headliners, a chance to test their form as they both return to racing two months after serious crashes in the Tour of the Basque Country.

The Slovenian, the reigning Olympic time trial champion, said he has had "good legs" since the start

of the week, but he suffered a minor fall yesterday.

Evenepoel, the reigning world time trial champion, said Wednesday's stage would be "a perfect test" of his recovery.

He said that the opening stages left him "very tired" but that he is sleeping "a lot" and feeling that his body is "getting used to racing again".

The Soudal-Quick Step leader, who fractured a collarbone and shoulder blade in his crash in the Basque Country, wants to see how his body will cope with a 45-50 minute effort in an aerodynamic position.

"I don't know what the pain will be like. I hope I can push as hard as I can," the Belgian said.

GOLF

# Furyk names assistants for '24 Presidents Cup

Reuters  
Montreal

US captain **Jim Furyk** yesterday named Stewart Cink, Justin Leonard and Kevin Kisner as his assistants for the 2024 Presidents Cup in Montreal this September.

"The three of them have a tremendous history with this event, but more importantly, they will be trusted voices in the team room and on the course for our guys," Furyk said in a news release. "I look forward to working with them closely as we build a 12-man US Team that is ready to compete at Royal Montreal (Golf Club) this fall."

The biennial competition between the Americans and the International Team (minus Europe) is scheduled for Sept 24-29.

The US has won 12 of the 14 previous editions, losing in 1998 and playing to a draw in 2003.

The US won the title in Montreal in 2007.

Cink, 51, competed in four Presidents Cups and is making his first appearance as a captain's assistant.

"Jim is a long-time friend and



it's an honour to be named as a captain's assistant for the 2024 Presidents Cup," Cink said.

"This event has meant so much to my career and it's a thrill to get to return to Montreal, where I have such great memories from 2007," he added.

Leonard, 51, competed in the Presidents Cup five times and is also making his debut as an assistant.

"It has been incredible to watch this US Team grow and develop in team competition over the years,

and I can't think of anyone better than Jim to lead this talented group into Montreal in a few months," Leonard said.

"My history with this event goes back nearly three decades, so I was honoured to receive the call and I'm excited for a great week of golf in September."

Kisner, 40, competed for the US Team in 2017 and 2022.

This is also his first appearance as an assistant.

"Match play is my favourite format in golf and I'm looking forward

### Past champions

Year	Winning team
2022	United States
2019	United States
2017	United States
2015	United States
2013	United States
2011	United States
2009	United States
2007	United States
2005	United States
2003	South Africa
2000	United States
1998	International Team
1996	United States
1994	United States

ward to adding some expertise and insight to our team room as we lead an incredible contingent of players into Montreal," he said.

"Jim is someone I've looked up to throughout my career and is naturally just a great leader, so it was a thrill when he called and asked me to serve as a captain's assistant this fall." The 12 players on the US team will be announced later this fall. Six will be automatic qualifiers based on FedEx Cup points, with six others picked by Furyk and his staff.

DOPING

# McMahon banned four years after arbitration

AFP  
Los Angeles

American swimmer Kensey McMahon has been issued a four-year ban by an independent arbitrator following a positive doping test last July, the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) announced yesterday.

The 24-year-old former University of Alabama swimmer, third in the 1,500m freestyle at the 2022 short-course World Championships in Melbourne, was suspended following a May 2 evidentiary hearing where USADA and McMahon presented their cases.

The arbitrator imposed a four-year ban dating to July 7, 2023, the date of a provisional suspension, after McMahon tested positive for the non-specified substance vadadustat at the US national championships, with all results forfeited from July 1, including a third in the 1,500m freestyle at the US meet.

McMahon and USADA agreed to delay the hearing so the swimmer could investigate the source of the positive test for vadadustat, a drug used to treat anemia and associated with chronic kidney disease.

Vadadustat is prohibited at all times as being in a category of drugs associated with growth factors and hormones.

In cases involving a positive test for such a non-specified substance, an athlete must prove their use was not intentional to avoid the four-year ban.

McMahon received a four-year suspension because she was unable to establish through evidence that her violation was not intentional.

The arbitrator did not conclude McMahon intended to cheat, only that she could not meet her burden of proof under the rules.

McMahon was the US collegiate champion for Alabama in March 2023 in the 500-yard and 1,650-yard freestyle



FOOTBALL

# Mbappe relieved with Real move, focussed on Euros

‘This is the club I’ve dreamed of being at, so I want to thank them’

Reuters  
Metz, France

**K**ylian Mbappe is thrilled his long-awaited move to Real Madrid has been confirmed, but the France captain is now concentrating on the national team as they prepare for Euro 2024.

Mbappe joined the Spanish club on Monday after his Paris St Germain contract ended, and with the transfer saga finally over, the forward is delighted and relieved, but at a press conference yesterday he wanted to keep the focus on France. “I wanted to express myself before starting this press conference. Everyone knows the news, it’s official, I’m going to be a Real Madrid player for the next five seasons,” Mbappe told reporters ahead of France’s friendly with Luxembourg.

“It’s an immense pleasure, a dream come true. It’s very exciting. I am very happy, liberated, relieved and extremely proud. This is the club I’ve always dreamed of being at, so I want to thank them.”

After giving his reaction to the news, Mbappe made it clear that he would not be saying any more regarding his club situation, as France aim to win the Euros for the first time since 2000.

“It’s a great day for me but I have responsibilities as captain of France and this situation has overshadowed the national team,” Mbappe said. “I know it’s not fair to journalists, but I’ll only answer questions about the national team. I want to protect my team, it’s been a long time since we won the European Championship, 24 years is too long.”

Mbappe’s season began in turmoil, as he was left out of the PSG squad after his refusal to sign a new contract.

Yet he ended the campaign with 44 goals, his highest tally in a season, and led his side to the league and cup double. “I approached the season with a different ambition because I always thought I wasn’t going to play. I was told to my face, I was spoken to violently, so I was convinced that I wasn’t going to play,” Mbappe said. “Luis Enrique and Luis Campos saved me. Without them, I would never have set foot on the pitch again.”

Mbappe said “things and people made me unhappy” at PSG. During PSG’s tour of Japan and South Korea last summer, the club’s management threatened to ban Mbappe from playing after he had told them he was planning on leaving the Parc des Princes this year.

“I was told that, I was made to understand that, I was spoken to violently,” Mbappe said. “At PSG I wasn’t unhappy, that would be biting the hand that feeds you, and spitting in the face of all the people who defended me, but things and people made me unhappy,” he added.



France’s forward Kylian Mbappe during a training session on the eve of the team’s friendly against Luxembourg in Longeville-les-Metz, eastern France, yesterday. (AFP)

Despite his achievements with PSG last season, Mbappe was not overly satisfied with his own performance, saying he wouldn’t be happy with a similar season next year. “That’s why my ambitions last season were different. It wasn’t as high in my standards, but just playing and winning trophies was my greatest pride,” he said. “This has been the most difficult season and the one I’m most proud of. I haven’t been unhappy at PSG, to say that would be unfair.”

The 25-year-old goes into his fourth tournament with France, having won the 2018 World Cup and reached the final in 2022, but at Euro 2020 they went out at the last-16 stage,

with Mbappe missing a penalty in the shoot-out against Switzerland.

“You don’t learn when you win like we did in 2018. I took a slap in the face at the Euros with a failed competition. It’s the big black spot on my CV with the national team,” Mbappe said. “The player I am in the World Cup has shown all his qualities, the player at the Euros has everything to prove and after 24 years, people are eager to win this competition.”

France play Luxembourg in Metz on today and have a final warm-up match against Canada on Sunday before heading to Germany for Euro 2024 where they will face the Netherlands, Austria and Poland in Group D.

## QATAR BEAT INDONESIA TO REACH ASIAN VOLLEYBALL CHALLENGE CUP QUARTERS



Qatar defeated Indonesia 3-0 (25-17, 25-15, and 25-17) to enter the quarter-finals of the Asian Volleyball Challenge Cup in Manama, Bahrain, yesterday. The tournament, which runs until June 10, serves as a qualifier for the Asian Volleyball Cup. Qatar finished second in the three-team Group C behind South Korea to ensure their qualification to the last eight.

## City launch legal action against Premier League commercial rules: report

London: Manchester City have launched legal action against the Premier League alleging “discrimination” in a move that could have far-reaching consequences for the English top flight, *The Times* reported.

*The Times* said the recently crowned champions would try to end the league’s associated party transaction (APT) rules, which they are understood to claim are unlawful, and seek damages. The Premier League tightened rules regarding APTs, relating to clubs signing sponsorship deals with companies linked to their owners, in February.

*The Times* added the dispute between City and the Premier League would be settled after a two-week arbitration hearing starting next Monday. Abu Dhabi-owned City sealed a fourth straight Premier League title last month, underlining their domination of the English game over the past decade.

Their rapid rise has been aided by sponsorship deals with a series of related parties in the Gulf. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways is both City’s stadium and shirt sponsor. In a separate case City, managed by Pep Guardiola, are facing 115 Premier League charges for alleged breaches of regulations and financial rules between 2009 and 2023 – charges they strongly deny. That hearing is reportedly set for November.

APT rules are designed to keep the Premier League competitive,

requiring clubs to prove that commercial deals represent fair market value. *The Times* report said City, in a 165-page legal document, argue they are victims of “discrimination” and refer to a “tyranny of the majority” aimed at stifling their success on the pitch.

All Premier League rule changes and major broadcast and commercial proposals require the approval of at least two-thirds of those who vote, or 14 of the 20 clubs. If City are successful in their legal fight, it could enable the richest clubs to value their sponsorship deals without independent assessment, further widening the financial gulf within the English top flight.

*The Times* said between 10 and 12 clubs had come forward, providing either witness statements or letters detailing evidence, in support of the Premier League’s defence against City’s claim. The Times said City are suing the Premier League for damages, referring to losses incurred as a result of the existing rules.

City say the rules were imposed at the instigation of rival clubs reacting to the Saudi takeover of Newcastle, which took place in 2021, with the aim to “safeguard their own commercial advantages”, according to the report. City have accused rival teams of “discrimination against Gulf ownership”, citing the comments of one senior club executive, *The Times* said.

FOCUS

## India’s Chhetri says farewell as Palestine eye World Cup landmark

AFP  
Hong Kong

**I**ndian legend **Sunil Chhetri** will say farewell to international football tomorrow while Palestine are on the brink of reaching the final stage of Asian World Cup qualifying for the first time. The 39-year-old skipper Chhetri has 94 goals in 150 appearances for India, behind only Cristiano Ronaldo, Iran’s retired Ali Daei and Lionel Messi in the list of all-time international goal-scorers. India’s most-capped player announced last month that tomorrow’s home qualifier against Kuwait in Kolkata will be his international swansong, and he will want to go out with a bang.

Igor Stimac’s side lie second in their group, behind already qualified Qatar, and can take a large step towards the third and final qualifying round for 2026 with victory. With two games left and two nations to go through, the last qualifying berth from the group is wide open with India and Afghanistan level on four points and Kuwait on three.

“I feel privileged to have had a career like this,” Chhetri said. “When I started playing football, all of this was unthinkable. If I would have left for Europe when I was a 15-year-old, for example, I could have had a different kind of career,” added Chhetri, who had a brief unsuccessful spell in Portugal more than a decade ago. “But when I now look back, I will not



trade what I have got for anything in the world.”

In other Asian qualifying matches for 2026 on Thursday, Palestine need just a point against Lebanon in Doha to seal their place in the final round for the first time. Against the backdrop of war in Gaza, the Palestinian team has already claimed a piece of footballing history this year by making a debut appearance in the Asian Cup knockout phase.

Many of the regional heavyweights have already progressed, among them Australia, Japan, Iran, Iraq and Uzbekistan. Son Heung-min’s South Korea have yet to join them, but they need just a point

from their last two games – at Singapore tomorrow and home to China five days later – to be sure.

South Korea will be under a second interim boss since sacking Jurgen Klinsmann in February – AFC Champions League-winning coach Kim Do-hoon. The German lost his job after being knocked out in the semi-finals of the Asian Cup and the South Korean FA have been frustrated in their attempts to find a permanent successor.

China and Thailand are battling to join the Koreans as qualifiers from Group C. China are second in the group and face the Thais at home knowing that victory will put them into the next phase but any other result could open the door to Thailand.

China coach Branko Ivankovic has not been able to name his strongest squad. “The difficulties we face with injuries and suspensions cannot be used as an excuse,” Chinese media quoted him as saying. “We must make the most of the players we have available.”

Graham Arnold’s Australia have a perfect four wins and the coach can afford to tweak his line-up knowing that they have already progressed. The Socceroos travel to Bangladesh on Thursday and then host Palestine, and Arnold is likely to give a first cap to exciting winger Nestory Irankunda. The 18-year-old, who will join Bayern Munich this summer, is in the Australia squad for the first time and will add pace and unpredictability to a functional team that rarely thrills.

SPOTLIGHT

## Man City’s De Bruyne not ruling out move to Saudi Pro League

Reuters  
Brussels

**M**anchester City midfielder **Kevin De Bruyne** is keeping an open mind over a potential move to the Saudi Pro League, the 32-year-old Belgian said, as he prepares to enter the final year of his contract with the Premier League champions.

The Belgium captain has six Premier League crowns and one Champions League title, as well as two FA Cups and five League Cups to his name since his 2015 switch from German side VfL Wolfsburg. “For Michele (his wife), an exotic adventure is okay. These are also conversations we are having more and more as a family,” De Bruyne said.

“I have one more year of contract, so I have to dwell on what could happen. My eldest son is now eight and knows nothing but England. He also asks how long I will play at City. Once the time comes, we will have to deal with it in a certain way.”

Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in sports like Formula One, golf and soccer over the last few years, with the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar and Karim Benzema, among big names signing lucrative deals to play in the Saudi Pro League.

“At my age, you have to be open to everything. You talk about incredible sums in what might be the end of my career. Sometimes you have to think about that,” De Bruyne added. De Bruyne will play his 100th international when Belgium host Montenegro in a friendly today ahead of the European Championship.

De Bruyne said Belgium are not among the favourites to win the Euros in Germany but not many teams will fancy playing against them. The playmaker did not make any bold predictions about how far Belgium will go in the tournament, which gets underway next week, but he is feeling upbeat about their chances. “I don’t think we are top favourites but I don’t think there are many countries keen to play us,” De Bruyne said.

Belgium are in Group E with Romania, Slovakia



and Ukraine. Today’s friendly against Montenegro in Brussels will mark captain De Bruyne’s 100th cap and the 32-year-old said he was proud of his record.

“I’ve played against many top teams and at all the major tournaments, like the World Cup and the European Championship. We have had, as a team, some good moments in those competitions. “I could have played a lot more but I’ve had some injuries in my international career. But I’m very happy to play this 100th game especially at home in front of our supporters.”

Belgium play Luxembourg in Brussels on Saturday before heading to Germany. “If we can find some rhythm in these two friendlies it will be a boost. We must look to play well, score some goals and create many good moments. It will probably also be important to experience some difficulties so that we can be better prepared for the Euros.”

De Bruyne said his hunger to keep performing at the highest level was undiminished. “When that hunger goes, you won’t see me anymore here talking to you,” he told reporters. He also said he was fully fit despite doubts over his condition towards the end of the season with Manchester City. De Bruyne missed the first half of the campaign due to a hamstring injury. “I feel good,” he said. “Hopefully, I have the right energy to play a good tournament.”