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FOOTBALL

FIFA Intercontinental Cup tickets on sale from tomorrow

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 Local Organising Committee (LOC) yesterday announced Qatar's readiness to host the final three matches of the prestigious club competition.

Tournament organisers confirmed tickets will be available from Thursday, November 21, with Visa card holders receiving exclusive access to a pre-sale period from tomorrow, November 14.

The tournament will see continental club sides from across the world compete for three titles from December 11-18. They are the FIFA Derby of the Americas on December 11, the FIFA Challenger Cup Qatar 2024 on December 14 and the FIFA Intercontinental Cup on December 18.

Stadium 974 will host two matches, before the much-anticipated final match at the iconic Lusail Stadium - marking the two-year anniversary of the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 final. Both venues are fully accessible and will offer a wide range of seating options for disabled fans.



Hassan al-Kuwari, FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 Local Organising Committee Marketing, Commercial & Ceremonies Executive Director, speaks at a press conference.

Participating teams are: Current UEFA Champions League holder from Spain, Real Madrid CF; Egyptian side and CAF Champions League 2024 winners, Al Ahly SC; Mexican winners of the CONCACAF Champions Cup 2024, C.F Pachuca; the yet to be determined winner of the CON-MEBOL Copa Libertadores 2024.

Spectators will be allowed to purchase six tickets per person. An official resale platform will be available at a later stage. Only tickets purchased through the official FIFA ticketing platform will be honoured.

Hassan al-Kuwari, LOC Marketing, Commercial & Ceremonies Executive Director said: "Once again Qatar is proud to



The final will be held at the iconic Lusail Stadium on December 18 - marking the two-year anniversary of the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 final.

host some of the world's best clubs and the biggest stars in football. Hosting the final match at Lusail Stadium on 18th December will be a wonderful way to mark the two-year anniversary of what is regarded as the best edition of the FIFA World Cup, and the best final match to date."

"We look forward to welcoming fans

from around the world to experience what will be an electric atmosphere in fantastic world-class venues. As always, fans will be able to enjoy Qatar's signature hospitality, amazing cultural offerings and incredible infrastructure for what will surely be a memorable and seamless experience," added al-Kuwari.

SPOTLIGHT

Aspire Academy's 10th Global Summit concludes

Summit provided a platform for exchanging insights on sports science and coaching techniques

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The star-studded 10th edition of the Aspire Academy Global Summit concluded at Qatar's Regency Sealine Camp, bringing together leaders from 50 top football organisations worldwide. Over two days, the summit provided a platform for exchanging groundbreaking insights on sports science, coaching techniques and performance, with a key focus on inspiring the next generation of sports leaders.

Ali Salem Afif, Chairman of the Aspire Academy Global Summit, shared his pride in hosting the summit in Qatar this year, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of Aspire Academy's founding. "We are proud to hold the 10th edition of this summit in Qatar during this exceptional year," said Afif. "The summit took place in a unique atmosphere that blended in-depth technical and professional work with recreational activities in the heart of Qatar's desert, in the Sealine area. This had a positive impact on participants from around the world."

The Global Summit compliments the work done all-year-round work by the Aspire in the World Fellows community. He thanked the organising committee members and the Marketing and Communications Department, led by Alanoud al-Misnad, for their invaluable efforts.

Al-Misnad said that hosting the summit in the breathtaking setting of Qatar's Sealine Desert brings a special essence to this 10th edition, reflecting an aspect of our nation's culture.

Al-Misnad, who also serves as a member of the summit's organising committee, added that the impressive attendance and broad participation of Aspire Fellows from around the world, along with prominent guest speakers, highlight the importance of the Aspire Academy Global Summit. After ten years since its inaugural edition in Paris in 2014, it is inspiring to see this 10th edition in Qatar receiving such outstanding international participation and engagement over two full days.

Al-Misnad also acknowledged the strong support the summit receives from Aspire Academy, the parent Aspire Zone Foundation, and longstanding partners, including Al Kass Sports Channels - the official broadcaster of the summit since its inception, the Qatar Football Association and Qatar Stars League.

The summit's first day concluded with an unforgettable gala dinner, held amidst



Aspire Academy graduate and four-time Olympic high jump medallist Mutaz Barshim made a guest appearance during the second and final day of the summit.

the stunning desert landscapes of the Outpost Al Barari. VIP guests, Aspire in the World Fellows, and sponsors enjoyed an exceptional dining experience under the starry sky with the sand beneath their feet.

The evening's highlight was a Star Chat with Italian basketball coach Sergio Scariolo, current head coach of the Spanish national basketball team. Under his leadership, Spain has won both a World Cup and four European Basketball Championship titles. During his talk, Scariolo shared valuable coaching techniques and emphasised the importance of continual learning and building strong connections with players.

"One of the most important tips I can give is a word you should all keep away from - 'complacency,'" Scariolo shared. "Never be satisfied and think your job is done. To stay at the top, you need to keep improving and changing."

He reflected on how his approach to communication has evolved over time,

stating: "In the beginning, communication meant telling players what to do and staying on top of everything. With experience and maturity, I learned that communication is about listening, being patient, and being aware of body language."

Unfortunately, former Argentina striker Gabriel Batistuta was unable to attend the summit due to unforeseen circumstances. However, the event continued on its second day with an exciting lineup of roundtables and workshops. A key session focused on the technical and tactical evolution of football over the past decade. Gerrard Trives Guardiola from Barcelona's Methodology Department provided valuable insights into how the club's style of play has adapted following the departure of legends like Lionel Messi and Neymar. He stressed the importance of allowing young players to express themselves while adapting to evolving tactical demands.

Meanwhile, Jose Tavares, Academy Director at Porto FC, emphasised the need



Director of Marketing and Communications at Aspire Academy Alanoud al-Misnad (right) with Italian basketball coach Sergio Scariolo, who delivered a Star Chat at the summit.

to anticipate future trends in football to start implementing change early. He also discussed the significance of emotional moments in a player's journey and how these can be harnessed to motivate players to achieve more. Cristian Javier Ramirez Lizana, Tactical Performance Analyst for the Brazilian Women's National Team, highlighted that effective communication is not only about how information is delivered, but equally about how it is received. He stressed the importance of understanding how different players process feedback, so technical staff can tailor their approach accordingly.

THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL PERFORMANCE: WHAT'S NEXT?

Darragh Connolly, Head of Academy Performance at Juventus, emphasized the importance of preparing young players for professional football as academies expand across various age groups. He stressed that the entire structure of a football club must be aligned to ensure players are ready for the challenges of the professional game.

Rick Cost, Director of High Performance at US Soccer, pointed out that a one-size-fits-all approach to development is not feasible across all football institutions. He advocated for tailored strategies and philosophies that cater to the unique needs of each club and player. Looking ahead, Cost highlighted the rapid rise of artificial intel-



ligence (AI) and its potential to transform football. He urged delegates to stay ahead of this trend, stressing the importance of using AI wisely to enhance coaching and performance analysis.

In a special moment, Aspire Academy graduate and four-time Olympic high jump medallist Mutaz Barshim made a guest appearance during the final afternoon of the summit. His presence underscored the Academy's commitment to excellence across all sporting disciplines.

The summit also recognized several members of the Aspire in the World Fellows with special awards, honouring their contributions and unwavering support throughout the last 10 editions of the Global Summit.

SPOTLIGHT

Aspire to host Sky Grace rhythmic gymnastics from Nov 20

Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) has announced a co-operation agreement with Sky Grace Academy in preparation for hosting the second edition of the Sky Grace 2024 International Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship.

Scheduled to take place from November 20-22, 2024, the championship will be held on the sports track inside Aspire Dome, marking a significant event in Qatar's sports calendar.

This championship promises a unique sporting event for the region, showcasing impressive displays of rhythmic gymnastics that combine technical skill and aesthetic beauty.

The opening ceremony will feature an exciting promotional display for Sky Grace Academy, inspired by major sports films, to highlight the tournament's moments and key highlights.

The ceremony will include striking footage from previous Sky Grace events between 2021 and 2023 in cities like Moscow, Sochi, and Beijing, along with appearances by Olympic champions, officials, and gymnastics stars.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, Nasser Abdulla al-Hajri, Chief Marketing Officer at Aspire, said: "We are pleased to sign this agreement with Sky Grace Academy, which enhances our ongoing efforts to support



Nasser Abdulla al-Hajri, Chief Marketing Officer at Aspire.

diverse sports activities in Qatar. Hosting the second edition of the International Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship in Aspire Dome is a significant step in developing artistic sports in the region and offering the audience a unique experience that combines athletic excellence with aesthetic performance.

"We look forward to welcoming participants and fans from around the world and aim to provide all necessary resources to ensure the event's success at the highest international standards."

Al-Hajri added: "This partnership is part of Aspire Zone Foundation's commitment to developing local and regional sports and supporting all athletes striving for



excellence in various sports fields.

The championship is expected to draw significant interest from sports fans in Qatar and the region, further establishing Doha's status as a leading destination for international sports events."

The opening ceremony will include a unique artistic display capturing the spirit of athletic competition, with participants performing routines using five main apparatus: the hoop, ball, clubs, ribbon, and rope, in stunning displays that will show-

case the competitors' skills. The ceremony will also feature the introduction of official judges, highlighting the countries they represent with national flags in a festive scene underscoring the championship's importance.

The "Sky Grace" championship is exclusively for women's competitions, where participants will present rhythmic routines that blend artistic beauty and physical grace to music, using rhythmic gymnastics apparatus. Each routine lasts between 60 and 90 seconds,

during which participants demonstrate high levels of flexibility, strength, and balance.

Following the success of the first edition, held in Beijing, China, from December 15-17, 2023, which saw athletes from 19 countries, including Belarus, Russia, Armenia, Australia, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Guatemala, Germany, India, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, the UAE, Serbia, Syria, Uzbekistan, and Cuba, the event brought together elite global talent, reinforcing the champion-

ship's status as a distinguished international sports event.

The second edition is expected to attract participants from 25 countries, including Qatar, Russia, Mexico, Cuba, Belarus, the Philippines, Guatemala, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, the UAE, India, Venezuela, Bulgaria, Serbia, China, the Netherlands, Egypt, Syria, Germany, Colombia, Slovakia, Madagascar, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, making it an ideal opportunity for showcasing and competing among the top rhythmic gymnastics talents.

The Aspire Dome is an ideal venue for hosting this event. It is the world's largest multi-purpose indoor dome with a seating capacity of up to 15,500 and includes 13 multi-purpose sports halls.

Closely associated with Aspire Academy, Aspire Dome offers world-class facilities that host various prominent sports events throughout the year.

Aspire Dome has previously hosted several prestigious international championships, including the Hyrox Championship held in May 2024 for the first time at Aspire, with around 4,000 athletes from 34 countries and 74 nationalities.

It was also one of the main venues for the 2024 World Aquatics Championships and contributed to the success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

CRICKET

NZ's Ferguson out of Sri Lanka ODIs

'He showed in the space of just two overs what an asset he is'

AFP
Colombo

New Zealand fast bowler Lockie Ferguson is out of the one day international series against Sri Lanka with a leg injury, days after taking a hat-trick against the same opposition.

Ferguson went off for treatment straight after becoming the sixth New Zealander to take a Twenty20 international hat-trick during his second over in Sunday's series-levelling win in Dambulla.

Seamer Adam Milne replaces the 33-year-old white-ball specialist and will join the squad in Dambulla ahead of today's first ODI of a three-match series.

"We're gutted for Lockie," said New Zealand coach Gary Stead.

"He showed in the space of just two overs what an asset he is with the ball and he's also brought a lot of leadership to this group.

"We're hopeful his recovery will be short and he'll be back out on the field in no time."

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said it was a "massive blow".

Sri Lanka have their own injury woes, with leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga ruled out due to a hamstring strain.

Dushan Hemantha has been drafted in, but Jeffrey Vanderson is expected to take the lead role.

"It's a setback, sure, but Jeffrey stepped up when Hasaranga was injured against India and performed admirably," Sri Lankan captain Charith Asalanka said.

"We're building strong bench strength, and replacements have been stepping up when called upon."

The second and third ODIs are in Pallekele on November 17 and 19.



New Zealand's Michael Bracewell (left) and coach Gary Stead attend a practice session yesterday, on the eve of their first ODI against Sri Lanka at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium in Dambulla. (AFP)

Sri Lanka hires South African consultant coach

Sri Lanka's cricket board yesterday named former South African batsman Neil McKenzie as a consultant coach ahead of their Test tour of South Africa. The ex-Proteas right-handed batter, 48,

will work with Sri Lankan players from Wednesday for just over a week, the board said. McKenzie's playing career highlights included sharing a 415-run stand with Graeme Smith against Bangladesh in 2008, the highest-ever opening partnership in Test history. "Mc-

Kenzie will bring in vital, in-depth insights about the South African conditions to help Sri Lankan players adapt to the challenge," the board's chief Ashley de Silva said in a statement. The two-Test series begins on Nov 27, with the second match starting on Dec 5.

CHAMPIONS TROPHY

PCB asks ICC to explain India's no to tour Pakistan

AFP
Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said yesterday it has asked the sport's governing body to explain India's refusal to send a team to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy next year.

The International Cricket Council informed the PCB last week that India would not tour Pakistan for the eight-team tournament, leaving the fate of the event hanging in the balance.

Pakistan had previously rejected the option of a hybrid arrangement that would allow India to play their matches at neutral venues, for example in the United Arab Emirates.

"The PCB has responded to last week's ICC letter seeking clarifications for the Indian Board's decision not to travel to Pakistan for next year's Champions Trophy," PCB spokesperson Sami-ul-Hasan told AFP.

Deteriorating political ties have meant the bitter rivals have not played a bilateral cricket series for over a decade - squaring off only in ICC multi-nation events.

The neighbours have fought three wars since being carved out of the subcontinent's partition in 1947 and that rivalry is often reflected on the cricket field.

Any cricket match between the two is among the most watched events on the global sporting calendar.

India and Pakistan have only faced off in ICC multi-nation events. India last visited Pakistan in 2008, for the Asia Cup.

Pakistani media reported yesterday that the PCB would be unwilling to accept security reasons for India's refusal to visit.

New Zealand have toured Pakistan three times in the past two years, with England visiting

twice and Australia once in the same period.

Pakistan also visited India for last year's ODI World Cup and the PCB had expected the gesture to be reciprocated for the Champions Trophy.

The Champions Trophy is slated to be played across three venues - Lahore, Rawalpindi and Karachi - from February 19-March 9 next year.

But a final schedule due to be announced this week has been postponed over the stand-off - which PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi termed disappointing.

"Almost every country wants the tournament to be played in Pakistan and it will be disappointing if they don't come," Naqvi, who is also the interior minister, said last week.

"I don't think anyone should make this a political matter. We'll give every team as many facilities as we can."

Naqvi said Pakistan would consider pulling out of events in India as a response.

"Pakistan has shown great gestures to India in the past, and we'd like to say clearly India shouldn't expect such friendly gestures from us every time."

India is due to host the women's ODI World Cup and Asia Cup next year and will co-host the Twenty20 World Cup with Sri Lanka in 2026.

Champions Trophy is the premier one-day competition after the World Cup with Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, England, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa competing.

The previous edition was held in England and Wales in 2017, with Pakistan defeating arch-rivals India in the final at the Oval. The tournament is under the auspices of the International Cricket Council, the sport's governing body.

The first Champions Trophy - albeit bearing a different name - was held in 1998 and next year's will be its ninth edition.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR UNPROVEN MCSWEENEY AGAINST INDIA

MELBOURNE: Where David Warner launched himself into Australia's Test team with a barrage of power hitting in limited overs cricket, **Nathan McSweeney** has followed a more conventional path in succeeding the retired opener. McSweeney is a product of academies and pathways, having represented Queensland since under-12 level before making a Sheffield Shield debut for the state at the age of 19.

Not unlike his overall first class batting record, McSweeney's Shield debut in 2018 was solid but unspectacular, with 42 runs scored against a modest Tasmania attack. But it was the right-hander's stubbornness that caught the eye as

he soaked up 179 balls in his first innings 35 batting fifth in the order. Fans hoping for more Warner-style fireworks and flair in the home series against India may well be disappointed with 25-year-old McSweeney, who is rarely in a hurry to put bat on ball.

"Being an opening batter, it's making sure I'm leaving the ball well and making sure the bowlers are bowling to me," McSweeney told Australian radio station SEN yesterday.

"Then being ready and positive to score when they miss is as simple as I want to make it."

Like Usman Khawaja and Marcus Labuschagne, the Queenslanders cut his teeth on fast and bouncy

pitches at the Gabba where discretion is often the better part of valour, particularly against new ball bowling.

McSweeney's career has similarly been a slow-burn and marked by struggle for a regular spot in a Queensland team featuring Khawaja and Labuschagne along with test batters Joe Burns and Matt Renshaw. Impatient with his progress, he left for South Australia at 22 and has not looked back.

Appointed South Australia captain in April, he won his spot in the Test team following a bright start to the Shield season, scoring a century and two fifties in the first two matches batting at number three.

That McSweeney has virtually no experience as an opener is cause for concern for some former players and pundits, who feel the overlooked Marcus Harris has been hard done by. Former Australia opener Ed Cowan was unimpressed with McSweeney's dismissals opening for Australia A in the second warmup against India A. McSweeney was caught behind the wicket in both innings in Melbourne, making 14 and 25. "He's a good first-class cricketer, but I still don't think he's the right man to open for Australia," Cowan told the Grandstand Cricket podcast. "The data would suggest that

at the moment in his career, he doesn't have the technique, nor the temperament, to do it." Australia's selectors have dismissed the concerns, saying McSweeney has been virtually an opener for South Australia when batting at three, pushed into action by quick wickets. "I don't think it's a huge adjustment to go from three to opening," selectors boss George Bailey said. Facing the early fire and brimstone of Jasprit Bumrah and an Indian attack keen to atone for a 3-0 whitewash by New Zealand will be a massive ask for a test debutant, let alone one with scant experience as an opener. McSweeney, who will open with a



familiar face in former Queensland team mate Khawaja, feels he is up to the task. "There's plenty of learning to go and plenty of improvement I hope, but I definitely feel like this is the best I've played and I'm ready for the challenge," he said.

TENNIS

Medvedev sees off De Minaur to boost ATP Finals bid

The fourth seed will next face world No 1 and title favourite Sinner



Russia's Daniil Medvedev gestures after winning his match against Australia's Alex De Minaur at the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Turin

Former champion Daniil Medvedev brushed aside ATP Finals debutant Alex de Minaur yesterday to bounce back from an opening defeat and boost his hopes of making the knock-out phase.

The Russian, who lost his first group-stage match to Taylor Fritz, overpowered De Minaur in Turin to win 6-2, 6-4 and leave his opponent on the brink of elimination. Australian De Minaur will be knocked out with a match to spare if the other tie in the Ilie Nastase Group between Jannik Sinner and Fritz goes to three sets later on Tuesday.

Medvedev, who lifted the title in 2020, did not face a single break point and broke De Minaur's serve

three times. The fourth seed will next face world number one and title favourite Sinner tomorrow.

"I decided not to care about it in a good way," Medvedev said. "If I lose, the season is over, if I win I have another chance on Thursday... I'll try and do the same the next match, so I don't care."

Both players battled to holds in their opening service games but Medvedev broke for a 2-1 lead and never looked back. He struck 16 winners in the first set and then lost just two points behind his serve in the second.

A break in the ninth game of the second set proved decisive and he closed out victory with another comfortable hold.

'Solid' Zverev eases past Rublev
Alexander Zverev opened his campaign by dispatching Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-4 in their round-robin

opener. In the afternoon match, Casper Ruud romped through the opening set before fighting back from 5-2 behind in the second to beat an out-sorts Carlos Alcaraz 6-1, 7-5.

Germany's Zverev had last faced Russian Rublev at the same stage of the finals in 2023 and won by the same score.

Zverev, a two-time winner of this event in 2018 and 2021, moved to second in the John Newcombe group, behind Norway's Ruud.

The 27-year-old Zverev, the recent winner of the Paris Masters 1000, has climbed back to No.2 in the world this season.

After an injury-hit 2022 season he had briefly dropped out of the top 25 in 2023.

"I was never sure I was going to get back to this level," Zverev said on the court in Turin. "Second year in a row for me here. I still

want to get better. I still want to improve on a few things. We'll see how next year goes."

Rublev held to love in his first three service games. He won a 13th straight point on serve to open the crucial seventh game, but Zverev then won the next four to break to 15.

Zverev did not allow a break point against his serve all match and converted immediately both times he had the chance.

"I thought it was a very solid match from my end," said Zverev. "Andrey is an incredible player, but everyone who plays here is an unbelievable player."

"Against anyone here, you have to play your best to have a chance, you have to be solid, mentally strong. I feel like I did that today, I felt like I used my chances quite well and I'm obviously happy with this win."

FOCUS

Poland hoping Swiatek can inspire BJK Cup 'revenge' against Spain

AFP
Málaga

Poland head into their first-round clash with hosts Spain at the Billie Jean King Cup Finals buoyed by the presence of Iga Swiatek and dreaming of a first-ever title in the team event.

The Poles have finished bottom of their group in each of the past two years without five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek, but she will be making her debut in the revamped knockout tournament.

Swiatek has struggled for her best form since winning her fourth French Open title earlier this year, failing to reach a final.

Her WTA Finals title defence ended in the group stage last week despite winning two of her three round-robin matches and she arrives in Malaga relatively fresh after missing several competitions in recent months.

"I'm happy that I can be part of the team again, because I always wanted that every year, but with the scheduling, it was pretty tricky and kind of impossible to make it work," world number two Swiatek told a press conference.

"I'm just happy to be here, and hopefully I can play some solid matches here and stay as long as possible together with the team."

Poland, who also have Magdalena Frech and Magda Linette in their squad, have comfortably the highest average ranking for their top three players of any team in the tournament. The only other top-10 player scheduled to feature is Italy's world number four Jasmine Paolini.

Poland face a tricky opening tie, though, against Spain, with Swiatek set to face former world number two Paula Badosa.

Spain beat an understrength Poland in a dead rubber in last

year's group stage, after both teams lost to eventual champions Canada.

"I believe we're going to get revenge, because last year was a tough one, but this year it's going to be a different match, different teams," said Polish captain Dawid Celt. "That's what I said, I believe we're gonna win the last point."

The winners of today's tie will face 11-time champions the Czech Republic in the quarter-finals.

CANADA EYEING UNLIKELY DOUBLE

Reigning champions Canada have a first-round bye and will face either Germany or Britain in the last eight.

However, world number 31 Leylah Fernandez is their only player ranked in the top 100.

Record 18-time champions the United States are without their top three players, Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula and Emma Navarro, with Danielle Collins set to lead the side in their first-round tie against Slovakia on Thursday. The winners will face Australia.

Japan will make their debut in the Finals after winning six straight ties last year and then defeating Kazakhstan in a play-off in April.

Naomi Osaka played in that clash in Tokyo but is absent in Spain, with Moyuka Uchijima their highest-ranked singles player, although they do boast three top-50 doubles players.

"Two years ago we start from the Asia Oceania regional event and we won five matches there, and also playoff," said captain Ai Sugiyama of her team's long journey.

"Naomi got injured, she really wanted to be here, but unfortunately she couldn't be ready for this BJK Finals. But we have a great team spirit."

Japan take on Romania tomorrow for the right to face Italy in the quarters.



F1 RACE DIRECTOR WITTICH LEAVES WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT

Formula One race director Niels Wittich has stepped down with immediate effect and Rui Marques will take over the role from next week's Las Vegas Grand Prix, the governing FIA said yesterday.

The FIA said Wittich, a German who has carried out the role since 2022 after Australian Michael Masi was removed from the position, had left "to pursue new opportunities".

"Niels has fulfilled his numerous responsibilities as race director with professionalism and dedication," it added in a statement.

"We thank him for his commitment and we wish him the best for the future."

Marques, a Portuguese, has previously served as an international steward and race director for the Formula Two and Formula Three championships. The Formula One championship has three rounds remaining with both titles still to be decided. Red Bull's Max Verstappen could win his fourth successive drivers' crown in Las Vegas. Meanwhile Dan Fallows is leaving his role as Aston Martin technical director this month but will stay within the group, the Silverstone-based Formula One team said yesterday.

Sinner collects year-end ATP trophy

Jannik Sinner spent his first rest day at the ATP Finals in Turin on Monday collecting the trophy for finishing the year ranked the No. 1 tennis player in the world.

Sinner entered the season-ending event already assured of becoming the first Italian to top the ATP end-of-year rankings.

"It's very special occasion to share that here in Italy," he said.

"I would like to thank you for the support around the world, to thank my team. Without the people who are close to me, who understand me as a person, who I am, it would be very difficult," Sinner added, calling himself "very lucky". Sinner's season has been dogged by controversy after he twice

tested positive for traces of the steroid clostebol in March. He was initially cleared by the International Tennis Integrity Agency but at the end of September the World Anti-Doping Agency appealed, seeking a ban of up to two years.

The Italian, who won his first match at finals on Sunday against Australian Alex De Minaur, succeeds Serbia's Novak Djokovic, who finished the year as world No. 1 a record eight times. Boris Becker, who spent 221 days at No. 1 in 1991 but never ended a year on top, attended the presentation. He said that while "there are certainly Carlos Alcaraz and others, Jannik is going to be world No.1 for a long time."



FOOTBALL

Saudis look to Renard to recapture past glories, reignite World Cup challenge

Reuters
Hong Kong

Saudi Arabia will look to rekindle past glories when they take on Australia in Asia's World Cup preliminaries in Melbourne yesterday with the Green Falcons aiming to move on from the lacklustre Roberto Mancini era with the return of Herve Renard. Renard is back at the helm for the first time since replacing the Italian last month after Mancini and the Saudis ended an often awkward 14-month dalliance.

One win, two draws and a loss in four games in the third phase of the continent's qualifiers for the 2026 finals has left the Saudis in third place in Group C, trailing second-placed Australia on goal difference and leaders Japan by five points. Only the top two finishers in each of Asia's three preliminary groups qualify automatically for the finals with

the third and fourth placed sides advancing to another round, and the Saudis are desperate to ensure guaranteed progress.

It was Renard who was at the helm when Saudi Arabia defeated Argentina in the nations' opening game at the World Cup in Qatar in 2022, the win a high point of an initial three-and-a-half year long tenure for the former Zambia coach.

For his return Renard will be without the talismanic Salem al-Dawsari, the winger who scored the winning goal against Argentina, after the Al-Hilal man pulled out due to injury although veteran midfielder Salman al-Faraj has been recalled.

The Saudis face a Socceros side boosted last month when Tony Popovic took over from Graham Arnold to pick up four points from games against China and Japan and Renard will be hoping for a similar return against Australia and Indonesia next Tuesday. The

Japanese lead the standings and face the Indonesians on Friday having received a raucous reception upon their arrival in Jakarta on Monday. Bahrain host China in the group's other game.

"I've never seen something like this," defender Yuto Nagatomo said upon arrival, according to Japanese media. "There was a big commotion at the airport, and I felt a bit like a Hollywood star."

Reigning Asian champions Qatar face a crucial meeting with Uzbekistan in Group A that Tintin Marques's side must win to reignite their challenge for an automatic berth. Qatar are six points behind leaders Iran, who take on North Korea in Laos, and Uzbekistan while third placed United Arab Emirates, currently level on four points with the Qataris, entertain Kyrgyzstan.

Group B leaders South Korea travel to face Kuwait holding a three point advantage over Iraq and Jordan, who meet one another in Basra, with Oman hosting Palestine in Muscat.



MOTORSPORT

F1 Academy drivers excited after first taste of Lusail Circuit

ALL-FEMALE, SINGLE-SEATER SERIES IS CURRENTLY IN ITS SECOND SEASON

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Young female drivers have described the Lusail International Circuit (LIC) as a challenging track after experiencing it for the first time.

The circuit will host the sixth round of the F1 Academy series, scheduled from November 29-December 1, as a support event for the highly anticipated Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024. This marks Qatar's first time hosting an F1 Academy race.

The all-female, single-seater F1 Academy series is currently in its second season. Using Formula 4 machinery, the series features seven rounds on the calendar, supported by all 10 F1 teams, each backing a driver. The final round is set for Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi next month.

The racers were enthusiastic as they kicked off a three-day, final in-season test at the LIC yesterday.

"It's such an interesting circuit - very high-speed and flowing. It's one of the few tracks on the calendar with really high-speed corners," said Hamda al-Qubaisi of Red Bull Racing, who comes from a well-known motorsports family. "It's also physically demanding, and we need to make sure we're physically prepared."

Hamda, daughter of Khaled al-Qubaisi, a prominent figure in UAE motorsport, and younger sister of Amna al-Qubaisi - the first Emirati female racer to compete in the Formula 4 UAE Championship, commented on the potential for female drivers to compete at higher levels.

The 22-year-old, who in 2021 became the first woman to claim a podium in the Italian F4 Championship, said: "We now have the support of the F1 Academy in the F4 category. Hopefully, in the future, we'll be competing in the higher categories. I think once we get into better cars, it will be easier for us to move towards F1."

Meanwhile, French driver Lola Lovinfosse of Rodin Motorsport team, looked forward to "the most challenging part of the season". "The race here is going to be very exciting. I think this track is very special, with its high-speed corners. It's going to be the highlight of the season. It's very fast and flowing and will bring good racing," she said.

Starting out in karts in 2018, Lovinfosse has since stepped into single seaters, racing in Spanish Formula 4 in 2021 and 2022.



FROM LEFT: F1 Academy drivers Hamda al-Qubaisi of Red Bull Racing, Lola Lovinfosse of Rodin Motorsport, Jessica Edgar of Rodin Motorsport, and Nerea Marti of Campos Racing during an interaction with the media at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday.

Lovinfosse raced for Campos last season, claimed three podium finishes, including two at her home French round at Paul Ricard, on the way to ending the year tenth in the drivers' standings.

The 19-year-old spoke about her journey in racing. "I've been that little young girl who didn't have anyone to look up to, so I am really proud to be in Spain's young girl's academy. It is obviously something I wanted to achieve," the French teen said.

She also had a message to young girls who are dreaming to make it big in formula racing. "I want to say to the young girls aspiring to be in sport that they have to keep pushing, to believe in themselves and for it will be possible. I don't think there is too much difference between the men and women," Lovinfosse said.

"It's just that it something new and the mentality of course which you should keep changing and improving. We didn't have many female racing drivers in the past so it is something new for everyone and it is just a matter of time - sooner or later that women would also be there in F1. It's a long way... Formula 3, Formula 2 but I think in the next 8 to 10 years it can be a possibility," she added.



Doriane Pin put together a strong performance on Day 1 of F1 Academy's in-season testing around the Lusail International Circuit yesterday.

she added.

All 10 Formula 1 teams have joined the F1 Academy project this season, each nominating a female driver. Marta Garcia, the inaugural champion, has progressed to the Formula Regional European Championship (FRECA) with Prema and is currently racing for Iron Dames.

This year's winner will earn a fully-funded seat in GB3 next season with Rodin Motorsport, along with 20 days of testing, funded by F1 Academy and Pirelli. Alpine junior Abbi Pulling, driving for Rodin, currently leads the F1 Academy standings with two events remaining and could clinch the title in Qatar.

FA investigates referee Coote over video rant

London: The Football Association is investigating after a video was posted on social media appearing to show Premier League referee David Coote making derogatory comments about Liverpool and their former manager Jurgen Klopp. Referees body Professional Game Match Officials Ltd announced on Monday that Coote, 42, had been suspended pending a full investigation.

The Football Association is also looking at Coote's comments. It is understood part of its investigation will centre on whether Coote's reference to Klopp's nationality constitutes an aggravated breach of its misconduct rules. "We are aware of the matter, and we are investigating it," an FA spokesman said yesterday.

According to the clip, Coote, who refereed Liverpool's 2-0 win against Aston Villa on Saturday, said Klopp was "arrogant" and used offensive language. Retired referee Mike Dean, now a TV pundit, believes the incident will have a damaging effect on officials throughout English football.

In an interview with Sky Sports, the 56-year-old said: "As referees you can't put yourself in that position no matter what you do. "You can say things away from camera, you can talk amongst your friends and things and colleagues, but you can't let somebody video this and then hope that it's never going to come out."

The video appears to refer to a match that Coote officiated between Liverpool and Burnley in July 2020, which finished 1-1. Liverpool had already been crowned champions.

Klopp criticised Coote after the match, saying the referee had been too lenient in his treatment of Burnley challenges.

Klopp left Liverpool at the end of last season after nearly nine years in charge at Anfield.

The German was also critical of Coote over an incident in a match against Arsenal last season in which Gunners midfielder Martin Odegaard's hand made contact with the ball. Coote, as VAR, did not advise on-field official Chris Kavanagh to review the incident. Coote was also the VAR in the Merseyside derby at Goodison Park in October 2020 when Toffees goalkeeper Jordan Pickford inflicted a season-ending injury on Liverpool defender Virgil van Dijk.

Pickford was not sent off for the challenge and did not face retrospective action because, under FA rules, that can only happen if an incident was not seen either at the time or when it was reviewed by VAR.

Qatar train ahead of World Cup qualifiers against Uzbekistan



Qatar players train yesterday ahead of their FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifying match against Uzbekistan, which will be played at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium tomorrow. Following the Uzbekistan game, Qatar will travel to Abu Dhabi to face the United Arab Emirates on November 19. With only four points from four games, Asian Champions Qatar are six points behind Group A leaders Iran and Uzbekistan, who have 10 points each and currently occupy the automatic qualifying spots.



GOLF

QGA to host International Series Qatar

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Golf Association (QGA) has announced that it will host the 2024 Asian Tour International Series Qatar, set to take place at Doha Golf Club from November 27-30. Returning to Doha for the second consecutive year, this prestigious event will gather 120 top golfers from around the world, showcasing exceptional talent and competition in the heart of Qatar.

The International Series is the most prized pathway in golf. A set of 10 elevated events sanctioned by the Asian Tour, the series offers golfers from around the world a route to the prestigious LIV Golf League as well as greater prize money and the chance to compete against elite-level fields at world-class destinations around the globe.



Hassan Nasser al-Naimi, President of the QGA and Chairman of the Championship Organising Committee.

Hassan Nasser al-Naimi, President of the QGA and Chairman of the Championship Organising Committee, extended his sincere

thanks to HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, along with all committee members, for their unwavering support of the game of golf.

Al-Naimi noted that the QGA, in partnership with the Asian Tour, has worked tirelessly to organise this prestigious international event, recognised as one of the world's leading professional golf tournaments. The championship brings significant media attention and delivers substantial economic and tourism benefits to Qatar.

He emphasised that this event is not just a sporting competition but also a key driver in boosting tourism, underscoring the association's plans to host even more global tournaments in the future. Al-Naimi also invited golf fans to come and experience the excitement of the tournament, highlighting the positive and far-reaching impact such sporting events have on the nation.

SPOTLIGHT

Lineker to leave Match of the Day after 26 years

AFP
London

Former England football captain Gary Lineker will step down as host of the BBC's flagship Match of the Day highlights show at the end of the season after 26 years, the broadcaster confirmed yesterday.

But the BBC said Lineker - the broadcaster's highest-paid presenter earning £1.35m a year - would remain at the corporation after both parties "agreed in principle to a contract extension through to the 2026 World Cup".

Lineker, who will have held the post for 26 years when he leaves at the end of the Premier League season in May 2025, said: "I'm delighted to continue my long association with BBC Sport and would like to thank all those who made this happen."

The 63-year-old Lineker took over as host



of the Saturday night programme in 1999. In March last year, Lineker was briefly taken off air by bosses after comparing the language used to launch a British government asylum policy to the rhetoric of Nazi-era Germany on social media.

In solidarity with Lineker, a number of fellow presenters and pundits including Alan Shearer and Ian Wright refused to appear on the programme, meaning an episode was reduced to 20 minutes and aired without its host, pundits and commentary. Lineker was reinstated just over a week later.

The BBC launched an independent review of its social media guidelines, which recommended that high-profile presenters should be able to express views on political issues but should stop short of campaigning on party politics or for activist organisations. The former Leicester, Everton, Tottenham and Barcelona forward has hosted refugees in his home and has often criticised government policies, particularly on immigration.

Last week Lineker, who turns 64 at the end of November, admitted he would "have to slow down at some point", and intimated to Esquire magazine that he may seek to focus full-time on his successful podcast business.