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One month to go for Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games 2026

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games Organising Committee today celebrate one month to go until Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, hosts the largest multi-sport event in Asia from September 19 to October 4.

Bringing together more than 11,000 athletes and 6,000 officials from 45 countries for 16 days of world-class competition, Aichi-Nagoya 2026 will feature 43 sports and 71 disciplines, with 1,407 medals to be awarded across 469 events in what is set to be a historic celebration of Asian sport.

Marking the third time Japan has had the honour of hosting the Asian Games, following Tokyo 1958 and Hiroshima 1994, Aichi-Nagoya 2026 stands as Asia's flagship multi-sport festival, uniting the continent under the official motto, "Imagine One Asia". "Representing the largest and



Representing the largest and most diverse continent within the Olympic family, these Games embody the true power, solidarity and shared vision of uniting Asia as one.

**OCA President
H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani**

most diverse continent within the Olympic family, these Games embody the true power, solidarity and shared vision of uniting Asia as one," said OCA President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani.

"Japan has a world-class track record in hosting major sporting events and I have no doubt that Aichi-Nagoya 2026 will set a benchmark for future editions - empowering our

youth and inspiring the next generation of Asian sport."

Supported by 10,200 volunteers and covered by 5,300 accredited media representatives, with hundreds of millions of fans tuning in around the world, Japan stands ready to stage an unforgettable event.

"As we celebrate one month to go to Aichi-Nagoya 2026, I would like to thank our dear friends in Japan who have prepared the greatest stage for Asia's athletes," said OCA Director General Husain Al-Musallam.

"These Games will create memories for millions of people not only in Japan, but across Asia, forging lifelong friendships through sport, promoting peace through our diversity and creating a legacy that reaches every corner of our great continent."

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 will get

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underway with a spectacular Opening Ceremony on September 19 and conclude with the Closing Ceremony on October 4.

As the final countdown begins, Asia's diverse nations stand united, ready for sixteen days of world-class sporting competition.



The Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya, Aichi, Japan, will serve as the main venue for the athletics competitions and the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2026 Asian Games.

Al Sadd, Al Gharafa, Al Shamal face tough ACL Elite openers

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar's Al Sadd, Al Gharafa and Al Shamal have been handed challenging starts to their AFC Champions League Elite 2026/27 campaigns after the League Stage draw was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday.

The three Qatari clubs will face some of the leading teams in West Asia, with Al Shamal hosting Al Ittihad, Al Sadd taking on Esteghlal and Al Gharafa travelling to Riyadh to face four-time champions Al Hilal in their opening matches.

The competition will feature 32 teams for the first time since its revamp under the current AFC Champions League Elite name in the 2024/25 season.

Al Shamal will be the first Qatari club in action when they host Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor on September 14. The match will kick off at 7pm.

It will be a tough opening test for Al Shamal against an Al Ittihad side with extensive

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE			
League Stage 26/27		West	
A1	Al Ain FC (UAE)	B1	Esteghlal FC (IRN)
A2	Shabab Al Ahli (UAE)	B2	Al Nassr Club (KSA)
A3	Al Gharafa SC (QAT)	B3	Tractor FC (IRN)
A4	Pakhtakor (UZB)	B4	Al Qadsiah Club (KSA)
C1	Al Sadd SC (QAT)	D1	Al Ahli Saudi FC (KSA)
C2	PFC Neftchi (UZB)	D2	Air Force SC (IRQ)
C3	Al Wasl FC (UAE)	D3	Al Hilal SFC (KSA)
C4	Al Shamal SC (QAT)	D4	Al Ittihad Club (KSA)

continental experience. The Qatar club will look to use home advantage to make a positive start to their first League Stage campaign.

Al Sadd will also begin their campaign on September 14, when they face Iranian giants Esteghlal FC. The kick-off time and venue for the match are yet to be announced.

The 2011 Asian champions will be looking for a strong start

against an experienced Esteghlal side as they begin their latest continental campaign.

Al Gharafa will face perhaps the toughest opening assignment among the three Qatari clubs when they travel to Riyadh to meet four-time Asian champions Al Hilal on September 15. The match is scheduled for 9.15pm at Kingdom Arena, where Al Gharafa will face a side that

remains among the leading contenders for the continental title.

The West Region also features defending champions Al Ahli Saudi FC, who are targeting a historic third consecutive ACL Elite title.

Their League Stage opponents include Al Ain FC, Al Sadd, Shabab Al Ahli, PFC Neftchi, Al Gharafa, Al Wasl, Pakhtakor and Al Shamal.

Al Hilal will also meet Al Ain, Al Sadd, Shabab Al Ahli, PFC Neftchi, Al Gharafa, Al Wasl, Pakhtakor and Al Shamal during the League Stage.

The West Region consists of 16 teams, with each club playing eight League Stage matches. The League Stage will begin on September 14 and run until February 2027.

The top eight teams from each region will advance to the Round of 16, which will be played from March 1 to 17, 2027.

The quarter-finals, semi-finals and final will be held in Saudi Arabia as part of a centralised Finals from April 23 to May 1, 2027.

Al Rayyan discover group opponents in AFC Champions League Two

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Rayyan SC have been drawn alongside Saudi Arabia's Al Taawoun FC, Jordan's Al Faisaly and Oman's Al Nahda Club in Group C of the AFC Champions League Two 2026/27 following yesterday's Group Stage Draw in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The 32-team competition will begin on September 15, with the group stage to be played in a home-and-away round-robin format.

The group stage will run until December 9, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the knockout stage.

In Group A, Al Wahda FC of the UAE will face PFC Nasaf of Uzbekistan, Kuwait SC and Bahrain's Al Khaldiya SC.

Group B features UAE side Al Jazira Club, Iran's Golgozar Sirjan SC, Bahrain's Al Muharraq SC and Turkmenistan's FC Arkadag.

Jordan's Al Hussein, Iraq's Al Shorta, Oman's Al Seeb Club and India's East Bengal FC

make up Group D. Group E brings together FC Seoul of Republic of Korea, Australia's Melbourne Victory, Vietnam's The Cong-Viettel FC and either Indonesia's Persib Bandung or Manila Digger of the Philippines.

Adelaide United, BG Pathum United of Thailand, Singapore's Lion City Sailors and Hong Kong's Tai Po FC form Group F.

Japan's FC Machida Zelvia headline Group G, which also includes China's Shanghai Shenhua, Cambodia's Preah Khan Reach Svay Rieng and Singapore's Tampines Rovers.

Group H consists of Gangwon FC of Republic of Korea, Malaysia's Kuching City FC, Hong Kong's Kitchee SC and Cambodia's Phnom Penh Crown FC.

The Round of 16 matches are scheduled for February 9-18, 2027, followed by the quarter-finals from March 2-18 and the semi-finals from April 6-14.

The final is scheduled for May 15, 2027.



Al Sadd stars Roberto Firmino and Claudinho, along with Al Shamal players Mohamed Ben Romdhane and Ahmed Al Saeed, took part in a promotional event at Qatar Mall yesterday to mark the launch of the 2026-2027 football season. BELOW: Al Gharafa's Yacine Brahimi signs an autograph during a promotional event.



Qatar U17 face Venezuela in World Championship opener

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar will open their campaign in the second edition of the FIVB U17 World Championship against Venezuela in Group A at the Aspire Zone's Women's Sports Hall today at 5pm. This will be followed by France on August 21 and Tunisia on August 23.

Yesterday, the Qatar 2026 Organizing Committee announced that preparations for the championship being hosted in Doha from Wednesday until August 28, are complete.

Secretary-General of the Qatar Volleyball Association and Executive Director of the tournament Yusuf Ahmed Kanoo described hosting the championship as a historic event for Qatari volleyball, stressing Qatar's readiness in terms of facilities and organizational expertise.

The matches will be held at the Women's Sports Hall in Aspire Zone and Al Arabi Sports Club.

Kanoo highlighted the tournament's importance in showcasing promising talent and the future of volleyball, noting that the Qatar U17 team is fully prepared after an extensive training program.

He also called on Qatari fans to attend and support the team.

For his part, Assistant QVA Secretary-General and Tournament Media Director Saeed



Qatar U-17 players and officials pose for a photo.



Salem Al Nuaimi said all organizational and media arrangements had been completed, including a media center at Aspire Zone's Women's Sports Hall.

QVA Board Member and Competition Director Mohammed Salem Al Kuwari expressed confidence in Qatar's ability to host a successful edition, noting that the FIVB had

praised the facilities and venues.

A total of 20 teams - France, Qatar, Tunisia, Venezuela (Group A), Cuba, India, Italy, Romania (Group B), Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Poland (Group C), Bulgaria, Egypt, Spain, Türkiye (Group D), Algeria, Iran, Pakistan and Chinese Taipei (Group E) are participating in the tournament.

Italy will begin their title defence in Pool B alongside Cuba, India and Romania.

The defending champions are among all four of the top finishers from 2024 returning to the World Championship, with runners-up Argentina, bronze medalists Chinese Taipei and fourth-placed

Spain also back in the field.

The expanded 20-team field welcomes nine teams making their Boys' U17 World Championship debut: hosts Qatar, France, Venezuela, India, Romania, Poland, Türkiye, Pakistan and Algeria.

Each team will play three preliminary round matches, with the top 16 teams in the combined ranking advancing to the Round of 16.

The remaining four teams will be eliminated.

The knockout stage will continue with the quarter-finals and semi-finals, followed by the bronze and gold medal matches.

The inaugural edition was held in Bulgaria in 2024 and won by Italy.

Qatar cruise past Sri Lanka to reach FIBA U18 Asia Cup knockouts

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar secured their first win in the FIBA U18 Asia Cup yesterday as they beat Sri Lanka 90-43 in their final Group C match in Ahmedabad, India.

The win capped Qatar's group stage campaign with a much-needed triumph that saw them advance into the knockout stage.

Qatar opened with sharp offensive focus, then raised the tempo in the third and fourth quarters.

The opening quarter ended 20-17 in Qatar's favour, followed by a stronger second quarter that closed 18-9, giving the team a 12-point half time lead. The third quarter proved decisive, as Qatar tightened defensive pressure and excelled offensively, outscoring Sri Lanka 29-10.

The final quarter sealed the victory with a 23-7 run, bringing the total to 90 points against Sri Lanka's 43 — a commanding 47-point margin.

Team captain Abdullah Yassin Mousa stood out, leading all scorers with 37 points and spearheading Qatar's attack in a match that demanded resilience after earlier defeats to Iran and China.

Sri Lanka's Sudam Liyanage was his side's top scorer with 10 points.



The result lifted Qatar to third place in Group C with 4 points (one win, two losses), behind China (6 points) and Iran

(5 points). Sri Lanka finished fourth with 3 points from three defeats. China advanced directly into the

quarter-finals, while Qatar will contest a playoff against the second-placed team from Group D for a spot in the last eight.

Iran, meanwhile, will face the third-placed team from Group D in another playoff.

Qatar's improved showing against Sri Lanka reflected adjustments made by head coach Mounir Ben Zeghala and his staff, who worked to address defensive lapses, reduce turnovers, and refine offensive execution after the opening two losses. The victory provided a crucial morale boost ahead of the playoff stage, which will test Qatar's ability to handle knockout competition.

Group winners qualify directly for the quarter-finals, while second and third-placed teams contest playoffs to complete the lineup.

Playoff matches are scheduled for August 20, followed by quarter-finals on August 21, semifinals on August 22, and the final on August 23.

Reaching the semi-finals carries added significance, as four teams that advance will earn qualification to the 2027 FIBA U19 Basketball World Cup to be held Czech Republic (June 26 – July 4, 2027).

Patrick Vieira appointed Senegal head coach

DAKAR: Senegal have appointed France's 1998 World Cup winner Patrick Vieira as head coach, the country's football federation announced yesterday, succeeding Pape Thiaw who was dismissed after the World Cup.

The appointment of Vieira, who was born in Senegal, is a "strategic move", the federation said in a social media post, aiming to "establish a high-level technical staff, in line with our country's sporting ambitions".

His main mission will be to revitalise the team after Senegal's bruising loss to Belgium in the last 32 of the World Cup.

Thiaw was sacked less than two weeks later. The 45-year-old former Senegal international had taken over as national team boss in 2024.

The Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) president said at the time that toxicity had surrounded the team at the World Cup after Thiaw demanded a pay rise.

The appointment of Vieira, who grew up in France, was ratified Monday, the FSF said.

His official presentation as head coach and onboarding will occur at a future, unspecified date, it added.

Vieira was a key part of a superb Arsenal side which won the English league three times between 1998 and 2004, before moving to Juventus and then Inter Milan in Italy.

After ending his playing career at Manchester City, Vieira cut his coaching teeth at New York City FC from 2016 before taking over French top-flight side Nice from 2018 to 2020.

The 50-year-old returned to England as manager of Premier League side Crystal Palace in 2021 but was sacked in March 2023 after a 12-match winless run. He subsequently had short stints at Strasbourg and Italian side Genoa. — **AFP**

F1's Albon re-signs with Williams

PARIS: Formula One constructor Williams announced yesterday it was extending the contract of driver Alex Albon for next season. The 30-year-old Thai finished eighth in the drivers' standings last year, securing Williams' best result since 2016. Albon joined the British team four years ago and will now stay with them to the end of 2027.

"Alex is one of the best drivers on the grid and knows better than anyone the enormous improvements we have made in recent years," Williams' team principal James Vowles said in a statement. The deal comes in the wake of Albon bringing up a century of race starts for Williams.

In interviews with AFP in February, Vowles stated it was "not realistic" for Williams to win the world championship this season or next, before Albon said Williams had started the 2026 campaign "on the back foot compared to our rivals". — **AFP**

Williams sisters fall at Cincinnati while Zverev advances

CINCINNATI: Serena and Venus Williams lost in their first doubles match together since 2022 while men's top seed Alexander Zverev battled into the fourth round on Monday at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters.

The Williams sisters, with 14 Grand Slam titles and three Olympic gold medals together, were side-by-side for the first time since the 2022 US Open but lost to American Payton Stearns and Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine 6-2, 1-6, 10-8.

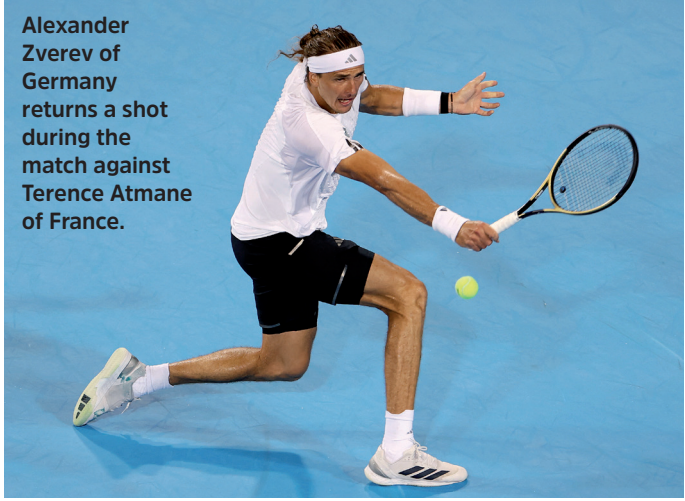
"It was fun and special. We kicked off a little rust," Serena Williams said.

"I didn't come here to win this tournament. It's about having fun and I did want to do the best I could."

German star Zverev, the reigning French Open champion, won his ATP season-best 46th match of the campaign by defeating Terrance Atmane 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6).

Zverev finished the Frenchman, a 2025 Cincinnati semi-finalist, with a sizzling backhand down the line.

"He was playing incredibly aggressively, hitting forehands all over the court," Zverev said.



"He made it difficult for you to play aggressive yourself."

Serena, 44, and Venus, 46, each lost serve once in the first set, dropping six of the final seven games, but dominated the second set and rallied from 8-2 down in the 10-point tie-breaker third set only to lose on a Venus double fault.

Alexandra Eala, the 17th-seeded Filipina, lost to US ninth seed Amanda Anisimova, who recovered after losing a 65-minute opening set for a 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 victory.

The opener featured a 20-minute fifth game, with Eala, 21, coming back from a break down before Anisimova battled back.

Men's fifth seed Alex de Minaur battled through multiple rain interruptions to defeat Arthur Fery 7-5, 7-6 (7/3).

The Australian was up a set and 5-1 after a 30-minute stoppage before Wimbledon semi-finalist Fery caught fire, but he took the tie-break to advance despite 29 unforced errors.

Bayern's Musiala reveals 'neurological disorder' after on-field collapse

BERLIN: Bayern Munich midfielder Jamal Musiala said he is suffering from a neurological disorder after a second on-field collapse in three days yesterday.

The 23-year-old Germany international fell to the turf just minutes after coming on late in a pre-season friendly at Heidenheim. A similar incident took place on Saturday in Bayern's home win over RB Leipzig.

Yesterday in Heidenheim, Musiala appeared dazed as he received medical treatment and was helped off the pitch.

Musiala later revealed on social media that he had a disorder which could lead to "temporary but treatable seizures".

"I have been diagnosed with brief, temporary episodes of absence that are easily treatable and are caused by a neurological dysfunction," Musiala said.

"These can lead to the moments that have occurred recently, such as against Leipzig and now in Heidenheim.

"I know that they may seem scary at first glance - but for me, they

are currently simply part of my everyday life."

Musiala added that he was "incredibly grateful for all your messages and your support".

"I am receiving the best possible medical care in this regard, and I am very optimistic."

After the match, Bayern sporting director Max Eberl said Musiala would comment on the situation soon.

"Jamal will speak about this in the near future. We knew about it and we are aware of the situation," Eberl said.

"Jamal will speak out."

On Saturday, Musiala collapsed on the pitch against Leipzig and required medical attention in hot conditions in the Bavarian capital, with temperatures well over 30C.

Musiala missed the first six months of last season due to a broken ankle sustained at the Club World Cup, but he returned in the second half of the campaign

and played for Germany at the 2026 World Cup. — **AFP**



Rodri joins La Liga champions Barcelona

BARCELONA: Barcelona yesterday announced the signing of Spain's World Cup-winning captain Rodri (pictured) from Premier League side Manchester City.

In a statement on their website, the La Liga champions said the 30-year-old has signed a deal that will run until 2030, bringing an end to one of the longest-running transfer sagas of the summer.

According to reports on Sunday, Barca and Man City reached a

deal to complete the transfer of the 2024 Ballon d'Or winner for a fee of around €75m (\$87m).

Rodri then arrived in the Catalan capital the following day to thresh out personal terms with his new club.

After seven trophy-laden years at Man City, the former Atletico Madrid and Villarreal player was reported to be close to joining Real Madrid, before finally opting for their arch-rivals.

The midfielder has struggled with injuries over the past two seasons but shone as Spain won their second World Cup in North

America last month. Rodri was a vital figure for Pep Guardiola at City, leading them to the 2023 Champions League and four Premier League titles among 12 major trophies.

"I am leaving the club with a huge sense of pride about what we have achieved and gratitude too for so many amazing memories," Rodri said in a statement on City's website.

Rodri becomes Barcelona's third high-profile arrival this summer, following on from Anthony Gordon from Newcastle and Karim Adeyemi from Borussia Dortmund. — **AFP**

India close on victory in first Test against Sri Lanka

GALLE: India took a big step towards victory in the first Test in Galle yesterday after their bowlers reduced Sri Lanka, chasing a daunting 372 to win, to 84-4 on day four.

Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar took two wickets to rattle Sri Lanka's top-order on a pitch offering big turn.

Earlier, India were bowled out for 193 at tea after Rishabh Pant top-scored with 66 and became the fastest player to hit 100 sixes in Test cricket.

Sri Lanka then slipped to 47-4 before skipper Dhananjaya de Silva, unbeaten on 31, and Sonal Dinusha, 25 not out, put on a stubborn stand to steer their team to stumps.

Opener Nishan Madushka Fernando was the first to go in the chase, top-edging a hook off Mohammed Siraj straight to fine leg to be dismissed for six.

Pasindu Sooriyabandara endured a forgettable debut after coming in as a concussion substitute for veteran Dinesh Chandimal, who hurt himself while fielding when he hit his



head on the ground and was ruled out of the rest of the match.

Sooriyabandara was trapped lbw by Suthar for a golden duck.

Prasidh Krishna then had Kamindu Mendis caught at the first slip for two. De Silva survived being caught at slip off a no ball by Ravindra Jadeja when he was on seven.

But Lahiru Udara fell to Suthar after close-in fielder

Dhruv Jurel took a low catch, which the TV umpire gave out after several replays.

The Sri Lankan camp were disappointed with the decision, as the ball looked to have hit the turf before settling into Jurel's hands.

De Silva and first-innings centurion Dinusha then took Sri Lanka to safety without further drama but the hosts have more than 90 overs ahead of them to draw or win the match.

Weather though could come to Sri Lanka's rescue, with rain again predicted on the fifth day of a weather-hit match.

Sri Lanka earlier struck regular blows in India's second innings, but Pant kept his team in a strong position with an excellent knock including eight fours and two sixes.

The swashbuckling wicket-keeper-batsman became the fastest player to 100 sixes, reaching the mark in 89 Test innings, surpassing Australia's Adam Gilchrist (130 innings).

Devdutt Padikkal, who scored an outstanding 167 in the first innings, looked solid again for his 44 after he arrived at crease in the first over when Yashasvi Jaiswal went for a duck. Sri Lanka seamer Asitha Fernando stood out with figures of 4-31.

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 284 and 84 for 4 (de Silva 31*, Suthar 2-30, Siraj 1-11) **need 288 runs to beat India** 462 and 193 (Pant 66, Padikkal 44, Asitha 4-41) — **AFP**