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# Al Arabi aim to maintain winning form against Al Shahania

FAWAD HUSSAIN  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Arabi will look to prove their victory over Al Sadd was no one-off when they face Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League today, while Al Ahli and Al Wakrah aim to build on their own wins as Week 6 gets underway.

Al Arabi ended Al Sadd's perfect start to the season with a 3-2 victory last week, handing the defending champions their first defeat after four successive wins. The result lifted Al Arabi to fourth place with nine points, level with third-placed Al Duhail.

Coach Cosmin Contra, however, is keen to ensure his players remain focused on the task ahead rather than dwell on their impressive result.

"The coaching staff and players have moved past our recent victory over Al Sadd, with their focus now entirely shifted toward preparations for the next challenge," Contra said.

"League matches demand consistent tactical and mental discipline. Al Shahania are well-organised defensively and possess a squad of capable players, which necessitates maximum effort, composure and the clinical conversion of scoring opportunities."

Al Shahania also arrive with confidence after beating Lusail. Seventh with seven points, they will look to make another move up the standings when the teams meet at Khalifa International Stadium at 7:45pm.

Coach Younes Ali acknowledged the quality of the opposition but believes his players can



Al Arabi's Michael Olunga takes part in team's training session.

deliver a strong performance.

"It is difficult facing Al Arabi, a well-organised side with significant experience and players capable of making a decisive impact. Our focus remains on our own performance and style of play on the pitch," he said.

Earlier, Al Ahli face Al Wakrah at Al Thumama Stadium at 5:30pm, with both sides seeking consecutive victories.

Al Ahli climbed to sixth with seven points after a commanding 5-0 win over Al Sailiya, while Al

Wakrah moved to ninth with five points following their victory over Al Gharafa.

Al Ahli coach Borja Jimenez expects a demanding contest against opponents he rates highly for their tactical organisation and individual quality.

"The match will not be easy. I am well aware of the high level Al Wakrah displayed in their previous round, a match they won, and we will approach the game with full concentration to secure a victory," he said.

## QSL FIXTURES

### Today

Al Ahli vs Al Wakrah  
Al Thumama Stadium | 5:30pm  
Al Shahania vs Al Arabi  
Khalifa International Stadium | 7:45pm

### Tomorrow

Al Sailiya vs Qatar SC  
Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium | 5:30pm  
Lusail vs Al Shamal  
Suheim Bin Hamad Stadium | 7:45pm

### On Sunday

Al Sadd vs Al Duhail  
Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium | 5:30pm  
Al Gharafa vs Al Rayyan  
Thani Bin Jassim Stadium | 7:45pm

Al Wakrah coach Jose Luis Sierra said his side had prepared thoroughly for the challenge.

"We are well aware that we are facing tough opponents with quality players across all positions. They also secured an impressive result in their last match and are looking to keep their own winning momentum going," he said.

Sunday brings two major clashes as second-placed Al Sadd, on 12 points, meet third-placed Al Duhail, who have nine, in a contest that could reshape the top end of the table.

Leaders Al Rayyan, with 13 points, face Al Gharafa later in the day.

Al Gharafa are 10th with four points after losing to Al Wakrah and will be eager to respond.

Tomorrow's meeting between fifth-placed Al Shamal, on eight points, and Lusail, who have five, adds another important contest to a round that could further tighten the standings. Earlier, Qatar SC and Al Sailiya face off in bottom-of-the-table clash.

## Al Sadd sign Muntari for two seasons

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Sadd have strengthened their attack with the signing of Qatar international striker Mohammed Muntari from Al Gharafa on a two-year deal. The reigning Qatar Stars League champions announced the arrival of the 32-year-old on their official X account.

Muntari joined Al Jaish in 2012 before moving to Al Duhail. He also had a loan spell at Al Ahli in 2018 before joining Al Gharafa ahead of the 2024-25 season. He made 29 appearances for Al Gharafa, scoring six goals.

At international level, Muntari made his Qatar debut in 2014 and has since earned 70 caps, scoring 16 goals. He scored Qatar's only goal at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, finding the net against Senegal. He was also part of Qatar's squad for the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

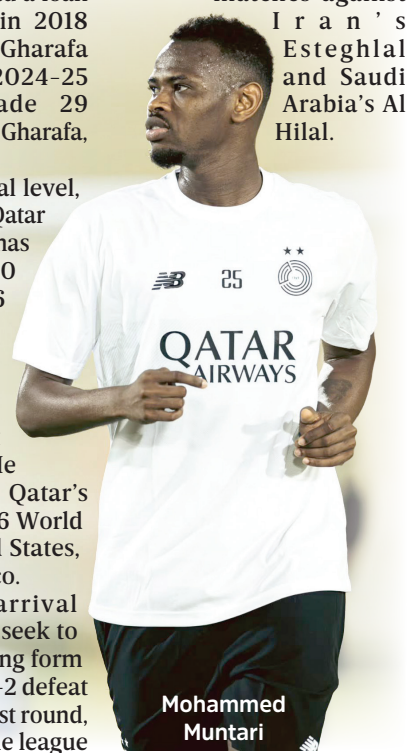
Muntari's arrival comes as Al Sadd seek to regain their winning form after suffering a 3-2 defeat to Al Arabi in the last round, their first loss of the league

campaign. The result saw them surrender the top spot and drop to second with 12 points, one behind leaders Al Rayyan.

Al Sadd will face Al Duhail at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Sunday as they look to get their title defence back on track.

The Wolves are also seeking to revive their AFC Champions League Elite campaign after losing their opening two matches against

I r a n ' s Esteghlal and Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal.



Mohammed Muntari

## U-17 Gulf Cup kicks off in Doha

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The second edition of the U-17 Gulf Cup will get underway today, with Qatar hosting 10 teams across 23 matches until November 4 in the largest edition in the tournament's history.

The tournament is organised by Qatar's Local Organising Committee in coordination with the Gulf Football Federation.

The official draw, held in September, placed participating teams into two groups of five. Hosts Qatar were drawn in Group A alongside the UAE, Bahrain, Oman and China, while defending champions Saudi Arabia were drawn in Group B alongside Iraq, Yemen, Kuwait and Egypt. China and Egypt will participate as guest teams, offering the Gulf side valuable experience against teams from outside the region.

The opening match will see Qatar face debutants China at Grand Hamad Stadium today, with kick-off at 17:45 Doha time. The UAE will face Bahrain in the second Group A fixture of the day at Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium, with kick-off at 20:00.

Defending champions Saudi Arabia will begin campaign tomorrow against Egypt at Grand Hamad Stadium, with kick-off at 17:45, while Iraq will face Yemen at Saoud bin Abdulrahman Stadium, with kick-off at 20:00.

The tournament will conclude on November 4 with the Final at Grand Hamad Stadium, with kick-off at 17:45.

In accordance with the competition regulations, matches in the Semi-Finals and the Final that are level at the end of normal time will proceed directly to a penalty shoot-out.

## 32 teams set for return of Mini Basketball World Cup

CHINTHANA WASALA  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: A total of 32 secondary schools from across Qatar will compete in the 2026-2027 Mini Basketball World Cup, organised by the Local Organising Committee of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 in collaboration with the Qatar School Sports Federation (QSSF).

The organisers yesterday announced the group allocations for the new season of the tournament, first of its kind in the Middle East.

Executive Director of the Communications and Guest Relations Committee at the Local Organizing Committee Abdulla Al Mawlawi, FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 Director Predrag Bogosavljev and Executive Director of the School Olympic Program Abdulrahman Al Muftah were in attendee at the press conference where the group allocations were revealed.

The allocations were based on the final standings of the inaugural edition, with schools ranked from first to 32nd place. Schools were also given the opportunity to select the countries they would represent, enabling the



Representatives from the participating teams pose with their jerseys.

teams to compete in an atmosphere similar to international basketball competitions. The inaugural 2025-2026 season saw the Lebanese School defeating Philippine School 58-47 to claim the title.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Mawlawi said the tournament offers school students a valuable opportunity to experience healthy competition, promote sportsmanship and foster intercultural understanding, contributing to the wider development of basketball among younger generations.

He noted that the partnership with the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and the QSSF supports the development of the game and creates opportunities to identify emerging talent.

Meanwhile, Bogosavljev stressed the importance of leaving a lasting legacy beyond the World Cup.

"Whenever we host a sporting event, we must ensure that we leave a lasting legacy that extends beyond the conclusion of the event itself," the former Serbian star said.

Al Muftah said the tournament

combines sport and education, introducing students to basketball's heritage in Qatar and around the world. He added that representing different countries encourages cultural exchange and strengthens students' connection with the 2027 World Cup. With Qatar gearing up to host the FIBA Basketball World Cup from August 27 to September 12 next year, in the first edition to be held in the Middle East, the Mini World Cup provides hundreds of students with an opportunity to experience the format of the global tournament.



## Asian Cup could be postponed but 'no hurry' to decide: AFC

ZURICH: The Asian Cup scheduled for January in Saudi Arabia could be moved back a year to 2028 "if we need to", the continent's top football official said, following a series of Houthis attacks on the country.

But AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al-Khalifa also said they were in "no hurry" to make a decision over Asia's

premier football tournament.

The 2027 Asian Cup is supposed to kick off on January 7 in the Saudi cities of Jeddah, Riyadh and Al Khobar.

The kingdom has in recent days come under sustained attack in a dramatic escalation in the war with the Houthis group.

"We can wait until the end of November," the Asian Football

Confederation president told reporters in Zurich on Wednesday about a decision on the fate of the Asian Cup.

"Things can change very quickly for better or worse in the region and it is a question of seeing what happens," he added.

"If we need to make a decision then we will, but we could move

back a year to 2028 if we need to.

"But at the moment we are monitoring the situation and everything is on schedule."

Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr saw their Asian Champions League match delayed by an hour on Monday after the Saudi-led military coalition said it had intercepted a missile fired towards Riyadh. — **AFP**

## Infantino offers apology but 'no answers' at FIFA meeting over World Cup plan



ZURICH: FIFA president Gianni Infantino (pictured) gave "no satisfactory answers" when grilled yesterday during a meeting to discuss his attempts to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors, senior members of football's global governing body said, but he did offer an apology for the failed project.

"We asked a great many critical questions,

but there were no satisfactory answers from my point of view," said Bernd Neuendorf, the head of the German Football Association (DFB), who is also a member of the FIFA Council. Neuendorf was speaking after the Council met behind closed doors at the body's Zurich headquarters, where Infantino's FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE) proposal was one of the main topics on the agenda.

Infantino has been under severe

pressure since his announcement in late July that he wanted to open FIFA's premium competitions such as the World Cup to private investors. That plan was ultimately abandoned in the face of widespread criticism, with a rebellion led by European governing body UEFA, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and CONCACAF, which runs the sport in North and Central America and the Caribbean.

"I think we had the opportunity

to say what we felt, and we spoke a lot about the issues," Debbie Hewitt, the chair of the English Football Association who is also a FIFA vice-president, told reporters, before adding that Infantino had said sorry.

"I think it is fair to say Gianni apologised at the beginning for what had happened, and he said that with some contrition, and then there were no holds barred in terms of what we felt about what happened."

Hewitt and Neuendorf are among the 36 members of the FIFA Council, along with Infantino.

Infantino has headed FIFA since 2016 and is running for re-election next March, despite calls for him to stand down in the wake of the FFE plan.

For the moment, no heavy-weight candidate has put themselves forward to run against him.

The deadline for submitting candidacies is November 18. — **AFP**

# Rayyan Bu Thaila claims impressive win to land Al Hamla Cup

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Rayyan Bu Thaila carried his strong form from last season into the new campaign, making a winning start with victory in the Al Hamla Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Representing Injaaz Stud, the five-year-old gelding won the 1400m Local Thoroughbred Conditions race after a well-judged ride by Alberto Sanna, who completed a double at the second meeting of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's domestic season.

Rayyan Bu Thaila was patiently ridden behind the leaders before producing an impressive turn of foot to sweep into the lead inside the final 200m and score convincingly by 1¼ lengths. Jihad

El Ahmad trained the winner.

QREC Racing Manager Abdulla bin Rashid Al-Kubaisi, awarded the Al Hamla Cup.

The meeting also produced a hat-trick for trainer Rudy Nerbonne and jockey Lukas Delozier, who enjoyed three victories while trainer Hamad Al-Jehani also

celebrated a double. Jadwat Al Shahania began Nerbonne's winning run in the Purebred Arabian Maiden, with Delozier in the saddle, scoring by three-quarters of a length.

Assfa Al Shahania followed in the Purebred Arabian Rated Maiden, with Faleh Bughenaim aboard, winning

by 2¼ lengths. Mehbas Al Shahania completed Nerbonne's hat-trick in the Local Purebred Arabian Maiden under Delozier, winning by a length.

Al-Jehani's double came through Sidi Star and Dapper Charm. Sidi Star won the Purebred Arabian Handicap

85-105 under Nicolas Baudet, while Dapper Charm took the Thoroughbred Handicap 70-90 with Delozier aboard.

Sanna's second victory came aboard Maraahab, trained by Hadi Al Ramzani, in the Thoroughbred Handicap 45-65. The pair secured the race by three-quarters of a length.

De Bruyne, trained by Ahmed Al-Jehani and ridden by Ghanim Ahmed Al-Jehani, edged the Thoroughbred Handicap 0-75 by a head in one of the day's closest finishes.

Wathnan Racing's War Boy, trained by Alban de Mieulle and ridden by Abdulla Rashid Al-Hajri, won the Local Thoroughbred Novice in the nine-race programme.



QREC Racing Manager Abdulla bin Rashid Al-Kubaisi awarded the Al Hamla Cup.



Alberto Sanna rides Rayyan Bu Thaila during the feature. PICS: Juhaim/QREC

## 2nd Al Rayyan Race Meeting Al Hamla Cup

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

### Al Hamla Cup, Local Thoroughbred Conditions

Rayyan Bu Thaila, Jihad El Ahmad, Alberto Sanna

### Purebred Arabian Handicap 85-105

Sidi Star, Hamad Al-Jehani, Nicolas Baudet

### Thoroughbred Handicap 70-90

Dapper Charm, Hamad Al-Jehani, Lukas Delozier

### Local Thoroughbred Novice

War Boy, Alban de Mieulle, Abdulla Rashid Al-Hajri

### Thoroughbred Handicap 0-75

De Bruyne, Ahmed Al-Jehani, Ghanim Ahmed Al-Jehani

### Thoroughbred Handicap 45-65

Maraahab, Hadi Al Ramzani, Alberto Sanna

### Local Purebred Arabian Maiden

Mehbas Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

### Purebred Arabian Rated Maiden

Assfa Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Faleh Bughenaim

### Purebred Arabian Maiden

Jadwat Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

# PSG 'got lucky' to win City thriller: Luis Enrique

MANCHESTER: Paris Saint-Germain boss Luis Enrique said the European champions rode their luck to beat Manchester City 4-2 and maintain a perfect start to their defence of the Champions League.

The visitors ran riot in the first half of City's first home game since being found guilty of breaking Premier League financial rules as they raced into a 3-0 lead.

Desire Doue, Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha were on target in a near flawless first 45 minutes by the French champions.

But City roared back after the break as Erling Haaland struck twice, while they also hit the woodwork twice and were denied by a brilliant goalline clearance by Nuno Mendes.

"We could have lost this match if they scored the chances that they created," said Luis Enrique.

"I think it was a very nice match, but the way they play, it's amazing. We like to play these kind of matches."

Maghnes Akliouche briefly restored PSG's three-goal lead in the second half, while Ferran Torres also missed a late penalty for the visitors.

"We try to win every single match.



PSG coach Luis Enrique (right) and Manchester City coach Enzo Maresca embrace on the touchline after the final whistle.

We try to score. We don't stop if we score one or two goals," added Luis Enrique.

"It's very nice to feel that but I have to repeat, today we were lucky because in the second half we could have conceded more goals."

Enzo Maresca had made a perfect start to the daunting challenge of replacing Pep Guardiola as City manager by winning his first eight games in all competitions.

Guardiola, who won 20 trophies in a 10-year spell at City, made his

*"We could have lost this match if they scored the chances that they created."*  
**Luis Enrique**  
**PSG coach**

return to the Etihad Stadium in a show of support after City were found guilty on more than 100 charges of financial impropriety between 2009 and 2018.

But he saw his former players fall to their first defeat of the season despite a spirited fightback after being thoroughly outplayed in the first half.

"From tonight we can learn many things," said Maresca. "Even if we concede two goals (in two minutes) against the best team in Europe, we need to continue.

"I try to continue to learn from the players because I just arrived three months ago, but the feeling at the moment is very good."

Victory took PSG top of the Champions League table after two games, while City drop to 17th. — **AFP**

# Martinez blames 'anger' for dig at United hierarchy

MANCHESTER: Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez said "anger and frustration" at defeat to Atletico Madrid led to his swipe at the club's board for a lack of investment in the transfer market.

The English giants lost 2-0 in Spain on Tuesday in the Champions League. They are also off to their worst start to a Premier League season for 40 years.

Martinez took aim at technical director Jason Wilcox, saying he "100 percent" expected more investment in the squad during the transfer window after United finished third in the Premier League last season to return to Europe's top competition.

United signed three midfielders -- Carlos Baleba, Youri Tielemans and Andrey Santos -- for around £150m (\$198m), but their spending fell far short of some of their Premier League rivals.

"After the match, I spoke out of anger and frustration at not getting the result we all wanted," Martinez posted on social media.

The Argentine international's comments were backed by some fans, but Martinez has been criticised for his own part in United's poor start to the season.

He scored an own goal in a 1-1 draw at bottom-of-the-table Fulham last month and was outmuscled by Dominic Solanke as 10-man Tottenham salvaged a point at Old Trafford last weekend.

"When I talk about wanting more, I'm talking about the ambition we must all have as part of this club. To keep growing, to become stronger and to have everything we need to compete at the highest level.

"These are standards we must all hold ourselves to, starting with me." — **AFP**

# Antony reveals home burglary during Betis' Champions League win

MADRID: Real Betis winger Antony revealed yesterday that his home was burgled while he was playing in his team's 3-2 Champions League victory over Porto the previous night.

The Brazilian helped Betis secure the win, setting up Cucho Hernandez for the equalizer at 2-2, but later discovered that thieves had broken into his home during the match.

"I am sharing this today because of a very sad and infuriating situation. A night that had every potential to be brilliant ended in outrage and frustration," Antony wrote on social media.

The winger described the distress of having his home invaded, saying the emotional impact outweighed the loss of possessions.

He said it was difficult to "describe the feeling of having one's personal space invaded," adding that the worst part was "not just the material loss, but the sense of insecurity within the very place where we should feel safest." — **XINHUA**



Newcastle United's head coach Matthias Jaissle

# Newcastle boss Jaissle says Fernandez-Pardo just needs a goal

LONDON: Matthias Jaissle is convinced £51m (\$67.5m) summer signing Matias Fernandez-Pardo just needs a goal to launch his Newcastle career.

The 21-year-old forward has yet to open his account since a deadline-day transfer from French club Lille last month, and he missed a couple of chances during a 4-1 Premier League defeat at Coventry on Monday.

Fernandez-Pardo has been used down the middle despite belief that he could be better suited on the wing.

But the Newcastle boss believes a goal could transform the fortunes of the 21-year-old Belgian, with Newcastle next in action at home to Aston Villa today.

"Young lads coming into the Premier League for the first time need adaptation time," Jaissle told reporters yesterday.

"I got the recommendation that I should be patient for at least half a year until winter with these lads. But I'm glad that we're seeing Matias in situations where he's bringing the principles on the pitch and creating the chances. It's just the goal missing right now to give him the confidence back.

"He's an amazing player and he has so much potential. We are convinced that it's just a matter of time. I watched him today in the session, when he got a couple more finishes. Pure class.

"I have full conviction he will perform again on a good level and hopefully he will get the rewards."

Defeat in Coventry was 11th-placed Newcastle's second 4-1 loss in three games -- having been thrashed at Leeds last month -- but German boss Jaissle said the defeats were down to individual errors rather than flaws in his system.

"It's never easy after conceding four goals to talk about the structure and what causes us the problems," Jaissle said.

"Against Coventry, we made too many individual mistakes, you cannot talk about formation or technical approach. Even though we're a young squad, we need to learn fast." — **AFP**

# Mourinho blasts 'shameless' timing of Vinicius ban decision

ROME: Jose Mourinho hit out at the "shameless" decision by Spanish football authorities to announce that Real Madrid winger Vinicius Junior had been slapped with a four-match ban just hours before their Champions League clash with Roma kicked off.

The Brazil international was handed the punishment on Wednesday after being sent off during today's 1-0 La Liga win over Villarreal for pulling the hair of an opponent.

It is a costly ban, depriving Mourinho of one of his star attackers for an important run of league games that includes a Clasico clash with rivals Barcelona, who hold a six-point lead over Real at the summit of the table.

Vinicius started as Mourinho's side pulled off an incredible late comeback to beat Roma 4-3 in the Champions League, having trailed 3-1 with seven minutes remaining.

But the Portuguese made his feelings clear about how the timing of the announcement had disrupted preparations in a post-match press conference.

Mourinho said: "Do you think it's normal that a player from a Spanish team, who has to play a match that is also important for Spanish football, that two hours before the match a player knows he's been given

a four-match suspension?

"Couldn't they do it now? Couldn't they do it tomorrow morning? Do we have to come by bus and almost arrive at the stadium when we find out Vinicius has a four-match suspension?"

Mourinho added: "They do things shamelessly now. The cat is out of the bag now. Two hours before the match, a player must know he has a four-match suspension.

"A Spanish team that has earned three points for Spanish football, for the rankings, for the prestige of Spanish football. You want to kill a player two hours before the match; it doesn't seem normal to me."

Real Madrid's coach Jose Mourinho reacts during the match against AS Roma.



# Barcola must get used to Liverpool highs and lows, says Iraola

LIVERPOOL: Bradley Barcola will have to cope with the scrutiny that comes with a huge price tag, said Liverpool boss Andoni Iraola after the Frenchman opened his account for the Reds with a Champions League hat-trick against LASK.

Barcola had made an underwhelming start to his Liverpool career after a reported £123m move from Paris Saint-Germain, but exploded into life against the Austrian champions in a 6-3 win for Iraola's men.

"Football is like this. You win a game, you are incredible; you have a bad performance, you are a disaster," said Iraola at his pre-match press conference ahead of Saturday's trip to Brentford.

"It is going to be like this for Bradley, for everyone who works in football. We have to assume this." Barcola's adaptation to a new league and team-mates has not been helped by injury troubles forcing Iraola into constant changes.

Cody Gakpo, Alexander Isak and Dominik Szoboszlai have missed the last two matches with injuries picked up on international duty. All three are doubtful for Saturday's trip to Brentford.

"Now it is a matter of finding the best condition and best connection with team-mates, the level of understanding, the work of everyone, when to attack the spaces," Iraola added on Barcola's adaptation.

"The more he plays with us, the

more he plays with his team-mates, the better he will become."

Iraola also revealed that centre-back Giovanni Leoni's return from a long-term knee injury has been further delayed. The Italian suffered an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury on his debut for the club in September last year. "Talking to the medical department it wasn't just an ACL. It was a bad injury, a lot of things around the knee were involved apart from the ACL," said Iraola. — **AFP**

# Zverev cruises past De Minaur to reach Shanghai Masters semis

**SHANGHAI:** Top seed Alexander Zverev took “a huge step up” to dismantle Alex de Minaur 6-4, 6-4 yesterday and roll into the Shanghai Masters semi-finals.

He will play Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who advanced when France’s Arthur Gea retired injured from their quarter-final after 22 minutes.

Zverev, who will end the year at world number one, was tested by the Australian’s speed in the first set but sent down a string of dazzling forehands to convert a break point in the fifth game.

Despite a double-fault the German saved three break points in a row to hold serve and was rewarded in the 10th game, taking the first set with a buttery backhand at the net.

Zverev refused to relent in the second set, setting up another break point in the



seventh game to go up 4-3 when De Minaur served into the net.

The 27-year-old Australian clung on for a bit longer but Zverev wasn’t sticking around, clinching victory on the first match point.

biggest match of his career when he quit his quarter-final with muscle issues.

The 21-year-old took a medical timeout for work on his lower right side when he was down 1-4 in the first set.

He returned to play but ended the match minutes later.

“I felt this morning, during a warm-up, pain in the psoas,” he said, referring to a muscle in the lower back.

He said he received “treatments” and decided to step on court despite being unsure about his fitness.

“I tried from the beginning, but it was not enough to play full and too dangerous for the end of the season.

“I’m really sad, but it’s the best choice I could do,” said 56th-ranked Gea, who was playing in his first tournament at the prestigious ATP 1000 level. — **AFP**



## Swiatek avoids seed exodus to breeze into Wuhan last eight

**WUHAN:** Iga Swiatek hit a new milestone yesterday as she stormed into a second consecutive Wuhan Open quarter-final with a 6-1, 6-4 win over American lucky loser Ashlyn Krueger.

The six-time Grand Slam champion recorded the 150th WTA 1000 victory of her career to continue her march towards a 13th title at this level.

Since the Tier I/WTA 1000 format’s introduction in 1990, Swiatek is just the third player to claim 150 wins from her first 50 main-draw appearances in such events, after Martina Hingis (162) and Serena Williams (153).

“I just wanted to focus on adjusting and being brave and, at the end, I’m happy that I was,” said the seventh-seeded Swiatek, who needs a title this week to strengthen her chances of qualifying for next month’s WTA Finals in Indian Wells.

“For sure I feel like I am playing better than at the beginning of the season, so I’m ready to push and I’m happy to be in the quarters for sure.”

The 25-year-old Pole, who awaits Ann Li or Janice Tjen in the quarter-finals, is one of just two top-10 seeds still standing in a draw that has witnessed a

slew of high-profile exits. A day after the shocking departures of the top two seeds, Aryna Sabalenka and Jessica Pegula, sixth-seeded Karolina Muchova and 10th-seeded Iva Jovic also bid Wuhan farewell.

Maja Chwalinska, a finalist at the French Open this year, enjoyed a 6-4, 6-1 triumph over American world number 11 Jovic to set up a quarter-final with Greece’s Maria Sakkari.

Diana Shnaider’s 7-5, 6-3 victory against Muchova was the Russian’s fourth career triumph over a top-10 opponent.

The 22-year-old will next take on Jelena Ostapenko for a place in the final four.

British world number 170 Sonay Kartal sent another seed packing after knocking out ninth-seeded Belinda Bencic in the second round.

This time she delivered a crushing 6-2, 6-0 blow to last year’s Wuhan semi-finalist Jasmine Paolini, the number 15 seed.

World number six Elina Svitolina avoided the seed exodus as she eased into the quarter-finals by ending the inspired run of Chinese wild card Guo Hanyu 6-1, 6-4. She plays Kartal next. — **AFP**

## Alcaraz to play in Vienna after Saudi postponement

**PARIS:** The Vienna ATP event said yesterday it had added world number three Carlos Alcaraz (**pictured**) to the tournament’s line-up, pouncing when a Saudi Arabian exhibition event was cancelled.

“When indications emerged on Wednesday that the Six Kings Slam... would be postponed until the end of December, tournament director Herwig Straka reacted immediately and contacted Carlos Alcaraz’s management,” Vienna organisers said in a statement.

“Everything happened very quickly after that, and Carlos agreed to come to Vienna without much hesitation,” said Straka.

“His commitment is a tremendous honour for our tournament.”

The lucrative Six Kings Slam exhibition, originally scheduled for October 21-24 and



to be streamed live by Netflix, was postponed after Yemen’s Houthis carried out deadly attacks on the kingdom.

Organisers now hope to hold the tournament on December 27-30.

US Open champion Alexander Zverev, Alex de Minaur and Learner Tien had already planned to play in Saudi Arabia and then in Vienna, which starts on October 26.

Further top-10 players already announced for Vienna, an indoor, hard-court ATP 500-level event, are Daniil Medvedev, Flavio Cobolli and Frances Tiafoe.

Alcaraz only previously played the Vienna tournament in 2021, when he reached the semi-finals.

The former world number one has shown inconsistent form since returning from a long injury layoff at the US Open at the end of August.

He won in Tokyo in September but was knocked out in the third round of the Shanghai Masters in straight sets by Zizou Bergs on Monday. — **AFP**

## McIlroy makes ‘solid’ start in rain-hit Delhi, Norgaard leads

**NEW DELHI:** Rory McIlroy (**pictured**) and defending champion Tommy Fleetwood finished four shots off the clubhouse lead on a rain-hit opening day at the DP World India Championship yesterday.

Denmark’s Niklas Norgaard carded six birdies and an eagle against two bogeys to emerge as the sole leader after a six-under-par 66 at Delhi Golf Club.

Northern Ireland’s Tom McKibbin, Belgian Thomas Detry and Spaniard Eugenio Chacarra were tied for second, one shot back, on a challenging day due to heavy rain and nearly five hours of stoppages.

The six-time major winner McIlroy shot a two-under-par 70 for a tie of 13th, carding birdies on holes two, 13, 15 and 18.

He also had two bogeys and called his opening round “solid”.

“The leaders haven’t gotten away and 54 holes to go, so a lot of golf left still.



“Solid start, not an amazing one, but at least satisfactory.”

Fleetwood was four-under for most of his round but suffered a double bogey on the last hole to join McIlroy.

The weather played spoilsport after a sunny start to the day as many players headed back to their hotel rooms after rain stopped play in the middle of the round.

The round remains unfinished for some including US star Patrick Reed, who was two over through four holes.

Nestled in the heart of Delhi, the DGC course is a par-72 layout that is short by modern standards at less than 7,000 yards.

It is studded with the ruins of ancient tombs dating back to the Mughal Empire.

Its narrow fairways are bordered by treacherous dense vegetation on a course that is a throwback to a bygone golfing era, rewarding accuracy rather than distance.

Chacarra carded seven birdies against two bogeys and is in contention for the Race to Dubai, placed between leader Reed and third-placed McIlroy.

“It’s a goal that I have on my team now, you know, try to make a push in the last four events to try to win it,” said the Spaniard.

“Obviously I got two guys, one behind, one in front, they’re world-class players and the best players in the world. “So it’s not going to be easy. I need to play my A-game and see where that takes me.” — **AFP**

## Messi’s Inter Miami book playoffs with 2-0 win over New York City

**MIAMI:** Lionel Messi set up a Rodrigo De Paul goal and German Berterame snapped his scoring drought as Inter Miami booked their place in the MLS playoffs with a 2-0 win over New York City FC on Wednesday.

Victory gave Cristian ‘Kily’ Gonzalez his first back-to-back wins since taking over as head coach last month, guaranteeing second-placed Miami at least a place in the wild card round, with five games left to play.

Messi -- who had scored twice on Saturday after returning to his club side from last week’s emotional Argentina send-off -- was again a dangerous presence, playing a hand in both first-half goals.

In the 20th minute Messi trapped the ball just outside the penalty area and passed it to De Paul, who found Suarez on the byline with a diagonal looping ball. Suarez rolled it flat across



the face of the goal, giving Berterame a simple finish for his first goal since May.

De Paul grabbed Miami’s second on a quick counter with the final kick of the first half. Berterame brought the ball across the halfway line and was slightly fortunate to find Messi to his right with a mishit pass.

Messi drew in three defenders then laid it off with the outside of his left foot to De Paul, who slammed it high to

the keeper’s right.

In a goalless second half, Messi sent a curling effort from just outside the box over the bar.

As the game clock hit 90, Messi played a short corner to De Paul, who unleashed a shot from outside the box toward the far top corner. United States national team goalkeeper Matt Freese made a superb diving save, tipping the ball onto the post.

New York City, on a dire streak of just one win in their last 11 MLS games, at least had a chance for a consolation deep in stoppage time with a penalty.

Ian Fray brought down fellow substitute Talles Magno, who turned sharply away from goal and ran into the defender’s trailing leg.

But Dayne St. Clair made a brilliant save, flinging himself low and right to palm the ball around the bar. — **AFP**

## Australia edge New Zealand to open Rugby league World Cup

**SYDNEY:** Jack Bostock bagged a hat-trick on debut as Australia edged New Zealand 24-22 to kick off their Rugby League World Cup defence with a thrilling victory on Thursday.

The 12-time champion Kangaroos were strong favourites going into the opening match at a sold-out Sydney Football Stadium but they were put through the ring and only just hung on.

They crossed twice in the first-half but were always on the back foot and lucky to reach the break at 10-10.

With a man in the sin-bin, Australia conceded an early second-half try and looked beaten before Bostock pounced with four minutes left to keep them on track for a fourth consecutive title.

It stretched Australia’s

record over New Zealand to 19 wins and just two defeats.

New Zealand applied the early pressure and opened the scoring in spectacular fashion after four minutes through Casey McLean.

The young centre capitalised on a high kick from Jahrome Hughes to somehow dot down in the corner with his body in the air and outside the field of play.

It was a sensational try and Jamayne Isaako curled over a touchline conversion to put them 6-0 ahead.

But the hosts clung on and against the run of play hit back when Dolphins winger Bostock intercepted a stray Hughes pass and sprinted almost the length of the field to haul them into the contest.

Brisbane Broncos star Reece Walsh missed a difficult conversion and then



sent a sloppy line drop-out into touch on the full, handing New Zealand a penalty and Isaako made no mistake.

Despite New Zealand applying all the pressure Australia again stunned them with another intercept try, this time from Tom Trbojevic who like Bostock streaked 90 metres to the

second-half and Newcastle Knights superstar Kalyn Ponga dotted down after a line break, his first try for New Zealand after switching allegiance from Australia.

It fired up the hosts and Bostock claimed his second after plucking the ball out of the air at full stretch and riding a collision with Walsh, converting to level the match 16-16.

Not to be undone, Walsh went one better, collecting a flick pass from Bostock and seeing off four defenders for a stunning try in the corner.

He vomited afterwards and was unable to take the kick, with Latrell Mitchell stepping up and missing to leave New Zealand 22-20 ahead with 10 minutes left.

Australia kept coming and Bostock outjumped Isaako at the death to cross for his third to seal the win. — **AFP**

## Inter Milan skipper Martinez facing month out with thigh injury

**ROME:** Inter Milan captain Lautaro Martinez (**pictured**) has picked up a left thigh injury, the Serie A champions confirmed yesterday, with Italian media reporting he will be sidelined for a month.

Inter said Martinez “underwent clinical and diagnostic tests (which) revealed a strain in his left hamstring”.

The length of his absence has not been specified, but according to press reports the Argentine will be sidelined until the next international break. The 29-year-old forward is therefore set to miss a month of action, including the Milan derby on October 31.

On Tuesday, Martinez scored two of his team’s three goals in a 4-3 defeat to Club Brugge during the second round of the Champions League league phase. He has already scored four times in the league this season for Inter. — **AFP**

