Morocco sweep titles as Al Kaabi wins silver at Arab Golf Championships


Qatar's Saleh Ali Al Kaabi in action at the at Doha Golf Club.

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Morocco swept all four individual and team titles at the 45th Arab Golf Championships, while Qatar's Saleh Ali Al Kaabi claimed the men's individual silver medal as the four-day competition concluded at Doha Golf Club yesterday.

Morocco's Reda El Hali secured the men's individual title with a 10-under-par total of 278 after rounds of 67, 70, 69 and 72. Al Kaabi finished runner-up on four-under-par 284 after carding a final-round 71 to take silver.

Al-Kaabi said he had targeted the individual title but was satisfied with his performance and silver-medal finish.

"Naturally, I was aiming for first place and the Arab title, but I am grateful for the outcome. I am pleased with the level of play I displayed and the result I reached by the end of the tournament, which featured intense competition among the participating national teams, particularly those from Morocco and the UAE, reflecting the strength of the championship and the high technical calibre of the competitors," he said.

The Qatari golfer said the result would motivate him to continue working hard ahead of upcoming competitions, including the Bahrain Open at the end of this month and the GCC Championship in Oman in December.

"Finishing in second place serves as a great motivation for me to continue working hard and developing. We look forward to performing even better in upcoming tournaments."


Qatar Golf Association President Hamad Abdullah Al-Mana (centre) and officials pose for a photo with the podium winners of the men's team event.


Qatar Golf Association Secretary-General Fahad Nasser Al-Naimi with members of Qatar men's team.

UAE's Sam Mullane finished third on three-under-par 285, while his team-mate Jonathan Selvaraj was fourth on one-under-par 287. Hugo Trommetter finished fifth on level-par 288, followed by Qatar's Daniil Sokolov on four-over-par 292.

Morocco also claimed the men's team title with a total of 863, one-under-par, finishing six strokes ahead of the United Arab Emirates (869). Qatar secured third place with 885, followed by Bahrain (909) and Tunisia (923).

Qatar Golf Association Secretary-General Fahad Nasser Al-Naimi praised the national team's performance, describing its third-place finish in the men's team event as a significant achievement.

"Securing third place is a significant achievement, especially given the strength of the participating Arab teams, which feature an elite group of outstanding players," Al-Naimi said.

He also congratulated Al-Kaabi on his individual success.

"We also congratulate Saleh Al-Kaabi on winning the silver medal; it is a well-deserved result following his impressive performance throughout the championship."

In the women's individual competition, Morocco's Maria Harrouch won the title after beating UAE's Intissar Rich in a play-off. Both finished on four-under-par 215, the same total as third-placed Rim Imni of Morocco.

Morocco also topped the women's team standings with 425, eight strokes ahead of the UAE (433). Tunisia finished third with 485, followed by Egypt (501) and Qatar (538).

The championship, hosted by the Qatar Golf Association for the first time, featured 72 players from 14 countries.

Second Vice President of the Arab Golf Federation Adel Al-Fayad praised the technical and organisational standards of the event, describing the championship as a success in both areas.

He said the standard of play and close competition reflected the strength of Arab golf, while the organisation demonstrated the efforts of the Qatar Golf Association and the organising committee.

Egyptian Golf Federation board member and delegation head Ahmed El-Shalqani also praised Qatar's hosting.

"We congratulate the Qatar Golf Federation on the outstanding success in organising this championship, which was executed to an exemplary standard both organisationally and technically. This comes as no surprise, given Qatar's extensive experience and exceptional capabilities in hosting major sporting events," he said.

The Arab Golf Federation also held meetings of its Executive Committee and General Assembly on the sidelines of the championship, discussing plans to develop the sport and raise playing standards across the region.


Action during the match between Qatar and Singapore.

Qatar U-23 play out goalless draw with Singapore at Vietnam tourney

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar U-23 played out a goalless draw against Singapore in their opening match of the Vietnam Friendly Tournament 2026 at Pleiku Stadium in Pleiku, Vietnam, yesterday.

The tournament, being held from November 10 to 14, features Qatar, Singapore, Thailand and hosts Vietnam in a single round-robin format.

Qatar will next face Thailand on November 12 before concluding their campaign against Vietnam on November 14.

The team's participation is part of its preparations for upcoming competitions, particularly the AFC U-23 Asian Cup qualifiers, with Doha set to host the tournament in June.

Ahead of the opening match, Qatar U-23 coach Jose Angel said the Vietnam tournament would provide valuable experience for his players, who are currently going through a rebuilding phase.

"The Vietnam friendly tournament is an opportunity to gain experience and learn about different football schools," the Spanish coach said.

He said playing against different national teams would help develop the players' performances and enhance their experience, adding that the team would aim to produce good performances and achieve the best possible results in the tournament.

'Towards a sporting generation and a promising future'

QOC set to host Youth Games with 338 athletes across three sports

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) will host the 2026 Youth Games from November 18 to 22, bringing together 338 athletes across three sports.

The Games are organised as part of QOC's efforts to identify and develop future sporting talent.

Held under the slogan 'Towards a sporting generation and a promising future', the five-day event will feature shooting, archery and padel competitions for young athletes aged between 12 and 17.

According to the Organising Committee, a total of 276 boys and 62 girls have registered for the Games.

Archery has attracted 95 participants in the 10-metre recurve event, while 177 shooters will compete in the 10-metre air rifle and air pistol events. Padel will feature 33 teams.

Speaking at a press conference held at the QOC Headquarters, Head of the Support Services Committee Abdullah Al Athba highlighted the readiness of the competition venues, equipment and logistical arrangements, as well as the availability of organisational staff and volunteers at the Qatar Foundation Dome and the Lusail Indoor Shooting Range.



Qatar Olympic Committee officials, organising committee representatives, sponsors and partners were present at the press conference.

Technical Committee Head Abdullah Al-Abdullah noted that the Games are organized in close coordination with the Qatar Shooting and Archery Association and the Qatar Padel Federation.

The 2026 Youth Games Director Hind Al Ibrahim said the event will help identify potential future talent and direct them for further development.

She also added that outstanding athletes may be considered for specialised training programmes, with the aim of preparing them to represent Qatar at future competitions.

She said the initiative was part of the QOC's commitment to establishing a sustainable pathway for sporting talent, adding that preparations for the Doha 2030 Asian Games made the development of young athletes even more important.

The organisers also highlighted their efforts to promote the Games and encourage community engagement, with promotional campaigns to be held at Gewan Island.

The competitions will take place daily from 4:00pm to 9:00pm, with the finals and awards ceremony scheduled for November 22.

Republic of Korea's Jiin breaks world record in Doha


Republic of Korea's Yang Jiin celebrates after winning the women's 25m pistol title.

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Republic of Korea's Yang Jiin delivered a record-breaking performance to win the women's 25m pistol title at the ISSF Rifle, Pistol and Shotgun World Championship Doha 2026, setting a new world record with 44 hits in the final.

Vietnam's Trinh Thu Vinh finished just one hit behind with 43 to take silver, while China's Zhang Yueyue secured bronze with 34.

At the Lusail Shooting Range yesterday, Yang set the pace from the opening stages and continued to build her score through the elimination rounds.

With every series bringing the world title closer, she maintained her consistency under pressure, eventually reaching 44 hits to establish a new world record and secure the gold medal.

Trinh made sure the contest remained intense until the very end.

The Vietnamese athlete finished on 43 hits, just one behind Yang, earning a well-deserved silver medal and an Olympic quota place for Vietnam.

India's Manu Bhaker finished fourth with 27 hits, followed by Portugal's Joana Castelao, who placed fifth with 24 after a shoot-off.

Hungary's Veronika Major finished sixth with 20, Germany's Doreen Vennekamp was seventh with 17, and India's Esha Singh placed eighth with 11.

Australia ready for challenge at FIFA U-17 World Cup in Qatar

THE PENINSULA


Australia players celebrate after qualifying for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 in this file photo. PIC: AFC

DOHA: Australia will head into the FIFA U-17 World Cup in Qatar without fear as captain Besian Kutleshi said the Joeys are determined to play an attacking brand of football against the world's leading young teams.

Australia have been drawn alongside Argentina, Denmark and Mozambique and will open their campaign against South American heavyweights Argentina.

The tournament will be held in Qatar from November 19 to December 13, with 48 teams competing across 12 groups of four. The top two teams in each group, along with the eight best third-placed sides, will advance to the Round of 32, which starts on November 30.

The final will be played at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on December 13, with the remaining matches taking place at the Aspire Zone complex in Al Rayyan.

Qatar is hosting the tournament for the second consecutive year and will stage five editions through 2029. Portugal are the defending champions after beating Austria 1-0 in last year's final. Kutleshi, who captained Australia throughout qualification, said the team had earned its place at the tournament and would not be intimidated by the opposition.

"We have earned out right to be at the tournament, 100 per cent, and had to play some really tough matches in qualification to get here. Of course, this is a different level but we have no fear," the 17-year-old told FIFA.

"It's important to respect our opponents and we will do that but we have a strong group ourselves. Having the chance to play nations such as Argentina is something that we have earned and we know what we are capable of."

Kutleshi said Australia wanted to impose their style on the tournament rather than simply make up the numbers.

"I back us, our team, though against any other and we want to show our qualities. We're an attacking team that looks to go forward and we like to have the ball in our control. That means dictating possession and then pressing hard to win it back and push forward looking to score goals. We want to be an attacking team and one that people will enjoy watching."

Australia have returned to the global youth stage for the first time since 2019, with Kutleshi playing a key role in their qualification.

"It's obviously a huge privilege to reach a World Cup and I know it's one that not many people will have, but we have worked really hard to get to this stage.

"Now, we know it is the best up against the best, but I don't think we will be fearing anyone. Rather, we will go into the games confident and looking to show what we can do and what Australian football is about."

Kutleshi also hopes Australia's performances in Qatar can inspire more young players in his country.

"At the end of the tournament, I'd like for people to look at us as being winners, of course, but also one that can be an inspiration for the next generations of young Australian talent. We want to inspire others to get involved in football in Australia and play an exciting brand of football that's good to watch."





Saudi Arabia prepare for U-17 World Cup in Doha

Saudi Arabia U-17 team continues its preparations in Doha following its arrival in Qatar to participate in the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026, which will take place from 19 November to 13 December, featuring 48 national teams from around the world.

Lens sack coach after Champions League rout



PARIS: Lens have sacked coach Yannick Cahuzac **(pictured)** less than a week after their 9-1 Champions League defeat at home to Como, a source close to the French club said yesterday, confirming a report from sports daily *L'Equipe.*

Cahuzac, who was appointed by Lens less than two months ago, lost his job after the French Cup winners' humiliating loss to Como last Wednesday, as well as a subsequent 2-1 reversal at their Stade Bollaert-Delelis home against Marseille on Sunday in Ligue 1.

"We feel like we're in a bad way. We feel that Wednesday's result has left its mark," Cahuzac admitted after the match against Marseille.

"We've managed to pick ourselves up. But we've got quite a few gaps in the team, and we feel we've lost our confidence."

The former Lens captain took over from Dino Toppmoeller in mid-September following the German coach's surprise departure after just four Ligue 1 matchdays.

In nine matches in charge of Lens, Cahuzac has secured just three wins and suffered six defeats across all competitions as Lens lounge in 11th place domestically.

Crucially, the 41-year-old has failed to pick up a single point in Europe, losing to Sporting Lisbon and Club Brugge, as well as the Como thrashing -- the joint record for the biggest winning margin in the modern Champions League.

"In front of our fans, here at Bollaert, this is unacceptable," Lens chairman Joseph Oughourlian told Ligue 1+ on Sunday, adding that he had had the words "never again" painted on the walls of the changing room.

Last season under current Crystal Palace manager Pierre Sage, Lens won the French Cup and finished second in the league behind Paris Saint-Germain. — ***AFP***

Recovering Kompany returns to Bayern training centre



BERLIN: Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany **(pictured)** has returned to the club's training centre as he continues his recovery from meningeal irritation, the Bundesliga champions said yesterday.

The Belgian was rushed to hospital after collapsing on the training pitch in Munich last month, before being diagnosed with the illness.

"Vincent Kompany is on the road to recovery and has been back at the training ground at Sabener Strasse since the start of the week," Bayern said in a brief statement.

"Kompany was under medical care recently, with assistant coach Aaron Danks filling in."

The club also said Kompany was receiving treatment for a shoulder injury at the training centre. Bayern said after his collapse that the 40-year-old would return to take back head coaching duties from Danks in a "matter of weeks, not days".

The Bavarians' next match is not until November 20, against Cologne, due to the international break.

Kompany was visibly sick and walked with a limp during Bayern's 6-1 home win over RB Leipzig in mid-October. — ***AFP***

MCC partners with ILT20 to celebrate Spirit of Cricket

THE PENINSULA

DUBAI: The DP World International League T20 (DP World ILT20) has partnered with MCC to celebrate the Spirit of Cricket at the tournament, which takes place in the UAE later this month, as the Club continues its programme of promoting the values of the game around the globe.

A 'Spirit of Cricket Award' will be presented at the culmination of the tournament to one of the six teams, or an individual, that has been seen to embody the Spirit of Cricket.

MCC, as part of its remit as Guardian of the Laws, is promoting the values of the Spirit of Cricket on a global basis. The Club hopes that, by celebrating cricket in the country and educating players about the Spirit, it can help to spread the word more widely.

Following the first award of its kind presented last year, MCC has since partnered with ICC Europe to present an award at each of the three ICC Europe Men's Sub Regional World Cup Qualification events earlier this year. The DP World ILT20, now in its fifth season, is a six-team T20 league which runs between Saturday, 21 November and Sunda.y 20 December, the day of the final.

The matches will take place at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the Dubai International Stadium, and the Sharjah Cricket Stadium. Desert Vipers are the defending champions.

There are a range of star overseas players in the tournament this year, including Babar Azam, Liam Livingstone, David Miller, Rashid Khan, Heinrich Klaasen, Faf du Plessis, Nicholas Pooran, Phil Salt, Alex Hales, Tim Seifert, Fakhar Zaman, Usman Tariq and Sunil Narine.

SL struggle to 114-3 after Pakistan's first Test declaration in Rawalpindi


Pakistan's Saqib Khan (right) celebrates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka's Lahiru Udara (left) during the second day.

RAWALPINDI: Debutant pace bowler Saqib Khan grabbed two wickets as Sri Lanka struggled to 114-3 by the end of day two of the opening Test after Pakistan declared at 434-9 in Rawalpindi yesterday.

Saqib dismissed Dinesh Chandimal for one in his second over and then removed a well-set Lahiru Udara for 42 to leave Sri Lanka on 65-3.

His experienced pace partner Mohammad Abbas took the first wicket, having opener Pasindu Sooriyabandara caught behind for a duck in the third over.

Kamindu Mendis (40) and Dhananjaya de Silva (22) were unbeaten at the close, with Sri Lanka still trailing by 320 runs on the first innings.

Bad light again stopped play 25 minutes before schedule.

De Silva was dropped by spinner Arafat Minhas in the penultimate over of the day.

Saqib had the figures of 2-54, while Abbas took 1-23.

Pakistan middle-order batter Saud Shakeel earlier missed his century by seven runs, a miscued hook off Asitha Fernando giving wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis his fifth catch in the innings.

Shakeel, who became Fernando's 100th wicket in 29 Tests, hit nine boundaries in his 199-ball innings.

He lifted Pakistan from 281-5 overnight with a resolute 96-run stand with Ghazi Ghori for the sixth wicket. Ghori scored a confident 48. Shakeel said he was disappointed at missing a fifth Test century.

"Yes, you get disappointed when you miss a milestone and it looks bad," said Shakeel. "But we have put up a good total with Arafat chipping in with a half century."

Sri Lankan fielding coach Jordan Gregory hoped his batters show grit to match Pakistan's total.

"We have to take the match session by session and hope that the Kamindu-De Silva partnership goes on and make a match of it because the pitch has enough to produce a result," said Gregory.

Debutant Minhas made a stylish 52, the fifth half-century of the innings, that included nine boundaries and a six.

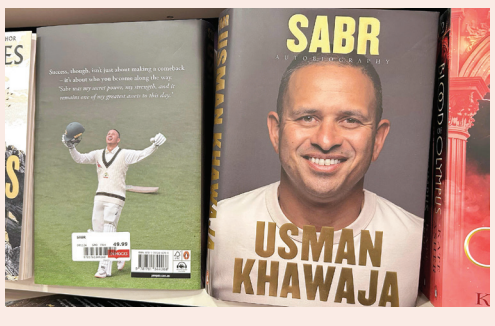
Sri Lanka had hoped for early wickets but struggled on a seemingly hard and green pitch, despite taking the second new ball after 80 overs.

Dilshan Madushanka finally made the breakthrough when Ghori edged him to gully, where Sooriyabandara held a low catch.

Pace bowlers Fernando and Madushanka were the pick of the Sri Lanka attack, both taking three wickets. The second and final Test is in Lahore from November 17.

BRIEF SCORES: Sri Lanka 114 for 3 (Udara 42, Kamindu 40*, Saqib 2-54) trail Pakistan 434 for 9 dec (Shakeel 93, Asitha 3-107, Madushanka 3-108) by 320 runs — ***AFP***

Cricket Australia chief rules out reopening 'sandpapergate' probe



Usman Khawaja's autobiography, SABR, is displayed at a book stall in Sydney yesterday.

SYDNEY: Cricket Australia chief Todd Greenberg yesterday ruled out reopening the investigation into the sandpapergate ball-tampering scandal, saying he did not see "any compelling reason" for a new probe.

Opening batsman Usman Khawaja said in his autobiography that the 2018 plot had been common knowledge throughout the team and not limited to a small number of players.

The book, released yesterday, has reignited the debate over the cheating controversy, in which Australian players were caught using sandpaper to make the ball swing against South Africa.

Greenberg said he would consider Khawaja's revelations -- which were on Monday backed as "100 percent accurate" by fellow opener David Warner -- but said there was no need for further action.

"We don't see any compelling reason to open the investigation or revisit this again," he said.

"I don't think there's anything that can be gained from that."

Captain Steve Smith, his deputy Warner and Cameron Bancroft were sent home in disgrace after the ball tampering was exposed.

A Cricket Australia investigation found they were the only three players with prior knowledge of the plot. But Khawaja, who retired this year after 88 Tests, tells a different story in a chapter dedicated to the scandal in his book "Sabr".

"It was all of us. Not the batters, not the bowlers, not the staff. All of us," he told the Sydney Morning Herald at the weekend ahead of the book's release this week.

Smith was banned for a year and sacked as captain over his part in the furore during the third Test in Cape Town. Bancroft was slapped with a nine-month ban. — ***AFP***

FIA chief says Qatar, Abu Dhabi Grands Prix will go ahead

PARIS: The final races of the Formula One season in Qatar and Abu Dhabi will go ahead as planned despite tensions in the Middle East, the president of motorsports' governing body Mohammed Ben Sulayem said yesterday.

The last two grands prix of the year are scheduled for November 29 in Qatar and December 6 in Abu Dhabi.

The Saudi Arabia Grand Prix earlier this year was scrapped following the outbreak of the United States and Israel's war with Iran, while the Bahrain race was delayed and moved to Malaysia.

"We are ready for Qatar and Abu Dhabi," FIA chief Ben Sulayem said on social media.

"We are fully prepared and committed to delivering two outstanding grands prix weekends and a spectacular conclusion to the Formula One world championship.

"We look forward to welcoming drivers, teams and fans to two iconic circuits for an unforgettable finish to the season. See you on the grid."

Ben Sulayem's comments echo those made by F1 boss Stefano Domenicali last month.

One of the options discussed was moving the Emirati race to Imola in Italy if the Middle Eastern races could not go ahead, but F1 told media yesterday the Italian track had been told to stand down.

"We cannot let Imola wait indefinitely. Therefore we have informed them today that we will not require them at the end of the season," an F1 official source said.

Drivers have expressed mixed feelings about racing in the Middle East, with four-time world champion Max Verstappen among those to air his reservations.

But F1 is confident the races can proceed as scheduled.

"Travel advice still allows travel, travel insurance is valid, events are taking place (for example MotoGP last weekend in Qatar) and business has returned to a normal level in both countries," the F1 source added.

"If the situation develops negatively in the coming weeks before the events in the Middle East we will not hesitate to do the right thing and the safety of everyone will always be the priority."

Italian youngster Kimi Antonelli has already wrapped up the drivers' world championship title, while his Mercedes team secured the constructors' crown last weekend in Sao Paulo. — ***AFP***

Tickets sales begin for 2027 MotoGP Grand Prix Of Qatar and Qatar 1812KM

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Lusail International Circuit (LIC) has officially launched ticket sales for the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2027 and the Qatar 1812 KM - FIA World Endurance Championship 2027.

Scheduled just two weeks apart in March 2027, the two events give motorsport fans the chance to experience two world class racing championships in Qatar within the same month at the same venue.

The MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar will take place from March 12 to 14, 2027 as Round 2 of the season, followed by the Qatar 1812 KM, the season opener of the 2027 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) from March 25 to 27, 2027.

The MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar returns for 2027 as the first full season of the new 850cc bikes gets under way, with 22 riders on the grid. Constructed in 2004, LIC made its debut the same year by hosting the first Qatar Grand Prix, marking the country's entry into the MotoGP World Championship.

To this day, LIC remains the only circuit on the calendar to host night races.

Tickets for the three day event are priced at QR200 and include free seating in the Main Grandstand as well as the Lusail Hill General Admission zone at Turn 1. They also give access to the Fan Zone with entertainment and activities for all ages, MotoGP merchandise and other retail outlets.



The MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar will take place from March 12 to 14, 2027.



Qatar 1812 KM will take place from March 25 to 27, 2027.

The road to the 2027 FIA World Endurance Championship begins in Qatar, with LIC hosting the Official Prologue from March 21 to 22, 2027, followed by the Qatar 1812 KM from March 25 to 27, 2027 which will bring together the world's leading manufacturers and elite drivers for the season opener. Fans can watch the battle unfold across the Hypercar and LMGT3 categories, with up to 10 hours of racing under the lights, complemented by a line up of off track entertainment.

For QR50, a three day ticket gives fans two prime viewing areas, the Main Grandstand and the elevated Lusail Hill at Turn 1, along with entry to the entertainment filled Fan Zone with access to official merchandise outlets

Tickets for both events include free parking coupled with taxi pick up and drop off zones.

Fans purchasing a full-price adult ticket can book up to six complimentary child tickets for children under the age of 12 per adult ticket, provided their tickets are registered during the purchase process, while children aged two and under enter free without a ticket.

Wheelchair ticket holders can request one free companion ticket by contacting tickets@lcsc.qa.

Tickets for both championships are available now through the official LIC ticketing platform at tickets.lcsc.qa. For corporate and group requests, please contact corporatesales@lcsc.qa .

Carlsen leads field at Chess World Championship Tour



BUDAPEST: Magnus Carlsen **(pictured)** and some of the biggest names in world chess have arrived in Budapest for the Total Chess World Championship Tour Pilot, a new tournament aimed at testing an innovative format and exploring a fresh direction for professional chess.

Carlsen, the world No. 1 for 15 consecutive years, is the headline attraction in a 24-player field featuring elite grandmasters, former world championship challengers and leading players from the next generation.

The tournament carries a $650,000 prize fund and will determine the inaugural champion of a competition that combines three major forms of chess: fast classical, rapid and blitz.

The field includes Fabiano Caruana, Wesley So, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Anish Giri, Alireza Firouzja, Jan-Krzysztof Duda, Liem Le, Richard Rapport, Levon Aronian, Hans Moke Niemann, Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, Ian Nepomniachtchi and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave.

Other participants include Jorden van Foreest, Haik M Martirosyan, Vladislav Artemiev, Abhimanyu Mishra, Andrew Hong, as well as leading women players Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan and India's Vaishali Rameshbabu. The event is designed to identify the most complete player by testing competitors across different time controls rather than relying solely on traditional classical chess.

The 24 players will begin in four groups of six, with each group playing a double round-robin over five days. Every player will contest 10 fast classical games, with 45 minutes on the clock plus a 30-second increment. A win is worth three points and a draw one.

A nine-round blitz Swiss tournament before the group stage will determine the players' tie-break rankings.

The leading players will then advance to knockout brackets based on their group positions. Each knockout tie will be played over two days and feature four Blitz games at 3+2, two Rapid games at 15+10 and one Fast Classical game at 45+30. — ***AGENCIES***

China's Chengdu sack manager Aloisi after season-end collapse

BEIJING: Chinese football club Chengdu Rongcheng has sacked manager John Aloisi after a deplorable end to a season they dominated, squandering a 12-point lead to drop from first to second place on the last matchday.

Chengdu needed just one win or a draw from their final four league games to clinch their first-ever title in the Chinese Super League (CSL), having earned promotion to the top tier in 2022.

The team from southwestern Sichuan province lost all four games, falling 2-3 to Shandong Taishan on Sunday.

"Mr John Aloisi no longer serves as the head coach of Chengdu Rongcheng, and other members of his team have also left their posts," the club announced.

Aloisi recorded more than 50 appearances for the Australian national team and played for Premier League side Coventry City before moving to La Liga. — ***AFP***

Sabalenka downs Muchova to win WTA Finals opener

LOS ANGELES: Aryna Sabalenka battled past Karolina Muchova in straight sets to make a winning start at the season-ending WTA Finals in Indian Wells on Monday.

Former world number one Sabalenka was forced to dig deep before finally prevailing 7-6 (7/2), 7-5 in just under two hours.

Second-seeded Sabalenka is chasing her first ever WTA Finals victory after suffering defeats in the 2022 and 2025 finals.

The four-time Grand Slam champion from Belarus looked to be in trouble after conceding a break of serve to go 5-4 down in the opening set.

But she broke back immediately for 5-5 and subsequently went on to hold her nerve in the tie-break 7-2 to seize the early initiative.

Both players struggled on serve in the second set, with Sabalenka suffering her fourth break as she served for the match at 5-4 up.

Crucially though, Sabalenka responded to that stumble by breaking back immediately to lead 6-5 and she made no mistake when serving for the match again, wrapping up victory when Czech opponent Muchova netted a backhand.

"I'm just trying to win every match I play, and at the same time trying to stay in the moment and focus on my game on each point and trying to stay calm and in control," Sabalenka said afterward.


Aryna Sabalenka serves in her singles match against Karolina Muchova of Czechia.

In Monday's other group game, WTA Finals debutant Mirra Andreeva motored past Ukraine's Elina Svitolina in straight sets, winning 6-4, 6-0, despite overcoming pre-match tightness. Third-seed Andreeva, the 19-year-old reigning French Open champion, took control with a break to open up a 4-2 first-set lead and never looked back against her sixth-seeded opponent. She duly held serve to close out the first set, and then demolished Svitolina in the second set, rattling off three service breaks to wrap up victory.

"I was so tight, I felt I was moving like a turtle," the teenager said afterwards. "I felt like I couldn't really hit the ball so I'm just very happy to get through the match and control my emotions."

Andreeva will face Sabalenka in her second round robin game on Wednesday.

This year's WTA Finals were scheduled to be held in Saudi Arabia but in July were moved to Indian Wells after US military strikes on Iran in February and the subsequent war in the region. " — ***AFP***

Endrick seeks more playing time amid January move talk

SINGAPORE: Brazil international forward Endrick said yesterday that he wants to play regularly, whether at Real Madrid or elsewhere, as was the case when he joined Lyon on loan last January.

The 20-year-old is set to play a role with the Selecao in a friendly against Japan in Singapore on Saturday.

He spent the second half of last season on loan in the French Ligue 1, where he scored eight goals and provided eight assists in 21 matches for Lyon. At Real he has been a bit-part player this season, as he was in the first half of the last campaign.

It has left him eyeing another potential January move when the transfer window reopens. "I don't know what will happen in January, all I ask for is that it is the best thing for my career," he said from Singapore.


Brazil's players Endrick (left) and Allan attend a press conference in Singapore yesterday.

"I'm very young... I'm still 20 and I'll see what happens. I just want to play, to be happy, to help my teammates, score goals, provide assists, as I was able to do at Lyon, which was one of the best things that happened to me in my life," he added. That move helped Endrick make coach Carlo Ancelotti's World Cup squad. But in Madrid, he faces tough competition to make Jose Mourinho's team.

"It's an opportunity to be at Real Madrid, but I know that there, in my position, there is one of the best players in the world, Kylian Mbappe." — ***AFP***

England hand first call-up to defender Hill

LONDON: England have called up uncapped Bournemouth defender James Hill for their Nations League matches against Croatia and Spain.


James Hill (right) in action in this file photo.

Hill has been added to Thomas Tuchel's squad after centre-backs Marc Guehi and Ezri Konsa were ruled out of tomorrow's clash with Croatia at Wembley.

Guehi withdrew with an injury suffered in Manchester City's Premier League defeat at Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

Newcastle defender Dan Burn was called up on Monday, while Arsenal star Konsa will not be fit to face Slaven Bilic's side at Wembley as he is following his own fitness programme. Konsa is expected to be fit for Sunday's game against world champions Spain in Madrid.

The unheralded Hill has enjoyed a rapid rise this season, playing 15 times for Bournemouth to catch Tuchel's eye.

Hill will be fighting for a spot in England's central defence along with Burn, Jarell Quansah and Jarrad Branthwaite.

"Bournemouth defender James Hill has received his first call-up to the England squad," a Football Association statement said yesterday.

"The 24-year-old, who represented his nation at under-20 and under-21 level, has joined England ahead of the forthcoming Nations League fixtures.

"Meanwhile, Ezri Konsa will not be in contention for Croatia at Wembley on Thursday as he continues to follow his own programme but will return to full training later this week before Sunday's trip to Spain." — ***AFP***