# CAFA U17 Women's Championship: Iran beats Afghanistan

KABUL: Iran defeated Afghanistan 6-0 on the first day of the CAFA U17 Women's Championship on Saturday.

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Afghanistan are in Dushanbe on a round-robin basis, with the final match between Tajikistan and Iran to close out the schedule on Wednesday.

Among the favorites will be regional women's football powerhouse Uzbekistan, who are coached by winning CAFA U20 Women's Championship boss Ilkhom Khanjariev.

Also expected to be in title contention are Iran, the champions of the regional U15 Girl's title in Tashkent two years ago, who will be under the stewardship of highly experienced national youth coach Shadi Mahini.

The 2021 CAFA U17 Women's Championship is the first edition of the tournament at this age level.

**The Kabul Times**

# Messi dazzles with Copa America quarter-final free kick against Ecuador

Lionel Messi scored a free kick to cap a 3-0 victory over Ecuador on Saturday in the Copa America quarter-finals, with his performance drawing effusive praise from his Argentina teammates.

The forward also assisted twice - once without looking at his target as he made the pass - in a Man of the Match effort that prompted Nico Gonzalez to say the entire squad draws "confidence and joy" from his play.

Argentina will face Colombia in the final four on Tuesday, and Messi will try to build on his output of four goals and four assists so far in the tournament.

"Messi surprises us day by day, he gets stronger and stronger and infects us all," said forward Nico Gonzalez. "He gives us confidence and joy. You have to continue down this path and enjoy it."

Added Lautaro Martinez: "We all follow Messi's leadership. Today we saw again how he makes a difference and we are all accompanying him."

"I always say it: individual [moments] are secondary, we are here for something else," Messi said. "I want to congratulate the group for the work they are doing - we have been away from our families for many days."

All signs now point to a Brazil vs Argentina final, as the powerhouse sides have each ripped through their respective fixtures and now stand just one more win apiece from facing one another with the Copa America trophy up for grabs. Messi and Neymar have lived up to expectations to help their nations advance to this stage.

The Selecao will play Peru in the semi-final, while the Albiceleste will take on Colombia.

Goal

# PGA Tour: Troy Merritt makes hole-in-one to help grab the Rocket Mortgage Classic lead

Merritt fired an ace at the par-three 11th to help him post a five-under 67 and get to 14 under at Detroit Golf Club, moving him alongside Chile's Joaquin Niemann.

Australia's Cam Davis sits a shot back in tied-third alongside Hank Lebioda, with Brandon Hagy in fifth, while England's Tom Lewis is one of six players on 11 under and just three off the lead.

"There's going to be quite a few birdies tomorrow and we've got to make them to keep pace and hopefully slightly ahead of everybody," Merritt said. "The mindset will be find that fairway first, give ourselves as many looks as we can and keep all the squares off the card."

Merritt opened with a 20-foot birdie and added another from 10 feet at the third, before firing his tee shot at the fifth to tap-in range and pick up another at the seventh to reach the turn in 32.

The world No 129 holed his tee shot with a five-iron at the 219-yard 11th hole but bogeyed the next and parred his final six holes, allowing Niemann to move alongside him by birdieing the 13th and 17th to close out a bogey-free 68.

"You hit a lot of drivers here and if you hit the driver well, you're hitting a lot of wedges," Niemann said. "I've been hitting the wedges pretty good this week, so I think, yeah, I think my whole game's been there and hopefully will stay there."

Ireland's Seamus Power shot a three-under 69 on Saturday to sit four shots back, while Scotland's Russell Knox and England's Danny Willett fell out of contention with scores of 72 and 71 respectively.

Skysport

# Advocates say THC does not enhance sports performance. So why is it banned?

For many, the announcement that U.S. track and field sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson had been suspended for a month after a failed drug test following her dazzling win in the 100-meters at the Olympic trials last month was as shocking as it was confusing.

The drug Richardson tested positive for — tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive component of marijuana — is not known for increasing the athletic prowess of those who consume it. Typically, its high relaxes people.

"It's not a steroid. It's not a growth hormone. It's nothing to make you run faster, jump faster, throw faster — furthest thing from that," said Joseph M. Hanna, a Buffalo, New York, attorney who is not working with Richardson but has represented major sports league franchises and professional athletes. "It has more of an opportunity to slow you down than to speed you up."

Nonetheless, marijuana is on the World Anti-Doping Agency's lengthy list of prohibited substances, which are either banned from use entirely by athletes or banned during competition periods. Marijuana falls under the latter category, meaning it is prohibited from being used from 11:59 p.m. on the day before a competition through the end of a competition.

To be on the list, a substance must meet at least two of the following criteria: the substance has to be considered a performance enhancer; it must potentially pose a health risk to athletes; and its use must violate the "spirit of sport," which the ageney's 2021 code defines as "the celebration of the human spirit, body and mind," adding that it reflects the values of sports, such as character, teamwork and "fun and joy."

The U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, which announced Richardson's positive test Friday morning, is a signatory to the World Anti-Doping Agency's code, along with the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee. That means it follows the rules set forth by the global organization.

Richardson, 21, consumed THC in the state of Oregon, where recreational marijuana is legal. But Oregon's law has no bearing on World Anti-Doping Agency rules, and therefore, not on U.S. Anti-Doping Agency rules, either.

Neither the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency nor the World Anti-Doping Agency responded to questions from NBC News about whether THC was currently considered to be a violation of all three of the criteria on the prohibited substances list.

In a 2011 paper, the World Anti-Doping Agency argued that smoking cannabis was a performance enhancer because it improves oxygenation and decreased anxiety ahead of competitions.

Steven Hawkins, the interim president of the United States Cannabis Council, a trade group seeking to legalize cannabis in the U.S., called the 2011 report absurd, arguing there was no empirical evidence that THC enhances athletic performance and excoriating the claim that it posed a health risk.

"These things have nothing to do with an athlete's performance."

"If an athlete likes a drink, that is a health risk. If an athlete smokes a cigarette, that poses a health risk. If an athlete likes to have a big, fat, greasy cheeseburger, that poses a health risk. These things have nothing to do with an athlete's performance," he said.

On Friday, Richardson told NBC's "TODAY" show that she had turned to marijuana before the Olympic trials after learning from a reporter that her biological mother had unexpectedly died. The 100-meter sensation, who was raised by her grandmother, described her response to the news as being "just blinded by emotions, blinded by badness."

Richardson is now not qualified to compete in the 100-meters, but because her suspension will be over while the Olympics track and field competition is still going on, she may be permitted by USA Track & Field to participate in another event. In a statement, USA Track & Field called her situation "devastating" and said it would provide resources for mental health challenges Richardson faced "now and in the future," but did not weigh in on whether it would allow her to run.

There is a precedent for doping rules changing, said Hanna, the attorney. Caffeine, once banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency, is now allowed. He said he could foresee the ban relaxing on marijuana as well.

"I would be very surprised if over the course of the next four years, by the time we come to the next Olympic games, this hasn't been looked at very hard or changed," he said.

Richardson apologized Friday to "my fans and my family and my sponsorship and to the haters, too," and said she wanted to be as "transparent as possible."

"But when it comes to Sha'Carri Richardson, it's never been a steroid," she said. "There will never be a steroid attached to the name Sha'Carri Richardson."

# Wimbledon: British teenager Emma Raducanu shocks Sorana Cirstea to reach the fourth round

Raducanu, who has been known as a serious talent within the British game for many years, had already swept past qualifier Vitalia Diatchenko and former French Open finalist Marketa Vondrousova to reach the third round without dropping a set.

The 18-year-old stayed in school to complete A levels in maths and economics, only finishing a couple of months ago, and playing on the biggest stage of her career so far on Court One, she handled the occasion in impeccable fashion.

Taking on the world No 45, who knocked out Victoria Azarenka in the previous round, Raducanu produced a sparkling attacking display, fighting spirit and tenacity, claiming the win on her third match point.

Raducanu, who won the first ITF junior title she was allowed to compete in, aged just 13, said in her on-court interview: "Honestly, I am so speechless right now, at the end I didn't know what my reaction would be if I won and that just happened, I am so so grateful for all the support I had today.

"Who would have thought, it is funny because at the start when I was packing to come into the bubble, my parents were like, 'Aren't you packing too many sets of match kit?'.

"I think I am going to have to do some laundry tonight, but I think they have a laundry service at the hotel, so I am all good."

Raducanu next faces a very winnable fourth-round clash against Ajla Tomljanovic on Monday, which will surely be played on Centre Court. The Australian world No 75 upset former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko 4-6 6-4 6-2. In a precursor for what was to come, she forced break points in the opening game of the match, which Cirstea saved, before holding to love in her first service game.

The Romanian flexed her muscles by claiming an early break to go 3-1 up after a smart backhand down the line.

If she thought she had broken the spirit of Raducanu, she was very wrong and the Brit proceeded to rattle off eight successive games which put her in a winning position.

She immediately broke back and then held to love to make it 3-3 and there was no looking back as she demolished Cirstea with an array of attacking winners, sealing the first set with a brilliant backhand defensive lob.

That carried over into the second set, quickly racing into a 3-0 lead, and at 0-40 on the Cirstea service game, the finish line was in sight. But a mixture of some Raducanu errors and some big serves allowed Cirstea to wriggle out of her predicament and changed the complexion of the second set. Cirstea then broke Raducanu and held again to draw level at 3-3, which is when the drama began. Raducanu showed guts to come from 0-30 down to hold serve and to stop the rot before a tension-filled 14-minute game on Cirstea's delivery.

Raducanu had her chances, with five break points and nine deuces, but she could not get over the line.

Cirstea's serve had come under threat the whole afternoon, though, and it was the same again, with Raducanu this time clinching the match at the third time of asking when her opponent dumped a backhand into the net.

American teenager Coco Gauff matched her feat of reaching the second week on her debut two years ago. Skysport