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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Arabi stun Sadd as Rayyan go top after win over Qatar SC

Sarabia struck twice in the opening 13 minutes, while Tannane scored early in the second half for Arabi



Al Arabi's Oussama Tannane (right) reacts after scoring against Al Sadd at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi handed defending champions Al Sadd their first defeat of the Qatar Stars League season with a thrilling 3-2 victory at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Friday, while Al Rayyan moved to the top of the standings with a convincing 3-0 win over Qatar SC.

Pablo Sarabia struck twice in the opening 13 minutes before Ousama Tannane scored early in the second half to seal a memorable victory for Al Arabi, who climbed to fourth place with nine points from five matches.

Al Sadd, who had won their first four matches, dropped to second place on 12 points, one behind new leaders Al Rayyan, who have 13 points after five rounds.

Sarabia gave Al Arabi an early lead in the fourth minute, but Roberto Firmino equalised for the hosts in the 12th minute. The visitors responded almost immediately, with Sarabia restoring their advantage a minute later. Al Sadd fought back again before half-time, with Agustin Soria finding the net in the 42nd minute to make it 2-2 at the break.

However, Al Arabi delivered the decisive blow just two minutes into the second half. Tannane unleashed a powerful left-footed shot from outside the box in the



Al Rayyan maintained their impressive start by beating Qatar SC.

47th minute to put the visitors ahead for the third time, and they held on to secure all three points.

The defeat ended Al Sadd's winning start and dealt a setback to their bid for a fourth consecutive league title, while Al Arabi extended their unbeaten run to five matches, having recorded two wins and three draws.

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan maintained their impressive start by beating Qatar SC at Lusail Stadium to claim their fourth victory of the campaign. Roger Guedes opened the scoring in the 19th minute before Gavin Pereira struck twice, scoring in the 22nd and 54th minutes, as Al Rayyan moved to 13 points from five matches.

Guedes broke the deadlock after finding himself through on goal and driving his shot into the right corner. Pereira doubled the advantage three minutes later, beating the defenders before firing into the top-left corner. Pereira completed the scoring early in the second half, making a strong run down the right before beating the goalkeeper to put the result beyond doubt.

Qatar SC, who remain without a win this season, had chances to respond but were denied by Al Rayyan goalkeeper Mahmud Abunada. He thwarted an effort following a goalmouth scramble in the 26th minute before keeping out a powerful drive from Pau Prim six minutes before half-time.

SPOTLIGHT

Lusail aim to extend impressive start

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail Sports Club is looking to continue its strong start to the season when they meet Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League (QSL) at the Khalifa International Stadium on Saturday.

Under the guidance of Portuguese head coach Emanuel Mesquita, Lusail has successfully avoided the typical struggles of a newly promoted side and established themselves comfortably in the mid-table tier early on.

Mesquita's side has proven to be a tough opponent, securing one win, two draws, and one loss and are in sixth in the table.

Playing in the top-flight league has provided a valuable learning experience for the team, according to Mesquita, who believes the opportunity to compete against the country's best sides is helping his players develop both individually and collectively.

Mesquita described the experience as a positive one, stressing that his players are enjoying the challenge while remaining focused on continuous improvement. "It's a very, very good experience. For us, it's a pleasure to be here. We are very happy to have the chance to play with the best teams in the country. For us, it's been a very good learning process, and we are happy with what we have been doing so far," Mesquita said during a pre-match press conference.

With plenty of matches still to play, the Portuguese coach said the team's priority is to continue improving while making the most of the experience. "There's a long way ahead, and we just try to improve every day and enjoy the process," the 42-year-old coach added.

Mesquita also highlighted the importance of maintaining the right



Lusail Sports Club's coach Emanuel Mesquita (centre) and defender Abdul Hadi (right) address a press conference yesterday, before their Qatar Stars League match against Al Shahania.

mentality and intensity required to compete at a higher level. He attributed the team's progress largely to the commitment and discipline shown by the players in training, insisting that hard work remains the foundation of their approach.

"The main secret is the work, the hard work that these boys put in every day and the serious way that we take every day. We take all days in a very serious way," he said.

According to Mesquita, that commitment began from the first day of the team's camp and will continue until the final day of the league, with the players fully aware of the responsibility that comes with representing the club.

"From the first day of the camp until the last day of the league, we will be very serious and the match will be a major challenge for both sides. We hope to continue achieving positive results; that is always our goal - to secure as many points as possible."

Lusail has also carried strong form into the QSL Cup as they have defeated Al Markhiya 1-0 and drew against Al

ing that there is still a long road ahead. "It's still a long way ahead to the end of the season, so we cannot slow down," he stressed.

Mesquita stressed the importance of maintaining momentum in the upcoming matches. "Lusail's goal for the upcoming match is to maintain the excellent performance shown in previous games and to capitalize on the positive momentum within the squad following the good results achieved in earlier rounds," he said.

On preparations for the Al Shahania match, the Portuguese coach added: "Preparations this week have gone very well. The international break was beneficial for refining certain details, especially since the team also enjoyed a very good rest period."

"We know that Al Shahania is a very good team, and the match will be a major challenge for both sides. We hope to continue achieving positive results; that is always our goal - to secure as many points as possible."

Lusail has also carried strong form into the QSL Cup as they have defeated Al Markhiya 1-0 and drew against Al

Waab 1-1. "In my opinion, the QSL Cup is a very good tournament; it was a great opportunity to give players who hadn't featured much the playing time they deserve. For me as a coach, this tournament is very interesting," Mesquita said, while praising the QSL Cup.

Lusail defender Abdul Hadi also confirmed the squad's readiness for the next round matches: "After the break, we certainly focused on regaining our physical and technical sharpness. Training sessions were very intense, and we strove to be in peak condition for the league's resumption. Thankfully, we are ready and aim to put in a strong performance and achieve a positive result."

"The QSL Cup matches helped us significantly by maintaining our physical fitness and focus, while also keeping us in a competitive match mindset. We have great confidence, especially given the tremendous effort put in by the coaching staff and the players. God willing, we will maintain this level and achieve positive results with the Lusail Club."

Tickets for GFF U-17 Gulf Cup on sale for QR15

Doha: The Gulf Football Federation (GFF), in collaboration with Qatar's Local Organising Committee (LOC), has announced the launch of ticket sales for the GFF U-17 Gulf Cup Qatar 2026, which is taking place from October 16 to November 4 in Doha, Qatar. Fans can purchase tickets online from roadtoqatar.qa for QR15.

Tickets are available in a single category with open seating. Upon purchase from roadtoqatar.qa, tickets will be made available on the official ticketing app Road to Qatar, allowing fans easy access to tournament matches. All tickets will be digital.

Jassim Sultan al-Rumaihi, GFF Secretary General, said: "The Arabian Gulf Cup U-17 tournament provides a valuable platform for emerging football talents in the region to showcase their abilities as they prepare for upcoming international competitions. This year, we are pleased to welcome the national teams of China and Egypt as guests, giving teams the opportunity to compete against strong and diverse footballing styles. We are excited to see fans come together in Qatar once again to support these future stars."

The tournament returns to Qatar for a second consecutive year, following its successful inaugural edition in 2025. Ten teams will compete for the coveted trophy, including guest teams Egypt and China, making it the biggest edition to date.

Following a draw held in September, the teams have been drawn into two groups of five. Hosts Qatar head Group A, alongside UAE, Bahrain, Oman and China. Defending champions Saudi Arabia head Group B, alongside Iraq, Yemen, Kuwait and Egypt.

A total of 23 matches will be played across three venues: Grand Hamad Stadium, Hamad bin Khalifa Stadium and Saoud bin Abdulrahman Stadium. All venues are accessible, ensuring a barrier-free experience for disabled fans. To purchase accessibility tickets, fans can email: accessibility.tickets@sc.qa.

The tournament will get underway at Grand Hamad Stadium on October 16 at 5:45pm, when Qatar face China. The 13,000-seater venue will also stage the final match on November 4 at 5:45pm. The stadium previously hosted matches during the 2025 edition, including the final, which saw Saudi Arabia win the title.

The GFF U-17 Gulf Cup Qatar 2026 will mark a key highlight of the country's football season, ahead of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026, which will take place from November 19 to December 13 at the state-of-the-art Competition Complex in Aspire Zone.

DURBAN TEST

Australia fight back before bad light ends play

RENSHAW, CUMMINS PUT TOGETHER 63 RUNS FOR 7TH WICKET

Reuters
Durban

Australia's captain Pat Cummins and Matt Renshaw led an afternoon fightback to see the tourists to 187-6 before bad light brought a premature halt to play on the opening day of the first Test against South Africa yesterday.

The pair put on an unbeaten 63 for the seventh wicket with Renshaw four runs short of a fifty and Cummins 33 not out.

The umpires took the players off one hour before the scheduled close as windy and gloomy conditions coincided with South Africa bringing back the pacy Anrich Nortje into the attack and when he sent a bouncer over Renshaw's head, play was immediately halted after the light meters were consulted.

The umpires waited out in the middle for another 45 minutes before calling off the day's proceedings.

Nortje was returning after almost four years away from first-class cricket, and took two wickets in the space of three balls before tea to give the hosts the upper hand.

The 32-year-old had not played since March 2023 as persistent injury and a focus on the T20 format kept him away from red-ball cricket but he justified his recall with a fiery spell after lunch that left the tourists teetering.

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma predicted Nortje could provide "X-factor", and he did as much in having Alex Carey caught at second slip off a fuller delivery that clocked in at 143 kph and then, two balls later, snagging Beau Webster caught behind to see Australia fall to 124-6. The fortunes of Nortje, who finished the day with 2-40 off 13.2 overs, contrasted with those of Australian cancer survivor Nic Maddinson, also making a comeback, but who failed to get a run.

The 34-year-old, a surprise choice to open after Australia won the toss and chose to bat, survived 33 balls without scoring before Marco Jansen bowled



South Africa's Marco Jansen delivers a ball on day one of the first Test against Australia at the Kingsmead stadium in Durban yesterday. (AFP)



Australia's Pat Cummins (left) and teammate Matt Renshaw leave the pitch on day one of the first Test against South Africa at the Kingsmead stadium in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

him to end a remarkable return following his battle with cancer last year.

His duck was the longest by an Australian opener in Test history and the third-longest by any Test opener.

It was Maddinson's first Test

appearance in almost a decade, having not played first-class cricket for 18 months as he fought testicular cancer that had spread to his lungs. He was only named in the team half an hour before play started

Australia counter-attacked

after Travis Head (9) and Maddinson went early, with Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith putting together a 60-run partnership for the third wicket before Wiaan Mulder (2-31) trapped Labuschagne lbw for 37 with the last ball before lunch.

Smith scored 25 on his first Test appearance in South Africa since the 2018 tour that led to his one-year ban for his role in the ball-tampering scandal known as "Sandpapergate".

Smith walked to the crease without any noticeable heckling from the sparse crowd and quickly set about speeding up the scoring, with two sixes when spinner Keshav Maharaj was introduced to the home attack.

However, vastly experienced Smith was dismissed in the first over after lunch, getting a thick edge to gully to earn Jansen (2-35) a second wicket.

BRIEF SCORES
Stumps Australia 187 for 6 (Renshaw 46*, Labuschagne 37, Cummins 33*, Mulder 2-31) **vs South Africa**

SPOTLIGHT

Tanzid and Islam lead Bangladesh to 317-8 in Afghanistan Test

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Openers Tanzid Hasan and Shadman Islam hit solid half-centuries to guide Bangladesh to 317-8 on the first day of the one-off Test against Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Tanzid, fresh from his maiden hundred against Australia at Darwin, hit eight boundaries and four sixes in his 83, while Islam's 67 had seven hits to the rope after Bangladesh won the toss and batted.

The duo took advantage of a slow-paced Sheikh Zayed Stadium, putting up a solid 124-run stand before Afghanistan hit back with five wickets for 101 runs.

The slump included the wicket of Bangladesh's most experienced batter Mushfiqur Rahim for nought, Mominul Haque for 39 and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto for 29.

Wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das with 53 and Mehidy Hasan Miraz (24) added 62 for the sixth wicket to help push Bangladesh's total towards 300.

At close, Nayeem Hasan was unbeaten on 11, and Taijul Islam was four not out.

Afghanistan's quicks Mohammad Saleem (3-70), Ismat Alam (2-20) and Yamin Ahmadzai (2-62) shared the bowling honours.

Ahmadzai could have had Islam caught on five but Hashmatullah



Litton Das of Bangladesh celebrates his half century on day one of the only Test against Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Shahidi spilled an easy chance at cover, costing Afghanistan dearly.

Leg-spinner Qais Ahmad had figures of 1-60. This is Afghanistan's home Test as they play matches on the neutral venues of the United Arab Emirates and India, given the volatile security situation in their own country.

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 317 for 8 (Tanzid 83, Shadman 67, Saleem 3-70) **vs Afghanistan**

ANNOUNCEMENT

Chapman and Foulkes ruled out of India T20s through injury

Reuters
Auckland

New Zealand batter Mark Chapman and fast-bowler Zak Foulkes have been ruled out of the Twenty20 series against India due to injuries, the country's cricket board (NZC) said yesterday.

New Zealand host India in five T20s, five one-day internationals (ODIs) and two Tests, with the opening T20 in Christchurch on October 22.

Chapman suffered a left hamstring tear during the European T20 League last month but is expected to be available for the ODI series against India.

Foulkes injured his right hip flexor during a recent Canterbury men's training session, with no

timeline yet set for his return. All-rounder Josh Clarkson and fast bowler Blair Tickner have been added to New Zealand's T20 squad as replacements for Chapman and Foulkes.

"I'm gutted for Mark and Zak and I wish them both a smooth recovery. We're fortunate to be able to lean on the expertise of Josh and Blair. I know they're both very excited to be involved," coach Rob Walter said.

SQUAD
Mitchell Santner (captain), Finn Allen, Michael Bracewell, Josh Clarkson, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Bevon Jacobs, Kyle Jamieson, Adam Milne, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Tim Seifert, Nathan Smith, Blair Tickner.

FOCUS

Hope, Rutherford fire West Indies to record T20 chase of 250 over India

AFP
Ranchi, India

Skipper Shai Hope and Sherfane Rutherford struck blazing knocks as the West Indies recorded the second-highest T20 chase of all time yesterday to beat India by six wickets.

After India posted 249-5 batting first, the West Indies rode on a 120-run fourth-wicket partnership between Hope, who hit an unbeaten 102, and Rutherford (84) to achieve the target with nine balls to spare in Ranchi.

Hope completed the win with the ninth six of his innings and one that brought up his century off 45 balls, as the West Indies bounced back to level the five-match series at 1-1.

South Africa hold the record for the highest successful run chase in men's T20 cricket, scoring 259-4 against the West Indies in Centurion in 2023.

West Indies' previous best chase was when they overhauled 231 by South Africa in Johannesburg in 2015. Hope and the left-handed Rutherford led an aggressive counter-attack after joining forces with the West Indies 58-3.

Rutherford reached his fifty off 24 balls and kept up the chase before falling to left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

He hit seven fours and seven sixes in his 37-ball blitz.



West Indies' captain Shai Hope (left) and Sherfane Rutherford play shots during the second T20 against India in Ranchi yesterday. (AFP)



Hope, who struck his second T20 ton, stood firm and put on an unbeaten stand of 74 with Romario Shepherd, who hit 34.

Indian speedster Mayank Yadav struck in the opening over with two successive wickets, removing Shimron Hetmyer for a first-ball duck. Yadav also bowled Rovman Powell for 24 with a delivery that clocked 150 km/h (93 mph), but Hope and Rutherford turned the chase on its head.

Earlier, Sanju Samson made 82 off 41 balls before skipper Shreyas Iyer and Tilak Varma powered India to an imposing total after being asked to bat first.

Samson and Ishan Kishan (43) put on 97 runs for the second wicket after swashbuckling opener Abhishek Sharma de-

parted for 20. Spinner Roston Chase struck the first blow and then delivered two more - bowling Kishan and Shivam Dube - to check India's surge. Pace bowler Shamar Springer dismissed Samson but Iyer and Varma bludgeoned 83 runs off 33 balls for the fifth wicket. Iyer fell to the penultimate ball of the innings after a rapid 40 off 18 balls while Varma finished unbeaten with 44 in equally quick time.

The third match is tomorrow in Indore.

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies 252 for 4 (Hope 102*, Rutherford 84, Mayank 3-36) **beat India 249 for 5** (Samson 82, Tilak 44, Chase 3-24) **by six wickets**

FARHAN, SADAQAT LEAD PAKISTAN TO T20 WIN OVER SRI LANKA



Pakistan's captain Sahibzada Farhan (left) speaks with teammate Maaz Sadaqat after hitting a six during the first T20I against Sri Lanka at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

Rawalpindi, Pakistan: Pakistan's newest skipper Sahibzada Farhan hit a swashbuckling half-century to guide Pakistan to a four-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the first T20 international in Rawalpindi yesterday. Farhan, appointed captain last month, smacked 89 off 53 balls with 10 fours and four sixes, guiding Pakistan to their target of 183 in 18.5 overs.

The win gives Pakistan a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Sri Lanka posted 182-8 as opener Lahiru Udara struck 91 off 55 balls after the tourists won the toss and batted.

Farhan and Fakhar Zaman got the hosts off to a rollicking start of 54-0 in five overs as Sri Lanka's attack failed to stop the flow of runs, with Zaman scoring 21 off 13. Maaz Sadaqat kept the momentum flowing as he hit three sixes and four fours in a brisk 50, adding 92 runs with his skipper to lead Pakistan to within sight of victory.

Pakistan lost Hasaz Nawaz and Saim Ayub cheaply before Farhan was caught in the deep, but

it did not derail their chase.

Earlier, Udara hit the highest T20 score by a Sri Lankan against Pakistan, improving upon Kusal Perera's 84 in Dubai in 2013.

Udara added 60 runs for the third wicket with Kamindu Mendis (23) after a poor start saw captain Kusal Mendis dismissed for one and Kamil Mishara depart for six, helping the team recover from 18-2.

Dasun Shanaka offered brief support as he and Udara added 57 for the fifth wicket, with Sri Lanka taking 66 runs off the last six overs.

Fast bowler Naseem Shah grabbed 3-36 for Pakistan, while debutant Mohammad Imran took 2-21.

The remaining two matches are tomorrow and Tuesday, both in Rawalpindi.

BRIEF SCORES
Pakistan 187 for 6 (Farhan 89, Sadaqat 50, Malinga 2-33) **beat Sri Lanka 182 for 8** (Udara 91, Naseem 3-36, Imran 2-21) **by 4 wickets**

TENNIS

Hurkacz sends Djokovic home with straight-set win

TOP SEED ALEXANDER ZVEREV STAYS ON COURSE TO CLAIM WORLD NO.1 RANKING

Reuters
Shanghai

Poland's Hubert Hurkacz beat Novak Djokovic for the first time as he dumped the four-times champion out of the Shanghai Masters with a 6-4 6-3 second-round victory yesterday.

Tenth seed Djokovic arrived in Shanghai fresh from winning a record seventh China Open crown after Australia's Alex de Minaur retired with a groin injury in Tuesday's final.

The 24-times Grand Slam champion, whose last Shanghai title came in 2018, had an 8-0 record against 29-year-old Hurkacz.

But the Pole, a former world number six, produced a clinical display, firing 13 aces and 28 winners while conceding little on serve to beat Djokovic in one hour and 27 minutes in his first Shanghai appearance since capturing the title in 2023.

Hurkacz, who missed the tournament in 2024 and 2025, extended his winning streak in Shanghai to eight matches and now faces either Italy's Lorenzo Musetti or China's Zhou Yi.

The defeat marked the latest setback in a testing season for the 39-year-old Serbian, who suffered a shock first-round exit at the US Open, his earliest Grand Slam defeat since the 2006 Australian Open.

"I was not close to what I was playing in Beijing," Djokovic said. "I'm slightly more tired, not fresh ...

"I didn't feel myself on the court in terms of feeling the ball. It's a super quick surface, completely different from Beijing.

"If you lose your serve, it is enough to lose the match, once per set, and that is what happened. It is very difficult to return his serve, almost impossible. So yeah, I did not adjust and it was a really tough draw for me, playing him in the first match."

Djokovic will now turn his at-



Poland's Hubert Hurkacz hits a return to Serbia's Novak Djokovic at the Shanghai Masters yesterday. (AFP)



Serbia's Novak Djokovic leaves the court. (Reuters)

tention to the European indoor swing, with next month's Paris Masters looming. He is ninth in the race for a spot at the season-ending ATP Finals in Turin.

"I am planning on only playing in Paris, so let's see.

"Hopefully I can have a good result there," Djokovic told reporters yesterday.



Germany's Alexander Zverev in action in Shanghai. (AFP)

TOP SEED ZVEREV MARCHES ON French and US Open champion Zverev remained firmly on track in Shanghai in his bid to secure the year-end world number one ranking by seeing off local favourite Wu Yibing 6-4 7-6(4).

The German world number two can ensure he will reach the pinnacle by the end of the year if he

makes the semi-finals or if his nearest challengers Carlos Alcaraz and Ben Shelton lose at any stage of the Masters 1000 tournament.

Jannik Sinner is currently the top-ranked player, but the Italian ended his season due to inflammation in his knee and will drop the points he earned for winning the Vienna Open, the Paris Masters and the ATP Finals last year.

The only blemish on an otherwise perfect day for top seed Zverev was a minor injury scare at 5-5 in the second set, when the 29-year-old slipped and fell near the baseline and then clutched his left ankle. Memories of the serious ankle injury he suffered in the 2022 French Open semi-finals briefly resurfaced but Zverev recovered and completed the win in the ensuing tiebreak to book a meeting with Frenchman Quentin Halys.

Earlier, US Open runner-up Shelton celebrated his 24th birthday with a 6-3 7-6(6) win over German Daniel Altmaier but it was the end of the road for Roland Garros finalist Flavio Cobolli, who fell 6-1 4-6 6-3 to Adrian Mannarino.

Mertens stuns Swiatek in Beijing, sets up China Open semi-final with Zheng

BEIJING: Elise Mertens stunned former champion Iga Swiatek 7-6(0) 6-3 on Friday to reach the China Open semi-finals, continuing her impressive run in Beijing after also eliminating American third seed Coco Gauff earlier in the week.

The 30-year-old Belgian, ranked 19th in the world, produced a composed display to secure back-to-back victories over Grand Slam champions and advance to just the third WTA 1000 semi-final of her career and her first since 2021.

Mertens seized control by dominating the opening-set tiebreak without dropping a point and carried that momentum into the second set, breaking Swiatek and completing one of the biggest upsets of the tournament.

She will next face home favourite Zheng Qinwen, who defeated sixth seed Elina Svitolina 6-3 7-6(6) earlier in the day to book her place in the last four.

Playing on a wildcard, Zheng took charge early by breaking Svitolina three times in the opening set. The Ukrainian world number seven responded strongly in the second, raising her level to force a tiebreak.

Zheng recovered from a sluggish start in the breaker, reeling off four consecutive points to regain the initiative before sealing victory in one hour and 47 minutes. Svitolina competed well throughout but was unable to withstand Zheng's attacking game as the Olympic champion consistently forced the pace and seized the initiative in crucial moments.

"I'm just happy to have a lot of winners during the match, and at the end, be brave in important moments," Zheng told reporters. The victory took Zheng to her fourth career WTA 1000 semi-final and her third on Chinese soil,



following appearances in Beijing and Wuhan in 2024.

"Truthfully, because I really wanted to grab this win, I was really nervous," the 24-year-old told the crowd.

"I played really aggressive in important moments," she said, adding that her opponent "raised her level" in a tight second set. Svitolina made just 13 unforced errors over the one-hour-and-47-minute match, but was out-gunned by 48 winners from the 2024 Olympic champion. Mertens, the world number 19, praised her opponent.

"I tried to be consistent. She's a great player, so I had to really push myself," said Mertens, who had lost both of her two previous matches against eighth-seeded Swiatek.

"It was really nerve-wracking at the end but I kept myself calm... I just can't believe it."

The 30-year-old was the evening's better technician, making just 11 unforced errors to Swiatek's 34 across the one-hour-and-50-minute affair.

Mertens had surged into her singles quarter-final after beating third-seeded Coco Gauff, also in straight sets.

FORMULA 1

Slick Verstappen grabs pole for Singapore sprint

AFP
Singapore

Max Verstappen scorched to Singapore sprint race pole position in his Red Bull yesterday after a thrilling qualifying session at the Marina Bay Street Circuit.

George Russell's Mercedes joined Verstappen on the front row for the 21-lap dash on Saturday with the Ferrari of Charles Leclerc third and Oscar Piastri's McLaren fourth.

A resurgent Verstappen, who won for the first time this season in Malaysia last weekend, clocked 1min 31.156sec under lights at a Marina Bay Circuit enveloped in haze caused by fires in Indonesia, 0.120sec quicker than Russell.

"It's always close here in Singapore. And also your lap itself, you're pushing as hard as you think is possible, close to the walls in places," said the four-time world champion.

"Once we bolted on the soft tyres (for SQ3), it felt like the car was coming alive a little bit more, but I did not expect this.

"Of course, very happy to be first."

Fifth was the McLaren of Lando Norris, followed by the Ferrari of Lewis Hamilton.

Championship leader Kimi Antonelli, sporting a new aerodynamic package, was only seventh in his Mercedes, with Liam Lawson (RB), Isack Hadjar (Red Bull) and Pierre Gasly (Alpine) completing the top 10 on the grid.

Verstappen has never won in Singapore, where extremes of heat and humidity play a part in the most physically attritional race of the season.

He was buoyed by the pace of



Red Bull's Max Verstappen (also inset) during the sprint qualifying at the Singapore Grand Prix in Marina Bay Street Circuit yesterday. (AFP)

his Red Bull, which traditionally struggles on slower speed and bumpy street circuits.

"I think the last few races we have been a lot stronger," said Verstappen.

"But this track still highlights a few little weaknesses in the car, but we manage to drive with them as well as possible."

However the Dutchman could face a grid penalty as he was being investigated by stewards after the session for allegedly overtaking Hamilton under yellow flag conditions during SQ1.

Russell said of P2: "It is going to be challenging, the grip here (means) the drivers on the pole side have a big advantage."

Antonelli admitted he struggled throughout the session.

"Still a lot to understand about this package, the car is very unpredictable and it is very hard to put a lap together," said the Italian, who is 84 points ahead of Russell in the drivers' standings.

"I came with high hopes. But I think it will be a difficult weekend. I don't really see where we can find seven tenths."

Singapore is featuring a sprint race for the first time, on a track that is notoriously difficult for overtaking. The only practice session for the teams to get to grips with the idiosyncrasies of the Marina Bay Street Circuit took place on a dusty track before sunset earlier yesterday, hardly ideal preparation for a 62-lap night race tomorrow.

Singapore is extremely tough on drivers, who can shed up to 3kg (6lb) during the Grand Prix from sweating alone, and the race weekend has been declared a "heat hazard" by organisers allowing drivers to wear cooling vests.

The teams also have to contend with the thick haze caused by wildfires in nearby Indonesia, which saw Singapore's air quality plunge to an "unhealthy" 205 on Friday according to the IQAir tracking website.

Readings above 150 are classified as unhealthy, while levels above 300 are considered hazardous. Motorsport's governing body told AFP the race was not under threat from the haze.

WOLFF DISMISSES 'BRAINGLESS' SPECULATION OF FAVOURITISM AT MERCEDES

Mercedes Formula One boss Toto Wolff rubbished talk his team favours championship leader Kimi Antonelli, calling critics "brainless," as stablemate George Russell's title chances fade with a penalty putting him at the back of the grid in Singapore.

"They're brainless, whoever thinks that," Wolff told reporters when asked what he would say to those who believe Antonelli is being given advantageous treatment.

Antonelli, who is running an upgraded car on the Marina Bay Street Circuit, has won eight races this season to his luckless teammate's three.

He leads Russell, who retired at last week's race with a failed engine, by 84 points going into the Singapore Grand Prix, where a penalty for going through his regulation four engines will put Russell at the back of the starting grid.

Favouritism is "completely nonsensical," Wolff said.

"I've always tried since I came into Formula One, even in my Williams days, to be the most balanced and the most transparent with the drivers," he said, recalling a conversation years ago on the grid with Alain Prost about his arch-rival Ayrton Senna.

"I said: 'Just out of interest, why did it go so wrong between you and Senna?' And he said: 'Because we never knew what the team was about.' 'So, I took it as my challenge to keep it always balanced. And it was not easy with Lewis and Nico back in the day," he said, referring to tension between then-teammates Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg at Mercedes under Wolff a decade ago.

MOTOGP

Fernandez logs record lap at Indonesia practice

AFP
Mandalika, Indonesia

Raul Fernandez set a new lap record to top the standings at the end of a crash-laden practice session at the Indonesian MotoGP on Friday.

The SuperFile-Trackhouse racer clocked 1min 28.725sec at a dry Pertamina Mandalika International Circuit to push Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi, who had led after the first session, into second place by 0.219sec.

Championship leader Jorge Martin, also on Aprilia, came third, with fellow Spaniards Pedro Acosta and reigning champion Marc Marquez behind him.

Fabio di Giannantonio was sixth, followed by Fabio Quartararo, Alex Marquez, Franco Morbidelli and Francesco Bagnaia.

In a second session high on drama, last year's race winner Fermin Aldeguer crashed at the last corner, while Quartararo skidded out



at Turn 9, though both were uninjured.

Enea Bastianini, Diogo Moreira, Alex Marquez and Alex Rins also fell. Japan's Ai Ogura crashed earlier, during the first session.

Marc Marquez won in Japan last week to whittle Martin's overall championship lead down to two points with six events of the season remaining.

Going into tomorrow's race, Martin sits top with 333 points, with Marquez on 331 and Bezzecchi in third place on 284.

LIV players face 'business decision': Morikawa

Yokohama, Japan: Double major winner Collin Morikawa said that LIV Golf players have to make "a business decision" about their futures, after Jon Rahm's lawyer said the Spanish star was quitting the breakaway tour. Rahm's decision to leave LIV due to "unacceptable" terms deals a significant blow to the divisive tour as it attempts to relaunch itself after declaring bankruptcy. Along with Bryson DeChambeau, double major winner and former world number one Rahm was arguably the most prominent golfer to defect from the PGA Tour and join the free-spending, Saudi-backed league. But LIV filed for bankruptcy protection last month after its deep-pocketed Middle Eastern

backers pulled the plug. The tour is trying to relaunch next year with new investors as "LIV 2.0". Retaining popular stars like Rahm has been widely seen as critical to its prospects. Morikawa said that "everyone has their own choice to make". "It's a business decision, it's a decision that a lot of guys aren't going to take lightly," said Morikawa. "Are you able to go to sleep at night, keep waking up motivated, doing what you love, going out and achieving your goals and whatever those goals might be? "It's whatever platform that's going to be best set at," he added. Rahm's lawyer John Beck told a US Bankruptcy Court of New Jersey that the player would "not be participating going forward in LIV 2.0".

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City will win appeal over financial charges, says Maresca

An commission found City artificially inflated revenues and reduced costs by over £900mn

AFP

Manchester

Manchester City boss Enzo Maresca said he has absolute faith the club will win its appeal after being found guilty of more than 100 breaches of Premier League financial rules.

In his first press conference since the bombshell announcement last week, the Italian also rejected any suggestion that City's haul of silverware over the past 15 years was now tainted.

"I completely trust the club," said Maresca, appointed as City manager in June having also previously worked at the Etihad as a member of Pep Guardiola's coaching staff. "I trust the club because I trust the people and this is also the reason why I joined the club... there is not another club in the world where I would like to be."

An independent commission found City had arranged "sham" contracts with a number of their commercial partners to artificially inflate revenues and reduce costs by over £900mn (\$1.2bn) over a nine-season period, between 2009 and 2018.

The 10-time English champions, who continue to deny any wrongdoing, are appealing against the judgement. They likely face a severe points penalty that could lead to relegation or even expulsion from the Premier League if they fail to overturn the verdicts.

"The reason why I joined this club is because I completely trust 100 percent the owner, the CEO, the sporting director, all



In his first press conference since the bombshell announcement last week, Enzo Maresca also rejected any suggestion that Manchester City's haul of silverware over the past 15 years was now tainted.

the organisation. So I don't have any doubt about that," said Maresca. "I spoke with the club for sure and we all (have) trust and the right moment to speak about that is when we win this appeal."

Since an Abu Dhabi-backed takeover in 2008, City have become the dominant force in English football. They have won

eight Premier League titles, the Champions League and multiple other trophies over the past 15 years.

Maresca rejected the suggestion those successes were now tainted. But Manchester United boss Michael Carrick said he felt "personally" affected having missed out on the Premier League title to City when play-

ing for the Red Devils in 2011/12.

"I've got my own questions about it. It's affected me personally in different ways over a period of time," Carrick told reporters. "It's unprecedented, you know, a unique situation to be in this, at this level with such a huge impact in so many ways. So, we all need to know what's going to happen, really. I think that's pretty clear."

Liverpool also have a major axe to grind after finishing runners-up to City three times in the past 12 years. City's first outing since the guilty verdict is at Anfield on Sunday and Liverpool boss Andoni Iraola also called for the uncertainty affecting the whole Premier League to be clarified as swiftly as possible. "I think the worst thing probably is the uncertainty, that no one knows what's going to happen," said the Spaniard.

Guardiola stepped down at the end of last season after a trophy-laden decade at the Etihad but is set to attend their next home game against Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday as a show of support.

Maresca has made a flawless start to his reign in charge, with City winning all five of their Premier League games so far to top the table. City are set for a hostile reception when they travel to Anfield, the home of their fierce rivals, but Maresca said his players would stay focused on the match.

"Probably (it) will be even more warm in terms of environment. But the reason why I decided to be a manager is for this kind of game," he said.

"In this moment, we are top of the league, so the players have all the reasons to be happy and excited."

Barca skipper Raphinha out against Getafe and Galatasaray

Barcelona: Barcelona captain Raphinha will miss the club's next two matches after picking up a hamstring issue while playing for Brazil, coach Hansi Flick confirmed. "It's not a big injury," Flick, who said that it nonetheless required attention, told reporters. "We have to take care about this because he has last season a lot of injuries about this. I think three injuries. And we take care. So, he's not available tomorrow (Saturday against Getafe in La Liga) and also not available in Istanbul against Galatasaray (on Tuesday in the Champions League)."

The German manager was furious at the schedule imposed on the players which resulted in the Brazilian taking the knock during a friendly match in Australia. Repositioned as a centre-forward at Barcelona since the start of the season, Raphinha is the top scorer in Europe's main leagues with 14 goals in eight matches across all competitions.

But he has been plagued by recurring muscle problems throughout his career, returning injured from the March 2026 international break, during which he faced France in a friendly in Boston. The 29-year-old's absence was sorely felt by Barcelona during the season's final stretch, particularly in the Champions League when they fell in the quarter-finals to Atletico Madrid.

The Brazilian forward also suffered a hamstring injury while playing for Brazil during the 2026 World Cup. The reigning two-time Spanish champions are unbeaten in La Liga this season and sit top of the table, five points ahead of Atletico Madrid.

MAN CITY WHISTLEBLOWER PINTO TO STAY UNDER POLICE PROTECTION

Computer hacker Rui Pinto, the man behind the Football Leaks website which helped trigger the Premier League probe into Manchester City's finances, will remain under police protection, Portuguese authorities confirmed.

Protection measures which were due to end on Saturday will now remain in effect pending a new decision, the Justice Ministry said in a statement. A previous resolution was nullified because Pinto had not been "duly informed of the reasons for the decision" and had not had the opportunity to challenge it, the statement added.

Pinto's lawyers last week denounced irregularities in the proceedings, highlighting the real threats facing their client, who was assaulted in Lisbon last April. The 37-year-old said he had to move to a secret location "due to the multiple death threats" he had received. Pinto has been a protected witness since 2020 after agreeing to grant Portuguese authorities access to millions of files gathered before his arrest.

Arrested in Hungary where he was living in January 2019 and extradited to his home country Portugal, Pinto spent more than a year in pre-trial detention before agreeing to cooperate with authorities by granting them access to the encrypted data in his possession.

LA LIGA

Mourinho lashes out at 'ridiculous' criticism of Mbappe

AFP

Madrid

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho slammed criticism of star striker Kylian Mbappe, labelling the attacks as "ridiculous".

The French captain has come under fire for spending his time recovering from a left knee injury – which he suffered playing in a Nations League match against Turkey – in France and Switzerland rather than Madrid.

The 27-year-old was also pictured at the entrance of a Parisian nightclub and photographed on a bicycle when he was in Switzerland. Some fans claimed it was a deliberate snubbing of Mourinho, who had only days before said that players should avoid skiing or riding bicycles so as to avoid risking injury.

"Are these criticisms over the top? They are ridiculous," said Mourinho at his press confer-

ence on the eve of their La Liga home match with Villarreal. "All the players who were obliged to be present every day for their recovery were here. Mbappe came, like the others, to undergo scans in order to be diagnosed. He then went to see a specialist in France, because he has history with his knee which we cannot ignore."

Mourinho, whose side already lag six points behind bitter rivals Barcelona in the title race, is never one to shy away from a confrontation and tackled each of the criticisms against Mbappe.

"Problems involving football are not sufficient for you," the 63-year-old Portuguese coach told reporters. "Therefore you have raised the issue of the disquette, which in fact was not one, because it was used for a private event for Fashion Week. As for the bicycle in Switzerland. It was in a hotel, made up of small houses, which makes them available so guests can ride to the communal areas, and you would have us be-

lieve he was competing in the Tour of Switzerland."

Mourinho shrugged off the potential of a hostile reception for Mbappe today against Villarreal, reiterating that he was "certain" the all-time World Cup record goalscorer had fulfilled "his obligations to Real Madrid".

It is not the first time this season that Mbappe has been subjected to attacks by fans. The Ultras Sur, a Real Madrid supporters' group linked to the far right and banned from the Santiago Bernabeu, took issue with him last month.

They were furious that prior to a Real Madrid match, Mbappe, alongside Vinicius Junior and fellow Frenchman Ibrahima Konate, partially rolled up t-shirts bearing the words "We are all Ceutans", which was intended to be a message of support for people in the Spanish territory bordering Morocco.

Ceuta, Spain's north African exclave has been grappling with a migration crisis.



Kylian Mbappe has come under fire for spending his time recovering from an injury – which he suffered playing in a Nations League match against Turkey – in France and Switzerland rather than Madrid.

EQUESTRIAN

Khaled al-Eid wins Gold Tour at Hathab

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Khaled Abdulaziz al-Eid won the Gold Tour class as the second round of the 10th Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour continued at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's (QEF) indoor arena.

Riding Racker, al-Eid finished first in 28.62 seconds. Abdulaziz Fahad al-Eid, on Q-Hayen, took second place in 29.94 seconds, while Mohammed Saeed Haidan finished third on Ekaterina in 27.37 seconds.

Team Bu Thaila won the Gold Tour team competition with a combined time of 58.56 seconds. Khajeem Faraj al-Adhba, head of the Veterinary and Farriery Department at QEF, presented the awards to the winners.

In the Open Class (110cm), Mohammed Abdullah al-Marri claimed first place on Hannes in 21.96 seconds. Yaqoub Nasser al-Mas finished second on Elio 4 in 22.83 seconds, while Hadi Mansour al-Shahwani took third on Mira in 24.35 seconds.

Al-Marri also won the Juniors' competition on Hannes, while al-Mas finished second on Elio 4. Abdullah Faisal al-Mana placed third on Aspire*in 24.41 seconds. Mohammed Saleh al-Marri, head of the championship's Facilities and Logistics Committee, presented the awards.

Ahmed Abdulrahman al-Abdullah won the Future Riders class (70cm), riding Mani in 48.25 seconds. Ahmed Nasser al-Obaidli



Riding Racker, Khaled Abdulaziz al-Eid clocked 28.62 seconds to win the Gold Tour.

finished second on Croat in 48.27 seconds, while Mashael Mohammed al-Thani and Salman Talal al-Hassan shared third place, both recording 47.61 seconds on Rive de Coeur and



Future Riders class winners pose on the podium during the second round of Hathab.

Tulipards, respectively. Ahmed al-Humaidi, equine programmes adviser at Al Shaqab, presented the awards.

Organised by the Qatar Equestrian Federation in partnership with Al Shaqab, the 10th edition of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour will continue today with the Future Riders class for the 12-16 age group (90cm), followed by the Bronze Tour individual and team competitions (120cm) and the Diamond Tour (150cm).

Montagliani to seek CONCACAF re-election in boost for Infantino: reports

Los Angeles: Victor Montagliani, widely touted as the biggest potential threat to Gianni Infantino's FIFA re-election bid, intends to remain as head of CONCACAF rather than run against the beleaguered president, multiple outlets reported Thursday.

Canadian businessman Montagliani reportedly told CONCACAF staff that he intends to seek a third full term heading the continental federation which represents North America, Central America and the Caribbean.

If confirmed, it would all but rule out Montagliani from challenging Infantino, who has been rocked by outrage over his now-aborted plan to create a commercial subsidiary to run FIFA's biggest events, including the World Cup. The next FIFA election is scheduled to take place in March. The CONCACAF election is due early next year.

A CONCACAF spokesman contacted by AFP did not immediately confirm the reports from the Guardian, BBC and ESPN, which all cited anonymous sources. Montagliani, a FIFA vice-president, had long been regarded as a close ally of Infantino. But there were signs, even before he distanced himself

over the now-scrapped plan to allow private investment into the World Cup, that he viewed FIFA's purpose somewhat differently to Infantino. The Canadian has been president of CONCACAF since 2016, bringing much needed stability to the confederation after his two immediate predecessors were swept up in a FIFA corruption scandal.

Since the latest FIFA controversy erupted following this summer's World Cup, Infantino has lost the support of numerous member associations as well as CONCACAF, Europe's UEFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). UEFA has even begun to prepare legal proceedings over the scrapped plan.

Nonetheless FIFA confirmed last month that Infantino will seek a fourth term heading football's global governing body.

Africa's CAF and South America's CONMEBOL remain loyal to Infantino, along with some Asian associations including 2034 World Cup hosts Saudi Arabia and 2022 hosts Qatar.

So far, only former Tottenham defender Ramon Vega has announced he intends to run against Infantino, with candidacies open until November 18.