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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Sarabia hat-trick fires Arabi to 6-0 rout of Shahania

Arabi followed their win over Sadd with another dominant display

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Pablo Sarabia scored a hat-trick as Al Arabi thrashed Al Shahania 6-0 in the Qatar Stars League at Khalifa International Stadium today.

Having beaten defending champions Al Sadd in their previous match, the Dream Team continued their winning form with a dominant display against Al Shahania.

The victory was Al Arabi's third of the season, and they are in third place with 12 points. Al Shahania, meanwhile, suffered their second defeat and remain eighth with seven points.

Sarabia was the star of the show, converting a penalty in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time before collecting a Michael Olunga assist to fire home from the edge of the box in the 64th minute. He completed his hat-trick eight minutes later, dribbling past two defenders before finding the net.

Earlier, Jordan Veretout opened the scoring in the 40th minute with a powerful strike from outside the box after Al Shahania cleared a corner with a header. Oussama Tannane then extended Al Arabi's lead five minutes into the second half with a left-footed finish from the edge of the box. Al Shahania's best chance came in the 54th minute after Al Arabi goalkeeper Jassim Al Hail made a costly error, first clearing the ball with his foot before picking it up. The resulting indirect free-kick, taken by Jawad El Jemili, struck the crossbar.



Al Arabi's Pablo Sarabia celebrates with teammates after scoring against Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League at Khalifa International Stadium.

ZAHZOUH NETS HAT-TRICK IN WAKRAH'S WIN OVER AHLI

Earlier, Al Wakrah produced a dominant display to beat Al Ahli 3-0 at Al Thumama Stadium, with Amin Zahzouh scoring a hat-trick.

The midfielder opened the scoring from the penalty spot in the 18th minute before doubling Al Wakrah's lead with a fine strike in the 62nd minute. He completed his treble in the 90th minute to seal a comprehensive victory.

Al Wakrah controlled the contest and capitalised on Al Ahli's defensive lapses, while the hosts struggled to create clear-cut chances or respond to Zahzouh's clinical finishing.

The win lifted Al Wakrah's points tally to eight, while Al Ahli were left searching for greater consistency after the home defeat.

Meanwhile, defending champions Al Sadd face traditional rivals Al Duhail in the marquee clash of the round at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium tomorrow.

Al Sadd return to the league looking to regain their form after losing 2-0 to Al Hilal SFC in the AFC Champions League Elite. Coach Razvan Lucescu acknowledged that his side were struggling to find their best form.

"We are not in our best form at the moment. In football, it is natural for a team to go through periods when it is not at its best. However, we will fight again and work hard to return to winning ways," the Romanian said.

Al Sadd will look to regroup against Al Duhail as they seek to keep pace with leaders Al Rayyan. The defending champions are second



Amin Zahzouh scored a hat-trick as Al Wakrah beat Al Ahli at Al Thumama Stadium.

with 12 points, one behind Al Rayyan, while Al Duhail are third with nine points.

REMAINING FIXTURES
Today: 5.30pm: Al Sailiya vs Qatar SC at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium; 7.45pm: Lusail vs Al Shamal at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium
Tomorrow: 5.30pm: Al Sadd vs Al Duhail at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium; 7.45pm: Al Gharafa vs Al Rayyan at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium

QFA president participates in FIFA Council meeting

Doha: Qatar Football Association President **HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani** participated in the 37th meeting of the FIFA Council, held via video conference on Thursday.

Sheikh Hamad attended the meeting in his capacity as a member of the FIFA Council. The meeting was chaired by FIFA President Gianni Infantino from Zurich, Switzerland, with members discussing several agenda items and making decisions and recommendations.

According to a FIFA statement, the organisation's management presented a proposed initiative, the FIFA Solidarity Programme from Financial Surplus, which aims to allocate part of FIFA's reserves to more than double planned funding for the 2027-30 period, taking it to \$6.35bn.

Under the proposal, funding for each FIFA member association would reach \$25mn, while allocations to continental, regional and zone confederations and other stakeholders would also increase significantly under the FIFA Forward 4.0 programme. Funding conditions would

be linked to the development of women's and youth football, long-term football projects and football infrastructure.

FIFA's relevant committees will finalise the details, including eligibility criteria, application and approval procedures, disbursement of funds, oversight and auditing.

The proposal is scheduled to be presented to the FIFA Council at its next meeting in December 2026 and included in FIFA's annual report for 2026. The measures will remain subject to approval by the 77th FIFA Congress, scheduled for March 2027, in line with the organisation's governance procedures.

SPOTLIGHT

Shamal target winning return as Lusail seek to bounce back



Al Shamal coach David Prats (left) and his Lusail counterpart Emanuel Mesquita at a press conference yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Fifth placed Al Shamal will look to return to winning ways when they take on ninth placed Lusail in the Qatar Stars League at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium today.

Al Shamal coach David Prats expects a tough test against a Lusail side he rates highly, but the Spaniard is determined to secure three points and get his team back on track in the league.

"We are expecting a tough match against a very good team that has outstanding players, plays in a distinctive way, and has an identity on the field," Prats said at the pre-match press conference.

"Lusail is one of the teams I like in the Qatari league this season because their performance model is very good, but all of that does not prevent us from going into the match with only one goal, which is to win and collect the three points in order to get back to winning ways."

Al Shamal are keen to put their recent league setback against Al Duhail behind them after suffering a difficult defeat. Prats, however, believes his team showed encouraging signs in their subsequent AFC Champions League campaign against Iran's Tractor Sazi.

"We are very excited about the opportunity to return to winning ways, especially after the difficult moments we experienced in our last league match against Al Duhail," he said.

"We succeeded in getting back on track after the Al Duhail match in the league, by facing Tractor of Iran in the AFC Champions League, during which we per-

formed very well, and what we want is to continue in the same direction."

Lusail, meanwhile, will be eager to respond after their 1-0 defeat to Al Shahania in the previous round. Coach Emanuel Mesquita said his players had prepared well for the encounter and were determined to claim maximum points.

"We are preparing for the upcoming Al Shamal match with high focus, and we have a strong desire to secure the three points and build on the continuous work the players have been putting in during training and matches," Mesquita said.

"We have worked well this week, focusing on the technical and tactical aspects we need for this encounter. The players have shown great commitment during training sessions, and they are fully prepared to face Al Shamal in the next round."

Mesquita acknowledged the quality of their opponents and anticipated a closely contested match, with Lusail aiming to deliver a strong performance and improve their position in the standings.

"The North is an organized team with outstanding players, and we expect a tough and difficult match for both teams. Our goal is to deliver a good performance on the field and come out with a positive result that strengthens our position in the standings," he said.

Meanwhile, bottom-placed Al Sailiya will seek their first points of the season when they face Qatar SC today. Al Sailiya have lost all five of their matches and sit 12th in the standings without a point. Coach Mirghani al-Zein said the team needed to unite and rebuild confidence after a difficult run of results.

Qatar lose to China in U-17 Gulf Cup opener

Doha: Qatar suffered a 2-0 defeat to China in their opening match of the second edition of the Gulf Cup U-17 football tournament at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha on Friday. Yuan gave China an early lead in the fourth minute before Liu Yubang doubled their advantage in the 37th minute.

The result put China at the top of Group A, which also features Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Bahrain. In another match yesterday, UAE claimed an impressive 2-1 victory over Bahrain.

Hosted by Qatar until November 4, the tournament features 10 teams divided into two groups of five, with 23 matches scheduled. Egypt and China are taking part as invited teams, providing the participating sides with an opportunity to compete in a diverse and competitive environment.

Qatar will look to bounce back when they face Bahrain in their second match on Monday at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium. Two matches are scheduled for today, with defending champions Saudi Arabia taking on Egypt at Hamad Al Kabir Stadium, while Iraq face Yemen at Saud bin Abdulrahman Stadium.

CRICKET

Hazlewood sees magic of reverse swing

Reuters
Gqeberha, South Africa

Australia fast bowler **Josh Hazlewood** predicts reverse swing may be crucial to the outcome of the three-Test series against South Africa, where abrasive pitches are helping revive a fading art.

Hazlewood extracted swing and used the reversing ball to good effect in the first Test at Kingsmead in Durban, which ended on Tuesday with Australia winning by 214 runs.

Reverse swing could be as vital

for the second Test in Gqeberha, which starts tomorrow and where the St George's Park wickets are expected to be similar.

The art of reverse swing has faded in recent years with greener wickets and lusher outfielders keeping the ball newer and less likely to rough up.

"The ball still looks new late in the innings if it gets that far," said Hazlewood about playing back home in Australia, but it is a different story on tour in South Africa.

"It's abrasive wickets. It's very hard underfoot," he explained.

"We probably got a hint of swing in the first innings and then

as the game goes it just deteriorates more and you get a bit more. So we knew it was crucial," he said of their success in Durban, where he returned carer-best figure of 6-49 in the last innings to secure Australia's triumph.

"If the wicket is hard, firm, deteriorating and not much seam movement, you're probably going to get that reverse swing," Hazlewood told a pitch-side press conference yesterday as Australia prepared for tomorrow.

"You probably want the ball a bit harder and a little bit of reverse swing rather than a lot of reverse swing and the ball's soft. That's

much easier to navigate as a batsman," he added.

Hazlewood, now 35, produced his performance in Durban after missing all of last season's Ashes series through injury.

"I just play every Test match that comes," he said of his longevity. "Could be your last one whenever. I don't think about it much.

"I think you know it was great fun last week playing with the same guys. Doing the work in the last innings and taking the 20 wickets for the game on what was a pretty flat wicket for the majority. I don't look too far ahead these days."



PREVIEW

South Africa look to re-establish Test credentials

Hosts considering several batting changes as Rabada returns

Reuters
Gqeberha, South Africa

South Africa will seek to show their heady ascent to the top of the Test cricket pile was no accident as they bid to level the series against Australia in the second match, starting tomorrow in Gqeberha.

The hosts suffered a 214-run defeat to Australia in the first Test that ended in Durban on Tuesday, a setback that left their status as world Test champions looking increasingly fragile.

South Africa secured a dramatic five-wicket victory over Australia to win the World Test Championship last year at Lord's in London, but their qualification for the final prompted debate.

They played fewer Tests than the likes of England and India and faced what was widely regarded as an easier schedule in the qualifying period.

Their winning form leading up to the WTC final also masked some poor batting performances, which coach Shukri Conrad acknowledged finally caught up with them against Australia at Kingsmead, where they looked anything but world champions.

"We've been heavily reliant on (captain) Temba (Bavuma) and (opener) Aiden Markram and then the lower order runs," he said after Australia exposed their batting fragility.

Several changes are expected for the second Test where Matthew Breetzke is set to be given a



South Africa's Kagiso Rabada appeals for an LBW decision against Australia's Nathan Lyon in the 2025 ICC World Test Championship final at Lord's in London, Britain, on June 13, 2025. (Reuters)

renewed chance to open alongside Markram.

Ryan Rickelton is primed to take over as wicketkeeper from Kyle Verreynne but move down the order. Tristan Stubbs, who batted at number five for the first Test, has been omitted, which could open the door for Marques Ackerman to make his Test debut.

RABADA BACK AFTER LENGTHY ABSENCE

South Africa will welcome

back paceman Kagiso Rabada for his first outing since the Indian Premier League in May, placing considerable expectation on his shoulders despite his lengthy absence. That means they will drop one spinner.

Australia's selection is also keenly anticipated but with Cameron Green's return from injury likely delayed, they might resist the temptation to make any changes after such an emphatic win.

One possibility, however, is that seasoned Scott Boland is brought into the attack as Australia monitor the workloads of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc after all three bowled at least 29 overs in the first Test.

Persistent rain and damp conditions are forecast for Gqeberha, particularly on the opening two days, which raises the prospect of delays or a shortened match at St George's Park.

SPOTLIGHT

SA rugby player Hyron Andrews dies in France



Sharks' Hyron Andrews (right) is tackled by Bulls' Walt Steenkamp during the United Rugby Championship (URC) match between South African teams The Bulls from Pretoria and The Sharks from Durban at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria on October 30, 2022. (AFP)

AFP
Paris, France

South African second row Hyron Andrews of Johannesburg-based side the Lions was found dead at a hotel in France on Friday, on the eve of his team's Champions Cup match against La Rochelle, local authorities told AFP.

A source close to the investigation said the 31-year-old lock was found in cardiac arrest in a shower cubicle that was locked from the inside.

The public prosecutor in La Rochelle, western France, confirmed that an investigation had been opened to determine the cause of death, which occurred on the island of Ile de Re, and said that an accidental death was currently the leading line of inquiry.

An autopsy is due to be carried out, the source close to the investigation said.

"This devastating news has sent shockwaves through the international rugby community," the Lions said in a statement.

"The former Sharks and Sale Sharks lock forward was a valued member of the Lions family, and his loss will be felt profoundly by his teammates, coaches, supporters and all who had the privilege of knowing him."

Andrews had only returned to his native South Africa earlier this year after a two-year spell with English Prem side Sale Sharks. He began his career with the Sharks franchise in Durban and represented his country at Under-20 level.

"We are heartbroken by the passing of Hyron. He was not only a gifted rugby player, but also a cherished member of our Lions family having recently joined us this season," added Lions chief executive Rudolf Straeuli.

"On behalf of... everyone at the Lions, I extend our deepest sympathies to (his wife) Maighlin, their young sons Hendrix and Emerson and the entire Andrews family. We stand with them in their sorrow and will remember Hyron with great affection and respect."

PLAYING IN 'HONOUR' OF HYRON

The Lions said today's match against La Rochelle would go ahead as planned "in honour of Hyron".

It is the first time the Lions have played in the Champions Cup, which brings together the best European and South African clubs. A moment's silence will be held ahead of all Champions Cup and second-tier Challenge Cup matches this weekend in memory of Andrews.

COMMENT

South Africa's Rabada primed to bring the heat in second Test, Wade warns

Reuters
Sydney

Retired Test player **Matthew Wade** has warned Australia to expect a more dangerous South African attack with pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada poised to return for the second Test in Gqeberha and make an impact with his trademark aggression.

Rabada missed Australia's 214-run victory in Durban with a hamstring injury but is in contention for Sunday's match at St George's Park, where reigning World Test champions South Africa will look to level the three-Test series.

"The thing that stands out with him is his competitiveness," Wade, Australia's assistant coach, told reporters. "He takes it to the opposition, he'll be in our face, he'll keep coming for the whole Test match, so we really know that."

Wade, who worked with Rabada in the Indian Premier League, said the bowler's ability to sustain pressure would give the hosts greater versatility after they struggled to contain Australia in the series-opener.

"They went with two spinners



last time but ... him and (Anrich) Nortje can basically take one quick spot and (do) short spells and really attack as hard if they want to."

Wade was downbeat about Cameron Green's chances of returning for Australia for the second Test, having missed Durban with an abdominal strain.

The all-rounder had returned to batting in the nets but was more likely for the series finale in Cape Town, he said.

That may mean another chance for Nic Maddinson, who was a surprise pick to open the batting with Travis Head in Durban, with Matt Renshaw moving down the order

to score 190 and 82 in a match-winning performance at number five.

Despite the result, former Australia captain Steve Waugh called for the team's selectors to stop changing the batting order, and let players settle in fixed roles.

Wade said the players were happy to be flexible. "If the conditions tell us it's time to change the batting order, we'll make that change," he said.

"We've seen over the last little bit that we've been able to adapt really quickly and more importantly the players take it on so easily - and credit to them."

FOCUS

Pant awaits fitness clearance as Bumrah returns for NZ Tests

Reuters
Mumbai

Wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant was named in India's squad for next month's two-Test series in New Zealand yesterday, subject to fitness clearance, while pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah returned to the side.

The Shubman Gill-led Test squad featured few surprises, with selectors retaining the core of the team, including all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja and opener Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Pant was recently ruled out of the first two India A test matches against New Zealand with a left side strain but was included in the senior squad pending medical clearance.

India begin the two-match Test series in Wellington on November 19 before the second and final match in Christchurch from November 27.

India also named squads for the accompanying five-match ODI series, with Gill set to captain the side in the opening three matches before Shreyas Iyer



Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah returns to the Indian Test side.

takes charge for the final two as they continue their preparations for next year's ODI World Cup in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Stalwarts Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retained their places in the ODI squad, while Bumrah was selected only for the test leg of the tour.

The much-anticipated ODI series starts in Auckland on November 4 and concludes in Mount Maunganui on November 15.

INDIA'S SQUAD FOR THE FIRST THREE ODIs

Shubman Gill (C), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer (VC), KL Rahul (WK), Nitish Kumar Reddy, Axar Patel, Naman Dhir, Anshul Kamboj, Gurnoor Brar, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Arshdeep Singh, Ishan Kishan (WK), Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna*, Kuldeep Yadav.

INDIA'S SQUAD FOR FOURTH AND FIFTH ODIs

Shreyas Iyer (C), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Tilak Varma, Ishan Kishan (WK, VC), Nitish Kumar Reddy, Axar Patel, Naman Dhir, Aaquib Nabi, Gurnoor Brar, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Arshdeep Singh, Kumar Kushagra (WK), Mohammed Siraj, Yash Thakur, Kuldeep Yadav.

INDIA'S TEST SQUAD

Shubman Gill (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul (VC), Devdutt Padikkal, Rishabh Pant (WK)*, Dhruv Jurel (WK), Ravindra Jadeja, Anshul Kamboj, Jasprit Bumrah, Prasidh Krishna, Akash Deep, Sai Sudharsan, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Siraj.

Note: *Subject to fitness clearance.

GOLF

McIlroy, Chacarra surge in rain-hit Delhi

AFP
New Delhi, India

Rory McIlroy and Spaniard Eugenio Chacarra kept up their charge with a strong start in their incomplete second round at the rain-hit European Tour's India Championship yesterday.

Spain's Angel Hidalgo, Pole Adrian Meronk, Dutchman Joost Luiten and Belgian Thomas Detry held the clubhouse lead with eight-under at the Delhi Golf Club course.

Six-time major winner McIlroy

began his curtailed second round by hitting an eagle in his first hole and then put up par scores in the next three before bad light stopped play on day two.

McIlroy currently sits four-under after he finished the opening day on a two-under-par 70.

Chacarra only managed five holes of his second round but ended one shot behind the leading four.

Players will complete their second round on day three, when the cut will be decided.

It was a long day for many golfers with Hidalgo and Meronk both facing 32 holes after nearly five

hours of play were lost due to rain and thunderstorms on Thursday.

"I'm just glad it's over to be honest, I'm knackered," said Meronk, who recently won the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship.

"But, yeah, it was a lot of solid golf. I'm happy with my position. Obviously a little bit disappointed with the bogey on the last, but it's still a good round."

Luiten also got to nine-under with a hat-trick of gains from the 13th and further birdies on the 18th and second, but sullied his card somewhat with a double-bogey on the penultimate hole of his round.

"It was good for 17 holes, and then my 17th, the eighth hole, I double bogey, which normally you would say it's a birdie hole," said Luiten.

"I think the long day and the tiredness just got to me a bit at the end and luckily I could get a birdie on the ninth. It's been a good day."

Opening day leader Niklas Norgaard of Denmark ended at five-under after he started with a bogey in the two holes he played on day two.

Defending champion Tommy Fleetwood posted two-under in the four holes he played late Friday to move four below par overall.



TENNIS

Medvedev sees off Paul to set up semi with Jodar

Jodar beats Ruud to become youngest-ever Shanghai semi-finalist



Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return to USA's Tommy Paul during their quarter-final at the Shanghai Masters yesterday. (AFP)



Spain's Rafael Jodar in action against Norway's Casper Ruud during their quarter-final in Shanghai yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Shanghai

Former world number one Daniil Medvedev downed Tommy Paul 6-3 1-6 6-3 in the Shanghai Masters quarter-finals on Friday, while Spaniard Rafael Jodar toppled Casper Ruud 4-6 6-4 6-3 to become the youngest semi-finalist in the tournament's history.

Russian fifth seed Medvedev fired 16 aces and 31 winners in a two-hour and eight-minute contest against the 15th-seeded American to reach the 70th tour-level semi of his career and strengthen his bid for a place at the ATP Finals in Turin.

The 30-year-old regrouped after dropping the second set and took control in the decider, capitalising on a dip in Paul's level to improve to 5-1 in their career meetings.

Medvedev next faces Jodar for the first time, while twice Grand Slam champion and top seed Alexander Zverev meets Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the other semi-final.

"He has a great game," Medvedev said of Jodar. "He hits very strong, so it is going to be fun to see it in real life, to get the feel."

"If I am playing well, I am tough to beat and that is what I am going to try to do."

Medvedev won his third title of the season in Hangzhou last month and is the only former Shanghai champion remaining in the draw, having lifted the trophy in 2019.

JODAR'S RISE CONTINUES

Jodar, 20, secured his fourth consecutive comeback victory from a set down at the ATP Masters 1000 event, extending a dream run on his Shanghai debut.

The 12th seed broke 20th-seeded Norwegian Ruud five times across the final two sets to wrest control of a tight encounter.

After seizing the crucial break for 5-4 in the second set and serving it out to love, Jodar elevated his game in the decider, breaking the former world number two Ruud three more times to seal victory in two hours and 20 minutes.

The latest milestone in Jodar's breakthrough

season also strengthened his chances of qualifying for the ATP Finals in his first full year on the ATP Tour.

Ranked 903 in the world little more than a year ago, Jodar surged into the top 50 in April after capturing his maiden ATP title in Morocco and reaching the semi-finals in Barcelona.

The energetic and aggressive right-hander built on that momentum with quarter-final appearances in Madrid and Rome before making the last eight at the French Open, where eventual champion Zverev ended his run.

Shanghai marks Jodar's fifth tour-level semi-final of the season and his second at Masters 1000 level after Montreal.

"I'm super happy how the season is going," Jodar said.

"Very high level, but still a lot of things to improve, which is very good because that means I can become a better player in the future. I just want more things."

"It's the first year on Tour and there are still a few tournaments, so I will try to give my best in the matches I have left this season."

SPOTLIGHT

Swiatek in Wuhan semis

AFP
Wuhan, China

Iga Swiatek kept up her bid for a WTA Finals place with a 6-4, 6-1 victory over Ann Li yesterday that set up an all-Polish semi-final at the Wuhan Open.

The six-time Grand Slam champion will face Maja Chwalinska for a place in the final.

Swiatek is chasing one of the last two remaining spots in the eight-player line-up at next month's WTA Finals in Indian Wells and took another step forward by reaching the Wuhan semis for the first time in her career.

"For sure it's great that we have two Polish players in the semi-finals," said Swiatek of her upcoming clash with childhood friend Chwalinska.

"I think it means a lot to Polish tennis, so hopefully it's going to be a nice match. I'm really happy for Maja, she for sure improved her game this year."

It had been a banner week for 26-year-old Li, who stunned world number two Aryna Sabalenka in the second round



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return to USA's Ann Li during their quarter-final at the Wuhan Open yesterday. (AFP)

and recorded the 100th tour-level victory of her career in the third round to reach a maiden WTA 1000 quarter-final.

The American world number 31 gave Swiatek a hard time in the opening set. But despite committing 21 unforced errors and facing three break points, Swiatek hung onto the one-break gap she created early on and took a one-set lead in 56 minutes.

Swiatek made a strong start to

the second set and never let go, as she moved into her fourth WTA 1000 semi-final of the year.

French Open finalist Chwalinska reached her first WTA 1000 semi-final with a 6-0, 3-6, 7-5 triumph over Greece's Maria Sakkari. "I think it would be great for us and great for Polish tennis as well," Chwalinska said of her Saturday meeting with Swiatek.

"It would be a great honour for me also because she's such a great

champion, she's done almost everything in our sport."

SONAY'S SECOND TOP-10 SCALP

Earlier, Sonay Kartal claimed the second top-10 win of her career and guaranteed herself a return to the top 100 with a 6-2, 2-6, 6-4 victory over Ukrainian world number six Elina Svitolina.

The first British player to make the semi-finals in Wuhan, Kartal missed six months of action this season with a spinal stress fracture before returning to competition three weeks ago.

Ranked a career-high 44 in the world 15 months ago, Kartal plummeted to 170 in the rankings due to her injury-enforced absence. The 24-year-old is the lowest-ranked semi-finalist in Wuhan Open history.

Her impressive return to form this week saw her dismiss three consecutive seeds in her last three rounds and she will now face 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko for a place in the final.

Ostapenko advanced to her second Wuhan Open semi-final, and first since 2017, with a 7-6 (8/6), 6-1 performance against 11th-seeded Diana Shnaider.

FOCUS

Lusail Sports Club launches table tennis programme



Lusail Sports Club Vice-President Jassim Mohammed al-Mudahka and club's table tennis team manager Yousef Nasser al-Hajjaji pose with new three signings - Ahmed al-Awlaqi, Ahmed Qarni and Ibrahim Gibran.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail Sports Club has launched its table tennis programme under the umbrella of the Qatar Table Tennis Association as part of its strategy to expand into various sports and attract more participants.

The club has strengthened its squad with three signings ahead of upcoming tournaments and competitions. Ahmed al-Awlaqi, captain of the Qatar national table tennis team, is among the club's new recruits. The experienced player has represented Qatar at international competitions and achieved notable success. The club has also signed promising national team player Ahmed Qarni and Ibrahim Gibran, both on loan from Qatar SC.

The contracts were signed by Lusail Sports Club Vice-President Jassim Mohammed al-Mudahka in the presence of the club's table tennis team manager, Yousef Nasser al-Hajjaji.

The launch of table tennis is part of the club's wider plan to expand its sporting activities. Lusail also intends to introduce men's and women's futsal and basketball in the near future.

The club said the expansion aims to attract talent, develop athletes and provide more opportunities for participation in different sports.

It also seeks to strengthen co-operation with national sports federations and support the development of local talent in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

'Sportswashing' or investment? Rwanda F1 stirs debate and doubts

KIGALI: Viewed by some as "sportswashing" and by others as an overly ambitious, grandiose project, the prospect of a Formula 1 Grand Prix in Rwanda has provoked reaction at home and abroad.

The government touts the initiative as a significant "investment in Rwanda's future", slated for sometime in the early 2030s. On Tuesday, Kigali put on a glitzy ceremony to announce the "historic" agreement between Rwanda, the organisation that owns Formula 1, and the International Automobile Federation (FIA).

A landlocked country still widely associated with a horrific genocide in 1994, Rwanda has used sports to revamp its image, attract tourists and impress investors with its organisational efficiency.

The event promises glamour -- replete with celebrities parties -- set against the backdrop of Rwanda's verdant hills and rich wildlife, all broadcast to a global audience.

THIRD MOST-WATCHED EVENT

Formula 1 markets itself as the third most-watched sporting event on the planet, trailing only the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup.

However, the project has drawn dismay from some quarters, including Amnesty International, which immediately condemned it as an act of sportswashing.

The NGO accuses Kigali of "buying into the world's biggest sports to polish its image and deflect from its appalling human rights record".

This same criticism has been levelled against Formula 1 on several previous occasions.

In its pursuit of global expansion, the sport has forged numerous

partnerships with governments with questionable rights records, including China and Azerbaijan.

SPORTS DIPLOMACY

Last year, Rwanda became the first African nation to successfully host the World Cycling Championships.

Through its "Visit Rwanda" campaign, Kigali also sponsors several major European football clubs, including Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), as well as the NBA's Los Angeles Clippers.

However, while President Paul Kagame is credited with a strategic vision that has driven Rwanda's economic transformation over his decades-long tenure, he has faced repeated accusations from opponents of suppressing political dissent.

Reacting to the news, Kenneth Roth, the former director of Human Rights Watch, noted on X Rwanda's "invasion via its M23 proxy of eastern Democratic Republic of Congo".

The armed M23 group, backed financially and militarily by Kigali, has forcibly seized vast swathes of the DRC.

Formula 1 is an expensive pursuit and far wealthier nations have already seen their ambitions backfire.

India and South Korea -- which built circuits specifically to host Formula 1 -- eventually withdrew as their financial losses mounted.

European organisers, including those in France and, more recently, the Netherlands, have encountered similar setbacks.

In comparison Rwanda, despite its economic boom, remains a low-income country with a GDP per capita barely exceeding \$1,100. It ranks 159 out of 193 countries on the United Nations' Human Development Index, although it is steadily improving.

PREMIER LEAGUE

United have ‘moved on’ from Martinez outburst: Carrick

Martinez took aim at United hierarchy following loss to Atletico

AFP
London

Michael Carrick said yesterday that Manchester United had “moved on” from Lisandro Martinez’s outburst aimed at the club’s hierarchy, stressing it was “really not a drama for us as a group”.

Argentina defender Martinez took aim at the United hierarchy following their 2-0 Champions League loss to Atletico Madrid on Tuesday, saying Carrick had been left with an under-strength squad.

The centre-back criticised technical director Jason Wilcox, saying he had “100 percent” expected more investment during the summer transfer window after United finished third in the Premier League last season.

It is understood Martinez, who issued an apology on Thursday, has been fined for his outburst. United manager Carrick confirmed during a pre-match press conference that Martinez would be in his squad for their Premier League match at bitter rivals Leeds tomorrow.

Carrick, under intense pressure after a terrible start to the season, was asked by reporters about Martinez’s comments and subsequent developments. “We’ve moved on from that, it was one of those things,” he said.

“I think Licha (Martinez) has come out and acknowledged the situation and as a group we’ve moved on. It’s really not a drama for us as a group, I think the boys have trained really well. This morning there was a really good feeling around the squad.”

Martinez, 28, said in a statement he had held positive talks with the club’s leadership and Carrick. “Everyone knows that I am a passionate person and that I live football with great intensity,” he said in a post on Instagram. “The frustration of the defeat led me to express how I felt at a time and place that perhaps were not the right ones, and for that I want to apologise.”

Former United captain Roy Keane has



Manchester United manager Michael Carrick is under intense pressure after a terrible start to the season with the club 13th in the Premier League.

branded the situation at his former club “a bit of a circus”. Carrick was pressed by reporters on the nature of the apology from Martinez, which did not mention Wilcox by name.

“I think he (Martinez) has released his statement and he’s realised he’s made a mistake,” said the United boss. “I think that’s enough for all of us to move on with.”

He added: “I understand the emotion at times. We ask for passion, we ask for emotion, we ask for fire and we ask for players to care. There’s a way of doing that and that’s already been acknowledged. We need to carry that. We need to carry that intensity and that willing-

ness and that togetherness and that spirit and everything.”

United have made their worst start to a league season in 40 years. They are 13th in the Premier League, with just one win from six matches, but Carrick, a former United and England midfielder, deflected a question about the pressure on him personally.

“I don’t need results, we all need results,” he said. “It’s not about me. Manchester United is a lot bigger than any individual, bigger than me. Bigger than any player, anyone else who works at this football club. It always has been, and it’s not about me.”

Saudi organisers say 2027 Asian Cup ‘on schedule’ after attacks

Riyadh: The Asian Cup in January is “on schedule”, Saudi Arabian organisers said, after growing fears for the tournament following Houthis attacks on the country.

The continent’s top football official said this week that the competition could be postponed to 2028, while stressing there was “no hurry” to make a decision.

The 2027 Asian Cup is supposed to kick off on January 7 in the Saudi cities of Jeddah, Riyadh and Al Khobar. In a statement late Thursday, the local organising committee said: “Preparations remain on schedule for the tournament. This work continues in close coordination with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and other relevant stakeholders.”

Saudi Arabia has in recent days come under sustained attack in a dramatic escalation in the war with the Iran-backed Houthi group. Several sporting events, including matches in domestic

football, have been postponed.

The local organising committee for the Asian Cup, the region’s most prestigious football tournament, said it “remains committed to keeping preparations on track and ensuring the necessary resources are in place to deliver a tournament that reflects Saudi Arabia’s ambitions and standards as a host.

“At the same time, it will continue to monitor developments relevant to the tournament and ensure the appropriate conditions are in place for its successful delivery.”

AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa told reporters on Wednesday they could wait until the end of November to make a final decision. “We could move back a year to 2028 if we need to,” he said. “But at the moment we are monitoring the situation and everything is on schedule.”

LA LIGA

Flick confirms return of Barcelona duo Raphinha, De Jong

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick announced that star attacker Raphinha and midfield lynchpin Frenkie de Jong have recovered from injury and could face Real Betis today.

The Catalans boast a 100 percent record in all competitions this season but face a tough test in La Liga in Seville against third-placed Betis. During his pre-match press conference, German boss Flick revealed the timely return of two of Barcelona’s biggest names.

“If you ask him, he’ll tell you he’s ready to start, but we’re taking things step by step. We have a lot of games in a short space of time and we need to manage that,” Flick told reporters of Raphinha, who has scored 14 goals in eight outings for Barcelona this term.

The 29-year-old Brazilian picked up a knock on recent international duty and was unavailable for Barca’s wins over Getafe in the league and Galatasaray in the Champions League.

Dutch international De Jong, 29, has not featured this season due to a knee issue sustained during the World Cup. “He gives us another option in midfield and we’ll see how he progresses,” Flick said. “He’s training well and is ready to get some minutes. He looks very focused and he’s a top player.”

The return of the pair will likely take some of the creative and goal-scoring burden off Lamine Yamal’s



Raphinha has scored 14 goals in eight matches for Barcelona this season.

young shoulders. The 19-year-old world champion has played the full 90 minutes in eight of the 10 competitive matches played by Barca this season, and in the other two he was substituted after an hour of play.

“He’s a special player,” Flick said. “We have to manage his minutes, but the important thing is that he enjoys playing. That’s how things are at the moment and I don’t want to interrupt that.”

After this weekend’s trip to La Cartuja, Barcelona face a daunting visit to twice-defending Champions League winners Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday before hosting Jose Mourinho’s Real Madrid in El Clasico five days later.

Maresca says Man City ‘more together’ after financial charges

London: Enzo Maresca believes Manchester City are “more together” after the club was found guilty of over 100 breaches of Premier League financial rules.

The club overcame a hostile Anfield atmosphere to beat 10-man Liverpool 3-0 last week in their first match since the verdict to make it six league wins out of six.

City boss Maresca said after the win the team needed to make their own “noise” to drown out the distraction of events off the pitch. The Italian was bullish at his press

conference on Friday despite this week’s 4-2 defeat in the Champions League by title-holders Paris Saint-Germain.

“I think probably since the noise we can see, I can see from my personal point of view the fans, the club, the team more together for sure,” he said.

Manchester City, who maintain their innocence, are appealing against the guilty verdict, delivered by an independent commission. Maresca, who has repeatedly reiterated his “trust” in the club hierarchy, said he

understood the intense focus on the issue but he warned against a rush to judgement.

“I don’t have any problem with people judging the situation – I think from my point of view the wise way to judge the situation is always to wait for the final words,” he said. “But I can understand that now people need to speak about this situation.”

A home win over Ipswich today would make Maresca the first manager in Premier League history to win his first seven games in charge.

BUNDESLIGA

Freiburg try to shut out the noise as fairytale run continues

AFP
Berlin

Five months on from their Europa League final appearance, Freiburg sit atop the Bundesliga table as the most successful period in the Black Forest club’s history rumbles on.

Freiburg travel to Bayer Leverkusen tomorrow having dropped just two points in five games this season, a better record than defending champions Bayern Munich or perennial challengers Borussia Dortmund.

But in fashion typical to the understated ethos of southwestern Germany, Freiburg are trying to turn down the noise on what their stellar start could become.

Coach Julian Schuster, who spent a decade in Freiburg’s midfield before replacing club stalwart Christian Streich as coach in 2024, said he would not even hazard a glance at the Bundesliga table.

“The good thing about my job is I don’t need to concern myself with that at all, nor do I need to expend any energy on it,” Schuster said emphatically after his side reclaimed top spot from Dortmund at the weekend.

But with Leverkusen just two years out from ending a 120-year wait to win a first Bundesliga title, Freiburg do not need to look far for inspiration on their own fairytale run.

Freiburg have gone from



Freiburg have dropped two points in five games this season. (Reuters)

strength to strength since their most recent promotion in 2016. Under Streich, Freiburg shed their yo-yo club status to become a regular member of the top flight, before making a first ever German Cup final in 2022.

Freiburg suffered a defeat on penalties to RB Leipzig in that match but the disappointment did not push them off course. Nor did Streich’s departure after a 12-year spell.

Schuster stepped into the void and continued his former mentor’s work, taking Freiburg to last season’s Europa League final. Aston Villa won 3-0 and also snatched up star winger Johan Manzambi in the summer, but Freiburg responded well to the double blow to record their best ever start to a campaign this season.

German coach Jurgen Klopp named four Freiburg players in

his squad in October, with Derry Scherhant and Philipp Treu looking set for a longer stint in the side after impressive performances.

In an indication of Freiburg’s growing importance, Klopp is expected to skip today’s Bayern-Leipzig clash in favour of tomorrow’s match in Leverkusen.

Not content to merely rub shoulders with the Bundesliga’s best, Freiburg are hoping to soon end their 122-year wait for silverware. Defender Matthias Ginter, a 2014 World Cup winner, is one of the few Freiburg players with silverware and called on the side not to shy away from their dreams.

After two fifth-placed Bundesliga finishes in four seasons, Freiburg will hope to break through and qualify for the Champions League for the first time.

ROUND-UP

Real Madrid say Tebas must resign over Goebbels comparison

Real Madrid called La Liga president Javier Tebas to resign after he compared the club’s efforts to discredit referees to the techniques of Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels. Tebas said in a post on X that Real Madrid’s in-house TV channel often suggested that referees attempt to prevent the club from winning.

The outspoken Spanish league chief said these tactics “recall propaganda mechanisms exploited by Goebbels”.

Tebas later attempted to clarify that he was drawing comparisons with “those propaganda techniques” and not with the ideology of the Nazis. Madrid responded by saying in a statement that Tebas’ claims were “deeply offensive (and) morally repugnant”.

It added that Madrid believe he is unfit to represent Spain’s leading clubs and that he should consider “immediate resignation”.

Coach Jose Mourinho has also claimed that Madrid are consistently penalised by referees.

Tebas has frequently clashed with Madrid’s president Florentino Perez, especially over the club’s plans to join a European Super League in 2021.

BAYERN ARE CLOSE TO THEIR BEST DESPITE CONSECUTIVE DRAWS: KOMPANY

Bayern Munich are edging closer to their very best despite drawing their last two matches, coach Vincent Kompany said.

The German champions, who



La Liga president Javier Tebas

take on visitors RB Leipzig today, have drawn their last two matches in all competitions – a 2-2 against Augsburg that included conceding the fastest goal in Bundesliga history, followed by a 3-3 at rank outsiders Viking in the Champions League on Tuesday.

They looked far from convincing in both matches, missing chances and looking shaky at the back, and having to come from behind both times to rescue draws. They are currently in third spot in the Bundesliga, two points behind leaders Freiburg and Borussia Dortmund.

“We want to attack,” Kompany told a press conference. “We have the feeling that there are a lot of things behind the perception of these two results. I have the feeling it is just before we show our

very best version. “In the last two matches we shot 50 times on goal. If we do a few things better then we are not too far from our very best version.”

Bayern have busy weeks coming up and after Leipzig – they face Arsenal in the Champions League before taking on leaders Freiburg in the Bundesliga. They then host Dortmund in Der Klassiker on October 31 after a German Cup second-round match against Magdeburg.

CHELSEA CAPTAIN JAMES FACES LAY-OFF AFTER KNEE SURGERY

Chelsea captain Reece James will be out of action for several weeks after undergoing successful knee surgery, manager Xabi Alonso said.

The England international, 26, missed last week’s 5-1 win over Bournemouth after suffering an injury in training.

James has suffered multiple injuries over the past few seasons, which have forced him to miss significant periods. Last season he enjoyed his best run of games for several years, culminating in his selection for England’s 2026 World Cup squad.

The right-back was among one of the five players to withdraw from England duty during the most recent international break and he now looks set to miss the next international window in November. Chelsea are sixth in the Premier League after six matches of the season.