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Inglis, Carey put Australia on top against South Africa



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Antonelli ready for final push to become F1's youngest champ

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HORSE RACING

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MOTORSPORT

Qatar Baja to get underway with prologue at Lusail today

Qatar star al-Attiyah is confident that he can compete for overall victory with an Optimus MD Rallye

By Sports Reporter
Lusail



Leading drivers and riders, including six-time Dakar champion and current FIA Middle East Baja Cup leader Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah, attended the pre-event press conference yesterday at Lusail International Circuit in the presence of QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai and QMMF Executive Director Amro al-Hamad.

A Prologue of 11.12km will kick start proceedings in the Qatar International Baja before the official ceremonial start at the Lusail International Circuit today afternoon.

An impressive field of cars, motorcycles and quads, competing in the penultimate rounds of the FIA World and Middle East Baja Cups and round five of the FIM Bajas World Cup, will then tackle a demanding two-day route through the northern, western and southern Qatar deserts.

A dozen of the leading drivers and riders attended the pre-event press conference yesterday evening at Lusail in the presence of QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai and QMMF Executive Director Amro al-Hamad.

Six-time Dakar champion and current FIA Middle East Baja Cup leader Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah was joined at the press conference by fellow Qatari Mohammed al-Marri, SSV contender Fernando Alvarez, Dutch Challenger pace-setter Mitchel van den Brink and FIA World Baja Cup title rivals, Francisco Barreto and Lionel Baud.

FIM Bajas World Cup leader Alex McInnes was accompanied by defending FIM champion Mohammed al-Balooshi, last year's Qatar event winner Konrad Dabrowski, leading female rider Joanna Modrzewska, quad front-runner Ahmed al-Jaber and Slovenian hot shot Toni Mulec from the FIM contingent.

Al-Attiyah is confident that he can compete for overall victory on his first ever appearance at his home event with an Optimus MD Rallye and navigator Max Delfino.

The Qatari said: "This will be an amazing race. If you see the number of competitors, it is fantastic. We try to win this race and maintain the focus for the next one in Dubai. Last year, I came with a Taurus with my team Nasser Racing and now we are here with a rear-wheel drive. The Optimus is a really good car and I will try to win the overall."

McInnes will be defending a two-point lead in the FIM Bajas World Cup. The Briton said: "This year I will really focus on the navigation as much as possible. Last year, I made a big mistake. I won the stage but had a penalty and I made a mistake at the end in Sealine and threw away the rally. I will try and play it safe and then go to Dubai next week and this is where I think I can make the gap. It's a good level with two past Dakar winners here. This is good for the sport, the racing and for me, so I can see where I am."

Al-Balooshi is the defending FIM champion and holds third in the rankings. The Emirati added: "My strategy is to do my best and get all the navigation right and ride well. This year third, but I started the season with an injury and now I am at 100%. It's good for the sport and for the QMMF that the entry is so strong. The more good riders on the entry list, the better for the region and the championship."

Argentina-based Alvarez is aiming for the SSV and overall championship titles in the FIA World Baja Cup with French navigator Xavier Panseri. The Can-Am driver said: "I have to finish this race but I am going to push because I need a good finish in the overall, for the SSV and for the Masters. I am fighting for many things on the last two races. Races like this are where you use a really good navigator. We have been together for a long time and I trust in him."

Hamed al-Wahaibi returns to action after recovering from an August leg break and is looking to try and close the gap on Mitchel Van den Brink in the FIA Challenger category.

UAE-based Briton David Mabbs is aiming for a win double of the FIA Middle East Baja Cup's Challenger class and the Master Driver award with his navigator David McBride. Both have tackled numerous desert Baja events on two wheels before but are aware of the unique challenge that await in Qatar. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari is backed by the QMMF and drives one of the latest Can-Am Challengers. The winner of this year's MERC round in Qatar said: "We forgot about fighting for the championship. I will not go to Dubai. I did Morocco in the new Can-Am and I need more mileage before Dakar. It is always good to win at home. We won the Qatar International Rally in February, so it would be good to win again in the Baja!"

Majed al-Thunayyan needs just three points to overhaul fellow Saudi Almashna al-Shammeri and clinch victory in the FIA World Baja Cup's Stock category for series production cross-country vehicles.

Al-Thunayyan actually drove his Nissan Patrol to the last three Bajas in Europe. He attended the Italian event in late June and finished second. He pressed on to northern Spain to repeat the feat at the Baja Spain Aragón and then headed to Portugal for the recent Baja Portalegre 500.

After pipping his rival to victory there, the Saudi drove the Nissan across the entire breadth of Europe, back into the Middle East and is now on the brink of a famous world title.

Today, motorcycle and quad riders will tackle the 11.12km Prologue from 1:15pm with the first car taking the start at 2:45pm. The result of the Prologue will determine starting positions for the opening selective section tomorrow morning.

Ceremonial start proceedings then get underway at the service park adjacent to the Lusail International Circuit from 6pm.

QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA – ENTRY LIST (CARS)

Ultimate: Francisco Barreto (POR)/Paulo Fiuza (POR) Toyota Hilux IMT Evo*; Lionel Baud (FRA)/Lucie Baud (FRA) X-Raid Mini JCW 3.0d*; Saood Variawa (RSA)/Charan Moore (RSA) Toyota Hilux IMT Evo*; Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Max Delfino (FRA) Optimus MD Rallye+; Khalid al-Jafla (UAE)/Andrei Rudnitskiy (LTU) Toyota Hilux Evo*; Ahmed al-Shami (UAE)/Leonard Cremer (RSA) Chevrolet Corvette+; Aliiyah Koloc (UAE)/Marcin Pasek (POL) Red-Lined Revo GTR; Martin Koloc (CZE)/Hugo Magalhaes (POR) Red-Lined Revo V8; Fahad al-Fahad (KSA)/Yasir al-Khuraif (KSA) Optimus MD Rallye

Challenger: Mitchel van den Brink (NED)/Bart van Heun (NED) Can-Am Maverick R*; Hamed al-Wahaibi (OMA)/Maciej Giemza (POL) Can-Am Maverick R*; Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/Oriol Mena (ESP) Can-Am Maverick R*; Ahmed al-Muhannadi (QAT)/Ali Hassan Obaid (UAE) MCE-5 T3M*; David Mabbs (UAE)/David McBride (UAE) Can-Am Maverick X3+; Abdullah al-Fahad (KSA)/Mohammed al-Muakhil (KSA) Taurus T3 Max+; Nouef al-Suwaidi (QAT)/Aisvydas Paliukenas (LTU) Taurus T3 Max+; Khalifa Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Stephane Duple (FRA) Taurus T3 Max+; Ahmed al-Kuwari (QAT)/Augusto Sanz (ARG) Taurus T3 Max+; Rashid al-Muhannadi (QAT)/Szymon Gospodarczyk (POL) Taurus T3 Max; Mohammed al-Attiyah (QAT)/Candido Carrera (ESP) Taurus T3 Max; Evgenii Kudriavtcev (UAE)/Oleg Zaikin (KGZ) Can-Am Maverick X3

SSV: Fernando Alvarez (ARG)/Xavier Panseri (FRA) Can-Am Maverick R*; Mohammed al-Marri (QAT)/Pierre Delorme (FRA) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo RR+; Hamad al-Harbi (KSA)/Faisal al-Suwayh (KSA) Can-Am Maverick R+; Maha al-Hamali (KSA)/Xavier Flick (FRA) Can-Am Maverick R+; Mohammed al-Atteya (QAT)/Aleksei Kuzmich (UAE) Can-Am Maverick R+; Camelia Liparoti (SMR)/Erika Mingozzi (ITA) Yamaha YXZ 1000R+; Dhari al-Dhafeeri (KUW)/Baptiste Cerrato (QAT) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo RR+; Nora al-Jassasi (UAE)/Jeannette Kvick (DEN) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo RR+; Abdulla al-Khelaifi (QAT)/Abdulaziz al-Jabri (QAT) Yamaha YXZ 1000R; Stefano Marrini (ITA)/Stefano Tironi (ITA) Yamaha YXZ 1000R; Farah Zakaria (JOR)/Dolyne Schlink (LBN) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo RR; Christiano Gabbarrini (ITA)/Atif al-Zarouni (UAE) Yamaha YXZ 1000R; Ghanim al-Attiyah (QAT)/Dmytro Tsyro (UKR) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo RR

Stock: Majed al-Thunayyan (KSA)/Omar al-Lahim (KSA) Nissan Patrol*; 501. Abdulla al-Rabban (QAT)/Ali Ajami (UAE) Nissan Patrol*; 502. Abdullah al-Shegawi (KSA)/Ali Mirza (UAE) Toyota Prado+

***denotes registered for FIA World Baja Cup**

+denotes registered for FIA Middle East Baja Cup

SPOTLIGHT

Four athletes to represent Qatar at Youth Olympic Games in Dakar

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

Qatar will field four athletes at the fourth Summer Youth Olympic Games 2026 in Senegal, Dakar from October 31 to November 13.

The Qatari athletes who will be in action are Adam Morsi in swimming, Dana Salem and Abobaker Idris in athletics, and Adham al-Deeb in fencing.

Morsi will begin competing on November 2, with his 100m and 50m breaststroke races scheduled for November 3 and 5, respectively. Idris will contest the 110m hurdles, al-Deeb in the individual foil fencing event on November 9, and Salem will race the 200m on November 10.

The team brings a strong record of achievement. Salem won silver in the 100m and Idris claimed gold in the 110m hurdles at the 2025 Asian Youth Games in Bahrain. Al-Deeb won gold in the junior individual foil event at the World Cup for Junior and Cadet Fencers in Tunisia.

Morsi has won gold in the 200m breaststroke at the GCC Swimming championship and the 100m breaststroke at the Arab Aquatics championship. He also broke Qatar's national record in the 100m breaststroke for the 13–14 age group at the ISF U15 Gymnasiade 2025 Under 15 in Serbia.

At the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Qatar secured two athletics gold medals through Abdulaziz Mohammed in the 200m and Awab Barrow in the 110m hurdles.

The 15-day Games will take place in Dakar, Diamniadio and Saly, featuring around 2,700 athletes across 25 sports and 153 medal events. Another 10 engagement sports will be held without medals being awarded.

Organised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Summer Youth Olympic Games are an elite multi-sport competition primarily for athletes aged 15 to 17. Dakar 2026 marks the first time an African country has hosted the Youth Olympic Games, representing a historic milestone for the continent's Olympic movement.

Naji Al-Amari, Head of Qatar's delegation, confirmed that the four athletes are ready to compete and expressed confidence that they will represent Qatar with distinction, reflecting their ambitions and the support extended to Qatari sport.

Rooted in Senegal's rich sporting heritage and strong community engagement, particularly among young people, Dakar 2026 aims to promote solidarity, cultural exchange, joy, pride and humility. The Games also seek to highlight sport as a unifying force that transcends competition and brings people together around the values of peace, friendship and social cohesion.



Qatar athletes who will compete at the Youth Olympic Games in Senegal are Adam Morsi in swimming, Dana Salem and Abobaker Idris in athletics, and Adham al-Deeb in fencing.

SPORT

CRICKET

Inglis, Carey put Australia on top with bold batting

Australia one run ahead of South Africa in the deciding Test

Reuters
Cape Town



Australia's Josh Inglis plays a shot on day two of the third Test against South Africa at Newlands stadium in Cape Town yesterday. *(AFP)*

Josh Inglis scored an unbeaten 85 as Australia reached 330 for four at the close of the second day of the decisive third Test against hosts South Africa at Newlands yesterday.

Australia are one run ahead of South Africa's score of 329 and in control of the match as they eye a commanding first-innings lead.

Inglis, who came into the side for the injured Steve Smith, shared an unbeaten 145 partnership with Alex Carey (51 not out) for the fifth wicket.

South Africa toiled in the field as all Australian batters except Marnus Labuschagne (0) got in and scored runs.

The Newlands wicket is traditionally best for batting on days two and three and so it proved as there was little seam or swing for the home side's pace attack.

"We knew that they were going to come hard through periods, and it was just about building partnerships," opener Matt Renshaw, who scored 74, told reporters.

"It felt like a nice wicket. There's a few balls starting to spin, a few balls that popped.

"The guys that have applied themselves have scored runs. It's a rapid outfield, so that also helps the scoring rate a bit quicker."

Renshaw and Travis Head (41) added 58 for the first wicket before spinner Simon Harmer (2-84) removed the latter with his first ball of the match.

Head chopped the ball on to his stumps playing off the back foot, an all too familiar mode of dismissal for him in recent times.

Labuschagne's poor run in Tests continued when he fell for a duck, caught by Aiden Markram at slip off Harmer. Renshaw and Cameron Green added 126 for the third wicket before they also fell in quick succession, this time to fast bowler Marco Jansen (2-37). Renshaw was caught by wicket-keeper Ryan Rickelton and Green edged to Harmer at slip. Another substantial partnership from Inglis and Carey, however, means the momentum remains with Australia as South Africa failed to apply scoreboard pressure or create many wicket-taking opportunities. The series is level at 1-1 after Australia won the first Test by 214 runs in Durban and South Africa responded with a victory by an innings and 31 runs in Gqeberha.

The team who win the match will occupy the No.1 position in the Test world rankings, which is currently held by Australia.



Australia's Cameron Green (left) shakes hand with Matt Renshaw on day two of the third Test against South Africa. *(AFP)*

BRIEF SCORES
Australia 330 for 4 (Inglis 85*, Renshaw 74, Green 65, Carey 51*, Jansen 2-37, Harmer 2-84) **lead South Africa 329** (Ackerman 95, Markram 78, Jansen 52, Starc 6-72, Lyon 2-71) **by one run**

SPOTLIGHT

Babar's lack of form no concern as Pakistan eye tri-series final



Pakistan's Saad Baig and Babar Azam (second right) run between the wickets during the tri-series match against Sri Lanka in Lahore on Tuesday. *(AFP)*

www.icc-cricket.com
Lahore

Pakistan batting coach Mike Smith had admitted he has no concerns about the recent form of Babar Azam as the side turns their attention to the tri-series final against Sri Lanka on Saturday.

Pakistan suffered their first loss of the ongoing tri-series when they fell to a disappointing eight-wicket defeat to Sri Lanka in Lahore on Tuesday, with Babar top-scoring with 29 as the side were skittled for just 110 by their Asian rival.

It means Babar has failed to make a half-century or better from his four knocks at the tri-series thus far, with the former skipper still amassing 118 runs and getting a start in each innings before not going on to register a big score.

But Smith believes the lack of a big score for Babar is of no concern to the team, with the Pakistan batting coach pointing to the fact that the side was unbeaten at the tri-series heading into Tuesday's contest.

"It is definitely not a cause for concern," Smith said in an interview posted on *www.icc-cricket com*. "The hardest part of batting in cricket is getting established at the crease, and Babar is doing that effortlessly.

"Had he converted one of those solid starts into a substantial century, this would not even be a topic of discussion.

"That is the nature of elite international sport- you cannot deliver a peak performance every single time.

"Those who truly understand the game can see how well he is striking the ball.

"We have zero doubt that a big score is imminent, and when it comes, it will be magnificent to watch." It was pacer Dilshan Madushanka that ripped through Pakistan's batting order on Tuesday with a magnificent five-wicket haul, with the left-armer causing plenty of problems for the tri-series hosts with the new ball and again later in the innings as Sri Lanka cruised home.

While Smith admitted it was not the perfect preparation for the tri-series final, the Pakistan batting coach said the result will have little impact on who claims the title on Saturday.

"That defeat will have no bearing whatsoever on the final," Smith said.

"In a tri-series of this caliber against quality opposition, very few teams remain undefeated throughout.

"A setback at some point is expected. Losing the game leading into the final changes nothing.

"Ultimately, a final comes down to whichever team handles the pressure best on the day and executes under strain to lift the trophy."

FIRST TEST

Shadman guides Bangladesh to 213-3 in Mirpur

AFP
Mirpur



Bangladesh's Shadman Islam (left) watches the ball after playing a shot as West Indies wicketkeeper Amir Jangoo fields during the first day of the first Test in Mirpur yesterday. *(AFP)*

Opener Shadman Islam hit an unbeaten 99 to steer Bangladesh to 213-3 on the opening day of the first Test against West Indies yesterday.

The left-hander was on the verge of his third Test century when bad light ended play after 74 overs at the start of the two-match series in Mirpur.

Shadman hit 10 fours in his 219-ball stay, with Litton Das on 10 not out.

"It was nerve-racking even for us - at the end of the day, the whole team was nervous because everyone wanted him to get to his hundred," Bangladesh batting coach Mohammad Salahuddin said.

"He has played around 30 (32) Test matches but has only two centuries, and I think that number should have been higher."

Towhid Hridoy retired hurt on 42 due to cramps after he and Shadman added 88 runs for the fourth wicket to steady the Bangladesh innings.

West Indies struck early when in-form opener Tanzid Hasan edged Jayden Seales to second slip for nine.

Mominul Haque added 28 before falling to Jomel Warrican's left-arm spin. Shadman guided Bangladesh to lunch at 96-2, before Warrican struck again shortly after the break to trap Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto lbw for 19.

"Ideally, I would want one more wicket, but we have control of the game. The game never got away from us," said Warrican.

"We were very disciplined as a bowling group.

"Even if you're not getting wickets, you try to be as disciplined as possible. That's the key, which we did very well. But ideally, we wanted at least one or two more wickets today."

Shadman brought up his half-century off 95 balls and he found an able partner in Hridoy, who came into the side in place of the injured Mushfiqur Rahim.

They batted through the afternoon session to take Bangladesh to 177-3 at the tea break.

Hridoy then suffered cramps as he approached his maiden Test fifty and was helped off the field.

Bad light then interrupted play for an hour, the umpires then calling off play for the day after a short resumption.

Warrican was the pick of West Indies' bowlers with 2-33.

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 213 for 3 (Shadman 99*, Hridoy 42, Warrican 2-33) **vs West Indies**

FOCUS

Boxing star Serrano is set for hometown farewell

Reuters
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico's seven-division world champion **Amanda Serrano** will retire after defending her unified featherweight world titles against Australia's Skye Falzon on home soil, in a fight her promoter dubbed "The Last Walk".

Most Valuable Promotions said Serrano, who holds a 50-4-1 record with 32 knockouts, will defend her unified WBO and WBA featherweight world titles on January 9 at Coliseo de Puerto Rico in San Juan.

Puerto Rico's only undisputed boxing champion is also gunning for the all-time women's knockout record which the 38-year-old jointly shares with American Christy Martin.

"Boxing has been my life and I never could have imagined the journey it would take me and my family on," Serrano said in a statement. "From the early days when women's boxing was fighting for recognition in small theatre shows, to headlining Madison Square Garden in New York, reaching millions of fans around the world on the biggest shows, and helping open doors for the next generation of female fighters... I always believed and I'm proud of everything we've accomplished."

Serrano made history alongside Ireland's Katie Taylor in 2022 when they became the first women boxers to headline New York's Madison Square Garden.

The highest-profile rivalry in women's boxing produced a trilogy of fights which Taylor swept via a majority decision in 2025.

A Guinness World Record holder for winning titles across seven weight divisions, Serrano also became a leading voice for equality in women's boxing.

In 2023, she competed in the first women's unified world championship bout over 12 three-minute rounds, later voluntarily vacating her WBC title rather than abandon her commitment to equal rules.

Falzon, who is also 38, holds a 12-2 record with seven knockouts.



ICC reprimands Pakistan's Rauf over conduct in England match

LAHORE: The International Cricket Council reprimanded and fined Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf yesterday, while also fining England for a slow over rate during a tri-series match in Lahore.

Rauf was fined 20 percent of his match fee for a code of conduct breach during Sunday's match, which Pakistan won by one wicket after Shadab Khan hit a century in a match-winning final-wicket stand with Rauf.

Rauf hit the winning run at the end of an 89-run partnership with Shadab to propel Pakistan into the series final, after the home side were reduced to 154-9 in pursuit of England's 242.

The ICC ruled that Rauf's conduct was contrary to the spirit of the game after an incident at the end of the 46th over, when he appealed for a wide and argued with England all-rounder Will Jacks. "Rauf raised his bat and continued the exchange despite a warning from umpire Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid," the ICC said in a statement.



Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis and Pavan Rathnayake celebrate their win as Pakistan's Haris Rauf (left) looks in Lahore. *(AFP)*

"He then brushed past the umpire while walking towards Jacks."

Rauf also had one demerit point added to his disciplinary record, his third offence in a 24-month period, taking his tally to five.

Under ICC rules, four or more demerit points incurred within a 24-month period become two suspension points. That in turn equates to a ban from one Test, two one-day internationals or two T20Is.

Rauf served a ban of two ODIs last year following breaches in three Asia Cup games against India. The bans will be doubled if Rauf reaches eight demerit points.

England were fined 15 per cent of their match fee after they were found to have bowled three overs short of their target.

They failed to qualify for the final after losing their first three matches.

FORMULA 1

Antonelli ready for final push to become youngest champion

Mercedes could clinch constructors' title but Brazil looks more likely

Reuters
Mexico City


Kimi Antonelli leads the standings by 123 points after winning nine of 18 races. *(AFP)*

Kimi Antonelli did not get to swig real champagne on the podium after he won in Texas last weekend, the 20-year-old Mercedes driver still too young for local drinking laws, but Sunday's Mexico City Grand Prix could be quite some shindig.

Antonelli, as even those living in the remotest valleys and islands of Italy must surely be aware by now, can become Formula One's youngest champion at the sprawling high-altitude capital's Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez as well as the first Italian to take the crown since 1953.

Now 123 points clear at the top and winner of half the 18 races this season, Antonelli needs only finish in the top nine and it's job done. If teammate George Russell or Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton fail to win, it will be the same outcome.

Mercedes team boss and co-owner Toto Wolff agreed it was 99.9% sure but Antonelli, who sprayed non-alcoholic fizz from an unbranded bottle in Austin, still needed to finish the job.

"It's either going to be a big tequila party or, if it's not a tequila party, then it's going to be caipirinha the weekend afterwards," Wolff said, with Brazil following on from Mexico.

Antonelli, whose boyish enthusiasm and enjoyment of racing have been very apparent since he took the championship lead in the third round of the season in Japan, naturally plans to wrap up the title with a flourish.

"I'm going to approach it with the same mindset, just trying to have as much fun as possible, trying to hopefully fight for another win," he said.

"It would be best to finish on a high, and that's the goal."

Mexico celebrates Day of the Dead on the same weekend, with a giant party in town even without Formula One's arrival.

Mercedes could also clinch the constructors' title but it still looks a long shot, with the team needing a perfect afternoon and Ferrari a terrible one. Brazil the weekend after looks much more likely.

McLaren's Lando Norris won in Mexico from pole last year but the reigning champions have ground to catch up and may not be as competitive.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen also has a strong record in Mexico, with five wins in the last eight attempts, and the Dutch four-times world champion will be looking to regain momentum after Antonelli thwarted his hopes of three wins in a row.

In the constructors' standings, Red Bull and McLaren are tied on points, with the former ahead on placings, and that battle for third place overall could go down to the wire.

So too could Audi's tussle with Haas for seventh, with seven points between them.

Even further back, tail-enders and newcomers Cadillac have cause to celebrate with veteran Mexican Sergio Perez set to start his 300th race in front of his home fans after having to sit out last year following his departure from Red Bull in 2024.

"How much has to happen that you make your 300th race at home," said Perez, for whom the stars aligned only after the Saudi race was cancelled and Bahrain rescheduled in Malaysia.

"It's incredible. And to have all the people that have been with me since day one supporting me, all my sponsors, all my family, all my fans."

BASEL OPEN

Djokovic rallies to beat Frenchman Humbert, boosts ATP Finals bid

AFP
Basel


Novak Djokovic celebrates beating Ugo Humbert in three sets in his opening match in Basel yesterday.

Novak Djokovic dug deep to overcome Ugo Humbert in three sets in his opening match in Basel yesterday, keeping his bid to qualify for the season-ending ATP Finals on course.

The 39-year-old Djokovic dropped the first set but recovered to beat the French left-hander 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 on his first appearance in Basel since 2011.

Djokovic strengthened his chances of a record 19th qualification for the ATP Finals by winning the China Open in Beijing earlier this month, the 102nd title of his career.

That was followed by an early exit at the Shanghai Masters, with the 24-time Grand Slam champion accepting a wild card into the Swiss event after slipping to 11th in the Race to Turin standings.

Djokovic is a seven-time winner of the ATP Finals, but he did not compete at either of the past two editions because of injury.

Only the top eight players qualify for the November 15-22 showpiece, although Jannik Sinner has already pulled out due to a knee problem.

Fourth seed Djokovic takes on Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff in the next round in Basel. He holds an 8-0 record against Struff.

WAWRINKA BIDS FAREWELL TO TENNIS

On Tuesday, Stan Wawrinka bid farewell to tennis as he brought the curtain down on a decorated 24-year career following a first-round exit at the Basel Open.

The 41-year-old Swiss announced earlier in the season that his last tournament as a professional would be the ATP 500-level event in his home country and a 7-5, 7-6 (7/2) defeat by Czech Jiri Lehecka brought an end to the career of the three-time major champion.

Former world number three Wawrinka, along with Andy Murray, was the only player to win multiple Grand Slams in a period dominated by Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"I was lucky enough to be able to play alongside them and sometimes beat them," Wawrinka told AFP in 2024.

He bested Nadal to win his first Grand Slam at the Australian Open in 2014, before beating Djokovic in the French Open final the following season and then again in the US Open title-match in 2016.

Alongside his compatriot Federer, the Lausanne native won the Davis Cup for Switzerland and claimed gold in the doubles at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

On court in Basel, Wawrinka's every point won, as well as several trademark booming one-handed backhands, was greeted by wild cheers from the partisan home crowd.

But Lehecka got his nose in front with a break of serve in the 11th game and sealed the opening set with an ace.

A tight second set went to a tie-break, but it was just a step too far for Wawrinka as his 21st-ranked opponent took firm control to seal the breaker and the match.

Wawrinka, who enjoyed a farewell ceremony in Basel on Monday, did a lap of the court to thank the crowd, before disappearing down the tunnel for the last time.

LA 2028 Olympics unveil official slogan 'Stars Align'

Organisers of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic and Paralympic Games have unveiled "Stars Align" as their official slogan, framing the motto as a meeting of lifelong athletic preparation and the spotlight of the entertainment capital.

The campaign debuted on Wednesday with a 60-second promotional video set to the Red Hot Chili Peppers' hit "Can't Stop," showcasing Southern California landmarks including the Hollywood Sign and Griffith Observatory.

While the slogan naturally evokes Hollywood glamour and celestial imagery, LA28 Chief Marketing Officer Alex Merchan said the organizing committee wanted the message to redefine modern perceptions of destiny.

"'Stars Align' to us, is not based on luck. It's grounded in effort and commitment," Merchan told Reuters in an interview.

"'Stars Align' is when preparation meets opportunity, we create something extraordinary."

Following the tradition of host city mottos - such as Tokyo 2020's "United by Emotion" and Paris 2024's "Games Wide Open" - LA28 aims to capture both the global sporting stage and local identity.

Merchan emphasized that the slogan extends beyond the estimated 15,000 competing athletes to include the local workforce, volunteers, and small businesses participating through initiatives like LA28's "Local Authentic" vendor program.

"Yes, we will celebrate those athletes, but we can't lose sight that these Games will be delivered by all the stars that take part in bringing them about," Merchan said, adding that the campaign serves as an invitation for the community to engage early.

The Olympic Games are scheduled to open on July 14, 2028, followed by the Paralympics on August 15.

The slogan rollout represents a milestone in an escalating commercial and cultural campaign heading into 2028, which will eventually include the domestic torch relay route across all 50 states and the unveiling of the official mascot.

"This is just the spark, our first coming out of the gate," Merchan said. "We have much more to come."

FOCUS

Eala recovers to move into Tokyo quarters

AFP
Tokyo


Philippines' Alexandra Eala reacts on a point against Australia's Talia Gibson during the Tokyo Open in Tokyo yesterday. *(AFP)*

Philippine sensation Alexandra Eala came from behind to beat Talia Gibson 4-6, 6-2, 6-0 in Tokyo yesterday and said "it took a lot to turn that match around".

The world number 19's recent run of early tournament exits looked in danger of continuing when Australia's Gibson, ranked 38, took the first set at the Pan Pacific Open. But Eala dug in and evened the match before hitting top gear in a dominating third set. The 21-year-old said the turnaround had been "a gradual increase of level".

"Maybe just a couple of small details that when accumulated make a big difference," she said. "In one 30-all I went more for my shot or in one deuce I did so and so. Those little details when all summed up, that's the difference."

Eala faces Russian third seed Diana Shnaider in the quarter-finals. She became the first player from the Philippines to win a title on the women's WTA Tour in August and her every move is big news at home. Eala was again backed by passionate support in Tokyo but she was on the ropes in the first set as Gibson punished her for missing chances. She began her comeback in the second set but she still let her opponent off the hook on several occasions. Eala went from strength to strength as the match moved into the final set and closed it out when Gibson dumped a shot into the net. She hit nine aces and broke Gibson's serve six times in the match. "Of course the support helps a lot all the time," said Eala.

"It creates a great atmosphere and I think there was a bit of back and forth within the crowd.

"You want to be present, you're very invested in the match so it comes naturally to focus."

Shnaider beat Aliaksandra Sasnovich of Belarus 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 to book her place in the quarter-finals. World number one Elena Rybakina plays her opening match today when she takes on fellow Kazakh Yulia Putintseva. Home favourite Naomi Osaka is also in action against Slovakian wild card Mia Pohankova.

SPOTLIGHT

Real Madrid, La Liga apology over Mbappe shows power of Chinese market

AFP
Madrid

Faced with a widespread boycott in China following the controversy sparked by Kylian Mbappe's comments about Mao Zedong, Real Madrid added its own apology on Tuesday.

The move was widely viewed as a move by the Spanish giants and 15-time European champions to protect their commercial interests in China. The furore was unleashed after a short video clip showed a meme depicting Mbappe as Mao Zedong, whom he calls a "Chinese dictator."

Three sponsors have dropped Mbappe and Chinese state TV has suspended the broadcast of Spanish league matches, jeopardizing La Liga's international development strategy. The apologies from La Liga and its president, Javier Tebas, as well as by Mbappe and Real Madrid, have so far failed to calm the situation. They have though served to highlight the crucial importance of the Chinese market for Spanish football.

A source within La Liga told AFP that China and the United States alone finance the "majority" of the international broadcasting rights, which were valued at 748mn euros ($834m) for the 2024-25 season.

According to La Liga, the matches broadcast on state-run CCTV are among the most-watched sporting events in the country.

Since 2016, La Liga has even adapted its schedule to Asian time zones, which has allowed it to significantly increase its viewership and, consequently, the value of its international TV rights.

On August 3, La Liga announced a new agreement with digital giant Migu, a subsidiary of China Mobile, to broadcast 380 matches a season until 2030, saying it confirmed "the league's long-term commitment to developing its fan base in China".

In addition to these global contracts, the two giants of Spanish football, Real Madrid and Barcelona, each have multi-million-euro investments in China.



According to the Real Madrid-affiliated newspaper Marca, the Madrid club generates between 10 and 15 percent of its sales of jerseys and merchandise in China.

Real Madrid also counts Chinese companies among its main sponsors with Hisense, sports betting firm Kaiyun Sports and Linglong Tire all featuring prominently.

Real Madrid's veteran president Florentino Perez, who made his fortune in construction through his publicly traded ACS group, owns several subsidiaries in China and Hong Kong. As part of a development agreement between La Liga and Chinese sports institutions, Real Madrid and Barcelona have played several pre-season friendlies in Asia against Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean teams in recent years.

In a statement to celebrate the Chinese New Year, Barcelona, which has opened several football academies in the country, estimated that it had more supporters in Asia "than in Europe and America combined".

HORSE RACING

Umm Wishah storms to Al Beshariyah Cup win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Umm Wishah produced an impressive late burst to claim the Al Beshariyah Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse, while jockeys Marco Casamento and Alberto Sanna and trainer Jassim al-Ghazali each celebrated two victories at the meeting yesterday.

The four-year-old filly came from behind to win the 1900m Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden, producing a strong finish inside the final 200m to take the lead and pull clear for a 3¼-length victory.

Owned by Abdulrahman bin Fahad al-Attiyah, Umm Wishah was ridden by Arnaud De Lepine and trained by Ahmed al-Jehani. She had finished runner-up a fortnight ago and made no mistake at her third attempt to open her account.

The Al Beshariyah Cup was presented by Deputy Director of the QREC Registration and Studbook Department Saad Ali al-Kubaisi,

Casamento and Sanna shared the riding honours with two wins each. Casamento partnered Khamiss to victory in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden for trainer Mohammed al-Ghazali and also guided Tabaa Zakhir to a 7½-length success in the Local Purebred Arabian Maiden for trainer al-Ghazali, whose double also included Aablan, who won the Thoroughbred Handicap 80-100 by three lengths under Jefferson Smith.

Sanna recorded his double aboard Ta'hoos Al Shahania, who won the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 55-75 for trainer Rudy Nerbonne, and Spycraft, who claimed the Thoroughbred Handicap 45-65 by 6½ lengths for trainer Bader al-Balushi.

The other winners were Haroon Al Laheef, who took the Local Purebred Arabian Show Horses Maiden by 7½ lengths for trainer Abdulla Dhabit Aldosari and jockey Salman Fahad al-Hajri, and Dabas, who won the Purebred Arabian Handicap 0-75 by two lengths for trainer Nayef Batal al-Otibi and jockey Abdulla Saleh al-Yafei.

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Jockey Arnaud De Lepine guided Umm Wishah to the Al Beshariyah Cup victory at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURE:** *Juhaim*

SERIE A

Inter leave it late again as Bologna sink AC Milan

MBANGULA HAT-TRICK SEALED A 4-2 WIN FOR BOLOGNA AT SAN SIRO

AFP
Rome

Inter Milan returned to the Serie A summit with a nervy 2-0 win at bottom side Venezia, while a Samuel Mbangula hat-trick sealed a 4-2 win for Bologna at San Siro to inflict a first league defeat of the season on AC Milan.

Champions Inter drew level with Lazio on 25 points at the top ahead of a hotly anticipated Milan derby meeting with their rivals on Saturday.

Ruben Amorim's side will go into that game on the back of losing their unbeaten streak after Alphadjo Cisse's double was not enough to avoid a defeat that left the Rossoneri fifth on 18 points.

Fresh off a pulsating stoppage-time turnaround against Fiorentina on Sunday that marked their fifth comeback win of the season, Inter thought they would have to fight back from behind once again when Lion Lauberbach fired the rock-bottom hosts in front after 29 minutes.

The champions were handed a reprieve when it was ruled out for offside, but had goalkeeper Ivan Provedel to thank for keeping the scores level at the break as he diverted a Lauberbach effort off the bar.

Venezia have picked up just three points all season but looked the likelier to make the breakthrough as Gianluca Busio fired over unmarked from 12 yards before Akor Adams rounded Provedel to score, only for the offside flag to save Inter again.


Venezia's Akor Adams (left) vies for the ball with Inter Milan's Yann Aurel Bisseck during the Serie A match in Venice. *(AFP)*

Last season's Serie B champions stunned Napoli with a win on new coach Davide Nicola's debut and another shock result looked possible until they were undone in painful fashion late on.

Matias Moreno and Redouane Halhal diverted dangerous deliveries into their own net in the space of two minutes to ensure Inter returned to the top of the standings and Venezia remained rooted to the bottom.

At San Siro, a lengthy injury list featuring the likes of Adrien Rabiot, Diego Moreira and Mario Gila restricted Amorim's options for the first midweek round of the season, while the Milan coach left Christian Pulisic and Luka Modric on the bench.

Mbangula, making his full debut for Bologna, swept home the opener inside eight minutes, but the visitors were soon pegged back when an Arthur Theate error gifted Cisse a simple finish.

The Milan teenager struck again in the 27th minute, volleying home a Fikayo Tomori cross, but the game was turned on its head once again in the space of two second-half minutes to stun the San Siro crowd.

The unfortunate Davide Bartesaghi turned a free-kick into his own net before Mbangula struck again with a composed control and finish in the box just after the hour mark.

The 22-year-old then completed a memorable night four minutes from time when he beat Mike Maignan for a third time with a smart finish after Bologna robbed the ball in midfield. Bologna sealed back-to-back wins for the first time this season to move into 11th place on 11 points.

Elsewhere, Adrian Bernabe had a penalty saved by Maduka Okoye as struggling Parma and Udinese played out a 0-0 draw.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

Al Rayyan cruise past Oman's Al Nahda

By Sports Reporter
Muscat

Al Rayyan overpowered Al Nahda Club to secure a dominant 4-1 win in their AFC Champions League Two Group C clash.

The win takes the Qatari side to six points, putting them in a strong position at the midway stage while Oman's Al Nahda remained rooted at the bottom with just a draw to their name. Al Rayyan took lead in the third minute as Wesley Ribeiro dribbled past one defender then saw his shot take a slight deflection off Ghanim al-Habashi but enough to wrong-foot goalkeeper Faiyz al-Rusheidi.

The Qatari side continued to press on and in the 19th minute, doubled their advantage when Ibrahim Mohammadali floated in a cross from the right for defender Youssef Ayman to head past Al Rusheidi. Al Rayyan missed a great chance to extend their lead two minutes into the second half after Gabriel Pereira released Aleksandar Mitrovic into space, only for the Serbian to rush his effort wide. Al Nahda were awarded a penalty in the 49th minute after Andre Amaro used his hand to block Jamal al-Washi's shot but Jameel al-Yahmadi's decision to send his spot-kick straight down the middle was read by Mahmoud Abunada, who made the save with his feet.


Al Rayyan's Gabriel Pereira attempts to score against Al Nahda in the AFC Champions League Two match in Muscat.

The home side were given another chance from 12 yards in the 59th minute following Julien de Sart's foul on Valon Ahmedi and this time, Mohammed Mubarak made no mistake with his penalty.

Any hope that Al Nahda had that the goal would spark a comeback came crashing down five minutes later when Pereira's strike from outside the box packed too much power and accuracy for al-Rusheidi. The home side went down to 10 men in the 80th minute when Harib al-Saadi picked up his second yellow card for a strong challenge on Ribeiro as Al Rayyan took the opportunity to add a fourth through Mohammadali seven minutes later to wrap up the win.

COMMENT

Captain Odegaard urges Arsenal to bounce back after Fleetwood upset

AFP
Fleetwood, United Kingdom

Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard has insisted "we can't feel sorry for ourselves" and must move on quickly following their stunning loss away to fourth-tier Fleetwood in the League Cup.

The Premier League champions crashed out 5-3 on penalties in an incredible upset after the fourth-round tie finished 1-1 in normal time at Fleetwood's home ground of Highbury.

Arsenal's Bruno Guimaraes had his penalty saved by Jay Lynch in the shoot-out before teenage defender Conor Haughey scored Fleetwood's winner. Aaron Loupalo-Bi's first-half goal had put Fleetwood ahead before Viktor Gyokeres equalised after the interval.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta made nine changes to his starting side but after a ragged first-half display he sent Norway midfielder Odegaard on for the second period.

The visitors, last season's losing finalists, managed an improved performance but still missed several chances before teenage rising star Max Dowman was sent off five minutes from the end of normal time.

"It's very frustrating to go out," Odegaard said after Fleetwood made a mockery of the 84 places between the clubs in the English football pyramid.

"Obviously, the way we've played was not on the level. We need to do much, much better than we did.

"Frustrating, but congratulations to Fleetwood and we look forward to the next game already and bounce back.

"They did well so we have to give them credit, but... we need to do better. I thought we improved during the game, but again, we need to step up even more - so that's a shame."

Arsenal now just have days to get the defeat out of their system ahead of what promises to be a tough match at Liverpool on Sunday, with the Gunners having drawn level on points with Premier League leaders Manchester City last weekend.

"We can't feel sorry for ourselves. We need to move on - we have a big game at the weekend, so bouncing back at the weekend is all we can do now," Odegaard added.

Meanwhile, British media reports Wednesday said Arsenal would lodge an appeal against Dowman's red card with the Football Association and were hopeful of a decision being handed down prior to the trip to Anfield.

The 16-year-old was dismissed for kicking out at Harrison Neal following a heavy challenge by the Fleetwood midfielder, with an unimpressed Arteta giving Dowman a strong word as he trudged off.

"Something that we discussed already before the match," Arteta said when asked what he told Dowman.

Late al-Rawi penalty earns Duhail win over Shaab Hadramout

Bassam al-Rawi converted a stoppage-time penalty as Al Duhail snatched a 2-1 victory over Yemen's Shaab Hadramout in the Gulf Club Champions League at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday to maintain their perfect start in Group A.

Yazan Mohamed had put the hosts ahead in the 73rd minute, but Aboud Dahman equalised for the visitors 10 minutes later with a powerful effort from outside the box.

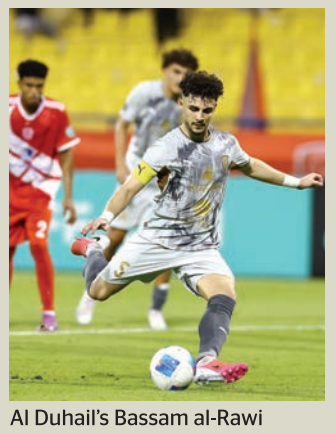
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Al Duhail dominated the opening exchanges and created several chances, with Almoez Ali narrowly missing the target in the eighth minute before Krzysztof Piatek headed over four minutes later.

Almoez had another opportunity in the 24th minute but failed to turn a cross into a goal as the hosts continued to press.

The Qatari side maintained their attacking approach after the break and finally broke the deadlock when Hani converted Sultan al-Brake's cross in the 72nd minute. Shaab Hadramout responded through Dahman, whose long-range effort brought the visitors level in the 83rd minute. Just when the match appeared set for a draw, Al Duhail earned a penalty following a foul on al-Abdullah, with al-Rawi keeping his composure to secure all three points.


Al Duhail's Bassam al-Rawi scores a stoppage-time penalty against Yemen's Shaab Hadramout in the Gulf Club Champions League at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday.

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SERIE A

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COMMENT

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AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

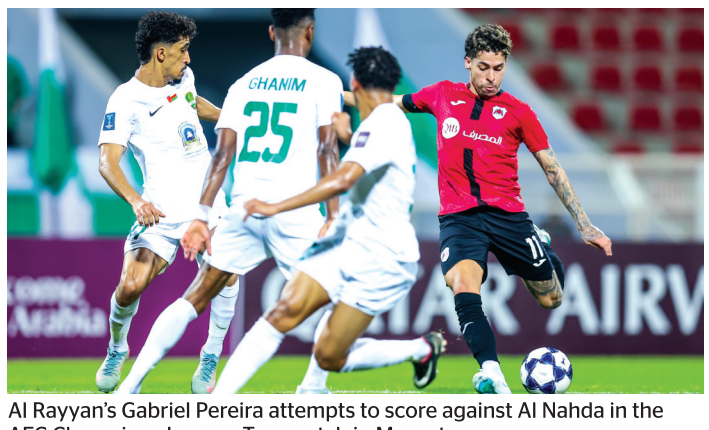
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By Sports Reporter
Muscat

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