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TENNIS

Zverev becomes world No. 1 after reaching Vienna quarter-finals

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QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA

Barreto, Dabrowski and Ahli emerge fastest in prologue

Today competitors will tackle 336.45km in one of the longest and most demanding selective sections

By Sports Reporter
Lusail



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Max Delfino of France pose with QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai, Executive Director Amro al-Hamad, board member Abdulrazaq al-Kuwari and the Dutch ambassador Ferdinand Lahnstein during the ceremonial start of the Qatar International Baja in Lusail yesterday.



Defending champion Konrad Dąbrowski was fastest rider in Prologue on his Duust Rally Team KTM 450.

Francisco Barreto, Konrad Dabrowski and Abdulaziz Ahli topped the times in their respective car, motorcycle and quad categories on the 11.12km prologue that officially got the competitive action underway at the Qatar International Baja yesterday. Thirty-seven cars, 45 motorcycles and eight quads graced the official start ceremony for the penultimate rounds of the FIA World and Middle East Baja Cups and round five of the FIM Bajas World Cup at Lusail.

Competitors were flagged off the podium in the presence of QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai, QMMF Executive Director Amro al-Hamad, QMMF board member Abdulrazaq al-Kuwari and the Dutch ambassador Ferdinand Lahnstein.

Italian Baja and recent Baja Portalegre 500 winner Francisco Barreto was the first driver to tackle the Prologue with his navigator Paulo Fiuza in an SVR Toyota Hilux. The Portuguese carded the target time of 7min 06.9sec with a five-second penalty for touching a gate and that was 12.1 seconds quicker than the time set by title rival Saood Variawa, who lost time in the dust running behind Lionel Baud.

Remarkably, the Toyota driver was also 12.1 seconds up on local hero and multiple event winner Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah in his Optimus MD Rallye. The Qatari also incurred a five-second time penalty and suffered a costly flat tyre near the end.

Barreto said: "We are really happy. No mistakes. Maybe the guys behind had a little bit of dust because we started minute-by-minute but it was a good result for us. The race starts tomorrow. We need to be smart and focused. I had Nasser behind me today. It's a pleasure to race with him. It's cool to learn and do our best."

Al-Attiyah added: "We had a puncture for the last five kilometres. We drove like one minute easy to manage and not lose too much time. At the end we lose only 12 seconds. Tomorrow is a long stage. It's a big stage and we will push."

Mitchel van den Brink and Bart van Heun began the event in a strong position in the Challenger class and are still eyeing overall honours. The Can-Am Maverick R crew finished the Prologue in sixth place behind the QMMF-backed local drivers, Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (Can-Am) and Nouef al-Sowaidi (Taurus).

Al-Kuwari said: "I am happy to be first in the category. The rain for me was 100 metres from the finish. I think there was a small cloud, only at the finish!"

Van den Brink added: "We needed to make a reverse and make the turn again at one flag on the stage and we lost some time there. Despite that, it is a good result."

Oman's Hamed al-Wahaibi was classified in seventh and the father and daughter duo of Martin and Aliyyah Koloc settled into eighth and 10th positions in their respective Red-Lined Revos and sandwiched Qatar's Khalifa Saleh al-Attiyah in ninth.



Francisco Barreto was the first driver to tackle the prologue with his navigator Paulo Fiuza in an SVR Toyota Hilux and the Portuguese clocked 7min 06.9sec.

The South Racing Can-Am Team's Fernando Alvarez teamed up with French navigator Xavier Panseri to hold 11th and head the SSV contingent. Qatar's Abdulla al-Rabban was the fastest of the three drivers in the Stock category in his Toyota Prado.

Qatari Mohammed al-Marri was over a minute slower and will start towards the rear of the field on Friday. X-Raid's Baud sustained a flat tyre near the start and will also suffer from a lowly starting position.

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah's nephew Ghanim al-Attiyah is tackling the event for the first time in a Can-Am Maverick R alongside his Ukrainian navigator Dmytro Tsyro. The young Qatari finished the Prologue in 21st overall and third in the SSVs, as a heavy rain shower fell in the area towards the end of competitive proceedings.

Last year's motorcycle winner Konrad Dabrowski was the first rider into the stage on his Duust Rally Team KTM 450. The Pole laid down the gauntlet with a run of 7min 15.1sec and that put him just 1.3 seconds quicker than FIM championship leader Alex McInnes.

The three-time event winner had to wait until the backmarkers had finished the Prologue to confirm his fastest time. Former enduro champion and 2023 FIM Rally-Raid World Cup Rally 2 winner Romain Dumontier was running near the rear of the field and came home in third place, albeit over half a minute behind the flying Pole, and Robert Wallace earned the fourth quickest time on his KTM 450 EXC.

Dabrowski said: "It went really well but it was tight. Just over a second to Alex. I've won it three times already, so only good memories from here. It's part of my preparation for the Dakar Rally."

Slovenian veteran Simon Marcic rounded off the top five on his Kove, with fellow countryman and defending Dakar Rally 2 champion Toni Mulec settling into seventh behind Michael Anderson and ahead of Ethan Lane, who incurred a five-second penalty. Current FIM champion Mohammed al-Balooshi and Qatar-based Makis Rees-Stavros completed the top 10. All 45 riders finished the Prologue.

Abdulaziz al-Ahli is the defending quad champion in Qatar and he made a solid start to the defence of his Baja title with the quickest time on his Yamaha Raptor. The Emirati finished the Prologue 7.3 seconds faster than fellow countryman Khalifa al-Bastaki after his rival incurred a five-second penalty. But al-Bastaki was further penalised for losing his time card.

Hani al-Noumesi led the Saudi quintet in second, ahead of current FIM series leader Ahmed al-Jaber, Abdulaziz al-Atawi, Abdulrahman Alabdullatif and Badr al-Hamdan. Italy's Matteo Lardori was eighth on the lone Suzuki and then suffered Stella issues and dirt in his carburettor after a rain shower on the road section back to Lusail.

Today, competitors tackle one of the longest and most demanding selective sections ever to grace a round of the FIA and FIM Baja Cups.

A punishing 336.45km – on a par with a stage in the W2RC or the iconic Dakar Rally - will take entrants through the northern, western and central deserts of Qatar, with the first bike getting underway at 6.55am. The leading car will roar into action at 9am

QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA – PROLOGUE TOP 5 RESULTS

Cars

1. Francisco Barreto (POR)/Paulo Fiuza (POR) Toyota Hilux IMT Evo; 7min 06.9sec*
2. Saood Variawa (RSA)/Charan Moore (RSA) Toyota Hilux IMT Evo; 7min 19.0sec*
3. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Max Delfino (FRA) Optimus MD Rallye; 7min 19.0sec+
4. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/Oriol Mena (ESP) Can-Am Maverick R; 7min 21.9sec*
5. Nouef al-Suwaidi (QAT)/Aisvydas Paliukenas (LTU) Taurus T3 Max; 7min 26.1sec+

***denotes registered for FIA World Baja Cup ;+denotes registered for FIA Middle East Baja Cup**

Motorcycles

1. Konrad Dabrowski (POL) KTM 450 Rally Replica; 7min 15.1sec
2. Alex McInnes (GBR) KTM 450 RFR; 7min 16.4sec
3. Romain Dumontier (FRA) KTM 450 Rally Factory; 7min 45.4sec
4. Robert Wallace (GBR) KTM 450 EXC; 7min 52.2sec
5. Simon Marcic (SLO) Kove 450 Rally EX; 7min 53.3sec

Quads

1. Abdulaziz Ahli (UAE) Yamaha Raptor 700; 8min 28.1sec
2. Hani al-Noumesi (KSA) Yamaha 700; 9min 01.7sec
3. Ahmed al-Jaber (KSA) Yamaha Raptor; 9min 47.9sec
4. Abdulaziz al-Atawi (KSA) Yamaha Raptor 700; 11min 30.7sec
5. Khalifa al-Bastaki (UAE) Yamaha YFZ 450R; 13min 35.4sec

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Sadd face tought test against Shamal as Rayyan seek to extend lead

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd face a tough test against Al Shamal in the Qatar Stars League today, while leaders Al Rayyan look to maintain their unbeaten run when they take on Al Arabi tomorrow.

The clash between defending champions Sadd and last season's runners-up Shamal at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium is one of the highlights of the round, with both teams looking to bounce back in the domestic competition after contrasting results in the AFC Champions League Elite.

Sadd returned to winning ways in the league with a 4-0 victory over Al Shahaniya last week after suffering two successive defeats. The win kept the champions second in the standings on 15 points, two behind leaders Rayyan, as they continue their bid for a fourth consecutive title.

Razvan Lucescu's side also earned their first point in the continental campaign with a 1-1 draw against Saudi Arabia's Al Qadsiah, having taken the lead before conceding an equaliser late in the match. Sadd will now look to build on that performance against a Shamal side buoyed by their impressive 3-1 victory over Saudi giants Al Hilal in the AFC Champions League Elite.

However, David Prats' men have struggled in the domestic competition, going winless in their last four league matches to slip to sixth place with nine points.

Lucescu stressed the importance of preparation amid a congested schedule, saying his players must remain focused and deliver a strong performance to secure all three points.

Prats acknowledged the challenge posed by the defending champions, describing Sadd as the best team over the past two seasons.

He hoped his players would carry the winning mentality they showed against Al Hilal into today's match.

Tomorrow, the spotlight will turn to Al Thumama Stadium, where unbeaten leaders Rayyan take on fourth-placed Arabi in a meeting between two sides. Rayyan are chasing their first league title since 2016 and will aim to preserve their two-point advantage over Sadd.

Meanwhile, Duhail hosting Wakrah at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. Eight-time champions Duhail are third with 15 points, level with Sadd but behind on goal difference, while Wakrah occupy fifth place with 11 points.

QSL ROUND 8 FIXTURES

Today: Al Shahania vs Al Ahli at Al Khor Stadium | 5:15pm; Al Sadd vs Al Shamal at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium | 7:30pm; Al Gharafa vs Qatar SC at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium | 7:30pm
Tomorrow: Al Sailiya vs Lusail at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium | 5:15pm; Al Arabi vs Al Rayyan at Al Thumama Stadium | 7:30pm; Al Duhail vs Al Wakrah at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium | 7:30pm



Al Sadd coach Razvan Lucescu at a press conference yesterday.

CRICKET

THIRD TEST

South Africa in peril after 3rd day against Australia

'The further it goes into the game, it's only going to get harder and harder'



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

Reuters
Cape Town

South Africa reached the close against Australia in a perilous position at 140 for four in their second innings on the third day of the decisive third Test at Newlands yesterday, a lead of 40 runs with six wickets remaining.

Matthew Breetzke will resume on the fourth morning on 19 with batting partner Ryan Rickelton on 8 as South Africa look to post a total that will trouble Australia batting last. The series is level at 1-1 and the winners will occupy top spot in the Test world rankings, which Australia currently hold.

How much is required remains to be seen. This is the first time a test match has been played in October at Newlands and while it has been warm, there is not the baking heat of mid-summer to open cracks and cause the pitch to crumble.

"The further it goes into the game, I think it's only going to get harder and harder (to bat)," Australian Josh Inglis said.

"I'm not sure of a total (to chase). You don't want them getting too many more than maybe 200 or so. Obviously spinning a fair bit. We've got a new ball in 30 odd overs. So, yeah, hopefully we start well tomorrow."

Aiden Markram was the first batter dismissed when he picked out mid-off Travis Head from the bowling of Mitchell Starc (2-29) for 1, before David Bedingham (11) was out on the pull for the second innings in a row and caught by Nathan Lyon off Josh Hazlewood.

Marques Ackerman made a bright 62 from 80 balls, his second half-century of the test after 95 in the first innings, but was cramped up by a Starc bouncer and caught at slip by Cameron Green.

Ackerman was furious as he left the pitch having wanted to review the decision, but was out of time having made the required signal to do so as the clock hit zero. That saved his side a review as replays showed he was out.

South Africa looked to be going to the close without further trouble until captain Temba Bavuma played a poor shot off spinner Lyon in the penultimate over of the day and was bowled for 35.

Inglis earlier equalled his career best score of 102, reaching his second test ton off 132 balls to help Australia to 429 in their first innings, a lead of exactly 100.

He was eventually out when wicketkeeper Rickelton caught him off the bowling of spinner Simon Harmer (4-104)

Alex Carey (80) also made a sizeable contribution, before Cooper Connolly was the last man out for 29, caught and bowled by Marco Jansen (3-60)

The series is level 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.

BRIEF SCORS: South Africa 329 and 140 for 4 (Ackerman 62, Bavuma 35, Starc 2-29) **lead Australia 429** (Inglis 102, Carey 80, Renshaw 74, Harmer 4-104, Jansen 3-60) **by 40 runs.**

FOCUS

Warrican's 5-wicket haul leads Windies fightback in Mirpur

AFP
Mirpur, Bangladesh

West Indies spinner Jomel Warrican took five wickets to bowl Bangladesh out for 272 before the visitors reached 134-4 on the second day of the opening Test yesterday.

The West Indies trail by 138 runs at stumps, with Tagenarine Chanderpaul batting on 43 and Justin Greaves on 15 when bad light ended play early in Mirpur.

Warrican, a left-arm spinner who struck twice on day one, returned figures of 5-53, his fourth five-wicket haul in Test cricket.

Bangladesh opener Shadman Islam, who resumed on 99 not out, reached his third Test century on the second morning but fell for 105 as Bangladesh lost their remaining seven wickets for 51 runs.

"We should have done better," said Shadman. "If our top-order batters had converted their scores into bigger innings of 150, 170 or even 200, the team total could have reached 450 or 500."

The hosts resumed on 213-3 and Shadman reached his hundred with a flick off debutant left-arm spinner Joshua Bishop on the second ball of the day. But Bishop trapped him lbw in his next over to trigger a collapse. Towhid Hridoy, who had retired hurt on 42 on the opening day due to cramps, returned to bat but was bowled by Bishop without adding to his overnight score.

Litton Das attempted to rebuild the innings with the lower-order and remained unbeaten on 34, but Warrican and fast bowler Shamar Joseph dismantled the tail with Bangladesh all out before lunch.

Bishop and Joseph took two wickets each to support Warrican's heroics.

West Indies made an aggressive start in reply, with openers John Campbell and Brandon King taking on the Bangladesh fast bowlers. Hasan Mahmud broke through when King edged out for 15, leaving the visitors at 29-1.

Campbell continued to attack, reaching his half-century off 61 balls to take West Indies to 89-1 at tea.

The visitors resumed after a rain interruption of around an hour, but Bangladesh struck soon after play restarted.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz removed Campbell for 54 with a sharply turning off-break that took the outside edge and captain Najmul Hossain Shanto held a diving catch to his left.

"The ball was a little bit darker and we had momentum going before the rain break," said Campbell.

"I think that (rain) allowed them to regroup and they were hitting better areas."

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam then struck twice in the 36th over, dismissing Kavem Hodge (7) and Amir Jangoo, for a duck, to reduce the opposition to 97-4. Chanderpaul and Greaves helped West Indies recover before bad light brought an early end to the day's play.

BRIEF SCORES
West Indies 134 for 4 (Campbell 54, Chanderpaul 43*, Taijul 2-44) **trail Bangladesh 272** (Shadman 105, Hridoy 42, Warrican 5-53, Joseph 2-41) **by 138 runs.**



West Indies' Jomel Warrican (second from left) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz during the second day of the first Test in Mirpur yesterday. *(AFP)*

Australia's Molineux clinches top deal at WPL auction

Australia captain Sophie Molineux clinched the biggest deal of the day at the Women's Premier League auction on Wednesday after a winning bid of $115,600 by UP Warriorz.

Molineux, a left-handed bowling all-rounder who led Australia to this year's T20 World Cup title in July, had former team Royal Challengers Bengaluru interested before Warriorz got her at more than double her base price of $52,500 in Kochi.

Warriorz, led by Australian veteran Meg Lanning, came into the mini auction with the biggest budget as the five franchises finalised their teams for the fifth edition of the women's T20 tournament.

Another Australian all-rounder, Grace Harris, returned to Warriorz with a deal of $31,500. And all-rounders ruled the day as Orla Prendergast became the first player from Ireland to land a WPL deal, heading to Gujarat Giants for $31,500.

India batter Kiran Navgire was the second-costliest buy after Delhi Capitals got her for $78,800.

The most expensive player ever sold at the WPL auction is India's Smriti Mandhana, who was bought by Bengaluru for 34mn rupees ($380,000) in 2023.

Next year's WPL begins on January 14 with the final scheduled for February 7. The WPL, staged first in 2023, delivered the Indian cricket board roughly $700mn in franchise and media rights alone.

The deals made the WPL the world's second-most valuable women's sports league after WNBA basketball in the United States. Reigning champions Bengaluru and Mumbai Indians have won two titles each in the four editions.

Mumbai Indians part ways with Malinga, Mhambrey and Hopkinson in support staff overhaul

Mumbai Indians announced yesterday the departure of long-serving Lasith Malinga plus Paras Mhambrey and Carl Hopkinson from their coaching roles, as the five-times Indian Premier League champions continue an overhaul of their backroom staff.

The changes come nearly two weeks after the franchise replaced head coach Mahela Jayawardene with former captain Kieron Pollard following a disappointing 2026 campaign.

They are rebuilding after coming ninth last season, missing the IPL playoffs for the fourth time in the last six editions.

"Mumbai Indians extend their heartfelt gratitude to Lasith, Paras and Carl for their contributions to the team and the wider MI family," the franchise said in a statement.

"Their commitment, the relationships they have built and the memories they have helped create will always be part of our journey."

One of the greatest players in the franchise's history, Malinga took 170 wickets in 122 appearances for Mumbai between 2009 and 2019, helping them win four IPL titles. He was also part of their Champions League T20-winning side in 2011.

The former Sri Lanka fast bowler later returned to the franchise in coaching and mentoring roles, extending an association that lasted well over a decade.

TRI-SERIES

England outlast Sri Lanka in dead rubber



England's Ben Duckett (right) plays a shot during the ODI tri-series match against Sri Lanka in Lahore yesterday. *(AFP)*



Sri Lanka's Pavan Rathnayake celebrates after completing his century against England in Lahore yesterday. *(Reuters)*

AFP
Lahore

Pavan Rathnayake's brilliant century went in vain as England stopped Sri Lanka from chasing a big 387 target, winning the dead rubber by 55 runs in Lahore yesterday.

On the same day last week, Rathnayake scored an epic 130 in Sri Lanka's 430-run chase in Rawalpindi but this time his 77-ball 118 was not enough as Sri Lanka were dismissed for 331 in 45.1 overs.

England opener Ben Duckett had earlier smashed his highest ODI score of 167 to propel England to 386-5.

With 87 needed in the last ten overs Sri Lanka were on course for another upset victory but hopes vanished when spinner Liam Dawson dismissed Rathnayake caught off a miscued sweep in the 45th over.

Dawson finished with career best figures of 4-49, while Sonny Baker finished with 2-75.

Besides Rathnayake's third ODI hundred, skipper Kusal Mendis chipped in with a 71-ball 89 with five sixes and eight boundaries to keep Sri Lanka in the hunt.

Despite the loss Sri Lanka can take heart for Saturday's final against Pakistan - also in Lahore - with sloppy England departing with just one win in four games.

Rathnayake, who hit 15 boundaries and a six, added 80 for the third wicket off just 59 balls with Mendis to keep England at bay.

Mendis had earlier added 84 for the second wicket with Avishka Fernando, who scored a quickfire 48.

Rathnayake kept the fight with a 72-run stand for the fifth wicket with Janith Liyanage (30) but Baker broke the stand to bring England back in the game

England captain Harry Broo was relieved.

"The way we finished the game off, we've learned a lot from the game when they chased 430," said Brook. "That's really good. I wasn't getting nervy, to be honest.

"We haven't had the series we wanted, we'd have liked to be in the final on Saturday. The lads are taking a lot of confidence."

Mendis showed confidence for the final.

"We have batted well, so not to worry about the final and I am sure we will be up to the task come Saturday," said Mendis.

Duckett's 132-ball knock included 24 boundaries, anchoring the innings along with Tom Banton's 74 runs after England were put in to bat.

Duckett, whose previous highest was 165 against Australia in the Champions Trophy at the same venue last year, put on 163 for the opening wicket with Banton.

Banton's 75-ball knock had two sixes and eight boundaries.

Duckett added another rapid 107 off just 75 balls for the second wicket with Harry Brook, with skipper Brook hitting two sixes and three fours in his 34-ball 44.

Duckett finally fell to a miscued scoop off Eshan Malinga in the 42nd over.

Jordan Cox, with 43 runs, Will Jacks's 30 and Sam Curran, who was 21 not out, helped England add 92 runs in the last ten overs.

Pacer Asitha Fernando chipped in with 2-63 but fellow pacer Malinga's only wicket cost 101 runs.

BRIEF SCORES
England 386 for 5 (Duckett 167, Banton 74) **beat Sri Lanka 331** (Rathnayake 118, Mendis 89, Dawson 4-49) **by 55 runs.**

TENNIS

Germany's Zverev becomes World No. 1

Alcaraz repels Basilashvili's four set points to enter quarter-finals

AFP
Vienna

Alexander Zverev accelerated his ascension to number one in the world rankings for the first time in his career yesterday as he beat Tallon Griekspoor 6-4, 7-5 to reach the quarter-finals of the Vienna Open.

The 29-year-old German was already assured of finishing the season top of the ATP rankings but, in the absence of current incumbent Jannik Sinner, two-time Grand Slam champion Zverev will now take that crown in next week's updated standings after winning his opening two matches in the Austrian capital. Long seen as tennis' nearly-man, Zverev has enjoyed a stellar 2026, breaking his major duck by picking up the titles at the French and US Opens.

Now he has broken further ground by becoming only the 30th man to claim top spot since the rankings were first published in 1973. He will be aged 29 years and 196 days when Monday's new rankings are published, making him the second-oldest first-time number one after Australian John Newcombe.

Due to a knee injury Italy's Sinner decided to end his season at the start of October, opening the way for Zverev to dethrone him.

And the big-serving Hamburg native ensured he did just that ahead of the season-ending ATP Finals next month by seeing off Martin Landaluce and Griekspoor in his opening two matches in Vienna. Zverev needed to save four match points against Spain's Landaluce in his first-round match on Tuesday, but was much more comfortable as he defeated Griekspoor in straight sets to write his name into the history books.

He raced out of the blocks on Thursday, breaking the 30-year-old Dutchman in the very first game and then confidently serving his way into a one-set lead.

The second frame went to 5-5 before Zverev pounced on Griekspoor's serve to get his nose in front. The match met an unexpected stoppage as Zverev brought up match point when a smash off the German's racquet caused part of the electronic board behind Griekspoor to malfunction.

But once the umpire covered the problematic panel up with a towel, Zverev then sealed his new ranking with an unreturnable serve.

Earlier, in the day, Carlos Alcaraz earned a victory of two starkly contrasting halves to reach his 60th tour-level quarter-final in Vienna. Alcaraz held off a second-set resurgence from Nikoloz Basilashvili to claim a 6-1, 7-6(11) triumph. Basilashvili entered the clash having won 14 of his past 17 matches and recovered from a difficult start to hand Alcaraz a stern test, but the Spaniard raised his level in trademark fashion just when he needed it for a one-hour, 41-minute win.

Alcaraz had reeled off seven consecutive games from 1-1 in the first set to take complete control of yesterday's encounter inside the Wiener Stadthalle, producing some typically showstopping all-court tennis.

But he then let slip a break lead in the second set as last week's Almaty finalist Basilashvili dug deep, and was forced to save four set points in the subsequent tie-break before converting his fourth match point for his 23rd consecutive win at ATP 500 level.

Daniil Medvedev punched and slapped the court in frustration before producing a remarkable escape to beat Britain's Cameron Norrie 4-6 6-3 7-6(1) and reach the quarter-final.



Germany's Alexander Zverev poses with his father, former tennis player Alexander Mikhailovich Zverev, after defeating Netherland's Tallon Griekspoor to reach the Vienna Open quarter-finals yesterday. Zverev accelerated his ascension to number one in the world rankings for the first time in his career yesterday. *(AFP)*



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz returns the ball to Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili during their Vienna Open match yesterday. *(AFP)*

EQUESTRIAN

Cherif and Maryam win at Hathab

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Cyrine Cherif and Maryam Abdulkarim Abd won the Silver Tour and Amateur Class respectively as the fourth leg of the 10th edition of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour got underway yesterday at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena.

Cherif topped the 130cm Silver Tour in 54.18 seconds aboard Gemagine. Mohammed Saeed Haidan finished second in 58.12 seconds on Quick Bel, while Amer Hamad al-Mansouri took third place in 58.57 seconds aboard Normamorka.

Khalid Sanad al-Nuaimi, a member of the tournament's Organising Committee, presented the awards to the Silver Tour podium winners.

Maryam claimed the 100cm Amateur Class in 27.78 seconds on Jumbo. Al-Qaqa bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani finished second in 28.41 seconds aboard Early Star, while Nawwar Talal al-Otaibi took third place in 29.2 seconds on Quilinic. President of the tournament's Ground Jury Ahmed al-Badawi presented the Amateur Class awards.

Competitions continue today with the Future Riders class over 70cm obstacles, followed by the Open Class at 110cm. The day will conclude with the Gold Tour, featuring individual and team competitions over 140cm obstacles.



Cyrine Cherif topped the 130cm Silver Tour in 54.18 seconds aboard Gemagine.



Maryam Abdulkarim Abd claimed the 100cm Amateur Class in 27.78 seconds on Jumbo.

SPOTLIGHT

Rybakina secures year-end top rank with Tokyo win

AFP
Tokyo

World number one Elena Rybakina hailed her "amazing achievement" after securing the year-end top ranking with a 6-2, 6-3 win over fellow Kazakh Yulia Putintseva in Japan yesterday.

Rybakina became world number one for the first time last month in winning the US Open, replacing Aryna Sabalenka at the summit. She ensured she will start 2027 on top after a comfortable opening match in Tokyo, swatting aside world number 67 Putintseva at the Pan Pacific Open in 70 minutes.

The achievement capped a year in which Rybakina also won the Australian Open in January and now has three Grand Slam titles.

"It means a lot, this is something we worked for with the team," said the 27-year-old.

"So many great players and we are all really close to each other, and I'm happy that now with last week and with today's win I made it possible to secure number one at the end of the year. "It's an amazing achievement and hopefully we can continue this way next year," she added. Moscow-born Rybakina has already secured her place at next month's season-ending WTA Finals at Indian Wells.

She arrived in Tokyo after winning her fourth title of the season last week at the Ningbo Open in China. She sent down six aces against Putintseva and saved the only break point she faced.

"Today the serve definitely helped me in the important moments," she said.

"I was just trying to pick my spot and I think today with a closed roof and a combination of the balls and the court made me feel better serving.

"I'm glad today it worked."

Rybakina's opponent in the quarter-finals will be Canada's Leylah Fernandez, who she beat in the Ningbo final.

Rybakina said she had not had time to explore Tokyo but planned to indulge a new hobby when she gets a chance.

"Because of my coach I am a little bit following Pokemon cards now," she said.

"I'm not a huge fan but he is so I know a little bit, and we were getting some cards, opening them and trying to find some important ones."

Former world number one Naomi Osaka's season ended with a second-round exit. The four-time Grand Slam champion lost 6-3, 7-5 to Slovakian 18-year-old Mia Pohankova, ranked 144 in the world yesterday.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates after beating Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva during the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo. *(AFP)*

Legend Turkoglu to mark 300 days to go to FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027



FIBA Hall of Fame member Hidayet Turkoglu is scheduled to visit Qatar as the country marks 300 days to go to the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 tomorrow. The Turkish Basketball Federation President will visit at the invitation of the tournament's Local Organizing Committee, with a program expected to include the Tissot Countdown Clock unveiling as well as engagements with the Qatar Turkish School students and basketball fans.

One of Türkiye's most celebrated sporting figures, Turkoglu became the first player from the country to be inducted into the FIBA Hall of Fame in 2026.

He helped Türkiye claim silver medals at FIBA EuroBasket 2001 and the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2010, held in Türkiye. Across 15 NBA seasons, he reached the 2009 NBA Finals with the Orlando Magic and received the NBA Most Improved Player award for the 2007–08 season. Following his retirement from professional basketball in 2015, Turkoglu moved into sports administration. He was elected President of the Turkish Basketball Federation in 2016, a position he continues to hold.

The visit will connect Qatar's basketball community and the next generation of basketball talent with one of Türkiye's most accomplished players, inspiring aspiring players as excitement builds towards the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027. Taking place in Doha from 27 August to 12 September 2027, the tournament will bring together 32 national teams for the first-ever FIBA Basketball World Cup in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with all games staged in a single city. Türkiye has already secured its place in the tournament, becoming the first nation to qualify following an unbeaten run in the European Qualifiers.

Young chess talents shine at Horwitz Bishop tournament



Horwitz Bishop Chess Academy organised a rapid chess tournament at DMIS, Doha, on October 23, attracting around 300 young players in the Under-9, Under-11 and Under-13 categories. A total of 33 prizes were awarded across the three age groups. Aarush Upganlawar won the Under-13 title, Advaith Saravanan topped the Under-11 category, while Dhrish Jibin emerged champion in the Under-9 section. Advocate Jaffarkhan M, chairman of the Legal Cell, ICBF, attended the event as chief guest and presented the prizes to the winners. The tournament was conducted under the supervision of chief arbiter Jaise Joseph and deputy chief arbiter Rayan Joseph Jaise. The arbiting team comprised Ismath, Abhinessh, Sreekanth, Jason, Melvin, Vikas, Hari and Sanju.

HORSE RACING

Dumonet wins Barzan Cup, Reverberate reigns

Trainer al-Jehani and jockey Boudot completed trebles at Al Rayyan Racecourse

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Dumonet made his mark in Qatar with a first local victory, landing the 1600m Thoroughbred feature to claim the QA Group 3 Barzan Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday and take his career tally to five wins.

The sixth meeting of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's domestic calendar featured nine races, with the Guineas and Barzan Cup Meeting producing an exciting night of action.

Dumonet, a four-year-old bay gelding, stayed close to the pace before producing a decisive late charge in the final 100m to edge Thor's Hammer by a neck, with Evergreen finishing a further head behind. Owned by Nasser Essa al-Kuwari, he is trained by Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki and was ridden by Patrick Cosgrave.

QREC Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiyah presented the trophy.

In the penultimate contest of the day, Reverberate claimed the QA Group 3 Thoroughbred Guineas with a thrilling neck victory over August George. Improving on his third-place finish on seasonal reappearance, the chestnut gelding secured the prestigious title for owner Fahad Ali al-Arumaihi, trainer Hamad al-Jehani and jockey Pierre-Charles Boudot, who both completed trebles on the card. QREC Chairman al-Attiyah presented the trophy.

Meanwhile, Dinar made a winning debut, producing a powerful late surge to claim the Local Thoroughbred Guineas title. Coming from behind, the grey gelding swept past the field to seal victory for Wathnan Racing and trainer Alban de Mieulle, with Jefferson Smith in the saddle. QREC Chairman al-Attiyah presented the trophy.

Khaddah captured the Purebred Arabian Guineas for four-years-old, following his runner-up finish in a Gr3 contest at Warsaw last month. The Wathnan Racing-owned grey colt pulled clear in the closing stages to win by 2½ lengths under Soufiane Saadi for trainer De Mieulle. Eng. Osama Omer al-Dafea presented the trophy.

Ghara made a winning seasonal return, capturing the 2000m Purebred Arabian Sheraouh Island Cup. The five-year-old mare produced a strong finish under jockey Boudot to score by a length for Al Wasmiyah Farm and trainer al-Jehani, having finished runner-up in the Gr1 Qatar Gold Sword in April.



QREC Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiyah poses with the connections of Dumonet after the bay gelding won the Barzan Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES:** *Juhaim*


Jockey Patrick Cosgrave rides Dumonet to the Barzan Cup win.


Jockey Pierre-Charles Boudot guides Reverberate to the Thoroughbred Guineas win yesterday.

RESULTS
6th Al Rayyan Race Meeting – Guineas and Barzan Cup
WINNERS: Horse, Trainer, Jockey
1 - Barzan Cup, Thoroughbreds, QA Gr3
Dumonet, Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki, Patrick Cosgrave
2 - Thoroughbred Guineas, QA Gr3
Reverberate, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
3 - Thoroughbred Open Race
Thunder Flow, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
4 - Local Thoroughbred Guineas
Dinar, Alban de Mieulle, Jefferson Smith
5 - Purebred Arabian Guineas
Khaddah, Alban de Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi
6 - Sheraouh Island Cup. Purebred Arabians
Ghara, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
7 - Thoroughbred Handicap 75-95
Forceful Speed, Debbie Mountain, Faleh Bughenaim
8 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden
Itemad Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
9 - Thoroughbred Maiden
Cuban Heels, Debbie Mountain, Alberto Sanna

Maresca braced for another tough test in Brighton repeat

Manchester: Manchester City manager Enzo Maresca has warned his side to expect no let-up from Brighton this weekend when the teams meet again just days after a dramatic cup tie.

League Cup-holders City edged the Seagulls on penalties to reach the quarter-finals on Wednesday after twice coming from behind to draw 2-2 at the Etihad Stadium.

After making 16 changes between them, both Maresca and Brighton counterpart Fabian Hurzeler are set to revert to their full-strength sides when the teams meet in the Premier League at the Etihad tomorrow.

Table-toppers City are level on points with champions Arsenal, while third-placed Brighton are just five points behind the leading duo. "They (Brighton) are in a brilliant moment," said Maresca. "They are winning games, they are scoring goals. They are scoring many goals every game -- three, four, five, goals a game.

"I've watched all their Premier League games since we started, and since the first day –against Arsenal, (Crystal) Palace, Liverpool, they always go front foot, man to man. "We knew that this was a tough game and they're going to be exactly the same on Saturday," added Maresca.

Brighton went in front after 30 minutes when Malick Yalcouye steered Georginio Rutter's shot past Geronimo Rulli from five yards. Mateo Kovacic hauled City level 20 minutes later with a fine finish that curled into the far corner from 25 yards.

Rutter restored Brighton's lead two minutes after half-time, slotting home from Jaouen Hadjam's cut-back. Vitor Reis deflected in Rayan Cherki's 72nd-minute free-kick to equalise for City.

Kovacic's penalty was saved by Jason Steele in the shoot-out, but Rulli denied Brighton's Yasin Ayari and Lewis Dunk to send City into the last eight. City's season continues under the shadow of being found guilty last month on over 100 charges of breaking Premier League financial rules.

The club have appealed and deny any wrongdoing, but face a severe sanction unless they overturn the verdict. No punishment has yet been announced, however, and Maresca – who has repeatedly stated his complete trust in City's hierarchy – remains focused on on-field issues.

PREMIER LEAGUE

No surprise to Carrick he's still Man United manager

AFP
London

Under-pressure Manchester United manager Michael Carrick said he was "here to do my job" as he insisted he needed "no assurances" over his future at Old Trafford. Despite mounting criticism of United's dismal form, Carrick claimed he was unsurprised to still be in charge after a woeful run of results. The 45-year-old also gave his backing to United captain Bruno Fernandes.

Portugal midfielder Fernandes was left on the bench for Sunday's loss at home to Bournemouth following his criticism of Carrick's tactics in a recent 4-1 thrashing by Como. "He's the one that's kind of led the team so well for many a game and many a year, and he'll continue to do that," Carrick told reporters.

Carrick's position has been the subject of intense speculation after a miserable run of eight games without a win. Sunday's humbling 3-0 loss against Bournemouth left United one point above the Premier League relegation zone.

The 20-time English champions have won just two of 12 matches in all competitions this season, with a return of seven points from eight league games representing their worst start to a league season in 40 years. Carrick was widely expected to be sacked this week but he remains in charge after a show of support from the club's hierarchy.

Speaking ahead of tomorrow's match away to Chelsea, the former United and England midfielder was in defiant mood. Asked if he was still surprised to be in post, Carrick said: "No, I am here to do the best for the team, and I am desperate to make us better and improve things, so I'm not surprised, no."


Manchester United manager Michael Carrick (left) said midfielder Bruno Fernandes is fully committed to the club and will remain captain for the Premier League game at Chelsea. *(Reuters)*

Carrick was equally adamant he did not require public backing from United's owners or director of football Jason Wilcox. "I don't need assurances from anyone," he said. "I totally get the position, I get the job, the responsibility, I get what comes with that."

Questioned on Fernandes's position, Carrick said leaving him on the bench against Bournemouth was a "decision for the game".

"That's it. Bruno is fully committed to this football club. I've got no issues with that, we move forward. We're looking forward to the game at the weekend now," he said.

Carrick has retained the support of the United faithful, being warmly applauded by fans as he made his way down the tunnel following the Bournemouth defeat.

Moments later a chorus of boos erupted as the players left the pitch as supporters made clear where they think the blame lies for United's poor performances.

Carrick was handed a two-year deal in May after inspiring a revival as caretaker boss that saw United finish third in the Premier League and return to the Champions League after struggling under Ruben Amorim. But results have been so bad this season that former United captain Gary Neville, who played alongside Carrick at Old Trafford, said that "sometimes a manager needs sacking for their own good".

Carrick, however, was adamant he would not walk away from his job, saying: "I've said it before, I care about what the supporters think. I care about what we give them, and what we offer them, and what they see.

"I know this job, I know what it brings, I know what we need to do really to be better. I don't need anyone else to tell me anything else."

This season's drastic decline is an all-too-familiar story for United supporters, who last witnessed a Premier League title triumph 13 years ago under Alex Ferguson.

But Carrick insisted his much-criticised players felt the sting of poor results every bit as much as the fans.

"The boys are hungry," he said. "We're hurting because we haven't won enough football games. But there is an intensity, an edge, a hunger to do better."

SPOTLIGHT

Mbappe, Real and La Liga face long road to redemption in China

AFP
Hong Kong

Kylian Mbappe, Real Madrid and La Liga have apologised for the superstar striker's comments about Mao Zedong, but the damage to their reputation in China won't be easily or quickly repaired, experts say.

The France captain, one of the best footballers on the planet, is at the centre of a major row after a video emerged this week of him appearing to make fun of former leader Mao. Mbappe talked about being amused by an internet meme of his face photoshopped onto "some guy, think he's a Chinese dictator".

Mao remains officially revered as the hero of the communist revolution and founder of the People's Republic of China. He is blamed by historians for millions of deaths, but publicly mocking him is taboo, and Mbappe's remarks saw him become the latest foreign sports figure or entity to infuriate Beijing.

Major Chinese brands cut ties with the 27-year-old, and Spanish top-flight matches will be pulled from state television broadcaster *CCTV*. Chinese state media and social media users lined up to lambast Mbappe, although they were left in the dark about what exactly he said.

China has the world's second-biggest economy and can be hugely lucrative, and within two days the striker, his club Real Madrid, and La Liga all apologised. A spokesman for China's foreign ministry said the Beijing government took Mbappe's apology "seriously".

So is that the end of the matter?

"Viewed from a calm, objective and emotion-free standpoint, this is clearly a very damaging incident," Yan Qiang, a veteran sports commentator, told AFP. "It causes serious damage to the image of La Liga and Real Madrid in China. In the age of the mobile internet things blow up on social media quickly and emotions run high. An apology does not necessarily mean the end of the story. It's better to have an apology than no apology at all, but it's definitely not the end of the story."

The Mbappe furore and fallout is not an unfamiliar tale. Various overseas sports leagues or players have found themselves in hot water for comments on topics that are politically sensitive to China. China effectively cut ties with the NBA in 2019 after then-Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey tweeted his support for Hong Kong protesters.

NBA executives said Morey had the right to freedom of expression. In contrast, La Liga immediately distanced itself from what Mbappe said. The NBA, which along with football is the most popular sport in China, was wiped from *CCTV* for more than a year. NBA pre-season matches only returned to China last year. Australian National University lecturer Debby Chan called the NBA case – and now Mbappe – an illustration of China's consumer nationalism, where online sentiment and state media converge into "a spiral of outrage".



NBA commissioner Adam Silver said the league lost "hundreds of millions of dollars" over the split.

Spanish football also has a lot to lose. A source within La Liga told *AFP* that China and the United States alone finance the "majority" of international broadcasting rights, which were valued at 748mn euros ($834mn) for the 2024-25 season.

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.

Adam Zhang, founder of the Beijing-based Key-Solution Sports Consulting, said showing fast and heartfelt remorse was the first step.

"This will influence the decision on whether to continue the broadcast ban and, if so, for how long," he told *AFP*.

Sports commentator Yan cast doubt on whether the reputation of Mbappe, whose face has adorned drinks bottles and advertising campaigns in China, can ever fully recover.

"Judging by commercial sponsorships and big ad campaigns he appeared in during the World Cup, he has a huge influence in China," he said. "If that influence can't be sustained there can be no talk of commercial interests, and La Liga and Real Madrid will definitely be badly affected."

Yan said it was "genuinely hard to predict" what happens next. "In the short term, I'm certainly not optimistic," he added. "If they want to repair their image and the relationship, their future actions and behaviour will be key."