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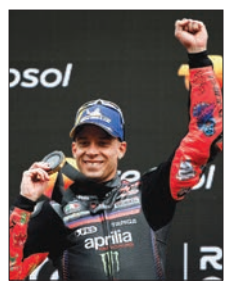
CRICKET | Page 2

Chaudhary's 66 helps Australia beat England in MCG thriller



MOTOGP | Page 3

Marquez's title party on hold after crash as Bezzecchi wins sprint

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FOOTBALL

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FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP QATAR

Chile lead comeback charge as Brazil and Colombia also win

Serbia made a winning start to their maiden campaign defeating Honduras 2-0 in Group L match

By Sport Reporter
Doha



Chile defeated Algeria from two goals down at the FIFA U-17 World Cup match at Aspire Zone yesterday.



Mexico joined Venezuela at the top of Group K after a narrow 1-0 victory over Romania.

Chile produced the comeback of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 so far, recovering from two goals down to beat Algeria 4-2 as Brazil, Colombia, Serbia and Venezuela also secured victories on an action-packed yesterday at the Aspire Zone.

Chile looked in serious trouble after Algeria raced into a two-goal lead through Ilyes Mekkaoui and Yacine Abed, but Rodrigo Catalan pulled one back before Lucas Lopez headed in the equaliser.

Amaro Perez then completed Chile's turnaround in the 34th minute, weaving through a challenge inside the area before prodding the ball home. Jonathan Guerrero sealed the victory in the 82nd minute after a mazy run and cool finish. The result put Chile top of Group J after the opening round, while Algeria were left bottom.

Brazil also had to work hard for their three points in Group I, edging Republic of Ireland 2-1 thanks to Eduardo's spectacular late winner. Rodrigo put Brazil ahead in the 30th minute with a pinpoint header, but Ireland responded just before half-time when Ryan Sheridan lashed a powerful right-footed shot into the net.

With the game seemingly heading for a draw, Eduardo collected the ball on the left, shifted it onto his right foot and unleashed a scorching effort that flew in off the underside of the bar in the 71st minute.

"It was a nervous debut. At half-time, we said to each other that we needed to play more bravely," Eduardo said. "I was able to cut inside, a region of the pitch that I also feel comfortable to play and, thank to God, I could score."

The victory put Brazil top of Group I, with Costa Rica and Tanzania sharing second place after their 2-2 draw.

Costa Rica appeared to be cruising after Jefrey Urbina and Jorshuad Pilarte put them two goals ahead inside the opening 15 minutes. Urbina produced a long-range stunner before Pilarte doubled the advantage with a superb free-kick.

Tanzania, however, refused to surrender on their World Cup debut. Faraji Kayanda pulled one back with a deflected effort shortly after the interval before heading in his second in the 73rd minute to complete the comeback and earn Tanzania a point.

In Group L, Colombia left it late to beat Japan 2-1, with Samuel Martinez converting a stoppage-time penalty after Japan had been reduced to 10 men. Colombia took the lead in the fifth minute when Miguel Agamez volleyed home after Adrian Mosquera's driving run down the right.

Japan levelled before half-time through Kakeru Saito, who finished after Maki Kitahara headed Riku Nakashima's deep cross across the face of goal.

Japan's hopes of holding on for a point were hit when Anthony Motosuna was sent off for a second yellow card with just under 15 minutes remaining.

Martinez then won a penalty in the 90th minute when he was brought down by Sosuke Hoshi. The Colombia No. 10 dusted himself down and converted the spot-kick in the third minute of added time.

Serbia also made a winning start to their maiden U-17 World Cup campaign, defeating Honduras 2-0. Substitute Tadija Samardzic made the difference, scoring twice after coming off the bench. He opened the scoring from close range five minutes after half-time before sealing the victory in the 71st minute with a towering header from Matej Strika's cross.

Venezuela also began Group K with three points after defeating Cameroon 2-1. Roman Lozada opened the scoring in the 29th minute, stealing in to divert Enmanuel Brito's header into the net.

Santiago Sanchez doubled Venezuela's advantage on the hour, side-footing home an Andy Saavedra cross.

Cameroon were reduced to 10 men when Eric Bolo was sent off for a second yellow card, but they set up a tense finish when Aviel Hentcho pulled one back in the second minute of stoppage time. Venezuela held on to claim victory.

Mexico joined Venezuela at the top of Group K after a narrow 1-0 victory over Romania. Adan Sanchez scored the only goal of the game in the 55th minute, collecting the ball just outside the area before unleashing an unstoppable left-footed strike into the top corner.

In Group J, Dominican Republic and Montenegro shared the spoils in a 1-1 draw between two U-17 World Cup debutants.

Mark Djokaj gave Montenegro the lead in the 12th minute with a neat finish, but Dominican Republic responded through Kamil Castillo, who rifled home the equaliser 12 minutes later. Both teams pushed for a winner after the break but had to settle for a point.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Mitrovic hat-trick fires Rayyan back to top after 5-goal thriller

By Sports Reporter
Doha



Al Rayyan's Aleksander Mitrovic celebrates after scoring a goal against Al Shahania during the Qatar Stars League match at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.



Action from the Al Wakrah vs Al Sailiya match played at the Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium.

Al Rayyan returned to the summit of the Qatar Stars League (QSL) standings after Serbian striker Aleksandar Mitrovic scored a hat-trick and Brazilian forward Gabriel Pereira struck twice in a thrilling 5-3 victory over Al Shahania at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

The concluding fixture of the 10th round produced an eight-goal spectacle, with Al Rayyan appearing to be cruising towards a comfortable victory before Al Shahania staged a spirited late fightback, scoring twice in stoppage time to reduce the deficit.

Mitrovic was the star of the evening, finding the net three times in a commanding attacking display, while Pereira's brace further strengthened Al Rayyan's grip on the contest.

Pereira opened the scoring in the 13th minute to give The Lions an early advantage before Mitrovic doubled their lead in the 24th minute.

The Serbian striker struck again just before half-time in the 45th minute, putting Al Rayyan firmly in control as they headed into the break with a commanding advantage.

Mitrovic completed his hat-trick in the 54th minute, converting from the penalty spot to extend the lead and put Al Rayyan in a seemingly unassailable position.

Al Shahania, however, refused to surrender and continued to battle despite the mounting deficit. Pereira added his second of the night in the 79th minute, taking Al Rayyan's tally to five and seemingly putting the result beyond doubt. The home side showed admirable determination in the closing stages, finding the net twice in stoppage time to give the scoreline a more respectable look and provide a dramatic finish to the encounter.

Despite the late resistance, Al Rayyan held on to secure all three points and return to the top of the QSL table.

The victory lifted Al Rayyan to 24 points from 10 matches, moving them above defending champions Al Sadd, who dropped to second place with 21 points.

Al Duhail also have 21 points and occupy third position.

For Al Shahania, the defeat leaves them For Al Shahania, the defeat leaves them at the 10th spot with just 10 points. For Al Shahania, Mohamed Surag (16th) and Bahaa Ellethy (90+2) and Francesco Antonucci (90+2 – Penalty) were on target.

Al Sailiya score maiden win

At the Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium, Al Sailiya registered their first win of the league this season as they edged Al Wakrah 3-2, courtesy a decisive 76th-minute strike from Younes Belhanda.

After a goalless first half, the contest burst into life in the second period, with five goals scored within 15 minutes.

Mohamed Taabouni broke the deadlock for Al Sailiya in the 61st minute before Luis Alberto restored parity for Al Wakrah just two minutes later.

Al Sailiya regained their advantage through Joselu in the 65th minute, but an own goal by Matias Nani three minutes later brought Al Wakrah level again at 2-2.

However, Belhanda struck in the 76th minute to restore Al Sailiya's lead and ultimately secure maximum points for his side who increased their tally to four points, while Al Wakrah remained on 11 points.

The victory capped an impressive attacking display from Al Sailiya, who showed resilience to regain the lead twice after being pegged back by their opponents in a fiercely contested second half.

CRICKET

Varma gives selectors something to think about ahead of World Cup

By Yash Mudgal
Doha

With the ICC ODI World Cup less than a year away, India's squad is almost finalised. But if the management and selectors are looking for a reliable backup middle-order option, Tilak Varma has certainly given them something to think about.

The India T20 vice-captain produced an impressive century for India A against Nepal in the Asia Cup Rising Stars clash in Doha on Friday, showcasing his ability to handle pressure and build an innings on a challenging surface.

Leading India A, Varma brought up his hundred off 107 deliveries, hitting six fours and four sixes along the way. He eventually departed for a well-compiled 107 off 113 balls.

What made the innings particularly impressive was the situation in which Varma walked out to bat. India A had already lost Abhishek Sharma and Ayush Badoni in quick succession when the left-hander arrived at the crease in the seventh over.

Rather than rushing his innings, Varma showed patience and composure on a slow, turning surface at the West End Park International Cricket Stadium. He gradually settled in before taking control of the innings.

His partnership with Kumar Kushagra proved crucial.

The duo stitched together a massive 206-run stand off 191 deliveries for the fourth wicket, with Kushagra also registering an excellent century, scoring 117 off 102 balls at No. 5.

The partnership provided India A with the momentum they needed and kept the scoreboard moving towards the 300-run mark.

Varma's impressive knock finally came to an end when he attempted to take on Nandan Yadav over long-on but found a fielder near the boundary.

India A went on to win the match by a massive 306 runs, bowling Nepal out for just 26. To be fair, Nepal were missing a few key players due to the ongoing Nepal Premier League, but that should not take away from the quality of Varma's innings.


India A captain Tilak Varma raises his bat after scoring a century against Nepal in their Asia Cup Rising Stars match in Doha on Friday.

The innings also provided an opportunity for India's chief selector, Pragyan Ojha, who was watching the contest closely. Varma, currently India's T20I vice-captain, has now put forward another strong performance that could strengthen his case for a bigger role in India's plans across formats.

A mixed New Zealand tour followed by encouraging performances

The century comes after a mixed T20I tour of New Zealand for Varma, where he managed 99 runs across five matches.

However, his unbeaten half-century in the second T20I played a decisive role in India's last-ball victory, earning him the Player of the Match award.

He subsequently featured in the India A versus New Zealand A first-class fixture, where he continued his good touch with an unbeaten 81.

Varma' red-ball performances add another dimension

His recent form has not been limited to white-ball cricket either. While captaining South Zone in the Duleep Trophy, Varma delivered an impressive run of performances and was named Player of the Series. He accumulated 266 runs across three innings, recording scores of 116 not out, 51 not out and 99 in the final.

With runs coming across formats, Varma is steadily building a strong case for himself as a dependable batting option.

India's preparations for the 2027 ODI World Cup are still some distance away, but performances like these will certainly give the selectors more options to consider.

On a difficult Doha surface, Varma demonstrated patience, temperament and the ability to anchor an innings while accelerating when required.

As a left-hander, Varma is also someone who can break the monopoly of right-handers in the batting line-up. For a team looking to strengthen its middle-order depth, this was an innings worth keeping an eye on.

FIRST T20

Australia edge England in MCG thriller

Young Nikhil Chaudhary leads with 66, Edwards also sparkles

Reuters
Melbourne


Australian batsman Nikhil Chaudhary plays a shot during the T20 international against England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday. *(AFP)*

Nikhil Chaudhary produced a decisive all-round performance before Jack Edwards struck the winning boundary as Australia secured a dramatic three-wicket victory over England with one ball to spare in the opening Twenty20 international at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday.

The hosts completed the highest successful T20I run chase at the MCG to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series and rebound from their 2-1 ODI series defeat by England.

Put in to bat, England recovered from an early wobble through a blistering counterattack led by captain Harry Brook, whose 28-ball 65 and a rapid partnership with Tom Banton powered the tourists to 187-9.

England's innings got off to a dreadful start as Joel Davies removed Phil Salt with the first ball of the match before Australia captain Mitchell Marsh struck soon afterwards to leave the visitors struggling at 13-2.

Australia's sloppy fielding proved costly. Brook was gifted multiple reprieves and made the hosts pay with a ferocious knock featuring four fours and six sixes, while Banton, who was also dropped twice, chipped in with 39 from 22 balls, including five fours and a six.

The pair transformed the innings with 97-run stand from just 41 deliveries for the third wicket, putting a 200-plus total firmly within England's reach.

However, Australia regained control later in the innings as England lost momentum after the Brook-Banton stand was broken, with no subsequent partnership worth more than 30 runs, while the hosts conceded only 37 runs and claimed four wickets in the final five overs to limit the damage.

Chaudhary and Edwards claimed two wickets apiece, while the remainder of Australia's attack chipped in with one wicket each.

Australia's pursuit was hardly straightforward. Jake Fraser-McGurk fell for one and, although Marsh made 37 from 32 balls, the hosts were forced to rebuild.

Wicketkeeper-batter Sam Harper contributed 32 before Chaudhary took charge with a superb 66 off 38 deliveries to keep Australia on course. Tim David added a valuable 20 as the chase went down to the wire.

Edwards sealed victory on the penultimate ball, slicing Sam Curran through the off side for four to finish unbeaten on 25 from 11 deliveries.

The win provided a welcome lift for Australia, who have also been dealing with renewed fallout from the 2018 ball-tampering scandal.

"It's been a pretty crazy 12 days (with the sandpapergate scandal)," Marsh said at the presentation ceremony.

"Today we saw the future of the Australia side with those young guys, and hopefully we can get back to enjoying that. They are a great bunch. We haven't spent a lot of time together but I could tell they were excited.

"There were a few nerves in and around the group but I want them to not care about making mistakes, enjoy the environment, and have the confidence they belong."

BRIEF SCORES
Australia 191 for 7 (Chaudhary 66, Marsh 37, Jacks 2-29) **beat England 187 for 9** (Brook 65, Banton 39, Chaudhary 2-21, Edwards 2-27) **by three wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

Rahul scores century, Gill falls for 98 as India eye big lead after day 3


India's KL Rahul celebrates his century during day three of the first Test against New Zealand at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. *(AFP)*

Reuters
Wellington

KL Rahul scored 136 and Shubman Gill a more aggressive 98 as India overhauled New Zealand's first-innings tally to take a 118-run lead on 486-4 at the close of play on the third day of the first Test in Wellington yesterday.

Gill blasted a six midway through the final session to reach the half-century mark for the 21st time in Tests and take his team past New Zealand's 368.

The India captain was saved by a DRS review of an lbw call off the bowling of Nathan Smith as the shadows crept across the ground but was dismissed two runs short of his 12th Test century in the final over of the day.

Jacob Duffy (1-180) came in for particular punishment on a day to forget for the New Zealand seamers but bowled Gill off his pads with the third ball of his 29th over and had a strong shout for lbw on new batter Anshul Kamboj with the last.

Rishabh Pant had been forced to shelter from a barrage of bouncers from the desperate New Zealand bowlers at the start of his innings but slipped the leash in the last half an hour to claim his 22nd Test fifty and finish the day 55 not out.

Seasoned opener Rahul had earlier played foil to his more flamboyant teammates, securing his 13th Test hundred soon after lunch before playing on to a Smith delivery to end his 290-ball knock in the final session.

The Basin Reserve pitch offered little for the bowlers and India's batters made hay all day in the Wellington sunshine, scoring 327 runs at the cost of three wickets to take a strong position in the match.

Devdutt Padikkal, who made 80 in a second-wicket partnership of 165 with Rahul early in the day, said India had no particular target they were batting towards.

"We are not looking too far ahead. It's important that we take one session at a time," he said.

"I think definitely we are in a really good position right now, but it's important that we really extend that lead as much as possible, so that we can put more pressure on them."

As at the start of the innings on Friday, the Indian batters took a while to get going but once they hit their stride they looked supremely comfortable on the lifeless surface and batted through the first session.

BRIEF SCORES
India 486 for 4 (Rahul 136, Gill 98, Jaiswal 85, Padikkal 80, Pant 55*, Jamieson 1-57) **lead New Zealand 368** (Nicholls 175*, Phillips 118, Bumrah 4-92, Akash Deep 3-53) **by 118 runs.**

Pakistan drop former captains Rizwan and Masood in contract overhaul

LAHORE: Pakistan's Cricket Board announced yesterday it would drop former captains Mohammad Rizwan and Shan Masood in a major overhaul of its central contract list.

The announcement comes a day after Pakistan won the second Test against Sri Lanka in Rawalpindi, marking a first series win in two years.

"We are testing new players and these contracts are devised to let players focus on their specific format," Pakistan selector Aaqib Javed told media.

The board overhauled the Test squad after the second Test in its disastrous 3-0 defeat against England, sending seven players home and sacking head coach Sarfaraz Ahmed.

White-ball head coach Mike Hesson was given the Test team in a bid to lift the country -- which is currently ninth and last in the 2025-27 World Test Championship cycle.

Besides Rizwan and Masood, white-ball specialist Saim Ayub, spinner Noman Ali and pace bowler Hasan Ali are among the 12 players that have been removed from contracts.

LIST OF PLAYERS OFFERED CENTRAL CONTRACTS
Contract (Test and ODI): Babar Azam and Salman Ali Agha
Contract (Test): Azan Awais, Mohammad Abbas, Sajid Khan and Saud Shakeel
Contract (ODI and T20I): Abrar Ahmed, Arafat Minhas, Fakhar Zaman, Faheem Ashraf, Haris Rauf and Shaheen Shah Afridi
Contract (T20I): Hasan Nawaz, Maaz Sadaqat, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Shadab Khan and Usman Tariq

Bangladesh A, Sri Lank A post wins at Asia Cup Rising Stars


Bangladesh A players celebrate beating Afghanistan A in their Asia Cup Rising Stars match at West End International Cricket Stadium in Doha yesterday. Afghanistan A were bowled out for 174 in 45 overs. Bangladesh A won by 1 wicket after finishing at 176-9 off 45.5 overs.


Sri Lanka A players celebrate a wicket during their 24-run win over Hong Kong at University of Doha for Science and Technology ground in Doha yesterday. Batting first, Sri Lanka finished at 284-9 off 50 overs. In reply, Hong Kong were restricted to 260-9 in 50 overs.

MOTOGP

Marquez's world title party put on hold after crash

Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi leads from start to finish to win sprint

Reuters
Portimao, Portugal

Marc Marquez's chance to clinch an eighth MotoGP title yesterday ended in the gravel when the Ducati rider crashed out of third place on the penultimate lap of the Portuguese Grand Prix sprint which was won by Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi.

Marquez had needed to outscore title rival Jorge Martin by just two points to be crowned champion on Saturday but the Ducati rider lost control on lap 11 and went out.

Aprilia's Martin eventually finished fifth to reduce Marquez's lead to 55 points ahead of Sunday's race, where Marquez can still seal the title with a round to spare.

Trackhouse rider Raul Fernandez finished second while Gresini Racing's Alex Marquez completed the podium.

The crash also keeps alive Bezzecchi's very slim title hopes but the Italian remains 62 points adrift and will need Marquez to score no further points this season to stay in contention.

"I'm so happy. The sprint has been like a torture for me till now, so very, very happy to make this kind of result," said Bezzecchi after his first sprint victory of the season. "Huge thanks to the team because they never stop believing in me... Now we continue working for tomorrow and we will try our best also in the longer race (on Sunday)."



Team Aprilia Racing's Italian rider Marco Bezzecchi celebrates after winning the sprint race at the Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao yesterday. *(AFP)*

MARQUEZ EXERCISES CAUTION IN THE SPRINT

Bezzecchi had broken the lap record to snatch pole and the Italian had the perfect start off the line while Fernandez found a way past a cautious Marquez to move up to second.

Bezzecchi and Fernandez peeled away at the front and Marquez seemed to be holding up the rest of the pack while his brother Alex moved up to fourth behind him, with Martin back in seventh despite his best efforts to overtake riders.

Martin continued to look for openings and although he moved up to sixth when he overtook VR46 Racing's Fabio di Giannantonio, he could not find a way past KTM's Pedro Acosta, who will be Marquez's teammate at Ducati next season.

However, light rain had started to fall across the track and Marc crashed out right in front of his brother Alex, sliding into the gravel as shocked spectators looked on in disbelief.

"Everything was going really under control... But then we arrive at turn seven and suddenly it was this slight rain that caused him to crash," Alex said.

"Then for three to four corners I was super slow because I don't want to crash!"

Alex then kept Acosta at bay on the last lap to secure the final podium spot, finishing less than half a second ahead of the KTM rider.

Report: Drivers at Qatar GP must pit twice over tire concerns



LAS VEGAS: Drivers at next week's Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix will need to make at least two pit stops for mandated tire changes, *The Athletic* reported yesterday.

Pirelli, the F1 tire supplier, is limiting cars racing next weekend at the Lusail International Circuit to 27 laps on a set of tires. With 57 laps to run, that means at least two stops in the pit.

Per *The Athletic*, the difficult Lusail track is hard on tires because its high-speed corners lead to tire wear and degradation. This is not the first time that Pirelli has installed a lap limit on the tires. In 2023, it was 18 laps, and in 2025, drivers could go as far as 25 laps before a pit stop.

In 2024, when no tire mandates were in place, the tires of cars driven by Lewis Hamilton and Carlos Sainz were punctured during the race. Max Verstappen is the defending champion in Qatar.

- Reuters

FOCUS

FSG still in Cadillac talks after window lapses

Reuters
Las Vegas

Fenway Sports Group allowed its exclusive negotiating window to purchase a stake in the Cadillac Formula One team to expire but remains among the prospective buyers, *Front Office Sports* reported yesterday.

The ownership group behind the Boston Red Sox and Liverpool FC allowed its negotiating window to expire without reaching an agreement with Mark Walter, whose TWG Global controls the F1 team.

Discussions are continuing despite the expiration of the exclusive period, although two sources told Front Office Sports that negotiations have encountered difficulties.

Walter values the Cadillac team at no less than $3bn, according to Sportico, with at least seven prospective buyers interested in acquiring a stake.

The size of Walter's ownership stake has not been publicly disclosed, and the identities of the other prospective buyers remain unknown.

FSG already has a presence in motorsports through its investment in NASCAR's RFK Racing, but a move into Formula One could face an additional obstacle.

The F1 team made its debut this season with backing from General Motors and TWG Motorsports, which also has interests in IndyCar's Andretti Global and NASCAR's Spire Motorsports.

The potential F1 sale represents another step for Walter in the restructuring of his sports holdings.

FOOTBALL

PSG lose Doue to knee injury in win over Nice

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain star Desire Doue was stretchered off in tears after suffering what looked like a nasty knee injury as the reigning French and European champions beat Nice 3-2 in Ligue 1 yesterday.

Doue went down after twisting awkwardly late in the first half as he tried to control the ball, shortly after scoring to put PSG 2-1 ahead.

He looked in agony as he clutched his right knee, and the match was stopped for five minutes to allow Doue to receive treatment before being carried off to a backdrop of applause from the crowd at the Allianz Riviera stadium.

PSG will now be dreading discovering the extent of the injury, having lost Khvicha Kvaratskhelia to a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee playing against Barcelona last month.

The Georgian winger is unlikely to return this season, and Doue looks set for a significant spell on the sidelines too.

The 21-year-old French international, who can play on the wing or in midfield, has been arguably PSG's best player this season after playing a key role in PSG's Champions League triumphs in each of the last two campaigns. He has notably scored three goals in three Champions League appearances this season for PSG, who sold Bradley Barcola to Liverpool at the beginning of the campaign and have seen Ousmane Dembele struggle with his fitness recently.

Earlier, Algerian international Mohamed Amoura had given Nice the lead only for Senny Mayulu to equalise with a penalty awarded after a VAR check following a handball in the home box.

Doue -- who was wearing a mouthguard after one of his teeth became dislodged while playing for France against Italy during the international break -- put PSG ahead a minute after that goal, turning in at the back post from an Achraf Hakimi assist for his sixth of the season in all competitions.

His replacement Ferran Torres scored PSG's third in the 85th minute, controlling in the box before finishing on the turn for his eighth goal of the season -- but first in two months.

Ali Abdi pulled one back for Nice in stoppage time, but their run of three straight wins was ended as PSG made it 12 victories on the bounce.

Eight of those wins have come in Ligue 1, in which PSG are now five points clear at the top from Lille, who host Lyon later.

Nice are sixth.

TENNIS

Alcaraz fights hard to beat Shelton, reaches Turin final

AFP
Turin, Italy

Carlos Alcaraz rallied past American Ben Shelton 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) yesterday to book his spot in the ATP Finals title match as he bids to lift the trophy for the first time.

The world number three showed signs of vulnerability but fought through to reach today's final where he will face either world number one Alexander Zverev or Russia's Daniil Medvedev.

Alcaraz lost to Italian Jannik Sinner in the season-ender's showpiece match last year and will aim to go one better this time around in Turin.

He has been dealing with a left-thigh injury since Wednesday but, playing with his leg heavily strapped, he extended his winning streak to 13 matches, a run that includes title-winning campaigns in Vienna and Paris.

However, it was a hard-fought victory as the Spaniard struggled to play with his usual freedom before pulling through in just over two hours.


Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates a point against USA's Ben Shelton during their semi-final at the ATP Finals in Turin yesterday. *(AFP)*

"I was a little bit frustrated at the beginning because I didn't start the match the way that I wanted to, to be honest," said the seven-time Grand Slam winner.

"But I'm just happy that I came back in the second set... Stayed my step, focused on my things, and ended up playing good tennis."

Having dropped only 15 games across his three round-robin matches without once losing his own serve, Alcaraz was broken in his very first service game against Shelton.

The 23-year-old quickly fell behind 3-0 and was unable to claw his way back into the set, despite having a break-back point at 4-2. Shelton closed out the set with a love service game, taking a one-set lead after just 31 minutes of play.

In the second set, Alcaraz rediscovered his aggressive form, gaining the upper hand by breaking to lead 5-3 before levelling at one set all on his own serve.

The deciding set remained tight, with neither player facing a break point, forcing the match into a tie-break.

Shelton faltered with two unforced errors allowing the Spaniard to pull ahead 5-1, a deficit from which the American could not recover.

"I think the third set was even closer. I think he raised the level a little bit from the second set, myself as well," said Alcaraz.

"Great points, great games, and just happy to play great tennis in the tie-breaker. I think it's what matters, to be honest. I'm excited for tomorrow and happy with everything today."

Earlier in the month, Alcaraz beat Shelton in the Paris Masters final to win the title for the first time, a measure of revenge on the American who had ended his US Open title defence earlier in the season.

CHERIF CLAIMS DIAMOND TOUR AT HATHAB ROUND SIX



Cyrine Cherif in action in the on the final day of the sixth leg of the 10th Longines Hathab – Qatar Equestrian Tour at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena.

DOHA: Cyrine Cherif emerged victorious in the 150cm Diamond Tour, delivering the standout performance on the final day of the sixth leg of the 10th Longines Hathab – Qatar Equestrian Tour, which concluded yesterday at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena.

Riding Triple T Calamando, Cherif secured the top spot with a time of 62.86 seconds. Khalid Abdulaziz al-Eid finished second aboard Rakar in 63.45 seconds, while Abdulaziz Fahad al-Eid claimed third place on Q-Hayen in 69.31 seconds.

The winners were honoured by Mohammed Saleh al-Marri, Head of the Tournament's Facilities and Logistics Committee.

In the 120cm Bronze Tour, Khalifa Abdullah al-Attiyah claimed victory aboard Elio, recording 57.29 seconds. Ali Omar al-Ansari finished second on Nikita in 62.26 seconds, while Sharida Nasser al-Kaabi took third place with Extra Bam in 66.53 seconds. The team competition saw Al Shaqab take first place with a combined time of 124.31 seconds, followed by Al Bida' in second with 131.54 seconds and Ajwad Bronze in third with 129.19 seconds. The awards were presented by Saeed al-Rashdi, Deputy Tournament Director.

The Future Riders 90cm two-phase competition saw Saud Abdullah al-Mohannadi take first place in 43.75 seconds aboard Beyonce. Al-Najla Abdullah al-Khulaifi finished second on Violet in 44.81 seconds, while Sultan Abdulaziz al-Sada placed third riding Argileth in 44.84 seconds. Vasco Manuel Coelho, Vice President of the Portuguese Equestrian Federation, presented the awards.

In the Preliminary Dressage competition, Nadine Ejazakhtar claimed first place with 69.445 points, followed by Judy Leader with 67.699 points and Khalid Mohammed al-Ghanim with 64.762 points.

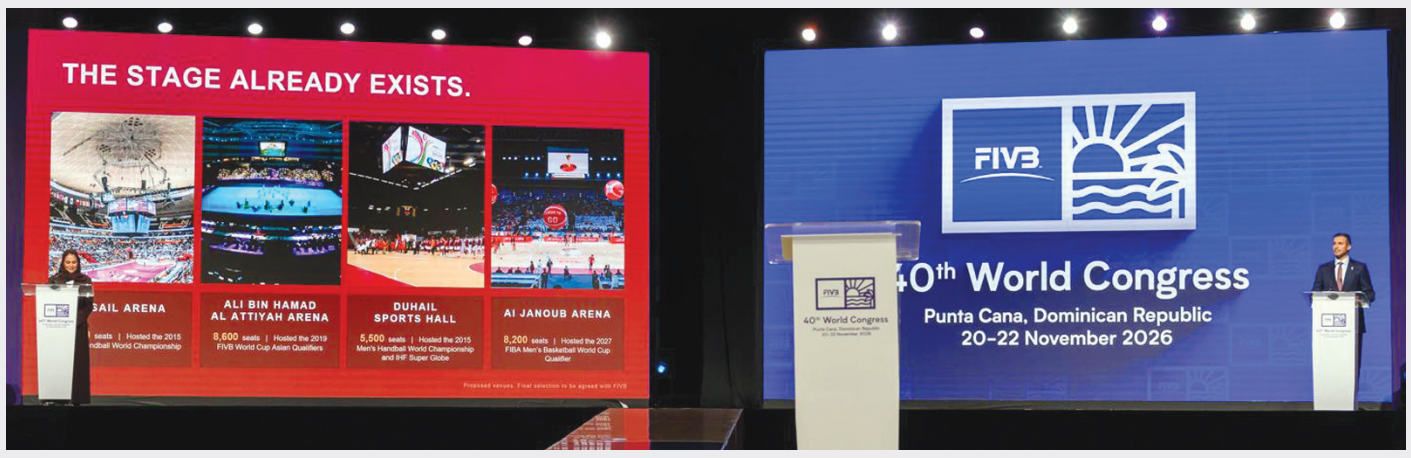
Hamad Nasser al-Marri topped the Introductory Dressage Silver Tour with 70.403 points, while Michelle Grimes finished second with 69.375 points and Mohammed Abdullah al-Marri placed third with 66.139 points.

In the Junior category, al-Marri secured first and third places with scores of 70.403 and 63.042 points, respectively, while Mohammed Abdullah al-Marri took second with 66.350 points.

Jassim Al-Jaham al-Kuwari dominated the Dressage Gold Tour, taking first place with 72.075 points. Youssef Essamlali finished second with 68.350 points, while Michelle Grimes came third with 67.934 points. In the Team Dressage competition, Ajwad Dressage secured the title with 137.964 points.

Triple E finished second with 134.459 points, narrowly ahead of Spears, which collected 134.323 points. The dressage winners received their awards from judge Maryam al-Jaidah.

Qatar showcases preparations for 2029 FIVB Men's World Championship at FIVB Congress



The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) participated in the opening day of the 40th FIVB World Congress in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic:, highlighting Qatar's preparations to host the 2029 FIVB Men's World Championship, the first edition to be staged in the Middle East and Arab world. Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the QOC, reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to developing volleyball, highlighting the successful hosting of the FIVB U17 World Championship and the partnership with FIVB to establish an international centre of excellence for beach volleyball in Doha. Sheikha Asma al-Thani, Director of Marketing, Communications and International Cooperation at the QOC, presented 'The Road to 2029', outlining Qatar's vision for the championship, which will bring together 32 national teams for 64 matches over 17 days. The presentation highlighted Qatar's world-class infrastructure, compact hosting model and proven experience in delivering major international events, alongside its ambition to expand participation and create a lasting legacy for volleyball across the region.





PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City stumble again in Fulham draw, Arsenal held

CHELSEA SUFFER AN EMBARRASSING 4-1 DEFEAT AGAINST LEEDS

AFP
Manchester

Manchester City's winless Premier League run extended to four games after a damaging 1-1 draw against Fulham, while leaders Arsenal were held to a dramatic 2-2 draw at Newcastle yesterday.

Third-placed City trail six points behind Arsenal as their title challenge wilts in the wake of a guilty verdict on widespread breaches of financial rules. The club deny any wrongdoing but are likely to be hit with a severe points penalty, and possibly even relegation, unless they overturn the ruling on appeal.

After seven consecutive league wins to start Enzo Maresca's reign, the off-field uncertainty appears to have derailed City's quest to topple Arsenal. Fulham had lost every meeting against City for the past 15 years but got their reward after striking early through Rodrigo Muniz at the Etihad Stadium.

City were furious that Erling Haaland's equaliser before half-time was controversially ruled out as the Norwegian was deemed to have kicked the ball out of the grasp of Bernd Leno. Elliot Anderson's sweet strike saved City from a fourth consecutive defeat, but they were booed off after another disappointing display.

"Almost 80 percent of the goals we concede are in the first 20 minutes and it's for sure something we need to improve," said Maresca.

At St James' Park, Eberechi Eze put Arsenal ahead in the 33rd minute with a clinical close-range finish from Kai Havertz's pass. But Newcastle rocked Mikel Arteta's men in the second half.



Manchester City's Elliot Anderson celebrates scoring the equalising goal during the Premier League match against Fulham at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester yesterday. *(AFP)*

Harvey Barnes fired Newcastle's 49th-minute equaliser from William Osula's pass after Arsenal midfielder Martin Odegaard conceded possession cheaply. When Dan Burn headed down from Lewis Hall's corner, Malick Thiaw pounced to give Newcastle the lead with a 62nd-minute tap-in.

Noni Madueke saved Arsenal from only their second league defeat this season, cutting inside for a low drive that eluded Lukas Hornicek's weak attempted save in the 78th minute. Arsenal are six points above second-placed Brighton, who can close the gap with a win at Hull on Sunday.

Leeds climbed to sixth place after coming from behind to stun Chelsea with a 4-1 win at Stamford Bridge. Emmanuel Emegha's first Chelsea goal opened the scoring, but the Blues have now lost four of their last five matches to put manager Xabi Alonso under scrutiny. Noah Okafor quickly levelled for Leeds before Dominic Calvert-Lewin put the visitors in front from the penalty spot. Okafor delivered a thumping finish into the top corner and Brenden Aaronson delivered the final blow in stoppage time as Leeds savoured a famous win at the home of one of their historic rivals. "We need to be tougher. It's something mandatory in this competition. Today we were in a fragile moment mentally," Alonso said.

Bournemouth climbed into the Champions League places as their sensational run continued with a 2-0 win over Nottingham Forest.

Evanilson struck for the sixth consecutive league game and Justin Kluivert added a second as the Cherries' winning run in all competitions stretched to nine games.

Teenager Luca Williams-Barnett was the star of Tottenham's 2-0 win over Ipswich as he netted on his first Premier League start before Dominic Solanke added a second to secure a fourth win in five for Roberto De Zerbi's men.

Thomas Frank's arrival at Crystal Palace failed to inspire a turnaround in the Eagles' fortunes as they lost 3-2 at Coventry to remain bottom of the table.

Dwight McNeil's late own goal gave the Sky Blues a vital victory in their quest for survival back in the top flight after four goals were shared in a thrilling first half.

Sunderland frustrated Aston Villa in a 0-0 draw that lifted the Black Cats above Manchester United in the relegation zone.

Mauricio Pochettino will take charge of United for the first time at Liverpool on Sunday with the Red Devils second bottom of the table.

HORSE RACING

AF Mezan delivers stunning late turn of foot to claim Al Gharafa Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Abdulrahman Mohammed al-Attiyah's AF Mezan produced an impressive performance to break his maiden at the fifth attempt, landing the Al Gharafa Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. The victory came on the grey colt's third start in Qatar and highlighted his considerable potential over seven furlongs.

Ridden with confidence by Marco Casamento, AF Mezan settled patiently before unleashing a decisive late acceleration inside the final 200 metres to sweep past his rivals and secure a comfortable victory in the contest for three-year-old Purebred Arabians. The result also completed a notable double for trainer Jassim al-Ghazali and a treble for Casamento, underlining the jockey's outstanding afternoon at the Al Uqda meeting.

Breaking from stall two, AF Mezan initially settled in third before Casamento gradually restrained him, allowing the colt to settle further back in the field. Grendel Al Shahania was among those ahead of him as the early pace began to take shape.

Assufurrat briefly set the tempo before AZ Hadi moved to the front, with Urgence and Gossip Al Cem tracking the leaders. Approaching the home turn, AZ Hadi and Urgence began to establish an advantage, appearing to have positioned themselves to fight out the finish.

AF Mezan, however, was quietly making progress through the field, with Casamento conserving his mount's energy for the decisive stages.

Urgence took command entering the straight as AZ Hadi began to weaken, while Gossip Al Cem and Grendel Al Shahania emerged as serious challengers. With 300 metres remaining, Urgence looked well placed to claim the honours.

But the race changed dramatically when Casamento asked AF Mezan for his effort.

Producing a devastating turn of foot inside the final 200 metres, the grey colt accelerated past his tiring rivals with remarkable ease, quickly putting daylight between himself and the chasing pack to claim an emphatic maiden victory.

It was an authoritative performance that demonstrated both AF Mezan's developing ability and his capacity to deliver under pressure. For al-Attiyah, the breakthrough success marks an encouraging milestone in the colt's career, while al-Ghazali and Casamento had further reason to celebrate following their respective doubles and trebles.

In the card opener, Gold Medallist continued his upward trajectory with an impressive victory in the opening race, the 1400m Thoroughbred Handicap (0-70) for three-year-old+, a Class 6 contest featuring 11 runners. The four-year-old bay gelding, owned by Mohammed Shaheen al-Kuwari and trained by Jassim al-Ghazali, doubled his career tally on his fourth outing of the campaign, scoring by 1¾ lengths under Marco Casamento.

Hazaa Al Shahania made a winning return to action with a dramatic last-gasp victory in race four of the day, the 1200m Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (0-65), a Class 6 contest featuring eight runners. The six-year-old chestnut gelding, representing Al Ghazali Stud, put his winless previous campaign firmly behind him with a ½-length success for trainer Nasser al-Ghazali, under Casamento.

RESULTS
Al Gharafa Cup
WINNERS:
(Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
Al Gharafa Cup, 3YO Purebred Arabian
AF Mezan (FR), Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-65, 3yo+
Muataz (QA), Hamad al-Jehani, Soufiane Saadi
Purebred Arabian Handicap 65-85, 4yo+
Caid Du Soleil (FR), Rudy Nerbonne, Patrick Cosgrave
Local Purebred Arabian Novice, 3yo+
Mutheer Al Naif (QA), Mohamed Khaled Elahmed, Alberto Sanna
Thoroughbred Handicap 55-75, 3yo+
Son Of Sarabi (GB), Mohammed Balasim al-Jumaili, Soufiane Saadi
Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 0-65, 3yo+
Hazaa Al Shahania (QA), Nasser al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
Local Thoroughbred Rated Maiden, 3-6yo
Nice Heart (QA), Abdulla Dhabit Aldosari, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri
Thoroughbred Handicap 0-60, 3yo+
Zaaeem (GB), Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki, Patrick Cosgrave
Thoroughbred Handicap 0-70, 3yo+
Gold Medallist (IRE), Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento



Jockey Marco Casamento rides AF Mezan to win in Al Gharafa Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURE:** *Juhaim*

Al-Sowaidi wins opening round of Qatar Off-Road Rally



Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation's (QMMF) Executive Director Amro al-Hamad poses with the participants of the Round 1 of the Qatar Off-Road Championship Rally. Nouef Hassan al-Sowaidi won the overall race. Driving a Can-Am Maverick alongside Lithuanian co-driver Aisvydas Paliukenas, al-Sowaidi clocked 40:33.8 to secure the overall victory. He also claimed first place in Class 2. Mohammed Almarri finished second overall in a Peugeot 208 with French co-driver Pierre Delorme, recording 41:23.5. He took the Class 4 victory. Mohamad Abdulrahman al-Attiyah and Tamer al-Hijazeen finished third overall in a Can-Am Maverick with a time of 41:32.7. Ahmed al-Kuwari and Abdulla al-Khelaifi completed the overall top five.