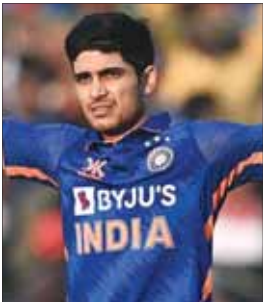


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GULF TIMES SPORT

TENNIS

McDonald stuns ailing Nadal as rain causes havoc at Australian Open

Page 3

FOOTBALL

Thousands throng Khalifa Stadium to greet PSG stars

PSG players toured Qatar's landmark destinations Lusail Marina, Mina District and were treated to local cuisines

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) players were greeted by 30,000 fans at the Khalifa International Stadium as the French champions trained yesterday during their promotional tour to Qatar.

Led by superstars Lionel Messi, Kylian Mbappa and Neymar, the PSG players trained in front of the fans for close to two hours. Today, Messi and PSG will travel to Riyadh to play a friendly against a select side made up of players from Cristiano Ronaldo's new club Al Nassr and their Saudi rivals Al Hilal at the King Fahd Stadium.

The loudest cheer was unsurprisingly reserved for Messi, who returned to Qatar exactly a month after leading Argentina to World Cup glory at the Lusail Stadium. The PSG players had earlier toured Qatar's landmark destinations Lusail Marina, Mina District and were treated to exquisite local cuisines.

Captain Marquinhos said the Qatar tour gave players an opportunity to unwind ahead of a hectic schedule and to meet fans. "We can keep the positive things from this tour. If we always look at the bad things, we don't move forward. We always train alone at the Camp des Loges in Paris, here we have the public who can give us a little energy. We have an important second part of the season, I hope this Qatar tour will boost us," the Brazilian defender said.

Coach Christophe Galtier was confident that PSG's friendly in Saudi Arabia will be of a competitive level and was excited at the prospect of the rivalry between long-term rivals Messi and Ronaldo.

"It may not look like a friendly match, it won't be a training match. There are so many personalities and competitors on the pitch that we will have a good level match. The presence of Messi and Ronaldo gives real sporting interest. It's a proper confrontation, not a charity game," he insisted.

"The match will be good for international football, for football in this region. It's a great promotion of our sport. I think there will be an audience," he added.

Galtier and PSG have been under pressure after the Parisians slumped to their second defeat of the season in a 1-0 loss to Stade Rennais on Sunday as their Ligue 1 lead was slashed to three points. Halfway through the Ligue 1 campaign, PSG are three points clear of Lens and five ahead of Marseille, who they still have to play away from home.

PSG lost despite fielding Messi, Mbappe and Neymar together for the first time since the World Cup. They are yet to rediscover the form they enjoyed before the season paused for the World Cup. Now a crunch Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich is on the horizon – the first leg in Paris is on February 14.

"We must use this exhibition match in Riyadh and Monday's French Cup



Paris Saint-Germain players train in front of 30,000 passionate fans at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday during their promotional tour to Qatar. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam



Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (centre) trains with teammates Neymar, Sergio Ramos and Kylian Mbappe at the Khalifa International Stadium.



PSG coach Christophe Galtier speaks to reporters yesterday.

match against (sixth-division minnows) Pays de Cassel both to find rhythm on an individual level and more coherence on a collective level. As a team we have to perform like we did in the first half of the season. We have struggled after the resumption of the league," said Galtier.

FOCUS

Gulf Cup success has exceeded our expectations: AGCFF president



Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation president Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani.

By Sports Reporter
Basra, Iraq

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, President of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF), yesterday said that the success of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup – being held in Iraq for the first time in four decades – has exceeded 'all expectations'.

Speaking during his appearance on popular talk show 'Al Majlis' on Al Kass channel, Sheikh Hamad added the Iraqi people had the greatest role to play in the

success of the tournament that ends today with a final between Iraq and Oman. Sheikh Hamad, who is also the president of Qatar Football Association (QFA), said packed houses at two venues Basra International Stadium and Al Minaa Stadium reflected the love of the game Iraq football fans have.

"Certainly, the organisational matters of the tournament witnessed some errors, but this is a natural thing and something that always happens in tournaments. If I were to evaluate it by a certain percentage, I would give it 8 out of 10," Sheikh Hamad said.

"From the beginning, I was confident that Iraq would be able to host the championship in a sound fashion, but I did not expect this great success, which restored the spirit and dynamism of the Arabian Gulf Cup and this is very important to AGCFF," he added.

"With all objectivity, I have to say the technical level of the matches did not live up to expectations but in general, the technical performance can be evaluated at 5 out of 10," he said.

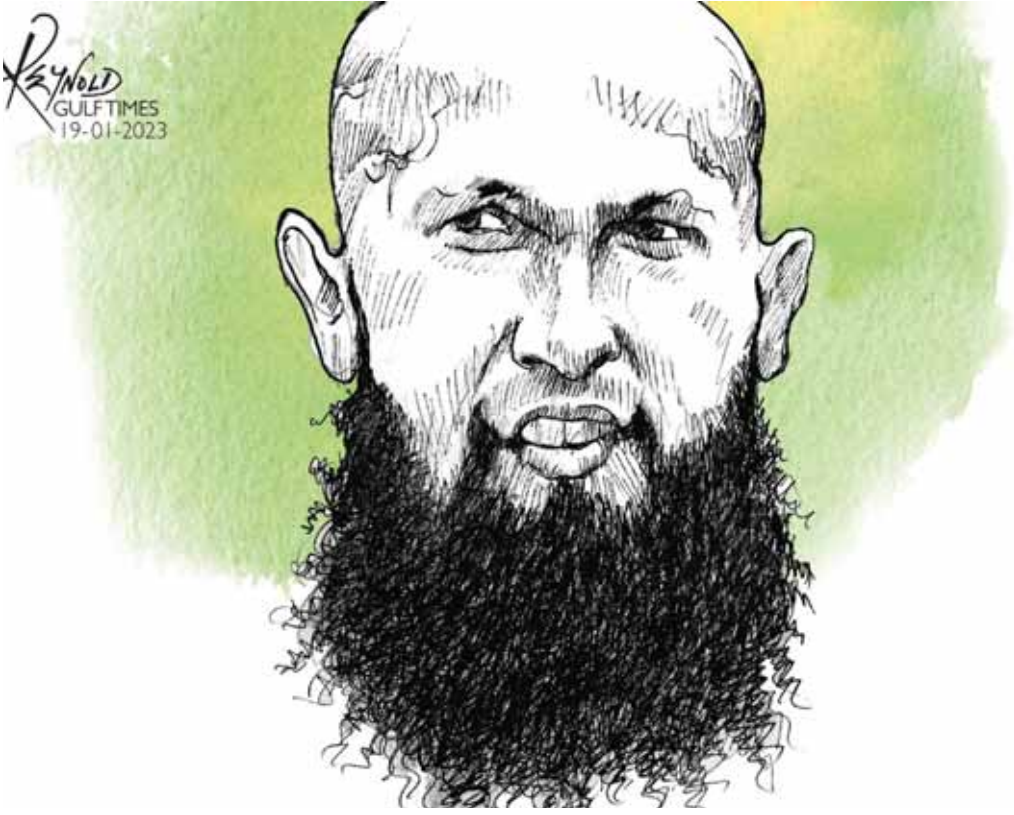
The AGCFF president said he would like to see Kuwait follow the example of Iraq in organizing a successful tournament at the end of 2024. He revealed there's a recommendation from participating teams to increase the duration of the tournament to allow players adequate rest between matches.

"We discussed a lot of matters during our meetings on the sidelines of the tournament, including inviting a team from outside the AGCFF umbrella following approval from the ruling body," Sheikh Hamad said.

Regarding his desire to run for a new term as president of the AGCFF, Sheikh Hamad said he had not made a final decision on the matter.

RETIREMENT

All-time great Amla ends long playing career



AFP
Johannesburg

Hashim Amla ended his 22-year playing career yesterday, with his legacy secure as one of South Africa's all-time cricketing greats.

English county Surrey announced they had been informed by Amla, 39, that he would not be returning as a player this year after helping the side to win the English county championship in 2022.

Surrey's director of cricket Alec Stewart lauded Amla for his "phenomenal career".

"He will quite rightly go down as a great of the game. Hashim is a fantastic cricketer and a wonderful person. Everyone at Surrey wishes him the best in the future," Stewart said. "He has been an incredible resource for the team to learn from on and off the field. As well as posting big scores at vital moments, he has also shown his willingness to dig in and do what is needed to get his team a result in tough games. I

can't thank him enough for what he has done for Surrey and hold him up as an example to all young players of what a true professional looks like."

Even in the twilight of his career, Amla's impact was plain to see in his final two seasons at Surrey, in which he contributed five more centuries including a best of 215 not out against Hampshire in 2021, and provided crucial support to captain Rory Burns as a senior figure in the dressing-room.

"I have great memories of the Oval ground and to finally leave it as a player fills me with immense gratitude for what has been," Amla said.

"A sincere thank you to Alec Stewart and the entire Surrey staff, players and Members for their support. The Surrey ship runs so professionally that it would make any international player feel a sense of honour just to be involved with.

"I wish them all the best and many more trophies."

Amla was a key member of one of South Africa's most powerful teams when they clinched the

Test championship mace with a series win in England in 2012.

Batting in a line-up which included captain Graeme Smith, Jacques Kallis and AB de Villiers, Amla made a South African record 311 not out in the first Test at The Oval in London.

It remains South Africa's only triple century in Test match cricket.

It was one of Amla's 28 centuries in a 124-match Test career during which he scored 9,282 runs at an average of 46.64.

He had an even better average in one-day internationals, hitting 27 centuries in 181 matches and scoring 8,113 runs at 49.46.

STYLISH ALL THE WAY

Amla spent much of his Test career batting at number three but opened the batting in one-day games, setting records for reaching each thousand-run milestone between 2,000 and 7,000 in the fewest innings.

He made his first-class debut for a Kwa-Zulu-Natal team, against the touring England team, as a 16-year-old in December 1999 and made his Test debut

against India in Kolkata five years later.

He struggled at the start of his Test career and was criticised for a notably angled backlift.

Amla made what he described as minor adjustments to his technique and became one of the most stylish players in world cricket with his fluent cover driving and wristy strokes to the leg-side.

Amla captained South Africa in 14 Tests but never seemed fully at ease in the role and resigned midway through a series against England in 2015/16 after scoring a double century in a high-scoring draw at Newlands in Cape Town.

He retired from international cricket after the 2019 Cricket World Cup and did not play in South African domestic cricket after the 2018/19 season.

But he continued to be a prolific run-scorer for Surrey, scoring 1,712 runs at an average of 48.91 in his last two seasons.

Amla is currently a batting consultant with the MI Cape Town franchise in the SA20 league.

BAVUMA BACK AS SOUTH AFRICA CAPTAIN AFTER MISSING T20 TOURNAMENT

Johannesburg: Temba

Bavuma will return from the sidelines of South Africa's new Twenty20 tournament to captain the country in three one-day internationals against England later this month. Bavuma is the only player in the 16-man squad who is not involved in the SA20 tournament, which will take a break to accommodate the one-day series in Bloemfontein and Kimberley from January 27 to February 1. Bavuma, South Africa's captain in both one-day and T20 formats, did not attract a bid from any of the six SA20 franchises. The one-day series is part of the World Cup Super League. South Africa are currently languishing in 11th place in the league. Only the top eight sides will qualify automatically for the Cricket World Cup in India later this year. South Africa probably need to win at least three of their remaining five fixtures to qualify. South Africa forfeited a series in Australia earlier this month in order to have their leading players available for the SA20. The squad includes burly fast bowler Sisanda Magala, the leading wicket-taker in South Africa's one-day domestic competition earlier in the season. Magala had missed selection for several squads and series because he had been unable to meet Cricket South Africa's fitness guidelines, notably the ability to run two kilometres in under 8min 30sec. "We are pleased with the inclusion of Sisanda and the commitment he has shown to meet the fitness standards required," said selection convener Victor Mpitsang. But there was no place for leading domestic run-scorer



Ryan Rickelton, who was not selected for a recent Test tour of Australia because of concerns about his fitness because of an ankle injury. Rickelton, who said he had deliberately delayed surgery in order to go on the tour and to play in the SA20, scored two hundreds and two fifties in seven innings. Mpitsang said Rickelton was not selected, although he was considered because the injury risk for a home series was considered less than for away tours. Newly-appointed Test coach Shukri Conrad will take charge of the side because new white-ball coach Rob Walter is still in New Zealand and will only start his job on February 1.

Squad: Temba Bavuma (captain), Quinton de Kock (wkt), Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Sisanda Magala, Keshav Maharaj, Janeman Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Wayne Parnell, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen.

Fixtures: **January 27**, Bloemfontein (day-night) **January 29**, Bloemfontein (day) **February 1**, Kimberley (day-night)

SPOTLIGHT

Madande shines as Zimbabwe post win

AFP
Harare

Clive Madande struck a four off the final ball of a rain-interrupted one-day international thriller in Harare yesterday to give Zimbabwe a three-wicket victory over Ireland.

The home side needed 13 runs from their last over under the DLS system and, boosted by a six from Ryal Burl, had reduced the target to four runs with one Graham Hume delivery left.

By rising to the occasion, wicketkeeper Madande joined Burl (59) and Sikandar Raza (43) as stars of a heroic fightback by Zimbabwe after Ireland posted 288-4 in 50 overs.

Zimbabwe scored 214-7 in reply as a three-match ODI series began, following a 2-1 win by the hosts in a three-match Twenty20 series.

Burl was run out seeking a second run off the second ball of the final over and Raza was caught earlier having misused an attempted shot over long on.

Harare-born former England Test batsman Gary Ballance contributed 23 to the Zimbabwe total before being caught at short third man attempting a pull shot off a back-of-a-length ball.

Ireland captain Andy Balbirnie struck 121 before retiring hurt.

The ODI series continues on Saturday and will conclude on Monday.

BRIEF SCORES
Ireland 288-4 in 50 overs (A. Balbirnie 121 retired hurt, H. Tector 101 not out; V. Nyauchi 2-65) **lost to Zimbabwe 214-7 in 37 overs** (R. Burl 59, S. Raza 43, C. Irvine 38, G. Ballance 23; M. Adair 2-40, G. Hume 2-41) **by 3 wickets on DLS method**
Series: Zimbabwe lead 1-0 with two matches to play

MATCH REPORT

Gill's superb 208 helps India survive Bracewell scare

Pacer Mohamed Siraj picks up 4 wickets as India go 1-0 up in the 3-match series

AFP
Hyderabad

Shubman Gill scored a brilliant 208 as India held on to beat New Zealand by 12 runs in the first one-day international in Hyderabad yesterday despite a blistering century from Michael Bracewell.

India looked to be coasting to victory with New Zealand in deep trouble at 131-6 while chasing 350 after opener Gill made just the 10th double hundred in ODI history.

All-rounder Bracewell responded by making 140 off 78 balls before falling in the final over when he was pinned leg before wicket by Shardul Thakur.

Disciplined early spells by India fast bowlers Mohamed Shami and Mohamed Siraj restricted New Zealand before Bracewell's late fireworks gave them hope of a sensational win.

Finn Allen struck a breezy 40 at the top of the order but New Zealand were facing a heavy defeat once Siraj removed Tom Latham for the sixth wicket.

Bracewell was then joined by left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner, who hit 57 of 45 balls as part of an impressive 162-run partnership before falling to Siraj.

Bracewell smacked 12 fours and 10 sixes but finished on the losing side as Siraj was the pick of the Indian bowlers with figures of 4-46.

Earlier, the 23-year-old Gill helped India post a formidable total of 349-8 after an innings spanning 149 balls and featuring 19 fours and nine sixes.

India skipper Rohit Sharma was the first man out for 34 and Virat Kohli soon followed for just eight after he was bowled by Santner.

Lockie Ferguson also removed Ishan Kishan cheaply but Gill received support from Suryakumar Yadav (31) and Hardik Pandya (28) before holding out to deep mid-wicket in the final over.

Gill, the Player of the Match, said: "I was waiting eagerly to go out there and do what I wanted to do. I wanted to unleash but sometimes you don't get to do it with wickets falling. I got to do it in the end. When the bowler is on top, you have to get them under pressure otherwise it's easier for them to create dot balls."

He added: "I tried to get singles and boundaries and get them under pressure. I wasn't thinking about 200 before I hit those sixes in the 46th or 47th over. That's when I thought I could get a double. I won't call it a "wow" feeling but it feels nice when the ball goes off the bat how you want it. There's certainly a feeling of satisfaction. It has sunk in pretty well, this is certainly one of those things, like what dreams are made of."

India captain Sharma said Bracewell threatened to take the game away from India's grasp with his daredevil batting.



India's Shubman Gill celebrates after scoring a double century (200 runs) during the first one-day international (ODI) against New Zealand at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad yesterday. **Below:** New Zealand's Michael Bracewell reacts during the first ODI against India yesterday. (AFP)



"To be honest, the way Bracewell was batting, we knew it was going to be a challenge. It was such clean striking. After we had them five down, we knew we were in the game unless we slip up. And that's what happened," Sharma said.

"But we always knew the threat of bowling under lights and with the dew like I said at the toss, which is the kind of challenge we wanted. Watching Gill bat is fantastic, clean striking and no aerial shots.

"We wanted to give him a run before the SL series the kind of form he was in. He's such a free-flowing batsman. Siraj has been brilliant, of late even in the other two formats.

"He's gone from strength to strength, running hard and clear about what he wants to do. He's not afraid to use the short ball as well which is exciting," he added. The second ODI will be played on Saturday at Raipur.

BRIEF SCORES
India 349-8 in 50 overs (S. Gill 208, S. Yadav 31) **beat New Zealand 337 all out in 49.2 overs** (M. Bracewell 140, M. Santner 57; M. Siraj 4-46) **by 12 runs**
Series: India lead three-match series 1-0

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

McDonald stuns Nadal as rain wreaks havoc on Day 3

‘I have a history of hip issues. I’ve had to do treatments in the past but it was not this amount of a problem’

Reuters
Melbourne

Rafa Nadal's Australian Open title defence lay in ruins yesterday after an injury-plagued defeat that shook up the men's draw, even as rain wreaked further scheduling havoc at Melbourne Park on day three.

A winning Nadal suffered a left hip problem midway through his 6-4 6-4 7-5 loss to American Mackenzie McDonald at Rod Laver Arena and gloomily played out the match in pain.

The result not only opens up the top half of the draw, it also hands Novak Djokovic a boost as the Serb hunts a 10th title at Melbourne Park to draw level with Nadal's 22 major triumphs in the Grand Slam race.

"It has been like this a couple of days," said Nadal of his injury. "I have a history of hip issues. I've had to do treatments in the past but it was not this amount of a problem."

For all Nadal's struggles, hard-hitting McDonald was hugely impressive and had the better of the match before his veteran opponent broke down.

Humiliated by Nadal at the same stage of the 2020 French Open, their only previous meeting, McDonald was glad to square the ledger.

"Last time I played him was at Chatrrier, he kicked my butt," said world number 65 McDonald.

"He's an incredible champion, he's never going to give up regardless of the situation so even closing it out against a top guy like that is always tough."

Another shock appeared set to rock Melbourne Park when Felix Auger-Aliassime went two sets down against Alex Molcan at Margaret Court Arena but the Canadian sixth seed rallied to close out the match 3-6 3-6 6-3 6-2 6-2.



Mackenzie McDonald of the US reacts on a point against Spain's Rafael Nadal during their singles match on day three of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. **Right:** Spain's Rafael Nadal gets medical attention during the break in the match against McDonald yesterday. (AFP)



UNDER THE ROOF

There was less tension in the women's side, as Iga Swiatek, hot favourite for the women's title, overcame Camila Osorio 6-2 6-3 under the roof on Rod Laver Arena.

A highly-anticipated first meeting between tennis prodigies went the way of Coco Gauff, who outshone Briton Emma Raducanu to win 6-3 7-6(4) in the evening session - offering fans a glimpse of the future of women's tennis in the post-Serena Williams era.

Daniil Medvedev stayed on course to reach a third succes-

sive final at Melbourne Park with another straight-sets victory, as the Russian flexed his muscles to ease past Australian John Millman 7-5 6-2 6-2.

Stefanos Tsitsipas was equally dominant against another home hope in Rinky Hijikata as the Greek third seed won 6-3 6-0 6-2.

Men's dark horse Jannik Sinner, who has reached the quarter-finals of all four Grand Slams but never gone any further, also swept into the third round by waltzing past Tomas Etcheverry 6-3 6-2 6-2 on the similarly protected John Cain Arena.

Rain kept the players off the outer courts throughout the day session, however, adding to fixture congestion triggered by extreme heat and storms on Tuesday when nine matches did not get started and two could not be completed.

Matches eventually got going following a delay of over six hours and after waiting nearly a day, Thanasi Kokkinakis needed three minutes and five points to dispatch Fabio Fognini 6-1 6-2 6-2 and set up a second-round match with Andy Murray.

It was a good day for the Americans - winners of the United Cup

team event - as Jessica Pegula downed Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-2 7-6(5) while Madison Keys and Frances Tiafoe beat China's Wang Xinyu and Shang Juncheng to stay "locked in".

"I made a joke about it with the guys... asking them before the match, 'are you locked?'" Tiafoe said.

"I've been kind of living by that for a little bit.

"You've seen the shift in myself in being just locked in everything you're doing, staying super present, staying in the moment, staying locked in."

Greek sixth seed Maria Sakkari

had a scare on Margaret Court Arena against 18-year-old Diana Shnaider and was forced to come from a set down to beat the Russian teenager 3-6 7-5 6-3 over more than 2-1/2 hours.

'IT WAS A HIGH LEVEL'

"It was a high level from both of us, she played an amazing match, she's talented, promising," said Sakkari, before joking that Shnaider should consider giving up her college eligibility in the United States and turn professional.

Bianca Andreescu crashed to a 2-6 7-6(7) 6-4 defeat by Cristina

Bucsa while Petra Kvitova fell 7-5 6-4 against Anhelina Kalinina and Sloane Stephens was beaten 7-6(2) 6-4 by Anastasia Potapova as Grand Slam champions continued to tumble out.

But Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina returned to the spotlight of John Cain Arena after her Court 13 opener to dispatch Kaja Juvan 6-2 6-1, while 2021 French Open winner Barbora Krejickova beat Clara Burel 6-4 6-1.

Victoria Azarenka, Australian Open champion in 2012 and 2013, lost only one game en route to beating Nadia Podoroska.

TOUR DOWN UNDER

Germany's Bauhaus holds off Ewan to win first stage

AFP
Adelaide

Germany's Phil Bauhaus (Bahrain Victorious) held off fast-finishing Australian Caleb Ewan to narrowly take out the first stage of the men's Tour Down Under in Adelaide yesterday.

Bauhaus had less than half a wheel to spare as he flashed across the finish line in Tanunda as Ewan (Australian National Team) stormed home from well back in the pack at the end of the 149.9km stage through South Australia's Barossa Valley wine growing region.

Australia's Michael Matthews (Jayco-AlUla) was third across the line from Italy's Alessandro Covi (ITA/UAE Team Emirates).

Italy's Alberto Bettiol (EF Education First) led the TDU overall after his win in Tuesday's Prologue around Adelaide's streets.

Bauhaus recovered from a crash earlier in the opening stage to get in position for a crack at the finishing sprint down the main street of Tanunda.

"I crashed pretty bad, it was a massive impact, but I recovered and the team did a really good job, we were always in front in the last lap," Bauhaus said.

"In the (lead-up) Schwalbe Classic I waited too long, so this time with 300 metres left I just went for it and it was pretty close at the end with Caleb, but I'm super happy.

"I did not want to celebrate early. I was only sure I won later. It was super nervous today. A lot of guys went down."

The stage was marred by a series of pile-ups and a few riders came down in a scrimmage in the closing furious kilometre.



German cyclist Phil Bauhaus (centre) from Bahrain Victorious team sprints to the finish to win stage one of the Tour Down Under - a UCI cycling event - in Adelaide yesterday. (AFP)

RESULTS AFTER THE FIRST STAGE

1. Phil Bauhaus (GER/Bahrain Victorious) 3hr 37min 35sec, 2. Caleb Ewan (AUS/Australian National Team) at 0 sec, 3. Michael Matthews (AUS/Jayco-AlUla), 4. Alessandro Covi (ITA/UAE Team Emirates), 5. Paul Penhoet (FRA/Groupama-FDJ).

General Classification:

1. Alberto Bettiol (ITA/EF Education EasyPost) 3hr 43min 54sec, 2. Michael Matthews (AUS/Jayco-AlUla) at 6 sec, 3. Magnus Sheffield (USA/INEOS Grenadiers) 8sec, 4. Julius Johansen (DEN/Inter Marche) 10sec, 5. Kaden Groves (AUS/Alpecin-Deceuninck) 11sec.

American Magnus Sheffield (Ineos Grenadiers) went down in the final run and sustained cuts on both knees.

He was able to cross the line, retaining his third place overall.

His team said he was being evaluated.

Ewan relished the rough and

tumble in the closing stages, tweeting: "Doesn't get better than a big crash does it?"

There was also a mass fall with 50km left with a half dozen riders tumbling onto the bitumen. Dutchman Robert Gesink (Jumbo-Visma) and New Zealand's Patrick Bevin (DSM) could not

continue in the stage. Matthews, making his first appearance in the TDU since 2014, pulled a few seconds back on race leader Bettiol through time bonuses and was satisfied with his day's work.

"I wouldn't have minded a bit harder stage today. We nailed the two intermediate sprints," Matthews said.

"It was a successful day to try to set me up for the overall. When you're that close to a win you're going to be disappointed. Overall it was a good day for us."

Matthews lies in second spot overall, six seconds back, with Sheffield slipping to third at eight seconds behind Bettiol heading into today's Brighton to Victor Harbor second stage raced over 154.8km.

REPORT: LIV NEARING TV RIGHTS DEAL WITH CW

NEW YORK: LIV Golf is close to completing a television rights agreement with The CW, *Golf.com* reported yesterday.

The Saudi-funded circuit was without a US television deal in its initial season in 2022, streaming events on its website and on YouTube. As a result, the breakaway league struggled to reach mainstream audiences.

The deal with The CW would be unorthodox primarily because the network would be new to the sports world, a break from its typically teen-skewing lineup of dramas.

LIV CEO Greg Norman told *Golf.com* last week regarding the importance of a television deal. "It's crucial. We have a great platform that really should be shown to the world. When we go internationally, we are applauded and accepted and everybody wants to see us. So here in the United States, it was obviously a very critical point to our business plan to make sure we do get on TV

and we will get on TV."

LIV broadcaster David Feherty hinted at the LIV-CW link today when he mentioned during an appearance in West Palm Beach, Fla., that the sides were in talks.

Norman, the front man of LIV Golf when it launched, helped the new circuit bring in such players as Phil Mickelson, Dustin Johnson, Bryson DeChambeau, Patrick Reed, Bubba Watson, Cameron Smith, Sergio Garcia and Lee Westwood.

After an eight-event opening season, LIV is looking to hold 14 tournaments this year, beginning with an event in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, from Feb 24-26.

The CW has 220 affiliate stations in the United States. The network was recently purchased by Nexstar Media Group, with previous owners Paramount Global and Warner Bros retaining minority stakes.

GOLF

Outspoken Poulter might skip Ryder Cup even if he qualifies

AFP
London

Ian Poulter's love affair with the Ryder Cup might be over.

The outspoken Englishman said yesterday that it's no guarantee he would play for Europe in the 2023 Ryder Cup in Rome if he does manage to qualify.

"I would love to qualify. Whether I play or not would be a different thing," the LIV Golf player told reporters ahead of the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship. "I certainly don't expect to get one of the six (captain's) picks.

"Not in any way, shape or form. Which is also a shame."

Poulter has played in seven Ryder Cups in his career, helping Europe win five. He has a 15-8-2 overall record in the event, including 6-0-1 in singles.

But his standing for this year's competition is in jeopardy because of his allegiance to the Saudi-backed LIV tour. The DP World Tour (formerly known as the European Tour) attempted to ban LIV players from

competing in its events last summer, but Poulter and others won a temporary stay on that ruling.

A court case in Europe is scheduled for next month to determine whether the DP World tour can banish members of LIV. If they can, it would take players like Poulter and Spaniard Sergio Garcia out of the running for Europe's Ryder Cup team.



Sweden's Henrik Stenson was stripped of his 2023 European captaincy upon accepting a deal to join LIV Golf. He was replaced by Englishman Luke Donald, who has not answered what he calls "hypotheticals" about whether he'd add LIV players to his team.

Poulter got snippy with the official Ryder Cup Twitter account last week, pointing out that it hadn't acknowledged his 47th birthday or Garcia's 43rd birthday the day before.

Poulter said yesterday he was "fighting petty with petty" with that decision. "Through time I have said lots of silly things," Poulter said.

"Should I have said it? Yes and no. All I did was highlight a fact. There was no other reason."

HORSE RACING

QREC announces increase in prize money from next season

‘I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE HIGHER AUTHORITIES FOR THEIR CONSTANT SUPPORT FOR HORSE RACING’

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The board of directors of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) yesterday, announced an increase in the prize money allocated to the winning owners, trainers and jockeys in the race meetings to be organised by next season.

The decision will be implemented in QREC meetings at both Al Rayyan and the Al Uqda racecourses in the 2023-2024 season, the QREC said yesterday.

This boost comes with the aim of increasing competition and raising the standard of racing in Qatar in line with the state's drive to promote this long-established sport, achieve more heights, have more horses, especially through the victories of Qatar's horses overseas and attract international runners to the races run in Qatar.

Speaking on the occasion, QREC chairman Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi, said the increase approved for the next season's races is lucrative and will add to the thrill and quality of racing. "I would like to thank the higher authorities for their constant support for horse racing and their keenness on continuous development, in terms of both racing quality and organisation", he said.

"This increase comes a few days after the approval to boost the prize money of the HH The Amir Sword Festival to \$10,000,000



QREC Chairman Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi.

starting this season. This figure is more than double the value of the Festival's prize money in previous seasons. Consequently, we, at QREC, are entering a very important stage and we will work to make the maximum use of this support and drive for continuous development."

Al-Mohannadi said: "The recent increase covering the race meetings of the next season, which we announced today, highlights the part which horse owners, trainers and jockeys will play

as they are first beneficiaries of this rise. They are, therefore, required to raise the standard of their horses, which would in turn contribute to QREC's efforts to raise the standard of the industry."

"In addition, they should utilise this increase to maintain the bright image of Qatar's horse racing and keep pace with the surge, which QREC will see in the near future. We are confident that all owners, trainers and riders cooperate with QREC in favour of Qatar's equestrian sport in gen-



eral and horse racing in particular. This increase will also help us enhance cooperation with our partners and will motivate more sponsors to join the QREC's success partners," he added. "We are preparing for the HH The Amir Sword Festival, which is the most important and prestigious event at QREC every season. We are determined to continue the success of the Festival," he said.

'QREC raising racing standard' Commenting on this rise, QREC Acting CEO Bader Mohamed al-Darwish, said: "The increase covers 163 various races throughout the next season.

There will be 64 cup races for horses rated 90 and higher and group races, including 36 races offering a purse of QR200,000 each, 11 offering QR150,000 each, 15 offering QR100,000 each and two Guineas races for three and four-year-olds offering QR200,000 each. The total prize money proposed for the 64 cup races amounts to QR10,750,000, compared to QR6,115,000 for the same races during the current season."

Al-Darwish said: "The new increase involves 61 handicap races for horses rated 90 and higher. Of these 61 races, 46 will have a pot of QR100,000 each.

Only one race will have a pot of QR80,000 and it will be for horses rated 0-95. In addition, 14 races will offer a pot of QR120,000 each and these will include two races for horses rated 0-95 and the rest will be for horses 0-100. The total prize money proposed for these handicaps amounts to QR6,360,000 compared to QR3,390,000 for the same races during the current season."

Speaking about the rise in the prize money of the races open for the highest rated horses, Bader al-Darwish said: "These will be 30 races, including 26 with a purse of QR100,000 each and four with a purse of QR120,000



QREC Acting CEO Bader Mohamed al-Darwish.

each. The prize money rise proposed for these races amounts to QR3,080,000 compared to QR2,230,000 for the same races during the current season."

QREC Acting CEO concluded: "There will be eight group races and their prize money will be boosted. Seven of them will have a prize money of QR100,000 per race and one will offer QR120,000. The total prize money rise proposed for these races amounts to QR720,000 compared to QR575,000 for the same races during the current season."

QREC Racing Manager Abdullah Rashid al-Kubaisi said: "The increase in the prize money of the next season will be a positive development in enhancing the standard of runners and owners' interest in owning top horses that can land the spoils. I expect to see a higher standard of racing and horses next season, especially with such a lucrative increase in 163 races."

FA CUP

Elliott's rocket sends troubled Liverpool into fourth round

AFP
London

Jurgen Klopp said he got the reaction he wanted after Harvey Elliott's sublime strike put troubled Liverpool back on track with a 1-0 win at Wolves in Tuesday's FA Cup third-round replay.

Klopp's side came in for scathing criticism after losing their last two Premier League games in desultory fashion at Brighton and Brentford.

But Elliott's brilliant long-range effort in the first half at Molineux secured a much-needed first victory in four games in all competitions. Ironically, Liverpool's reward for seeing off Wolves is a return trip to Brighton in the fourth round.

The Reds' dismal 3-0 defeat at Brighton on Saturday left them languishing in ninth place in the Premier League, 10 points adrift of the top four.

"It feels like ages ago that we had that feeling that we win and play well," Klopp said.

"We played a really good first half and in the end it was just passion to block the shots. It's the reaction we wanted to see from ourselves and the boys delivered.

"The goal was exceptional. I don't want to make Harvey's performance smaller, but I had a few men of the match today, just the others didn't score."

In the bout of soul-searching that followed that embarrass-



Liverpool's Harvey Elliott celebrates at the end of the FA Cup third round match against Wolverhampton Wanderers at Molineux Stadium in Wolverhampton. (AFP)

ment, Klopp said his struggling team needed to go "back to basics". Amid mounting questions about Klopp's own future at Anfield, the German claimed this week that he will not leave the club unless he is forced to and hinted at changes in his squad during the summer.

Hamstrung by injuries to a host of key players including Virgil van Dijk and Luis Diaz, Klopp made eight changes after the Brighton debacle, with only Cody Gakpo, Thiago Alcantara and Ibrahima Konate retaining their places. Mohamed Salah and Alisson Becker were among those left out, but Liverpool's understudies rose to the challenge.

Wolves had forced the replay

with a 2-2 draw at Anfield, but Julen Lopetegui's side were angered when they had a potential winning goal from Toti controversially ruled out for offside in the final seconds.

They were unable to take their chance to avenge that injustice despite a lively start that saw Adama Traore's cross headed just wide by Raul Jimenez.

It was Elliott who produced the opener in breathtaking fashion in the 13th minute.

Klopp's midfield has been written off as ageing and past their best this season.

But the 19-year-old Elliott offers hope for the future, a point he underlined by running unchecked from the halfway line before blasting a superb strike

over Jose Sa from 25 yards.

Sa was caught too far off his line but that should not detract from the quality of Elliott's first goal since October.

Snapping into tackles and winning second balls, Liverpool were showing more hunger and tenacity than in recent weeks.

Gakpo was still searching for his first Liverpool goal in his third appearance since signing from PSV Eindhoven.

The Netherlands forward nearly broke his duck with a dipping volley that flashed just over.

Gakpo was replaced by Salah for the last 25 minutes, but it was Wolves who finished strongly with Ruben Neves' free-kick narrowly clearing the crossbar.

Wolves' best chance to draw level came when Jimenez couldn't head home on the goal-line from Traore's cross as Joe Gomez got the crucial block. Elsewhere, Championship side Birmingham survived a scare in their 2-1 win at third-tier Forest Green.

In a delayed third-round clash after the original tie was postponed due to a waterlogged pitch, Ben Stevenson's brilliant long-range strike put Forest Green ahead after eight minutes.

But Lukas Jutkiewicz grabbed Birmingham's equaliser in the 50th minute and Kevin Long killed off League One's bottom club 15 minutes later.

Bristol City won 2-1 at Swansea, while Luton beat Wigan 2-1 and West Brom thrashed Chesterfield 4-0.

Tamih clinches Al Kharrara Cup



Jockey J P Guillambert guided the Ahmad Mubarak al-Kuwari-owned Tamih to Al Kharrara Cup triumph in a thrilling Purebred Arabian Conditions feature race of Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's meeting at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. In a close finish, Tamih edged Shgarde, ridden by Alberto Sanna. Ezzat Nafs, saddled by Hugo Besnier, came third. **PICTURE: Juhaïm**

FOOTBALL

Referees to explain VAR decisions to stadium and TV audiences

Reuters
London

Referees will explain VAR decisions to stadium crowds and television audiences in a 12-month trial starting at next month's FIFA Club World Cup in Morocco, soccer's law-making body said yesterday.

The International Football Association Board (IFAB) failed to agree, however, on trialling rugby-style temporary concussion substitutes.

The players' union FIFPRO had lobbied for such a trial in the English Premier League, France's Ligue 1 and Major League Soccer in the United States.

IFAB said in a statement after a meeting at London's Wembley Stadium that it also discussed clarifications relating to the laws of the game, including the guidelines on 'deliberate play' in offside situations.

FIFA has invested heavily in

VAR technology since it was introduced at the 2018 World Cup in Russia but controversy remains.

Japan's victory over Spain in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar triggered a heated debate, with the ball initially judged to have gone out of play but the decision then reversed after a lengthy VAR consultation.

English Football Association (FA) chief executive Mark Bullingham, who chaired the meeting, told reporters conversations between the referee and the VAR official would remain private.

Referees would however have a microphone to explain the outcome.

"There will be a trial where in FIFA tournaments over the next 12 months there is the ability for the referee, after a VAR decision has been made, to announce to the stadium and the broadcast audience what has happened and to clarify that decision," he said.

"We think that is important in terms of transparency, and

also for the crowd in the stadium who we think at the moment do not get enough information."

The experiment could also be extended to this year's women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

IFAB said no consensus was reached on carrying out a trial with temporary substitutions for actual or suspected concussion but the subject remained under active review.

A trial of permanent concussion substitutions was extended indefinitely.

IFAB also looked at measures to create fairer conditions and the amount of time played, but decided against introducing a 'countdown clock' to limit time-wasting.

"The approach taken during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 was received positively, and possible measures included the stricter and more accurate calculation of additional time and a more consistent application of the Laws of the Game," it said.

Juventus name new board with club facing legal challenges

Juventus' new board of directors was approved by shareholders yesterday ahead of a potential trial for alleged financial crimes which led to the previous administration resigning en masse. In a statement, Juventus said that 87 percent of those holding voting rights voted in favour of the new board, which "will remain in office until the date of the shareholders' meeting convened for the approval of the financial statements as at 30 June 2025". Gianluca Ferrero takes the

role of chairman in place of Andrea Agnelli, who stepped down along with the rest of the board in November. "I want to give my best, alongside the board we will work to create a future that is worthy of our past," said Ferrero in a short statement.

Accounting expert Ferrero, 60, will be flanked by new CEO Maurizio Scanavino, also CEO of the GEDI media conglomerate owned by Juve's holding company EXOR which publishes Italian newspapers La Repubblica

and La Stampa. The rest of the board is composed of Fioranna Negri, Diego Pistone and Laura Cappiello, making up a small group brought in to guide a club which last month ratified revised losses for the 2021/22 season of 239.3mn euros (\$255mn). They will have to face a tough period in which Juventus and one-time key figures from the club, including Agnelli, could be put on trial for accounting offences, with a preliminary hearing set for March 27.