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# GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

Murray wins 5-set epic as Djokovic overcomes injury fear

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FOOTBALL

# Iraq beat Oman in thriller for first Gulf Cup title in 35 years

Manaf Younis' header with a minute remaining in extra time gives Lions of Mesopotamia their fourth title



Iraq players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Arabian Gulf Cup at the Basra International Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

By Sports Reporter  
Basra, Iraq

Iraq clinched the Arabian Gulf Cup for the fourth time in history after a dramatic 3-2 win over Oman in the final at the Basra International Stadium yesterday.

In front of raucous home fans, Ibrahim Bayesh gave Iraq the lead in the 24th minute. The Lions of Mesopotamia were seconds away from victory in normal time but Oman pulled level in the 10th minute of added time through Salah al-Yahyai's penalty. In the extra

time, Iran regained the lead in the 116th minute after Ajmad Attwan converted a penalty.

Oman again fought back brilliantly to draw level in the 119th minute through Omar al-Malki. The thriller looked destined to go into penalty shoot-out, but Manaf Younis' header with a minute remaining to send the host nation into raptures.

Iraq, which hosted the 25th edition of the tournament after 44 years when it hosted the inaugural edition in 1979, secured their first regional title in 35 years. Their previous titles came in 1979, 1984 and 1988.

However, the celebrations were overshadowed by a stampede which broke out outside the stadium hours before the final, with one person killed and dozens injured.

Long banned from hosting international football matches, war-torn Iraq had been counting on the Gulf Cup to burnish its image but it had already been forced to apologise for organisational lapses. Thousands of fans, many without tickets, had gathered outside the 65,000-seat stadium in Iraq's main southern city of Basra since dawn in the hope of watching the final.

"A large number of fans, many of

them without tickets, had gathered since first light to try to get in," an interior ministry official said.

An AFP photographer inside the stadium said the turnstiles were still closed when the crush occurred. Sirens blared as ambulances arrived to ferry the injured to hospital. Images posted on social media showed a sea of people outside the stadium.

Fans began arriving again in the afternoon as calm was restored to Basra International Stadium, said interior ministry spokesman Saad Maan. The gates were closed after fans entered the arena, many of them waving Iraqi flags



Iraq players are overcome by emotion after their dramatic win over Oman.



Iraq fans react as they watch the match in Basra. (Reuters)

ahead of the match.

The army called on fans to heed the instructions of security force personnel on access to the stadium so the championship could be "wrapped up in a civilised fashion that does honour to Iraq".

Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani had earlier chaired a meeting with key ministers and the governor of Basra to discuss "special measures for

the Gulf Cup final", his office said.

Football is by far Iraq's biggest spectator sport and the rare opportunity to see home international games has drawn thousands of fans. The tournament has also attracted thousands of foreign fans who crossed from neighbouring Kuwait to see the games in Basra, little more than 50 kilometres from the border.

RIYADH SEASON CUP

# Ronaldo scores twice in Saudi reunion goal-fest with Messi

AFP  
Riyadh

Cristiano Ronaldo recovered from a punch in the face to score twice against Paris Saint-Germain yesterday in a lively reunion with his great rival Lionel Messi. Ronaldo, 37, was decked by PSG 'keeper Keylor Navas's flailing fist but he drilled the resulting penalty and then added another in a 5-4 exhibition defeat, his first appearance since moving to Saudi Arabia in a deal said to total more than 400mn euros.

For Qatar-owned PSG, Messi and Kylian Mbappe both scored and Neymar missed a penalty before they withdrew on the hour-mark alongside Ronaldo, who was representing a composite Saudi side, to leave the world's four best-paid players watching from the bench in Riyadh.

After spending a day in Qatar on Wednesday, PSG players arrived in Saudi Arabia yesterday afternoon. The Parisians were well received, as soon as they landed at Riyadh airport, with a presentation of flowers and bouquets.

Among the packed crowd at the 69,000-seat King Fahd Stadium was a Saudi real estate mogul who paid \$2.6mn at auction for a ticket giving him dressing-room access to the players. After Ronaldo led out the Riyadh



Paris Saint-Germain's Lionel Messi (left) walks past Riyadh All-Star's Cristiano Ronaldo during the Riyadh Season Cup match in Riyadh yesterday. (AFP)

Season Team, drawn from his new club Al Nassr and Saudi rivals Al Hilal, to flame-throwers and tickertape, Messi opened the scoring after just three minutes when he was fed by the livewire Mbappe.

Ronaldo's first touch in Saudi football was a throw-in but he had a shot saved and a penalty appeal waved away before Navas caught him flush on the

cheekbone as they challenged for a high ball. Ronaldo, still rubbing the red mark on his face and grimacing, fired past Navas to make it 1-1 on 34 minutes.

Five minutes later, PSG's Juan Bernat was given a straight red card for a foul on Salem al-Dawsari - Saudi Arabia's match-winner in their famous group-stage World Cup victory over Argentina. Messi, perhaps irritated by the



Riyadh All-Star's Cristiano Ronaldo scores during the Riyadh Season Cup match at the King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh. (AFP)

intensity of the mid-season friendly, aimed a reproachful look at Ronaldo, his sparring partner in their days playing for Barcelona and Real Madrid.

PSG were soon back in front thanks to Marquinhos's delicate finish before Neymar missed his spot-kick, shooting tamely after a trademark stutter run-up. Minutes later, Ronaldo hit his second equaliser deep into first-half injury time, heading against the post

and then burying the rebound to make it 2-2 at half-time.

Mbappe put PSG back in front shortly after the break, turning his marker inside-out and laying on an easy finish for Sergio Ramos, before Hyun-soo Jang found a third equaliser for the hosts. But Mbappe thumped home a penalty and Hugo Ekitike scored to make it 5-3 before Brazilian striker Talisca grabbed the Riyadh team's

fourth goal at the death. It was the first outing in Saudi for Ronaldo, who will make his Saudi Pro League debut for Al Nassr on Sunday after signing for more than 200mn euros, according to a source close to the club. The veteran Portuguese star will be paid an additional 200mn euros, the source said, to be an ambassador for Saudi Arabia's expected 2030 World Cup joint hosting bid with Egypt and Greece.



CYCLING

# Australia's Dennis takes over Tour Down Under lead

'I don't know what's happening with cycling these days, there's no respect in the bunch'

AFP  
Adelaide

Australia's Rohan Dennis (Jumbo-Visma) powered to win the second stage and seize the overall lead in the Tour Down Under as his rivals came to grief yesterday. The two-time individual world time trial champion surged over the line at the head of a five-man breakaway to win the longest stage of the World Tour race, the 154.8-kilometre ride from Brighton to Victor Harbour. The bonus for his stage win came on the back of setbacks for overnight leader, Italy's Alberto Bettiol (EF Education-EasyPost), and Australia's Michael Matthews (Team Jayco-AlUla), who have dropped out of general classification calculations. Bettiol came to a dead stop with cramps in his right leg, while Matthews lost valuable time with a chain issue and had to wait for a replacement bike while the peloton charged on up Nettle Hill, 20km from the finish. Dennis, receiving word on his team radio, fully capitalised and dashed past Australia's Giro d'Italia champion Jai Hindley (BORA-hansgrohe) inside the final kilometre to claim the stage and the leader's ochre jersey. "That was a lot of work for a few seconds in GC (general classification)," said Dennis, the 2015 TDU winner. "I just battled over the climb to get across to Jai Hindley and Simon Yates. "From

there it was just a battle and I was hoping Yatesy wouldn't attack because he had sat on before helping us in the final five kilometres. I didn't expect to go to the (finish) line. I thought it'd be hard over the climb and it's a tricky run-in too, so hard for teams to control it."

It was a massive fillip for Dennis's Dutch Jumbo-Visma team, after its captain Robert Gesink suffered a fractured pelvis in a heavy fall during Wednesday's opening stage. Pre-race favourite Matthews' mishap at the base of the decisive climb with about 22km to go came as he was chipping away in his bid for the leader's jersey with time bonuses. He was fuming after the race at his misfortune, which has plunged him from second to 58th in the GC and out of race contention. "I was in a good position, the team rode really well all day, got two good intermediate sprints and got some time back on the GC guys and we got to the final climb," Matthews said. "I don't know what's happening with cycling these days, there's no respect in the bunch. "I was in a great position. I got hit from one side, hit from the other side and my chain got stuck between the frame and the front crank and I couldn't get it out." Bettiol ended the day just in front of Matthews in the GC in 57th spot. The peloton go into Friday's third stage, the 116.8km Norwood to Campbelltown leg, featuring the notorious Corkscrew climb.

RESULTS

**STAGE TWO:** 1. Rohan Dennis (AUS/Jumbo-Visma) 4hr 0min 40sec, 2. Jay Vine (AUS/UAE Team Emirates) at 2 sec, 3. Mauro Schmid (SUI/Soudal Quick-Step), 4. Simon Yates (GBR/Team Jayco-AlUla), 5. Jai Hindley (AUS/BORA-hansgrohe) 5sec.

**GENERAL CLASSIFICATION:** 1. Rohan Dennis (AUS/Jumbo-Visma) 7hr 44min 41sec, 2. Jay Vine (AUS/UAE Team Emirates) at 3sec, 3. Magnus Sheffield (USA/INEOS Grenadiers) 12sec, 4. Mauro Schmid (SUI/Soudal Quick-Step) 13sec, 5. Corbin Strong (NZL/Israel-Premier Tech) 14sec.



Australian cyclist Rohan Dennis from Jumbo-Visma team crosses the finishing line to win the stage two of the Tour Down Under in Adelaide yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

# Smith signs for Sussex ahead of Ashes

AFP  
London

Australia Test star Steve Smith will prepare for this year's Ashes with a short stint at English county side Sussex, the club announced yesterday.

Smith, second in the Test batting rankings, will be available for County Championship matches against Worcester, Leicestershire and Glamorgan before the first Ashes Test starts at Edgbaston on June 16.

The signing of the former Australia captain, who averages more than 60 in 92 Tests, will give him valuable batting practice in English conditions. "I am excited about joining Sussex for a few games in May and hopefully making a contribution to a successful season," said the 33-year-old.

"I am particularly looking forward to working with the younger players in the squad and hoping I can provide some guidance to them."

Sussex Cricket CEO Rob Andrew said he was delighted by the high-profile signing. "To have arguably the world's best batter play for Sussex just before an eagerly awaited Ashes Test series is great for us and the County Championship," he said.

"Being able to attract a player of Steve Smith's calibre is a massive statement and will be of great benefit to our young homegrown players, particularly our crop of talented young batters."

Smith joins India Test batter Cheteshwar Pujara, who previously agreed a return to Sussex for the 2023 season.

Australia will be defending the Ashes in a five-Test series in June and July.

**Ireland skipper Balbirnie out of Zimbabwe ODI series**

Ireland captain Andy Balbirnie has been forced to pull out of the one-day squad playing in Zimbabwe after he was struck on the helmet while batting, the team's medical chief said yesterday.



Balbirnie retired hurt at 121 not out on Wednesday after top-edging a Brad Evans full toss into the grill of his helmet, during the first of three one-day internationals against Zimbabwe.

"He was reassessed this morning, but the decision has been made to withdraw him from the remaining two matches of this series as a precaution," said Mark Rausa, medical services head for Cricket Ireland.

Murray Commins, Munster Reds' 26-year old, left-handed batter, will join the squad in his place, receiving his first senior squad call-up.

Commins has been playing in South Africa and was due to fly into Harare on Thursday.

"It's extremely disappointing to lose our skipper in this manner, particularly after his outstanding century in his 200th match for Ireland," said national selector Andrew White. "We all hope his recovery is quick and he is back on the park soon."

White added that in Commins they had a "direct replacement" for the injured skipper.

"We know he has the stroke play, technique and mindset to build big scores and being left-handed, he will also add a new dimension to the top order," he said.

Zimbabwe won the opening ODI, Clive Madande scoring a boundary off their final ball to overhaul Ireland on the DLS in a rain-affected match.

The ODI series continues on Saturday and concludes on Monday.

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

# Dutch crush Chile 14-0 to set record

AFP  
New Delhi

The Netherlands set a new record for goals scored in a match at the men's Hockey World Cup yesterday, thrashing Chile 14-0 in a pool match.

Hammering the hapless debutants at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, the Dutch surpassed a previous record of 12-0 set by Australia against South Africa in 2010. The three-time winners finished top of the pool and became the first team into the quarter-finals.

Jip Janssen kicked off the score-fest in the sixth minute, putting away the first goal on a penalty corner, followed by back-to-back goals by Derck de Vilder and Thijs Van Dam in the 22nd and 23rd minutes.

Skipper Thierry Brinkman struck another in the 25th minute, before Janssen scored his second in the 29th to notch a 5-0 half-time lead.

Brinkman got a second in the first three minutes of the second half to restart the demolition. Janssen completed his hat-trick in the next minute from another penalty corner. Terrance Pieters, Koen Bijen and Justen Blok produced three more successful strikes, with Janssen hitting his fourth towards the end of the third quarter.

Bijen dealt another blow to Chile in the 45th minute before Teun Beins converted a penalty corner three minutes later.

Brinkman completed his hat-



Netherlands's Jip Janssen scored four goals against Chile during their Hockey World Cup match in Bhubaneswar, India, yesterday.

trick for the 14th goal just two minutes before full-time.

Elsewhere, Malaysia finished second in the table after a 3-2 win over New Zealand. Australia, England and Belgium lead the other three pools respectively.

Outside the World Cup, India currently holds the record for goals in an international hockey match, set during their 26-0 win over Hong Kong during the 2018

Asian Games.

Later in the day, a below-par India beat tournament debutants Wales 4-2 in their final pool match but failed to qualify directly for the quarter-finals.

India can still qualify for the quarter-finals if they beat New Zealand in their crossover match in Bhubaneswar on Sunday.

Akashdeep Singh (32nd and 45th minutes) struck twice, while

Shamsher Singh (21st) and Harmanpreet Singh (59th) got the other goals for India.

Gareth Furlong (42nd) and Jacob Draper (44th) were the goal-getters for Wales.

Needing to win by a margin of eight goals to directly qualify for the quarter-finals, India failed to live up to the expectations as they finished second in Pool D behind England.

SPOTLIGHT

# Bolt seeks missing \$12.7mn from Jamaica investment firm

Reuters  
Kingston

Olympic champion Usain Bolt is seeking to recover more than \$12.7mn that disappeared from his account with a Jamaican investment firm and is willing to take the case to court if necessary, Bolt's attorney said.

Bolt last week was informed that his account balance at Kingston-based Stocks and Securities Ltd (SSL) had inexplicably dwindled to just \$12,000, lawyer Linton Gordon told Reuters late on Tuesday.

"We will be going to court with the matter" if the company does not return the funds, Gordon said. "It is a grave disappointment, and we are hoping that the matter will be resolved in a way that Mr. Bolt



will recover his money and be able to live in peace."

SSL said in a January 12 statement that it had become aware of fraudulent activity by a former employee and has referred the matter to law enforcement, adding that it had taken steps to secure assets and strengthen protocols.

SSL did not immediately respond to an email or phone calls

seeking further comment.

The Jamaica Constabulary Force said on Monday that its fraud and financial investigation teams were probing "alleged fraudulent activities at (SSL) which are said to have affected the accounts of Mr. Usain Bolt among other individuals."

Finance Minister Nigel Clarke said on Tuesday night that SSL had allegedly committed "alarming and evil fraud" and that authorities would "bring all perpetrators to justice."

Bolt's account was intended to serve as a pension for the eight-time Olympic gold medalist sprinter and for his parents, Gordon said.

Bolt retired in 2017 after dominating global sprinting for a decade, reviving a sport plagued by doping scandals and becoming a household name.

AIU charges Belarusian coach for breaching code of conduct

Belarusian coach Yuri Maisevich was charged by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) yesterday for allegedly breaching World Athletics' Integrity Code of Conduct during the withdrawal of Krystsina Tsimanouskaya from the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2021.

Tsimanouskaya, 26, was forced out of the Olympics by her national team after criticising coaches for entering her in an event that was not her customary distance.

She defected from Belarus during the Games and took refuge in Poland after the Olympics. In August last year, she said in an Instagram post

that she had been awarded Polish citizenship. "Maisevich did not act with integrity and acted in bad faith; failed to safeguard the athlete's dignity and his actions constituted verbal and mental harassment; and that he brought athletics generally into disrepute," the AIU said in a statement.

"This matter was referred to the AIU by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and World Athletics (WA) on 30 September 2021.

"Maisevich was one of two Belarusian officials whose Olympic accreditation was revoked by IOC regarding this situation. The other official, Artur Shumak, has not been charged." (Reuters)



FOCUS

# Murray wins five-set epic as Djoko overcomes injury fear

HARD-HITTING BROOKSBY DELIVERS RUUD SHOCK, JABEUR SENT PACKING BY VONDROUSOVA IN SECOND ROUND

AFP  
Melbourne

Andy Murray triumphed in an epic, five-set Australian Open battle which finished in the early hours of Friday in Melbourne after nine-time champion Novak Djokovic defied injury and a drunken heckler to progress to the third round.

Murray hit back to defeat home hope and 159th-ranked Thanasi Kokkinakis 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 7-5 - the match finishing at just after 04:00. At five hours and 45 minutes it was the longest match in Murray's career.

Djokovic, chasing a 10th Australian Open and men's record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam, defeated 191st-ranked French qualifier Enzo Couacaud 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-0.

Ons Jabeur was prime among the numerous seeds to crash out on Thursday although most of the carnage occurred in the men's draw - second seed Casper Ruud, Taylor Fritz, Alexander Zverev and Diego Schwartzman were all sent packing. Former world number one Murray, 35, will play 24th seed Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain in round three after his second successive five-set triumph this week.

"It was unbelievable that I managed to do it, to turn it around," said the three-time Grand Slam champion, who has a metal hip and looked on the verge of retirement four years ago at Melbourne Park.

"I don't know how I managed to get through it."

Murray had stunned Italian 13th seed Matteo Berrettini in his opening match in another five-setter. Despite the drama, serious questions were being asked of the late finish.

"It is essential we create better rules in tennis regarding the weather (light and wind) and starting times or cutoff times for matches," tweeted tennis legend Martina Navratilova.

"Murray and Kokkinakis will finish around 4am. Crazy- no other sport does this @AustralianOpen."

With the shock exit on Wednesday of hobbling defending champion Rafael Nadal, the top two men's seeds are both now gone.

With top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz also absent through injury, it presents a huge opportunity for Djokovic. The 35-year-old Serb required a medical timeout



Britain's Andy Murray celebrates after defeating Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis in their Australian Open match in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

and had heavy strapping on his left thigh against Couacaud. He was also bothered by some rowdy fans and at one point during the match demanded that a drunken fan be thrown out.

But Djokovic recovered his poise and fitness to beat and will face 27th seed Grigor Dimitrov in round three.

"There was a lot happening tonight in the match," Djokovic, who has been struggling with a hamstring injury, told the Rod Laver Arena. His on-court interview was momentarily paused when a spectator shouted out.

"I love you too, thank you," said Djokovic, who has enjoyed a warm return to Melbourne Park following his deportation a year ago because of his stance on Covid vaccines. Fellow seeds

Andrey Rublev, Dan Evans and Holger Rune all also won in the second round. Among the leading men's players who lost out on Thursday, world number three Ruud was always struggling against hard-hitting Jenson Brooksby, and the Norwegian went down in four sets to the American, 6-3, 7-5, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2.

Ruud, who could have become world number one in Melbourne, refused to blame an abdominal injury. "I gave it my all, but in the fourth set especially it wasn't enough," he said.

Eighth seed Fritz was also on his way home after wildcard local hope Alexei Popyrin beat him 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4, 6-7 (6/8), 6-2.

"This is a dream and I don't

want to wake up at all," said 113th-ranked Popyrin, who was reduced to tears by the crowd chanting his name.

Zverev, the 12th seed, suffered another setback on his return from serious injury as he lost to 107th-ranked Michael Mmoh.

In the women's draw it looked as if most of the top seeds would sail through.

But after the clock ticked past midnight, Tunisian number two seed Jabeur was beaten 6-1, 5-7, 6-1 in 1hr 41min by Czech world number 86 Marketa Vondrousova. It left Jabeur still waiting to win a maiden Grand Slam title.

Earlier in the day, Aryna Sabalenka showed why she is a serious contender by powering into the third round, defeating American Shelby Rogers 6-3,



USA's Jenson Brooksby (left) shakes hands with Norway's Casper Ruud after their match yesterday. (AFP)



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur walks off the court after losing her second round match against Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova yesterday. (Reuters)

6-1. Also safely through was France's fourth seed Caroline Garcia, a 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 winner over former US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez.

American qualifier Katie Volynets dumped out Russian world number nine Veronika Kudermetova.

The 21-year-old Volynets won 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 and then paid a heartfelt tribute to her extended family in war-ravaged Ukraine.

"I really feel for them and to have their support through all of this is incredible," she said.

## Nadal sidelined for six to eight weeks with injury

Rafael Nadal said yesterday he will be out for up to eight weeks after suffering a left hip flexor injury during his shock second-round exit from the Australian Open.

The 36-year-old world number two wrote on Twitter that scans showed a moderate muscle tear. It will not require surgery. It is just the latest injury to blight the career of the 22-time Grand Slam champion from Spain.

"I have carried out medical tests after the defeat yesterday," he tweeted, adding that they showed "a grade-two lesion in the iliacus psoas of the left leg".

"Normal recovery time six to eight weeks," he wrote, adding that he would now rest and undergo anti-inflammatory physiotherapy.

The projected timeline puts his participation at the ATP 1000 Indian Wells and Miami events in March in doubt, which would see him plunge down the rankings.

Nadal will more likely target being ready for the clay-court season in mid-April, leading into the French Open in May, where he will be chasing a 15th Roland Garros title.

The defending champion slumped out of the Australian Open on Wednesday to 65th-ranked American Mackenzie McDonald in the second round - his worst Grand Slam result in seven years.

He took a medical timeout when a break down in the second set after hurting himself stretching for a forehand and grimacing in pain. His wife Mery was pictured in tears in the stands at Rod Laver Arena. He said afterwards he was "destroyed mentally" and acknowledged that at his age it was getting harder to deal not only with injuries, but also the recovery process.

"I don't know what can happen in the future. But I need to avoid again a long period of time outside (of the sport)," he said. "Because if not, it's tough."

Despite his age and yet another injury, Nadal gave no suggestion that he intends to retire any time soon.

"From here on, I guess when things move forward, the right decisions will be made because what I want is to continue playing tennis," he said on Wednesday in Melbourne.

"Don't think I'm saying all this because I want to take a step back. "It is not the case, but my current feelings are bad."

(AFP)

## MARYAM SHINES IN DRESSAGE AT HATHAB



Maryam Ahmed Alsemaitee excelled in the dressage (Medium Level 1) of the 8th Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour at Al Shaqab yesterday finishing both first and second on the podium. Maryam topped with bay stud San Francisco with a score of 68.182 points before returning with gelding Copain 10 to finish second with a score of 67.576. Jessica Waldon claimed the third place riding Givenchu Utopia and accumulating a score of 67.500pts.



In Dressage Prelim (Level 2) competition, Azade APA Triolet stood first on bay mare What A Pleasure getting the best score of 68.661 points. Khalid Sanad al-Nuaimi claimed the runners-up spot with Gop Stop having a score of 68.571. Kyle McCulloch finished third on Juul with 68.482. Today, the Hathab showjumping competitions will be held with the Small and Medium Tour for individuals and teams.

SPOTLIGHT

## Bencic unfazed by hype

Reuters  
Melbourne

Belinda Bencic's form in the build-up to the Australian Open has led to talk of a potential title charge, but the Olympic champion said she is ignoring the hype after claiming a 7-6(3) 6-3 win over American Claire Liu yesterday.

Bencic entered the Australian Open on the back of winning her seventh career title, after beating Daria Kasatkina in the final of the Adelaide tune-up tournament earlier this month. The 12th-seeded Swiss then beat Bulgarian Viktoriya Tomova in her opening match at Melbourne Park, before claiming a second-round victory over Liu yesterday despite being 5-2 down at one point in the first set. When asked about how her win in Adelaide had affected her Australian Open campaign, Bencic told reporters: "I'm happy with the title, for sure, and just with the good results."

"But still, you come to a Grand Slam, it starts from zero. It doesn't help me any more I won Adelaide. Congrats to me, but now what? I'm trying to fight through every match here as well and go as far as possible."

Bencic added that it was tough to completely block out all specu-



Switzerland's Belinda Bencic reacts after a point against Claire Liu of the US during their match in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

lation about her title chances.

"I'm thinking, who are these people? Are they me when I'm playing on the court? Do they know how I feel, sleep, wake up, how I eat, how my body feels? You never know what's really going on," Bencic said.

"Of course you can feel maybe more attention or more hype, but it's for everyone. I feel like last year Madison Keys won Adelaide, then suddenly she was the favourite to win. It's like every tournament is different. "People are so quick to shift to, "This one is in form, this one and this one! It's not helping me on the court, so why should I think about it?"

Bencic will next face Italy's Camila Giorgi tomorrow.



## HORSE RACING

## Thomas guides Wathnan Racing's Inverness to Khor Al Adaid Cup glory

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

On a day of thrilling horse racing, attended by a large number of fans at the Al Rayyan Racecourse, Inverness of Wathnan Racing won the Khor Al Adaid Cup making a late surge to out gallop Hamaki yesterday.

The four-year-old colt was ridden by Ronan Thomas and burst into a lightening pace in the final 200m of the 2,800m Thoroughbreds (Class 1) race to win the QR200,000 feature.

Kamaki, which was steered by Soufiane Saadi, led most part of the race, but finished second ahead of Local Law, guided by Hugo Besnier. Jockey Marco Casamen- secured his successive double in two days after he guided Nasser Saeed MS Al Eida-owned Gold Fleece to victory in the 2,000m Thoroughbred Pearl for Fillies & Mares only. Jefferson Smith-guided She's Our Queen came second.



Jockey Ronan Thomas guides Inverness to Khor Al Adaid Cup victory. **Right:** The connections of Inverness celebrate after Wathnan Racing-owned bay colt won the cup yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaime



## FOOTBALL

# Dzeko is the hero as Inter Milan win Italian Super Cup

'I'M REALLY HAPPY THAT WE'RE BRINGING HOME ANOTHER TROPHY, AND I HOPE THERE WILL BE MORE IN THE FUTURE'

AFP  
Riyadh

Inter Milan retained the Italian Super Cup on Wednesday after Edin Dzeko inspired his team to a 3-0 victory over local rivals AC Milan.

The damage was done in the opening 21 minutes in Riyadh thanks to Dzeko, who played a defence-splitting pass for Federico Dimarco's 10th-minute opener and doubled Inter's lead 11 minutes later.

Lautaro Martinez then added a brilliantly taken third in the 77th minute to underline Inter's superiority on a night in which Milan simply didn't show up.

Inter claim the Italian season's first trophy as they did last year when they beat Juventus.

"We put in a great performance, the boys were brilliant from the first minute until the final whistle," Dzeko told *Mediaset*.

"We won the Super Cup last season so we knew how great it is to win it... I'm really happy that we're bringing home another trophy, and I hope there will be more in the future."

Without the raucous soundtrack of a packed San Siro, Wednesday's match in Saudi Arabia was an unusual Milan derby but that won't stop Inter fans claiming local bragging rights as well as the Super Cup for the seventh time.

Both teams are trailing way behind Napoli in what is beginning to look like a one-team title charge but Inter appeared a class above uninspired Italian champions Milan who barely laid a glove on Simone Inzaghi's side.

"We weren't up to the task in the first half, we made too many mistakes and from there it was difficult to turn the match around," Milan coach Stefano Pioli told *Mediaset*.

"The defeat hurts because it was a trophy we wanted to win, but the rest of the season is still there for us. We just need to get back to playing the way we know how."

Milan continued their sluggish start to the new year and Dzeko punished them by helping Inter to a two-goal half-time lead which was more than deserved.

The 36-year-old beautifully sent



Inter Milan's players celebrate winning the Italian Super Cup against AC Milan at the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh on Wednesday. (AFP)

Nicolo Barella scampering in behind Milan's defence, allowing the Italy midfielder to roll a low pass which compatriot Dimarco had no problems tucking away.

Dzeko then punished sloppy Milan defending of a free-kick by charging through onto Alessandro Bastoni's

drilled long pass, cutting inside Sandro Tonali and driving home a fine strike from a tight angle.

Milan huffed and puffed in the second half but the closest they came to getting back into the game was the underwhelming Rafael Leao smashing over the bar three minutes after the break.

And Martinez made absolutely sure Inzaghi would claim his fourth Super Cup trophy as a coach when the Argentina forward span a bamboozled Fikayo Tomori and controlled Milan Skriniar's long pass before tucking home a beautiful finish with the outside of his right foot.

## QFA suspends Abdelkarim Hassan indefinitely, penalises Al Rawi and Waad



**Doha:** The Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced yesterday that national team player **Abdelkarim Hassan** has been suspended for an indefinite period, in addition to deducting 50 percent of his salary, issuing a warning to him and fining him QR200,000. This came in a statement by the QFA through its official account on Twitter, based on the report submitted by the department of national teams to the Association's General Secretariat. A 50 percent deduction of the salaries of Abdelkarim Hassan, Bassam al-Rawi, and Mohamed Waad was announced, based on what was stated in Clause No 2 of Article 22 of the professional regulations for local football players 2022/2023. The QFA also decided, based on the report of the national teams committee, to suspend the player Abdelkarim Hassan for an indefinite period. The disciplinary committee decided, based on Article 77/4 and Article 44/1 and 2, to issue a warning to the player Abdelkarim Hassan and a fine of QR200,000, in addition to

warnings to players Bassam al-Rawi and Mohamed Waad and a fine of QR100,000 and QR50,000, respectively. It is worth mentioning that Al Sadd Sports Club had announced, on December 21, that midfielder Abdelkarim Hassan had been completely excluded from the ranks of the first team. The President of Qatar Football Association (QFA) Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani had previously confirmed the penalty that will be issued against the player Abdelkarim Hassan, indicating that Al Sadd Club's decision to permanently exclude the player is separate from the decision of the Football Association. Hassan, who won the title of best player in Asia in 2018, participated with the Qatari national team in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, which concluded on December 18. He won many titles with the Qatari national team, most notably the 2019 Asian Cup, in addition to winning several titles with Al Sadd, the most recent of which was the Qatar League title last season. (QNA)

## Klinsmann: Reyna-Berhalter spat 'sad' for US soccer

**Berlin:** Former US national team coach Jurgen Klinsmann said the Gregg Berhalter-Gio Reyna saga "had an influence" on the US team's performance at the World Cup in Qatar. The Americans finished second in Group B behind England, but were eliminated after a 3-1 loss to the Netherlands in the Round of 16. After the US exit, stories emerged of a rift between coach Berhalter and the Reyna family, who admitted to pressuring US officials with details about Berhalter's past. Klinsmann, who managed the US team from 2011-2016, said the highly publicised feud was "sad to see". "From a fan perspective and a

supporter perspective, all that we hope to see is that when you go into a tournament, that every piece of energy is saved for the team. "Looking at it now, it seems that was not the case. They had problems and they were not able to solve them, and it might have had an influence (on the team's performance)." Borussia Dortmund forward Reyna, widely regarded as one of the most talented young players in US soccer, was hardly used by Berhalter in Qatar. During the latter stages of the World Cup, news emerged that Berhalter had come close to sending the 20-year-old home because he was unhappy with the player's attitude.

## BOTTOMLINE

## Manchester City top Deloitte Money League for second straight year

Reuters  
London

Manchester City have topped the Deloitte Football Money League for the second year in a row as the world's highest revenue-generating club in the 2021-22 season in which fans returned to stadiums as Covid-19 restrictions were eased.

Abu Dhabi-owned City generated total revenue of 731mn euros (\$790.65mn), followed by Real Madrid

(714mn euros) and Liverpool (702mn euros).

City's rivals Manchester United generated 689mn euros and Paris St Germain made 654mn euros.

Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal, West Ham United, Leicester City, Leeds United, Everton and Newcastle United were all on the list as the Premier League clubs made up 11 of the top 20.

"The Premier League was the only one of the Big Five European leagues to experience an increase in its media rights value during its most recent

rights sale process," said Tim Bridge, lead partner in Deloitte's Sports Business Group. "It continues to appeal to millions of global followers and its member clubs have a greater revenue advantage over international rivals."

City posted a Premier League record commercial revenue of 373mn euros in 2021-22, a growth of 65mn euros from the previous season.

Liverpool were the biggest movers in this year's edition of the Money League, rising four places from seventh to third to achieve their highest-ever position.

The Merseyside club overtook Man-

chester United in the rankings for the first time, following their run to the 2022 Champions League final which generated additional broadcast revenue.

Liverpool were also only one of five clubs to report over 100mn euros in matchday revenue, which was the first time the club had done so, as fans returned to stadiums.

Among the LaLiga teams, Barcelona and Real Madrid have yet to recover revenue to their pre-pandemic levels, with the clubs' revenues down 203mn euros and 43mn euros respectively

from 2018-19.

Leicester City (17th) and Everton (19th) are the only Premier League clubs in the Money League whose revenues have fallen, by roughly six per cent each, to £213.6mn and £181mn respectively, seeing them drop two places in Leicester's case and one place in Everton's.

Bayern Munich (6th) and Barcelona's (7th) revenues rose slightly, by two per cent and five per cent respectively, to £553.5mn and £540.5mn, but that modest growth saw them drop three places each in the Money League.

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

For the first time, Deloitte's Football Money League also reported on revenues generated from the women's teams at Money League clubs, with sides reporting average revenues of 2.4mn euros in the 2021-22 season.

Barcelona generated the highest revenue, with 7.7mn euros, having reached the Champions League final in 2022 and winning the competition in 2021. United reported the second-highest revenue with 6mn euros, followed by City (5.1mn euros), PSG (3.6mn euros), Arsenal (2.2mn euros) and Spurs (2.1mn euros).