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Sunday, January 22, 2023

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SPORT



AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Every season counts now, says Djokovic as he enters last 16

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HORSE RACING

Al Wasmiyah Farm’s Scherzo clinches Sheikh Joaan Rifle

HE Sheikh Al Qaqa bin Hamad al-Thani crowned the winners of the last two races of the prestigious meeting



HE Sheikh Al Qaqa bin Hamad al-Thani presented the trophies to connections of Scherzo, which won the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club Chairman Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi is also seen in the picture. **PICTURES:** *Juhaime*

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Scherzo made it a hat-trick of HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle victories for Al Wasmiyah Farm after jockey Andrea Atzeni guided the four-year-old to a spectacular photo-finish win at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) 31st race meeting.

At the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday, Georges Mikhaliides-trained bay colt made a slow start to the prestigious Thoroughbreds (Class 2) race as In The Night and Semper Augustus exchanged early leads. But Scherzo picked up the pace when it mattered in the 2200m feature race, with Bolthole, ridden by Ronan Thomas going neck-to-neck. It set up a thrilling finish to the \$100,000 race with Scherzo pipping Alban Elie De Mieulle-trained Bolthole by a head to clinch the race.

In The Night, which had Tomas Lukasek in the saddle, had to settle for third place. Soufiane Saadi-ridden Semper Augustus came fourth.

The HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day is held under the patronage of Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani. It was a festive atmosphere at the Al Rayyan Racecourse as the racing



HE Sheikh Al Qaqa bin Hamad al-Thani with the connections of Wathnan Racing's Abbes, which won the Grade 3 HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy for four-year-old+ Purebred Arabians.

connoisseurs gathered for a bumper 10-race card with various entertainment activities held throughout the day.

Earlier, Wathnan Racing's Abbes won the Grade 3 HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy for 4yo+ Purebred Arabians over 2,200m by four lengths, completing a double on the day for trainer Alban de Mieulle and jockey Mickael Barzalona. HE Sheikh Al Qaqa bin Hamad al-Thani crowned the winners of the last two races of meeting.

Barzalona had earlier steered Bucanero to win in HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Ha-

mad Al Thani Trophy for four-year-old Purebred Arabians over 1,750m by two-and-a-quarter length in eighth race of the day.

Meanwhile, Al Shaqab Racing's Al Wakrah won the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy for 4yo+ Purebred Arabians over 1,750m, having drawn four lengths clear under jockey Faleh Bughanaim, while Mohamed Abdulhadi Al Hajri's Stylish Performer won the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy for trainer Hamad al-Jehani, having prevailed in the sixth race

by a length and a quarter under jockey Hugo Besnier.

Also yesterday, the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy for four-year-old+ Local Thoroughbreds saw Wathnan Racing's Equinoxe – trained by De Mieulle – clinching the title under Thomas, who claimed a double. Earlier in the day, Thomas led Zuhair Mohsen-trained Al Ehdashari to Local Purebred Arabian Novice Cup (Far Bend) victory. Classic Order completed the double for trainer Mohsen after winning the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Tro-



Andrea Atzeni rides Scherzo to HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle victory.



- 2 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy (Gr3 Pa) - Purebred Arabians (Far Bend)
Abbes, Alban Elie De Mieulle, Mickael Barzalona
- 3 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy - 4yo Purebred Arabians (Far Bend)
Bucanero, Mohamed Ghazali, Mickael Barzalona
- 4 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy - Purebred Arabians (Far Bend)
Al Wakrah, Eric Lemartinel, Faleh Bughanaim
- 5 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy - Thoroughbred Open Race (Class 2) (Far Bend)
Stylish Performer, Hamad al-Jehani, Hugo Besnier
- 6 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy - Local Thoroughbreds (Far Bend)
Equinoxe, Alban Elie De Mieulle, Ronan Thomas
- 7 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy - 3yo Thoroughbreds (Class 2) (Far Bend)
Classic Order, Zuhair Mohsen, Soufiane Saadi
- 8 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy - Thoroughbred Sprint (Class 2) (Far Bend)
Come Quick, Bader Al Balushi, Maxime Guyon
- 9 - Local Purebred Arabian Novice Cup (Far Bend)
Al Ehdashari, Zuhair Mohsen, Ronan Thomas
- 10 - Local Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Cup (Far Bend)
Concorde, Mohamed Nasser al-Naimi, Soufiane Saadi

Mickael Barzalona guides Abbes to Grade 3 HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy victory.

phy for 3yo Thoroughbreds over 1,500 by two lengths and a quarter. Saadi rode the Hamad bin Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Attiya-owned gelding to complete his double having guided Concorde to victory in Local Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Cup, the first race yesterday. Ridden by Maxime Guyon, Abdulatif Hussain al-Emadi's Come Quick also notched up a victory winning the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, a Thoroughbred Sprint for 3yo+ over 1,200m.

RESULTS
HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle - Thoroughbreds (Class 2) (Far Bend)
Scherzo, Georges Mikhaliides, Andrea Atzeni

QMMF’s HRT Thuraya finishes second at the Abu Dhabi 6H endurance race

Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation's HRT Thuraya team yesterday clinched the second spot in the 992 AM Class at the Abu Dhabi 6H endurance race. In the Porsche 911 GT3 Cup (992), driven by Qatari drivers Abdulla Ali al-Khelaifi, Ghanim al-Maadheed, and Ibrahim al-Abdulghani and German semi-pro Julian Hanes, Thuraya completed 146 laps at the Yas Marina Circuit with an average of 161.87kph. The team registered their fastest time in the 130th lap when they clocked a time of 1:57.451. The Abu Dhabi race – a six-hour endurance test – was the second round of the 24-Hour Series and also the third round of the Middle East Endurance championship, following stops in Kuwait (12 hours) and the Dubai (24 hours).



CRICKET

Skipper Rohit lauds pace bowlers as India clinch series

‘You expect that kind of bowling outside India. These guys have got a lot of skills, they have been working on that for all this while and you could see the reward’



India's captain Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the second ODI against New Zealand at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium in Raipur yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Raipur

Skipper Rohit Sharma yesterday hailed India's seam bowlers after the hosts hammered New Zealand by eight wickets to clinch the series in the second one-day international. Pace spearhead Mohamed Shami returned figures of 3-18 to help dismiss the Black Caps for 108 after India elected to bowl first in Raipur. Rohit made 51 as India romped home in 20.1 overs to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. And the captain said his bowlers had made an impression with their seam movement at home since the recent ODI sweep of Sri Lanka when Mohamed Siraj led the charge with nine wickets. "These last five games (in-

cluding three against Sri Lanka), bowlers have really stepped up," Rohit said after the win. "You expect that kind of bowling, that kind of seam movement outside India. But these guys have got a lot of skills, they have been working on that for all this while and you could see the reward." Indian pitches are known to be spin-friendly, in contrast to wickets in Australia and England where fast bowlers have a bigger role. At the toss Rohit took a while to announce his decision to field, and told the presenter he "forgot" about the team call. But things soon turned serious when Shami struck in the first over and with his fellow quicks had the tourists reeling at 15-5 by the 11th over. "I feel that the more you work with the ball in practice, the more success will come," said

man of the match Shami. "As a new-ball bowler, it's important to assess the conditions and pass the message quickly to the other bowlers as well." Glenn Phillips made 36 as he combined with the middle- and lower-order batsmen including Michael Bracewell (22) and Mitchell Santner (27) to take the total past 100, but the innings lasted only 34.3 overs. After Shami's opening-ball heroics, fellow quick Hardik Pandya and spinner Washington Sundar took over to return two wickets each. Shami bowled Finn Allen on the fifth ball of the first over, at a venue making its international debut. Siraj sent back Henry Nicholls, caught at slip for two, before Shami and Pandya took two wickets caught-and-bowled to rattle the visitors, whose skipper Tom Latham fell for one.



New Zealand's Finn Allen (left) walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal by India's Mohamed Shami yesterday. (AFP)

Phillips and Bracewell attempted to rebuild and hit back in a 41-run sixth-wicket stand before Shami broke through. He got Bracewell, who hit 140 in his team's 12-run loss in the opener, caught behind. Phillips kept up the defiance in another partnership with the left-handed Santner. The pair put on 47 before Pandya bowled Santner. Phillips departed in an attempt to hit out spinner Sundar only to be caught at mid-wicket, and the innings soon folded. "We just couldn't build partnerships at the top," said Latham. "Guys lower down tried to fight but it wasn't easy. We didn't adapt well today, considering the surface." The Indian openers Rohit and Gill, who hit a match-winning 208 in the previous match, put on 72 runs for the first wicket. Rohit struck some delightful

boundaries including a six off his trademark hook shot to ease into the target. He kept up the charge as he reached his 50 in 47 balls but soon fell lbw off fast bowler Henry Shipley. Virat Kohli hit a few boundaries before he was stumped by Latham off Santner for 11. Gill hit the winning four with the left-handed Ishan Kishan at the other end. The final match is on Tuesday in Indore. **BRIEF SCORES**
New Zealand 108 all out in 34.3 overs (G. Phillips 36, M. Bracewell 22, M. Santner 27; M. Shami 3-18, H. Pandya 2-16, W. Sundar 2-7) **lost to India 111-2 in 20.1 overs** (R. Sharma 51, S. Gill 40 not out; H. Shipley 1-29, M. Santner 1-28) **by eight wickets. Series:** India lead the three-match series 2-0.

SPOTLIGHT

Doheny hits 84 as Ireland win to level Zimbabwe series

AFP
Harare

Stephen Doheny made light of his lack of international experience to top score with 84 as Ireland beat Zimbabwe by 46 runs yesterday to level their one-day international series. After losing the toss and been put in to bat, Ireland made 294-7 at Harare Sports Club with Doheny and Harry Tector (75) the chief contributors. In response, Zimbabwe never matched the tourists' run rate and despite half centuries from former England Test batsman Gary Ballance (52) and Innocent Kaia (51), they fell short. Zimbabwe were all out for 248 in 47.3 overs, and now the stage is set for a series decider in the Zimbabwe capital tomorrow. The result bucked a trend as the team winning the toss and opting to bat second won all four previous tour matches - three in a Twenty20 series won 2-1 by Zimbabwe and the first ODI. Doheny, 24, made his ODI debut in the series opener and scored just three runs as Zimbabwe won by three wickets. But it was a different story in his second outing as he struck a six and seven fours before being caught at mid-off by Ballance.

Opening partner Paul Stirling, deputising as captain for injured Andy Balbirnie, set a good example with 45 runs, including two sixes and four fours, before Ballance caught him at fine leg. Tector followed up a century three days ago with a brisk 75 off 61 deliveries, including one six and seven fours, before he was caught by Ryan Burl at deep mid-wicket. Tendai Chatara (3-51) and Burl (2-66) were the best of the Zimbabwe bowlers. Ballance was caught at long-off by Josh Little attempting an off drive having faced 67 balls and hit two fours. Stirling caught Kaia, who struck a six and three fours, at extra cover off a short delivery from Little (4-38), the most successful Irish bowler. Gujarat Titans have hired Little for the Indian Premier League season, making him the first Irish international to get an IPL contract. **BRIEF SCORES**
Ireland 294-7 in 50 overs (S. Doheny 84, H. Tector 75, P. Stirling 45, G. Dockrell 30; T. Chatara 3-51, B. Evans 2-66) **bt Zimbabwe 248 in 47.3 overs** (G. Ballance 52, I. Kaia 51, R. Burl 41, C. Chibhabha 40; J. Little 4-38, M. Adair 2-39, G. Hume 2-52) **by 46 runs. Series:** Tied 1-1 with final match tomorrow.

France's Coquard wins stage as Vine holds Tour Down Under lead

ADELAIDE: Frenchman Bryan Coquard jubilantly broke through for his first World Tour win in 10 years as Jay Vine maintained his overall lead after the fourth stage of the Tour Down Under yesterday. The lightweight Coquard (Cofidis) dashed to the front in Willunga's main street to sprint away with the penultimate stage over 133.2km from Italy's Alberto Bettiol (EF Education EasyPost) and France's Hugo Page (Intermarche Circus Wanty). Australia's Vine (UAE Team Emirates) held on to his 15-second advantage in the general classification heading into Sunday's fifth and final Unley to Mount Lofty stage over 112.5 km. Vine, well protected by his UAE team from the buffeting crosswinds during the fourth stage, leads from Britain's 2018 Vuelta a Espana winner Simon Yates (Team Jayco-AlUla) and Spain's Pello Bilbao (Bahrain Victorious). Coquard, who had 48 wins before Saturday's stage, excitedly greeted his breakthrough World Tour victory in the TDU. "It's been a long time, I wait 10 years for this win, my first one in the World Tour," Coquard said. "I am very proud and very happy. I have won a lot of races, but never in the World Tour. That was the goal for 2023, so to win it already in January is good news." Rivals tried in vain to catch out Vine and the Tour Down Under ochre leader's jersey but he was well protected by four UAE Team Emirates teammates. "It was very stressful today. There was one point that I thought we were going to have an easy day and 45 km in it was just on and it was on until the end," Vine said. "It's good, we have an amazing team, we had six guys in the front group helping me and there were clear instructions from the team car. I haven't been counting any chickens before they're hatched and we've now got through this day, but arguably tomorrow is the day when we've got the stronger team for the Mount Lofty finish."

GOLF

Rookie Thompson swoops for three eagles to lead Rahm

AFP
Los Angeles

US PGA Tour rookie Davis Thompson grabbed a trio of eagles on Friday in an eight-under par 64 that kept him two strokes clear of Spain's Jon Rahm in the US PGA Tour American Express tournament in California. After notching back-to-back eagles in his first-round 62, Thompson matched the US tour record for eagles through 36 holes in a tournament as he added another three on the Nicklaus Tournament course, one of three in use for the event in La Quinta, California. "Just had some good numbers into par-fives and was able to execute my shots," said the 23-year-old graduate of the developmental Korn Ferry Tour, who is chasing his first US PGA Tour title. "Had some putts drop. So it was nice to make some eagles." The first came at the par-five 11th, where he rolled in a 20-foot eagle putt. After a birdie at 15, he slowed a bit with bogeys at the

16th and first, but he bounced back with a birdie at the third followed by an eagle at the fourth, where he hit a five-iron to about 15 feet and made the putt. He added birdies at the fifth and sixth, and at the seventh hit a "really good six-iron and make, like, a 20-footer" to cap a run that saw him pick up seven strokes in the space of five holes. "Everything is kind of clicking these last two playing days and just looking forward to trying to keep it rolling tomorrow," Thompson said. On Saturday he'll play the Stadium Course, which will also host the final round after the 54-hole cut is made. World number four Rahm, who lifted the title in the California desert in 2018, was impressed by Thompson's eagle tally. "Five eagles in two rounds on two different courses is pretty impressive," Rahm said. "It's good playing." Rahm said he was "feeling great" after posting eight birdies without a bogey in his eight-under 64 on the Nicklaus course for a 16-under par total of 128.

FOCUS

Maserati MSG Racing enters new era in Mexico City



Maserati MSG Racing accelerated into a new era for Formula E at the Mexico City E-Prix, with the team narrowly missing out on the top 10 at the Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez. Facing the dawn of Gen3, drivers Edoardo Mortara and Maximilian Günther gained invaluable insight during the Season 9 opener and showed promising initial pace following an encouraging pre-season test. A challenging qualifying session - which saw both drivers fall short of the Duel stages - left the duo facing an uphill recovery in the race, in which they started from 16th and 17th. Edo advanced to 15th on the opening lap by overtaking McLaren's Rene Rast, although the race was quickly paused when a collision for Robin Frijns brought out the Safety Car.

Action was resumed on lap five but was again halted one lap later when Jaguar's Sam Bird stopped on track with a technical failure. The field took to green flag running again on lap nine. Edo and Max overtook a penalised Dan Ticktum during the restart, while the latter also passed Rast, who activated Attack Mode, for 15th. On lap 18, an unfortunate spin and collision caused by a snap of understeer forced Edo to retire, leaving Max as the team's sole runner for the remainder of the race. With a late Attack Mode activation, the German pilot made good progress to threaten for points in the closing laps and overtook DS Penske's Jean-Eric Vergne on the final tour to finish 11th. Formula E's ninth season will continue on January 27th and 28th, with a double-header event on the Riyadh Street Cir-

cuit in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Diriyah. "It was a difficult day but in motorsport, you learn the most from your bad days - not your good ones. A poor qualifying put us on the back foot, but in the race, we were able to come back strong, with Max fighting from 17th to 11th and finishing just outside the points. Edo was showing really strong pace during the race, and his incident in Turn One was unfortunate. It's a shame as his pace was great. We have a lot to learn and there is a lot of data that we need to process from this weekend so that we can be in a better position for the next race in Diriyah," James Rossiter, Team Principal, Maserati MSG Racing, said. Speaking on the occasion, Maserati MSG Racing's driver Edoardo Mortara said, "This weekend wasn't our best. Af-



ter the pace we had in Valencia, I found it difficult to find a good rhythm in the car, especially over one lap. I managed to come back in the race and until the crash, I think we were in a good position, especially with our pace and on the energy side. I found it quite challenging to find a good balance on the tyres, and a snap of oversteer caused me to go off in the first corner. Overall, there were few positives to take, but we will examine our data closely, understand what happened and come back for Diriyah." "This weekend has been tough for us as a team. With the high altitude it was quite difficult to get the tyres into the sweet spot which impacted our pace in qualifying. Starting from the back, our pace in the race was much better and our efficiency and strategy proved to be competitive. I was able to move

forward several places, but unfortunately, we were just short of the top 10. We've gained a lot of data from this weekend, and now, we just need to examine our performance, focus on our progress, and come back stronger in Riyadh," said Maserati MSG Racing's driver Maximilian Günther. Head of Maserati Corse Giovanni Sgro: "Maserati is back to racing and although the result was not what we were hoping for, it still made the Mexico City E-Prix exciting and memorable for all of us. Motorsport is unpredictable. First and foremost, we're relieved Edo is OK and what a competitive race for Max, as he fought from 17th to finish just outside the points in 11th. This first race has been a great learning experience and we now focus our attention and determination on Saudi Arabia."

AL-AJAMI, AL-QADI SHINE AT HATHAB



Faleh Suwead al-Ajami topped the Big Tour class and also bagged the third spot during the 8th round of the Longines Qatar Equestrian Tour Hathab at the Al Shaqab yesterday. Al-Ajami registered the fastest round with 13-year-old mare Ambre De Beaufour in 66.83 seconds. He then returned with 10-year-old gelding Larko Denfer to claim the third place after timing 75.04secs. Salmeen Sultan al-Suwaidi took the runner-up spot with 14-year-old mare Fiori LS in 69.58secs.



Commercial Director of Al Shaqab and Vice-President of the Higher Organising Committee of Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour Omar al-Mannai (left) and Head of Endurance Shiekh Mohamed bin Nawaf al-Thani pose with Open Class podium winners. Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi won the Open Class, a day after winning the Medium Tour. Al-Qadi and Aslan 69 were once again unstoppable as they emerged fastest in 125cm class. Ahmad Mohamed al-Badi (Tom Ford) was second, followed by Jodie Anne Leeder (B Chelsea S).

TENNIS

Every season counts now, says Djokovic as he enters last 16

Murray bows out, Sabalenka storms into pre-quarter to set up showdown with Bencic

AFP
Melbourne

An ailing Novak Djokovic said yesterday every moment counted now that he was in the “last stage” of his career, after battling past Grigor Dimitrov and into the Australian Open last 16.

The Serb came through a titanic 77-minute first set before taming the Bulgarian 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena, needing treatment twice on his troublesome hamstring. He will face home hope Alex de Minaur for a place in the quarter-finals after the 22nd seed defeated Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi in three sets.

Djokovic’s gutsy win inched him nearer to a 10th Australian Open title and record-tying 22 Grand Slam crowns. Winning once again in Melbourne would also return him to world number one for the first time since June. Now 35, Djokovic said he was savouring each tournament more.

“Every season counts I guess now, when you come to the last stage, the last quarter, of your career,” he said.

“Obviously you start appreciating and valuing each tournament more because you might not have a lot left in the tank. I’ve been truly fortunate to do what I love, I love the sport, I love competing. It’s been almost 20 years now of professional sport. I can’t be more grateful than I am.”

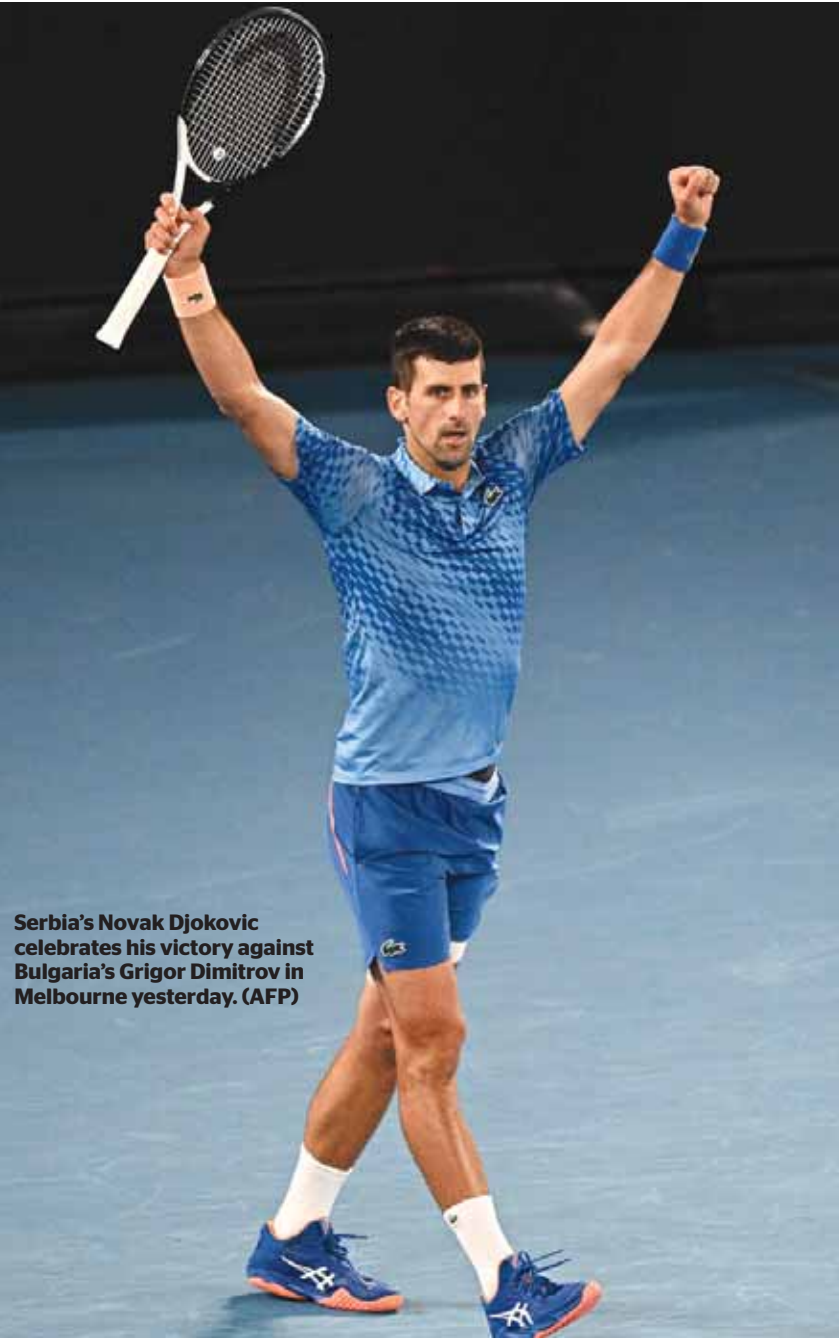
Victory put Djokovic into the last 16 for a 15th time but he was made to work for it, especially with his left hamstring troubling him. “It kind of always starts well in last few matches, including this one, and then some movement happens and then it gets worse,” he said. “Pills kick in, some hot cream and stuff. That works for a little bit, then it doesn’t, then works again. It’s really a rollercoaster, honestly. I’ll take it match by match. I don’t know what awaits, but I do hope and I have faith for the best.”

Djokovic aggravated his hamstring during his run to a 92nd title at the Adelaide International this month and has been struggling with it since.

Djokovic came into the match without his usual off-day practice session to give his leg as much time as possible to recover. With his left thigh heavily strapped, the Serb broke immediately and consolidated to take an early grip on the first set. He was cruising but appeared to feel the injury when moving for a shot at 5-3. He managed to earn three set points, which were saved, but was then broken when serving for the set at 5-4. Agitated, he complained to the umpire about being given a time violation and was then forced to save two set points, before an epic tiebreak.

He eventually got over the line on his fifth set point after some intense tennis.

Djokovic took a medical timeout at the changeover and returned to dial up the pressure and take a break before comfortably seeing out the second set. With Dimitrov flagging, he turned the screws further by breaking twice early in set three.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his victory against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

Despite a mid-set wobble when the Bulgarian clawed back and then more treatment on his leg, Djokovic battled to the finish line. De Minaur, who is aiming for a first quarter-final at Melbourne Park, now awaits Djokovic after a 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-1 victory.

“These are the matches you want to be playing,” said the Australian.

Djokovic’s fellow 35-year-old Murray will not join him in the next round, however, as the Briton’s 4:05am finish eventually caught up with him.

Former number one Murray was clearly feeling the effects of his epic five-setter in round two, which started on Thursday but ended in the early hours of Friday.

The 24th-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut won 6-1, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3,

6-4 and faces unseeded Tommy Paul of the United States. “I gave everything that I had the last three matches - I’m very proud of that,” said Murray.

“But I’m also disappointed because I put loads of work into the beginning of this year and was playing well enough to have a really good run, have a deep run.”

Also in the men’s draw, fifth seed Andrey Rublev surged into a clash with Holger Rune - then thanked his beaten opponent Dan Evans for giving him a banana mid-match.

The Russian crushed the Briton 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 to make the fourth round for a third time. He will face Danish teenager Rune for a place in the quarter-finals after the ninth seed survived a nasty fall to sweep past unseeded Frenchman Ugo

Humbert 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

In two all-American matches, Jeffrey Wolf strolled past Michael Mmoh in three sets while Paul made equally light work of Jenson Brooksby.

Meanwhile hard-hitting Aryna Sabalenka burnished her title credentials as she barrelled through, along with several other women’s seeds. The Belarusian fifth seed blew away 26th-seeded Elise Mertens 6-2, 6-3 to set up a clash with Olympic champion Belinda Bencic.

Thirtieth seed Karolina Pliskova and 23rd seed Zhang Shuai also went through in straight sets on day six at Melbourne Park, and will clash in the fourth round.

Sabalenka is trying not to get carried away. The Minsk-born 24-year-old teased the Margaret Court Arena crowd for supporting Belgium’s Mertens over her, but said she was enjoying the ride into the second week.

“About the favourite, that I am on that favourite list... I mean, it’s really good that I’m there,” said the Belarusian, who is yet to drop a set. But I better focus on myself, on my game, make sure that my dream will happen.”

Bencic has also not dropped a set in Melbourne. The Swiss 12th seed eased past unseeded Italian Camila Giorgi 6-2, 7-5. Also into the fourth round is the 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova, who beat her fellow Czech Marketa Vondrousova in three sets. She faces Donna Vekic of Croatia. French fourth seed Caroline Garcia fought back after a disastrous first set to beat world number 158 Laura Siegemund 1-6, 6-3, 6-3.

RESULTS

Men’s 3rd round: Andrey Rublev (RUS x5) bt Daniel Evans (GBR x25) 6-4, 6-2, 6-3
Holger Rune (DEN x9) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5)
Alex De Minaur (AUS x22) bt Benjamin Bonzi (FRA) 7-6 (7/0), 6-2, 6-1
Novak Djokovic (SRB x4) bt Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x27) 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4
Ben Shelton (USA) bt Alexei Popyrin (AUS) 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4
Jeffrey Wolf (USA) bt Michael Mmoh (USA) 6-4, 6-1, 6-2
Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP x24) bt Andy Murray (GBR) 6-1, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3, 6-4
Tommy Paul (USA) bt Jenson Brooksby (USA) 6-1, 6-4, 6-3.

Women’s 3rd round: Karolina Pliskova (CZE x30) bt Varvara Gracheva (RUS) 6-4, 6-2
Zhang Shuai (CHN x23) bt Katie Volynets (USA) 6-3, 6-2
Magda Linette (POL) bt Ekaterina Alexandrova (RUS x19) 6-3, 6-4
Caroline Garcia (FRA x4) bt Laura Siegemund (GER) 1-6, 6-3, 6-3
Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x5) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x26) 6-2, 6-3
Belinda Bencic (SUI x12) bt Camila Giorgi (ITA) 6-2, 7-5
Donna Vekic (CRO) bt Nuria Parrizas Diaz (ESP) 6-2, 6-2
Linda Fruhvirtova (CZE) bt Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) 7-5, 2-6, 6-3.

FOOTBALL

Napoli score 2-0 win over Salernitana to move 12 point clear

AFP
Milan

Napoli further extended their grip on the Serie A title race yesterday by beating local rivals Salernitana 2-0 to temporarily move 12 points ahead of the chasing pack.

Goals from Giovanni Di Lorenzo and Victor Osimhen immediately either side of half-time made sure that Napoli will be at least nine points clear at the halfway point of the season after a straight-forward win in soaking Salerno.

Luciano Spalletti’s side now have to wait until their closest rivals AC Milan take on Champions League-chasing Lazio in Rome on Tuesday to know just how far in front they will be after collecting 50 points in 19 matches.

Inter Milan are a further point behind their local rivals and will move provisionally into second place if they beat Empoli tomorrow.

Napoli do not have to worry about Juventus who had been ahead of Inter on goal difference but were docked 15 points on Friday for illicit use of transfers to boost their balance sheet.

Save the ruling being overturned on appeal later this year, Juve are out of the race, making Napoli’s bid for a first league crown since 1990 that much simpler.

Salernitana are winless in

seven matches and sit 16th on 18 points, six in front of Verona who are just inside the relegation zone after beating Lecce 2-0 earlier on Saturday to continue their recovery under new coach Marco Zaffaroni.

The hosts were also playing under a new manager of sorts as Davide Nicola took his place on the bench at the Stadio Arechi after being sacked on Monday and then brought back in less than 48 hours later.

Nicola’s team huffed and puffed but once Di Lorenzo broke their resistance with a precision finish from Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa’s low pass in first-half stoppage time there was only going to be one winner.

Napoli made the short trip to Salerno without Khvicha Kvaratskhelia who usually flanks Osimhen, but the Nigeria forward is in unstoppable form and netted his league-leading 13th of the season two minutes after the break.

Kvaratskhelia’s replacement Eljif Elmas cut inside and then let off a low shot which bounce back off the post and straight to Osimhen, who gobbled up the chance to double Napoli’s lead.

Napoli had one scare with seven minutes remaining when Alex Meret did superbly well to tip Krzysztof Piatek’s low drive onto the post, and that save made sure of a potentially huge three points for a team who are seemingly having everything their way.



Napoli’s Victor Osimhen (right) celebrates with Giovanni Di Lorenzo after scoring against Salernitana during the Serie A match in Salerno, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)

Wolfsburg put six past Freiburg

Berlin: Jonas Wind scored two first-half goals as in-form Wolfsburg romped to a 6-0 hammering of high-flying Freiburg in the Bundesliga yesterday. Visitors Freiburg were hoping to cut the gap to Bayern Munich to two points after the leaders’ 1-1 draw at RB Leipzig on Friday. But they capitulated after falling behind to Patrick Wimmer’s second-minute opener. Wind scored twice in the space of nine minutes to put the home side three goals to the good at the break. Wolfsburg added three more in the second half, through Yannick Gerhardt, Ridle Baku and Luca Waldschmidt’s late penalty, to move up to sixth place. Wolfsburg are now unbeaten in 10 matches, with five straight league wins, having started the season with four Bundesliga losses in their first seven games under new coach Niko Kovac. Eintracht Frankfurt took advantage of Freiburg’s misfortune to climb into second place with a 3-0 home win over rock-bottom Schalke. Danish forward Jesper Lindstrom rocketed a strike high into the Schalke goal in the 27th minute for his seventh league goal of the campaign. Rafael Borre scored a second with less than five minutes remaining, before Aurelio Buta made it three in the second minute of injury time. Union Berlin fought back to win 3-1 at home against Hoffenheim and move into third. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Rally great al-Attiyah targets Paris Olympics gold in shooting

Qatari ace has an Olympics bronze in skeet from the London Games in 2012

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

Having cemented his place as one of the all-time greats after his fifth Dakar Rally victory last week, Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah is in no mood to stop.

The 52-year-old racing legend, who is also equally good at shooting, has set his sights on winning gold at the Paris Olympics next year. Al-Attiyah has an Olympics bronze in skeet from the London Games in 2012. Now, the Qatari ace wants to stand on top of the podium in Paris, in what will be his seventh Olympics. With his unbreakable resolve, it would not be a surprise if he goes on to add another feat to his illustrious career.

"That's my second major goal. I have started preparing for Paris and will continue to get ready for the challenge. Paris Games will be my 7th Olympics," al-Attiyah said, in one of the many felicitations functions held in his honour after his return from Dakar triumph.

Al-Attiyah is an once-in-a-lifetime athlete, having shown his world class abilities in two different sports concurrently for over a decade. Admittedly, shooting is his second love as he devotes most of his time to racing. And al-Attiyah knows medalling at Olympics, that too gold, would be a gigantic challenge.

"It's not easy, but this year we will have a lot of preparation. We will have a two-month training camp in Italy and then we

will take part in the Asian Games, Asian Championships and the Arab Championships to continue our practice. Then next year we will focus more for the Olympic Games," he noted.

Matching Ari Vatanen's tally of Dakar wins put him in the same bracket as Dakar legends, but number five sets al-Attiyah apart as the second-most successful driver in the car category behind Stephane Peterhansel – who has eight.

In the unforgiving Saudi terrain over a fortnight, al-Attiyah showed his tactical acumen as well his mastery behind the wheels even as his main rivals tumbled one by one. Al-Attiyah's team principal at Toyota Gazoo Racing Glyn Hall summed up the Qatari character perfectly recently. "There are so many different elements of Nasser," Hall said. "He is tough. I think the softest part of Nasser is his teeth!"

For al-Attiyah though, it is all about determination and willingness to stay on top of his game – whether it may be racing or shooting. "I love my sport and I always try to be on top," the soft-spoken al-Attiyah says with his trademark smile. "Hard work is a result of where I am now. There is no other way to achieve success. I am thankful to Qatar (government) for all the support I get for my sport. I always look to do best for my country," he says modestly.

"When I see everyone around me, it's a nice feeling. I always dream and work to be the number one to raise the Qatar flag. You have to be strong in the things you know and enjoy it. If you love to do

something, do it properly, this is what I am trying to do and getting success. I get a lot of support from everyone here in Qatar and the Middle East also which keeps me going. This is a really nice, nice feeling. I will try to do my best to be the number one and raise the Qatar flag in the world."

Al-Attiyah aims to break the record of eight titles in the car category held by Frenchman Peterhansel. "I am really setting this target. The target to break

the record for eight titles. I have won five now and I have a long mission. I hope I will be able to achieve the target. Inshallah, I will try my best to keep going in this class," he said.

Al-Attiyah, who also has 18 Middle East titles, will be seen in the Oman International Rally next week. "I am looking forward to winning in Oman as we are aiming to win the Middle East Championship title again. I am ready for the challenge," he said.

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah poses with the Dakar Rally trophy during a felicitation function in Lusail.



That's my second major goal. I have started preparing for Paris and will continue to get ready for the challenge. Paris Games will be my 7th Olympics. It's not easy, but this year we will have a lot of preparation. We will have a two-month training camp in Italy.

LA LIGA

Griezmann shines as Atletico thrash Valladolid

AFP
Madrid

Atletico Madrid produced one of their best performances of the season to thrash Real Valladolid 3-0 yesterday, with Memphis Depay making his debut. The Dutch forward, signed from Barcelona on Friday, came off the bench in the second half but by then Antoine Griezmann's virtuoso display had the hosts in full control at the Metropolitan.

The French forward produced a sublime assist for Alvaro Morata to open the scoring and then struck the second

himself. Mario Hermoso netted the third from the rebound after his header from Griezmann's free-kick was parried back into his path.

Those three goals in an 11-minute spell in the first half wrapped up the points for fourth-placed Atletico. Diego Simeone's team have endured a tough season both in the league and also in Europe, where they were eliminated, but earned a second win in seven league games to get heading back in the right direction.

On Thursday they face rivals Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey quarter-finals, important both as a derby but also their last realistic chance of silverware this season. Invigorated by the cup draw and De-

pay's arrival, Atletico started brilliantly. Griezmann's stunning back-flick played in Morata, who cut inside and drilled home at the near post. Five minutes later Griezmann doubled Atletico's lead, blasting home Nahuel Molina's cross.

Hermoso's third was validated after a long VAR check and Atletico spurned chances to increase their winning margin after the break. Angel Correa hit both posts with one shot, while Yannick Carrasco twice came close.

The victory brings Atletico within 10 points of leaders Barcelona, albeit having played two extra games. The Catalans host Getafe today, while second place Real Madrid travel to face Athletic Bilbao.

Real Sociedad, third, beat Rayo Vallecano 2-0 earlier yesterday.

RESULTS

Rayo Vallecano 0 Real Sociedad 2 (Sorloth 15, Barrenetxea 36); Espanyol 1 (Braithwaite 43) Real Betis 0; Atletico Madrid 3 (Morata 18, Griezmann 23, Hermoso 28) Real Valladolid 0

Playing today (all times GMT): Villarreal v Girona (1300), Elche v Osasuna (1515), Barcelona v Getafe (1730), Athletic Bilbao v Real Madrid (2000)

Tomorrow: Valencia v Almeria (2000)

Played Friday: Real Mallorca 1 (Rodriguez 59) Celta Vigo 0

CHESS

Carlsen leads star cast as Qatar Masters to return after 8 years

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Masters Chess will be back on the calendar in 2023 after a break of eight years. With an \$110,000 prize fund, it will likely be one of the strongest open tournaments of the year with reigning five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen leading the field.

Organised by the Qatar Chess Federation (QCF) under the auspices of the International Chess Federation (FIDE), the tournament will take place for the third time from October 10-20. The Qatar Masters Open was first held in 2014 and won by Chinese Grandmaster Yu Yangyi, while Norwegian Carlsen defeated Yangyi in a playoff to win the next edition in 2015. There will be nine rounds with the winner taking home \$25,000.

QCF president Mohamed al-Mudahka said that the Qatar Masters is considered one of the

most competitive open tournaments in the world as the line-up includes some of the best players in the world. "Everyone witnessed the great success of Qatar in organising the 2022 World Cup for the first time in the Arab region and the Middle East. So other sports will certainly follow the same path of success, and we are discussing various projects besides the Qatar Masters tournament. But for me now this is an extremely important event," said al-Mudahka, who is also International Director of FIDE.

Carlsen said he was excited to return to Qatar. "I am very happy to play in the Qatar Masters again. This tournament is very important. All means of comfort are available to all the participants, thanks to the wonderful support provided by the organisers. The atmosphere will certainly be fine and the participation is in large numbers and the competitions will be strong. I can't wait for the start of the tournament and play in it," the defending champions said.



Qatar Chess Federation president Mohamed al-Mudahka (right) with world champion Magnus Carlsen.

Troubled Juventus docked 15 points in suspect transfer trial

Milan: Juventus' troubled start to the new year slipped into disaster on Friday after the Italian Football Federation docked the Serie A giants 15 points for using transfers to artificially boost their balance sheet. The FIGC said in a statement that the points sanction was to be inflicted this season, a huge blow to Juve whose chances of qualifying for next season's Champions League are now greatly compromised.

Juve drop down from third to 10th place on just 22 points, 15 from the top four positions in Italy's top flight. Missing out on Europe's top - and richest - club competition would be a further blow to the club's accounts which last season were nearly 239 million euros in the red.

Juve's current sporting director Federico Cherubini was also banned for 16 months, another serious punishment which Juve said in a statement they would appeal at the Italian Olympic Committee. The club's former leadership were also handed long bans by the FIGC including two years to ex-chairman Andrea Agnelli and former CEO Maurizio Arrivabene and 30 months to former sporting director Fabio Paratici, now at Tottenham Hotspur.

The FIGC also said that it had asked that the bans - which also included eight months

for former vice-president and playing icon Pavel Nedved - be extended beyond Italy to the jurisdictions of international governing bodies UEFA and FIFA.

All eight other clubs facing potential FIGC sanctions, including Serie A teams Sampdoria and Empoli, were acquitted, something Juve's legal team called "a clear injustice".

They were accused of using capital gains - the positive difference between purchase and sale values net of amortisation and write-downs - from a series of player exchanges in which little or no money passed between clubs. One widely-cited deal was between Juve and Barcelona in 2020 which saw Miralem Pjanic move to Catalonia and Arthur Melo go the other way. Arthur was valued at 72mn euros and Pjanic 60mn euros, sums both clubs could immediately book on their balance sheets while the cost of purchases can be spread over the length of a player's contract. Juve recorded a capital gain of 43mn euros on Pjanic, the second highest in the club's history. The decision to dock Juve points came as the FIGC reopened a trial which had ended last year with Juve and a host of other clubs including Serie A leaders Napoli being acquitted.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool-Chelsea stalemate dents top four hopes, Newcastle held

AFP
Liverpool

Liverpool and Chelsea did little for their chances of climbing into the Premier League's top four with an uninspiring 0-0 draw as Newcastle went third after another goalless draw at Crystal Palace yesterday. In a repeat of last season's League and FA Cup finals, which Liverpool won on penalties after 0-0 draws, neither side could break the deadlock at Anfield to remain 10 points off the top four.

Chelsea did have the ball in the net early on, but Kai Havertz's strike was ruled out for offside after a VAR review. The visitors introduced new 100mn euro (\$108mn) signing Mykhailo Mudryk off the bench in the second half and the Ukrainian came as close as anyone to a winner when he fired into the side-netting.

Jurgen Klopp admitted he might

not have made it to 1,000 games in his managerial career if there had been too many similar matches in the previous 999. But he was satisfied with a first Premier League clean sheet since October. "I'm okay with 0-0 because you have to accept these steps," said Klopp.

Newcastle missed the chance to go two points clear of Manchester United ahead of their trip to leaders Arsenal today. The Magpies did enough to edge above United on goal difference as they extended their unbeaten run in the league to 15 games. Eddie Howe's men controlled the majority of the game, but were thankful to Nick Pope for a sensational save to deny Jean-Philippe Mateta a second half winner for Palace.

At the other end of the table, Everton's 69-year stay in the top flight looks ever more precarious. Jarrod Bowen struck twice in the first half as West Ham won 2-0 at the London Stadium to move out of the bottom three thanks to their first win in eight league games.



Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech (left) vies for the ball with Liverpool's Andrew Robertson during the Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (AFP)

An 11th defeat in 14 matches puts more pressure on Frank Lampard's position as Everton boss.

"It's been a bad run of results for us all, and for Frank, but I would never say that," said Everton chairman Bill Ken-

wright on whether the former Chelsea boss had taken charge for the last time. "We've just got to start winning."

Leicester secured their first point since the World Cup break but were denied a vital win by a late Brighton equaliser in a 2-2 draw. Kaoru Mitoma's sumptuous strike gave the visitors the lead, but Marc Albrighton quickly levelled and Harvey Barnes put Leicester in front just after the hour mark. Teenage striker Evan Ferguson came off the bench to head in off the post in the 88th minute and snatch a point that moves Brighton into the top six.

Bournemouth dropped into the bottom three despite ending a run of six consecutive defeats with a 1-1 draw against Nottingham Forest. Jaidon Anthony put the hosts in front, but Sam Surridge came back to haunt his former club seven minutes from time.

Southampton remain rooted to the foot of the table after a 1-0 defeat to Aston Villa that was disrupted by a drone

flying above the stadium. Play was temporarily halted and players taken off the pitch at St. Mary's for their own safety towards the end of the first half. Once the action got back underway, Villa maintained their upward momentum under Unai Emery as Ollie Watkins headed in Douglas Luiz's free-kick 13 minutes from time.

RESULTS

Bournemouth 1 (Anthony 28) Nottingham Forest 1 (Surridge 83); Crystal Palace 0 Newcastle 0; Leicester 2 (Albrighton 38, Barnes 63) Brighton 2 (Mitoma 27, Ferguson 88); Liverpool 0 Chelsea 0; Southampton 0 Aston Villa 1 (Watkins 77); West Ham 2 (Bowen 34, 42) Everton 0

Playing today: Leeds v Brentford (1400 GMT), Manchester City v Wolves (1400 GMT), Arsenal v Manchester United (1630 GMT)

Playing tomorrow: Fulham v Tottenham (2000 GMT)