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## Frenchman Perez holds on to claim Abu Dhabi title



**FOOTBALL | Page 4**

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# GULF TIMES SPORT



**TENNIS**

## Tsitsipas into Australian Open quarters but Swiatek, Gauff out

Page 3

# Swiatek to headline Qatar TotalEnergies Open

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar TotalEnergies Open will return with a bang with nine out of the world's top ten players confirmed to participate in the 2023 edition to be held at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha from February 13 to 18.

Of the world's top ten superstars, only the World No. 6 Maria Sakkari of Greece is unlikely to be in action in the \$780,637 total prize-money event.

The World No. 1 and defending champion Iga Swiatek of Poland leads the star cast of 56 players for the singles and 28 pairs for the doubles events of the 21st edition of the WTA 500 tournament.

Swiatek defeated Estonia's Anett Kontaveit in straight sets last year to lift the Golden Falcon trophy for the first time in her career in Doha.

The 21-year-old Warsaw-born player, who went on to add two Grand Slams (French Open and US Open) to her trophy cabinet after the victory in Doha, besides wins at Indian Wells, Miami, Stuttgart, Rome, and San Diego; in what was her best year so far on the tour, will be joined by super stars including Ons Jabeur, Jessica Pegula, Caroline Garcia, Aryna Sabalenka, Coco Gauff, Daria Kasatkina, Veronika Kudermetova, and Belinda Bencic to give tennis fans in Qatar and the region a treat of a lifetime.

For World No. 2 Ons Jabeur, the highest-ranked African and Arab tennis player in WTA and ATP history, a victory in Doha will not only cement her legendary status in the region, but will also ensure the tournament has an Arabian or African winner for the first time in its history – a record many people are looking forward to.

The 28-year-old Tunisian narrowly missed out twice on having a Grand Slam crown on

her head last year, having suffered disappointing defeats at Wimbledon and at the US Open.

While all eyes will be on the top-ten stars as the favourites, two-time winner Petra Kvitova will also be waiting in the wings with the expectation of making history of her own as the first player to lift the coveted trophy thrice.

Of the four lucky players who have been two-time champions in Doha, namely Anastasia Myskina, Maria Sharapova, Victoria Azarenka, and Petra Kvitova, only the 32-year-old Kvitova and Belarussian Azarenka remain in contention to break the record and make history.

While Kvitova is one of the confirmed players for the main draw, Azarenka, on the other hand, is on the alternate players list at this year's edition.

Tournament Director Saad al-Mohannadi said: "It is a great privilege to have almost all the top players confirmed for the Qatar TotalEnergies Open once

again. Their desire to be a part of this tournament is a further confirmation of the reputation it has garnered over the years, the recognition of the organisation, and the maximum attention to detail everyone involved in the tournament has always put into it.

"We appreciate TotalEnergies, the title sponsor, and all our other supporters for their commitments over the years in always making this tournament a great success."

"This year's edition is unique in that it is the first major tournament to be hosted by Qatar after the grand success of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. We believe the world will witness an amazing event just like they did at Qatar 2022 and we can't wait to host the stars," he added.

The Qatar TotalEnergies Open 2023 is the 21st edition of the annual tennis tournament that has grown to become one of the main signature events on the Qatar sporting calendar.



Poland's Iga Swiatek defeated Estonia's Anett Kontaveit last year to lift the Golden Falcon trophy.

## FOOTBALL

# Nketiah last-minute winner sees Arsenal go past United

HAALAND SCORES FOUR HAT-TRICKS IN 19 PREMIER LEAGUE APPEARANCES AS MANCHESTER CITY TAME WOLVES

AFP  
Manchester, United Kingdom

Eddie Nketiah's last minute winner earned Arsenal a thrilling 3-2 victory over Manchester United to move five points clear at the top of the Premier League yesterday after Erling Haaland's hat-trick fired Manchester City to a 3-0 victory over Wolves.

The Gunners remain on course for a first title in 19 years with a game in hand over City.

"That's really significant. It's something we can be proud of but we have to stay humble," Saka told Sky Sports of Arsenal's points tally.

"It's only halfway through the season and things can change very quickly. But if we keep playing like we have then we'll be in a good place at the end of the season. We just have to keep it up."

Mikel Arteta's men were forced to come from behind at the Emirates after Marcus Rashford's thunderous strike opened the scoring with his ninth goal since the World Cup break.

Arsenal levelled within seven minutes as Nketiah's powerful header rounded off a brilliant team move.

Bukayo Saka's long-range effort that arched into the bottom corner put the home side in front early in the second half.

This time United bounced straight back when Lisandro Martinez, who had been a target for Arsenal before arriving at Old Trafford in July, headed in a loose ball from a corner.

Erik ten Hag's men were penned inside their own box for much of the final quarter as the post denied Saka a second and



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah celebrates with teammate Bukayo Saka after scoring their third goal against Manchester United during the Premier League match in London yesterday. (Reuters)

David de Gea saved from Nketiah.

Arsenal's pressure finally got its reward when Nketiah flicked home Martin Odegaard's shot and the goal survived a VAR check for offside.

A first defeat in 11 games realistically ends any hope of United's first title in a decade as they slip 11 points behind Arsenal in fourth, having played a game more.

Haaland's fourth hat-trick in 19 Premier League appearances had briefly cut Arsenal's lead at the top to two points as Pep Guardiola got the reaction

he wanted from the defending champions.

Guardiola questioned his players hunger to retain the title after Thursday's 4-2 win over Tottenham.

Haaland is the one major difference to Guardiola's previous title-winning sides in England and the Norwegian silenced any doubts over whether City are a stronger force without a recognised striker.

The 22-year-old's scoring rate has slowed marginally in recent weeks, but his header from Kevin De Bruyne's cross moved him level with the 23 league

goals that saw Mohamed Salah and Son Heung-min share the Golden Boot with last season.

Haaland then took his tally to 30 goals in all competitions from the penalty spot early in the second half after Ilkay Gundogan had been upended by Ruben Neves.

Wolves then gifted Haaland his hat-trick four minutes later as goalkeeper Jose Sa presented the ball to Riyad Mahrez, who unselfishly squared for his teammate to roll into an unguarded net.

"The numbers are incredible," said Guardiola.



Manchester City's striker Erling Haaland shoots a penalty kick and scores his second goal against Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

"We can't play the false nine with him. You have to adapt some movements with him and we are doing quite well."

"When he played and scored, I don't know many goals, he is the solution and everything of the team and when he does not score, he is the problem in our team," added Guardiola.

"We know his quality. We know each other. He is not a player to be dropped. We can't play the false nine with him. You have to adapt some movements with him and we are doing quite well."

A comfortable win was just

what Guardiola was looking for after he called out a lack of hunger and desire from his squad to retain the title after coming from behind to beat Tottenham 4-2 on Thursday.

"We talk a little bit these days about what we think we miss," said Guardiola. "It's just one game. We will see in the future."

"Our football was really, really good. Today we improved. That was just today. We will see what happens in the next games."

Just a second league defeat since Lopetegui took charge leaves Wolves above the relegation zone only on goal difference.

Leeds edged one point clear of the bottom three, but remained without a league win since November after a 0-0 draw at home to Brentford.

David Raya denied the in-form Wilfried Gnonto with the best save of the game to salvage the Bees a point that moves them above Liverpool into eighth.

**RESULTS**

Leeds 0 Brentford 0  
Manchester City 3 (Haaland 40, 50-pen, 54) Wolves 0  
Arsenal 3 (Nketiah 24, 90, Saka 53) Manchester United 2 (Rashford 17, Martinez 59)



FOCUS

# QGF to host Stars Championship for top clubs

wBy Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Gymnastics Federation (QGF) will host the Artistic Gymnastics Doha Stars Championship for clubs from January 26-28 in which teams from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, UAE and Lebanon besides Qatar will participate.

Ali al-Hitmi, President of the Qatar Gymnastics Federation (QGF) and First Vice-President of the International Gymnastics Federation (IGF), said that the championship is being held with the aim of spreading the culture



Ali al-Hitmi

of gymnastics at local as well as Arab level. In future, European and continental clubs will also be invited to participate, he said.

It is expected that the tournament will witness strong competitions, especially since the public attendance will be large given the high participation of gymnasts.

Abeer al-Buainain, Secretary-General of QGF, and Tournament Director, confirmed that the 'local organising committee is working hard to make the new version of clubs gymnastics championship a big success'.

She added that committees have been formed for this tournament and that the technical committee has already prepared



Abeer al-Buainain

the programme for the championship.

Al-Buainain said: "We consider hosting such tournaments as an opportunity to exchange experiences among gymnasts of countries participating in the tournament. There is no doubt that we have many gains at various levels from organising such tournaments, hence we were also keen on participating delegations to watch it.

"We aim to host a distinctive event in keeping Qatar's organisational abilities and everyone will enjoy the technical level of the participants.

"We wish everyone all success in the first edition of the championship," al-Buainain added.



A young Qatari gymnast during a training session.

GOLF

# France's Perez holds on to claim Abu Dhabi title

51-year-old Padraig Harrington finished solo in fourth place at 16 under par

AFP

Abu Dhabi

Victor Perez endured nail-biting drama over the closing stretch of the Abu Dhabi Championship, before edging a one-shot win yesterday.

The 30-year-old Frenchman holed out his bunker shot on the par-3 17th hole in remarkable fashion to get to 19-under, before visiting the fairway bunker and making a bogey on the par-5 18th hole at Yas Links Abu Dhabi.

Perez finally closed with a six-under par 66 for an overall total of 18-under par 270.

Australia's Min Woo Lee paid the price of a bogey on the 17th hole when he missed a par putt from less than five feet. He almost holed out his third shot for an eagle on the 18th which could have forced a play-off.

However, his ball rolled back towards the pin and stopped agonisingly close. The birdie saw him finish on 68 and in tied-second place alongside Sweden's Sebastian Soderberg (67).

Ireland's 51-year-old Padraig Harrington, who was trying to become the oldest winner on the European Tour, was in solo fourth place at 16-under par. He started his round with a bogey, but made seven birdies in his round after that.

The win was Perez's third on the tour in 91 starts and moves him to the top of the European Tour rankings with 1,335 points. He is likely to climb to 60th place in the world, up from 117th.

"It feels fantastic," said an emotional Perez.

"I thought you always need a bit of fortune and there's always the deciding shots coming down the stretch that can make or break. To hole that bunker shot on 17 is probably going to be a highlight.

"I was just trying to fly the ball all the way to the hole and if it came up a bit heavy, it was probably going to release down to the hole and probably have an 8-footer for par. I was expecting Sebastian to hole his putt for birdie.



Victor Perez of France poses with his trophy after he won the final round of the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship at Yas Links Golf Course in the United Arab Emirates' capital Abu Dhabi yesterday. (AFP)

"In my head, I was going best case scenario, probably one ahead or tied going into the last hole, but I came up with a two-shot lead, which is always massive.

"The other person is going to have to do something great and you're going to have to do something poor to lose a two-shot lead.

"I almost did, but thankfully, a six was enough."

Italy's Francesco Molinari (71) and Sweden's Alex Noren (68) were tied for the fifth place at 14-under.

The European Tour next moves down the road to Dubai for the Dubai Desert Classic, a second Rolex Series event in

successive weeks. World number one Rory McIlroy is scheduled to play the tournament at Emirates Golf Club.

## Leading final round scores (GBR & IRL unless stated/par 72):

- 270** - Victor Perez (FRA) 71-65-68-66
- 271** - Min Woo Lee (AUS) 68-69-66-68, Sebastian Soederberg (SWE) 67-71-66-67
- 272** - Padraig Harrington 68-73-64-67
- 274** - Francesco Molinari (ITA) 67-67-69-71, Alexander Noren (SWE) 72-66-68-68
- 275** - Tyrrell Hatton 72-67-71-65, Shubhankar Sharma (IND) 67-70-69-69, Jason Scrivener (AUS) 65-70-72-68
- 276** - Adrian Meronk (POL) 70-67-68-71,

- Nicolai Højgaard (DEN) 71-67-69-69, Rafael Cabrera (ESP) 69-69-71-67, Richard Bland 71-69-66-70, Sami Valimäki (FIN) 67-75-72-62, Dale Whitnell 68-72-70-66, Grant Forrest 71-68-65-72
- 277** - Edoardo Molinari (ITA) 67-72-68-70, Jeff Winther (DEN) 73-68-66-70, Andy Sullivan 72-69-67-69

## Selected

- 278** - Henrik Stenson (SWE) 68-74-70-66, Pablo Larrazabal (ESP) 70-69-68-71
- 279** - Shane Lowry 67-70-66-76
- 281** - Tommy Fleetwood 68-73-72-68
- 284** - Lee Westwood 69-73-69-73, Thomas Bjørn (DEN) 69-72-73-70
- 285** - Ian Poulter 71-70-72-72

SPOTLIGHT

# Spain's Rahm shares PGA American Express lead with rookie Thompson

AFP

Los Angeles

World number four Jon Rahm, chasing his second US PGA Tour title in as many weeks, shares the lead with rookie Davis Thompson heading into the final round of the American Express Tournament.

Fourth-ranked Spaniard Rahm sounded supremely confident after firing an eagle and six birdies on Saturday in a seven-under par 65 to pull level with overnight leader Thompson on 23-under 193 at La Quinta, California.

Thompson, a former amateur standout at the University of Georgia and a winner on the Korn Ferry developmental tour, carded

a five-under par 67 to keep himself squarely in the hunt for a first PGA Tour title.

"Nothing but positive. That's all I can say," said former US Open champion Rahm, who won this title in 2018.

"Ball striking felt amazing. Hit a lot of great shots out there off the tee. Giving myself a lot of opportunities with the irons. Took advantage of quite a few of them."

Even some difficulties on the greens coming in - most notably a three-putt bogey at the par-three 17th - didn't dampen Rahm's confidence, although he said he knew another low score would be needed on the Stadium Course, where the final round will be held after the first three rounds were spread over three courses.

Rahm, who opened 2023 with a come-from-behind victory in the Tournament of Champions in Hawaii this month, walked off the 18th with the lead, even though he couldn't get a 12-foot birdie putt to drop at the last.

He had expected Thompson, who piled up a US tour record-equalling five eagles over the first two rounds - to regain the top spot.

But the 23-year-old American, who had five birdies in his first 12 holes but dropped out of a tie for the lead with a bogey at the 14th, found only one more birdie coming in - rolling in a four-footer at the 16th at the Stadium Course.

"I was really proud with how I stayed patient," Thompson said after the third round.

"I didn't really force anything.

Made a bad bogey on 14, but came back and birdied 16, so it was a good way to finish."

Thompson acknowledged he was still getting used to the three-course format, which requires studying more courses and has the cut come after 54 holes.

"It's definitely different," he said.

"I just try to have an aggressive mindset and try to go hit some good shots."

Thompson said he was looking forward to going up against Rahm, testing the nerves he has already honed in junior golf, amateurs and on the Korn Ferry Tour.

"Now it's on one of the biggest stages," he said.

The leading duo were four strokes clear of JT Poston and

South African Christian Bezuidenhout. Bezuidenhout had 10 birdies in his 10-under 62 and Poston carded a six-under 66 to join him on 197.

Another four players shared fifth on 198.

That included American Harry Higgs, who had 12 birdies and a double-bogey in his 62 on the Nicklaus Tournament course.

Second-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler, who could finish as low as solo ninth and still supplant Rory McIlroy atop the world rankings, carded a six-under par 66 that left him tied for tied for ninth on 17-under 199.

American Dylan Wu joined the group of six on 199 with an 11-under par 61 that featured 11 birdies on the Nicklaus course.

CYCLING

# Vine wins Tour Down Under after finishing second to Yates in final stage

AFP

Adelaide

Australia's Jay Vine claimed his first World Tour victory in the Tour Down Under yesterday, with Britain's Simon Yates winning a thrilling uphill battle to take the race's final stage.

Yates (Team Jayco-AlUla) gave one final lung-busting effort to overtake Vine at the Mount Lofty finish for his first-ever victory in Australia, denying Vine from winning a stage at this year's TDU.

Vine (UAE Team Emirates) capped an outstanding week after keeping close to his only serious rival for the ochre leader's jersey in the hard slog up to the finish, sealing his win in the final general classification.

Vine won the World Tour TDU at his first attempt and continued his rise to prominence in world professional cycling after winning two stages at the Vuelta a Espana last year.

"It's incredible to stand here wearing this winner's jersey," Vine said.

"And the way we drove that was first-class, the team were incredible with their support all week, and I am so happy to be able to finish it off today. It's so satisfying."

Vine described a "hectic" race, where the team "had to be on our toes all day".

Yates, the 2018 Vuelta a Espana winner, rolled the dice with 1.7km to go, and Ben O'Connor (AG2R Citroen Team) and Vine tacked on the end of the three-man breakaway in the dash to the finish.

Yates was forced to do all the work with one kilometre left and made another concerted effort to get away before Vine set sail for the stage win, only to be collared near the line by the dogged Englishman.

Yates said his team had come to the race "with a lot of ambition".

"We didn't walk away with the overall, but we can be really happy with the stage.

"Second overall was the best I could do, today was our last chance and we took it... Jay Vine is a massive talent and I'm sure

that won't be the last we see of him."

Yates pulled back four seconds on Vine in the final stage to finish 11 seconds behind overall, with Spain's Pello Bilbao (Bahrain Victorious) third on 27 seconds.

American Magnus Sheffield (Ineos Grenadiers) finished in the lead bunch to secure fourth overall, 57 seconds down, and came away from a consistent week as the winner of the Young Rider's jersey classification.

## Adelaide, Australia: Results from the fifth and final stage of the men's Tour Down Under yesterday, a 112.5-km ride from Unley to Mount Lofty:

- 1. Simon Yates (GBR/Team Jayco-AlUla) 2hr 41min 16sec, 2. Jay Vine (AUS/UAE Team Emirates) 0sec, 3. Ben O'Connor (AUS/AG2R Citroen Team) 2sec, 4. Antonio Tiberi (ITA/Trek-Segafredo) 3sec, 5. Sven Erik Bystrom (NOR/Intermarche-Circus-Wanty) 6sec.

## Final General Classification:

- 1. Jay Vine (AUS/UAE Team Emirates) 16hr 7min 41sec, 2. Simon Yates (GBR/Team Jayco-AlUla) 11sec, 3. Pello Bilbao (ESP/Bahrain Victorious) 27sec, 4. Magnus Sheffield (USA/INEOS Grenadiers) 57sec, 5. Mauro Schmid (SUI/Soudal Quick-Step) 58sec.



Australian rider Jay Vine from UAE Team Emirates celebrates winning the Tour Down Under UCI cycling event in Adelaide yesterday. (AFP)



Jon Rahm of Spain and Rickie Fowler of the US look on from the 18th green during the third round of The American Express at PGA West Pete Dye Stadium Course in La Quinta, California. (AFP)



TENNIS

# Top seed Swiatek crashes out as Tsitsipas survives

Major winners Rybakina, Ostapenko, Azarenka advance; Gauff leaves in tears after defeat while Pegula gets through

Reuters  
Melbourne

Top seed Iga Swiatek was bundled out of the Australian Open fourth round yesterday, with title threat Coco Gauff also exiting in tears, as a pair of underestimated Grand Slam champions tore open the women's draw.

Third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas avoided a similar fate by claiming a thrilling 6-4 6-4 3-6 4-6 6-3 win over Italian Jannik Sinner and keep his dreams of a maiden Grand Slam title alive.

"It was a long match. I feel like I've spent a century on this court," Tsitsipas said of the contest, which lasted just over four hours. "It was a ripper, as they say here. I can feel my face burning from the effort today."

World number one Swiatek was sent packing by Elena Rybakina in the early match at Rod Laver Arena, the Pole falling 6-4 6-4 to the Kazak Wimbledon winner who started her tournament in the Melbourne Park wilderness of Court 13.

Rybakina shrugged off the scheduling snub before the fourth round showdown but used it as fuel in her first appearance on centre court as a tightly wound Swiatek slowly unravelled. "I felt the pressure, and I felt that I don't want to lose instead of I want to win," said Swiatek, who dominated last season with two Grand Slam wins.

"I felt like I took a step back in terms of how I approach these tournaments, and I maybe wanted it a little bit too hard."

The result means this year's Australian Open will be the first Grand Slam tournament in the open era where the top two seeds in both the men's and women's singles draws have lost prior to the quarter-finals.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina hits a return against Poland's Iga Swiatek during their singles match on day seven of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

#### FORGOTTEN OSTAPENKO

Rybakina, the 22nd seed, might have expected to face Gauff in the quarter-finals but the much-hyped American teenager was upset 7-5 6-3 by Jelena Ostapenko, the forgotten Grand Slam winner of women's tennis.

The 2017 French Open champion thrashed 30 winners past Gauff on Margaret Court Arena, her last two sealing the match in style to leave the 18-year-old in tears at her post-match media conference.

"I feel like it was rough," Gauff told reporters, before breaking down with emotion. "When you play a player like her and she plays really well, it's like, you know, there's nothing you can do."

The win secured a first Aus-

tralian Open quarter-final for hard-hitting Ostapenko, as well as the first at a major since her run to the Wimbledon semi-finals in 2018.

Latvia's first - and only - Grand Slam champion stunned the world when she hoisted the trophy at Roland Garros as an unseeded 20-year-old.

She has had mostly lean years since but never doubted she would return to the spotlight again.

"My life changed a lot (after the 2017 French Open), so I needed a few years to really get used to what happened because I was really young," she said.

"I always knew and believed in my game. If I play well, I can beat almost anyone."

At a tournament fast running out of star power, unheralded

Czech Jiri Lehecka landed another blow for the lesser lights as he toppled Canadian sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime 4-6 6-3 7-6(2) 7-6(3) in the men's tournament.

The 21-year-old next plays Tsitsipas, seeking revenge for a loss to the Greek in the Rotterdam semi-finals last year.

"He'll know what my strengths are."

"He'll feel I can get him under pressure," Lehecka said.

#### KORDA DELIVERS

While Lehecka was a bolt from the blue, big things have been expected of Sebastian Korda for some time and the young American is finally delivering on expectations at Melbourne Park.

He took another step towards emulating his Australian Open-winning father Petr by booking

his first Grand Slam quarter-final with a 3-6 6-3 6-2 1-6 7-6 (10-7) win over Hubert Hurkacz at Rod Laver Arena.

Korda, whose father won the 1998 title under the Czech flag, showed impressive composure as Polish 10th seed Hurkacz roared back to level the fifth set tiebreak at 7-7 by winning four consecutive points.

Korda held firm, closing it out with a backhand winner to set up a clash with Russian 18th seed Karen Khachanov.

"It feels awesome. I was not feeling too much energy towards the fourth and fifth sets but you guys picked me up," the 29th seed told the crowd.

Khachanov had a much easier passage, hammering Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 6-0 6-0 7-6(4) at John Cain Arena.

The Russian has now reached the quarter-finals at all four Grand Slams.

"Obviously, yeah, that gives me some kind of compliments on what I achieve so far, and I'm just happy to do it."

"Hopefully I can continue even further on even bigger things," he said.

While the high seeds have tumbled, American Jessica Pegula has been rock solid and reached her third consecutive quarter-final at Melbourne Park by beating Czech 20th seed Barbora Krejickova 7-5 6-2.

Third seed Pegula will face 24th-seeded twice champion Victoria Azarenka, who fought back from a set down to beat Zhu Lin 4-6 6-1 6-4 and end the Chinese star's impressive run.

Zhu, who beat sixth seed Maria Sakkari in the last round, started well and broke the 2012 and 2013 champion in the opening game before allowing her back, only to pull away from 3-3.

With the first set in the bag, world number 87 Zhu then came



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas greets Italy's Jannik Sinner after winning their match on day seven of the Australian Open yesterday. (AFP)

under pressure and Azarenka took the second set 6-1.

The Belarusian broke at 4-4

in the decider before showing composure to defend two break points and serve out for the win.

SPOTLIGHT

## Injured hamstring is major headache for Djokovic in De Minaur test



Reuters  
Melbourne

Novak Djokovic is on track for a record-extending 10th Australian Open title but question marks remain over his fitness ahead of today's fourth-round clash with Alex de Minaur as his injured left hamstring continues to cause problems.

Fourth seed Djokovic defeated Grigor Dimitrov in straight sets in the third round but fears about the durability of his injured hamstring only grew as the Serbian once again struggled.

All eyes will be on the bandages that drape the left hamstring when the 35-year-old takes on home favourite De Minaur who, like Djokovic, has dropped one set in Melbourne so far.

"It's really difficult to say with Novak exactly what's happening physically. He's getting the job done, he certainly doesn't look like he's (100) percent," seven-times Grand Slam champion John McEnroe told *Eurosport*.

Asked if De Minaur could cause issues for Djokovic's injured hamstring, McEnroe added: "De Minaur is someone potentially (who could do that) because he relies on speed and grit and mak-

ing an opponent work. The type of guy that could cause Novak problems if he's not 100 percent."

Before Djokovic takes on De Minaur, fifth seed Andrey Rublev will play Danish teenager Holger Rune as the Russian bids to reach the quarter-finals at the season-opening major for the second time in three years.

Rublev, 25, believes ninth seed Rune will not be the underdog in their contest, with the Dane a dark horse at the tournament following his Paris Masters final victory over Djokovic in November.

In the other matches, Spanish 24th seed Roberto Bautista Agut

will face American Tommy Paul looking to equal his best result in Melbourne, having reached the quarter-finals in 2019, while Ben Shelton will play JJ Wolf in an all-American clash.

Shelton will be competing in the last 16 of a Grand Slam for the first time in his career - a remarkable achievement for the 20-year-old who a year ago was No. 569 in the ATP Rankings and still in college.

In the women's draw, last year's WTA Finals champion Caroline Garcia will bid for her maiden last-eight berth at the tournament when she comes up against Magda Linette, the last

remaining Pole after Iga Swiatek and Hubert Hurkacz exited yesterday.

Big-hitting Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, seeded fifth, will aim to stretch her undefeated start to the season against Swiss 12th seed Belinda Bencic, who is also in solid form with a seven-match winning streak.

Czech 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova, the youngest woman left in the draw, will play Croatian Donna Vekic for a place in the quarter-finals as she looks to maintain her fairytale run, while former world number one Karolina Pliskova takes on Zhang Shuai.

CHESS

## De Joya wins Qatar Center Ranking Championship

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The curtains came down on the three-day Qatar Center Ranking Championship which featured 28 male and female players using the classic chess method according to the Swiss system of 5 rounds/ half an hour + 30 seconds for each move.

Mohamed al-Madhahka, President of the Qatar Chess Federation (QCF), and Youssef Mohamed al-Mutawa, Secretary-General of QCF, were present during the championship.

The tournament witnessed strong competitions among the participants who sought best results to increase their rating.

Filipino player Florian de Joya won the title after taking first place while Indian player Syed Abdel Qader finished in second place.

The third place was grabbed by Egyptian Mahmoud Younis while the fourth place went to Alexander. In the prize for the best Qatari player participating in the tournament, Rayan Irfan clinched the competition. Khaled al-Jamaat won the best player in the under 12 years of age segment.

Youssef Mohamed al-Mutawa praised



Mohamed al-Madhahka, President of the Qatar Chess Federation (QCF), watches players in action. **Right:** Officials of QCF and prize winners at the end of the Qatar Center Ranking Championship.



the levels of the ranking tournament. He said: "There was such excitement due to the desire of the players to increase their rating. I offer congratulations to the first-place winners."

He added: "We are happy with the success of the tournament and the keen-

ness of the players to take part in competitions, which were very strong. The Qatar Chess Federation's plan is based on honing talents, focusing and caring for young players to prepare a chess generation aware of the upcoming various tournaments and competitions, and therefore

their participation in such tournaments is important."

He said: "We have great confidence that such tournaments will show us new faces of Qatari chess in the coming period to participate in various international forums."

## HOSTS INDIA CRASH OUT OF HOCKEY WORLD CUP

**Bhubaneswar, India:** India suffered an early exit from the hockey World Cup after the hosts lost 5-4 to New Zealand on penalties in a dramatic crossover match yesterday. Fancied India, led by defender Harmanpreet Singh, needed a win to make the quarter-finals of field hockey's biggest tournament and had the home fans on edge after the match ended 3-3 in Bhubaneswar.

New Zealand came back from 3-1 down to level the contest and then held their nerve as the penalty shootout went to sudden death.

Sean Findlay starred for New Zealand, ranked 12th in the world, scoring the goal that forced penalties and then twice converting in the shootout as the underdogs celebrated at the Kalinga Stadium. Sixth-ranked India once dominated men's field hockey, winning eight Olympic gold medals between 1928 and 1980. The former national game of the cricket-mad nation witnessed a revival after India won bronze at the Tokyo Olympics

and followed it up with a Commonwealth Games silver in Birmingham last year. Australia, holders Belgium, the Netherlands, England and Spain have also secured their place in the quarter-finals.



Sean Findlay of New Zealand in action against India.



## QNB STARS LEAGUE

# Leaders Al Arabi to take on Al Sadd in Qatar Derby today

‘WITH ALL THESE PLAYERS BACK IN THE SIDE, A NEW AND DIFFERENT PATH BEGINS FOR THE TEAM’

By Sports Reporter

Doha

**T**able toppers Al Arabi will take on reigning champions Al Sadd in the Qatar Derby of the 2022-2023 QNB Stars League season at the Al Arabi Stadium today.

The league returns to action after a postponed week of action since many of the club players were doing duty for their national teams at the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup.

The 7pm kick-off clash will provide its own excitement for the fans irrespective of the teams’ standings in the points tally. Both teams have exciting stars who are capable of stealing the show on a given day.

Al Arabi are at the top of the standings with 22 points from seven wins, a draw and a loss, while Al Sadd are eighth with 10 points from three wins, a draw and four defeats.

“We know that Al Arabi are a strong competitor and are at the top of standings. Their leadership stature provides more value to the match,” Al Sadd coach Juan Maneul Lillo ‘Juanma’ said.

“Presently, we have the players who have returned after the World Cup and they are adapting to their new roles. We also have players who were with the national team at the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup. With all these players back in the side, a new and different path begins for the team,” he said.

Speaking on the eve of the match, Al Sadd defender Pedro Miguel said: “The match will be difficult because Al Arabi are in good form and have a good team. Al Sadd are also ready. Some of our players have now returned. We need the points and everyone knows that this is a very difficult match but we are ready. Our goal is to win and continue to compete for the league title.

“The team is well prepared to face Al Sadd and our preparations were good during the past



Defending champions Al Sadd’s players in action during a training session yesterday.

week after the postponement of Week 10 matches. So it was good especially since the Al Sadd match is always difficult,” he said, adding, “Our team is game for it and we will do our best to put up a strong showing.

Al Sadd are looking for compensation after losing the services of more than one player in the first seven matches and we are also looking to produce another distinguished appearance and collect the three points.”

The Dream Team has achieved two successive victories over Al Ahli and Al Wakrah after the long break and consolidated their position on top of the table.

Al Arabi would be keen to keep winning in their bid to stay on top and ultimately win the league title, which has been eluding them for many seasons now.

“The team is well prepared to face Al Sadd and our preparations were good during the past week after the postponement of the matches. So it was good, especially since the Al Sadd match is always a difficult one,” Al Arabi coach Younes Ali said.

“We will face a strong competitor. They have always been a difficult competitor for all the teams. But our team is game for it and we will do our best to put up a strong showing.”

Al Arabi have collective and individual brilliance to achieve the big target and will count mainly on Syrian star Omar al-Somah and Tunisian Yousef Msakni, who both are in good form.

“An important match awaits us against Al Sadd, who are strengthened after the return of their international players.

However, we are fully prepared for the match and come out with the best result,” Msakni said.

“It is too early to talk about topping the league, we are still in the 11th round and we will take each match separately. The one against Al Sadd will be tough for both teams.

“Al Sadd are a big team that is not affected by the absence of some players, and they achieved victory in the last round. Their players will definitely be ready to meet us. We will also do our best to win and make our fans happy,” he said.

Other matches of the week will not be less exciting as the teams seek to collect more and more points to enhance their position in the table. Another important encounter will be between Al Gharafa, placed 6th

with 12 points, and Al Rayyan which is second-to-last position with four points, tomorrow at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium.

Al Shamal face Al Duhail in the opening match of the week at the Al Duhail Stadium today.

The match is crucial one for both teams who will be striving to get the valuable three points, especially Al Duhail – who are eager to make it to the top of the rankings. Only two points separate Al Duhail and leaders Al Arabi, while Al Shamal are also looking to score wins to improve their position.

Al Duhail so far have 20 points from nine matches, while Al Shamal are in seventh place with 10 points obtained from seven matches, after their matches were postponed when the league resumed after a long break. Al



Al Sadd coach Juan Maneul Lillo ‘Juanma’ addressing the media.



Al Arabi players during a training session.

Shamal made a great start and are keen to continue what they did before the break.

They have achieved three wins and a draw apart from three defeats and thus want to make amends and return to the path of more success and positive results with good performance and results. Al Markhiya

will face Al Ahli at the Al Duhail Stadium today. While Al Ahli are in the top four, Al Markhiya are ninth and would aim to challenge their rivals. Al Ahli have recorded three wins and four draws and lost two games so far to take their points tally to 13. Their last win (2-1) came at the expense of Al Sailiya.

## BUNDESLIGA

## Dortmund beat Augsburg on Haller’s return from cancer

AFP

Dortmund, Germany

**B**orussia Dortmund clinched a 4-3 thriller at home against Augsburg yesterday as Sebastian Haller returned to the team after battling testicular cancer.

Dortmund took the lead three times, only for Augsburg to equalise, exploiting the home side’s disorganised defence. Dortmund manager Edin Terzic brought on Jamie Bynoe-Gittens and Gio Reyna in the 70th minute, with both wingers scoring goals to help carry their team to victory.

Speaking after the match, Terzic praised his team’s resilience in a “wild, chaotic match. I’m happy we still won the game with all the setbacks... The positive thing is that we fought back.”

Augsburg coach Enrico Maassen said his side, who are just one place above the relegation play-off spot, could take positives from the “annoying” result. We played a huge game... We will get our points if we play like this.”

Dortmund had the better of the early proceedings before Jude Bellingham broke through in the 29th minute.

The 19-year-old Englishman collected the ball on the edge of the box and sent the Augsburg defenders the wrong way, before drilling a low shot into the bottom right corner of the net.

Despite Dortmund’s dominance of possession, Augsburg hit back in the 40th minute, when Dion Beljo dispossessed a sloppy Nico Schlotterbeck before passing to Arne Maier, who hammered home.

Schlotterbeck redeemed himself immediately, however, heading in a Julian Brandt free-kick to put Dortmund up 2-1.

Augsburg equalised in stoppage time, Ermedin Demirovic chipping over Dortmund ‘keeper Gregor Kobel for his sixth goal of the campaign. Haller came off the bench in the 61st minute to rapturous applause from the home and away fans, his first competitive appearance since May 2022.

With the game drifting towards more dropped points for the home side, Bynoe-Gittens and Reyna were introduced.

The home side reclaimed the lead almost immediately, with the 18-year-old Englishman



Borussia Dortmund’s Jude Bellingham celebrates after scoring against Augsburg yesterday. (Reuters)

Bynoe-Gittens superbly curling the ball in from outside the box.

Augsburg’s David Colina hit back less than a minute later but Dortmund reclaimed the lead two minutes after that, when US forward Reyna lifted the ball over Rafal Gikiewicz and into the back of the net.

Reyna turned to Dortmund’s famous yellow wall after scoring the winner, putting his fingers in his ears in an apparent gesture referencing the ongoing spat between national team coach Gregg Berhalter and the Reyna family which has engulfed US football since the Qatar World Cup. Terzic lauded Reyna’s resilience, saying “he’s copped so much in the last couple of weeks.”

Dortmund held on in a nervous final few minutes for the three points which moved them into sixth place in the table.

Defender Schlotterbeck, who was at fault for two of Augsburg’s three goals, thanked his team’s attackers for bailing out the side’s shoddy defence.

“Quality up front – and no quality at the back,” the Germany defender told broadcaster DAZN.

“I don’t even know whether I should be happy with the win or angry about the three goals conceded.”

In Sunday’s late game, Borussia Moenchengladbach host Bayer Leverkusen.

## Roma stroll past Spezia to increase top four hopes

Roma pounced on Juventus being slapped with a massive points deduction by seeing off Spezia 2-0 yesterday and provisionally moving into Serie A’s Champions League positions.

Jose Mourinho’s team are fourth in Italy’s top flight after yesterday’s matches thanks to goals in each half from Stephan El Shaarawy and Tammy Abraham and the Italian Football Federation’s (FIGC) decision to dock Juve 15 points on Friday.

Juve are still officially third as their punishment is not yet represented in the league table but as long as Atalanta, who started the day level with Roma, don’t win at the Allianz Stadium in Turin later the capital club will be in the top four come the end of the day.

Roma are level on 37 points with Inter who host Empoli today and just one behind second-placed AC Milan ahead of the champions’ trip tomorrow to Rome to take on Lazio, the other team who can move above Roma into the top four.

The away side came away with the three points despite the absence of Italy international Nicolò Zaniolo, who refused to be picked in the matchday squad and was openly criticised by the club’s general manager Tiago Pinto pre-match.

Pinto said of Zaniolo that “personal interests have been put ahead of the collective good” with over a week remaining in the winter transfer window, adding that “it’s not the first time this has happened”.

Zaniolo was key to Roma’s Conference League triumph last season but wants to leave after a poor campaign in the Eternal City in which he has been overshadowed by Paulo Dybala as the clear star of Mourinho’s team.

Dybala was again key for Roma at the Stadio Picco, having a hand in both goals and continuing his happy partnership with Abraham. Missing star striker M’Bala Nzola, Spezia were content to rough up Roma but were caught right before half-time when El Shaarawy

exchanged passes with Dybala and finished a lightning breakthrough with a simple finish. And three minutes after the break Dybala was handed the ball by Salvatore Esposito and the Argentina forward fed Abraham who brilliantly nutmegged both Mattia Caldara and goalkeeper Bartłomiej Dragowski on his way to netting his fifth league goal of the season.

Spezia are 15th on 18 points, one ahead of Sassuolo who sit just above the relegation zone following their 1-1 draw at Monza earlier yesterday.

Sassuolo are edging ever closer to the bottom three as Verona won for the second time since Marco Zaffaroni took over during the World Cup break on Saturday to move to within five points of safety.

Their point at the U-Power Stadium made survival even harder for Sampdoria, who fell to a 1-0 home defeat to Udinese following Kingsley Ehizibue’s strike with two minutes remaining.

## FOCUS

## Ronaldo fails to score as Al Nassr beat Al Ettifaq

Reuters

Riyadh

**A**nderson Talisca earned Al Nassr a 1-0 home win over Al Ettifaq yesterday, but the fans that turned up to Mrsool Park in droves to see Cristiano Ronaldo in action were left disappointed after he was unable to mark his Saudi Pro league debut with a goal.

Expectations for Ronaldo’s debut were sky-high after his brace against Paris St Germain on Thursday, but despite showcasing plenty of endeavour against Al Ettifaq, the 37-year-old was unable to add to his tally of more than 800 senior goals overall for club and country. Named the captain ahead of the match, Ronaldo was full of running and

had a couple of bright moments, but mostly cut a lonely figure up front as his new teammates appeared to be on a different wavelength and rarely picked him out.

Brazilian forward Talisca put Al Nassr ahead in the 31st minute, when he rose to meet Abdulmajeed al-Sulaiheem’s cross and plant a header past Al Ettifaq goalkeeper Paulo Victor.

Victor was kept on his toes, as Pity Martinez, al-Sulaiheem and Talisca forced him into saves with well-struck efforts from long range in the second half, but Al Nassr were unable to find another goal.

Al Nassr’s win moved them back into first place in the league standings on 33 points from 14 matches, after they were briefly overtaken by Al Hilal earlier. Al Ettifaq are in 10th place.



Nassr’s forward Cristiano Ronaldo (second left) fights for position for a corner-kick during the Saudi Pro League match against Al Ettifaq at the King Fahd Stadium in Riyadh yesterday. (AFP)