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Sunday, March 12, 2023

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GULF

TIMES

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CRICKET

Gill ton powers India's reply but Australia still ahead in fourth Test

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Third Qatar Olympic Committee Beach Games continues at Katara

Action during the second day of third Qatar Olympic Committee Beach Games at Katara – Cultural Village yesterday. Over 800 participants are competing for top honours in football, volleyball, 3x3 basketball, boxing, karate, swimming and aquathlon in the eight-day multi-sporting event.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Haaland hits winner for City, Bournemouth stun Liverpool

Victory takes City to within two points of leaders Arsenal, who are in action today when they travel to Fulham

AFP
Manchester

Manchester City needed an Erling Haaland penalty 12 minutes from time to see off Crystal Palace 1-0 yesterday as Liverpool's resurgence proved short-lived after a 1-0 defeat at Bournemouth. Victory takes City to within two points of Premier League leaders Arsenal, who are in action today when they travel to Fulham. Pep Guardiola's men dominated for almost the entire 94 minutes at a sodden Selhurst Park, but were headed for another major blow to their title defence until Ilkay Gundogan was chopped down inside the box by Michael Olise. Haaland kept his cool to roll home his 34th goal of the season from the spot.

Earlier, Liverpool were brought back to earth with a bang after inflicting Manchester United's record-equalling defeat in a 7-0 win last weekend. Philip Billing scored the only goal for Bournemouth to lift the Cherries out of the bottom three as Mohamed Salah fired a second half penalty wide.

"The game was pretty much the opposite of what we wanted to show and to do today. I think we played for pretty much 95 minutes the game Bournemouth wanted to play," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp. "This game was a massive knock and how it is with knocks, you have to take them, you have

Bournemouth's Philip Billing (right) scores past Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson during the Premier League match. (Reuters)

to have a look how big the scars are and then you go from there."

Fifth-placed Liverpool are now six points adrift of the Champions League places after Harry Kane ensured a tough week for Tottenham ended on a high by scoring twice in a 3-1 win over Nottingham Forest. The England captain's future has been a source of speculation after Spurs crashed out of both the FA Cup and Champions League in the space a week.

Antonio Conte's men had failed to

score in their previous three games, but Kane ended that drought by rising highest to head in Pedro Porro's cross. Kane then coolly slotted home his first penalty since missing a crucial spot-kick in England's World Cup quarter-final exit to France. Richardson made amends for criticism of Conte this week by teeing up Son Heung-min to fire in Spurs' third. Joe Worrall pulled a goal back for Forest, who then also had a stoppage time penalty from Andre Ayew saved by Fraser Forster.

Gary Lineker made the most of his absence from the BBC's flagship football highlights programme Match of the Day to watch his beloved Leicester lose 3-1 against Chelsea. Lineker was forced to "step back" from his presenting duties after comparing the UK government's rhetoric towards refugees this week to Nazi-era Germany. Leicester remain rooted in the relegation battle, just one point above the drop zone after a fifth consecutive defeat.

Ben Chilwell put Chelsea ahead

Manchester City's Erling Haaland and manager Pep Guardiola celebrate after their team's win over Crystal Palace in London. (Reuters)

early on against his former club before Patson Daka levelled. But a sensational pass from Enzo Fernandez and finish from Kai Havertz put Chelsea back in front and Mateo Kovacic's strike secured a third consecutive win for the Blues, who continue to lift the pressure on Graham Potter.

Everton moved out of the bottom three and up to 15th thanks to a third 1-0 win in four home games under Sean Dyche. Dwight McNeil smashed in the only goal inside the first minute to end Brentford's 12-game unbeaten run in the Premier League.

Leeds remain second from bottom but closed to within a point of safety after twice coming from behind to draw 2-2 at home to high-flying Brighton. Alexis Mac Allister put the Seagulls in front before Patrick Bam-

ford levelled before the break. Jack Harrison then scored at both ends in the second half to leave Brighton still nine points off the top four, albeit with three games in hand.

RESULTS

Bournemouth 1 (Billing 28) Liverpool 0; Crystal Palace 0 Manchester City 1 (Haaland 78-pen); Everton 1 (McNeil 1) Brentford 0; Leeds 2 (Bamford 40, Harrison 78) Brighton 2 (Mac Allister 33, Harrison 61-og); Leicester 1 (Daka 39) Chelsea 3 (Chilwell 11, Havertz 45+6, Kovacic 78); Tottenham 3 (Kane 19, 35-pen, Son 62) Nottingham Forest 1 (Worrall 81)

Playing today (1400 GMT unless stated): Fulham v Arsenal, Manchester United v Southampton, West Ham v Aston Villa, Newcastle v Wolves (1630)

FOURTH TEST

Gill ton powers India’s reply but Australia still ahead

Kohli was unbeaten on 59 as India were 289-3 at stumps on day three, still trailing Australia’s 480 by 191 runs



India's Shubman Gill celebrates after reaching his century against Australia in the fourth Test in Ahmedabad yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Shubman Gill’s sparkling century and an unbeaten 59 by Virat Kohli kept India strong in their first innings reply against a persistent Australian spin attack in the fourth Test yesterday. India were 289-3 at stumps and still trailing Australia’s 480 by 191 runs on day three at the world’s biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. Gill stood out with his 128 – the opener’s second Test ton and first in India – as he built key partnerships including a 113-run stand for the second wicket with Cheteshwar Pujara, who made 42. “It feels great to be able to get a hundred in India,” Gill, 23, said. “The pitch was pretty good to bat on. Anything that was happening off the pitch was off the rough area.” Spinners kept coming back with wickets as Nathan Lyon, Matthew Kuhnemann and Todd Murphy took one each on a pitch favouring the batsmen. Gill, who replaced a struggling KL Rahul in the third Test, hit 12 fours and one big six in a good show of batting to surpass his previous Test best of 110 despite cramping towards the end of his knock. He finally fell lbw to Lyon’s off-spin in the third session before Kohli took charge along with the left-handed Ravindra Jadeja, on 16, to see out the day’s play. “The way Shubman played was exceptional to be honest,” Lyon

said. “That one I got him on was probably a little bit flatter, a little bit faster than what he was expecting,” he added. “A decent ball on my behalf, but I thought the way he went about it was pretty special... He’s definitely a special player.” Kohli reached his first Test half-century since January 2022 after a jittery start to his innings when he got off the mark on the 12th ball. Australia delayed taking the second new ball, available to the fielding side after the 80th over, by 14 overs. Earlier Gill overcame a tough spell of run-making in the second session to raise his ton with a fine sweep off Murphy, taking a bow as the raucous weekend crowd applauded, but lost his partner Pujara four balls later. Off-spinner Murphy trapped Pujara lbw, ending a stand which prospered after skipper Rohit Sharma fell to Kuhnemann’s left-arm spin for 35 in the morning session. “It’s a big moment for the two young spinners and I think they bowled exceptionally well,” Lyon said of Murphy and Kuhnemann. “I think it’s pretty even. We know games in this part of the world can speed up quickly.” Australia’s stand-in-skipper Steve Smith rotated his bowlers, who remained disciplined in their line and length to test the batsmen’s patience for much of the hot afternoon. Gill broke the shackles with two successive boundaries off Cameron Green to bring the

crowd alive with delightful cover drives. India started the day on 36-0 and kept attacking. Mitchell Starc bowled to plan with his short balls and a heavy leg-side field, but Rohit took on the challenge as he smashed the left-arm quick for a four and a six at long leg. The pitch has been vastly different from the vicious spinning tracks in the previous three Tests and Usman Khawaja brought Australia the early advantage with his 180. India lead the four-match series 2-1 after Australia won the third Test. The hosts need a win to clinch the series and secure a berth in the World Test Championship final in June.

SCOREBOARD
Australia I Innings 480 all out
India I Innings (overnight 36-0, Rohit 17, Gill 18)
R. Sharma c Labuschagne b Kuhnemann 35
S. Gill lbw b Lyon 128
C. Pujara lbw b Murphy 42
V. Kohli not out 59
R. Jadeja not out 16
Extras (b4, lb3, nb2) 9
Total (3 wickets, 99 overs) 289
Still to bat: S. Iyer, S. Bharat, A. Patel, R. Ashwin, U. Yadav, M. Shami
Fall of wickets: 1-74 (Rohit), 2-187 (Pujara), 3-245 (Gill)
Bowling: Starc 17-2-74-0, Green 10-0-45-0 (nb1), Lyon 37-4-75-1, Kuhnemann 13-0-43-1 (nb1), Murphy 22-6-45-1

FIRST TEST

Mitchell, Tickner lead New Zealand fightback against Sri Lanka

AFP
Christchurch, New Zealand

A stubborn century from Daryl Mitchell, a blazing 72 from Matt Henry and three wickets to Blair Tuckner swung the momentum New Zealand’s way in the first Test against Sri Lanka yesterday. Sri Lanka had claimed the initiative on the first two days of the Christchurch Test but were 83 for three in their second innings at stumps on day three, a lead of 65 runs. Angelo Mathews was not out 20, with Prabath Jayasuriya also at the crease on two. New Zealand earlier recovered from 151 for five to be all out for 373, an 18-run lead, after a dogged 102 from Mitchell and Henry’s swash-buckling performance that included 58 runs from boundaries. Tuckner claimed the wickets of captain Dimuth Karunaratne for 17, Oshada Fernando for 28 and Kusal Mendis for 14 in the 38 overs before stumps to finish with three wickets for 28 runs off 10 overs. Sri Lanka, who need to sweep the two-Test series to keep their hopes of making the World Test Championship final alive, had ripped through the New Zealand top order. But Mitchell, who has so often been New Zealand’s saviour in his 17-Test career, refused to give in as he toiled through 193 deliveries for his eighth century. The 31-year-old All Blacks player and coach John Mitchell, lifted his average to a remarkable 58 from 25 innings. He put on 54 for the sixth

wicket with Michael Bracewell, a further 47 with Tim Southee and 55 with Henry. Mitchell leapt in the air when he reached his century, waved his bat and received a hug from Henry to celebrate. He added only two more runs before was caught behind off Lahiru Kumara and New Zealand were 291-8. Henry then exploded with his personal-best 72, which included 10 fours and three sixes. He belted spinner Dhananjaya de Silva out of the attack by taking 17 runs in just one over. Worse was to come for Sri Lanka when de Silva’s replacement Kasun Rajitha conceded 24 to Henry in his first over. This was on a third-day wicket that continued to offer assistance to the bowlers, with Rajitha and Asitha Fernando both getting movement early in the day. Leading up to the drinks break, Bracewell, who had seemed the more settled of the New Zealand overnight pair, was undone by the introduction of left-arm spinner Jayasuriya. Bracewell had a life when an appeal for lbw was turned down, with reviews showing height was an issue, but with the next elviry Jayasuriya found an edge and Bracewell was caught behind for 25. Southee brought up New Zealand’s 200, belting Jayasuriya over the mid-wicket fence, and continued to swing until the third over with the new ball when he was out to a diving catch by Kumara at square leg. The New Zealand captain had smashed back-to-back fours off Rajitha but his attempt at a third fell short and he was out for 25 off 20 deliveries. For Sri Lanka,

Fernando returned the best figures of four for 85 while Kumara took three for 76. Of concern for New Zealand was the fitness of Neil Wagner, who left the field in the final session for treatment to a leg injury.

SCOREBOARD
Sri Lanka I Innings 355
New Zealand I Innings
Mitchell c Dickwella b Kumara 102
M. Bracewell c Dickwella b Jayasuriya 25
T. Southee c Kumara b Rajitha 25
M. Henry b A. Fernando 72
N. Wagner c de Silva b A. Fernando 27
B. Tickner not out 2
Extras (b4, lb6, w3) 13
Total (all out; 107.3 overs) 373
Fall of wickets: 1-67 (Conway), 2-70 (Williamson), 3-76 (Nicholls), 4-134 (Latham), 5-151 (Blundell), 6-188 (Bracewell), 7-235 (Southee), 8-291 (Mitchell), 9-360 (Henry), 10-373 (Wagner)
Bowling: Rajitha 31-10-104-2, A. Fernando 29-3-5-85-4 (1w), Kumara 25-5-76-3 (2w), de Silva 9-2-34-0, Mathews 3-0-18-0, Jayasuriya 10-1-46-1

Sri Lanka II Innings
Fernando c Blundell b Tickner 28
D. Karunaratne c Nicholls b Tickner 17
Mendis c Bracewell b Tickner 14
A. Mathews not out 20
P. Jayasuriya not out 2
Extras (lb1, w1) 2
Total (3 wickets; 38 overs) 83
Fall of wickets: 1-28 (Karunaratne), 2-47 (O. Fernando), 3-81 (Mendis)
Bowling: Southee 12-4-23-0, Henry 10-2-19-0, Tickner 10-1-28-3 (1w), Wagner 3-0-9-0, Mitchell 3-1-3-0



New Zealand’s Daryl Mitchell plays a sweep shot during the first Test against Sri Lanka yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

South Africa bowlers excite captain Bavuma after sweep of West Indies

AFP
Johannesburg

South African captain Temba Bavuma said he was “very excited” about the depth of strength among South Africa’s bowlers after his side completed a 284-run win on the fourth day of the second Test at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. But he said it was disappointing that a young side would not play another Test until they host India at the end of the year. “Our batting remains a challenge but when these guys (the bowlers) click we always have chances in the game,” said Bavuma, who was named man of the match after scoring a career-best 172 in the second innings. He said rookie Gerald Coetzee, 22, had impressed in his first two Tests. “He brings that pace and aggression that we want in our attack.” Coetzee adds to a battery that includes Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje and Marco Jansen. Bavuma said he also regarded Lungi Ngidi highly despite Ngidi not being picked for the series. South Africa won the series 2-0 despite Rabada and Coetzee being the only frontline bowlers to play twice.

The West Indies were bowled out for 106 yesterday after being set to make 391 to win. Bavuma said spin bowlers Simon Harmer and Keshav Maharaj had shown their quality in helpful conditions on Saturday and justified the decision to pick both at a ground which traditionally favoured fast bowlers. The match was effectively won and lost in 8.1 overs leading up to lunch when the West Indies crashed to 34 for six. Rabada struck twice in three balls and sparked the collapse after opening batsmen Kraigg Brathwaite and Tagenarine Chanderpaul survived the first 10 overs, putting on 21 runs. Rabada dismissed Brathwaite for the seventh time in successive innings when he trapped the West Indian captain leg before wicket for 18 with a ball which kept low. Two balls later Raymon Reifer gloved a catch down the leg side to wicketkeeper Heinrich Klaasen. Harmer and Maharaj also took two wickets each as the West Indies lost six wickets for 13 runs. Off-spinner Harmer shared the new ball with Rabada and extracted extravagant turn. He bowled throughout the innings and finished with three for 45. Brathwaite believed the West Indies had shown some improvement since being heavily beaten in Australia in December. “I still think we are making some good strides,” said Brathwaite. “In the first Test we were in some good positions and our bowlers took 40 wickets (in the series), which was a good job.” Bavuma said he regretted that there were no more Tests for South Africa until



West Indies’ Roston Chase (right) looks on after being bowled by South Africa’s Keshav Maharaj (not seen) as South Africa’s Tony de Zorzi (centre) and wicketkeeper Heinrich Klaasen celebrate during the second Test at The Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg. (AFP)

Maharaj faces lengthy lay-off after freak injury
Johannesburg: South African left-arm spin bowler Keshav Maharaj faces a lengthy period out after suffering a freak injury during South Africa’s 284-run win over the West Indies in the second Test in Johannesburg yesterday. Cricket South Africa announced that Maharaj “has a complete rupture of his left Achilles tendon” and will see a surgeon. Maharaj, 33, went down in obvious pain after he jumped to celebrate the wicket of Kyle Mayers shortly before lunch on the fourth day. He had to be taken off the field on a stretcher. Maharaj has been South Africa’s leading Test spin bowler since making his debut in 2016 but has more recently become a regular in the one-day international team. His injury will mean that he misses the one-day series against the West Indies which starts in East London on Thursday – and could put him in doubt for the World Cup in India in October.

December. He said some multi-format players would be involved in competitive limited overs matches before then but ways had to be found to keep the Test specialists in form.

SCOREBOARD
South Africa I Innings, 320
West Indies I Innings, 251
South Africa II Innings (overnight 287-7)
T. Bavuma c Roach b Holder 172

K. Maharaj c Motie b Mayers 10
G. Coetzee not out 9
K. Rabada c and b Holder 16
Extras (nb4, w1) 5
Total (100.4 overs) 321
Fall of wickets: 1-6 (Elgar), 2-8 (De Zorzi), 3-32 (Markram), 4-69 (Ricketton), 5-103 (Klaasen), 6-206 (Mulder), 7-277 (Harmer), 8-293 (Bavuma), 9-297 (Maharaj)
Bowling: Roach 14-2-54-1, Joseph 14-1-49-2 (nb1), Holder 19-4-2-48-3 (Innb), Mayers 17-5-46-3 (Innb, 1w), Reifer 11-0-36-1 (Innb), Motie 10-1-40-0, Chase 14-1-45-0, Blackwood 1-0-3-0

West Indies II Innings
K. Brathwaite lbw b Rabada 18
T. Chanderpaul c Elgar b Harmer 2
R. Reifer c Klaasen b Rabada 0
J. Blackwood c Bavuma b Harmer 4
R. Chase b Maharaj 0
K. Mayers lbw b Maharaj 7
J. Da Silva b Coetzee 34
J. Holder b Coetzee 19
K. Roach c sub (Petersen) b Coetzee 2
A. Joseph st Klaasen b Harmer 18
G. Motie not out 0
Extras (b1, nb1) 2
Total (35.1 overs) 106
Fall of wickets: 1-21 (Brathwaite), 2-21 (Reifer), 3-25 (Chanderpaul), 4-26 (Chase), 5-26 (Blackwood), 6-34 (Mayers), 7-82 (Holder), 8-87 (Da Silva), 9-106 (Roach)
Bowling: Rabada 7-1-19-2 (Innb), Harmer 17-1-8-45-3, Maharaj 2-5-1-4-2, Markram 0-1-0-0, Coetzee 8-1-37-3
Result: South Africa won by 284 runs
Series: South Africa won the two-match series 2-0

SPOTLIGHT

BBC sport output in chaos as Lineker taken off air in asylum row

AFP
London

The BBC's sport service was in meltdown yesterday after pundits and commentators refused to work in support of presenter Gary Lineker, who was forced to "step back" after accusing the government of using Nazi-era rhetoric.

Match of the Day presenter Lineker, England's fourth most prolific goalscorer, sparked an impartiality row by criticising the British government's new policy on tackling illegal immigration. The 62-year-old compared the language used to launch the new policy to that of Nazi-era Germany on Twitter, which the BBC said on Friday was a "breach of our guidelines".

"The BBC has decided that he will step back from presenting Match of the Day until we've got an agreed and clear position on his use of social media," the broadcaster said in a statement. However, the decision decimated scheduled sports programming across the BBC's television and radio output.

Pundits and former England strikers Ian Wright and Alan Shearer immediately tweeted that they would not take up their usual roles on Match of the Day, followed by the programme's commentators. Wright then said on his podcast yesterday that he would quit the BBC if Lineker was sacked for good.

The BBC announced that the highlights show, a Saturday night fixture since 1964 and the longest-running

football television programme in the world, would air without pundits or a presenter for the first time. It also said players would not be asked for interviews after some indicated they would not be available in support of Lineker.

Weekend preview show Football Focus and results programme Final Score were also pulled from the schedule due to presenters and pundits pulling out. Saturday sports schedules for BBC Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were also amended.

"We are sorry for these changes which we recognise will be disappointing for BBC sport fans," said the broadcaster. "We are working hard to resolve the situation and hope to do so soon."

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) described the action taken against Lineker as a "massive own goal on the part of the BBC." The NUJ's general secretary Michelle Stanistreet added: "Yielding to sustained political pressure in this way is as foolish as it is dangerous."

Lineker is a freelance broadcaster for the BBC, not a permanent member of staff, and is not responsible for news or political content so does not need to adhere to the same strict rules on impartiality. The former Leicester striker was in attendance at the King Power to watch his home town club lose 3-1 to Chelsea, but did not speak to reporters. Some Leicester fans showed their support for Lineker with placards reading: "I'm with Gary, migrants welcome."

The row was sparked by Lineker's response to a video in which Home Secre-



tary Suella Braverman unveiled plans to stop migrants crossing the Channel on small boats. Lineker, the BBC's highest-paid star, wrote on Twitter: "This

is just an immeasurably cruel policy directed at the most vulnerable people in language that is not dissimilar to that used by Germany in the '30s."

The Conservative government intends to outlaw asylum claims by all illegal arrivals and transfer them to other countries, such as Rwanda, in a

bid to stop the crossings, which totalled more than 45,000 last year. A YouGov poll published on Monday showed 50 percent backing the measures, with 36 percent opposed.

But rights groups and the United Nations said the legislation would make Britain an international outlaw under European and UN conventions on asylum. Some 36 Tory lawmakers have sent a letter to the BBC warning that the affair will "no doubt shake many people's already fragile confidence" in the corporation's impartiality.

The BBC's move sparked a wave of criticism from politicians and public figures, many of whom accused it of buckling to demands from Conservative lawmakers. Opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer said the BBC "got this one badly wrong and now they're very, very exposed", while a petition calling for Lineker to be reinstated has attracted almost 180,000 signatures.

Former BBC director general Greg Dyke said the broadcaster had made a mistake. "The real problem today is that the BBC has undermined its own credibility by doing this," he told the broadcaster.

The issue has brought to a head years of debate over BBC impartiality, which intensified after Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016.

The Lineker row comes at a particularly heated period after allegations that BBC chairman Richard Sharp facilitated a loan guarantee for former prime minister Boris Johnson while applying for the job.

LA LIGA

Madrid cut gap on Barca with victory over Espanyol

Barca visit Athletic Bilbao today ahead of El Clasico at Camp Nou next weekend

AFP
Madrid

Vinicius Junior scored a fine solo goal as Real Madrid came from behind to beat Espanyol 3-1 and cut Barcelona's lead to six points at the top of La Liga yesterday. Joselu had sent the visitors ahead early on at the Santiago Bernabeu but Vinicius produced a surging run and lethal finish to pull the champions level.

Eder Militao's header completed the turnaround and Madrid could have added more goals in the second half, with Rodrygo hitting the crossbar from a free-kick. Eventually Marco Asensio tucked away the third in stoppage time after a fine run and pass from defender Nacho Fernandez. Barcelona visit Athletic Bilbao today to try and restore their advantage, ahead of El Clasico at Camp Nou next weekend. Madrid face Liverpool in the Champions League on Wednesday and Barcelona next Sunday.

After failing to score from open play in their last three matches across all competitions, Madrid's three well-taken goals were a confidence boost. With Karim Benzema out with an ankle issue, although poised to return for the Champions League last 16 second leg clash with Liverpool, Carlo Ancelotti selected Rodrygo up front in his place.

The coach also opted to play Eduardo Camavinga out of position at left-back again and the French midfielder's mistake helped the visitors move ahead after eight minutes. Camavinga misjudged a long ball which he allowed to reach Ruben Sanchez, who crossed for striker Joselu to smash into the top corner. It was the forward's 12th goal of the season - only Bar-



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (centre) in action during the La Liga match against Espanyol in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

celona's Robert Lewandowski has scored more in La Liga, with 15.

Stirred by Espanyol's goal, Madrid quickly improved in the early afternoon spring sun, and Vinicius fired them level with a superb solo effort of his own. The Brazilian winger cut inside from the left and drove home to net his 19th goal of the season across all competitions.

Militao headed the champions in front before the break, meeting a sumptuous Aurelien Tchouameni cross, which the midfielder served up with the outside of his boot

Rodrygo came closest to extending Madrid's lead when he curled a free-kick over the wall but it struck the crossbar. Vinicius was warmly applauded by Madrid fans as he was taken off late on, with Ancelotti giving another brief cameo to young forward Alvaro Rodriguez.

However it was another substitute, Asensio, who wrapped up the win with a cool finish after Nacho's uncharacteristic dribble forward into attack. Defeat leaves Espanyol provisionally 14th, two points above the relegation zone.

RESULTS

Real Madrid 3 (Vinicius 22, Militao 39, Asensio 90+3) Espanyol 1 (Joselu 8); Elche 1 (Morente 90+6) Real Valladolid 1 (Larin 4)

Today (all times GMT): Real Mallorca v Real Sociedad (1300), Sevilla v Almeria (1515), Villarreal v Real Betis (1730), Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona (2000)

Tomorrow: Girona v Atletico Madrid (2000)

Played Friday: Cadiz 2 (Sobrinho 39, Alcaraz 82-pen) Getafe 2 (Unal 61-pen, 90+16-pen)

TENNIS

Unreal! Thompson topples Tsitsipas at Indian Wells

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Unseeded Australian Jordan Thompson grabbed one of the biggest wins of his career on Friday, ousting third-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-6 (7/0), 4-6, 7-6 (7/5) to reach the third round of the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters. "It's unreal at a Masters 1000 ... to have a win like that is incredible," said Thompson, the world number 87 whose only prior victory over a top-10 player came back in 2017 against Andy Murray at Queen's Club.

He admitted he felt a little lucky when a stinging forehand from Tsitsipas on match point was ruled a hair wide. "I'm thankful that last ball was out - I thought it was in," Thompson told fans on court.

While Tsitsipas led the third-set tiebreaker 2-1 and 4-3, Thompson's coolness under pressure paid off as Tsitsipas belted a forehand into the net to give the Aussie a match point before succumbing with the near miss. Thompson next faces Chilean qualifier Alejandro Tabilo, who hung on to beat American Maxime Cressy 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (15/13).

For Tsitsipas it was another setback in the wake of his sparkling run to the Australian Open final in January. He departed Melbourne energised despite falling to Novak Djokovic in the title match, but shortly thereafter suffered a shoulder injury.

Playing his first tournament since a second-round exit at Rotterdam, Tsitsipas admitted earlier this week that his shoulder was still troubling him and he didn't have high hopes of a third Masters 1000 crown.

Women's second seed Aryna Sabalenka - playing just her second tournament since winning the Australian Open - moved smoothly into the third round with a 6-2, 6-0 win over Evgini-

ya Rodina, who was playing her eighth match since a return to competition at last year's US Open after three years away from the game.

Sabalenka, still barred from playing under her native flag of Belarus because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, next faces Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko, who beat 29th-seeded Croatian Donna Vekic 2-6, 6-2. In other women's matches, last year's runner-up Maria Sakkari salvaged Greek pride with a battling 2-6, 6-4, 6-0 victory over American Shelby Rogers.

Sakkari, trailing 1-4 when rain halted play for about 90 minutes, managed to turn it around in the second set. She fended off five break points - despite three double faults - to hold serve in the fifth game and broke Rogers to pocket the set.

Fifth-seeded Daniil Medvedev, fresh off three straight ATP victories Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, continued his red-hot form with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over American Brandon Nakashima.

Third-seeded Casper Ruud, former champion Cameron Norrie and 12th-seeded Alexander Zverev all eased into the third round with straight-sets victories. For Ruud, a 6-2, 6-3 victory over former top-10 Argentinian Diego Schwartzman was a confidence-boosting win in a season in which he had so far failed to advance past the second round in three tour-level tournaments he had played.

For Norrie, however, a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Taiwanese qualifier Wu Tung-lin marked a continuation of the form that saw him reach finals last month in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, failing to Carlos Alcaraz in the first and beating him in the second. Germany's Zverev, attempting to rebuild his career after surgery for ankle ligament damage suffered at the French Open last year, breezed past Argentina's Pedro Cachin 6-3, 6-1.



Jordan Thompson of Australia celebrates after his victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece at the Indian Wells Masters. (AFP)

Benzema disputes 'liar' Deschamps' claim over World Cup fitness

Paris: Karim Benzema has responded to Didier Deschamps' claim that the striker told him "he wouldn't have been ready" to play at the World Cup because of an injury by implying the France coach was a "liar". The Real Madrid forward pulled out of the France squad with an injured left thigh on the eve of the tournament and departed their team hotel in Qatar soon afterwards. Benzema returned to training with his club on December 10, four days before France played Morocco in the World Cup semi-finals.

"Karim told me himself that he wouldn't have been ready," Deschamps

told the Parisien newspaper. "When Karim got injured, our doctor accompanied him to the Aspetar clinic to undergo an MRI," said Deschamps.

"Karim passed on the results to someone who follows him in Madrid and who also gave him an opinion. When he came back to the hotel, it was already gone midnight. I met Karim in his room with our doctor who had come to give me the report from the scan... Karim was hurt because this World Cup meant a lot to him. He told me, 'It's over.' We stayed together for about 20 minutes," added Deschamps.

"When leaving I told him, 'Karim, there's no rush. Organise your return with the team manager.' When I woke up I found out he was gone. It's his decision, he won't tell you otherwise, I understand and respect it."

Benzema, who announced his international retirement the day after France lost the World Cup final on penalties to Argentina, appeared to dispute Deschamps' version of events on social media. The Ballon d'Or winner posted on Instagram a screenshot of Deschamps' remarks accompanied by the phrase "but what audacity" and a clown emoji.

He also shared the video of a popular French influencer, who repeats the words "liar, you are a liar", while addressing Deschamps. Benzema's hasty departure from Qatar had fuelled speculation of a rift between him and the rest of the squad as well as Deschamps.

The injury was just the latest chapter in Benzema's complicated and turbulent history with Les Bleus, which saw him frozen out of the team for five and a half years because of his involvement in a blackmail scandal over a sextape involving his former teammate Mathieu Valbuena.

SHOOTING

Tuzun, Smith shoot trap gold at ISSF World Cup Doha

‘It has been lovely being in Qatar. People are very nice and now very dear to me’

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Turkiye's Oguzhan Tuzun and Australia's Penny Smith emerged as the men's and women's trap event winners respectively following a pulsating finals of the ISSF World Cup Shotgun – Doha 2023 at the Lusail Shooting Range yesterday.

The men's action saw some solid marksmanship of two rounds (15 and 20 targets) and eight qualified shooters before the elimination brought it down to four and eventually three. Türkiye's Tuzun capped it with a total score of 33 successful shots for the gold while Britain's Matthew John Coward-Holley claimed the silver with 30 hits. India's Prithviraj Tondaiman took the bronze with a score of 20. Kuwait's Naser Meqlad finished fourth (13).

Speaking through his “translator”, Türkiye's ambassador to Qatar Mehmet Mustafa Goksu, who was also one of the chief guests at the presentation ceremony for the men's trap, Tuzun said he was very happy at doing his best.

Later, while speaking to the media, the 40-year-old champion said, “It has been lovely being in Qatar. The people are very nice and now very dear to me. That helped me prepare my best to do what I came here for. During the finals, I missed two targets and it became challenging but I was determined to do my best.”

Earlier, in women's trap final, Penny Smith of Australia prevailed over Zuzana Rehak Stefecekova of Slovakia in a shoot-off after they tied 28 each. Penny ended up with a successful shot to claim the gold while Stefecekova had to settle for the silver. Kathleen Alicia Gough of USA took bronze (20) while Spain's Fatima Galvez ended fourth. Speaking of her victory, the 26-year-old Penny said, “I'm delighted with the way I achieved the win. ‘Feels great. I've been working pretty hard on some specific things at home, and it came out and today was a good day. So it's turned out well.”

Both of the top two finishers missed seven out of their 35 targets in the medal



Turkiye's ambassador to Qatar Mehmet Mustafa Goksu, Qatar Olympic Committee's Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari and Qatar Shooting & Archery Association President Mishaal Ibrahim al-Nasr pose with the podium winners of men's trap, Oguzhan Tuzun, Matthew John Coward-Holley and Prithviraj Tondaiman.

round, but Smith said she adjusted herself to the conditions. “To be honest, I'm not really sure (why we all missed many targets). But whatever it was, we all seemed to make an adjustment right at about the same time, and that worked out. So it ended up well. But that was a battle for sure,” she said.

Smith also said the standard of the sport among women is growing. “The quality is really high. The standard is growing in women's trap and it's just fantastic too. The competition is really ramping up leading into the Paris Olympics next year,” she said.

RESULTS: TRAP FINALS

Men: Gold: Oguzhan Tuzun (Türkiye); Silver: Matthew John Coward-Holley (Britain); Bronze: Prithviraj Tondaiman (India).

Women: Gold: Smith Penny (Australia); Silver: Zuzana Rehak Stefecekova (Slovakia); Bronze: Kathleen Alicia Gough (USA).



Women's trap winner Penny Smith of Australia poses with runner-up Zuzana Rehak Stefecekova of Slovakia and bronze medalist Kathleen Alicia Gough of USA.

SPOTLIGHT

Al-Kaabi aims for more titles after GCC Golf Championship success

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Qatari golfer Saleh Ali al-Kaabi is aiming for more titles after he claimed two gold medals at the recently-concluded GCC Golf Championship in Bahrain. Team Qatar and al-Kaabi retained their GCC Golf Championship titles after an impressive performance at the Royal Golf Club last weekend.

Al-Kaabi won the individual championship, for the second successive year, at the end of the four-day championship. In the team championship, Qatar team consisting of al-Kaabi, Ali al-Shahrani, Jaham Jassim al-Kuwari and Abdulrahman al-Shahrani finished first followed

by Bahrain, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait.

“I am very proud and happy to win the GCC Championship titles for teams and individual for the second year in a row,” said al-Kaabi.

“I put in a great effort this season and the Qatar Golf Association gave me the opportunity to participate in major Golf tournaments whether inside or outside Qatar such as Qatar Masters, Qatar Open and International Golf Series, which was an excellent preparation for the GCC Golf Championship. I still have many tournaments to represent Qatar, and I hope to make more achievements,” he added.

Qatar team was coached by Hassan Benrokia, while Salman al-Khanji was the head of the delegation.



Napoli go 18 points clear

Naples: Khvicha Kvaratskhelia helped move Napoli another step closer to a first Serie A title in more than three decades with a wonder goal in yesterday's 2-0 win over Atalanta which pushed his team 18 points clear.

Georgia winger Kvaratskhelia's league strike of the campaign set Napoli on their way to stretching their lead on Inter Milan who fell to a shock 2-1 defeat at lowly Spezia on Friday. Amir Rrahmani made sure of the points with 13 minutes remaining with a towering header.

Lazio can cut the yawning gap between Napoli and the rest to 17 if they win at Bologna and take second spot. But it's surely only a matter of time un-

til southern Italy's biggest club win the Scudetto for the first time since 1990, when Diego Maradona was still strutting his stuff in sight of Mount Vesuvius.

Napoli now turn their attentions to the visit of Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday, a 2-0 first-leg lead to protect and a debut spot in the Champions League quarter-finals within their grasp. Defeat will likely damage Atalanta's bid for Europe's top club competition as they stay sixth and five points behind the top four.

Roma sit fourth and host Sassuolo today while AC Milan, who are fifth and level on 47 points with Jose Mourinho's team, have struggling Salernitana at the San Siro tomorrow.

AL-AJMI WINS BIG TOUR CLASS



Omar al-Mannai, vice-president of the Longines HATHAB Qatar Equestrian Tour committee, presents the trophy to Big Tour winner Faleh Suwead al-Ajmi at the Longines Arena at Al Shaqab yesterday. Al-Ajmi emerged triumphant in the 11th round with 17-year-old bay mare Ghana. Khaled Mohamed al-Emadi finished second in the feature event astride Little Lord Pezi 2, while Cyrine Cherif came third with her nine-year-old gelding Obama.



Mohamed Khalifa al-Baker won the Open Class with What A Pleasure, as Khalid Mohamed al-Emadi finished second astride Mira V/D Roshoeve. Mohamed Abdullah Juma and Hurry Up came third. The Future Riders class two phases competition was topped by Ahmed Jassim al-Suwaidi riding Miss Serena. Abdulla Khalid al-Julandani on Ivanhoe was the runner-up.

BUNDESLIGA

Bayern alone on top after Dortmund drop points

AFP

Berlin

Borussia Dortmund led twice but were held 2-2 by bitter local rivals Schalke to lose ground on Bayern Munich who earlier won 5-3 against Augsburg and ended yesterday two points clear atop the Bundesliga.

Kenan Karaman scored Schalke's second equaliser with 10 minutes left to frustrate visiting Dortmund's hopes of keeping pace in the title race. Dortmund were missing several first-team regulars due to illness and injury, including captain Marco Reus and in-form midfielder Julian Brandt.

With many attacking stars missing, it took defender Nico Schlotterbeck to put Dortmund ahead, hammering in a low drive from outside the box. Schalke equalised five minutes into the second half through Marius Buelter, who latched onto a pinpoint cross from winger Rodrigo Zalazar.

Dortmund re-took the lead after 60 minutes, when a defence-splitting pass



Benjamin Pavard scored a brace in Bayern Munich's win over Augsburg.

from Emre Can found Rafael Guerreiro who slammed home. With 10 minutes remaining, Schalke pegged Dortmund back once more when an unmarked Karaman headed past 'keeper Alex Meyer. Schalke sat deep in the dying stages, frustrating Dortmund's attempts to find a winner

and held on for a draw which will be celebrated like a win by fans whose team sits in the relegation zone.

Earlier, two goals from Benjamin Pavard and a first in Bayern colours for Joao Cancelo helped the leaders romp to a 5-3 home victory over Augsburg. Four of Bayern's five goals came from defenders, calming fears the side may be toothless after the pre-game scratch of striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting.

Bayern midfielder Jamal Musiala said his side “were getting back into the swing of things” but was disappointed they conceded three goals at home after also reaching the Champions League quarter-finals with Wednesday's win over Paris Saint-Germain.

Augsburg led after just two minutes through Mergim Berisha, who scored the only goal in his team's surprise 1-0 win over Bayern in September. Bayern manager Julian Nagelsmann praised his side's “important reaction” after the early setback, but lamented “taking our foot off the pedal at the end” of the match.

The home side upped the intensity and replied after 15 minutes through Cancelo,

who scored his first goal for Bayern since joining them on loan from Manchester City at the end of January. Pavard struck twice, the first a poacher's finish in the box and the second an elegant chip over Augsburg 'keeper Rafal Gikiewicz.

Leroy Sane added Bayern's fourth on the cusp of half-time. Berisha converted a second half penalty before Canada wing-back Alphonso Davies added Bayern's fifth late in the match. Augsburg's Irvin Cardona scored a consolation goal in injury time.

Sadio Mane, making his first start since the injury in November the kept him out of Senegal's World Cup squad, laid on two assists. RB Leipzig climbed to third with a comfortable 3-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach at home thanks to second-half goals from Timo Werner, Emil Forsberg and Josko Gvardiol.

Eintracht Frankfurt missed a chance to put more pressure on the top four, held to a 1-1 draw at home against Stuttgart. In the German capital, Hertha Berlin picked up a valuable point in their relegation battle, playing out a 1-1 draw against Mainz.

11th Qatar National Arabian Horse Show for Individual Owners



The connection of Warda Al Ammar - winner of 3 Fillies two-years-old (Class 2C) pose yesterday during the 11th Qatar National Arabian Horse Show for Individual Owners being organised by Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club. The three-day event will conclude today. **PICTURES: Juhaim**

