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Alcaraz, Swiatek start strong at Indian Wells



PREMIER LEAGUE | Page 4

Arsenal regain five-point lead, Casemiro off as Man Utd draw

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GULF TIMES SPORT

CRICKET

Kohli mega-ton gives India sniff of victory in 4th Australia Test

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QNB STARS LEAGUE

Leaders Duhail hold Sadd with two stoppage-time goals

Nam Tae-hee pulled a goal back in the sixth minute of extra time, before Federico equaliser two minutes later

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Leaders Al Duhail scored two goals in the stoppage time to hold arch rivals Al Sadd to a sensational 2-2 draw in the QNB Stars League yesterday. It was a dramatic ending to the most high-profile match of the league at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, as the home fans were left stunned after a stunning fight back from Duhail.

Defending champions Sadd led through Baghdad Bounedjah (34th minute) and Santi Cazorla (57th minute) but Duhail's remarkable turn-around came after Nam Tae-hee pulled a goal back in the sixth minute of stoppage time, before Fernandez Federico equalised two minutes later. After 15 matches, Duhail are ahead of second-placed Al Arabi by five points. Sadd are third, two points behind Arabi.

The Wolves held sway for almost the entire length of the match while Duhail seemed to be running out of luck with some of their crucial hits missing the target. But with minutes to go, the Red Knights gathered pace and momentum to catch their rivals off guard.

Duhail's first goal was a top shot drive from outside the box from the South Korean attacking midfielder Nam Tae-hee which flew diagonally into the far top right corner of the net. The Red Knights again caught their rivals by surprise with Mohamed Musa essaying a perfect kick from the right about 20 yards off the box which went in front of the goal and an unmarked Federico lunged forward to make a superb header for the second goal. Such was the shock

and awe of the act that it took a few seconds before the fans threw themselves up in delight.

Earlier, in the 82nd minute a Nam Tae-hee kick had hit the crossbar and fallen just out and Duhail were left cursing their luck with many of their attempts failing. In the end, however, they did get their act right and superbly.

In contrast, Sadd seemed not to put a foot wrong when Bounedjah first rushed ahead to score off a Cazorla assist from a long distance in the first half and later soon in the second half Cazorla made the most of a Pedro Miguel cross from the right.

This was Al Sadd's only second draw of the league so far. They have 9 wins and 5 losses. For Al Duhail, this was their third tie result so far besides 11 wins and a solitary defeat.

Earlier at the same venue, Al Rayyan rallied to hold fourth-placed Al Wakrah 1-1 in an absorbing match.

Jacinto Dala provided the opening goal of the match for Wakrah in the 82nd minute before Rayyan hit back to equalise through their star Yohan Boli in the 89th minute.

The solitary point gain saw Wakrah move to 24 points from 16 matches, while tenth-placed Rayyan took their tally to 13 points from 15 matches.

Meanwhile, Al Markhiya scored a valuable 3-1 win over Al Sailiya at the Al Arabi Stadium. Al Sailiya surged ahead through Sergio Carlos in the 11th minute, but Al Markhiya bounced back and replied through Driss Fettouhi (38th minute), Jameel al-Yahmadi (67th minute) and Jose Correia (89th minute).

Al Markhiya are eight with 18 points, while bottom-placed Al Sailiya have points.



Al Duhail's Fernandez Federico scores a lunging header in the stoppage time during the QNB Stars League game against Al Sadd yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Record number of entries received for Qatar International Baja

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) has received a record number of entries and strength in depth across all the various categories for the three-day Qatar International Baja, which will take place from March 16-18. Competitors from a staggering 31 nations is further broken down into 47 cars in the FIA category and 51 motorcycles and four quads, which will compete in the second round of the FIM Bajas World Cup.

Seven T1+ and three T1 cars, three in the T2 section for series production cross-country machines, 21 in the lightweight prototype T3 category and 13 T4 vehicles will tackle the Baja, which counts as the second round of both the FIA World and Middle East Cups for Cross-Country Bajas.

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah, Toyota Hilux teammate Juan Cruz Yacopini and Polish driver Krzysztof Holowczyc (Mini JCW Rally Plus) closed out the podium on the opening round of the FIA World Cup in Saudi Arabia last month and they head the car field.

Saleh al-Saif tops a formidable T3 entry and will be hoping to build upon his Saudi win. Defending FIA champion Fernando Alvarez and last year's series runner-up Dania Akeel are the Saudi's closest challengers after round one in their South Racing Can-Ams, although all T3 points' scorers from round one



are present in Saudi Arabia and include Kees Koolen, Santiago Navarro and Otavio Sousa.

The QMMF has also entered a seven-strong team of SRT-prepared Can-Am Maverick X3s for local drivers Adel Abdullah, Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, Nasser al-Kuwari, Rashid al-Mohannadi, Ahmed al-Mohannadi, Mohamed al-Meer and Nouef Hassan al-Suwaidi.

Young Spaniard Pau Navarro triumphed in T4 in Saudi Arabia and he tops a T4 entry that features Jeremie Warnia, Pietro Cinotto, Cristiano Batista and the local quartet of Ahmed al-Kuwari, Khalid al-Mohanandi, Abdullah al-Khelaifi and Mohamed al-Attiyah.



The QMMF has also entered a seven-strong team of SRT-prepared Can-Am Maverick X3s.

In the absence of FIA Middle East Cup leader Yasir Seaidan, fellow Saudi drivers, Hamad al-Harbi and Abdullah and Ahmed al-Shegawi and Kuwait's Salem al-Dhafeeri have the opportunity to snatch the series lead before the spring and summer break.

Emirati Mohamed al-Balooshi, Qatar-based Australian Martin Chalmers and Briton Alex McInnes finished first, second and third at the Saudi Baja and lead a stunning motorcycle field, where they will face competition from top riders from Poland, Canada, Saudi Ara-

bia, the UAE, Australia, Kuwait, Italy, Lebanon, South Africa and Slovenia.

Qatar will be represented by Sheikh Mohamed al-Thani, Yaghoob Azadi, Mohamed al-Kaabi, Abdulrahman al-Sheeb and Rashid al-Naimi.

The Duust Diverse Racing Team has entered four bikes for last year's Qatar Baja-winning Pole Konrad Dabrowski, the leading female duo of Poland's Joanna Modrzewska and Kuwait's Sarah Khuraibet and Norway's Ola Floene, the latter better known as an international co-driver with the likes of An-

try rallying is the fastest growing of all the sports under the FIA umbrella and it is great to see so many international entrants joining a very strong line-up of motorcycles competing in the FIM Bajas World Cup. Our event has a reputation for being a major challenge for all levels of ability. Not only does our event offer varied desert terrain but we also devise a route with tricky navigation that offers a great challenge to our competitors."

Timed action gets underway with a Prologue stage on Thursday, March 16th from 3pm

2023 QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA - LEADING ENTRIES

FIA - T1+ and T1

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND) Toyota GR DKR Hilux*
2. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG)/Daniel Oliveras (ESP) Toyota Hilux Overdrive*
3. Krzysztof Holowczyc (POL)/Lukasz Kurzeja (POL) Mini JCW Rally Plus*
4. Denis Krotov (KGZ)/Konstantin Zhiltsov (ISR) Toyota Hilux Overdrive*
5. Guoyu Zhang (CHN)/Oriol Mena (ESP) Baic ORC BJ40*
6. Yunliang Zi (CHN)/He Sha (CHN) Baic ORC BJ40*
7. Ronan Chabot (FRA)/Gilles Pillot (FRA) Toyota Hilux Overdrive*
8. Khalid al-Feraihi (SAU)/Sebastien Delaunay (FRA) Nissan Pick-Up+
9. Stefano Moro (ITA)/Francesco Proietti (ITA) Mitsubishi Pajero DID*
10. Abdullah al-Rabban (QAT)/Tamer al-Hijazeen (QAT) Chevrolet+

MATCH REPORT

Kohli mega-ton gives India sniff of victory in 4th Test

Australia reach 3 for no loss with Head and Kuhnemannhim at the crease

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Virat Kohli hit his first Test century in over three years with a towering 186 yesterday to give India a sniff of what would be a stunning victory in the fourth Test against Australia. The hosts finished their first innings on 571 to overhaul Australia's 480 and get a first-innings lead of 91 on another run-filled day four at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

Kohli was the last man out after he fell to Todd Murphy in the final session of play as India lost their ninth wicket and Shreyas Iyer did not bat due to back pain. His wife, Bollywood actor Anushka Sharma, took to social media after the end of day's play to say the former captain was "playing through sickness" during his epic knock.

Australia reached three for no loss at stumps with Travis Head getting the runs while alongside nightwatchman Matthew Kuhnemann. The left-handed Kuhnemann made a surprise entry to the crease after opener Usman Khawaja, who hit 180 in Australia's innings, did not come out to bat after getting hurt on the field.

Axar Patel, who shared a 162-run sixth-wicket partnership with Kohli, admitted that another Australia collapse like in the earlier Tests was unlikely, but that India would still try. "It will not be like we will run through them like in the previous three games. We will have to work hard, keep patience and bowl on good areas," Axar said.

Kohli ruled the day with his 28th Test ton after he got a single off spinner Nathan Lyon in the second session to bring the house down as fans went wild with celebration. Kohli, who now has 75 international tons across three international formats, kissed his locket before looking up to the sky. Resuming on 59 after reaching his first Test half-century on Saturday since January 2022, the landmark came after a patient innings of 241 balls. "He's a class player and he didn't give us a chance really," Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey said of the star batsman.

"We knew it was going to be tough bowling to Virat. We were able to contain him as much as we could and try to take wickets around him."

Kohli then hit a flurry of fours after reaching his hundred and along with an



India's Virat Kohli watches the ball after playing a shot during the fourth Test against Australia in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

attacking Axar, who made 79. Khawaja attempted to catch an Axar six at the boundary but could not stay inside the rope, hurting his foot in the process and limping off the field. It was termed as "lower leg soreness" by a team spokesman and it was unclear if the batsman would play on the fifth day.

Kohli got past 150 after tea and Axar reached his third half-century of the series to wear down the opposition bowlers on a pitch vastly different from the rank turners in the previous three matches. Spinners Lyon and Murphy bowled 110.5 overs between to get three wickets each on another day of hard grind for the bowlers.

Axar went into fifth gear after his fifty as he slogged and smashed Kuhnemann for two sixes in an over before being bowled off an inside edge by Mitchell Starc. Kohli lost his overnight partner

Ravindra Jadeja for 28 in the morning session and Srikar Bharat fell in the afternoon after the wicketkeeper-batsman hit 44 in an 84-run partnership with the former captain.

Opener Shubman Gill led India's strong reply on Saturday with his 128. India need a win to clinch the series and be sure of a berth in the World Test Championship final in June. World number one Australia have already booked their place.

SCOREBOARD		
Australia I innings 480 all out		
India I innings (overnight 289-3, Kohli 59, Jadeja 16)		
V. Kohli c Labuschagne b Murphy	186	
R. Jadeja c Khawaja b Murphy	28	
S. Bharat c Handscomb b Lyon	44	
A. Patel b Starc	79	
R. Ashwin c Kuhnemann b Lyon	7	
U. Yadav run out (Handscomb)	0	

M. Shami not out	0
S. Iyer absent hurt	-
Extras (b14, lb4, nb4)	22
Total (all out, 178.5 overs) 571	
Fall of wickets: 1-74 (Rohit), 2-187 (Pujara), 3-245 (Gill), 4-309 (Jadeja), 5-393 (Bharat), 6-555 (Axar), 7-568 (Ashwin), 8-569 (Yadav), 9-571 (Kohli)	
Bowling: Starc 22-3-97-1, Green 18-1-90-0 (nb3), Lyon 65-9-151-3, Kuhnemann 25-3-94-1 (nb1), Murphy 45-5-10-113-3, Head 3-0-8-0	

Australia II innings	
M. Kuhnemann not out	0
T. Head not out	3
Total (0 wickets, 6 overs)	
Still to bat: U. Khawaja, M. Labuschagne, S. Smith, P. Handscomb, C. Green, A. Carey, M. Starc, N. Lyon, T. Murphy	
Bowling: Ashwin 3-2-1-0, Jadeja 2-1-1-0, Shami 1-0-1-0	

FIRST TEST

Mathews ton inspires Sri Lanka as New Zealand chase 285

AFP
Christchurch, New Zealand

A classy century from Angelo Mathews and the early wicket of Devon Conway kept Sri Lanka's World Championship hopes alive in the first Test against New Zealand yesterday. "We've given ourselves a great chance to win the Test match," Mathews said after his masterful 115, made from nearly six hours in the middle in Christchurch.

His innings rescued Sri Lanka from a tight spot and led the tourists to a second innings total of 302. That set New Zealand a target of 285, and the home side were 28 for one by stumps after 17 overs, with Conway out for five. Tom Latham was not out 11 with Kane Williamson on seven, with New Zealand requiring 257 on the final day.

The highest fourth-innings score at Hagley Oval is 256 for eight in a drawn Test.

"We had to work extremely hard to get those runs and we've got the fast bowlers to exploit the conditions," Mathews said. "We had the belief that if the batters get the runs on the board the fast bowlers will come into play. We need to strike early (Monday) to get into the game and if we can open one end we can put a lot of pressure on the Kiwis."

Sri Lanka need another nine wickets on the final day but their chances could be dashed by rain that is forecast for the morning. New Zealand have only pride at stake but Sri Lanka, playing their first Test in seven months, are chasing their ticket to the World Test Championship final against Australia.

They must win in Christchurch as well as the second Test in Wellington to make the final. Sri Lanka also need Australia to win or draw their current fourth Test against India.

There was jubilation in the Sri Lankan camp when Kasun Rajitha had Conway caught and bowled for five, and similar scenes when he thought he had Williamson lbw without scoring.

Sri Lanka reviewed the not out call but Williamson, who only made one in the first innings, was safe. Mathews went to the middle late Saturday with Sri Lanka in trouble at 81 for three, which became 95 for four early Sunday with the dismissal of night-watchman Prabath Jayasuriya.

But New Zealand's confidence

was dented as the 35-year-old Mathews put on 105 for the fifth wicket with Dinesh Chandimal and added a further 60 with Dhananjaya de Silva before he was dismissed by Matt Henry. His 235-ball innings, filled with chanceless ones and twos and 11 boundaries, took Sri Lanka to a position of strength.

De Silva continued the momentum with his late cameo, finishing unbeaten on 47 while Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara chimed in with scores of 14 and eight as Henry mopped up the tail. Blair Tuckner, who accounted for the Sri Lanka top order, took four for 100 while Henry finished with three for 71.

New Zealand seamer Neil Wagner, who left the field injured on Saturday, did not bowl after scans revealed a bulging disc in his back and a torn right hamstring. Wagner has been ruled out of the second Test starting on Friday.

SCOREBOARD	
Sri Lanka I innings 355	
New Zealand I innings 373	
Sri Lanka II innings (overnight 83-3, Mathews 20, Jayasuriya 2)	
Mathews c Blundell b Henry	115
Jayasuriya c Blundell b Tuckner	6
D. Chandimal b Southee	42
D. de Silva not out	47
N. Dickwella c Blundell b Henry	0
K. Rajitha lbw Henry	14
L. Kumara run out (Williamson/ Henry)	8
A. Fernando c Williamson b Southee	0
Extras (b4, lb3, w4)	11
Total (all out, 105.3 overs) 302	
Fall of wickets: 1-28 (Karanaratne), 2-47 (O. Fernando), 3-81 (Mendis), 4-95 (Jayasuriya), 5-200 (Chandimal), 6-260 (Mathews), 7-266 (Dickwella), 8-288 (Rajitha), 9-298 (Kumara), 10-302 (A. Fernando)	
Bowling: Southee 26-3-9-57-2, Henry 28-5-71-3 (1w), Tuckner 28-1-00-4 (1w), Wagner 3-0-9-0, Mitchell 12-2-31-0 (2w), Bracewell 8-1-27-0	
New Zealand II innings	
T. Latham not out	11
D. Conway c & b Rajitha	5
K. Williamson not out	7
Extras (b4, nb1)	5
Total (one wicket; 17 overs) 28	
Fall of wicket: 1-9 (Conway)	
To bat: H. Nicholls, D. Mitchell, T. Blundell, M. Bracewell, T. Southee, M. Henry, N. Wagner, B. Tuckner	
Bowling: Rajitha 6-4-5-1, Fernando 6-2-9-0, Jayasuriya 3-0-10-0 (1nb), Kumara 2-2-0-0	



Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews celebrates after scoring hundred during the first Test against New Zealand in Christchurch. (AFP)

FOCUS

Kohli 'sick' during his epic knock, says wife Anushka

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Virat Kohli's Bollywood actor wife Anushka Sharma yesterday claimed her husband was unwell during his huge knock of 186 against Australia, his triumphant first Test ton in over three years. The star batsman ended his long drought with the bat on day four of the fourth Test against Australia to power India's first innings reply in Ahmedabad.

Kohli finally fell to Todd Murphy's off spin in the final session after playing 364



deliveries in a marathon innings in front of a rapturous crowd at the world's biggest cricket stadium. In an Instagram story posted after the superstar cricketer's 75th international ton, Anushka wrote: "Playing through sickness with this composure. Inspiring me always."

Axar Patel, who shared a 162-run sixth-wicket stand with Kohli in India's 571 all out in response to 480 by Australia, said Kohli appeared to be anything but unwell. "That (he was ill) I don't know, but the way he was running between the wickets, it didn't seem he was unwell," Axar told reporters. "The way he got the partnership in this heat and ran between

the wickets, it was good batting alongside him."

Called "King Kohli" for his prolific run-making, the maestro racked up his 28th Test ton with a single off spinner Nathan Lyon in the second session to bring the house down in Ahmedabad. Kohli went through an extended batting slump in 2021 and 2022, during which time he lost the Indian captaincy, one of the most high-pressure jobs in world sport.

Kohli, 34, had spoken about his mental health struggles during his dry phase, including how he had been "snappy" to Sharma, with whom he has a young daughter.

T20

Mehidy stars as Bangladesh stun hapless England to seal series



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz (left) celebrates after dismissing England's Sam Curran during the second Twenty20 in Dhaka yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Dhaka

Mehidy Hasan Miraz shone with ball and bat as minnows Bangladesh stunned world champions England to win the second Twenty20 international by four wickets and seal the series 2-0. Mehidy bowled a career-best 4-12 to help the hosts bowl out England for 117 before he hit 20 off 16 balls as Bangladesh raced to 120-6 in 18.5 overs in Dhaka.

The defeat, which followed a six-wicket loss in the first T20, was a wake-up call for England's white ball unit before the 50-over World Cup on similarly tricky low-bounce Indian pitches later this year. Najmul Hossain top-scored with 46 not out for Bangladesh,

who have now won at least one series in one format against all Test-playing countries.

Sent into bat first, England were rarely in the contest after losing their way in the middle of the innings as their batsmen struggled to cope with a low and slow wicket in Mirpur. Shakib Al Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud and Mustafizur Rahman each complemented Mehidy with a wicket apiece.

Ben Duckett top-scored with 28 while Phil Salt made 25 off 19 balls. Taskin dismissed opener Dawid Malan for five but Salt and Moeen Ali showed positive intent to put on 34 runs for the second wicket. The visitors then lost Salt, skipper Jos Buttler (four) and Ali (15) in consecutive overs to ruin their prospect of putting in a big total.

Mehidy then struck twice in one over to dismiss Sam Curran (12) and Chris

Woakes (0) to deny England a late recovery. Bangladesh in their reply lost both their openers Liton Das (nine) and Rony Talukdar (nine) cheaply but young Towhid Hridoy made 17 to steady the innings.

Najmul and Mehidy put Bangladesh in charge with a 41-run stand. England sniffed a chance with a few late wickets as Jofra Archer wracked havoc to finish with 3-13. However, Najmul thwarted the visiting side with his unbeaten 47-ball innings featuring three boundaries.

Taskin completed the win with consecutive fours off Chris Jordan in the nineteenth over. "It was a different game of T20 cricket, exciting as well but credit to Bangladesh," Buttler said.

"It was a tough wicket to start on and Duckett was doing well, we needed someone to stay with him," he said. "I thought it was an outstanding bowl-

ing performance to defend a low total. We bowled without luck as well but really proud of everyone's effort," Buttler added.

Bangladesh skipper Shakib called it "a very good team effort". "They had a very good start, but we kept our nerve," he said.

"In a tricky game like this it was important to keep our nerve," he added.

The third and final match of the series will be held at the same ground tomorrow. England won the preceding three-match one-day international series 2-1.

BRIEF SCORES	
England 117 all out, 20 overs (B. Duckett 28, P. Salt 25; Mehidy Hasan Miraz 4-12) lost to Bangladesh 120-6, 18.5 overs (Najmul 46 not out, Mehidy 20; J. Archer 3-13) by 4 wickets	

TENNIS

Top seeds Alcaraz, Swiatek start strong at Indian Wells

Defending men's champion Fritz had to work harder to get past 41st-ranked Shelton in the second round

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Top seeds Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek raced into the third round of the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters 1000 without wasting a minute on Saturday. Spain's second-ranked Alcaraz, the US Open champion who can return to number one in the world with a third Masters 1000 crown, needed just one hour and 16 minutes to get past Australian qualifier Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-3, 6-3.

Women's number one Swiatek, winner of the French and US opens last year, was even more ruthlessly efficient in a 6-0, 6-1 triumph over American Claire Liu. Alcaraz lost just one point on his serve in the first set and did not face a break point in the match as he lined up a meeting with Tallon Griekspoor, a 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/4) winner over Argentina's Guido Pella.

"Well, I surprised myself today with my serve," the effervescent 19-year-old said. "I serve really well in the first set and in the second set as well."

Early breaks in each set were too much for Kokkinakis to overcome in the face of Alcaraz's speed and power. "All that I'm looking for in every match is to enjoy and to play relaxed," Alcaraz said. "I think that's the most important part of my game, to stay relaxed and go for it and not to think about the mistakes, the points, the rounds. Just live the moment, play the match, and go for it," he added.

Alcaraz was able to do just that as



Iga Swiatek of Poland whips a doublehanded backhand during her match against Claire Liu of the United States. (AFP)

there was no sign of the right hamstring injury that forced him out of the ATP tournament in Acapulco prior to Indian Wells. He had missed the Australian Open with similar trouble, but returned

to win in Buenos Aires last month before falling in the final at Rio de Janeiro – where he was hindered by the injury. "It seems today that I move really well," Alcaraz said. "I think I'm ready and to

tally recovered from the injury!"

Defending men's champion Taylor Fritz, who toppled Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal in last year's final, had to work harder to get through his



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain celebrates after his win over Thanasi Kokkinakis of Australia in Indian Wells. (AFP)

second-round opener, a 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 victory over 41st-ranked Ben Shelton. Seventh-seeded Dane Holger Rune and eighth-seeded Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime advanced.

Rune beat American Mackenzie McDonald 7-5, 6-3 while Auger-Aliassime beat Spain's Pedro Martinez 7-6 (7/5), 6-4. Former world number one Andy Murray, grinding his way back after hip replacement surgery in 2019, defeated lucky loser Radu Albot 6-4, 6-3 – the Briton's first straight-sets win in a year that has seen him pull off a string of unlikely marathon victories that included

a five-set epic lasting five hours and 45 minutes in the second round of the Australian Open.

Swiatek, meanwhile, needed just 65 minutes to dispatch Liu as she launched her bid to become just the second woman – after Martina Navratilova in 1990 and '91 – to win back-to-back Indian Wells titles. Neither Liu nor the breezy conditions on Stadium Court troubled Swiatek, who won 25 of 32 first-set points.

Liu did manage to save a match point as she finally held serve in the penultimate game, slipping a forehand passing shot under Swiatek's guard on game point. It brought a relieved smile to the American's face, but Swiatek closed it out in the next game. "For sure Claire used that moment when I didn't play as aggressive that I should be, but I'm pretty happy that I was able to close it out pretty fast," Swiatek said.

She can expect a tougher challenge when she faces 2019 Indian Wells and US Open winner Bianca Andreescu, who defeated American Peyton Stearns 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. Women's fourth seed Ons Jabeur of Tunisia made a winning return after being sidelined in the wake of a minor knee operation, beating Poland's Magdalena Frech 4-6, 6-4, 6-1.

Fifth-seeded Caroline Garcia overcame Hungarian Dalma Galfi 6-1, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4 and Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, runner-up at the Australian Open in January, rallied from 4-1 down in the second set to beat former Aussie Open winner Sofia Kenin 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/5).

FOCUS

AAB Chess Open FIDE-Rated tournament begins

Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros. Co. (AAB), the distributor of Toyota and Lexus in Qatar, is conducting the 7th edition of AAB Chess Open FIDE-Rated tournament in collaboration with Qatar Chess Association (QCA). The event is being held at the Qatar Chess Association Training Centre will see participation of all rated players under 2200 rating points. This edition promises to deliver a series of exciting matches in an Over the Board (OTB) tournament setting. 126 chess enthusiasts across the country are participating in this edition.

The First Move was made in the presence of QCA President Mohamed al-Mudhahka, with members of QCA and Eiman al-Ansari, AAB Government Relations & Public Affairs Director leading the AAB representatives.

The tournament is being played in a classical chess format of 7 rounds Swiss System, which runs for two weekends. Its tournament results are linked for individual rating purposes with the World Chess Federation (FIDE).

AAB Chess Open has become hugely popular across Qatar and deemed one of the strongest chess tournaments in the country with high-rated players participating in it. It saw great participation from the Chess community past editions with a substantial number of participants who are FIDE rated. The AAB Chess Open, Qa-



AAB Government Relations & Public Affairs Director Eiman al-Ansari makes the first move in the presence of Qatar Chess Association president Mohamed al-Mudhahka and other officials.

tar's first FIDE Rated Open Chess Tournament, is a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative geared towards developing the community through sports.

Organised to nurture and sustain the in-

terest and passion of chess enthusiasts in the community, the tournament paved the way for the Rated players to improve their world ratings and for the Non-Rated players to be rated on an international level.

With a strong partnership with QCA, the tournament has created a meaningful impact on the lives of the young chess enthusiasts as well as adult players who are given the chance to get world rating.

FOOTBALL

Ex-Qatar coach Sanchez takes over Ecuador

AFP
Quito



Spaniard **Felix Sanchez**, the former Qatar coach, is taking over the Ecuador team, the national football federation (FEF) announced.

Sanchez, 47, replaces the Argentine Gustavo Alfaro who left after Ecuador was eliminated in the group stage at the World Cup in Qatar. They finished third in Group A with just one victory, 2-0 over hosts Qatar, then coached by Sanchez.

Sanchez started as a coach in the Barcelona youth academy aged 21. He moved to the Aspire Academy in Qatar in 2006 and coached national age group teams before taking over the national team in 2017. His first games in charge of Ecuador will be two friendlies against Australia on March 24 and 28.

IRAN NAMES GHALENOEI AS QUEIROZ SUCCESSOR

Iran's Football Federation named Iranian Amir Ghalenoei as coach

of the national team for a second time, succeeding Portuguese Carlos Queiroz. The appointment was announced after a 4-0 victory by Ghalenoei's current club side, Gol Gohar, against Naft Masjed Soleyman. Queiroz left the job after failing to get past the World Cup group stage.

Ghalenoei, 59, held the Iran job from 2006 to 2007 before his contract was ended after elimination by the South Korea in the 2007 Asian Cup quarter-finals. He is the most successful coach in Iranian premier league history with five titles, three times with Tehran powerhouse Esteghlal FC and two with Sepahan. Ghalenoei played for Iran scoring an international goal in a friendly match against Kuwait in 1996.

Doan strikes late as Freiburg edge lowly Hoffenheim

Wolfsburg, Germany: Freiburg's Japanese winger Ritsu Doan scored late to secure a 2-1 home win over under-pressure Hoffenheim yesterday, lifting his side up to fourth in the Bundesliga. RB Leipzig's 3-0 victory over Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday had pushed Freiburg out of the top four heading into the match.

Trying to keep on track for their first ever taste of Champions League football, Freiburg scored early through Maximilian Gastein, who pounced on a loose ball after a swerving delivery from Vincenzo Grifo. Hoffenheim hit back early in the second half thanks to a low drive from midfielder Angelo Stiller.

Hoffenheim defender Ozan Kabak picked up a second yellow card with six minutes remaining for throwing the ball away, handing Freiburg the advantage in the closing stages. Doan took the initiative and scored in the 89th minute, threading the ball into the corner of the net to give the home side a valuable victory. Hoffenheim's loss leaves them stranded alone on the bottom of the table on 19 points and in danger of relegation for the first time since their promotion in 2008. Bayer Leverkusen kept their unlikely push for European football going, winning 3-2 at Werder Bremen thanks to goals from Mitchel Bakker, Jeremie Frimpong and Adam Hlozek.

Leverkusen were dealt a blow before kick-off when star midfielder Florian Wirtz

and striker Patrik Schick were ruled out with tiredness and injury respectively. Bremen's Marvin Ducksch opened the scoring midway through the opening half but Leverkusen equalised just four minutes later through Bakker.

The visitors hit Bremen on the counter 10 minutes into the second half, Dutch defender Frimpong finishing off a length-of-the-field move to give his side the lead. Leverkusen looked to have wrapped up the match when Hlozek glanced in a superb header from another counter attack to make it 3-1 with seven minutes remaining, but a late Niclas Füllkrug penalty gave the home side hope of snaring a point.

Bremen continued to push but Leverkusen held on, chalking up their fourth win in their past five matches in all competitions.

OPENDA HAT-TRICK SENDS LENS THIRD AS REIMS SINK MONACO

Lois Openda scored a five-minute first-half hat-trick as Lens thrashed Clermont 4-0 in Ligue 1 yesterday, while Folarin Balogun's goal secured Reims victory at Monaco.

Lens' improbable title challenge had fizzled out after only one win in their past seven games but they climbed back into third, three points clear of Monaco following their 1-0 defeat by Reims.

Openda, who had not scored since January 11, took advantage of the gifts from

the home defence as he scored three left-footed goals.

He broke between two defenders before popping the ball between the legs of the goalkeeper Mory Diaw after 30 minutes.

Three minutes later the Belgian striker pounced when Clermont's Maxime Gonalons gave the ball away on the edge of his penalty area. Barely a minute after that, Openda benefited from another big mistake by central defender Mateusz Wieteska to add his third.

In the second half Seko Fofana hit the post for Lens before substitute Alexis Claude-Maurice made it 4-0 from an Openda cross.

In Monaco, the hosts twice struck the post through Wissam Ben Yedder and Brazilian defender Vanderson before Balogun put Reims ahead.

The Arsenal loanee and England Under-21 international raced onto a pass from Alexis Flips and drilled a low shot past Monaco goalkeeper Alexander Nubel for his 16th league goal this term.

Reims are unbeaten in Ligue 1 since Will Still took over as coach in October, winning for the fourth time in five games and making it 19 without defeat.

They move up to eighth and to within four points of the European places.

Toulouse won 2-0 at bottom side Angers and Lorient beat Troyes by the same scoreline.

Qatar beat Saudi for third successive win



Qatar continued their winning streak at the 9th Asian Beach Handball Championships in Bali, Indonesia with a comfortable 2-0 (26-17, 24-17) win over Saudi Arabia yesterday. Last year's runners-up Qatar, who had earlier beaten Philippines 2-0 (17-14, 28-14) and South Korea 2-0 (23-17, 25-9), now lead Group A with six points. The reigning champions Iran are second with two wins and four points, followed by the Philippines at the third spot. The tournament serves as a qualification tournament for the 2024 IHF Men's Beach Handball World Championships.

ISSF WORLD CUP SHOTGUN DOHA

Hinton, Gough strike gold as US top medal tally

By Sports Reporter
Doha

United States of America topped the medals tally after William Hinton and Alicia Kathleen Gough won the mixed team trap gold on the final day of the ISSF World Cup Shotgun Doha 2023.

At the Lusail Shooting Range yesterday, Hinton and Gough beat Kuwait's Talal Alrashidi and Sarah Alhawal 6-0 in the gold medal match.

USA finished the championship with six medals – three gold, two silver and a bronze. Hinton in particular was on fire yesterday, as he shot a perfect 90, including all of the targets in the qualification round.

The bronze medal was won by Poland's Sandra Bernal and Piotr Kowalczyk, who edged out Turkiye Pelin Rumeysa Kaya and Tolga Tuncer 6-4 in a thrilling play-off.

The qualification round was topped by Alhawal and AlRashidi after the Kuwaiti duo finished with 145 hits. Hinton and Gough were close second with 144,

followed by Kaya and Tuncer and Bernal and Kowalczyk pair's 143 each.

The Indian pair of Prithviraj Tondaiman and Shreyasi Singh finished sixth as they shot a combined score of 142 out of 150 in the qualification, which was a point less than the bronze medal match qualifying score of 143.

Two Qatari teams, Hassan Kholoud al-Khalaf/Saeed Abusharib and Metha Hamad Albinali/Ahmad Majid al-Khelaifi, finished in 20th and 23rd positions with 133 and 124 hits respectively.

The nine-day World Cup was hosted by the Qatar Shooting and Archery Association under the auspices of the International Shooting Sport Federation.

Italy, with one gold medal and three bronze, finished second ahead of Australia and Turkiye who won one gold medal each to share the third place.

The 12-leg ISSF World Cup series will now move to Bhopal, India for the Rifle and Pistol rounds before six more rounds which will take place in Larnaca (Cyprus), Lima (Peru), Cairo (Egypt), Baku (Azerbaijan), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Lonato (Italy) and Rio De Janeiro (Brazil).



Gold medalists William Hinton and Alicia Kathleen Gough of US, silver medalists Talal Alrashidi and Sarah Alhawal of Kuwait and bronze medal winners Poland's Sandra Bernal and Piotr Kowalczyk pose with their medals at the Lusail Shooting Range yesterday.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal regain five-point lead, Man United held

Newcastle climb above Liverpool into fifth place with a 2-1 home victory against Wolves

AFP
London

Arsenal powered five points clear at the top of the Premier League with a stylish 3-0 win at Fulham, while Casemiro was sent off as Manchester United were held to a 0-0 draw by Southampton yesterday. Mikel Arteta's Arsenal side had seen second-placed Manchester City close the gap with victory at Crystal Palace on Saturday. The Gunners responded with the kind of composed display that has been the hallmark of their unexpected title charge.

First-half goals from Gabriel Magalhães, Gabriel Martinelli and Martin Odegaard – all set up by Leandro Trossard – put Arsenal on course for a fifth consecutive league win. With 11 league games left, the north Londoners have the title in their sights. Since being knocked out of pole position after a defeat against City, which came during a run of four games without a win, Arsenal have shown the mettle of potential champions with a strong response to that wobble. It was Arsenal's 11th victory from 14 away league matches this season, underlining the durability and maturity that has them in position to win the title for the first time since Arsène Wenger's 'Invincibles' in 2004.

"We scored beautiful goals. I'm really happy to win away from home, especially with a clean sheet," Arteta said. "It's great to see the goals distributed through the team. Leandro laid on three assists and could also have scored too."

There was more good news for Arsenal in the last 14 minutes as Brazil forward Gabriel Jesus made his first appearance since injuring his knee at last year's World Cup. With Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger watching from the



Arsenal's Martin Odegaard (centre) celebrates with Leandro Trossard after scoring against Fulham during the Premier League match at the Craven Cottage in London yesterday. (Reuters)

stands, the Gunners ensured their celebrity fan got satisfaction from his trip to Craven Cottage.

Gabriel put Arsenal ahead after 21 minutes as the Brazilian centre-back rose above three Fulham defenders to meet Trossard's corner with a powerful close-range header. Arsenal struck again with another aerial raid in the 26th minute. Trossard was the provider once more, teasing his way down the left flank before lofting a cross towards

Martinelli, who easily out-jumped Anelke Robinson to head home from close range. Odegaard put the result beyond doubt in the final seconds of the first half as Arsenal benefitted from more abject Fulham defending. Producing his third assist of the afternoon, Trossard's cross reached Odegaard in the Fulham area and the midfielder, granted far too much space, controlled on his thigh and set himself for a fierce strike that fizzed past Bernd Leno.

At Old Trafford, Casemiro's dismissal forced third-placed United to settle for a drab stalemate against bottom of the table Southampton. United are unbeaten in their last 22 home games, but this was a limp performance in their first league match since last weekend's humiliating 7-0 defeat at bitter rivals Liverpool.

The Brazil midfielder's initial booking for a high challenge on Carlos Alcaraz in the 34th minute was changed

to a red card following a VAR check. It was the former Real Madrid star's second sending off in eight appearances following his red card against Crystal Palace, leaving him facing a four-match suspension.

"Casemiro played over 500 games in Europe and never once got a red card. Now he has two in the Premier League," United manager Erik ten Hag said. "His absence is not the issue. We will deal with that. This game was influenced by the referee."

Newcastle climbed above Liverpool into fifth place with a 2-1 win against Wolves at St James' Park. Sweden striker Alexander Isak headed Newcastle in front from Kieran Trippier's 26th-minute free-kick. Hwang Hee-chan stabbed in Wolves' 70th-minute leveler after a miscued clearance from Trippier, but Miguel Almiron came off the bench to win it nine minutes later when his shot deflected in off Max Kilman.

After their first win in six games in all competitions, Newcastle are four points behind fourth-placed Tottenham with two games in hand in the race to qualify for the Champions League. West Ham were booed off despite moving out of the relegation zone with a 1-1 draw against Aston Villa at the London Stadium. Villa went ahead with their first effort on target, Ollie Watkins heading in Emiliano Buendia's cross in the 17th minute. West Ham equalised nine minutes later when Said Benrahma converted a penalty awarded for Leon Bailey's shove on Lucas Paqueta.

PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS

Fulham 0 Arsenal 3 (Gabriel 21, Martinelli 26, Odegaard 45+2); Manchester United 0 Southampton 0; Newcastle 2 (Isak 26, Almiron 79) Wolves 1 (Hwang 70); West Ham 1 (Benrahma 26-pen) Aston Villa 1 (Watkins 17)

Madrid to appear as "injured party" in Barca referee scandal case

Barcelona: Real Madrid will appear in the refereeing corruption case involving Barcelona as an "injured party" once proceedings move forward, the Spanish champions said yesterday. Spanish prosecutors charged Barcelona with corruption on Friday, over payments the club made to a former vice-president of Spain's referees' committee through a company owned by him.

"Real Madrid expresses its deep concern about the seriousness of the matter and reiterates its full confidence in the action of justice and has agreed that, in defence of its legitimate interests, it will appear in the proceedings as soon as the judge opens them to the injured parties," Real Madrid said in a statement.

According to Spanish prosecutors, the Catalan club paid a total of more than 7.3mn euros to Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira, former referee and ex-vice president of the refereeing committee of the Spanish football federation between 1994 and 2018. Two of the club's former presidents, Josep Maria Bartomeu and Sandro Rosell, as well as Enriquez Negreira are facing the same charge, originating from the Barcelona prosecutor's office. Enriquez Negreira was allegedly paid for providing the club with advice on topics relating to referees, according to Barcelona.

On a sporting level, Barcelona face no immediate danger because the governing bodies of Spanish, European and world football have five-year statute of limitations, Liga president Javier Tebas has said. On the criminal level, the accused could face up to four years in prison.

Sanctions against the club could range from "suspension of activity...to outright dissolution as a company," Alberto Palomar, professor of law at Carlos III University of Madrid said.

FOCUS

Ten-man Roma stunned by Sassuolo and out of Serie A top four

AFP
Milan

Roma dropped out of Serie A's Champions League places yesterday after falling to a shock 4-3 home defeat to Sassuolo. Roma could have moved level on points with second-placed Inter Milan who lost at struggling Spezia on Friday but were stunned by an Armand Lauriente double, Domenico Berardi's penalty and Andrea Pinamonti's neat finish with 15 minutes remaining.

Roma were without the suspended Jose Mourinho and had to play the entire second half a man down after Marash Kumbulla was sent off for kicking Berardi and conceding the spot-kick from which the Italy international gave Sassuolo a two-goal half-time lead.

Mourinho's team, who netted through Nicola Zalewski, substitute Paulo Dybala and Georginio Wijnaldum, are now fifth, level on 47 points with fourth-placed AC Milan but below the champions by virtue of having played a game more. There is little



Players scuffle during the Italian Serie A match between Roma and Sassuolo at the Olympic stadium in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

chance of Roma moving back into the top four as Milan host Salernitana tonight. Mourinho was absent after his two-match ban for being sent off during Roma's defeat at Cremonese earlier this month was confirmed. Roma are livid at the decision as Mourinho's red card came following a blazing row with

fourth official Marco Serra, who, the capital club claim, insulted their Portuguese coach.

Home fans waved hankies in a Spanish-style protest before kick-off while Roma decided on a media blackout for both Sunday's match and next weekend's Rome derby. A Roma team

missing Italy internationals Lorenzo Pellegrini and Andrea Belotti to injury and Bryan Cristante to suspension got made an awful start.

They gave away two cheap goals to Lauriente in the first 18 minutes. Zalewski pulled Roma back into the game midway through the first half with a

volley which bounced fortuitously over Andrea Consigli. Kumbulla's daft reaction on the stroke of half-time presented Berardi with Sassuolo's third.

Roma were forced to bring on Dybala, being rested ahead of the trip to Real Sociedad in the Europa League last 16 on Thursday. Even though the Ar-

gentina forward did crash in his team's second in the 50th minute there was no stopping Sassuolo. Pinamonti dinked home a lovely finish after being sent through by the lively Lauriente. Wijnaldum's first Roma goal was scant consolation.

Verona's survival bid stalled after a 1-1 draw with Monza left them five points from 17th-placed Spezia and safety. Simone Verdi's 51st minute opener for the hosts was almost immediately cancelled out by Stefano Sensi's tap-in from Carlos Augusto's pull-back. Verona were saved from defeat when their former star Gianluca Caprari was denied a winner for Monza after Andrea Petagna was millimetres offside in the build-up. Fiorentina beat bottom team Cremonese 2-0.

SERIE A RESULTS

Roma 3 (Zalewski 26, Dybala 50, Wijnaldum 90+4) Sassuolo 4 (Lauriente 13, 18, Berardi 45+4-pen, Pinamonti 75); Cremonese 0 Fiorentina 2 (Mandragora 27, Cabral 50); Lecce 0 Torino 2 (Singo 20, Sanabria 23); Verona 1 (Verdi 51) Monza 1 (Sensi 55)