



F1 | Page 2

Perez hopes it will be his turn to win in Saudi Arabia



TENNIS | Page 3

Alcaraz, Swiatek roll into quarters, Medvedev survives



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# GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

Haaland has Champions League mission at Man City

Page 4

## MOTORSPORT

# Local star al-Attiyah starts as favourite to win Qatar Baja

Al-Attiyah holds eight-point lead ahead of second round of the 2023 FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas

By Sports Reporter  
Lusail

Despite badly damaging his Toyota Hilux in a high-speed barrel-roll near the end of a selective section at the recent Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah has agreed a deal to drive a borrowed Toyota and starts as the favourite to win this weekend's Qatar International Baja.

The event is the second round of the 2023 FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas and al-Attiyah and co-driver Mathieu Baume head to pre-event formalities at the Lusail Sports Complex with eight-point advantages in their respective Drivers' and Co-Drivers' Championships, courtesy of outright victory at the Saudi Baja-Ha'il last month. FIA T3 and T4 cars have graced the top 10 on numerous cross-country events in the last few seasons: American Seth Quintero finished third at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in a T3 Can-Am and Poland's young Eryk Goczal won the Dubai International Baja last December in a T4 Can-Am.

But no T3 or T4 machine has ever won in Qatar. That means al-Attiyah and his six rivals in the latest T1+ machines and three drivers of older specification T1 cars should battle it out for overall victory. Way back in 2004 when the Qatar Baja was based out of Sealeine, south of Doha, the Qatari secured victory with Frenchman Didier le Gal in a Chevrolet Pro Truck and he repeated the feat the following season with Alain Guehenne in a BMW X5.

The event didn't run again until 2011 when it took place to a Baja-type format as a candidate for inclusion in the 2012 FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Rallies. Al-Attiyah won again, this time with Spanish co-driver Lucas Cruz in a SAM Mercedes 35CC.

As a round of the five-day FIA World Cup, al-Attiyah won with Cruz in a Toyota in 2012, with Mathieu Baume in a Mini All4 Racing in 2014 and 2015 and with Baume in a Toyota again in 2016.



Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah has a remarkable record at his home Baja in Qatar.

Further wins followed with Baume and Toyota in 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2022. There was no car event in 2021, the year the event became a shorter Baja again.

This year, al-Attiyah will drive a Hilux that has been flown in especially from Portugal and will then be rebuilt in time to be used by Lithuanian driver Benediktas Vanagas at Spain's Baja Extramadura in mid-April. Vanagas's Hilux normally runs under the Toyota Gazoo Racing Baltics banner and the car has been provided to Toyota Gazoo Racing for al-Attiyah to use in Qatar. The five-time Dakar winner will then use a new DKR Hilux for the Sonora Rally in Mexico next month.

Al-Attiyah said: "Obviously we are grateful to Benediktas and his team for supplying the car. This is my home event and it is so important to me that

I can perform well in front of the local fans and continue my run of success here in Qatar."

The Qatari's Argentinean teammate Juan Cruz Yacopini is his closest challenger in the title race after round one and drives the second of four Toyota T1+ Hiluxes and the first of three running under the Overdrive Racing banner. Denis Krotov switches to the Toyota that was used by South Africa's Henk Lategan at the recent Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and Frenchman Roman Chabot returns to cross-country action to drive the fourth car.

Krzysztof Holowczyc is a formidable opponent and the experienced Pole drives the sole Mini JCW Rally Plus in the field. He holds third in the points' standings alongside co-driver Lukasz Kurzeja. The event has also attracted a

pair of official Baic ORV BJ40s that have been built in China and will be driven by Guoyu Zhang and Yunliang Zi. The cars appeared at the recent Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and are registered for FIA World Cup Baja points.

Saudi Border Guard team driver Khalid al-Feraihi is chasing FIA Middle East Cup points in his Nissan Patrol and again teams up with Frenchman Sebastien Delaunay. He holds seventh in the Drivers' Championship after a disappointing opening round. Italy's Stefano Moro (Mitsubishi) and local driver Abdullah al-Rabban (Chevrolet) wrap up the T1 field.

There are three T2 Nissan entries in the category for series production cross-country machines and all three are for Saudi drivers. Ibrahim al-Muhanna and Ahmed al-Shegawi are

### FIA WORLD CUP FOR CROSS-COUNTRY BAJAS STANDINGS AFTER ROUND 1

**Drivers:** 1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT) 40pts; 2. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG) 32pts; 3. Krzysztof Holowczyc (POL) 24pts; 4. Saleh al-Saif (SAU) 19pts; 5. Fernando Alvarez (ESP) 16pts; 6. Pau Navarro (ESP) 13pts; 7. Kees Koolen (NLD) 12pts; 8. Dania Akeel (SAU) 11pts; 9. Jeremie Warnia (FRA) 8pts; 9. Santiago Navarro (ESP) 8pts; 11. Otavio Sousa (BRA) 7pts; 12. Michele Cinotto (ITA) 5pts; 13. Ricardo Ramilo (ESP) 4pts  
**Co-drivers (top 3 only):** 1. Mathieu Baume (AND) 40pts; 2. Daniel Oliveras (ESP) 32pts; 3. Lukasz Kurzeja (POL) 24pts, etc

### FIA Middle East Cup for Cross-Country Bajas - standings after round 1

**Drivers:** 1. Yasir Sealdan (SAU) 40pts; 2. Hamad al-Harbi (SAU) 32pts; 3. Abdullah al-Shegawi (SAU) 23pts; 4. Ahmed al-Shegawi (SAU) 20pts; 5. Salem al-Dhafeeri (KWT) 15pts; 6. Ibrahim al-Muhanna (SAU) 13pts; 7. Mohamed al-Hameli (SAU) 12pts; 7. Khalid al-Feraihi (SAU) 12pts; 9. Saeed al-Mouri (SAU) 11pts; **Co-drivers (top 3 only):** 1. Alexey Kuzmich (ANA) 40pts; 2. Dmytro Tsyro (UKR) 32pts; 3. Waleed al-Shegawi (SAU) 23pts



Sun goes down at the Lusail Sports Complex as the vehicles are lined up ahead of this weekend's Qatar International Baja.

chasing FIA Middle East Cup points and Majed al-Thunayyan is registered for the FIA World Cup.

Today competitors will complete any late scrutineering checks before the competitive action gets underway

with a 9.08km Prologue stage from 2.40pm (motorcycles) and 3.40pm (cars) onwards. This precedes the ceremonial start at a new location on Lusail Boulevard, starting with the motorcycles and quads from 19.20hrs.

## FOCUS

# Navigational challenge on a tricky terrain awaits competitors at Qatar Baja

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar International Baja – organised by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) – will have a record participation of 105 entries from 31 countries in the T3 (lightweight prototype cross-country vehicles) and T4 (modified Rally Raid vehicles) categories.

"We have a record 105 entries from 31 countries this time at the Qatar International Baja and we are proud to hold this event. This shows that we are on the right track of development in motor rallying," said QMMF's Executive Director Amro al-Hamad during a media briefing with the drivers and riders, ahead of the three-day event at the QMMF headquarters at Lusail Sports Complex yesterday. QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai was also present on the occasion.

The Qatar International Baja is the second round of the FIA World Cup and the Middle East for Baja Cross Country, and the second round of the FIM Baja World Cup. Among these are 47 cars, 51 motorcycles and 4 quads in various

categories. This is besides the participation of a list of 21 vehicles in T3 and 13 others in T4 category.

The divers and riders echoed the navigational challenge in overcoming the deserts of Qatar. "No matter how experienced you are, it is always a different and tough challenge in Qatar," they said.

Qatar-based Australian rider Martin Chalmers said: "I have been racing in the region for the last 10 years and Qatar is the toughest terrain to navigate. You can get lost as the track is rocky and there are too many edges. I have not participated in Europe, so I don't know how difficult it is, but the Qatar Baja I am sure is one of the toughest in the world."

UAE's star rider Mohamed al-Balooshi said: "I would like to thank the QMMF for this amazing event. This competition gives all the Arab riders a push. The navigation part at the Qatar Baja is tough and the key here is to go slow, so you can go a little bit faster. For me this is a unique round since I failed to win last year after a close contest. This year we are well prepared and we will like to do our best this time."

The competition is fierce particularly in the T3 "VIA" category where Spaniard Fernando Alvarez has a golden opportunity to seize the lead in the general standings, in the absence of Saudi's Saleh al-Saif. Alvarez is ranked second after the first round in Saudi Arabia and



Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation's Executive Director Amro al-Hamad is joined by drivers and motorcyclists for the pre-event press conference at the Lusail Sports Complex yesterday.

is only 8 points adrift. Dania Akeel finished as runner-up to Alvarez last season and will be looking to recover quickly from a disappoint-

ing Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in her Can-Am. The Saudi holds third in the rankings, three points clear of the Dutch businessman Kees Koolen in his

G Rally Team OT3.

Other regular championship contenders present include Spain's Santiago Navarro, Brazilian Otavio Sousa, Argentina's Hector Diego Martinez and Kuwait's Meshari al-Thefiri.

Yasir Sealdan leads the FIA Middle East's T3 category but is not present at the Qatar Baja. His absence paves the way for fellow countrymen Hamad al-Harbi and Abdullah al-Shegawi to battle it out for valuable points against a fierce local line-up.

The QMMF has entered seven Can-Ams for a selection of Qatar's leading drivers and former FIA World T2 Champion Adel Abdulla, Rashid al-Muhannadi, Mohamed al-Meer and Nouef Hassan al-Suwaidi are registered to score points in the FIA Middle East Cup, along with Lebanon's Henry Kahy, a former FIA MERC3 champion.

Spaniard Pau Navarro holds a six-point advantage over Frenchman Jeremie Warnia in the FIA World Cup's T3 standings. But the young FN Speed Team Can-Am driver faces a strong field in Qatar that includes Warnia and his other title rivals – Brazilian Cristiano de Sousa, Uruguay's Luis Henderson, Italy's Pietro Cinotto and Spain's Ricardo Ramilo.



F1

# Perez hopes it will be his turn to win in Saudi Arabia

‘I was unlucky last year with the timing of the safety car while leading the race’

Reuters  
Jeddah

Red Bull will start as favourites again in Saudi Arabia on Sunday but this time Sergio Perez hopes to keep double Formula One champion teammate Max Verstappen off the top step of the podium.

The Mexican started from pole position last year at Jeddah's Corniche circuit and had the floodlit night race seemingly under control until a pitstop and unfortunately-timed safety car wrecked his chances.

Perez was runner-up to Verstappen in the Bahrain season-opener on March 5 with some predicting Red Bull could win all 23 races this year such was their domination. Sunday will give another indication of just how big an advantage they really enjoy, and whether Perez can be anything more than a support act for his Dutch teammate.

“It will be very interesting to see how everyone performs in Jeddah this week, it is a very different track to Bahrain,” said Perez. “I was very unlucky last year with the timing of the safety car while leading the race so hopefully it can be my turn to win.”

Jeddah will also provide further insight into whether Ferrari can get back in the fight on straight-line speed and what Fernando Alonso and Aston Martin can do next. Alonso's third place for his much-improved team was the emotional story of the Bahrain race with the 41-year-old Spaniard emerging as closest rival to the Red Bull pair.

“I am curious to go to Jeddah and Australia. Very different circuits...high-speed corners, very little degradation,” said Alonso after that podium performance. “I think in Bahrain, we were strong in things that maybe we don't find in Jeddah and Australia. So, if we are strong in the next two races, I think we will have



Sergio Perez was runner-up to teammate Max Verstappen in the Bahrain season-opener on March 5 with some pundits predicting Red Bull could win all 23 races this year such was their domination.

a very good 2023.”

The hopes of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc — runner-up in Jeddah last year — have taken a hit with the Monegasque facing a 10-place grid penalty after the team needed to change the electronic control unit on his car. The race could also add to the cloud of gloom hanging over Mercedes, after seven-times champion Lewis Hamilton and George Russell had only the fourth best car in Bahrain.

“This weekend in Saudi Arabia we will learn more about W14, its characteristics and its limitations. It provides a very dif-

ferent test to Bahrain, and it will be interesting to see how the car reacts,” said team boss Toto Wolff. “We are bringing some small developments to the car: they won't be game changers, but they can start moving us in the right direction.”

The midfield battles will also be closely watched for signs of an emerging pecking order, with McLaren eager to get their first points on the board and Renault-owned Alpine yet to perform to expectations. “Bahrain showed we have some good race pace so a points finish is very much a possibility,” said McLaren's Lando Norris.

The fast and flowing 6.1km Jeddah layout puts much more emphasis on straight-line speed than Sakhr, where tyre degradation was a big factor. The safety car has been deployed in both races held in Jeddah with the first in 2021 twice stopped due to accidents.

Safety improvements have been made since last year, with walls pushed back to provide better sight-lines for drivers. Security has also been ramped up for the race after last year's attacks by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis on an oil facility near the circuit.

SPOTLIGHT

## Ferrari's Leclerc hit with 10-place grid penalty for Saudi GP

AFP  
Paris

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was yesterday hit with a 10-place grid penalty for this weekend's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. The sanction was meted out by Formula One's rulers the FIA after Ferrari were forced to change the power unit twice in Leclerc's car at the season-opening race in Bahrain.

Ferrari then moved to use a third power unit for the race in Saudi Arabia, breaking the rules that only permit two changes in an entire season.

Leclerc, who is already 25 points adrift of double world champion Max Verstappen's Red Bull after he failed to finish in Bahrain, faces further penalties if more parts need to be changed on his car ahead of Sunday's race in Jeddah.

Ferrari's new team principal Fred Vasseur explained what had gone wrong for the scuderia in Bahrain. “On Sunday, we had two different issues,” he said. “The first one was on the Sunday morning, when we did the fire up, and the second one was in the race. Unfortunately, it was two times the control unit, the ECU. It's something that we never experienced in the past. I hope now it's under control, but we have a deep analysis on this.”

The former Alfa Romeo chief, who took over from Matteo Binotti after last year's reliability-hit campaign, added: “Unfor-

tunately, we'll have to take the penalty in Jeddah, because we have only a pool of two control units for the season.”

In Bahrain, Leclerc was running a comfortable third when he experienced a loss of power on lap 47 and retired, Verstappen going on to win from Sergio Perez for a Red Bull 1-2.

### AUSTRIA TO STAY ON F1 CALENDAR UNTIL 2027

Austria will continue to host Formula One until 2027 after signing a four-year contract extension, both sides said. The Austrian Grand Prix returned to Formula One in 2014 and the last race of the current agreement was set to be held on July 2.

“The Austrian Grand Prix brings together the perfect mix of a challenging track, high-speed racing, and a beautiful venue for our fans, so I am delighted that we will be coming back to the Red Bull Ring until at least 2027 under this new agreement,” Formula One President and CEO Stefano Domenicali said.

Since its return the Red Bull Ring has proved a popular fixture on the calendar with tens of thousands of Dutch Max Verstappen and Red Bull fans flocking to the Styrian venue. The venue reported it has received a total of 1.39mn fans since its comeback, hosting 11 races including two events behind closed doors to kick off a 2020 season derailed by the pandemic. Last year's sold out edition welcomed 303,000 spectators.



Ferrari were forced to change the power unit twice in Charles Leclerc's car at the season-opening race in Bahrain. (AFP)

GOLF

## Thomas frustrated with ‘bizarre’ start to 2023



Justin Thomas of the US hits from a bunker during the Pro-Am event prior to the Valspar Championship in Palm Harbor, Florida. (AFP)

Reuters  
New York

Justin Thomas admits the frustration with the inconsistent form of his game is steadily growing. He has made 12 consecutive cuts dating to last July. But Thomas doesn't have a win and has only three top 10s during that stretch, and the streak only reached a dozen when he made the cut on the number at The Players Championship last week.

A tie for 60th at TPC Sawgrass was the latest example of Thomas reaching the weekend but failing to be anywhere close to contention come Sunday. Through his first six events of 2023, Thomas' solo fourth at the Phoenix Open is his only finish better than T20. “I would say frustrated is definitely one of the words I would use to describe how I'm feeling. It's a lot,” he said, ahead of the Valspar Championship. “It's just been an odd year. I've been working really hard and trying to get what I feel like is back to more how I'm playing. But then again, I'll have weeks where — it's weird. It's like I've described it to probably my team, it's like I feel really close and I feel really far at times. So it's kind of bizarre.”

The Valspar would appear to be a prime opportunity for Thomas to kick-start his season. He tied for third last year and owns

the event's second-lowest career scoring average at 69.67. Thomas is also the top-ranked player in the field at No.

10 — although he has dropped from No. 5 just last summer despite the defection of several former top-10 players to LIV Golf.

He also is coming off a difficult week at TPC Sawgrass, where he entered the event with the lowest scoring average among all players since 1983 with at least 15 rounds played. So it's fair to say that even Thomas doesn't know what to expect at the Valspar.

“I don't need to start over and kind of rewrite the book. It's not that far off,” he said. “It's just this game of golf can do that sometimes. I think that quote kind of was going around again of what Max (Homa) said however many years ago — you know, this game can make you feel one swing away from want to go quit and one swing away from feeling like you're going to win the Masters, and that's kind of where I'm at right now.”

Thomas said he's a big fan of the Copperhead course at Innisbrook Resort, where he has finished worse than T18 just once in five previous starts. Can this week be the springboard toward the string of upcoming majors, beginning with next month's Masters? “I mean, my golf game obviously doesn't feel great,” Thomas admitted. “I haven't been playing really, really well, but I feel like I'm close. I'm just trying to stay pa-

tient and stay positive and just kind of wait for good things to happen because I now that great things are coming. It's just a matter of time and I just need to be in the right frame of mind for it.”

### RICKIE FOWLER JOINS TIGER WOODS-BACKED TECH LEAGUE

Rickie Fowler became the newest member of the TGL, the tech-infused golf league announced. The league, which is fronted by Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods, now features 12 of the 18 golfers needed to compete on six three-man teams in match play on a virtual course.

Play is scheduled to begin in 2024. “With his dynamic personality and competitive spirit, Rickie Fowler is a perfect fit for TGL. Welcome to the league!” TGL wrote Wednesday on Twitter.

Fowler, 34, has five PGA Tour career victories but none since the Waste Management Phoenix Open in 2019. He does have six top-10 finishes in 10 starts this season and sits 59th in the Official World Golf Ranking. He joins World No. 2 Jon Rahm of Spain, No. 3 McIlroy, Woods, No. 6 Max Homa, No. 7 Xander Schauffele, No. 10 Justin Thomas, No. 11 Collin Morikawa, No. 13 Matt Fitzpatrick of England, No. 25 Billy Horschel, No. 32 Justin Rose of England and No. 38 Adam Scott of Australia as members of the TGL.

CRICKET

## Kiwi warhorse Wagner vows to return after injury setback

Reuters  
Christchurch

Veteran seamer Neil Wagner is adamant he will be back in Test whites for New Zealand once he shrugs off a serious hamstring strain sustained against Sri Lanka. The South Africa-born Wagner, who turned 37 on Monday as New Zealand won a cliff-hanger in the first Test against Sri Lanka, has also been hampered with a bulging disc in his back through the home summer.

The hamstring has ruled him out of the second Test starting in Wellington tomorrow and could sideline him for up to 10 weeks, though the silver lining is that he can avoid surgery.

Following Sri Lanka, New Zealand's next Test is not until an away series against Bangladesh in November, leaving Wagner time to weigh his future as well as recover.

Retirement, however, is the last thing on the fiery fast bowl-



er's mind. “People might make their predictions and stuff like that and I've made a career out of proving people wrong. It's definitely not the end of me,” Wagner told New Zealand media. “A lot of people said it could be the end of me after my first Test. I think the day I call it quits is the day I

call it quits probably, or when they don't pick me again.”

Wagner has also played with joint inflammation in his foot for most of a decade while still managing to play 63 Tests and take 258 wickets for the Black Caps. He said the hamstring problem suffered over the weekend when bowling in Christchurch may have been due to other parts of his body “overcompensating trying to carry a load.”

Wagner bows out of the home summer having made key contributions in both of New Zealand's dramatic wins over England and Sri Lanka. He took England's final wicket in Wellington to secure a one-run win that tied the series at 1-1.

On Monday, he ran a bye on his injured leg with Kane Williamson on the final ball to ensure a two-wicket win over Sri Lanka. Paceman Doug Bracewell, who played his last Test in 2016 against South Africa, has been called into New Zealand's squad for the second Test as a possible replacement for Wagner.

### England's whitewash in Bangladesh an ‘eye-opener’: Mott

**Dhaka:** England's 3-0 defeat in their Twenty20 series in Bangladesh was a real “eye-opener” for the world champions, white-ball coach Matthew Mott said. Bangladesh secured a 16-run victory in Mirpur on Tuesday to complete the whitewash and Mott said England would have to learn from it.

“We really wanted to finish well here. I think it's been a fantastic tour in terms of what we've been up against, a very strong home team,” Mott said. “That one hurts. To finish the way we did will leave a bit of a sour taste in our mouths. It should act as a real eye-opener on where we need to improve.”

England were short on batters for the series after Tom Abell and Will Jacks were forced to withdraw due to injuries, and Mott defended the decision to not call up replacements. “There was a realisation that we were probably better off

investing in some batters here and putting them under pressure in these games. You only learn from your mistakes,” Mott added.

“The opportunities they were given here will give them time to reflect and when we get into pressure situations in World Cups, I am confident that it will have been the right decision.”

However, former England captain Nasser Hussain suggested they were looking too far ahead to the 50-overs Cricket World Cup, which will take place in India in October and November. “I see what they're trying to do, but the short-term view and the long-term view, you've always got to balance that as a selector ...,” Hussain said.

“I just think not having the extra batter sends the wrong message ... Pay attention to this game in front of you, and if you do that then the future will look after itself.”



HORSE RACING

# Yunus cruises to Rodat Al Maida Cup victory

Wathnan Racing's Neat And Dandy lands the 1700m Handicap for Thoroughbreds

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Yunus claimed the Rodat Al Maida Cup winning the feature of Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club's (QREC) 41st Race Meeting at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Yunus made it a double for trainer Rudy Nerbonne. Partnered by jockey Lukas Delozier, the 5YO won the 1700m Conditions for 4YO+ Purebred Arabians by one and a half lengths. Abdulaziz Jassim al-Boenain, Al Uqda Complex Manager, presented the trophies to the winners.

Earlier, Wathnan Racing's Neat And Dandy (IRE) recorded his second victory in a row. The Alban de Mieuille-trained 4YO gelding took the 1700m Handicap (65-85) for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds by three quarters of a lengths, giving jockey Soufiane Saadi a second winner on the day.

The 1200m Handicap (0-80) for 3YO+ Thoroughbred saw a stunning effort from the Fatima Bint Sultan al-Dosari-owned Cloak And Dagger (IRE). Saddled by Mohamed Ghazali and ridden by Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi, the 7YO was victorious by staggering nine and a half lengths clear of the field at the line.

Injaaz Stud's colours, trainer Julian Smart and jockey Jefferson Smith were present at the winner's enclosure for the second time on the day, as Silencer (IRE) produced a good performance and won the 1200m Maiden for 3-6YO Thoroughbreds by three quarters of a length.

His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Shwomil'a (QA) was given a fine ride by jockey Rashid Ali al-Saaq, who steered the 4YO filly to success on fourth career start as she dominated the 1200m Maiden for 4-6YO Local Purebred Arabians by five lengths for trainer Rudy Nerbonne.

Al Jeryan Stud's Diva De Pine (IT) was an impressive winner of the 1200m Maiden for 4-6YO Purebred Arabians for trainer M.H.K al-Attayah, pulling four lengths clear of the field at the line under Soufiane Saadi's cool ride.

The Khadija Mohamed al-Bastaki-owned Rock Bottom (GB) bounced back



Abdulaziz Jassim al-Boenain, Al Uqda Complex Manager, presented the trophies to connections of Yunus. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm



Jockey Lukas Delozier rides Yunus to Rodat Al Maida Cup victory.

to good form in the Handicap (0-65) for 4YO+ Thoroughbreds. Under jockey Giuseppe Cultraro, the 7YO prevailed by almost two lengths in the 1200m contest for trainer Abdulrahman Abdulwahed.

Injaaz Stud's Nadiraha (QA) began the meeting getting off the mark on fifth career with a two-and-a-half length victory in the 1700m Handicap (0-65) for 4YO+ Local Thoroughbreds under jockey

Jefferson Smith for trainer Julian Smart.

**RODAT AL MAIDA CUP WINNERS**

- 1 - Rodat Al Maida Cup - Purebred Arabian Conditions  
Yunus, Rudy Andre Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
- 2 - Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85 (Class 4)  
Neat And Dandy, Alban Elie De Mieuille, Soufiane Saadi
- 3 - Thoroughbred Handicap 0-80 (Class 4) (Qatari Riders only)  
Cloak And Dagger, Mohamed Ghazali, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi
- 4 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6)  
Silencer, Julian Colin Smart, Jefferson Smith
- 5 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate  
Shwomil'a, Rudy Andre Nerbonne, Rashid Ali al-Marri
- 6 - Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate  
Diva De Pine, M.H.K al-Attayah, Soufiane Saadi
- 7 - Thoroughbred Handicap 0-65 (Class 6)  
Rock Bottom, Abdulrahman Abdulwahed, Giuseppe Cultraro
- 8 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-65  
Nadiraha, Julian Colin Smart, Jefferson Smith

## Qatar Olympic Committee Beach Games

The karate event for both boys & girls at the Qatar Olympic Committee Beach Games 2023 concluded at Cultural Village Katara. In the over 16 karate final (girls), Salma Abdulrahman claimed the first place overall, as Waad Sukaria seized the runner-up place while Nada al-Yazidi finished third.

In the men's Karate final, Mohamed Younis won the first place ahead of Said Mostafa Amar who finished in second place and Karam Jood snatched the third place.

In the men's 3x3 beach basketball, Salaheddin Sakour claimed the first place, as Adham Hashem Abdulnaser won the second place and the third place went to Abdulhameed Shaoash.

In effort to build up a better sport future for high education institutions, Qatar Collegiate Sports Federation (QCSF) has encouraged students to be an integral part of the sport activities during the Games. The QOC Beach Games, which sees the participation of more than 800 athletes, will conclude tomorrow.



## Qatar enter Asian Beach Handball Championships semis



Five-time champions Qatar yesterday defeated title holders Iran 23-18, 23-20 in a thrilling contest to book a place in the semi-finals of the 9th Asian Beach Handball Championships in Bali, Indonesia. Qatar, unbeaten in the championship so far, having beaten Saudi Arabia 2-0 (26-17, 24-17), Philippines 2-0 (17-14, 28-14) and South Korea 2-0 (23-17, 25-9) in their previous Group A matches, topped the table with eight points. Al Annabi, the runners-up in the previous edition, will take on Vietnam who finished second in Group B, in the semi-final tomorrow. Meanwhile, in Group B, Oman topped the table with their fifth straight win in Bali to make it to the semi-finals. They will meet Group A runner-up Iran as they seek their sixth appearance in the title clash. The tournament serves as a qualification tournament for the 2024 IHF Men's Beach Handball World Championships.

**DOPING**

## Olympic shot put runner-up Saunders gets 18-month ban

AFP  
Washington

Olympic women's shot put silver medalist **Raven Saunders** has been issued an 18-month suspension for not being available for doping tests, the US Anti-Doping Agency yesterday. The 26-year-old American committed three "whereabouts failures" within a 12-month span to bring about the punishment, which is set to end in February 2024 and therefore give her a chance to compete at next year's Paris Olympics.

Saunders, who has been outspoken in raising awareness of social injustice and mental health issues, finished second at the Tokyo Games with an effort of 19.79 metres. Her violations came when she was in a USADA testing pool and had to inform authorities of her whereabouts so she could be located for random out-of-competition tests.

Saunders missed tests on January 8, May 26 and August 15 last year. Her 18-month ban began with the third violation and all results from that date onwards were disqualified.



WADA says Russian athletes are being tested despite Ukraine war

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) director general Olivier Niggli has told AFP that Russian competitors "are being tested now" despite their disappearance from global view after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. "The idea that the Russians are not being tested now is false," he said. "They are being tested now."

However Niggli said the reinstatement of the Russian anti-doping agency RUSADA - suspended in the wake of a massive doping and corruption scandal - was "complicated" because it was currently impossible to send WADA officials to Moscow to make a first-hand assessment. Athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus were banned from international competition in response to the Russian invasion.

But the International Olympic Committee has said it is examining a "pathway" to allow athletes from those two countries to take part in the 2024 Paris Olympics, a suggestion that has been greeted with dismay by Ukraine.

The possible involvement of Russians in the Paris Olympics also puts into sharp focus the issue of doping. WADA banned Russia from major sports events for four years in 2019 after finding doping data handed over from its Moscow laboratory had been manipulated.

That data was supposed to be provided as part of RUSADA's reinstatement in the wake of the massive doping and corruption scandal in which evidence was found of state-

sponsored Russian doping between 2011 and 2015. WADA had said it would consider the reinstatement of RUSADA in December after two years of non-compliance.

Niggli said the Russian invasion would not affect WADA's assessment of whether to allow RUSADA back into its fold.

"The armed conflict ... is not supposed to influence the anti-doping work we have done," Niggli told AFP in an interview at WADA's Lausanne headquarters. "We follow a process which is in place... which should function whether there is a war or not. This is where it gets a little complicated," he said.

To confirm that anti-doping measures are being followed and that the information RUSADA was putting out was correct, it was necessary to send people to Moscow, which was not possible in the current circumstances. "We cannot send people to do an audit in Moscow, for reasons that are understandable. Therefore today we are not in a position to have all the answers."

Niggli said the Ukraine conflict should not affect the Russian agency's functioning.

**INDIAN WELLS MASTERS**

## Alcaraz and Swiatek roll into quarters, Medvedev survives

AFP  
Indian Wells, United States

Top seeds Carlos Alcaraz and Iga Swiatek eased into the Indian Wells quarter-finals on cue on Tuesday as in-form Daniil Medvedev defied injury in a wild three-set win over Alexander Zverev. Alcaraz, the world number two who can regain the top ranking with a win this week, had a short night's work on Stadium Court as Britain's Jack Draper retired with an abdominal injury with the Spaniard up 6-2, 2-0.

World number one Swiatek, meanwhile, had the last word in most of the long rallies as she powered past 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu 6-3, 6-1. Their smooth progression was a stark contrast to the drama earlier in

the day, when Medvedev shook off a second-set fall and badly twisted ankle to beat Zverev 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 to push his ATP win streak to 17 matches.

The world number six, coming off ATP wins in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, rolled his right ankle and lay on the court for several minutes before limping to his chair. Zverev, who suffered three torn ankle ligaments at last year's French Open, looked on in concern, but after the injury was examined and taped by medical staff Medvedev continued - and turned the match around.

He saved all 10 break points he faced in the second set, grabbing a 4-1 lead on the way to victory in the tiebreaker. Up an early break in the third, Medvedev wasted a match point as he was broken in the 10th game. Zverev couldn't build on that, however, and Medvedev held at love to clinch the win after three

hours and 17 minutes. Ankle allowing, Medvedev was scheduled to face 28th-ranked Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina - a 6-3, 6-4 winner over Chilean qualifier Cristian Garin. Alcaraz will have a day off before facing Felix Auger-Aliassime, who saved six match points - three in the third-set tiebreaker - in his 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) victory over Tommy Paul.

Swiatek next faces Romania's Sorana Cirstea, who battled to a 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 victory over fifth-ranked Caroline Garcia of France.

Men's defending champion Taylor Fritz defeated Hungarian Marton Fucsovics 6-4, 6-3 in a tense match that belied the straightforward scoreline. Fritz will face Italian Jannik Sinner, who beat three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka 6-1, 6-4. Britain's 2021 champion Cameron Norrie beat

seventh-ranked Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-4 to line up a clash with American Frances Tiafoe, a 6-4, 6-4 winner over Chilean qualifier Alejandro Tabilo.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka reached the quarter-finals for the first time with a 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 victory over Barbora Krejickova. Sabalenka next faces 19-year-old American Coco Gauff, who squeezed past Swedish qualifier Rebecca Peterson 6-3, 1-6, 6-4. Gauff, the fourth seed, has won three of their prior four meetings.

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, a former world number two now ranked 15th, saved four match points in a 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (13/11) victory over third-ranked Jessica Pegula. The Czech next faces last year's runner-up Maria Sakkari, the seventh seed who beat Karolina Pliskova 6-4, 5-7, 6-3.



Daniil Medvedev of Russia reacts as Alexander Zverev of Germany touches his foot after Medvedev had a fall during their Indian Wells Masters match. (AFP)



SPOTLIGHT

## Arteta won’t compromise on Arsenal’s bid for Europa, Premier League glory

**AFP**  
London

**M**ikel Arteta insists Arsenal will not down tools in the Europa League to help their bid to win a first Premier League title for 19 years. Arteta’s Premier League leaders sit five points clear of second placed Manchester City with 11 games left. Bowing out of the Europa League could aid the Gunners’ hopes of holding onto the lead in the title race as it would allow more recovery and preparation time. But Arteta does not share that view because the Arsenal boss is trying to restore a winning culture to a club mired in mediocrity for much of the past two decades.

Arsenal host Sporting Lisbon in the second leg of their Europa League last 16 clash today with the tie delicately balanced after a 2-2 draw in Portugal last week. “Our priority is the two competitions,” Arteta said. “The best way to prepare for any competition is to win the previous match and having the confidence and the proper emotion to approach the next game.”

Arteta’s philosophy has so far been proved right. Arsenal have won six and drawn one of their seven Premier League games immediately following their Europa League matches this season. Despite arriving back in London in the early hours of Friday morning, the visitors cruised to a 3-0 win at Fulham on Sunday with the game won by half-time.

It is master against the apprentice in the Premier League title fight as Arteta takes on his former boss in City manager Pep Guardiola. Arteta was Guardiola’s assistant for three years between 2016 and 2019. The influence of Guardiola is clear to see Arsenal’s style of play under Arteta, but also in the mentality the Spaniard is trying to instil.

City lifted the League Cup for four consecutive seasons under Guardiola between 2018 and 2021. Rather than preferring a less congested fixture schedule, the City boss believes that winning trophies is an “addiction.”

The FA Cup is where Arsenal have been able to get their hit over the past 19 years, winning the competition five times, including in Arteta’s first season in charge. But Arsenal have only won one European trophy in their history – the 1993/94 Cup Winners’ Cup.

Arteta is desperate to change that appalling record for a club of Arsenal’s size and is not willing to compromise despite the risk his young squad could run out of gas in the final months of the season.

Meanwhile, forward Eddie Nketiah will be out of action for the foreseeable future due to an ankle injury and is not in the squad to face Sporting Mikel Arteta said.

The 23-year-old Nketiah limped off the pitch following the 4-0 win over Everton this month and has not played since. Nketiah had been leading Arsenal’s attack in the absence of Gabriel Jesus. “It’s getting better. He’s still in the boot. He’s still a few weeks away and we need to be patient. It was a nasty injury and he

has a big challenge ahead of him. Thank God it’s not as bad as it could have been,” Arteta told reporters.

Jesus, who has scored five goals and contributed seven assists following his 45mn pound (\$54.11mn) move from Manchester City in July, played 13 minutes of the 3-0 win at Fulham on Sunday after sustaining a knee injury at the World Cup with Brazil.

“It was great to see him back, you can feel the happiness of everyone around him. We missed him and now he’s back,” Arteta said. “We have to manage his minutes, his involvement. He’s feeling good and every day he’s training he says his sensations are better so that’s really positive.”

If Arsenal are to make it to the final in Budapest on May 31, they will have to progress past a stellar cast of big names in Europe’s second tier competition. Manchester United have one foot in the quarter-finals after a comprehensive 4-1 win over Real Betis at Old Trafford. Juventus still have work to do when they travel to Freiburg defending a slender 1-0 first leg lead. Six-time winners Sevilla may be fighting a relegation battle in La Liga but are always a threat in the knockout stages of the Europa League and take a 2-0 lead to Istanbul against Fenerbahce.

Jose Mourinho led Roma to their first European trophy in 61 years by lifting the Europa Conference League last season.

The Italian giants are also well-placed to reach the last eight after beating Real Sociedad 2-0 at home last week.



### Spain, Portugal confirm Morocco, don’t rule out Ukraine from World Cup 2030 bid

**Haria, Spain:** Spain and Portugal confirmed the addition of Morocco to their bid to host the 2030 World Cup and said Ukraine may still be included, in a statement yesterday.

Morocco’s King Mohamed VI announced on Tuesday that his country had joined the bid by the two European countries, apparently replacing war-torn Ukraine in a three-way alliance. Spain and Portugal declared their joint candidacy in 2021, before adding Ukraine to their bid last October. “Ukraine’s participation in the project will be finalised at the appropriate time, due to the situation in the country, and the UAF (Ukrainian Federation of Football) president, Andriy Pavelko, who is currently suspended from his duties,” said the Spanish and Portuguese football federations in a joint statement.

Spanish media had reported that the arrest in November of Pavelko over fraud allegations had left Ukraine out of the running. Spanish football federation chief Luis Rubiales and his Portuguese counterpart, Fernando Gomes announced the decision at a UEFA meeting taking place in Kigali in relation to the FIFA Congress.

Earlier yesterday, the Spanish and Portuguese prime ministers welcomed Morocco’s move to join their bid, saying it boosted their chances of hosting the event. “I think this bid by the Iberian Peninsula with Morocco is very positive,” Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa told a joint news conference with his Spanish

counterpart Pedro Sanchez on the Spanish island of Lanzarote.

“It sends an important message to the entire world and especially Europe and Africa, since it says that we are two neighbouring continents, two continents that want to work together,” he added. “It is the first time that a joint bid is presented from both sides of the Mediterranean, a bid between Africa and Europe. I think this can only help to unite that which can’t be separated.”

Sanchez, meanwhile, said Morocco joining the bid “places Spain and Portugal’s joint candidacy in better shape to win the race”. Neither Sanchez nor Costa mentioned Ukraine during the press conference. Spanish reports previously said that with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine still ongoing, there was little likelihood that the country would be ready to host World Cup matches in seven years’ time. Football’s world governing body FIFA is expected to announce the 2030 World Cup hosts in 2024. A South American bid including Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay and Chile is set to challenge the Iberian bid, and Saudi Arabia hopes to lead a joint ticket with Egypt and Greece.

The World Cup has had joint hosts before. In 2002 Japan and South Korea shared the competition. In 2026, the finals will be played in the United States, Mexico and Canada, when 11 of the 16 planned venues will be in the US. The first World Cup, in 1930, was hosted and won by Uruguay.

### ROUND-UP

## Police return a silver medal stolen from Salah’s home in Cairo

**E**gyptian police said yesterday they have recovered a silver medal which was stolen from

the home of Liverpool striker Mohamed Salah. The theft took place on March 2 and police were able to identify the two thieves, including a former security guard in the residential complex, the Ministry of Interior added in a statement.

All the stolen goods were seized, which include a silver medal, a number of sports shoes and TV receivers. A security source confirmed to Reuters that the player intended in the statement is Salah. The photo, published by the police on Facebook, showed that the silver medal was for the African Cup of Nations.

Salah finished on the losing side in both the 2017 and 2021 Cup of Nations finals. Egypt captain Salah, 30, is due to visit his home country next week as he will lead the national team in a double-header against Malawi in African Cup of Nations qualifying, a home game on March 24 and the away match four days later. Salah last week became

Liverpool’s all-time top scorer in the Premier League with 129 goals.

### HALLER BACK IN IVORY COAST SQUAD AFTER CANCER TREATMENT

Ivory Coast centre forward Sebastien Haller was recalled to the national squad for matches against Comoros after an absence of several months during which he underwent treatment for testicular cancer. The 28-year-old forward joined Borussia Dortmund in July from Ajax Amsterdam and only managed a few training sessions after which the cancer was detected.

He underwent two operations and four cycles of chemotherapy before resuming training in January. He began playing again on January 22 and scored his first goal after his illness on February 4 against Freiburg.

Haller, who has scored four goals playing for Ivory Coast’s national team will play in games against Comoros on March 24 and 28 for the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations. Ivory Coast is the tournament’s organiser this year.

### FOCUS

# Champions League mission at Man City for Haaland

Norway forward scores five goals in City’s 7-0 demolition of RB Leipzig

**AFP**  
Manchester

**E**rling Haaland admits he is at Manchester City to win the Champions League after smashing in five goals against RB Leipzig – and warns he can get even better. The Norway forward propelled City into the quarter-finals after a 7-0 win at the Etihad on Tuesday and underlined their determination to finally win Europe’s elite club competition.

“Of course the club want to win the Champions League, they want to still win trophies,” said Haaland, who has now scored a staggering 39 goals in 36 appearances for City since arriving from Borussia Dortmund last year. “They’ve won the Premier League four times out of the last five years so they didn’t bring me in to win the Premier League, they know how to win the Premier League,” he said. “So, you can read between the lines. I’m here to try to help the club develop even more, to win the Champions League for the first time.”

Haaland became only the third player to score five goals in a single Champions League game at the Etihad, taking his tally in the competition to 33 goals in 25 games. He is the quickest player to reach the 30-goal milestone in the competition and, at the age of 22, the youngest.

Haaland also eclipsed Tommy Johnson’s 1928/29 club record of 38 goals in a single season for City. But he insisted his appetite for goals was far from satisfied and he hopes to get even better.

“I knew I was going to score goals because, last season, how many goals did City score? Probably a hundred. When I saw them last season without a striker I was thinking when they were crossing the ball in, I was like ‘Ah, I’d love to be there’. In the end there is so much potential in this team and I think we can improve a lot.... It’s an easy thing to say but I could have scored more goals. I missed a lot of chances.”

City’s performance emphatically dispelled any concerns after their 1-1 draw in the first leg last month. Ilkay Gundogan and Kevin De Bruyne also got on the scoresheet as Pep Guardiola’s men wrapped up an 8-1 aggregate success. “The feeling is amazing,” said Haaland,



Manchester City’s Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring against RB Leipzig in Champions League last 16 match. (AFP)

who has now scored five hat-tricks this season. “First of all to win 7-0 and to give a kind of statement in this tournament, the Champions League, which is a tournament I love.”

### HAALAND’S LIFE WOULD BE ‘BORING’ HAD HE SET RECORD, SAYS GUARDIOLA

Haaland virtually wrote his own record book for City against RB Leipzig, but manager Pep Guardiola spoiled what might have been one more. Haaland scored five goals but Guardiola substituted him in the 63rd minute.

No player in Champions League history has scored six goals in a game. “If he achieved this milestone, the record, at 22, will be boring, his life, so now he’ll have a target to do it in the future, here and eve-

rywhere,” Guardiola said. “So that’s why I make a substitution.”

Haaland became the third player in history to score five goals in a game, matching Luiz Adriano, who achieved the feat in 2014 for Shakhtar Donetsk, and Lionel Messi, in 2012 for Barcelona – with Guardiola as coach. “I didn’t know with Messi when it was happening against Leverkusen, they told me in the first interview,” Guardiola said.

“But I made a substitution (Tuesday) because normally when the game is over, I want to... let them play, as many players as possible. Haaland equalled Messi’s record, but he did it in 60 minutes, it’s different. Who knows if he would have played 90 minutes?”

Haaland was a six-foot-four-inch bulldozer in front of the net all night,

narrowly missing several other excellent chances in a victory that secured an 8-1 win on aggregate. “I told (Guardiola) I would love to score a double hat-trick but what can I do?” said Haaland, who was hauled off minutes after his fifth goal.

Leipzig manager Marco Rose said he knew his team might be in for a stiff challenge against Haaland. “He had a great night. He was so hungry,” Rose said. “He scored goals with the foot and head, won second balls, deep runs. It looked really simple. He took the ball from the referee, that tells you it was a special night for him. Congratulations to Erling.”

Haaland has 10 goals in the Champions League this season, and 33 in his career, reaching the 30-goal mark in 25 games, the fewest ever. He is also the youngest ever to reach that mark.

## IBRAHIMOVIC RECALLED TO SWEDEN SQUAD AGED 41

**Stockholm:** AC Milan’s veteran striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic was named yesterday in Sweden’s squad for this month’s Euro 2024 qualifiers, when he could break Italian goalkeeper Dino Zoff’s age record.

Ibrahimovic, 41, last featured for his country 12 months ago and will beat Zoff’s Euro qualifier milestone of 40

years and 90 days set in 1983 if he features in games against Belgium on March 24 or Azerbaijan on March 27.

He has played just three games for Milan this season after recovering from a knee issue. “Zlatan feels fit and in decent shape even though he has been away for a while,” coach Janne Andersson said

in a statement. “From that perspective, I think he can contribute. Especially on the pitch, but also off the pitch,” Andersson added. Should Sweden make it all the way to next year’s competition in Germany, Ibrahimovic could also beat the record set by Hungary’s Gabor Kiraly, who played in the 2016 edition aged 40.

After Sweden failed to qualify for the 2022 World Cup Zlatan said last year that he will “continue as long as I can,” and he has said he is “panicking” at the prospect of retiring. The three countries are all in the qualifying group F, together with Estonia and Austria, with the top two reaching the finals.