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Alcaraz to face Sinner, Swiatek plays Rybakina



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE | Page 4

Real face Chelsea in quarters, City meet Bayern

Saturday, March 18, 2023
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GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Rahul, Jadeja give India win in first ODI against Australia

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MOTORSPORTS

Al-Attiyah fights back to lead Qatar International Baja

Dabrowski extends motorcycle lead; Qatar’s Nasser al-Kuwari and Brazil’s De Sousa top T3 and T4 standings



Qatari ace Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel in action during the Qatar International Baja yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

Qatar’s Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and co-driver Mathieu Baumel lost the lead to Polish rivals Krzysztof Holowczyc and Lukasz Kurzeja on the longer first stage of the Qatar International Baja yesterday morning and then battled back to set the fastest time on the next one to lead by 2min 33.8sec at the end of the day.

At the wheel of their borrowed Toyota Hilux, the defending champions now head into the final day with a slim cushion over their team-mates, Denis Krotov and Konstantin Zhiltsov, who hold second place in their Overdrive Racing Toyota Hilux, despite two flat tyres.

Al-Attiyah said: “The first stage was not really clear but we made two mistakes that cost 10 minutes. On the next two sections we pushed and are quite happy.” Krotov said: “Today was good. No problems with navigation. My co-driver did a good job. Two punctures cost us time.”

With Holowczyc reportedly stopped in the second stage of the day with cooling issues on his Mini JCW Rally Plus, that opened the door for the Chinese driver Guoyu Zhang and his Spanish co-driver Oriol Mena to climb into third place with their Baic ORC BJ40, despite one flat tyre.

The day’s action featured three competitive sections of 117.29km, 46.05km and 70.53km for the cars and a similar distance for the motorcycles and quads with the FIM entrants tackling the shorter two sections first.

Nasser al-Kuwari is better known as an esteemed international co-driver but the Qatari has excelled so far this weekend in the driving seat and has carved out a 4min 02.1sec lead over his usual driving partner Meshari al-Thefiri in the FIA T3 category for light-weight prototype machines after the Kuwaiti suffered navigational issues. Along with French co-driver Francois Cazalet, the QMMF Rally Team’s Can-Am driver now holds a lofty fourth in the overall standings.

Al-Kuwari said: “I am very happy



Cristiano de Sousa of Brazil leads T4 in his South Racing Can-Am.

with the result today. You have two options. Is the route okay or not and we followed the right route. We both did a great job. I was careful with the rocks and I kept my speed. My co-driver is one of the best and I trust him and we are happy to lead the T3.”

Al-Thefiri and Oriol Vidal are sixth overall and second in the T3 section with their new MCE-5 T3M and seventh-placed Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and his co-driver Alexei Kuzmich hold third in T3 in the second of the QMMF Rally Team Can-Ams.

Abdulaziz a-Kuwari said: “I am very happy with my first day ever in this kind of rally. It was good experience. The first time in my life in cross-country. A lot of things to see in the stage, cars passing you, different terrain, sometimes sandy, sometimes gravel. My co-driver did a fantastic job.”

Al-Thefiri added: “We were lost and we saw three ways and we tested them all and then we catch the right way after six minutes. I push more. My first time here and a new car for me. I see this car last year in Dubai and we decided to drive the T3M this time.”

Brazil’s Cristiano de Sousa Batista and Portuguese co-driver Fausto Moto continue to lead the FIA T4 section in their South Racing Can-Am and hold 10th overall. French rival Jeremie War-

nia is second in the class and 11th, while young Pau Navarro is classified in third with his FN Speed Team Can-Am. Italian racer Pietro Cinotto incurred time penalties for breaking the power steering on the Prologue and is out of contention for the podium.

Overdrive Racing’s Juan Cruz Yacopini holds fifth place in his Toyota Hilux and Saudi Arabia’s Khalid al-Feraihi is on course for useful FIA Middle East Baja Cup points. Despite stopping to assist at the scene of an accident involving Khalid al-Muhannadi and Pedro Santos, the Saudi holds eighth overall. The time lost at the scene of the incident was handed back to the Nissan driver after the stage.

DABROWSKI IN CONTROL IN THE MOTORCYCLES

Konrad Dabrowski extended his lead in the motorcycle category to 18min 57.6sec after another dominant stage win on his KTM. The talented young Polish junior rider, who is following in his father Marek’s footsteps, won the day’s stage by 14min 43.2sec from Great Britain’s Robert Wallace, who retained second overall.

Dabrowski said: “I started ninth after winning the Prologue and that was a good starting position for today. My plan was to catch the leaders and to

gain as much time as possible and I was actually able to do it before the refuel. By then I knew that the result would be very good. After the second half I opened all the way and it was a really nice day.”

Martin Chalmers claimed third on the day and the Aussie holds a similar position in the overall rankings, with Canadian rival Jonathan Finn in fourth and fellow Australian Andrew Houlihan riding strongly to come home in fifth and first in the Veterans category.

Emirati Abdullah al-Lanjawi and Saudi Arabia’s Mishal al-Ghuneir were classified in sixth and seventh and eighth-placed Mirjam Pol continued to lead the Women’s category. Ireland’s Oran O’Kelly stopped to assist South Africa’s Michael Anderson, who crashed his KTM on the stage.

The experienced Saudi rider Haitham al-Tuwaijri topped the quads in the unofficial results from the overnight-leader Emirati Abdulaziz al-Ahli.

Today, Cars tackle one stage of 224.96km that has been split into four sections of 33.73km, 28.51km, 43.23km and 113.20km by three non-competitive transfer zones. The first vehicle is due in stage at 10:40am. Motorcycles tackle the same route with the first rider going live at the earlier time of 08:45am.

Qatar International Baja - Positions		
FIA - Cars (Top 16 only) after stage 3		
1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/ Mathieu Baumel (AND) Toyota GR DKR Hilux 2he 23min 33.4sec*	(FRA) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 3hr 00min 49.7sec*	
2. Denis Krotov (KGZ)/Konstantin Zhiltsov (ISR) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 2hr 26min 07.2sec*	T1 unless stated; *denotes registered for FIA World Cup; + denotes registered for FIA Middle East Cup	
3. Guoyu Zhang (CHN)/Oriol Mena (ESP) Baic ORC BJ40 2hr 30min 26.3sec*	FIM - Bikes (top 15) after two stages	
4. Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT)/François Cazalet (FRA) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 2hr 39min 11.3sec+	1. Konrad Dabrowski (POL) KTM 450 Rally 4hr 05min 14.3sec	
5. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG)/Daniel Oliveras (ESP) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 2hr 40min 10.0sec*	2. Robert Wallace (GBR) KTM 450 RFR 4hr 24min 11.9sec	
6. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Oriol Vidal (ESP) MCE-5 T3M (T3) 2hr 43min 13.4sec*	3. Martin Chalmers (AUS) Beta 430 RR 4hr 45min 48.3sec	
7. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/Alexei Kuzmich (ARE) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 2hr 49min 22.8sec+	4. Jonathan Finn (CAN) Honda CRF 450 RL 4hr 56min 55.9sec	
8. Khalid al-Feraihi (SAU)/Sebastien Delaunay (FRA) Nissan Pick-Up 2hr 54min 57.3sec+	5. Andrew Houlihan (AUS) Husqvarna FR 4hr 58min 04.4sec	
9. Otavio Sousa (BRA)/Joao Ferreira (PRT) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 2hr 55min 40.2sec*	6. Abdullah Lanjawi (ARE) Husqvarna FE450 4hr 59min 40.7sec	
10. Cristiano de Sousa Batista (BRA)/ Fausto Mota (PRT) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo (T4) 2hr 56min 05.6sec*	7. Mishal al-Ghuneim (SAU) KTM 450 Rally 5hr 00min 53.1sec	
11. Jeremie Warnia (FRA)/Loic Minaudier (FRA) Polaris RZR 1000 R (T4) 2hr 57min 45.8sec*	8. Mirjam Pol (NLD) KTM 5hr 01min 11.3sec	
12. Nouel Hassan al-Suwaiddi (QAT)/ Aisvydas Paliukenas (LTU) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 2hr 57min 55.3sec+	9. Cesare Zacchetti (ITA) KTM EXC 350F 5hr 02min 20.0sec	
13. Dania Akeel (SAU)/Laurent Lichtleuchter (FRA) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 2hr 58min 02.1sec*	10. Marwan al-Rahmani (ARE) KTM 450 Rally 5hr 05min 10.0sec	
14. Hector Diego Martinez (ESP)/Sergio Lafuente (URY) South Racing Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 3hr 00min 05.5sec*	11. Ola Floene (NOR) KTM 450 Rally 5hr 05min 37.2sec	
15. Pau Navarro (ESP)/Gonçalo Reis (PRT) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo (T4) 3hr 00min 37.3sec*	12. Abdullah al-Shatti (KWT) Husqvarna 450 Rally 5hr 28min 16.3sec	
16. Ronan Chabot (FRA)/Gilles Pillot	13. Mohamed al-Balooshi (ARE) KTM 450 Rally Replica 5hr 35min 51.6sec	
	14. Ehab al-Hakeem (LBN) Yamaha WR 450F 5hr 48min 48.9sec	
	15. Jaco Anderson (ZAF) KTM 450 EXC 5hr 51min 21.0sec	
	FIM - Quads	
	1. Haitham al-Tuwaijri (SAU) Yamaha Raptor 700 4hr 46min 26.8sec	
	2. Abdulaziz al-Ahli (ARE) Yamaha Raptor 700 5hr 01min 56.8sec	
	3. Mansoor al-Suwaiddi (ARE) Yamaha YFZ 450R 6hr 02min 32.8sec	
	4. Arnoud Dom (BEL) Suzuki LTR 450 6hr 09min 03.4sec	



Poland’s Konrad Dabrowski has a 18min 57.6sec lead in the motorcycle category.



Drivers battle it out in the tough Qatar terrain yesterday.

FORMULA ONE

Verstappen sparkles as Red Bulls dominate

AFP
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Max Verstappen showed no ill effects after a recent stomach bug yesterday as he and Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez dominated opening practice at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

The defending double world champion clocked a fastest lap in one minute and 29.617 seconds to outpace Perez by four-tenths of a second, the champion team stamping their authority in the heat at the Jeddah Street Circuit.

Two-time champion Fernando Alonso followed his bold third place at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix by taking third ahead of his Aston Martin team-mate Lance Stroll.

The two Mercedes, running with various upgrades, were fifth and sixth, George Russell narrowly outpacing seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, with Carlos Sainz seventh for Ferrari.

Pierre Gasly of Alpine was eighth ahead of Alex Albon, in his improved Williams, and Yuki Tsunoda, 10th for Alpha Tauri.

Charles Leclerc was 11th in the second Ferrari.

Hamilton ruffled some at Mercedes Benz when he declared this year's machine was 1.5 seconds per lap slower than Red Bull in



Mechanics wheel the car of Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez' (front) and that of his Dutch teammate Max Verstappen (centre) after the first practice session at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit ahead of the 2023 Saudi Arabia Grand Prix. (AFP)

race trim, a deficit the team were seeking to overhaul.

"He's shaking the tree and he wants a reaction," said the 1996 world champion Damon Hill on Sky Sports.

With an air temperature of 28 degrees Celsius and the track at 44, Sainz led the early pace-setters, on soft tyres, before Alonso, also on softs, and then Hamilton, on hards, took over.

After five minutes, everyone had been out except for Verstappen and Stroll, still recovering from his pre-season wrist injuries.

Perez showed that Red Bull

were not being left out when he went top after 15 minutes, a second clear of Albon, with a lap in 1:31.486.

For a short spell, Alonso and Perez traded fastest laps before



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen chats with a mechanic during the first practice session at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit yesterday. (AFP)

Verstappen, recovered from his stomach bug, swept to the top on his second lap in 1:30.494, trimming it 1:30.062 to move almost half a second clear of the Aston Martin.

After half an hour, it was Verstappen ahead of Alonso, Perez and Russell, with the two Ferraris, both using newly-installed power units, eighth and ninth, more than a second off the Dutchman's pace even before Verstappen extended his gap at the front to seven-tenths.

With five minutes remaining, Stroll ran off at high speed but avoided the barriers.

Lando Norris, running a new engine in his McLaren, was

shown a black-and-white flag for failing to follow the instructions of the race director.

HAMILTON TRAINER LEAVES

The session was preceded by an announcement from Hamilton that he had split from long-term personal trainer Angela Cullen after more than seven years, the New Zealander moving on to pursue new adventures.

"For the last seven years, Angela Cullen has been by my side, pushing me to be the best version of myself," said Hamilton in an Instagram post. "So today I hope you'll join me in wishing her the very best as she takes her next steps to pursue her dreams."

CRICKET

Rahul hits polished 75 as India ease past Australia

THE HOSTS GRAB A 1-0 LEAD IN THE THREE-MATCH SERIES WITH A COMMANDING VICTORY IN MUMBAI

Reuters
Mumbai

India's middle-order batter K L Rahul struck an unbeaten 75 to anchor their nervy chase against Australia in a low-scoring contest and secure a five-wicket win in the opening one-day international yesterday.

Chasing 189 for victory on a spicy pitch, India slumped to 39-4 but Rahul's unbroken 108-run partnership with Ravindra Jadeja guided them home with 10.1 overs to spare.

Earlier, India's bowlers, complemented by some excellent catching, bundled out Australia for 188 inside 36 overs at the Wankhede Stadium.

Mitchell Marsh, returning to international cricket after ankle surgery, smashed 81 off 65 balls but his exit triggered a collapse.

With India's regular captain Rohit Sharma absent due to family commitments, Hardik Pandya won the toss and elected to field at the Wankhede Stadium.

By the second over, India had drawn first blood.

Travis Head, who made five, charged out against Mohamed Siraj but ended up deflecting the ball onto his stumps.

Marsh steadied the ship with a 72-run stand with Steve Smith, who is leading Australia in the absence of Pat Cummins who stayed back in Sydney following the death of his mother.

David Warner also missed the match through injury though Australia expect the opener to play in the next two ODIs.

Smith made 22 before Pandya removed him caught behind.

Pandya said: "We were under pressure in both the innings, but we kept our composure, and found ways to come out of those situations. When we got the momentum our way, we didn't let it go. I am really proud the way we played today. Jaddu did what he was supposed to do coming back after eight months away from ODIs. I enjoyed my bowling and batting, would have loved to finish it off, but the way KL and Jaddu batted, it was calming to those watching from the outside."

Marsh, in his first knock as an ODI opener, hit 10 fours and five sixes and Australia looked pretty comfortable at 129-2 in the 20th over before the wheels came off their innings.

Jadeja removed Marsh and took a stunning catch to send back Marnus Labuschagne (15) before Mohamed Shami's triple strike derailed Australia.

Josh Inglis (26), replacing an unwell Alex Carey at wicketkeeper, dragged the



India's K L Rahul plays a shot on the off-side during the first one-day international (ODI) against Australia at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. India won the match by five wickets. (AFP)

ball onto his stumps, Cameron Green (12) had his off-stump uprooted and Marcus Stoinis (5) perished in the slip.

Glenn Maxwell made eight on his return from a broken leg and Mohamed

Siraj (3-29) dismissed the scoreless Sean Abbott and Adam Zampa in successive overs as Australia folded in 35.4 overs.

Rahul said: "Three wickets had gone down, and Starc was swinging the ball.

He is dangerous when it is moving. I gave myself some time, not go searching for runs. I was fortunate I got a couple of boundaries early on. Whoever I batted with, the talk was that there is a bit of help in the wicket, but we can't go into our shell and look to play out a certain bowler. We wanted to run hard, we wanted to put the loose balls away. The minute a left-hander walked in, I got a few loose balls too."

The Indian opener added: "That happens to the best of bowlers. Jaddu batted beautifully, he is in great form, and he knows what to do in those situations. When we started off, I didn't think the pitch was going to help the bowlers that much. The minute Shami came back in, he did wonders. Any team that wants to win needs to pick wickets in the middle over. I enjoyed my keeping. When there is bounce, I enjoy it. When it is slow and slow, it is challenging physically."

India's start was even worse and their top four were back in the hut inside 11 overs after Mitchell Starc (3-49) struck three blows that included the prized wicket of Virat Kohli, who managed four.

Rahul added 44 runs with Pandya to arrest the slide and killed off the contest with his collaboration with Jadeja, who remained not out on 45, which included the winning boundary.

Australia captain Smith said after the match: "We weren't expecting this when we rocked up here. India bowled well this morning, but we probably left a few out there. Had we got 250, we would have had some match. Got started really well. He took the game on early, and got a few away. Through the middle we lost a few too many wickets. We were always one partnership from them beating us, and Jadeja and Rahul did that. 260-270 was par. It was offering a fair bit for the seamers. The ball swung pretty much throughout. We just needed to score more runs. If we had got a partnership and take it deeper. It was not to be, and credit to India."

The second match is scheduled in Visakhapatnam tomorrow, while Chennai hosts the final ODI on Wednesday.

India won the preceding four-Test series 2-1.

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 188 all out in 35.4 overs (M. Marsh 81, J. Inglis 26; M. Shami 3-47, M. Siraj 3-29) **lost to India 191-5 in 39.5 overs** (KL Rahul 75 not out, R. Jadeja 45 not out; M. Starc 3-49, M. Stoinis 2-27)

Toss: India

Result: India won by five wickets

Series: India lead the three-match ODI series 1-0

SECOND TEST

Conway scores 78 as New Zealand dig against Sri Lanka



New Zealand's Devon Conway (left) and teammate Kane Williamson walk from the field at tea on day one of the second Test against Sri Lanka at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Wellington

Devon Conway's blistering 78 helped hosts New Zealand race to 155-2 against Sri Lanka at the end of a rain-delayed opening day of the second Test yesterday in Wellington.

Conway fell short of a hundred as he was caught and bowled by Dhananjaya de Silva, who dived low to his right to get both hands on a superb catch, to end a thrilling 108-ball knock.

First-Test hero Kane Williamson was unbeaten on 26 at the close of play alongside Henry Nicholls on 18 when bad light stopped play at the Basin Reserve after Sri Lanka won the toss and put New Zealand in to bat in blustery conditions.

New Zealand started strong, with Conway and Tom Latham putting on an opening partner-

ship of 87, after the 2,500th Test match in cricket history was hit by a damp start.

Heavy overnight rain delayed the toss until after lunch.

Latham fell for 21 around the halfway point of the day's curtailed proceedings when he spooned a Kasun Rajitha delivery to deep square, into the hands of Prabath Jayasuriya.

Conway responded by smashing 13 fours in a fiery knock.

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st innings

Latham c Jayasuriya b Rajitha 21
D. Conway c & b de Silva 78
K. Williamson not out 26
H. Nicholls not out 18
Extras (lb10, nb1, w1) 12
Total (2 wickets; 48 overs) 155

Fall of wickets: 1-87 (Latham), 2-118 (Conway)

Bowling: K. Rajitha 16-3-42-1, A. Fernando 12-4-33-0, L. Kumara 10-1-49-0, D. de Silva 8-3-18-1, P. Jayasuriya 2-0-3-

Paine retires from first-class cricket

Melbourne: Former Australia Test captain Tim Paine ended his cricket career yesterday after Tasmania's Sheffield Shield match against Queensland ended in a draw at the Bellerive Oval. Wicketkeeper Paine played 35 Tests for Australia, including 23 as skipper after Steve Smith was stripped of the role following a ball-tampering scandal during the team's 2018 tour of South Africa. Paine quit the Test captaincy in November 2021 following revelations that he was investigated in 2018 for sending lewd text messages to a female former receptionist at state governing body Cricket Tasmania. He subsequently withdrew

from the game and took a mental health break for nearly a year before returning to play domestic cricket. The 38-year-old, who also played 35 One-Day Internationals, was given a guard of honour as he left Bellerive Oval and Tasmania captain Jordan Silk confirmed Paine had ended his first-class career. "He's been a phenomenal player," Silk said. "It's an incredible effort to have the longevity that he's had. He's certainly going to be missed behind the stumps. I'm sure a lot of guys who are playing now will say that there will never be another keeper as good as Tim Paine in Australia."



Al-Duhami shines in Medium Tour at Hathab; Ghanim al-Qadi wins Small Tour



Saudi Arabia's Ramzy al-Duhami clinched the Medium Tour Class during the 12th round of the Longines Hathab - Qatar Equestrian Tour yesterday. The experienced rider timed 33.87 seconds in the jump off with 16-year-old gelding High Quality in the 135cm class. Al-Duhami also took third spot with his 12-year-old stallion Las Vegas VD Padenborre in 36.25 seconds. Qatar's Rashid Towaim al-Marri finished third with his trusted mare Navaronne in 35.36 secs. The Medium Tour team competition was won by Ajwad, comprising riders Rashid Towaim al-Marri, Cyrine Cherif and Saeed Nasser al-Qadi. Exxonmobil was second and while Alfardan took third spot.



The Small Tour was won by Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi astride 14-year-old mare Quick Step in 57.61 seconds. Abdulaziz Ahmad al-Mohannadi (Peppercrack K; 58.39secs) was second, followed by Mohamed Dhafi al-Marri (Destiny 297; 61.46 secs) in third. Andre Sakakini, former Egyptian Olympic rider, awarded the trophies to winners.



In the junior rider's category, Haya Khalid al-Hitmi clinched the top spot, with Hend Abdulhadi al-Hajri claiming both the second and third positions.

INDIAN WELLS MASTERS

Alcaraz to take on Sinner, Rybakina test for Swiatek in semis

The Spaniard posts his first victory over Auger-Aliassime in four meetings

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz beat Felix Auger-Aliassime for the first time in his career to book a semi-final clash with Jannik Sinner at Indian Wells. Women's top seed Iga Swiatek lined up a last-four grudge match against Elena Rybakina, who stunned the Polish world number one in the quarter-finals at the Australian Open in January.

Alcaraz posted his first victory over Auger-Aliassime in four meetings with a 6-4, 6-4 win to keep his bid to regain the world number one ranking on track. "It's wonderful to beat Felix finally, and the way I did it, playing at a great level," said Spain's Alcaraz, 19, who called it perhaps his best match of the season.

Italy's Sinner reached the final four with a 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 victory over defending champion Taylor Fritz and now has a chance to avenge his loss to Alcaraz in an electrifying quarter-final at the US Open last year. That five-set battle lasted five hours and 15 minutes, its 2:50am finish the latest in US Open history. Alcaraz would go on to lift the trophy and become the youngest world number one in the history of the ATP rankings. "We've played several times and all the matches have been very tough," Alcaraz said. "I like this kind of challenge, I'm going to enjoy it."

Alcaraz hadn't dropped a set in reaching the quarters, but Auger-Aliassime was the first top-10 player he has faced this year. This time, Alcaraz was ready for him, saying his prior defeats to the Canadian had taught him to "stay there."

The two-hour clash was a thrilling display of athleticism and shot making from both players. Alcaraz saved the first break point he faced as he served out the first set, but after he broke to open the second Auger-Aliassime - who saved six match points in a fourth-round win over Tommy Paul - promptly broke back to set the tone for a tense back and forth battle.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reaches for a forehand return during his quarter-final match against Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime at the Indian Wells Masters. (AFP)

Auger-Aliassime had already saved two break points in the 10th game when Alcaraz gave himself another with a backhand volley winner, and with a break in hand he confidently served it out. Sinner defied difficult, windy conditions to outgun Fritz, gaining the decisive break in the ninth game of the third set when his pounding forehand to the corner forced the miss from the American. Sinner polished it off with a hold at love after two hours and 17 minutes.

Swiatek, the defending Indian Wells champion and winner of the French and US Opens last year, swept past 83rd-ranked Romanian Sorana Cirstea 6-2, 6-3. Wimbledon champion Rybakina,

who fell to Aryna Sabalenka in the Australian Open final, outlasted 76th-ranked Czech Karolina Muchova 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-4.

Swiatek, in her 50th week at number one, is vying to become just the second woman after Martina Navratilova in 1990-91 to win back-to-back titles at Indian Wells. Cirstea did all she could to stick with Swiatek, recovering an early break and fending off a break point to level the first set at 2-2.

But Swiatek, adjusting to the warm daytime conditions after two straight night matches, won the next eight games to take a stranglehold on the contest. Down 4-0 in the second, Cirstea clawed

one back and held serve for 4-2 in a spirited display before Swiatek closed it out.

Rybakina had all she could handle from the oft-injured Muchova. She needed three match points, wasting two with a pair of backhand errors before sealing it with her sixth ace of the day. The other semi-final berths were decided on Wednesday, when Daniil Medvedev - chasing a fourth straight ATP title after victories at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai - beat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain to set up a clash with American Frances Tiafoe. Sabalenka also advanced, blowing away American Coco Gauff to book a meeting with 2022 finalist Maria Sakkari.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Palace sack Vieira after winless run

AFP
London

Crystal Palace sacked manager Patrick Vieira yesterday after a miserable run of one win in 14 Premier League games sucked them into a relegation battle. The London club, without a win in 2023 under the former Arsenal and France midfielder, are 12th in the table but are just three points above the drop zone.

The bottom nine clubs are separated by just five points, cranking up the pressure as the season enters its final months. The dismissal of the French World Cup winner takes the number of managerial sackings during the 2022/23 campaign to nine, one fewer than last season's total, which equalled the Premier League record.

"It is with enormous regret that this difficult decision has been made," chairman Steve Parish said in a club statement. "Ultimately, results in recent months have placed us in a precarious league position and we felt a change is necessary to give us the best chance of retaining Premier League status."

Parish praised Vieira for making a "significant" impact at the club. Palace finished 12th last season and reached the FA Cup semi-finals. The club said in their statement that the process to appoint a new manager was under way. Three members of Vieira's coaching staff - Osian Roberts, Kristian Wilson and Said Aigoun - have also left Selhurst Park.

Vieira, 46, replaced Roy Hodgson before the start of the 2021/22 season and was praised for implementing an exciting brand of football. But this season they have scored just 21 goals in 27 games - only three clubs have scored fewer. Their 1-0 defeat by Brighton on Wednesday was their third loss in a row.

Palace travel to leaders Arsenal on Sunday, with under-21s boss Paddy McCarthy taking charge. Vieira, who won three Premier League titles as a player with the Gunners, previously managed New York City and Nice. Parish said that the mood in the camp was good despite the team's miserable run.

"You know, everybody loved Patrick, genuinely," he said. "The players had all the time in the world for him. You saw from the performances he never lost the players at all, they were all running and playing for him. I think things just weren't happening, so the mood was good, it was fine, but obviously we're hoping that there's a bit of fresh impetus, a few different ideas, maybe we surprise the opposition a little bit doing something different."

Hodgson is reportedly among the favourites to take charge, even if it is only until the end of the season. The 75-year-old former England manager announced his retirement in 2021 after four years at the helm of his boyhood club. Other names being linked to the job include ex-Leeds manager Jesse Marsch, former Borussia Dortmund boss Lucien Favre, and Ralph Hasenhuttl, who was dismissed by Southampton in November.



Crystal Palace, without a win in 2023 under Patrick Vieira, are 12th in the table but are just three points above the drop zone. (Reuters)

MARTINEZ INCLUDES RONALDO IN PORTUGAL SQUAD FOR OPENING EURO QUALIFIERS

Lisbon: Cristiano Ronaldo was yesterday included in the first Portugal squad announced by new coach Roberto Martinez, for Euro 2024 qualifying matches against Liechtenstein and Luxembourg.

The 38-year-old "is very important for the team," the Spanish coach stressed during a press conference in which he unveiled his squad of 26. "I do not look at the age," said Martinez.

Portugal will face Liechtenstein on March 23 in Lisbon before travelling

to Luxembourg on March 26. Martinez said his first squad "is important because it is the starting point" for Euro 2024. Ronaldo, whose international career began in August 2003 in a friendly against Kazakhstan, holds the world record for men's international goals with 118.

History suggests that, if he returns to the starting line-up, he will boost his total in the next two matches, at least against Luxembourg. Portugal have played Liechtenstein seven times,

winning six and drawing one, a World Cup qualifier in 2004 which Ronaldo started but did not finish. They have outscored Liechtenstein 35-3 but Ronaldo has never scored against the Principality.

Portugal have faced Luxembourg 19 times, winning 17 and losing just one, outscoring them 59-8. Ronaldo has hit nine of those, his most against any international team. Ronaldo has represented Portugal in every international competition since Euro 2004, collect-

ing a European championship winners' medal in 2016.

His quest to add a World Cup medal in Qatar last year, started well as he became the first player to score in five editions when he converted a penalty in a win against Ghana. But he was left out of the starting line-up for the last-16 clash as Portugal ripped Switzerland apart. When Portugal lost to Morocco in the quarter-finals, he started on the bench and ended the tournament in tears.

Squad

Goalkeepers: Diogo Costa (Porto), Jose Sa (Wolves/ENG), Rui Patricio (Roma/ITA)
Defenders: Diogo Dalot (Manchester United/ENG), Joao Cancelo (Manchester City/ENG), Danilo Pereira (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Pepe (Porto), Ruben Dias (Manchester City/ENG), Antonio Silva (Benfica), Goncalo Inacio (Sporting Lisbon), Diogo Leite (Union Berlin/GER), Nuno Mendes (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA), Raphael Guerreiro

(Borussia Dortmund/GER)
Midfielders: Joao Palhinha (Fulham/ENG), Ruben Neves (Wolves/ENG), Bernardo Silva (Manchester City/ENG), Bruno Fernandes (Manchester United/ENG), Joao Mario (Benfica), Matheus Nunes (Wolves/ENG), Otavio Monteiro (Porto), Vitinha (Paris Saint-Germain/FRA)
Forwards: Cristiano Ronaldo (Al Nassr/KSA), Goncalo Ramos (Benfica), Joao Felix (Chelsea/ENG), Rafael Leao (AC Milan/ITA), Diogo Jota (Liverpool/ENG)

QATAR BEAT VIETNAM, REACH BALI FINAL



Qatar team beat Vietnam to reach the final of the 9th Asian Men's and Women's Handball Championships currently held in Bali, Indonesia. The 9th Asian Men's and Women's Beach Handball Championships will conclude tomorrow. The event serves as qualification event for the 2024 IHF Men's and Women's Beach Handball World Championships. Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Qatar, Vietnam, Oman, Philippines, Kuwait, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea and People's Republic of China are the participating teams in the men's competition. Women's competition includes teams from Indonesia, Vietnam, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

QOC BEACH GAMES 2023 CONCLUDE



The curtain fell on the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) Beach Games 2023 Championship held at Katara Beach in Doha. The championship attracted 800 male and female athletes over the course of eight days. It was the third edition of the Games.

FOOTBALL

Real face Chelsea in CL quarters, City meet Bayern

SERIE A LEADERS NAPOLI TAKE ON AC MILAN IN ALL-ITALIAN SHOWDOWN

AFP
Paris

Holders Real Madrid will play Chelsea in the quarter-finals of the Champions League for the second season running, while Manchester City were paired with Pep Guardiola's former side Bayern Munich in yesterday's draw.

Serie A leaders Napoli take on AC Milan in an all-Italian showdown and Inter Milan face Portuguese league leaders Benfica.

The winners of Real's tie against Chelsea will go on to face either City or Bayern in the semi-finals, throwing open the possibility of an all-English last-four tie.

That also increases the chances of seeing an Italian team reach the final for the first time since Juventus in 2017, as Inter will play either Milan or Napoli in the last four should the Nerazzurri beat Benfica.

Real's path to what would be a 15th European Cup is starting to look remarkably like last season, when they beat Chelsea and City before defeating Liverpool in the final.

Carlo Ancelotti's team are fresh from beating Liverpool in the last 16, and will now hope for a repeat of a year ago when they eliminated Chelsea 5-4 on aggregate in the quarter-finals, with Karim Benzema scoring a hat-trick in the first leg in London.

The teams also met in the semi-finals in 2021, when the Stamford Bridge side won on their way to lifting the trophy for the second time.

City's ongoing bid to win the Champions League for the first time faces a major obstacle in a Bayern side who knocked out Paris Saint-Germain in the last round.

It will be the first encounter between the clubs since the 2014/15 group stage, when Guardiola was in charge of the Ger-



UEFA Champions League final ambassador Dutch former player Patrick Kluivert shows the paper slip of Chelsea FC during the draw for the quarter-final, semi-final and final of the 2022-2023 UEFA Champions League in Nyon yesterday. (AFP)

man giants. Guardiola left Bayern to join City in 2016, but is still chasing a first Champions League title as a coach since winning it with Barcelona for the second time in 2011.

"It will be a reunion with Pep Guardiola and Erling Haaland, old acquaintances from the Bundesliga," said Bayern CEO Oliver Kahn.

"To win the Champions League you need to beat the best teams. That is the challenge and we accept it."

The draw appears somewhat lopsided, with the four richest clubs left in the competition all on the same side, while Italian clubs find themselves in the other half.

A year ago no Serie A side made it be-

yond the last 16, but now the runaway Italian league leaders Napoli will face the team who won the domestic title last season.

Napoli won 2-1 away to Milan in the league earlier this season and are due to host the seven-time European champions in Serie A on April 2, just a week and a half before the first leg of their Champions League tie.

Napoli are the only other club left in the competition other than City who have never won the trophy, while Inter's meeting with Benfica brings together two teams who have won it five times between them.

Benfica lost to Liverpool in the last eight a year ago and have never reached

the semi-finals in the Champions League era. Inter, currently second in Serie A, 18 points behind Napoli, have not reached the semi-finals since last winning the trophy under Jose Mourinho in 2010, the last victory for an Italian club in the Champions League.

If both Milan clubs progress, they would meet in the semi-finals of the Champions League just like in 2003, when AC Milan beat Inter on the now-defunct away goals rule.

The quarter-final first legs will be played next month, with City at home to Bayern on April 11 and Benfica hosting Inter in Lisbon the same day.

Real will entertain Chelsea at the Santiago Bernabeu the following day, when Milan will welcome Napoli to San Siro.

The semi-finals will take place in May with the final in Istanbul scheduled for Saturday, June 10.

Draw in full for the UEFA Champions League quarter-finals and semi-finals:

Quarter-finals
First legs
April 11

Benfica (POR) v Inter Milan (ITA) (2nd leg April 19)

Manchester City (ENG) v Bayern Munich (GER) (2nd leg April 19)

April 12
Real Madrid (ESP) v Chelsea (ENG) (2nd leg April 18)

AC Milan (ITA) v Napoli (ITA) (2nd leg April 18)

Semi-finals
AC Milan (ITA) or Napoli (ITA) v Benfica (POR) or Inter Milan (ITA)

Real Madrid (ESP) or Chelsea (ENG) v Manchester City (ENG) or Bayern Munich (GER)

- The ties will be played May 9-10 and 16-17

- Final to be played June 10 in Istanbul

SPOTLIGHT

United face Sevilla, Juve meet Sporting in Europa quarters

Reuters

Nyon, Switzerland

Manchester United will face record six-times Europa League winners Sevilla in the quarter-finals while Juventus take on Sporting after the draw was held in Nyon yesterday.

United, who beat Real Betis in both legs of their last 16 tie, will travel to Spain once again after Sevilla - who last won the competition in 2020 - qualified despite losing the second leg to Fenerbahce.

The Spanish side have never lost to United in three meetings, last beating them in the semi-finals in 2020.

Manchester United manager Eric ten Hag highlighted Sevilla's record in the competition but said his immediate focus was on domestic fixtures. "It is going to be tough, they are very experienced in the Europa League, won it so many times. I don't know the team in detail but for me the most important is football and I don't look forward to Sevilla," he said.

"First we have the international break and then three Premier League games, so there is much time to focus on that

"Definitely all the opponents that are coming to this stage of the Europa League are strong and you have to play your best football if you want to go through."

Juve, who dropped out of the Champions League after finishing third in their group, will look to win the competition after their top-four hopes in Serie A were all but dashed with a 15-point deduction over their transfer dealings.

The Turin-based side are seventh in Serie A, 10 points behind fourth-placed AC Milan. Winning the Europa League guarantees a spot in the Champions League next season.

Juve's opponents Sporting beat Premier League leaders Arsenal 5-3 in a penalty shootout

on Thursday after the last-16 tie finished 3-3 on aggregate. Dutch side Feyenoord will face AS Roma in a repeat of last year's Europa Conference League final where the Italian side came out on top with a 1-0 victory.

Bayer Leverkusen, who are now managed by former Spain midfielder Xabi Alonso, beat Hungary's Ferencvaros without conceding a goal over two legs and will face Belgian side Union Saint-Gilloise, who knocked out Union Berlin.



EUROPA LEAGUE QUARTER-FINALS

Manchester United v Sevilla

Juventus v Sporting

Bayer Leverkusen v Union Saint-Gilloise

Feyenoord v AS Roma

* Team drawn first host the first leg

* **First legs:** April 13

* **Second legs:** April 20

SEMI-FINAL DRAW

Semi-final 1: Juventus/Sporting v

United/Sevilla

Semi-final 2: Feyenoord/Roma v Leverkusen/Union

* Team drawn first host the first leg

* **First legs:** May 11

* **Second legs:** May 18

Draw for the Europa Conference League quarter-finals and semi-finals:

Quarter-finals

Lech Poznan (POL) v Fiorentina (ITA)

Gent (BEL) v West Ham United (ENG)

Anderlecht (NED) v AZ Alkmaar (NED)

Basel (SUI) v Nice (FRA)

- First legs to be played April 13, second legs on April 20

Semi-finals

Lech Poznan (POL) or Fiorentina (ITA) v Basel (SUI) or Nice (FRA)

Gent (BEL) or West Ham United (ENG) v Anderlecht (NED) or AZ Alkmaar (NED)

- First legs to be played May 11, second legs on May 18

- Final to be played June 7 in Prague

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Al Arabi beat Al Sailiya in Week 17, Al Gharafa and Al Sadd pick up points

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi beat Al Sailiya 4-1 in Week 17 of the 2022-2023 season QNB Stars League at the Al Arabi Stadium yesterday.

The win also saw Al Arabi regain the top spot in the rankings with 37 points from 17 matches, while Al Sailiya remained at the bottom with nine points from 17 matches.

Al Arabi, however, had to rally after being a goal down before Omar al-Somah and Yousef Msakni scored a brace each for them.

While Mehrdad Mohamadi scored for Al Sailiya in the eighth minute of the match, Al Arabi replied through al-Somah's goals in the 32nd and 45+1 minute, and with Msakni's strikes in the 63rd and 85th minutes.

Al Sailiya made a good start with Mohamadi scoring a fine goal, making an about turn, after receiving a cross from Ahmad Sebaie. With the goalkeeper rushing out, Mohamadi found the target with ease.

Al Arabi then staged a rally with Msakni striking from the top left of the box, but the ball bounced out of Al Sailiya goalkeeper Claude Amine's hands, but a lurking al-Somah pounced on the chance to score. The Dream Team then fetched the

lead after a long free-kick was punched off by goalkeeper Amine, but Al Arabi players relayed the ball back into the danger area for al-Somah to repeat his goal-scoring act.

In the second half, it was Msakni show as the Tunisian scored from the right in front of the goal. The fourth goal of the match saw Msakni get to the ball near the goalline and go past two defenders to beat the goalkeeper. Msakni was provided the assist by Mohamed Salah El Neel.

Also yesterday, Al Gharafa got back to winning ways by beating Umm Salal 2-1 at the Al Gharafa Stadium. Al Gharafa's goals were scored by Yacine Brahimi (35th-minute penalty) and Ahmed al-Janahi

(57th minute). Joao Teixeira pulled one back for Umm Salal in 90+4 minute.

Al Gharafa moved on to 26 points from 17 matches with their seventh victory, while Umm Salal stood on 13 points from 17 games.

In the third match of the day, Al Sadd came back from being a goal down to beat Al Shamal 3-1 at the Al Arabi Stadium.

The reigning champions suffered a reversal at the very start with an own goal, but then stormed back to overwhelm their opponents in distinct fashion.

Boualem Khoukhi scored two goals for Al Sadd (52 and 90+1).

In between, Akram Afif added a goal in the 73rd minute.



Yousef Msakni (left) of Al Arabi celebrates one of his two goals against Al Sailiya yesterday.