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TENNIS | Page 3 Rybakina shows the exit to defending champ Swiatek



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FORMULA ONE

Perez takes Saudi pole after Verstappen suffers car problem

MOTORSPORT

Al-Attiyah, Baumel clinch home victory in fine style

POLISH KTM RIDER KONRAD DABROWSKI CONFIRMS MOTORCYCLE WIN AT THE QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA

By Sports Reporter

atar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and co-driver Mathieu Baumel clinched victory in the car category in their Toyota GR DKR Hilux, while Polish KTM rider Konrad Dabrowski stayed clear of late trouble to defend his motorcycle title at the end of a punishing Qatar International Baja yesterday.

Al-Attiyah controlled proceedings through the demanding last stage to take the day's win by 10min 18sec from Chinese rival Guoyu Zhang and that was sufficient for the Qatari to finish 16min 21.6sec ahead of Overdrive Racing teammates, Denis Krotov and Konstantin Zhiltsov, in their Toyota Hilux. Zhang and his Spanish co-driver Oriol Mena rounded off the podium places in their Baic ORC BJ40,

Al-Attivah said: "It was a good Baja. The first day I had a small margin and the second day I pushed a lot. I thank Jean-Marc (Fortin) from Overdrive

car over very swiftly so that I was able to compete here. I am very glad to win here again on my home race. I always want to compete in every international event in Qatar and it's great to bounce back with a win after my big crash in Abu Dhabi."

Runner-up Krotov added: "After 35km, I had to stop and change the tyres. After that we lost a little power and didn't have a big speed. One turbo was not working. But the race was good and I enjoyed the stages."

Competitors tackled 224.96km on the final day and the route was split into four sections of 33.73km, 28.51km, 43.23km and 113.20km by three noncompetitive transfer zones.

Overdrive Racing's Juan Cruz Yacopini and Daniel Oliveras moved up to fourth overall on the final stage in the third of four Toyotas.

The experienced Meshari al-Thefiri began the day second in T3 behind his usual co-driver Nasser al-Kuwari and the Kuwaiti delivered a solid stage performance to set the fastest time and sneak through to win the FIA T3 thanks to Qatar Airways for flying this machines on his first race with a new



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his French co-driver Mathieu Baumel celebrate victory in the car category at the end of a pulsating Qatar International Baja which concluded yesterday.



Polish KTM rider Konrad Dabrowski yesterday on way to winning the Qatar Baja for a second time.

MCE-5 T3M and Oriol Vidal looking after the navigation. Al-Thefiri also finished fifth overall. He said: "We managed to finish. It's so difficult with the road book to know if you are out of the route. It is not easy. The car was very good. We caught Nasser (Al-Kuwari) about 20km from the start, so I managed my pace then and I knew what my advantage was. I am very happy that this is the first win for the MCE-5. Hard luck to Nasser."

With Nasser al-Kuwari and French co-driver François Cazalet dropping precious minutes on the stage with the lack of brakes and punctures, that opened the door for the Qatari's brother Abdulaziz to snatch second place in the category in his QMMF Rally Team Can-Am. On his debut in this type of motor sport, the former winner of the Qatar International Rally also finished in an excellent sixth in the general classification. Nasser came home in sev-

enth and third in T3. "From the first 20km, we had one flat tyre and we changed it," said Nasser al-Kuwari. "Then we catch Meshari and we had another flat tyre. We changed it. We catch him again and try to pass him and then we had a third one. Then we had no chance to win and we just tried to get the car to the finish. We also had

brake issues. But I am happy with my performance." Abdulaziz al-Kuwari said: "Very happy to finish second. I would love to have won T3 but it is not easy after the delay with the puncture on the first day. Unlucky for Nasser to come with the third puncture. I took it safely. I wanted to do all the mileage. I want to transfer to this kind of rallies. I prefer this type of rallies. You don't have to drive every week."

The French crew of Jeremie Warnia and Loic Minaudier managed to overhaul Brazil's Cristiano de Sousa Batista and Portuguese co-driver Fausto Moto to secure a narrow victory in the FIA T4 category in their Polaris RXR 1000 R. They finished eighth overall and beat their Can-Am rivals by 2min 10sec on the final day to secure a winning margin of just 30.3 seconds.

Seventeen minutes of time penalties for missing route waypoints had pushed Pau Navarro down the T4 rankings after the third stage in his FN Speed Team Can-Am. He climbed back to third on the final day. Saudi Arabia's Khalid al-Feraihi and French co-driver Sébastien Delaunay boosted their FIA Middle East Baja Cup title aspirations with valuable points for finishing 11th overall in their Nissan Patrol behind the 10th-placed Ronan Chabot in his Overdrive Toyota. Krzysztof Holowczyc (Mini JCR Rally Plus) and Ahmed al-Shegawi (Can-Am) retired on Friday after their mechanical issues.

Dabrowski retains motorcycle title

Konrad Dabrowski retained his motorcycle title in Qatar with a polished performance that saw his win every stage on his KTM. The Pole won yesterday's last stage by 6min 49sec to record a winning margin over Great Britain's Robert Wallace of 31min 04.8sec. He also claimed the honours of finishing as the first FIM Junior.

Dabrowski said: "Qatar is very lucky for us. A second win here in a row, I like to come here because it is great experience and I can improve my navigation and my riding. I was sick today on the stage after spending a night in the air conditioning. It was so difficult just to ride the bike on the second part of the stage. I am very tired but happy to win this race. I was super tired when I finished but it's a great feeling to win."

With Martin Chalmers dropped out of contention on the final morning, the battle for the final place on the podium swung in favour of the Dutch female racer Mirjam Pol. The KTM rider climbed from eighth to third to finish as the top Women. She edged out Andrew Houlihan for the last podium place by iust 66.4 seconds, although the Australian had the consolation of winning the Veterans' class and finishing a fine fourth. A delighted Pol said: "When you start eighth overall and you finish third it is a big surprise. I had all the route waypoints and when I arrived I only saw two lines and that's when I realised I had achieved a very good result."

Mohamed al-Ramani climbed to fifth at the expense of sixthplace Canadian Jonathan Finn. Mohamed al-Balooshi was the championship leader after the opening round in Saudi Arabia and the Emirati reached the finish in eighth.

Several riders were handed time back overnight by FIM officials for delays on Friday helping at the scene of other competitors' accidents. Oran O'Kelly received a credit of 53 minutes and Alex McInnes and Simon Marcic were also handed time back. McInnes went on to finish 10th overall after setting the second quickest time behind Dabrowski on the final stage. Marcic came home in third place on the day and finished 14th.

Sultan al-Balooshi (UAE) did not restart after his issues on Friday. Arnoud Dom was the unofficial winner of the quad category after Haitham al-Tuwaiiri and Abdulaziz al-Ahli failed to finish. Mansoor al-Suwaidi finished second.

2023 QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA - POSITIONS AFTER STAGE 4: FIA - Cars (Top 16 only)

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND) Toyota GR DKR Hilux 4hr 51min 2. Denis Krotov (KGZ)/Konstantin Zhiltsov (ISR)

Toyota Hilux Overdrive 5hr O8min 11.3sec* 3. Guoyu Zhang (CHN)/Oriol Mena (ESP) Baic ORC BJ40 5hr 11min 00.6sec* 4. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG)/Daniel Oliveras

(ESP) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 5hr 23min

5. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Oriol Vidal (ESP) MCE-5 T3M (T3) 5hr 30min 32.4sec*

6. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/Alexei Kuzmich (ARE) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 5hr 38min 05.3sec+

7. Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT)/François Cazalet (FRA) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 5hr 42min

8. Jeremie Warnia (FRA)/Loic Minaudier (FRA) Polaris RZR 1000 R (T4) 5hr 45min 51.5sec* 9. Cristiano de Sousa Batista (BRA)/Fausto Mota (PRT) Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo (T4) 5hr 46min 21.8sec*

10. Ronan Chabot (FRA)/Gilles Pillot (FRA) Toyota Hilux Overdrive 5hr 47min 36.5sec* 11. Khalid al-Feraihi (SAU)/Sébastien Delaunay (FRA) Nissan Pick-Up 5hr 56min 24.7sec+ 12. Otavio Sousa (BRA)/João Ferreira (PRT) Can-Am Mayerick X3 (T3) 5hr 59min 07.7sec* 13. Fernando Alvarez (ESP)/Xavier Panseri (FRA) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 5hr 59min

14. Pau Navarro (ESP)/Gonçalo Reis (PRT)

Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo (T4) 6hr O2min 01.5sec*

15. Ahmed al-Kuwari (QAT)/Manuel Luchesse (QAT) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R (T4) 6hr 07min

16. Adel Abdulla (QAT)/Marc Serra (QAT) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T3) 6hr 11min 45.9sec+ T1 unless stated

* denotes registered for the FIA World Cup ++ denotes registered for the FIA Middle East

2023 QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA - POSITIONS AFTER STAGE 3:

FIM - Bikes (top 16 only) 1. Konrad Dabrowski (POL) KTM 450 Rally 7hr 22min 09.3sec

2. Robert Wallace (GBR) KTM 450 RFR 7hr

53min 14.1sec 3. Mirjam Pol (NLD) KTM 8hr 43min 18.1sec 4. Andrew Houlihan (AUS) Husqvarna FR 8hr

44min 24.5sec 5. Marwan al-Rahmani (ARE) KTM 450 Rally

8hr 46min 07.6sec

6. Jonathan Finn (CAN) Honda CRF 450 RL 8hr 47min 47.5sec

7. Cesare Zacchetti (ITA) KTM EXC 350F 8hr 49min 09.5sec

8. Mohamed al-Balooshi (ARE) KTM 450 Rally

Replica 9hr 04min 24.8sec 9. Abdullah al-Shatti (KWT) Husqvarna 450

Rally 9hr 10min 08.2sec 10. Alex McInnes (GBR) Husqvarna FE450 9hr

10min 56.0sec 11. Ola Floene (NOR) KTM 450 Rally 9hr 12min FIM - Quads

Replica 9hr 15min 42.8sec

9hr 13min 09.9sec

15min 00.1sec

16. Ehab al-Hakeem (LBN) Yamaha WR 450F 10hr 12min 08.3sec

15. Oran O'Kelly (IRL) KTM 450 Rally 9hr 30min

12. Abdullah Lanjawi (ARE) Husqvarna FE450

13. Mishal al-Ghuneim (SAU) KTM 450 Rally 9hr

14. Simon Marcic (SVN) Husqvarna 450 Rally

1. Arnoud Dom (BEL) Suzuki LTR 450 10hr

36min 34.8sec

2. Mansoor al-Suwaidi (ARE) Yamaha YFZ 450R 10hr 50min 29.7sec

3. Hani al-Noumesi (SAU) Yamaha Raptor 700 13hr 07min 17.6sec

SECOND TEST

Williamson and Nicholls smash double tons for NZ

Kane Williamson becomes first New Zealand batter to cross 8,000-run mark

Wellington

ane Williamson and Henry Nicholls both scored double centuries and shared a partnership of 363 as New Zealand flayed Sri Lanka's bowling to rack up an imposing 580 for four declared on the second day of the second Test yesterday. The tourists had responded with 26-2

by the close of play at Wellington's Basin Reserve and face an uphill battle to avoid being swept in the two-match series after losing the first Test by two wickets in Christchurch on Monday. Williamson also scored a century, his

27th in Tests, in the second innings of that match, but yesterday's magnificent effort in the company of Nicholls was an entirely different order of dominance.

After a rain-disrupted day one, Williamson resumed on 26 not out with his country 155-2 and barely put a foot wrong until he holed out in the deep in the late afternoon with 215 runs to his name.

The 32-year-old became the first New Zealand batsman to score 8,000 Test runs as he marched to his sixth double century, pounding 23 fours and a couple of sixes in the 296-ball innings.

Nicholls pillaged runs at a slightly lower rate at the other end as he worked his way out of a recent form slump with his highest test score of 200 not out. It was the first time two New Zealand batsmen had scored double centuries in one in-

Sri Lanka are not the first team to regret winning the toss and choosing to bowl on an apparent greentop only to watch the Black Caps batting for a couple of days.

Daryl Mitchell scored a quickfire 17 and Tom Blundell 17 not out after Williamson's departure as New Zealand swung the bat to inflate their tally before the declaration. Seamer Lahiru Kumara (0-164) of the visiting bowlers suffered the most but Asitha Fernando and Kasun Raiitha were both also well into three figures in the debit column.



New Zealand's Kane Williamson (left) celebrates 200 runs with teammate Henry Nicholls on day two of the second Test against Sri Lanka at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

Matt Henry wasted little time in showing them how to bowl on the track, tempting opener Oshada Fernando into a push at the ball which Blundell gobbled up behind the wickets.

Doug Bracewell then celebrated his return to test cricket after a gap of nearly seven years with the wicket of Kusal Mendis, who departed for a duck after Doug Conway took a brilliant catch at

Skipper Dimuth Karunaratne, who was 16 not out, and nightwatchman Prabath Jayasuriya, unbeaten on four, will resume on Sunday with Sri Lanka a hefty 554 runs in arrears.

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st innings

T. Latham c Jayasuriya b Rajitha D. Conway c & b de Silva K. Williamson c sub b Jayasuriya H. Nicholls not out D. Mitchell c & b Rajitha T. Blundell not out Extras (b2, lb17, nb8, w5) Total (for 4 wickets; 123 overs) 580/d Fall of wickets: 1-87 (Latham), 2-118 (Con-

way), 3-481 (Williamson), 4-530 (Mitchell) **Bowling:** K. Rajitha 32-6-126-2 (6nb). A. Fernando 26-6-110-0 (2w. 1nb). L. Kumara 25-1-164-0 (3w), D. de Silva 19-3-75-1 (1nb), P. Jayasuriya 21-1-86-1

Sri Lanka 1st innings O. Fernando c Blundell b Henry D. Karunaratne not out 16 K. Mendis c Conway b D. Bracewell 0 P. Jayasuriya not out **Extras** Total (for two wickets, 17 overs)

Fall of wickets: 1-13 (Fernando), 2-18 (Mendis) Bowling: T. Southee 6-3-5-0, M. Henry

7-3-15-1, D. Bracewell 3-2-1-1, M. Bracewell 1-0-5-0 Toss: Sri Lanka Umpires: Richard Illingworth (ENG),

Chris Gaffaney (NZL) TV umpire: Michael Gough (ENG)

SPOTLIGHT

Shakib and Towhid set up record Bangladesh win against Ireland

Sylhet, Bangladesh

hakib Al Hasan and debutant Towhid Hridoy both narrowly missed centuries but still guided Bangladesh to a record 183-run victory over Ireland in yesterday's first one-day international

Shakib hit 93 and Towhid added 92 to guide Bangladesh to their highest ever ODI score of 338-8 after the tourists put them in to bat.

Ebadot Hossain led the reply with 4-42 and left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed chipped in with 3-42 to bowl out Ireland for 155 runs just shy of 31 overs.

"The way we batted was exceptional. Wasn't the easiest wicket to bat for the first 20 overs. But Shakib was brilliant, Towhid also impressive," skipper Tamim Iqbal said after the match, according to Cricbuzz.

George Dockrell was the last man dismissed after making 45, Ireland's highest total.

Stephen Doheny and Paul Stirling put on 60 runs in the opening stand but once Shakib dismissed Doheny for 34 Ireland collapsed to 5-76, never to re-

"We were not too disappointed at the halfway stage as the wicket was good and the best time was to bat under lights," Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie said.

"But we kept losing wickets and didn't get any partnerships," Balbirnie added.

Graham Hume finished with a career best 4-60 but the hosts shrugged off early pressure from the Irish bowling attack.

Shakib and Towhid added 135 for the fourth wicket to lift Bangladesh from 81-3 after Tamim (3), Litton Das (26) and Najmul Hossain (25) all fell cheaply.

He became the second Bangladeshi cricketer to reach 7,000 ODI runs after Tamim.

Shakib is now also just the third cricketer to surpass that milestone in ODI runs and 300 one-day wickets after Sri Lanka's Sanath Jayasuriya and Pakistan's Shahid Afridi.

He shifted gears after reaching his third successive ODI fifty and



Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan plays a shot during the first one-day international (ODI) against Ireland at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

hitting Harry Tector for five fours in an over.

He fell seven runs short of his 10th ODI hundred after chasing a wide yorker from Hume to get the bottom edge.

Towhid played the best debut innings for Bangladesh in ODIs, adding 80 runs for the fifth wicket with Mushfiqur Rahim, who struck 44 off 26 balls.

Hume removed both batsmen in the same over before taking the wicket of Taskin Ahmed but the tourists were unable to stop

the flow of runs. The remaining ODIs will be played in Sylhet tomorrow and Thursday.

Ireland, who will also play three Twenty20 internationals and a Test during their tour, last visited Bangladesh for a bilateral series in 2008.

BRIEF SCORES

Bangladesh 338-8 in 50 overs (Shakib Al Hasan 93, Towhid Hridoy 92, Mushfiqur Rahim 44; G. Hume 4-60) beat Ireland 155 all out in 30.5 overs (G. Dockrell 45, S. Doheny 34: Ebadot Hossain 4-42. Nasum Ahmed 3-43) Toss: Ireland Result: Bangladesh

won by 183 runs

Series: Bangladesh lead series

Asia Lions beat India Maharajas, reach final



Upul Tharanga of Asia Lions in action during the Eliminator match against India Maharajas in the Legends League Cricket Masters 2023 at Asian Town Cricket Stadium in Doha yesterday. Batting first, Asia Lions scored 191 for 5 in 20 overs. Asia Lions bowled out India Maharajas for 106 in 16.4 overs to win by 85 runs. Asia Lions will meet World Giants in the final tomorrow.

BOTTOMLINE

Bracewell joins IPL side RCB, Ravindra brought into NZ squad

Reuters New Delh

ichael Bracewell will miss New Zealand's one-day international series against Sri Lanka, the country's cricket board (NZC) said yesterday, after he was signed by Indian Premier League (IPL) team Royal Challengers Bangalore to replace Will Jacks.

All-rounder Rachin Ravindra will take Bracewell's spot in the New Zealand squad for the three-match series, which begins on March 25 and ends on March 31, the same day the 2023 IPL season kicks off.

"Michael's been a key contributor to our white ball teams since making his debut last year," coach Gary Stead said. "With a World Cup in India this year it's great to have players getting more experience in those conditions."

Bracewell is the latest addition to the list of New Zealand players who will be released early after the current Test series ends on March 21, including Kane Williamson (Gujarat Titans), Tim Southee (Kolkata Knight Riders) and Devon Conway (Chennai Super Kings). Finn Allen (Royal Challengers Bangalore), Lockie Ferguson (Kolkata Knight Riders) and Glenn Phillips (Sunrisers Hyderabad) will leave the squad after the first ODI.

FOCUS

Lahore Qalandars defend PSL title with thrilling 1-run win over Multan Sultans



Lahore Qalandars players and team officials celebrate winning the PSL title for the second time in a row in Lahore yesterday.

AFP Lahore

ahore Qalandars became the first team to win back-to-back Pakistan Super League titles yesterday, beatling Multan Sultans by one run in a thrilling final.

Captain Shaheen Shah Afridi took 4-51 after smashing a rapid 44 not out but had to effect a run out at the bowler's end as Multan's Khushdil Shah tried to make a third run to force a super over.

Qalandars had scored 200-6 in their 20 overs before a packed 25,000 Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore and Sultans finished on 199-8. Qalandars had also defeated Sultans in last year's final.

Shaheen conceded 34 runs in his opening two overs as Sultans raced to 101-1 in 10 overs, with Rilee Rossouw (52) and Mohamed Rizwan (34) adding 64 for the sec-

ond wicket. Rossouw smashed seven fours and two sixes off just 32 balls.

But Shaheen returned for his second spell to dismiss Kieron Pollard (19), Tim David (20), Anwar Ali (one) and Usama Mir (nought). With 35 needed in the last two overs, Shah

and Abbas Afridi took 22 from Haris Rauf's 19th over but failed to get 13 in the last. Earlier, Qalandars were lifted by a ram-

paging Shaheen who clobbered a 15-ball

44 not out with five towering sixes and two fours, helping his team smash 85 runs in the last five overs

mered an 18-ball 30.

Abdullah Shafique top-scored with a 40-

ball 65. Shafique and Fakhar Zaman (39) took Qalandars to 95-1 after their team won the

toss and batted and opener Mirza Baig ham-

Lahore Qalandars captain Shaheen Shah Afridi launches a drive for a 6 during his innings

of 44 not out against Multan Sultans in the final of PSL in Lahore yesterday.

But once Zaman was dismissed, Oalandars lost four wickets in the space of 18 balls, slumping to 112-5. Shaheen promoted himself to number

Qalandars)

BRIEF SCORES

Lahore Qalandars 200-

6, 20 overs (Abdullah

Shafique 65, Shaheen

Zaman 39, Mirza Tahir

beat Multan Sultans

199-8, 20 overs (Rilee

Shah 25, Tim David 20;

Rashid Khan 2-26) by

Player of the match:

Shaheen Afridi (Lahore

Rizwan 34, Khushdil

Shaheen Afridi 4-51,

Rossouw 52, Mohamed

Afridi 44 not out, Fakhar

Baig 30; Usama Mir 3-24)

seven and instantly made an impact, as he and Shafique hit 24 runs in the 17th over from pacer Ihsanullah.

Leg-spinner Usama Mir was the pick of Sultans' bowlers with 3-24.

Unvaccinated Djokovic to miss Miami Open

Reuters

ovak Djokovic will miss next week's Miami Open after the Serbian was denied an exemption that would have allowed him to enter the US despite not being vaccinated against Covid-19, tournament director James Blake

said yesterday. "We tried to get Novak Djokovic to be allowed to get an exemption, but that wasn't able to happen," Blake told Tennis Channel.

"Obviously, we're one of the premier tournaments in the world, we'd like to have the best players that can play. We did all that we could. We tried to talk to the government, but that's out of our hands."

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and the state's two US senators were among those calling on the Biden administration to allow

world number one Djokovic to enter the US and compete at the tournament he has won six times.

Djokovic, 35, is also missing the ongoing Masters tournament in Indian Wells, California due to his inability to secure the exemp-

The US currently bars unvaccinated foreigners from entry into the country, a policy that is expected to be lifted when the government ends its Covid-19 emergency declarations on May

Djokovic, who missed last year's Australian Open after being deported from that country due to his vaccination status, has said he would skip Grand Slams rather than have a Covid shot.

He won his record-tying 22nd Grand Slam at the Australian Open in January. He has not played at Indian Wells or the Miami Open - which together comprise the "Sunshine Double" - since 2019.

A representative for Djokovic said the player would make no further comment regarding his absence from the Miami tournament, and he planned to return to the tour at the Monte Carlo Masters claycourt event that begins on April 9.

Djokovic will then continue his preparations for the French Open in May by playing in the Srpska Open in Banja Luka, Bosnia.

Svitolina to make comeback at

Charleston Open in April Former world number three Elina Svitolina will make her return to the WTA Tour following her maternity break at next month's Charleston Open in South Carolina after accepting a wild card, organisers of the claycourt tournament said.

Ukraine's Svitolina, who last played a year ago in Miami, is set to return to action following the birth of her daughter Skai with husband and fellow tennis player



Gael Monfils. The 28-year-old has also partnered with the tournament and WTA Charities to

host a special "Tennis Plays for Peace" pro-am event in April, benefiting war-torn Ukraine

and the Elina Svitolina Foundation. "Increasing awareness and raising funds for Ukraine is very

important to us as a tournament and to our players," tournament director Bob Moran said in a statement.

"We are passionate about working with Elina, who has a deep and personal understanding of the needs in her home country right now, to further exemplify the mission of Tennis Plays for Peace and stand united with Ukraine."

The tournament hosted a proam in 2022 and raised \$100,000 in donations for relief efforts in Ukraine.

Svitolina, who has 16 WTA titles and is a two-times Grand Slam semi-finalist, will be joined in the Charleston field by five former champions including holder Belinda Bencic.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka has also signed up to play.

The Charleston Open will take place from April 1-9, organisers have confirmed.

INDIAN WELLS

Rybakina knocks out defending champion Swiatek

'I had nothing to lose, I just wanted to enjoy. I think it was one of my best matches'

Reuters Indian Wells

lena Rybakina knocked out defending champion Iga Swiatek with a 6-2 6-2 semi-final victory at Indian Wells to set up a clash against Aryna Sabalenka in the final.

Two months after Rybakina knocked Swiatek out of the Australian Open in the fourth round, the Wimbledon champion in an impress against the world number one. Rybakina was in control from the start,

breaking early to take a 2-0 lead, before going on to clinch the first set when Swiatek produced a double fault on set Rybakina's serve was tested in the first

game of the second set, but the Kazakh held under pressure and then won the next four games to take a 5-0 lead.

Swiatek was far from her best on the night and later revealed that she had struggled with "discomfort" in her ribcage during the match, but added that she $\,$ was still expecting to defend her title at next week's Miami Open.

"We're going to consult with the medical team. For sure I'm going to use these days off before Miami (to recover)," Swiatek told reporters.

The Pole did manage to avoid a bagel in the second set by saving a break point to hold before breaking to then further reduce the arrears, but Rybakina broke back immediately to extinguish the comeback and secure the win.

"I really played well today, it was a really nice atmosphere tonight," Rybakina said in her on-court interview.

"I didn't expect I would play that well today. I had nothing to lose, I just wanted to enjoy. I think it was one of my best matches this season."

Rybakina will be out for revenge when she faces Sabalenka, who defeated her in the Australian Open final in January. The



Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan reacts after match point as she defeated Iga Swiatek of Poland in the semi-final of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. (USA TODAY Sports)

Belarusian leads 4-0 in their head-tohead, "It was really close, we had so many battles and so far I'm losing, but hopefully that will change," Rybakina added.

Earlier, Australian Open champion Sabalenka was not at her best in a 6-2 6-3 win over Greece's Maria Sakkari, but maintained her composure even when her old nemesis - the double fault - reared its ugly head on a sunny day in the Southern California desert.

"In the past I lost so many matches

like that after a few not super smart mistakes," said Sabalenka,

"I was reminding myself that it is okay to make mistakes. I'm not a robot, I'm a human. I can miss those shots, and probably that's why I was able to keep fighting and keep trying."

After the start of the match was delayed by more than 30 minutes to fix an audio issue related to the electronic linecalling system, Sabalenka cracked an ace out wide to open the match.

She broke Sakkari for a third time on an errant Sakkari forehand to capture the first set but the Belarusian's frustration began to mount in the second when two double faults gave Sakkari a look at break points at 2-2.

Sabalenka regrouped to hold for 3-2 and broke Sakkari in a lengthy deuce game for a 4-2 advantage she would not relinquish, pouncing on a short return of serve on match point and burying the ball with an emphatic backhand.

Rybakina says she reached highest level in rout of Swiatek

Indian Wells: Elena Rybakina said she showed glimpses of her best form during her dominant win over world number one Iga Swiatek in the Indian Wells semi-final, adding she feels she can beat anyone by maintaining that level.

The world number 10 thrashed holder Swiatek 6-2 6-2 to set up a clash with Aryna Sabalenka. The Kazakh said her aggressive style

and booming serve made all the difference in the match. "Today I was pushing a lot. Overall, some players it's more difficult to play against," Wimbledon champion Rybakina said.

"With Iga, she's a tough opponent, but when I play like this and everything goes in... Today in some moments I played at my highest level. There are moments you feel, 'OK, I can beat anyone if I always

"It's the goal, but you never feel amazing and perfect every match. I think today it was really good from me.'

Rybakina said she was reaping the rewards of the hard work she had put in over the years. "I think I've been improving in these four years on tour. It's just eve-

rything coming together - the experience, the team became bigger and I'm working a lot on fitness," she said. "Just getting stronger a bit physically and just the work we did for

the past four years. It's showing now on the court and with my Rybakina will look to beat Sabalenka for the first time in their fifth meeting, after losing to the Belarusian in the Australian Open final in

"It's not going to be an easy match," Rybakina said. "It's going to be in these clutch moments that I need to play better. Hopefully now it's going to change the score between us.'



Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates in attendance for the semi-final between Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina and Poland's Iga Swiatek at the 2023 WTA Indian Wells Open in Indian Wells, California, on Friday. (AFP)

Sabalenka says WTA doing its best to support players amid tensions due to war

two Aryna Sabalenka said the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) was doing a good job of supporting players from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus amid tensions in the locker room following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year. Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko withdrew from her match with Belarusian Sabalenka at Indian Wells due to what she said was a panic attack triggered by a chat with WTA Chief Executive Steve Simon about tennis's response to Russia's invasion.

Indian Wells: World number

The top-ranked Iga Swiatek called for more support to be offered to Ukrainian players after Tsurenko's pullout and said the actions taken by the tennis leadership was not enough. "Nobody can control the emotions of others. I think the WTA are doing their best." Sabalenka said after reaching the Indian Wells final. Sabalenka said there was still tension between players but individual athletes had not done anything wrong. "I think the WTA are doing a really great job to support both sides," Sabalenka said.

GOLF

Slick Schenk grabs PGA Valspar Championship lead with Spieth lurking

AFP Miami

dam Schenk, playing for a 10th consecutive week, fired a twounder-par 69 to grab a onestroke lead after the second round of the PGA Valspar Championship. The 31-year-old American, who shared

the 18-hole lead, was on seven-under 135 after 36 holes at Innisbrook's Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida. "It really couldn't have been a ton better

said. "We're doing a really good job managing the courses."

with the amount of putts I made," Schenk

Countryman Kramer Hickok, chasing his first PGA crown like Schenk, was second on 136 after a second 68 in windy

Three-time major winner Jordan Spieth, the 2015 Valspar champion, fired a 70 to share third on 137 with fellow Americans Cody Gribble and Davis Riley plus England's Tommy Fleetwood.

"Kind of an off day on approaching the greens, hit pretty rusty wedges," Spieth said. "To shoot one-under on this golf course in the wind is a good score so I feel good about my position going into the weekend."

Schenk made a birdie-birdie start, blasting out of a bunker to seven feet and sinking the putt at the par-5 first hole then dropping his approach inside three feet to

set up a tap-in at the second. After a three-putt bogey on the third, Schenk answered with a 17-foot birdie putt at the par-5 fifth and added another birdie from 4 1/2 feet at the 12th before a closing bogey after finding a greenside bunker. "I had better control of my golf ball," Schenk said. "Made a few putts, had some nice saves for par which really holds the round together. It was another one of those rounds that could have been even par. It wouldn't have been 5- or 6-under ever but we managed it well and very pleased with 2-under."

Schenk, whose best PGA finish was third at the 2021 Shriners Children's Open, is keeping busy before the birth of his son next month.

"Having a little baby boy here in about a month and a half," Schenk said. "So trying to make as many points as I can to take as much time off as I can and spend time with him and my wife, which will be very special."

Hickok birdied three par-5 holes and made two birdies on par-3 holes with putts from 30 feet at the fourth and just inside 40 feet at the 15th.

"I've been putting really nice," said Hickok. "Seeing the lines really well and hitting some good putts. I don't really feel like I'm playing that well tee to green but just keeping the ball in front of me and really scoring pretty well."

Spieth birdied the par-5 first, fifth and 11th holes but made bogeys at the par-3 eighth and par-4 10th.

"I drove the ball maybe the best of the year today. Gave myself a lot of chances with some wedges," Spieth said.



Jordan Spieth lines up a putt on the fifth green during the second round of the Valspar Championship. (USA TODAY Sports)

Tottenham drop crucial points in top-four race

LEICESTER CITY SNAP A RUN OF FOUR CONSECUTIVE LEAGUE DEFEATS

ottenham Hotspur's hopes of a top-four finish in the Premier League suffered a dent as Southampton earned a last-gasp 3-3 home draw with a James Ward-Prowse penalty that would have been cheered in Newcastle yesterday.

Antonio Conte's side looked set to move into third place as goals by Harry Kane and Ivan Perisic put them 3-1 ahead with around 15 minutes of normal time left on the clock.

But bottom club Southampton battled back to salvage a point in their quest to beat the drop.

A big day at the foot of the table saw Leeds United move out of the relegation zone with a 4-2 victory at fellow-strugglers Wolverhampton Wanderers while second-from-bottom Bournemouth came down to earth after last week's defeat of Liverpool as they went down 3-0 at Aston Villa.

Leicester City snapped a run of four consecutive league defeats to draw 1-1 at

Fourth-placed Tottenham have 49 points from 28 games with Newcastle United, who benefited from a stoppagetime penalty to beat Nottingham Forest on Friday, have 47 points having played two games less.

At the bottom, Southampton have 23 points from 28 games.

Bournemouth on 24 from 27 along with West Hm United who dropped into the relegation zone courtesy of Leeds United's impressive win at Wolves. Everton, who were playing Chelsea in the late kick-off are next on 25 points, the same total as Leicester.

Tottenham may come to rue the day they allowed Southampton a relegation

Withoput playing that well they were in control thanks to Kane and Perisic but allowed Theo Walcott to score his first goal for two years to make it 3-2 in the

Tottenham substitute Pape Sarr was then adjudged in the 90th minute to have fouled Ainsley Maitland-Niles as he attempted to hack clear a bouncing ball and



Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane controls the ball during the English Premier League match against Southampton at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton, southern England, yesterday. (AFP)

Leeds will head into the international break above the relegation zone thanks to a superb display at Wolves.

Jack Harrison smashed home the opener for Leeds from near the penalty spot in the sixth minute and Luke Ayling doubled the lead from a corner early in

the second half. Leeds substitute Rasmus Kristensen added a third just after the hour mark but Wolves hit back with goals by Jonny and

carded for a dangerous tackle on Ayling. Rodrigo chipped Wolves keeper Jose Sa to seal the points and Wolves were handed another red card when unused substi-

Ward-Prowse made no mistake to earn tute Matheus Nunes was dismissed for arguing. Harvey Barnes netted a superb second-half equaliser to earn Leicester their point at Brentford who had Shandon Baptiste sent off in the closing stages.

Brentford, dreaming of a European qualification spot, had gone ahead in the 32nd minute through Danish midfielder Mathias Jensen's deflected drive.

Also yesterday, Ellis Simms grabbed a last-gasp equaliser as struggling Everton boosted their fight for Premier League survival with a dramatic 2-2 draw against

Sean Dyche's side were moments away from a damaging defeat until Simms scored his first goal for the club to stun Stamford Bridge into silence.

Everton's show of defiance came after

they twice trailed in west London. Joao Felix had put Chelsea ahead early in the second half with his second goal since joining on loan from Atletico Madrid in January.

Abdoulaye Doucoure's equaliser was followed by Kai Havertz's third goal in his last three appearances as the German converted penalty in the closing stages.

Simms was on loan at Championship side Sunderland earlier this season, but the 22-year-old showed he could be saviour in the releas tle with his crucial leveller. Everton are now two points clear of the relegation zone after extending their unbeaten run

Barcelona referee corruption charge overshadows 'El Clasico' buzz

Barcelona

pain's Clasico is one of the world's biggest sporting occasions, pitting giants Barcelona and Real Madrid head-to-head, but the build-up to today's La Liga clash has been overshadowed by "Caso

Barca have been charged with corruption by Spanish prosecutors for payments between 2001 and 2018 to the company of former refereeing chief Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira, totalling around €7.3mn (\$7.8mn).

The club say they were pay-

ing for reports and advice on refereeing but prosecutors have accused the club of seeking to gain favourable decision-making from officials.

Charges were filed last week against Barcelona, former vice president of Spain's refereeing committee (CTA), Negreira, and two former Barcelona presidents, Sandro Rosell and Josep Maria Bartomeu, among others.

Although La Liga leaders Barcelona can virtually clinch the title if they beat second-place Real Madrid today to move 12 points clear, headlines remain dominated by the Negreira case, with tensions rising around Spain.

In the first round of fixtures after Barcelona were charged last weekend, at various stadiums there was a form of protest against the supposed corruption

It was clearest in the Basque country, where Xavi Hernan-dez's side faced Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

Supporters threw mock money onto the pitch with "mafia" printed on it, along with Barcelona's club emblem.

"I was surprised at the hostile atmosphere towards Barca, it was sad to see," said Xavi after his team's narrow 1-0 win.

"(Barca) are being judged prematurely, which I don't think is good for society."

After Barcelona's payments to Negreira's company were unearthed in February, the club responded quickly and denied any

wrongdoing.
President Joan Laporta said the club had ordered an external investigation and would provide answers as quickly as they could.

However, they have not scheduled a news conference to answer questions on the issue and their silence has been criticised by La Liga president Javier Tebas.

"Yes (It's the worst moment) that I remember," Tebas told Movistar channel Vamos on Tuesday. "The problem that we have is the worst. There are payments recognised by Barcelona to the vice-president of the CTA, that's something abnormal.

"It's understandable that tension is generated.

"The reputation of our football is at stake. I am ashamed. We have no explanation from Barce-

Laporta did speak at a lunch event with the Equestrian Circle in Barcelona and said there was a "campaign" to damage Barcelona's interests.

"Let it be clear Barca have never bought referees and Barca have never had the intention of buying referees, absolutely never," said the president.



training ground in Sant Joan Despi on the eve of the 'El Clasico' clash against Real Madrid. (AFP)

FORMULA ONE

Perez takes Saudi GP pole after Verstappen suffers car problem

AFP

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

ergio Perez claimed pole position for today's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix to salvage pride for Red Bull after Max Verstappen was forced out of qualifying with a driveshaft failure The 33-year-old Mexican clocked a

best lap in one minute 28.265 seconds to beat Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, who faces a 10-place grid penalty, by 0.155sec in a closely fought qualifying session. It is Perez's second career pole and

second in Saudi Arabia, while Verstap-

pen will start from 15th. "Good job guys," said Perez. "Hopefully, Max will be able to fight through in the race and we can enjoy a good result. We've got a good car and it's a good cir-

cuit for me." As a result of Leclerc's penalty, twotime champion Fernando Alonso will start from the front row of the grid for Aston Martin alongside Perez after winding up third fastest ahead of Mercedes' George Russell and Carlos Sainz,

who was fifth in the second Ferrari. Lance Stroll was sixth in the second Aston Martin ahead of Alpine's Esteban Ocon, seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Mercedes and rookie Oscar Piastri of McLaren.

Pierre Gasly was 10th for Alpine. "Red Bull are on a different planet," said Leclerc, who will set off from 12th on the grid. The floodlit session began in cooler conditions than FP3 and Williams

Nyck de Vries, who had missed the



Pole position winner Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez (left) chats with second-placed Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc at the end of the qualifying session of the Saudi Arabia Grand Prix at the Corniche Circuit in Jeddah

earlier session due an engine change on his Alpha Tauri car, spun almost immediately at the first corner, but recovered. His tyres, however, were gone for a fly-

The Red Bulls were soon setting the pace again, Verstappen heading Perez by six-tenths on his first run, before Lando Norris brushed the wall at the final cor-

As the Ferraris showed sign of improvement, Aston Martin pushed in response and after 12 minutes, Alonso spun at Turn Two, retaining control without hitting any barriers and snatched fourth place.

Logan Sargeant was another spinner, the American rookie revolving his Williams at Turn 22 as McLaren's pit crew worked frantically to salvage Norris's car and hopes in vain.

The blur of busy and error-strewn O1 action ended with Norris eliminated in 19th along with Sargeant, 20th, Yuki Tsunoda and his Alpha Tauri team-mate De Vries, and Alex Albon in the second

The Q2 segment began with Alfa

Romeo and Haas leading the queue ahead of the Aston Martins. Alonso immediately lit up the time screens in purple and set the pace in 1:28.757.

Verstappen, who had a sharp snap through Turns One and Two, soon reported a power problem. "It's an engine problem," he said, as he made slow progress. "It's almost not accelerating."

The Dutchman limped back to the pits and with five minutes remaining climbed out as his crew set to work. He left the garage, walked away to the weigh-room and out of qualifying as the team diagnosed a driveshaft problem.

This left Alonso on top ahead of Perez, who returned to try and restore some pride for Red Bull on a second run, clocking 1:26.635 to beat him by a tenth ahead of the two Ferraris.

The two Haas cars and both Alfa Romeos were eliminated along with Verstappen, creating the prospect of an unexpectedly open battle for pole with Alonso seeking his first pole in 11 years since the 2012 German Grand Prix.

"It happened at Turn 10," said Verstappen. "Very annoying because we were having such a good weekend. It will be tricky now to get to the front so have to concentrate on points, but anything is possible at this track."

With Leclerc facing a 10-place grid penalty, his rivals sensed a rare chance for pole, Alonso attacking his lap, Leclerc outpacing him and then Perez going top in 1:28.265 - half a second clear of the Ferrari.

Russell also dipped into the 1:28s to go third ahead of Alonso before the Aston Martins and Ferraris returned for their final flings.

Al Wakrah beat Al Ahli 5-2 in week 17 of QNB Stars League

DOHA: Al Wakrah returned to winning ways, prevailing 5-2 over Al Ahli in their Week 17 match of the 2022-2023 season QNB Stars League at the Al Wakrah Stadium yesterday.

The Blue Wave showed their intent and form right from the word

go, with Mohamed Benyettou (19th-minute penalty), Khaled Munir (38th minute), Jacinto Dala (40th and 90th minutes) and Yousef Abdurisag (49th minute) getting the five goals for them. Al Dokali al-Sayed helped Al Ahli pulled back two goals, striking in the 33th and 64th minutes.

The win also saw Al Wakrah inch their way into 27 points from 17 games, while Al Ahli stayed on 21 points from 17 matches.

The Blue Wave's attacking play had Al Ahli working hard in defence and Hossein Kanaani had his team pay the price for bringing down a charging Khaled Munir inside the penalty area. The referee straight away signalled for the spot and Benyettou, who stepped up, put Al Wakrah in the lead.

Al Ahli retaliated as their midfielder Al Dokali fired from top centre just outside the box to make it 1-1.

Al Ahli's joy was however shortlived as Al Wakrah struck back and this time with Abdurisag working his way past defenders to set up Muneer with a perfect pass for a fine goal (2-1).

Minutes later, it was the turn of Al Wakrah's Angolan star Dala to show his class as he dribbled his way long before striking from the top of the box for a superb goal (3-1). Dala then set up Abdurisag with a fine ball to run in without being

challenged and score. The goal left the player delighted (4-1). Al Dokali scored off a corner kick which fell to him following a header and his left foot kick went on to beat the goalkeeper (4-2). Dala then scored one more goal, this time off a cross from Benyettou while rushing in, with the goalkeeper well-beaten.



Action from the QNB Stars League round 17 match between Al Wakrah and Al Ahli yesterday. Al Wakrah won 5-2 on home soil. In other matches yesterday, Al Duhail beat Qatar SC 3-1 while Al Rayyan edged Al Markhiya 3-2.