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FOCUS

Qatar Olympic Committee unveils 2023-2030 strategy

Since its establishment on March 14, 1979, QOC has played a major role in spreading sports awareness in the country

QNA
 Doha

In the presence of the President of Qatar Olympic Committee H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, the QOC yesterday unveiled its 2023-2030 strategy during a ceremony held at Marsa Malaz Kempinski Hotel. The strategy aims to achieve three main objectives: ensuring sports excellence, promoting Olympic culture and achieving comprehensive sports development.

QOC's First Vice-President Mohamed Yousef al-Mana, QOC's Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, QOC's Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain, and a number of heads of clubs, federations, and sports committees in the State of Qatar attended the glittering ceremony.

To achieve these objectives, the QOC is keen to continue promoting the Olympic culture by encouraging all segments of society to participate in sporting events, and adopt healthy lifestyles, extending to include building and developing elite teams of Qatari male and female players to ensure excellence in all sports, including training, management and other technical aspects.

Through hosting major sports tournaments, the QOC also seeks to promote sports tourism, support the national economy, and invest in the sporting legacy left by the major tournaments hosted in Qatar recently.

At the top of QOC's priorities is the preparations of na-



Qatar Olympic Committee President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani attends the QOC ceremony held at Marsa Malaz Kempinski Hotel in Doha yesterday.

tional teams, especially at the age groups level. This strategy aims to build a strategic framework and develop systematic implementation plans to develop the performance of athletes, provide for their needs, and take care of their educational, professional, and health path, in addition to

measuring, monitoring, and evaluating their performance to ensure the achievement of interim and main goals.

QOC pays great attention to the development of women's sports in the State of Qatar. It ensures equal opportunities for both genders to practice sports

and participate in major tournaments.

Over the past many years, these efforts have resulted to raise Qatari women's participation and performance in various sports which ensured their participation in the last three editions of the Olympic Games

in London 2012, Rio de Janeiro 2016, and Tokyo 2020.

Since its establishment on March 14, 1979, the QOC has played a major role in spreading sports awareness in the country, sponsoring and developing the Olympic culture in accordance with the Olympic Charter,

and supporting and developing sports performance, which contributed to the great boom in Qatari sports during the past 44 years and many unprecedented achievements at various levels.

The latest achievements were Qatari athletics star Mutaz Essa Barshim winning the gold medal at the 2022 World Athletics Championships, becoming the first player to win the gold in High Jump on three consecutive occasions throughout history, and the Qatari weightlifter Fares Ibrahim winning two medals, a gold, and a silver, in the 2022 World Weightlifting Championships.

Additionally, the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 recorded the best Qatari participation in history, as they managed to achieve three medals - two gold medals in athletics and weightlifting, and a bronze in the beach volleyball competition.

Qatari successes in the sports sector were not limited to winning medals only, Qatari sports figures held high positions in various international institutions.

HE the President of QOC Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani was elected as the First Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC), during the 26th General Assembly of the Association in October 2022.

In addition, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has selected HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, HE Vice-Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation (QF) Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani and QOC's Secretary-General Jassim bin

Rashid al-Buainain as members of several affiliated committees.

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani was appointed as a member at the IOC's Olympism 365, HE Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al-Thani as a member at the IOC's Olympic Education Commission and Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain as a member at the IOC's Olympic Program Commission.

The QOC hosted a camp for the refugee Olympic team that participated in Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 from July 23 to Aug 8, 2021.

The QOC also hosted a number of meetings between the IOC and the Olympic Council of Asia, and a dialogue meeting between the IOC and the Afghan representatives of the National Olympic Committee and the General Directorate of Physical Education and Sports.

In recognition of its recent successes, the QOC won National Olympic Committees' (NOC) Breakthrough Award by the Association of National Olympic Committees on the sidelines of the ANOC General Assembly in Greece in 2021.

These achievements come within the framework of QOC's prominent role in promoting various sports and hosting many major sporting events.

During the ceremony held yesterday, QOC honoured the graduates of the training courses and programs that the committee supervised in organising in 2022, and a group of distinguished and retired employees, based on its belief in the importance and appreciation of the administrative staff.

SPOTLIGHT

The new strategy marks beginning of another phase of success, says QOC secretary-general



The Secretary-General of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) H E Jassim Rashid al-Buainain addresses a QOC gathering in Doha yesterday.

QNA
 Doha

The Secretary-General of Qatar Olympic Committee H E Jassim Rashid al-Buainain asserted that Qatari sport, through the past four decades, has been able to write a history full of achievements at all levels, pointing out that the champions of Qatari teams have left their mark in various regional and international forums.

These remarks came during the ceremony of celebrating the founding anniversary of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and the launch of its new strategy 2023-2030.

"This year marks the beginning of a new era in our journey, and today we begin a new phase of success, after we have completed an outstanding phase of our past strategy, in which the Qatar Olympic Committee, with the efforts and cooperation of sports federations and committees, was proudly able to achieve the goals set for the previous strategy," al-Buainain said.

In the past, these efforts were crowned with the great achievements of the (Team Qatar) champions in the continental and international events, the latest of which was the remarkable result in the Olympic Games - Tokyo 2020 - where Qatar won the first Olympic gold medal in its history through the weightlifter Fares Ibrahim and high jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim, in addition to the bronze medal of beach volleyball clinched by the duo Sherif Younes and Ahmed Tijan to place Qatar in the lead of Arab nations at the 41st Olympic rank, he added.

The secretary-general of QOC pointed out that these achievements and previous ones were made thanks to the great support of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the directives and keen attention of the President of QOC H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, which had great impact on the prominent role played by the QOC in rising to the level of pioneering and remarkable organisation of many major sporting events that made the State of Qatar the capital of sports.

"Today, we are moving forward with announcing the strategy of the Qatar Olympic Committee 2023-2030, which is considered an incubator for sports and aims to achieve three main results, which are ensuring sports excellence, promoting Olympic values, and achieving sports development," al-Buainain said.

He explained that in this new strategy, QOC seeks to prepare the sports teams and equip them to participate in the Doha 2030 Asian Games, in addition to developing the main plans towards progress to host the Olympic Games in the future, referring to the upcoming events that will be hosted by Qatar, most notably the World Judo Championships 2023, the World Water Games 2024, and the Asian Games - Doha 2030.

Concluding his remarks, al-Buainain extended thanks to all the members and staff of QOC for their efforts in providing the necessary support to all sports federations and committees in order to achieve the best results to raise the name of the State of Qatar high in sports forums.

ONE-DAY SERIES

Starc bags 5 wickets as Australia win to level ODI series

The left-arm fast bowler helps the visitors win the match by 10 wickets



Australia's Mitchell Starc (third right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India's K L Rahul (not pictured) during the second one-day international (ODI) at the Y S Rajasekhara Reddy Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Visakhapatnam

Australian pacer Mitchell Starc ripped through India's lineup with five wickets to lay the platform for a crushing 10-wicket win in the second one-day international in Visakhapatnam yesterday that levelled their three-match series at 1-1. Chasing 118 to win after Starc claimed 5-53 for his ninth five-wicket haul in ODIs in a fiery spell earlier in the day, Australia romped home in only 11 overs to set up a thrilling finale in Chennai on Wednesday. A ferocious Mitchell Marsh cracked an unbeaten 66 in 36 balls - a knock that included six sixes - while Travis Head made 51 not out to get the tourists over the finish line.

"It was a quick one, 37 overs for the

game. You don't see that too often," Australia captain Steve Smith said. "I thought our bowlers were outstanding.

"Starc in particular with the new ball, swinging it back down the line and putting them under early pressure. He complemented really well with the rest of our bowling group."

Australia put India in to bat and struck early as Starc had Shubman Gill caught at point for a duck with a wider ball in the first over and the left-arm batter dismissed Rohit Sharma and Suryakumar Yadav off successive balls a little later.

Skipper Rohit, back after missing India's five-wicket win in the series opener due to family commitments, was caught at slip for 13 while the explosive Suryakumar fell lbw in the next ball to leave India in trouble at 32-3 inside five overs. KL Rahul enjoyed a return to form in the last match with an unbeaten 75, but he

fell victim to a sharp inswinger from Starc and Hardik Pandya joined him in the pavilion shortly after thanks to a spectacular catch by Smith.

The Australia captain flew to his right to pull off a one-handed blinder at slip in Sean Abbott's second over as the hosts lost half their side for 49 on a track that offered the quick bowlers some early swing and bounce.

After a spell of low-risk cricket, India lost Virat Kohli when Nathan Ellis trapped him lbw for 31 in the 16th over and the paceman then had Ravindra Jadeja caught behind for 16 to snuff out the home side's hopes of a late comeback.

Abbott removed Kuldeep Yadav and Mohamed Shami before Axar Patel (29 not out) carted Starc for two big sixes but the bowler rattled Mohamed Siraj's stumps as India were restricted to their lowest ODI total against Australia at home.

"It's disappointing. We didn't play to our potential and didn't apply ourselves with the bat," Rohit said after India's heaviest defeat in terms of balls remaining.

"We always knew that wasn't enough runs. It wasn't a 117 pitch at all. Starc is a quality bowler.

"He's been doing it for years for Australia with the new ball. He kept bowling to his strength and we kept falling to his strength."

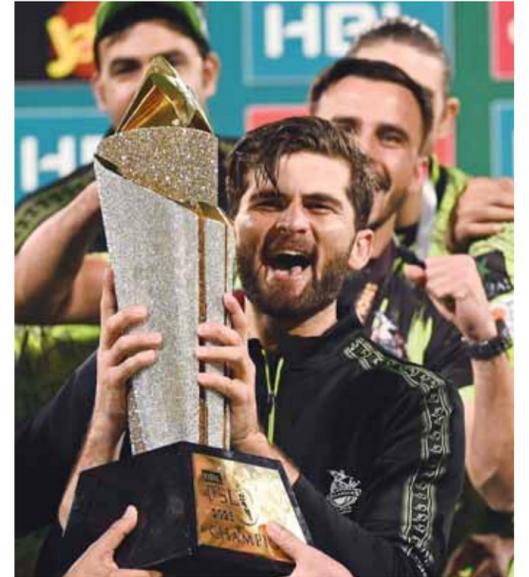
BRIEF SCORES

India 117 all out in 26 overs (V. Kohli 31, A. Patel 29 not out; M. Starc 5-53, S. Abbott 3-23, N. Ellis 2-13) **lost to Australia 121 for no loss in 11 overs** (M. Marsh 66 not out; T. Head 51 not out)

Toss: Australia
Result: Australia won by 10 wickets
Series: Three-match series level at 1-1

FOCUS

Fast bowler Afridi named Team of PSL 8 captain



Lahore Qalandars' captain Shaheen Shah Afridi holds the trophy during a ceremony at the end of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 final match played against Multan Sultans in Lahore on Saturday. (AFP)

www.pcb.com.pk
Lahore

Shaheen Shah Afridi of Lahore Qalandars was named captain of the Team of HBL PSL 8 by an independent panel that was headed by Haroon Rashid (Chairman of HBL PSL 8 Technical Committee) and also included respected commentators Bazid Khan, Daren Ganga, Nick Knight and Sana Mir as members.

While selecting the side, the independent panel considered a number of T20 cricket aspects, including consistency, impact on the side and overall game, and best possible team combination.

Afridi on Saturday night inspired Lahore Qalandars to finish on top of the points table with seven wins, then helped his side to bounce back from a Multan Sultans drubbing in the Qualifier by overcoming Peshawar Zalmi in Eliminator 2, and, finally slapped a 15-ball 44 not out and took four for 51 to not only walk away with the player of the final award but also guided his side to their second successive HBL PSL title.

Since the concept of Team of HBL PSL was introduced in 2019, this is the fourth successive year Afridi has made it to exclusive side.

The side also includes Multan Sultans' Emerging Category players Abbas Afridi and Ihsanullah, who won the Emerging and Player of HBL PSL 8 awards, respectively. Like the Multan duo, it is also the first time for Mohamed Harris and Azam Khan to be selected in the team of the tournament.

Overall, the side includes five players from losing finalists Multan Sultans, two players each from Lahore Qalandars and Peshawar Zalmi, and one player each from Islamabad United and Karachi Kings.

Mohamed Rizwan and Babar Azam have been selected as openers, with Mohamed Harris, Rilee Rossouw, Azam Khan and Kieron Pollard forming a formidable middle-order.

Team of HBL PSL 8 (in batting order)

- 1. Mohamed Rizwan** (Multan Sultans) (550 runs, 1x100, 4x50, strike-rate 142.85)
 - 2. Babar Azam** (Peshawar Zalmi) (522 runs, 1x100, 5x50, strike-rate 145.40)
 - 3. Mohamed Harris** (Peshawar Zalmi) (350 runs, 2x50, strike-rate 186.17)
 - 4. Rilee Rossouw*** (Multan Sultans) (453 runs, 1x100, 3x50, strike-rate 171.59)
 - 5. Azam Khan** (Islamabad United) (282 runs, 2x50, strike-rate 161.14)
 - 6. Kieron Pollard*** (Multan Sultans) (260 runs, 2x50, strike-rate 163.52; 3 wickets, 8.62 eco.)
 - 7. Imad Wasim** (Karachi Kings) (404 runs, 3x50, strike-rate 170.46; 9 wickets, 7.93 eco.)
 - 8. Shaheen Shah Afridi** (Lahore Qalandars) (captain) (133 runs, strike-rate 168.35; 19 wickets, 9.13 eco.)
 - 9. Rashid Khan*** (Lahore Qalandars) (20 wickets, 6.53 eco.)
 - 10. Abbas Afridi** (Multan Sultans) (23 wickets, 9.45 eco.)
 - 11. Ihsanullah** (Multan Sultans) (22 wickets, 7.59 eco.)
 - 12. Saim Ayub** (Peshawar Zalmi) (341 runs, 5x50, 165.53)
- * denotes overseas players

BOTTOMLINE

New Zealand on the brink of series sweep

Reuters
Wellington

New Zealand moved to the brink of a 2-0 series sweep over Sri Lanka on day three of the second Test yesterday by dismissing the tourists for 164 and reducing them to 113 for two, still 303 runs in arrears, after enforcing the follow on.

After Kane Williamson and Henry Nicholls posted double centuries as the hosts made 580-4 declared on day two, it was the turn of New Zealand's bowlers to take centre stage at Wellington's Basin Reserve.

Spinner Michael Bracewell and seamer Matt Henry took three wickets apiece as the Sri Lankans were dismissed in their first innings before the tea break.

Despite a battling 89 from skipper Dimuth Karunaratne, Sri Lanka lost six wickets with the addition of only 55 runs after lunch. With the threat of rain hanging over the fifth day of the match, Blacks Caps skipper Tim Southee wasted no time in sending Karunaratne and his opening partner Oshada Fernando straight back in to face the home attack again. Fernando faced 36 balls before departing for five to give paceman Doug Bracewell, cousin of Michael, another wicket on his return to Test cricket after a gap of nearly seven years. Karunaratne played another captain's innings, however, recording a fourth half century in his last five innings and putting together a second-wicket partnership of 71 with Kusal Mendis. His New Zealand counterpart Southee separated them when Karunaratne,

on 51, pulled a shot to deep midwicket where Devon Conway took a fine catch into the sun. Angelo Mathews came out to join Mendis and the pair survived until stumps.

Mendis will resume today on 50 not out, while Mathews was unbeaten on one.

In one positive historical note for Sri Lanka, Mendis and Mathews both scored centuries as they batted together for two rain-disrupted days to save a draw the last time the two teams played a Test in Wellington five years ago. Michael Bracewell said New Zealand, who beat England last month after following on at Basin Reserve, would not be getting ahead of themselves.

"We've got a big job, the two guys at the crease at the moment are obviously very experienced and have scored a lot of Test runs," he told reporters. "You have that goal in the end, but really trying to concentrate on what you're doing in the moment."

Victory would complete a memorable week for allrounder Bracewell, who signed up to a maiden Indian Premier League contract with Royal Challengers Bangalore as a replacement for injured Englishman Will Jacks.

"It's one of those things that's a little bit strange happening in the middle of a game," he said. "So I haven't afforded myself too much time to get too excited because obviously there's a big game in front of me but I'm excited for getting over there."

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st innings 580-4
Sri Lanka 1st innings (overnight 26-2)
O. Fernando c Blundell b Henry 6

D. Karunaratne c Latham b M. Bracewell 89
K. Mendis c Conway b D. Bracewell 0
P. Jayasuriya c Mitchell b Southee 4
A. Mathews c Blundell b Henry 37
D. Chandimal st Blundell b M. Bracewell 1
D. de Silva c Southee b M. Bracewell 0
N. Madushka c M. Bracewell b Henry 19
K. Rajitha run out (Latham/M. Bracewell) 0
L. Kumara not out 1
A. Fernando c Williamson b Tickner 0
Extras (b4, lb1, nb1, w1) 7
Total (all out, 66.5 overs) 164

Fall of wickets: 1-13 (O. Fernando), 2-18 (Mendis), 3-27 (Jayasuriya), 4-34 (Mathews), 5-114 (Chandimal), 6-116 (de Silva), 7-156 (Madushka), 8-163 (Rajitha), 9-163 (Karunaratne), 10-164 (A. Fernando)
Bowling: T. Southee 15-6-22-1, M. Henry 20-6-44-3 (1w), D. Bracewell 12-7-19-1 (1nb), M. Bracewell 12-1-50-3, B. Tickner 6.5-1-21-1, D. Mitchell 1-0-3-0

Sri Lanka 2nd innings (following on)
O. Fernando c sub (Young) b D. Bracewell 5
D. Karunaratne c Conway b Southee 51
K. Mendis not out 50
A. Mathews not out 6
Extras (lb1, nb1, w4) 1
Total (for two wickets, 43 overs) 113

To bat: D. Chandimal, D. de Silva, N. Madushka, K. Rajitha, A. Fernando, P. Jayasuriya, L. Kumara
Fall of wickets: 1-26 (O. Fernando), 2-97 (Karunaratne)
Bowling: T. Southee 9-5-9-1 (1w), M. Henry 9-2-24-0, M. Bracewell 10-3-28-0, D. Bracewell 8-2-20-1 (1w, 1nb), B. Tickner 7-1-31-0 (1w)
Toss: Sri Lanka



New Zealand's captain Tim Southee (left) gets a high five from teammate Henry Nicholls as New Zealand walk from the field at the end of Sri Lanka's first innings during day three of the second Test at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Alcaraz, red-hot Medvedev reach Indian Wells final

'Always better to finish on your first match point and not on the eighth'



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain reacts after winning a point in his semi-final against Jannik Sinner of Italy in the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. **Right:** Daniil Medvedev (left) is congratulated by Frances Tiafoe of the US after their semi-final. (USA TODAY Sports/AFP)

Reuters
Indian Wells

Top seed Carlos Alcaraz was far from his best but did enough to beat Italy's Jannik Sinner 7-6(4) 6-3 on Saturday and set up an Indian Wells final showdown with red-hot Russian Daniil Medvedev in the California desert.

In a rematch of their thrilling US Open quarter-final that the 19-year-old Spaniard won in five hard-hitting sets en route to winning the title, Alcaraz needed to save a set point in the opening frame against Sinner before reasserting his control.

Sinner, who ended Taylor Fritz's title defence in the quarter-final, got the first

break for a 2-1 lead but Alcaraz broke at love to draw level at 4-4 before going on to grab the tightly-contested frame.

In the second set, Alcaraz stepped up the pressure, often having Sinner scrambling around behind the baseline. He broke early for a 2-0 lead and was well on his way after a perfectly-weighted lob landed just inside the baseline for a 3-0 lead.

From there, Alcaraz relied on an array of shots and raw power to turn what had been a close encounter into a rather comfortable victory to improved to 3-2 against Sinner. Alcaraz will now turn his focus to the showdown with fifth seed Medvedev where a victory would return the Spaniard to top spot in the world ranking for the first time since January.

In the early match, Medvedev squan-

dered seven match points before finally getting past Frances Tiafoe 7-5 7-6(4) to secure a place in his first Indian Wells final.

"Always better to finish on your first match point and not on the eighth," said Medvedev. "But that's what makes tennis also a fun sport, and I'm just really happy that I managed not to lose this match and not to have regrets, nightmares, whatever."

The victory extended what has been an impressive run for the Russian, who has won 19 consecutive matches and is one victory away from adding another title to the ones he collected in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai over the last month.

Medvedev had a glorious opportunity to grab an early break until Tiafoe, who entered the match having not dropped a

set in Indian Wells, impressively stormed back from 0-40 in the fifth game of the opening set to hold serve. But Medvedev made the most of his next break point when he desperately swatted the ball from near his toes from where it clipped the net cord and dropped inside the line to pull ahead 6-5 before going on to serve out at love to take the set.

Medvedev then struck an unbelievable forehand pass down the line to break Tiafoe in the opening game of the second set and five games later turned aside the first break point he faced all day and grabbed what looked to be a comfortable 4-2 lead.

But Tiafoe did well to save three match points on serve to pull within 4-5 and then levelled the set a game later when Medvedev double-faulted on the second break point he faced.

SPOTLIGHT

Bopanna becomes the oldest Masters champion at age 43

Reuters
Indian Wells

Coffee connoisseur Rohan Bopanna credited the special Indian blends he consumes on Tour for his success after the 43-year-old became the oldest ATP Masters 1000 champion by winning the men's doubles title on Saturday.

Bopanna and his playing partner Matthew Ebden of Australia beat the top-ranked pair of Dutchman Wesley Koolhof and Briton Neal Skupski 6-3 2-6 10-8 to claim their second title together and first of the season.

"Truly special. It's called Tennis Paradise for a reason. I've been coming here over the years and seeing all these guys win and I'm really happy that Matt and I were able to do this and get this title here," Bopanna said.

"There have been some tough matches, close matches and today we played against one of the best teams out there, so I'm really happy we got the title."

Former doubles world number three Bopanna, whose family owns a coffee plantation in Coorg district in the south Indian state of Karnataka, said the drink

was the secret of his success. "It's the Indian coffee that I keep having when travelling. That's the secret. The biggest thing is to make sure you recover well after matches and that's really helped me," Bopanna said. Bopanna beat the record held by former partner Daniel Nestor and said taking care of his body had paid off.

"That's the most important part, especially when you're getting older. Some days I tell Matt I maybe just practised 20 minutes, but I'd rather rest the body and be ready for our matches," Bopanna said.

"That's really been the key. I spoke to Danny and told him 'sorry, I'm going to beat your record! Being in the final I was already the oldest and winning the final that stays with me. Really happy with that.'"

Indian doubles great Mahesh Bhupathi hailed former playing partner Bopanna's longevity and ability to peak late in his career.

"Bring it home Bofors," Bhupathi tweeted, alluding to the nickname Bopanna has earned because of his booming serve.

"Bofors gone where no Indian man has gone before... The distance in the desert! Keep climbing!"



Rohan Bopanna of India and Matthew Ebden of Australia celebrate with the winner's trophy after defeating Wesley Koolhof of Netherlands and Neal Skupski of Great Britain in the doubles final during the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

GOLF

Baldwin tames wind for first European triumph

AFP
Saint Francis Bay, South Africa

Matthew Baldwin of England tamed the wind to end an 11-year wait for his first European circuit triumph when he won the SDC Championship by seven shots in South Africa yesterday.

He finished with a four-under 68 for a total of 270 at Saint Francis Links on the southern coast, with a closing 67 from Spaniard Adri Arnaus earning him second place.

Swede Jens Dantorf, Kristian Johannessen of Norway, South African Jaco Ahlers, Antoine Rozner of France and Scot Ewen Ferguson shared third place on 278, one stroke behind Arnaus.

"Winning means the world to me," said Baldwin, who added that growing up in the English coastal town of Southport helped him combat the windy South African conditions.

"Coming from a seaside town I am used to playing in the wind and it was very strong at times this week," said the champion, who took a four-shot lead into the final round.

"Forgive me as I am a little tongue-tied at the moment."

"I cannot right now really process what I have achieved."

Baldwin had to play the final four holes of his third round early yesterday after bad light prevented him doing so the previous evening.

He birdied three of them while then co-leader Johannessen dropped a shot, allowing Baldwin to build a four-stroke advantage.

The Englishman continued his good form in the final round, stretching the lead to six shots after nine holes thanks to three birdies.

After bogeying the par-four 11th - the only hole where he dropped a shot twice this week - Baldwin responded with a par, then two birdies to ensure there would be



Britain's Matthew Baldwin celebrates winning the trophy at the DP World's SDC Championship in South Africa's St Francis Bay yesterday. It was his maiden title on the European circuit after 11 years and 200 events. (@DPWorldTour)

no dramatic collapse. He parred the last four holes, with a superb bunker shot at 15 the highlight, and walked off the course clutching his putter and a huge smile on his face.

Leading final round scores in the DP World Tour (European Tour) SDC Championship at Saint Francis Links in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, yesterday (RSA unless stated, par 72):

- 270 - Matthew Baldwin (ENG) 70-67-65-68
- 277 - Adri Arnaus (ESP) 72-68-70-67
- 278 - Jaco Ahlers 78-64-68-68, Jens Dantorf (SWE) 74-63-71-70, Ewen Ferguson (SCO) 72-70-68-68, Kristian Johannessen (NOR) 67-66-73-72, Antoine Rozner (FRA) 72-68-70-68
- 279 - Matthieu Pavon (FRA) 75-69-68-67
- 280 - Thomas Aiken 72-70-69-69, Daniel Brown (ENG) 70-70-67-73, Keenan Davidge 72-69-71-68, Joost Luiten (NED) 69-71-67-73, Albert Venter 70-67-72-71

FOCUS

Schenk clings to Valspar lead as Spieth, Fleetwood chase

AFP
Miami

Unheralded Adam Schenk closed with a birdie to grab a one-stroke lead over Jordan Spieth and England's Tommy Fleetwood after Saturday's third round of the PGA Tour's Valspar Championship.

Schenk birdied two of the last three holes in windy conditions to shoot a one-under par 70 and stand on eight-under overall after 54 holes at Innisbrook's Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida.

Chasing his first PGA Tour title in his 165th start, Schenk fired his approach at the last inside five feet, then made the putt to seize the lead.

"Didn't have a ton go our way until the very end. Tough day but overall very pleased," Schenk said. "It was difficult. Wind was up, switching, it got cold at the end. We just stuck to our gameplan, kept our head down."

Schenk, playing for a 10th consecutive week ahead of becoming a father next month, has a career-best of third at the 2021 Shriners Children's Open but will be with three-time major winner Spieth in the final round's pairing.

"I just focus on myself," Schenk said. "I knew that last putt was to make it into the final group. Happy I made it. I'm excited for tomorrow."

Spieth, the 2015 Valspar champion, and Fleetwood, seeking his first PGA Tour win after 111 starts, each fired 69s to share second on seven-under with Webb Simpson, the 2012 US Open champion, with fellow Americans Cody Gribble and Taylor Moore on six-under.

"Didn't quite have my best stuff on the approach game and lag putting, but overall, I'm in a good spot going into tomorrow," Spieth said. "Lot of good players up there. Tommy has been in good form... I still think after it rains tonight it's going to take some more scoring than the last couple days."

Fleetwood has won six European Tour titles, his most recent victory at last November's Nedbank Challenge in South Africa, but has four runner-up efforts without a victory on the US circuit.

"We all dream and every time we see it up, every week we want to win," Fleetwood said. "I haven't done it yet. We can start at any time and start racking them up."

"Happy to be in contention again... overall happy with where I feel like my game is heading. Just try to do all the right things tomorrow and see if it's my time or not."

Fleetwood had a tap-in birdie at the par-5 first



Adam Schenk walks with his caddie (not pictured) onto the 17th green during the third round of the Valspar Championship. (USA TODAY Sports)

and sank another birdie putt at the par-5 14th while making 16 pars.

"Started off with a nice birdie and it was like keep putting away," said Fleetwood. "Birdies were very hard to come by."

Spieth endured a roller-coaster day with five birdies, five bogeys plus an opening eagle.

A closing bogey cost him a share of the lead heading into the final day.

"Eventful," Spieth said. "For the amount of mistakes I made, it's nice to shoot a couple under."

World number 14 Spieth is seeking his 14th PGA Tour title and his first since last April's Heritage event. Spieth dropped his 6-iron second shot eight feet from the opening hole and sank the eagle putt to immediately tie the lead.

"Great way to start, especially on a day where you know you're going to get a lot of wind," Spieth said. "Par-5s were great. That's what you need to do in these kind of conditions on this golf course."

He made a birdie at the par-5 fifth, then had four bogey-birdie runs between the seventh and 16th holes.

"I tried to be a little more aggressive with the putter," Spieth said.

QATAR WIN 9TH ASIAN BEACH HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP



Qatar players and team officials celebrate winning the gold medal in the 9th Asian Beach Handball Championship in Bali, Indonesia, yesterday. Qatar beat Oman in the title clash 18-14, 16-12. Besides eventual champions Qatar, teams of Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Vietnam, Oman, the Philippines, Kuwait, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Republic of Korea and People's Republic of China featured in the March 10-19 tournament.

FA CUP

Man United reach semi-final with win over Fulham

Fulham captain Aleksandar Mitrovic sent off for pushing referee in a 3-1 defeat

AFP
Manchester

Manchester United set up a FA Cup semi-final against Brighton in remarkable fashion as Fulham captain Aleksandar Mitrovic was sent off for pushing the referee in a 3-1 defeat at Old Trafford yesterday.

Mitrovic was shown one of three Fulham red cards in a matter of seconds as he barged into Chris Kavanagh for awarding United a penalty after a VAR review for William's handball on the line.

The Brazilian was also dismissed, along with Fulham manager Marco Silva on the touchline.

United took advantage as two goals from Bruno Fernandes and Marcel Sabitzer's first for the club kept Erik ten Hag's men on course for a treble of cup competitions.

The Cottagers had been on course to reach the last four for the first time in 21 years when Mitrovic fired them ahead early in the second half.

United needed goalkeeper David de Gea to make a remarkable save to deny the Serbian a second before the tie completely turned on one incident 18 minutes from time.

William used his hand to deflect Jadon Sancho's shot behind, preventing a certain goal.

Kavanagh initially only gave a corner, but reversed his decision on seeing the replay to spark chaotic scenes.

Silva was first to be shown red for approaching the official near the VAR monitor.

William was then dismissed, but it is Mitrovic who faces the most severe ban after pushing the referee on the arm and then squaring up to Kavanagh.

Fernandes coolly sent Bernd Leno the



Fulham's Dutch defender Kenny Tete (centre) vies with Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes (right) and Manchester United's English defender Luke Shaw during the English FA Cup quarter-final at Old Trafford in Manchester, north-west England, yesterday. (AFP)

wrong way from the penalty spot to level. United quickly made the most of the two-man advantage as Luke Shaw crossed for Sabitzer to flick home. Fernandes inflicted the final blow as he blasted home in the sixth minute of added time to take United to Wembley on April 23.

Earlier, Brighton dashed League Two Grimsby's dreams of a trip to Wembley with a 5-0 thrashing.

Fourth-tier Grimsby had made his

tory on their way to the quarter-finals by beating five sides from higher divisions.

But Paul Hirst's men were caught out by the class of in-form Brighton, who are eyeing the club's first ever major trophy.

The floodgates threatened to open when Deniz Undav scored for the Seagulls after just six minutes.

Grimsby held out to limit the damage before half-time, but ran out of steam in the second half. Evan Ferguson scored

twice and had another strike ruled out by VAR check for offside.

Brighton's free-scoring wingers Solly March and Kaoru Mitoma then rubbed salt into Grimsby wounds by scoring in the final 10 minutes.

Sheffield United will face Manchester City in the other semi-final after a City loanee Tommy Doyle scored a stunning stoppage-time winner to beat Blackburn 3-2.

FOCUS

Saka double against Palace sends Arsenal eight points clear



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka scores their fourth goal during a Premier League match against Crystal Palace at Emirates Stadium, London, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

Arsenal will head into the international break eight points clear in the Premier League title race after Bukayo Saka scored twice in a 4-1 home defeat of Crystal Palace yesterday.

With chasers Manchester City otherwise engaged this weekend in the FA Cup, Arsenal took full advantage with Gabriel Martinelli opening the scoring and Granit Xhaka also on target.

Jeffrey Schlupp got Palace's first goal in five league games to briefly raise their hopes in the second half but Arsenal were never going to miss the chance to tighten their grip on top spot as they chase a first English title for 19 years.

Arsenal's ninth victory in London derbies this season, a new English league record, took them to 69 points from 28 games with reigning champions City on 61 having played a game fewer.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal side bowed out of the Europa League on penalties to Sporting on Thursday but they showed no sign of hangover from that disappointment and a sixth successive Premier League win looked in the bag by halftime with Martinelli opening the scoring from Saka's pass in the 28th minute.

It was the perfect response by

the Brazilian whose penalty miss against Sporting proved so costly in midweek.

Saka doubled the lead in the 43rd when he guided home a low shot beyond Palace's teenaged goalkeeper Joe Whitworth after being played in by Ben White's pass.

Arsenal were running riot when Xhaka made it 3-0 10 minutes into the second half after an assist by Leandro Trossard.

Schlupp replied just past the hour and there were a few jittery moments with Wilfried Zaha firing inches wide before Saka made sure with his 12th league goal of the season in the 74th, guiding in a first-time shot from Kiernan Tierney's pass.

Palace, who sacked manager Patrick Vieira this week and are without a win in 2023, stay in 12th place but are only three points above the relegation zone.

With Spring in the air in north London there was a feeling of euphoria at the final whistle with Arsenal now assured of an eight-point lead going into April as the season pauses briefly for England's Euro 2024 qualifiers against Italy and Ukraine.

Arteta said he was impressed at how his team bounced back from the midweek Europa League exit.

"Really pleased with the performance, the energy, the determination that we showed again, the way we controlled the game," Arteta told *Sky Sports*.

FORMULA ONE

Gutsy Perez wins Saudi GP as Verstappen battles from 15th spot to second



Red Bull's Sergio Perez passes the chequered flag to win the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in Jeddah last night. (Reuters)

Reuters
Jeddah

Sergio Perez won the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix from pole position in a Red Bull one-two yesterday with Max Verstappen staying top of the championship after racing from 15th to second with the fastest lap.

Double Formula One world champion Verstappen snatched the bonus point from Perez with a last-lap blast around Jeddah's floodlit Corniche street circuit that left him a point clear of the Mexican.

The result was Red Bull's second one-two in as many races this season but a reverse of the March 5 opener in Bahrain.

"That safety car again tried to take the victory away from us in Jeddah but not this time," said Perez, who started on pole last

year but was caught out by a safety car deployment and ended up fourth.

"I was on for victory last year so finally I got it," added the Mexican, who now has five career wins and finished 5.355 seconds clear despite the safety car cutting his early advantage.

Verstappen now has 44 points, Perez 43 and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso 27. Red Bull have 87 points in the constructors' standings with Mercedes moving up to second on 41.

Alonso was third at the chequered flag, in what would have been a 100th career podium for the 41-year-old double world champion, but the Spaniard was given a 10-second penalty after the podium celebrations and dropped to fourth.

"It doesn't hurt much to be honest," said Alonso, who questioned why it took so long for the stewards to apply the second

penalty. "I was on the podium, I did the pictures, I took the trophy, I celebrated and now I have apparently three points less... okay, let's try to recover in Australia."

Alonso's loss was George Russell's gain, the Briton moving up to the podium for Mercedes with seven-times world champion teammate Lewis Hamilton fifth and Ferrari's Carlos Sainz in sixth place.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc finished seventh with the Alpine pair of Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly eighth and ninth and Kevin Magnussen taking the final point for Haas.

Alonso made a great getaway to pass Perez into the first corner and lead a race for the first time since 2012, when he was at Ferrari, but any joy was short-lived as the stewards investigated an incorrect start position.

Television replays showed the Spaniard

lined up too far to the left on the front row and he was given a five-second penalty.

Alonso took it at the pitstop on lap 19 after the safety car, triggered by Canadian team mate Lance Stroll stopping on track, was deployed on lap 18.

The stewards later investigated whether Alonso had taken the five-second penalty correctly and imposed the further 10-second post-race sanction.

It took Perez four laps to take charge with the Mexican meeting no resistance as he swept past for the lead, but he could not relax.

Verstappen, who suffered a drive-shaft failure in qualifying, was up to 11th after five laps and on lap 12 passed Hamilton for eighth.

When the safety car period ended on lap 20, Verstappen was pushing Russell for third and took the place three laps later.