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## Russell, Rinku star as Kolkata win IPL thriller



FORMULA ONE | Page 3

## Verstappen comes from ninth on grid to win in Miami




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FOOTBALL

## Madrid must halt 'unstoppable' City, not only Haaland, says Ancelotti

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FOOTBALL

# Olunga powers Duhail to eighth QNB Stars League title



Al Duhail's coach Hernan Crespo (centre) lifts the Falcon Shield and celebrates with his players after winning the QNB Stars League yesterday.



Qatar Stars League CEO Hani Taleb Ballan presents the Falcon Shield to QNB Stars League champions Al Duhail at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium.

**By Sports Reporter**
Doha

Al Duhail clinched their first QNB Stars League title in three years, after Michael Olunga struck four goals in 5-2 win over relegation-threatened Al Shamal yesterday.

The Red Knights just had to draw their final fixture in front of their fans at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium for their eighth title, but Duhail did in style with a comprehensive win, easing any nerves. Duhail finished on 51 points, two ahead of Al Arabi, who beat two-time defending champions Al Sadd 2-1 yesterday. "Qatar is a lucky country for us Argentineans, my country won the World Cup here and now as an Argentina, I have three trophies in my first season which is amazing," a delighted Duhail coach Hernan Crespo said recalling Lionel Messi's side World Cup triumph in December.

"We fought very hard throughout the season because the opponents like Al Arabi and Al Sadd were very difficult. I want to thank the players, the entire management and all people who were involved with the club," added Crespo, who has lead Duhail to title in first year at the helm.

Shamal, meanwhile, will go into a play-off match against Second Division runners-up Al Khor to stay in the top-flight. Yesterday, Al Sailiya finished bottom of the 12-team league and were relegated from the league after losing 0-1 to Al Wakrah, who finished in fourth place to seal a spot in next season's Qatar Cup. Second Division champions Muaither SC were promoted to next season's QNB Stars League.

Duhail dominated from the start and went ahead when Almoez Ali scored in the seventh minute. Olunga then took over as the Kenyan striker scored a quick hat-trick in the 21st, 32nd and 35th minute as Duhail went 4-0 up at half-time.

Shamal reduced the deficit three minutes into the second half after Argentine Matias Nani converted a penalty. But four minutes later, Olunga restored the four-goal advantage to finish the season with 22 goals and win the Mansour Muftah Award for Top Scorer. With Duhail already in celebration mode, Mustafa Tariq Mashal scored in stoppage time for Shamal.

At the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, Arabi finished second after a 2-1 win over Al Sadd, who rested eight regulars. Both the teams will once again clash on Friday in the final of the prestigious Amir Cup final. Arabi took the lead in the second minute through Abdullah al-Marafee, while the prolific Omar al-Somah added a second in the 55th minute. Substitute Baghdad Bounedjah pulled a goal back in stoppage time for Sadd, who finished third with 44 points, seven adrift of bitter rivals Duhail.

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan survived relegation after they beat Al Gharafa 4-1 at the Grand Hamad Stadium. The needed win helped The Lions steer clear of the relegation zone as they ended up 9th in the league standings with a tally of 20 points. Al Gharafa with 32 points finished a creditable sixth.

Rayyan's goals came through Mohamed Emad Aiash (8th minute), Yohan Boli (51st), Jesisson Vargas (61st) and Abdulaziz Hatem (66th) delivering the goals. The only consolation goal for The Cheetahs was scored by Moyad Hassan in the 70th minute.

SPOTLIGHT

# Qatari culture highlights dazzling opening ceremony of Judo Worlds

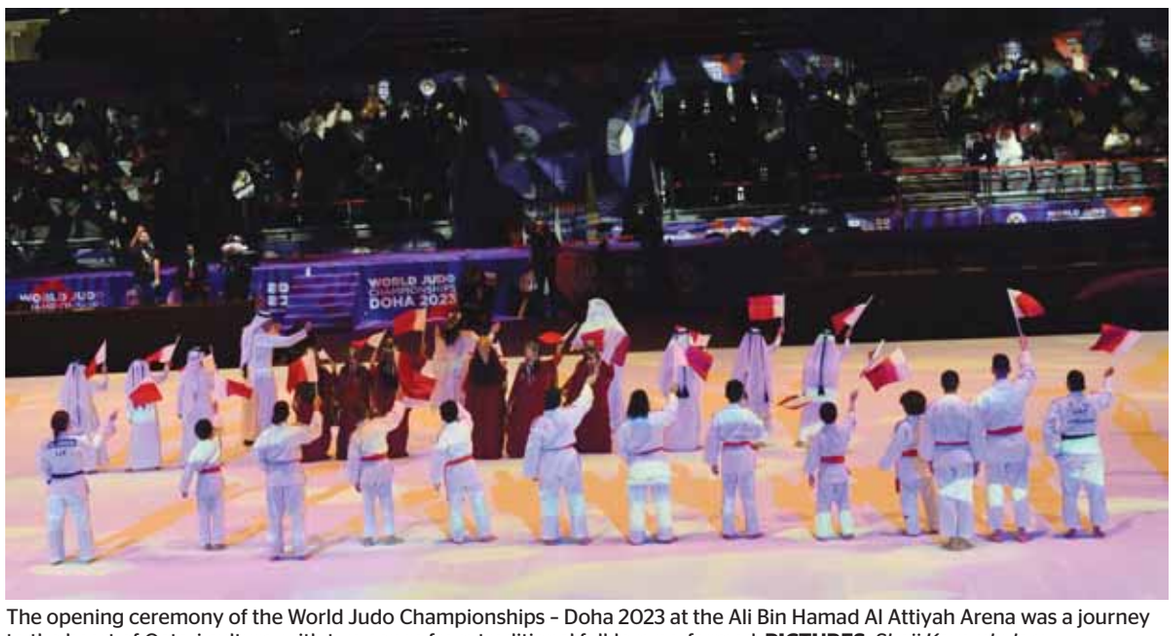
## Uta Abe beats Diyora Keldiyorova in women's under 52kg final, Japan's Hifumi secures men's under 66kg gold

**By Sports Reporter**
Doha

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of the Local Organising Committee, graced the opening ceremony of the World Judo Championships – Doha 2023 yesterday at the Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah Hall in Doha in the presence of a large local and international audience.

The ceremony began with a welcoming speech by Khalid bin Hamad al-Attiyah, Director of the Local Organising Committee of the World Judo Championships – Doha 2023. He expressed his gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, saying: "We are pleased to host the best world-class judokas. This championship is an opportunity to shed light on Qatar's commitment to attracting the world's largest sports events, and we thank everyone who made this event possible."

Marius Vizer, President of the International Judo Federation, delivered his speech, praising Qatar's efforts in organising the championship and saying, "Through investing in sports, you invest in a better future for the world, in education, unity, friendship and non-discrimination." Vizer added: "I would like to express our gratitude to the government of Qatar for its support for international sporting events and promoting judo worldwide."




The opening ceremony of the World Judo Championships - Doha 2023 at the Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena was a journey to the heart of Qatari culture, with two songs from traditional folklore performed. **PICTURES:** *Shaji Kayamkulam*

The opening ceremony was a journey to the heart of Qatari culture, with two songs from traditional folklore, in addition to a blend of children's performances combining judo and Qatari heritage.

### INTENSE BATTLES ON DAY TWO

The ceremony ended with the resumption of the final competitions in the women's under 52kg category, where Uta Abe from Japan successfully defended her title as World Champion by defeating Uzbekistan's Diyora Keldiyorova in an intense final. The bronze medals were secured by Odette Guiffrida from Italy and Amandine Buchard from France. Abe's victory in the World Judo Championships - Doha 2023 marks her fourth consecutive World Championship win, having previously won in Baku 2018, Tokyo 2019, and Tashkent 2022. In the men's under 66kg category, Japan's Hifumi Abe emerged victorious, claiming the gold medal after defeating countryman Joshiro Maruyama in a thrilling final. Bronze medals were awarded to Mongolia's Yondonperenlein Baskhüü and France's Walide Khyar.



In the men's under 66kg category, Japan's Hifumi Abe claimed gold after defeating compatriot Joshiro Maruyama in the final.

Hifumi Abe secures his fourth World Championship gold medal with this victory, having previously emerged victorious in Budapest 2017, Baku 2018, and Tashkent 2022.

Nearly 670 judokas from around 100 countries are featuring in the May 7-14 championships.

For further information on the World Judo Championships - Doha 2023 and ticket purchases, fans can visit the official website, judodoha2023.com

SPORT

SPOTLIGHT

# Pakistan 'in good position' for World Cup: Babar

**AFP**
Karachi

Captain **Babar Azam** says the "dominant" one-day series win over New Zealand sets Pakistan up nicely for the World Cup, despite doubts over their participation.

The hosts beat a depleted New Zealand 4-1 in the five-match series and on their way briefly reached the top of the one-day rankings for the first time.

Pakistan scored 337 in the second match - their second-highest successful chase in one-day internationals - and Babar became the fastest player to 5,000 ODI runs en route to his 18th century in the format.

Opener Fakhar Zaman meanwhile achieved the distinction of hitting hundreds in three successive ODIs, firmly establishing his place in Pakistan's top three, which also includes opener Imam-ul-Haq.

Uncertainty looms over Pakistan's participation in the World Cup in October-November because of tensions with hosts India.

Despite that and defeat in the final match on Sunday, Babar was in buoyant mood.

"Winning the series is great and so is achieving number one ranking that has set us in a good position for the World Cup," said the skipper.

Asked if the uncertainty was worrying for the Pakistan team, Babar said: "We can't say anything about that, but wherever we get a chance to play, we will play."

The stand-off started last year when India announced it would not send a team to Pakistan for the Asia Cup in September, a month before the World Cup.

In response, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has threatened to pull out of the World Cup.

There are signs of a thaw, however.

Last week Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari visited India to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Goa - the first visit by a senior Pakistani official in years.

Babar refused to accept that in missing eight of their top players - mostly due to Indian Premier League duty - New Zealand were easy to beat.

"You don't play an international team thinking that they are a junior team," said Babar. "You have to give 100 percent to win against an international team, so we played better and dominated."

Pakistan won the first two matches by five and seven wickets in Rawalpindi before clinching the next two by 26 and 102 runs in Karachi.

New Zealand took the final game by 47 runs, also in Karachi.

Stand-in New Zealand skipper Tim Latham said the series was useful despite the results.

"We wanted to expose players to different roles and I think it was a great opportunity for all of them to experience these conditions," he said.

New Zealand are sweating on the fitness of regular skipper Kane Williamson, who injured his knee during the IPL and looks likely to miss the World Cup.

New Zealand were runners-up in the last two World Cups, in 2015 and 2019.

"It was nice to - probably not put a complete performance together - but to get over the line and leave with a smile on our face," said rookie paceman Henry Shipley. "It's been a pretty tough place to come over here and bowl seam. We learnt a lot in the process."

Shipley, who made his T20 International debut last month, is among a few Kiwi players to leave Pakistan with an elevated standing after taking a miserly 3-34 in the final ODI to be named Player of the Match.

Mark Chapman did his hopes of breaking into New Zealand's World Cup squad no harm by smashing 290 runs in a record for a five-match series in the T20 format. Chapman's fellow all-rounder Cole McConchie shone in a losing cause with an unbeaten half-century on his ODI debut in the third match of the series in Karachi.




CRICKET

# Russell, Rinku star as Kolkata win IPL thriller

'I didn't think about the last ball. Even when I hit those five sixes, I hadn't thought much. I was playing on the merit of the ball'

**AFP**
Kolkata

Andre Russell's blazing 42 and a finishing act by Rinku Singh kept Kolkata Knight Riders in the hunt for the IPL play-offs with a tense final-ball win over Punjab Kings yesterday.

Kolkata looked in trouble at 124-4 while chasing 180 for victory when Russell and Rinku, who hit an unbeaten 21 off 10 balls, put on a destructive partnership of 54 to win by five wickets at their home Eden Gardens.

Russell smashed three sixes off England left-arm quick Sam Curran in the 19th over but got run out on the penultimate delivery with Kolkata needing two off the final ball.

The left-handed Rinku, who smashed five sixes on the final five balls in a match-winning knock for Kolkata last month to become an IPL sensation, hit the winning boundary off Arshdeep Singh.

"I didn't think about the last ball. Even when I hit those five sixes, I hadn't thought much," said an elated Rinku.

"I was playing on the merit of the ball. I had the belief in me that I could finish the game."

Man of the match Russell said: "When I have Rinku at the other end I am not worried. I have confidence in him. I get goosebumps when I see what he is doing now. I have company at the backend."

Kolkata jumped from eight to five in the 10-team table led by holders Gujarat Titans as teams jostle for the final four spots to make the play-offs.

Skipper Nitish Rana set up the chase with his 51 after England's Jason Roy, who came in as an impact player, gave the home team a solid start with his 38 off 24 balls but a few wickets set Kolkata back.

But the Russell-Rinku combination tore into the opposition attack as Kolkata hammered 53 runs in the final four overs to pocket their fifth win in 11 matches.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy set up victory with bowling figures of 3-26 including the key wicket of Liam Livingstone, lbw for 15, as Punjab finished on 179-7.

Skipper Shikhar Dhawan's 57 and late cameos boosted Punjab's total with 36 runs from the last two overs, but the effort was not enough.

Fast bowler Harshit Rana provided the early breakthroughs including Sri Lanka's Bhanuka Rajapaksa for a duck.

Chakravarthy and Suyash, who got Punjab's big buy Curran caught behind four, combined to choke the flow of runs with their leg spin.

The left-handed Dhawan attempted to keep up the charge despite getting little support from the other end as he reached his third fifty of the season before departing in the 15th over.


Kolkata Knight Riders' Andre Russell plays a shot during the IPL match against Punjab Kings at the the Eden Gardens Stadium in Kolkata yesterday. *(AFP)*

**BRIEF SCORES**
**Kolkata Knight Riders 182 for 5** (Nitish 51, Russell 42, Roy 38, Chahar 2-23) **beat Punjab Kings 179 for 7** (Dhawan 57, Varun 3-26, Harshit 2-33) **by five wickets**

**India name Kishan for World Test Championship final against Australia**

Dashing batsman Ishan Kishan was yesterday named in India's squad for the upcoming World Test Championship final against Australia in place of the injured KL Rahul.

Rahul captains Lucknow Super Giants in the lucrative Indian Premier League but has been sidelined from the rest of the tournament with a right upper thigh injury.

The batsman, 31, will undergo surgery followed by rehab at the National Cricket Academy, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement yesterday.

"He is ruled out of the upcoming ICC World Test Championship (WTC) final against Australia," it said.

A decision on Jaydev Unadkat, who hurt his left shoulder while training in the IPL, for the WTC final will be taken later, the statement added.

Kishan, 24, is uncapped in Test cricket, but has played 14 ODIs and 27 T20Is so far, and was also in the Test squad for the home series against Australia earlier this year.

He is the second wicketkeeper in India's WTC squad behind K.S. Bharat, who made his Test debut against Australia in February in the absence of Rishabh Pant.

Pant is recuperating after a car accident in December.

The WTC final will be played at the Oval from June 7-11.

It will be India's second WTC final after they lost the decider in the inaugural edition to New Zealand in 2021.

CYCLING

# Matthews wins stage three of Giro d'Italia, Evenepoel extends his lead



Team Jayco AlUla's Australian rider Michael Matthews celebrates on the podium after winning the third stage of the Giro d'Italia 2023 cycling race, 216 km between Vasto and Melfi yesterday. *(AFP)*

**Reuters**
Milan

Australian Michael Matthews timed his final effort to perfection to win a rain-affected stage three at the Giro d'Italia yesterday, following a 216-km ride from Vasto to Melfi.

Matthews and Mads Pedersen were neck-and-neck until the final corner, but the Australian, who was set up perfectly by his Jayco-AlUla team, moved in front on the home straight to emerge victorious and claim a first stage win at the Giro since 2015.

"We rode all day today. They were fully committed for me to win the stage," Matthews said.

"I don't have words at the moment. It's been such a roller coaster this year. Now already on stage three with a stage win? That's more than I could ever dream of."

Trek-Segafredo's Pedersen finished second, ahead of Kaden Groves (Alpecin-Deceuninck) and Vincenzo Albanese (EOLO-Kometa).

Corratec-Selle Italia riders Alexander Konychev and Veljko Stojnic were the early pacesetters, leading the stage for the first half of the race, before being reeled in by the main group with 36 km to go.

Belgian Evenepoel extended his lead after taking three bonus seconds to tighten his grip on the leader's maglia rosa jersey, while Joao Almeida recovered from a fall in slippery conditions to move up to second.

Primoz Roglic, who was eclipsed by rival Evenepoel in the intermediate sprint, climbed to third.

"I went for the time bonus in the intermediate sprint because we were just there as we wanted to stay at front because the rain had made the road a bit dangerous," Evenepoel said.

"I saw Roglic and his team mates right behind us so I sprinted. It didn't cost much energy. There were a few seconds up for grabs. One second more on Primoz and three on the others, it's good, especially after such an easy day of racing."

Today's stage four is a 175km ride from Venosa to Lago Laceno, which features two long and manageable ascents before culminating in a steep climb and a flat finish.

BOTTOMLINE

# T-Ten Global Sports launches US Masters T10 League with fanfare

**Agencies**
Dallas

T-Ten Global Sports, organisers of the Abu Dhabi T10, have announced the inaugural season of the US Masters T10 League, to be held in Dallas, Texas.

The league is being co-organised with the help of Ritesh Patel, who also owns a participating franchise SAMP Army. The league, based on the thrilling 10-over format, will have legendary cricketers who have recently retired from the international format along with young and upcoming stars.

There will be six teams but, gauging the interest levels so far, the organisers are bracing for an eight-team cap. The dates are yet to be finalised.



**FROM LEFT:** T-Ten Global Sports chairman Nawab Shaji Ul Mulk, co-organiser Amit Patel, former Pakistan captain Misbah-ul-Haq, basketball player Spencer Dinwiddie and former New Zealand bowler Corey Anderson

Patel, one of the main organisers of the American edition and league partner, said: "We are excited to bring this fast, explosive cricket format to the USA. Players participating in this tournament have huge following all over the globe, and this is a great opportunity for American fans to witness this for the first time on American soil."

Patel's SAMP Army took part in the Abu Dhabi T10 last year. They were led by captain Moeen Ali into the play-offs along with the other American presence, New York Strikers.

The launch of the US Masters T10 League saw in attendance cricketers like Corey Anderson, Misbah-ul-Haq, Shivnarine Chanderpaul and America's leading domestic players.

"It's a great honour to be a part of this format in the US, especially at this age. Everyone wants the older players to play again and so US Masters T10 will be a success," Misbah-ul-Haq said.

"After six momentous editions of the Abu Dhabi T10, and an upcoming Indian Masters League, T Ten Global Sports are thrilled to announce the inaugural edition of US Masters T10 League in USA," said Nawab Shaji ul Mulk, the head of TTGS. "T10 was founded in 2017 to bring the format of a fast game such as football. We are in the US now after 6 years. Since this is a fast, energetic and action-based sport, we thought US would be a great destination for a format like this."

To embed the sport of cricket within the American audience and the cricket-loving diaspora, other US sporting stars are also joining by buying ownership within teams.

Basketball player and Brooklyn Nets point guard Spencer Dinwiddie is joining the Morrisville Unity team. "I am super excited to be a part of the US Masters T10 League and working alongside Shaji Ul Mulk and Ritesh Patel who are introducing this growing international sport of cricket to America," the NBA superstar, 30, said.




Kayvon Thibodeaux, the outside linebacker of the New York Giants team in the National Football League, is going to be a part of his team's city franchise in the league – NY Warriors T10. "I'm excited to be a part of an effort to promote the sport of cricket in America."

FORMULA 1

# Verstappen comes from ninth on grid to win Miami GP

'FOR SURE WINNING A RACE FROM P9 IS ALWAYS VERY SATISFYING'

**AFP**
Miami



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium after winning the Miami Grand Prix. *(AFP)*

World champion Max Verstappen powered from ninth on the grid to beat team-mate Sergio Perez and extend Red Bull's all-conquering start to the season with victory at the Miami Grand Prix on Sunday.

The win - Red Bull's fifth from five races this season - extends Verstappen's lead at the top of the standings to 14 points and follows his triumph in the inaugural Miami race last year.

The 1-2 for Red Bull is their fourth in five races so far this year as the team utterly dominate the sport leaving their rivals to battle for the third podium position. Aston Martin's Spanish veteran Fernando Alonso took third for his fourth podium in five races this season as he continues to enjoy his late career revival.

Verstappen had to work hard for his third victory of the campaign after his disappointing performance in Saturday's qualifying left him in the middle of the grid. But the speed of the Red Bull car, combined with smart decisions on tyres, meant that the Dutchman was able to quickly get himself in contention and then produce a late surge to beat his team-mate Perez, who remains second in the standings.

Perez, starting on pole, made the perfect start, racing clear of his rivals but Verstappen, on hard tyres, quickly moved through the field and took just 15 laps to reach second place behind his teammate.

Perez pitted on lap 20 allowing Verstappen to take the lead but the Dutchman had to give that up when he went into the pits on lap 46, changing to the medium compound tyres and coming out 1.2 seconds behind.

It took just two laps for Verstappen, who won the inaugural Miami Grand Prix a year ago, to take advantage of his fresher tyres with better grip as, after a brief joust, he overtook the Mexican, on 25-lap-old tyres, to take the lead.

Verstappen's 38th win for Red Bull equals the team record set by Sebastian Vettel and is the first time a driver has won from exactly ninth on the grid since Niki Lauda at the French Grand Prix in 1984.

"I took the cars off one by one and then I could stay out really long on the hard tyres and that's where we I think made the difference," said Verstappen.

"For sure winning a race from P9 is always very satisfying," he said. It was a disappointing day for Perez, who after his victory in Baku last week, had a great chance to win from pole but was left frustrated with the tyre choice. I think the medium initially was really poor. It wasn't expected and that really compromised our pace," said Perez.

"Then, in all honesty, I think Max had tremendous pace on that hard tyre and I have got to analyse what happened today because we simply didn't have the pace," he added. Mercedes had some consolation at the end of a difficult week with George Russell

taking fourth place ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and team-mate Lewis Hamilton finishing sixth.

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff had described the car as a "nasty piece of work" after qualifying but Russell was delighted with his fourth. "I am feeling pumped to be honest because it has been a while since we had a good race like that where we made overtakes stick," he said.

"I would have liked to have been three positions higher but we know the position we are as a team right now and P4 was the maximum today," he added.

Charles Leclerc, who crashed late in qualifying and started seventh on the grid, finished in seventh place on another disappointing day for Ferrari.

"There's really a lot of work to do," said Leclerc. "We have a car that has a good feeling under ideal conditions, but as soon as you get away a bit it gets complicated. We need a more consistent car especially in the race.

"It's a very difficult situation because you can fight in qualifying, but then in the race you have to accept that you are passed."

The Alpine pair of French drivers Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocan finished eighth and ninth with Dane Kevin Magnussen finishing tenth. It was a tough debut in his homeland for American rookie Logan Sargeant of Williams who had to pit early after losing his front wing and ended last.

## MIAMI GRAND PRIX CONSIDERS SWITCH TO NIGHT RACE

The Miami Grand Prix is considering a switch to becoming a night race, Tom Garfinkel, the event's managing partner, said yesterday.
Garfinkel said that talks were ongoing with Formula One management about options for the future and said a night race was one item on the agenda.
"We've had some discussions about potentially doing that," Garfinkel told reporters on Sunday.
Sunday's race, won by Red Bull's Max Verstappen, was the second Grand Prix held in Miami, with the event taking place around Hard Rock Stadium, home to the NFL's Miami Dolphins.
Garfinkel, who is also president and chief executive of the Dolphins, indicated that the intense heat of last year had contributed to the idea.
"Obviously at this time of year, the weather is a little unpredictable," he said. "This year is pretty nice and the breezes have helped a lot, but last year was unseasonably hot."
Moving the race to the night would, however, have an impact on European television ratings, given it would be broadcast well after midnight. "There's a lot of factors that go into that (decision) with F1 and television and everything else. So, we've got to weigh all those things. But we're certainly open-minded to it," he said.
"We're not at a place where we're making a decision right now. I think we're having discussions about if we did it, and what would it look like."
The new Las Vegas Grand Prix in November will be a night race and F1 also races after dark in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Singapore. *(AFP)*

MOTORSPORT

# Veteran al-Atya set to participate in WRC in Portugal


Qatar's Nasser al-Atya and Italian co-driver Bernacchini Giovanni feature pose before testing their car ahead of this week's WRC Master Cup leg in Portugal.

**By Sports Reporter**
Doha

Veteran driver Nasser bin **Khalifa al-Atya** and Italian co-driver Bernacchini Giovanni will feature in this week's WRC Master Cup leg in Portugal.

Al-Atya, who returned to action almost four years ago, yesterday tested his Ford Fiesta R5 with Giovanni.

"The test went really well. It was really tough, very technical. We will be doing this for the next three days also. We arrived yesterday and got down to the track today," al-Atya said yesterday.

"I hope we do well in the rally. There are 87 participants and clearly it is a very strong field. I am hoping to do well as I have been preparing for this season well," he added.

"I am very excited to represent Qatar on my own. I am very excited. I will try to keep the Qatar flag flying high," al-Atya said.

The WRC Masters Cup is a category that is making a debut for drivers over the age of 50. A former Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) series runner-up in 1993, al-Atya returned to track in 2019 after a gap of 22 years.

"I am getting stronger with my practice with the car. My physical fitness is good too as I am training in the gym. I am confident about my chances," he added.

## Top fighters unwilling to put legacy on the line: Paul

Jake Paul said top boxers are too focused on protecting their undefeated records and should be more willing to sign up for high-profile fights.
Britain's Tyson Fury and Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk agreed late last year to a heavyweight unification title fight but the talks broke down in March.
Former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua also invited Fury to think again about a future fight, though nothing has been finalised.
"It's annoying, I think in boxing fighters are not willing to risk their undefeated record and put it all on the line," YouTuber-turned-boxer Paul told Sky Sports on Sunday at Formula One's Miami Grand Prix.
"Their legacy and being undefeated is more important to them because Floyd Mayweather set that example for the sport so if you lose you're 'swept under the rug' in boxing."
Paul applauded Ryan Garcia for agreeing to face the unbeatean Gervonta Davis last month in the non-title catchweight fight, even though he suffered the first defeat of his career.
"Even though he lost he did what a lot of other fighters aren't doing and making big fights happen," Paul added. Having lost to Tommy Fury in their fight in Saudi Arabia in February, Paul said he is confident of facing the British reality TV star in a rematch.
"It's going to happen, it's going to happen for sure," Paul said. "Tommy is down and I'm excited for that."

FOCUS

# ATP hails 'new era' for Chinese tennis at Shanghai Masters launch

**AFP**
Shanghai



ATP Executive Vice-President International Alison Lee (centre) signs a big tennis ball during Shanghai Masters 2023 launch ceremony yesterday. *(AFP)*

ATP executives hailed a "new era" for Chinese tennis as they relaunched the lucrative Shanghai Masters yesterday after three consecutive years of Covid cancellations.

The flagship event of the men's game in the Asia-Pacific region was among many international sporting fixtures stopped by Beijing's strict anti-virus measures over the past few years.

International sports bodies have sought to bring back such events since those restrictions were lifted in December.

"We are very confident this is the moment we will start a new journey... for tennis in China," ATP CEO Massimo Calvelli said at a launch ceremony.

Elite women's tennis is also returning to China after the WTA abandoned in March a boycott

it had imposed over concerns for the safety of player Peng Shuai. Peng, a former doubles world number one, has not been

seen outside China since 2021, when she made - and then withdrew - accusations of sexual assault against a high-ranking official.

The WTA had said it would not return to China without a formal investigation into the

allegations and an opportunity to meet privately with Peng.

Calvelli, when asked why the men's game had not joined the boycott, said the ATP had made "different considerations".

"For me the important part is the WTA is coming back, which is the right thing for the sport," he told journalists before the ceremony for the Shanghai Masters. Calvelli pointed to the success of Chinese players as another reason it was a "special time to come back".

Wu Yibing beat US player John Isner in the Dallas Open in February to become the first Chinese player to lift an ATP tour trophy.

Zhang Zhizhen then became the first Chinese player to reach the quarter-finals of an ATP Masters 1000 event when he beat American Taylor Fritz in the Madrid Open last week.

October's Shanghai Masters will double its duration and the prize-money pool will exceed $10 million, making it the richest sports event in Asia, the ATP said yesterday.

The event is the last of four ATP Tour events in China scheduled this year.

Former world number one Daniil Medvedev will headline the Zhuhai Championships on September 20-26, which will run concurrently with another tournament in Chengdu.

The China Open will then begin in Beijing in late September, leading into the Shanghai Masters.

Several other major international sports events will be held in China in 2023.

Badminton's Sudirman Cup begins on Sunday, and the Asian Games kick off in Hangzhou in September. Major snooker and golf tournaments are also planned.

## Nadal missing French Open would be 'brutal': Federer

Roger Federer said he hopes Rafa Nadal will recover in time for the French Open and that it would be a "brutal" blow for tennis if the 14-time Roland Garros champion is absent this year. Nadal has been dealing with a hip injury he suffered at the Australian Open in January, and fears that the Spaniard may miss the Paris Grand Slam grew after he pulled out of this week's Italian Open.
Nadal skipped last week's Madrid Open and also missed tournaments at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona. "It would be brutal, it would be tough for tennis if Rafa isn't going to be there," 20-times Grand Slam winner Federer told Sky Sports on Sunday at Formula One's Miami Grand Prix. "I still hope so, I saw he pulled out of Rome so I wish him the best. Obviously Novak (Djokovic) hasn't been playing that much so I hope he's going to be strong as well and then all the young guys coming through as well," added Federer, who retired from tennis last year. Nadal has competed at the French Open every year since winning the first of his men's record 22 major titles in Paris in 2005. The claycourt major begins on May 28.

SPOTLIGHT

# Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Final Draw: All you need to know

In just three days' time, Asia's top 24 teams will learn their route to ultimate glory at the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023. All eyes will be on Doha for the Final Draw ceremony as the stage is set for the Continent's flagship international tournament, which kicks off on January 12, 2024.

Ahead of the glitz and glamour, the-AFC.com presents some interesting facts and figures ahead of this Thursday's draw.


Katara Opera House will provides the perfect setting for the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Final Draw.

**CULTURAL BEATS**

A world-renowned cultural hub for artistes and musicians, the Katara Opera House provides the perfect setting for the Final Draw with its sophisticated architecture that fuses modern and traditional Islamic design elements, and is home to the renowned Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, which sows the seeds of symphonic music in the Arab region, while serving as a platform for music from all over the world.

Both music and football are universal languages with the inherent ability to merge cultures and traditions, and the Katara Opera House stands ideal as a venue to showcase the richness of Qatari and Asian culture.

Proceedings at the only facility of its kind in Qatar kick off at 2pm local time and will be livestreamed on the AFC YouTube channel and Facebook page.

**LUCK OF THE DRAW**

After an intense and enthralling qualification period spanning three years concluded in June 2022, a final cast of 24 teams is left standing.

The teams will be divided into four Pots of six each in accordance with the latest FIFA Ranking. Thereafter, the teams will be drawn into six groups of four each across Groups A to F.

To ensure that Qatar commences the tournament with the opening match, the hosts have been allocated the first position in Pot 1. The full list is as follows:

Pot 1: Qatar, Japan, Iran, South Korea, Australia, Saudi Arabia

Pot 2: Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Uzbekistan, China, Jordan

Pot 3: Bahrain, Syria, Palestine, Vietnam, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon

Pot 4: India, Tajikistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia

**THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM?**

The decision to award the Asian Cup 2023 hosting responsibility last October to the Qatar Football Association (QFA) means that Qatar will be the first country to host the Continental showpiece for a third time.

Having staged the tournament in 1988 and 2011, the defending champions move ahead of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates, who have each twice served as hosts. It is the seventh time that the Asian Cup will be played in the West Zone.

With Qatar having hosted the FIFA World Cup 2022, it also means that this will be the first ever AFC Asian Cup to have matches played at World Cup venues. As many as 13 teams at the Asian Cup 2023 were also present at the 2011 edition. Sure to be backed by a partisan crowd, Carlos Queiroz's men are bidding to become only the fifth team to win back-to-back Asian crowns after Iran, Japan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia.

**A DEBUTANT, A RETURNING TRIO AND OLD-TIMERS**

Tajikistan will become the 36th debutant in Asian Cup history when they take to the field in Qatar, thanks to Shervoni Mabatshoev's winning goal against Singapore on June 11 , 2022 during the third round of Qualifiers that sealed a historic qualification to Asia's crown jewel.

The Dastai Muntakhabi, who had previously fallen short at the same qualifying stage for the 2019 edition, are the only new face at the Asian Cup Qatar 2023 and their qualification means that since the competition's inception in 1956, only two editions have not been graced by at least one debutant.

Only three of the remaining 23 teams were not involved in the 2019 showpiece in the UAE – Indonesia, Hong Kong, China and Malaysia. While the Garuda and Harimau Malaya both last took part in 2007, Hong Kong, China's participation is their first since the fourth edition that took place in 1968.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Iran and South Korea will each be contesting their 15th Asian Cup, two more than China, who are second on the list. Iran have played the most games in Finals history with 68 and are also the only team to have lifted the trophy three times in a row (1968, 1972, 1976).

Elsewhere, Japan, the tournament's most successful side with four triumphs, and 2007 champions Iraq are the eighth and ninth teams to reach 10 Asian Cup participations.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Madrid must halt Man City, not only Haaland: Ancelotti

## Norwegian striker has scored 51 goals in 45 games across all competitions

**AFP**
Madrid

Carlo Ancelotti said his Real Madrid side must stop Manchester City's whole team and not just striker Erling Haaland when they meet in the Champions League semi-finals today. The reigning 14-time record champions host Pep Guardiola's hungry visitors in the first leg who are spearheaded by Norwegian hitman Haaland, who boasts 51 goals in 45 games across all competitions.

The 22-year-old has notched 12 of those in eight Champions League matches, but Ancelotti said his plan was to try and foil a City side that looks "unstoppable" as a whole. "Obviously Haaland is a very dangerous player. He's showing impressive qualities, above all in goalscoring. He's a threat obviously," Ancelotti said yesterday.

"Just talking about Haaland means not talking about a complete team that plays good football, defends well, attacks, that has ideas. We're not setting up for a game to stop Haaland, but to stop a team that seems unstoppable, but I think we can have chances to have an equal game, one that we can win."

City have been foiled time and time again in their quest to win the Champions League, but Haaland's lethal edge gives them a strong chance of beating Madrid and reaching the final. Ancelotti said he thought Manchester City have more avenues to cause danger with Haaland in the side. "It's a more complete team than last year. They had a very good forward in Gabriel Jesus, but he has different characteristics to Haaland," continued the Italian coach. "Today, they can take advantage more of long balls, because they have a very tall striker, and behind him is (Kevin) De Bruyne, so they can win balls in the air. They have not changed their style, they are very well organised at the back and a team that handles the ball very well."


Real Madrid players train on the eve of their Champions League semi-final first leg match against Manchester City. *(AFP)*

**SEEKING 'REVENGE' HUGE MISTAKE AGAINST MADRID: GUARDIOLA**

Seeking Champions League revenge against Real Madrid would be a grave error by Manchester City, Guardiola claimed yesterday.

The City coach said his team would try and capitalise on an "opportunity" instead of aiming to make Ancelotti's reigning champions pay for eliminating them at the same stage last season.

The former Barcelona player and manager was at odds with City's defensive midfielder Rodri, who said the team were hungry for revenge against the record 14-time winners today at the Santiago Bernabeu. "It will be a huge mistake, we're not here for revenge, just an opportunity," Guardiola said.

"Last season we did everything, more than everything to reach the final, but (in) football... it's not enough."

City have never lifted the trophy but Madrid have triumphed five times in the last nine seasons. Guardiola's side beat Madrid 4-3 in the first leg last season and led by a goal in the return, until two late Rodrygo Goes strikes forced extra-time.

Karim Benzema scored a penalty in the additional period to send Madrid through to the Paris final, where they beat Liverpool.

"I think we did 180 minutes brilliantly but it's not enough sometimes, you can lose the leg in five minutes," said Spanish midfielder Rodri. "You have to kill the opponent when you can. We've learnt from the past but I don't like to talk about the past. We've learnt a lot, it's another year, another goal, with the hunger of having revenge."

LIGUE 1

# Messi returns to training with PSG

**AFP**
Paris

Lionel Messi returned to training with Paris Saint-Germain yesterday six days after Argentina's World Cup-winning captain was suspended for going on an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia. "Leo Messi returns to training Monday morning," tweeted the club along with a photo of the 35-year-old in action.

His return makes it likely he will feature in PSG's home match with relegation-threatened Ajaccio next Saturday. PSG hold the whip hand in defending their Ligue 1 title, a six point lead over Lens with four matches remaining. He was suspended by the Qatar-owned club after failing to turn up for training last Monday.

Instead, the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner travelled to Saudi Arabia without PSG's permission to fulfil commitments as part of a contract with the country's tourist office. Messi subsequently apologised in a video.

The affair has made it increasingly unlikely that Messi will remain at PSG beyond this season, when his two-year contract with the club expires.

On Sunday night, PSG got their bid for a record 11th French league title back on track by beating Troyes 3-1 . After PSG lost to Lorient at home the previous weekend, angry fans protested outside the club's headquarters and at the home of injured Brazilian star Neymar.

Kylian Mbappe scored first with a close-range header after seven minutes, drawing level with Lyon's Alexandre Lacazette on 24 league goals this season. Vitinha's right-footed finish on 58 minutes seemed to have put PSG on the way to victory but they lowered their guard and allowed Xavier Chavalerin to pull a goal back for Troyes when he headed past Gianluigi Donnarumma.

PSG poured forward looking for a third goal and after Mbappe's poked finish from Renato Sanches was saved, Fabian Ruiz curled in the rebound to make the three points safe.

Former Arsenal forward Lacazette had a remarkable day, scoring four goals including a penalty with the last kick of the match as Lyon fought back from three goals down to beat Montpellier 5-4. Earlier, fourth-placed Monaco pulled five points clear of Lille with a 2-1 win at Angers. Nantes meanwhile continued their slide towards Ligue 2 as they lost 2-0 at home to relegation rivals Strasbourg.

They remain 17th in the 20-team league, but this season four clubs go down as Ligue 1 will shrink to 18 clubs next season. After starting the day trailing Strasbourg only on goal difference, Nantes are two points behind 16th-placed Auxerre.



Lionel Messi poses with his Laureus World Sportsman of the Year award in Paris yesterday. *(AFP)*

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Everton stun Brighton to move out of relegation zone, Fulham beat Leicester

**AFP**
London

Everton moved out of the Premier League relegation zone with a stunning 5-1 win at Brighton yesterday, while Leicester's hopes of survival are hanging by a thread after a 5-3 defeat at Fulham. Brighton are in the hunt to qualify for Europe for the first time in the club's history, but a heavy schedule looked to have taken its toll on Roberto De Zerbi's men as they were torn apart by an Everton side that had not won away since October.

The Toffees had the dream start as Abdoulaye Doucoure opened the scoring after just 34 seconds. Doucoure's brilliant volley from Dwight McNeil's cross doubled Everton's lead before Brighton goalkeeper Jason Steele deflected McNeil's cross into his own net. De Zerbi responded by making four half-time substitutions and Brighton peppered the Everton goal but were caught out on the counter-attack when McNeil showed great poise to round Steele to make it 4-0.

Alexis Mac Allister finally pulled a goal back after Kaoru Mitoma's initial effort came off the post. But McNeil fittingly had the final say as he rounded off a brilliant performance in stoppage time by smashing into the top corner. A first win in eight games lifts Sean Dyche's men two points clear of the drop zone. Brighton remain in seventh, two points behind Tottenham with two games in hand, but their outside shot at a top-four finish now appears gone.


Everton's Dwight McNeil (right) celebrates with Abdoulaye Doucoure after scoring against Brighton during the Premier League match. *(AFP)*

Leicester boss Dean Smith admitted his players might be struggling with the pressures of a relegation battle after a disastrous defensive display at Craven Cottage. The Foxes, who won the Premier League in stunning fashion in 2016 and lifted the FA Cup two years ago, are staring relegation in the face.

Leicester remain outside the relegation zone on goal difference for now but could end the day in the bottom three should Nottingham Forest avoid defeat at home to Southampton. Smith's men also face a tough run-in with Champions League-chasing Liverpool and Newcastle to come before ending the season at home to West Ham.

Only Leeds and Bournemouth have conceded more goals than Leicester in the Premier League and defensive deficiencies were again their undoing at Craven Cottage. Goals from Willian, Carlos Vinicius and Tom Cairney put Fulham 3-0 up before half-time.

Cairney and Willian struck again either side of Harvey Barnes' consolation to make it 5-1. Jamie Vardy also saw Leicester's first penalty of the game saved by Bernd Leno in an action-packed second-half before the visitors pulled two more goals back in the final 10 minutes. James Maddison converted a second penalty before Barnes pounced to make it 5-3 after a calamitous defensive mix-up between Shane Duffy and Leno. But it was too little, too late for Leicester who face an anxious wait to see where they will sit in the table before they are in action again in a week's time against Liverpool.