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India, Sri Lanka eye Asia crown for World Cup momentum



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Brighton thump Man United as Man City come from behind

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SQUASH

Farag beats Elias to clinch his third Qatar Classic title

'The one person I want to thank the most and is my inspiration every day is my wife Nour'



QTerminals Qatar Classic champion Ali Farag (right) and runner-up Diego Elias (left) pose with Tareq Zainal, secretary-general of the Qatar Tennis, Squash and Badminton Federation, after the final at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Ali Farag won his third QTerminals Qatar Classic title yesterday after beating Diego Elias 3-1 (15-13, 11-5, 8-11, 11-9) in a gripping final at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex. Ahead of the match, much had been made of the World No 1's dominant 19-3 head-to-head record over Elias, with the Peruvian's sole win since 2017 coming when Farag was forced to retire hurt in the final of last year's US Open.

Despite Farag's superior record, it was Elias who started the opening game better, with the 26-year-old accurate at the front as he took the first five points of the final. Farag responded by pushing up the court and flipped the momentum, taking ten of the next twelve points to earn three game balls at 10-7. Elias dug in well to save all three, forcing a tie break at 10-10. After

three more game balls for Farag, and one for Elias, it was the Egyptian who managed to break the deadlock, clinching a brutal 26-minute first game 15-13.

The bruising nature and finale of the first game appeared to have sapped the strength from Elias' legs in the second, with the Peruvian struggling badly against Farag's relentless pressing as the top seed doubled his lead with a comfortable 11-5 win. Game three was a more even contest, with Elias moving far better than in the second game.

Farag, who appeared to be closing in on a second title of the season at 8-5 up, then allowed Elias back into the contest, with the World No 1 making an uncharacteristic number of errors as a resurgent Elias forced his way into the contest with an 11-8 win. There were more worrying signs from Farag early in game four, with the Egyptian - who appeared fatigued - making more errors as Elias dominated play to take the first three points. The Egyptian, however,

was able to claw back momentum, finding a second wind and going on the hunt as he reeled in 'the Puma's' lead before bringing a thrilling final to an end with an 11-9 win.

For both Elias and Farag, attention turns to the Platinum-level US Open, which takes place which takes place between 07-14 October in Philadelphia's Arlen Specter US Squash Center.

Afterwards, Farag said: "I had to put in a world class performance to be able to compete with Diego. He's such a champion, the way he's been playing these last couple of years. This week he's been phenomenal, and I don't need to talk about his squash because it speaks volumes about itself.

"He's a true champion. To call a tin against himself at 12-12 when we're going for the No 1 spot and the referee hadn't called it speaks volumes about the character he is and I really appreciate sharing a court with him and I look forward to many more [finals] together in the future. It doesn't get any better than this. I had a lot



Ali Farag is all smiles as he poses with his wife and women's World No 8 Nour El Tayeb and daughter after his victory yesterday.



Ali Farag and Diego Elias in action during the pulsating final.

of the people I care for and who care about me in my corner. The crowd lifted me up all week."

Farag added a moving tribute to wife and women's World No 8 Nour El Tayeb: "The one person I want to thank the most and is my inspiration every day is Nour. The way she juggles between being a great mother, a great wife, a great squash player, a great daughter and a great friend, everything is about her is admirable. I am grateful to be

with such a person day in and day out."

Elias added: "I'm not very happy with the result, but I'm actually very happy with the way I ended up fighting at the end of the match. I'm just happy I'm getting closer and hopefully next time I get the title. I've been improving match by match, tournament by tournament and I didn't finish too badly. I'm just excited for the next one and hopefully I can fight for another title soon."

CHESS

Carlsen, Nakamura among top stars for Qatar Masters

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Chess Federation (QCF) is preparing to host the third edition of the Qatar Masters International Open Chess Championship which will include an elite group of the most prominent players. The championship will be held at the Lusail Sports Hall from October 10-20.

Qatar Masters carries a total prize money of \$110,000 with the title winner receiving \$25,000. The championship will witness the participation of 170 players with the biggest and brightest chess stars present.

World No 1 and five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen of Norway is at the forefront of the participating stars as he makes his third appearance after having previously appeared in the 2014 and 2015 editions. World No 3 American Hikaru Nakamura, Dutchman Anish Giri, ranked seventh in the world, India's eighth-ranked Dommaraju Gukesh, Jorden van Forrest and Iran's Parham Maqsoodlou will also take part.

Also participating in the championship is 17-year-old Indian Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa, who defeated world champion Magnus Carlsen last year in the Airthings Masters Chess. Praggnanandhaa finished second to Carlsen at



Mohamed al-Mudahka, president of the Qatar Chess Federation.

the FIDE World Cup in Baku last month.

Kazakh's Woman Grandmaster Bibisara Asaubayeva, the world blitz chess champion in 2021 and 2022, has also announced her participation in the women's competition, which includes 16 players along with India's Grandmaster Ramesh Vaishali and her compatriot Vantika Agrawal.

Among the Arab players, Qatari participation is led by Hussein Aziz, besides Bassem Amin of Egypt and Salem Abdulrahman from the United

Arab Emirates.

Mohamed al-Mudahka, president of the Qatar Chess Federation and chairman of the Organising Committee, said that the federation is putting the final touches on all arrangements in order to complete them on time, indicating that the tournament will witness many accompanying events.

He said: "The Qatar Masters Championship is considered one of the strongest open tournaments, given that it includes the most prominent champions of the game in the world. I believe that the competitions will be exciting in October and we are very happy to host this major tournament and its return again after it was previously organised in two successive editions in 2014 and 2015."

Hamad al-Tamimi, executive director of the Qatar Chess Federation and director of the championship, confirmed that the organisational preparations have reached their final stages, indicating that the championship matches will be broadcast on international chess websites, as well as the QCF's website, in addition to the presence of studio analysis throughout the championship.

He said: "We seek to continue the series of successes in organising an ideal tournament for this type of tournament, and organising a successful edition of the Qatar Masters International Open Chess Championship."

QATAR MASTERS OPEN 2023				
Rating: 2839	Rating: 2780	Rating: 2760	Rating: 2758	Rating: 2727
Rating: 2716	Rating: 2712	Rating: 2707	Rating: 2705	Rating: 2699

Qatar Masters carries a total prize money of \$110,000 with the title winner receiving \$25,000.

CYCLING

Kuss set for Vuelta victory as Poels wins stage 20

AFP
Barcelona

Sep Kuss is set to win the 2023 Vuelta a España, the American's first Grand Tour title, after successfully defending his slim overall lead in yesterday's penultimate stage which was won by Wout Poels.

Kuss went into the penultimate stage of the race 17 seconds ahead of Jumbo-Visma teammate Jonas Vingegaard, with Primoz Roglic completing the team's domination of the general classification in third place, and the three crossed the finish line together. Shortly before, Wout Poels outsprinted Remco Evenepoel to claim the stage win, after both riders were part of an early breakaway group.

With the Jumbo-Visma team happy to sit back and defend their top three places overall, a 31-man breakaway group on the opening climb led by last year's Vuelta winner Evenepoel was allowed to stay away and extend its gap.

Stage 20 was the longest of this year's race, a 208 kilometre hilly ride from Manzanares El Real to Guadarrama. While none of the ascents were above category three, the riders did face 10 climbs before the final flat eight kilometres.

Evenepoel, whose general classification hopes evaporated on stage 13 where he lost more than 27 minutes on the leaders, seemed poised to win his fourth stage of this year's Vuelta.

The Belgian had three Soudal Quick-Step teammates alongside him for most of the race.

While Jumbo-Visma cruised along to safely guide the peloton, the breakaway was pushed by Quick-Step. They increased the pace in the final 50 kilometres, dropping riders along the way.

The final climb saw Poels attempt to get away from the rest and it looked like Evenepoel's race was over, but he rallied to rejoin the Dutchman along with three other riders.

But Poels, of the Bahrain Victorious team, put in a last-chance attack just before the final corner to get ahead of Evenepoel and held on to beat him in the final sprint, with Pelayo Sanchez finishing third. More than 10 minutes later the Jumbo-Visma trio strolled to the finish line.

A beaming Kuss was flanked by this year's Tour de France winner Vingegaard and Giro d'Italia winner Roglic, with the team set to make history by becoming the first to win all three Grand Tours in one season – and with three different riders.

The Vuelta concludes today with a flat 101.5 kilometre ride from Hipodromo de la Zarzuela into Madrid.

Dutch rider Wout Poels celebrates after crossing the finish line during the stage 20 of the 2023 La Vuelta, a 207.8km race between Manzanares el Real and Guadarrama, yesterday. (AFP)



CRICKET

India, Sri Lanka eye Asia crown for WC momentum

'We came without our key players, but still we managed to make final'

AFP
Colombo

Rohit Sharma's India face underdogs Sri Lanka in today's Asia Cup final, a crucial momentum-builder heading into next month's ODI World Cup.

The cricketing giants have 13 Asian titles between them and Sri Lanka have a history of sneaking into the tournament's final – to the consternation of fans keen for any showdown between arch-rivals India and Pakistan.

Bangladesh ended India's unbeaten run in the 50-over tournament after edging them out by six runs in Friday's last Super Four match. Shubman Gill hit 121 but his knock went in vain after India faltered in their chase of 266 in Colombo, where today's final will also be held.

"I don't think it has broken our momentum," Gill told reporters after the narrow defeat.

"We have played good cricket. Sometimes it happens on these wickets. I was set and should have finished off the game."

Gill said clinching India's eighth Asia Cup title would give them "confidence" ahead of the World Cup starting back home on October 5. India began with a washed-out match in Pallekele against Pakistan, whose fast bowlers rattled their top order and bowled them out for 266 in the only innings possible due to rain.

Big guns Virat Kohli and returning batsman KL Rahul hit back with centuries in their next outing against Babar Azam's team to rack up 356-2 and crush Pakistan by 228 runs.

India then prevented a gutsy Sri Lankan chase to book their place in the final, but Gill said their opponents were still a threat. "We will have to pull up our socks



Sri Lanka's Pathum Nissanka (right) speaks with captain Dasun Shanaka during a team practice session at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday, on the eve of their Asia Cup final against India. (AFP)

and be at our 100 percent to beat them," he said.

Sri Lanka, who won the previous edition of the Asia Cup played in the T20 format, came in as underdogs and snuck into the Super Fours with a dramatic win over Afghanistan. They soon got into

their groove on home soil and, despite going down to India, edged out Pakistan in a knockout match for their 11th Asia Cup final.

"We came without our key players, but still we managed to make the finals," skipper Dasun Shanaka said.

Injuries sidelined Dushmantha Chameera and Wanindu Hasaranga, but others stood up at crucial junctures.

Kusal Mendis and Charith Asalanka both hit match-winning knocks to take the team over the line in a rain-shortened match and push a much-favoured Pakistan out of the tournament.

Up-and-coming fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana and left-arm spinner Duniya Wellalage have impressed and lead the tournament's bowling chart with 11 and 10 wickets respectively.

Wellalage rattled India's batting with five wickets including the prized scalps of Kohli and Rohit in their Super Four match.

Twice before in the Asia Cup Sri Lanka have lost to India in the Super Four stage only to beat them in the finals, in 2004 and 2008.

Theekshana out of final

Theekshana has been ruled out of the Asia Cup final against India due to an injury, Shanaka confirmed yesterday. Theekshana, 23, hurt his hamstring during their Super Four win over Pakistan. "He won't be able to take part in this game since he got a Grade 3 injury, but he will be there for the World Cup," Shanaka said.

Sundar replaces injured Patel

India spinner Axar Patel has been ruled out of the Asia Cup final against Sri Lanka and Washington Sundar joined the team as a replacement, the country's cricket board said yesterday. Patel suffered a "left quadriceps strain" in the team's Super Four loss to Bangladesh where the bowling all-rounder took a wicket and scored 42 runs.

Sundar, an off-spinner who also bats, arrived in the Sri Lankan capital yesterday evening to join the squad, according to the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan sweat on pacer Naseem's fitness ahead of World Cup

AFP
Karachi

Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah is doubtful for next month's World Cup due to a shoulder injury, with the PCB awaiting medical reports before making a final call on his fitness and participation.

Naseem was ruled out of the Asia Cup after suffering the injury during a tournament match against India in Colombo last Sunday. Pakistan's local media reported initial scans of his right shoulder showed the injury was worse than expected but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said yesterday that Naseem was still being monitored.

"The PCB medical team has been monitoring the status of Naseem's shoulder injury," the board said. "Medical consultations with the experts are underway to provide the best possible care to Naseem. The medical panel will decide on fast bowler's return to cricket based on further assessments."

The 20-year-old has been part Pakistan's pace trio along with Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf. Rauf also suffered injury to his flank and had to miss the Sri Lanka game in the Asia Cup.

Naseem's absence will hit Pakistan's chances in the World Cup which starts in India on October 5. They also failed to reach the final of the Asia Cup after suffering a crushing 228-run defeat against India and by two wickets against Sri Lanka.

Australia's Head's World Cup in jeopardy as he breaks hand

Australian opener Travis Head's participation at next month's World Cup is in doubt after he broke his hand during Friday's one day international against South Africa.

Head had to retire hurt in his country's 164-run defeat to South Africa at Centurion on Friday after being hit on the hand by Gerald Coetzee.

"It's a confirmed fracture but as to the nature of the break and what sort of timeframe to heal, that will be assessed tomorrow," said Australia coach Andrew McDonald.

The 29-year-old Head, who has been a spearhead at the top of the innings for Australia in one dayers, would be sorely missed if he is to be ruled out of the World Cup, which starts in India on Oct. 5.

"He's going to go in for some more scans tomorrow... We have fingers crossed, clearly with the World Cup, fast approaching," McDonald added.



Australia's Travis Head receives medical treatment during the fourth ODI against South Africa at the SuperSport Park in Centurion on Friday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

Bangladesh rest key players for New Zealand ODIs ahead of World Cup



Litton Das to lead Bangladesh against New Zealand three-match ODI series. (AFP)

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday named a 15-man squad for this month's three-match one-day international series against New Zealand, resting several key players, including regular captain Shakib Al Hasan.

Batsman Mushfiqur Rahim, all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz, and pace trio Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam, have all been rested alongside Shakib.

Naim Sheikh, Afif Hossain, and Shamim Hossain, who also played in the Asia Cup, have been excluded, the Bangladesh Cricket Board said in a statement.

Opening batsman Liton Das will lead the squad, which marks the return of senior campaigners Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad, alongside Soumya Sarkar and Nurul Hasan Sohan.

Tamim did not play a game since his retirement U-turn against Afghanistan in July, while Mahmudullah played the last of his 218 ODIs against England in March.

Uncapped opener Zakir Hasan, pacer Syed Khaled Ahmed, and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain also made the squad. "The decision to rest players was taken in consideration of the World Cup in India, which will be a long tournament where ensuring the mental and physical fitness of the cricketers will be very important," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin.

"The series against New Zealand provides us an opportunity to take a look at some other players as well ahead of this major event," he added. Minhajul said that the newly-called Zakir was very close to playing against Ireland in March before he suffered an unfortunate injury.

"Khaled has done well in his list A career, and Rishad offers a different dimension to our bowling attack," he said.

New Zealand will arrive in Dhaka today for the series, which begins on September 21 at Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The second and third ODIs will be held on the same ground on September 23 and 26. The series will be the last for both teams before the World Cup starts in India on October 5.

Bangladesh, who failed to qualify for the final in the ongoing Asia Cup, won their previous two ODI home series against New Zealand 4-0 in 2010 and 3-0 in 2013.

New Zealand will also play two Tests in Bangladesh after the World Cup ends on November 19.

SQUAD: Liton Das (Captain), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Anamul Haque, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah Riyad, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mahedi Hasan, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Zakir Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Khaled Ahmed.

FORMULA 1

Sainz on pole after Verstappen out in Q2

AFP
Singapore

Carlos Sainz took pole position in a Ferrari yesterday for the Singapore Grand Prix after a dramatic qualifying session where world championship leader Max Verstappen and his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez failed to make it into the top-10 shootout.

Sainz's lap of 1min 30.984sec pipped the Mercedes of George Russell by 0.072sec and the second Ferrari of Charles Leclerc who was third, 0.007sec further back.

Red Bull had struggled for pace all weekend but nobody expected Verstappen, who has won the last 10 races in a row, to finish 11th fastest in Q2 and be eliminated along with Perez, who was 13th.

Sainz will start from pole for the second consecutive grand prix after also being fastest at the Italian GP two weeks ago.

"A bit like Monza really, we hit the ground running in FP1. I felt very confident all through the sessions and put it together in Q3," said Sainz, who also topped the time sheets in Saturday's third free practice session.

"I just focused on not doing any

mistakes on that lap. Keeping it clean in Singapore normally pays off."

Russell will start from the front row for the first time since the Australian Grand Prix at the beginning of April.

"Really happy with this weekend as a whole," said the Englishman. "I felt really confident in the car, the team did a great job with the strategy."

"We are on an off-set strategy compared to everybody else, so we have an extra set of medium tyres tomorrow which nobody around us has. So to get to Q3 and be on the front row with a strategic advantage tomorrow is an exciting place to be."

Verstappen is chasing a third world title and has a massive 145-point lead over Perez.

But the Dutchman has never triumphed under the lights in Singapore and faces an almost impossible task to end the drought after a torrid weekend when the Red Bulls were well off the pace.

It was the first time since the Russian Grand Prix in 2018 that neither Red Bull managed to make it into Q3.

Perez won in Singapore last year from second on the grid, but will make his 250th grand prix start



Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr gestures after the qualifying session of the Singapore Formula One Grand Prix at the Marina Bay Street Circuit in Singapore yesterday. (AFP)

in Sunday's night race from the back half of the grid. Red Bull have won all 14 races so far this season but Singapore's Marina Bay street

circuit is shaping up as the biggest challenge to the team's unprecedented quest to win all 22 races. Verstappen has won 12 of the 14

races this season with Perez the only other driver to take the chequered flag. The McLaren of Lando Norris will join Leclerc on the second row of the grid for today's night race.

"Everything was super close, Mercedes were really strong today too," said Leclerc.

"Unfortunately I missed it just a little bit to gain a few positions. Carlos did a great job to get 1-3 for tomorrow."

"We did not expect to be this competitive on a track like this. This is a good sign for the future."

Lewis Hamilton and Kevin Magnussen were fifth and sixth respectively and will occupy the third row followed by Fernando Alonso, Esteban Ocon, Nico Hulkenberg and Liam Lawson.

Earlier Q1 was brought to a premature halt by a red flag after Lance Stroll spectacularly crashed his Aston Martin entering the pit straight at the end of a hot lap.

A huge impact into the wall sent his car spinning across the track with wheels and bodywork flying.

Lando Norris was close behind and did well to avoid the wreckage in his McLaren.

The crash eliminated Stroll, who remarkably managed to walk away unaided. Valtteri Bottas, Os-

car Piastrri, Logan Sargeant and Zhou Guanyu also failed to make it into Q2.

THE GRAND

- Front row**
Carlos Sainz (ESP/Ferrari)
George Russell (GBR/Mercedes)
- 2nd row**
Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari)
Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren)
- 3rd row**
Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Mercedes)
Kevin Magnussen (DEN/Haas)
- 4th row**
Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin)
Esteban Ocon (FRA/Alpine)
- 5th row**
Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Haas)
Liam Lawson (NZL/AlphaTauri)
- 6th row**
Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull)
Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine)
- 7th row**
Sergio Perez (MEX/Red Bull)
Alexander Albon (THA/Williams)
- 8th row**
Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/AlphaTauri)
Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Alfa Romeo)
- 9th row**
Oscar Piastrri (AUS/McLaren)
Logan Sargeant (USA/Williams)
- 10th row**
Zhou Guanyu (CHN/Alfa Romeo)
Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin)

PREMIER LEAGUE

Brighton thump Man United as Man City strike back

Tottenham see off Sheffield with stoppage-time goals, Liverpool win

AFP
London

Manchester United's crisis deepened yesterday as Brighton's Danny Welbeck scored in a 3-1 win against his old club while Manchester City beat West Ham to stay perfect in the Premier League.

Liverpool had a brief taste of life at the top, beating Wolves 3-1 in the early kick-off, while Tottenham scored two goals in stoppage time to beat Sheffield United.

The season is spiralling out of control for Erik ten Hag's United, who started the campaign in buoyant mood after ending their trophy drought and finishing third in the league last season.

Some fans dreamed of a long-overdue title challenge but instead they find themselves trailing leaders City by nine points after a third chastening defeat in five matches. United started brightly at Old Trafford, desperate to put their nightmare start to the season behind them but former youth player Welbeck silenced the home fans in the 20th minute.

A 53rd-minute goal by Pascal Gross gave United a mountain to climb and substitute Joao Pedro made it 3-0 before a consolation for Hannibal Mejbri. Brighton's fourth straight league win against United lifted them to third in the table.

Ten Hag, in his second season at Old Trafford, now has a huge job on his hands to save United's season, besieged by problems on and off the pitch. Jadon Sancho has been exiled from first-team training after a public spat with the manager while fellow forward Antony has been given a leave of absence to address domestic abuse allegations, which he denies. Protests continue in the stands against unpopular owners the Glazer family, who appear to have put their attempt to sell the club on hold.



Brighton's Pascal Gross (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Manchester United during their Premier League match in Manchester yesterday. (Reuters)

Champions Manchester City continue to churn out the wins, even though Pep Guardiola's men did not have it all their own way at the London Stadium, trailing to a James Ward-Prowse goal in the first half. Jeremy Doku equalised early in the second period and Bernardo Silva put City 2-1 before Erling Haaland's seventh goal of the season guaranteed a fifth win in five games.

City's win lifts them to 15 points, two clear of Liverpool at the top of the table. Earlier, Jurgen Klopp's men roused themselves after an anaemic first-half display against Wolves, recovering from a goal down following a first period that Wolves dominated. Cody Gakpo scored 10 minutes into the second period and Andy Robertson finished neatly in the 85th minute before an own goal

from Hugo Bueno added gloss to the scoreline.

It was the third time this season that Liverpool have come from behind to win. Klopp said his team deserved to win the game after their powerful second-half performance but stressed that they could not afford to keep falling behind. "Turning games around is helpful in a season but we cannot rely on it, we cannot," he said.

"We have to play better in the first half of games generally. We are not stable yet, that is not possible. Too many things are new." Sheffield United looked to be on track for their first win of the season at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. But Spurs grabbed an equaliser in the 98th minute when Richarlison headed home Ivan Perisic's corner to set up a grandstand finish, with 12 minutes

of additional time at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium and Dejan Kulusevski scored the winner.

Aston Villa scored three late goals to beat Crystal Palace 3-1.

The London side led 1-0 courtesy of Odsonne Edouard's first-half goal but Jhon Duran equalised in the 87th minute. Douglas Luiz scored a penalty deep into stoppage time to put Villa in front and Leon Bailey made it 3-1. Fulham's Carlos Vinicius condemned Premier League new boys Luton to a fourth consecutive defeat.

In late game, Newcastle beat Brentford 1-0 at St James' Park to end a run of three successive defeats. Eddie Howe's side won for the second time this season thanks to Callum Wilson, who netted a 64th minute penalty after Anthony Gordon was fouled by Mark Flekken.

BUNDESLIGA

Hummels double in Dortmund's comeback win over Freiburg

AFP
Berlin

Mats Hummels scored goals in each half as Borussia Dortmund fought back late to win 4-2 at Freiburg yesterday.

Hummels put Dortmund in front early but Dortmund again suffered a collective blackout, allowing Freiburg to take the lead in first-half injury time with two quick goals.

Donyell Malen gave far too much space to Freiburg's free-kick specialist Vincenzo Grifo, who threaded a ball into the box, allowing Lucas Hoeler to head the home side level.

Just four minutes later, the Dortmund defence again lost track of a free-kick, Nicolas Hoefler heading in to give his side the lead.

Malen equalised midway through the second half thanks to a clever assist from Germany striker Niclas Füllkrug.

Dortmund looked set to drop points for the third straight game before Freiburg goalscorer Hoefler saw red with eight minutes remaining, giving the visitors a one-man advantage which they duly used.

Hummels scored again, trickling the ball into the goal with two minutes remaining, before Marco Reus added a fourth to seal the win, giving his side a timely boost ahead of Tuesday's Champions League trip to Paris Saint-Germain.

"To have class and calmness on the ball... that's something we need to improve if we want to be a top team," Hummels said.

Dortmund captain Emre Can called the win "stressful".

"It's not easy to win here in Freiburg and we did it today," said Can.

Hummels' goals meant the 2014 World Cup winner has now scored in 16 consecutive Bundesliga seasons.



Dortmund's German defender Mats Hummels celebrates after scoring a goal during the Bundesliga match against Freiburg in Freiburg, Germany, yesterday. (AFP)

Valencia stun Atletico Madrid as Duro hits two

Hugo Duro struck twice for Valencia as they earned a 3-0 victory over Atletico Madrid yesterday in La Liga. The hosts have started the season well after flirting with relegation until the final day of the previous campaign, and this was their best performance yet under coach Ruben Baraja. Atletico coach Diego Simeone has faced many different Valencia coaches over almost 12 years in charge and had only lost twice before defeat at Mestalla in 28 games. Defeat was the worst way for Atletico to prepare for the start of their Champions League cam-

paign on Tuesday at Lazio. "They came into the game with a lot more intensity and if you don't match it ... it's impossible to win any game," said Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak. "They deserved to win, we have to congratulate them and we have to look in the mirror. We know we can give a lot more than we gave today. We lacked everything today ... we played a very bad game, we lost 3-0 and that hurts a lot." Spanish striker Duro, 23, slid in at the near post to fire into the roof of Oblak's net after just five minutes. The forward kept his composure to

beat the Slovenian goalkeeper again when sent through on goal by Fran Perez after shrugging off Axel Witsel. Javi Guerra struck the third goal with a fine solo move and finish inside Oblak's near post as Los Che continued to dominate. Valencia could have increased their lead but Oblak saved well from Diego Lopez in the final stages, among other openings. Earlier Athletic Bilbao earned a convincing 3-0 win over Cadiz to climb provisionally second behind leaders Real Madrid, who host Real Sociedad today. (AFP)

FOOTBALL

Al Bidda SC eye top flight after QFA membership nod

'It's been an exciting as well as a difficult journey since we started as an amateur team in 2015'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

In a significant development marking a new chapter in the history of Al Bidda SC, the club announced that it has been granted membership in the Qatar Football Association (QFA).

Al Bidda, who have been competing in the Second Division league as an amateur side, can now target a place in the top flight Qatar Stars League. Al Bidda was established in 2015 and has developed a roster of skilled local and international players. They were granted approval by the QFA in September 2018, allowing them to participate in the Second Division League season as an amateur team.

Earlier this year in June, the club's membership was accepted to officially join QFA as a professional team. Al Bidda, who won the 2021-2022 Second Division Cup, finished second in the same competition last season. The club's quick rise comes after seasons of persistent work and dedication where the team showed notable progress and exceptional performance on the field.

President of the club's Board Sheikh Fahed bin Mohamed al-Thani said in a statement. "I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Qatar Football Association for their continuous support and trust in us, and the acceptance of our membership is the result of the commitment and hard work of each and every member of the Al Bidda SC family."

At a press conference yesterday, the club's Vice-President Sheikh Hamad bin Mohamed al-Thani and Executive Director Ghasan Oueijan outlined the club's vision as they chart their path towards Qatar Stars League (QSL). "It's been an exciting as well as a difficult journey since we started as an amateur team. The Covid-19 pandemic hampered our progress but we have very good memories in recent years as we won the Second Division Cup," Sheikh Hamad told reporters yesterday.

"We are aware it is going to be a difficult challenge in the Second Division



Al Bidda SC's vice-president Sheikh Hamad bin Mohamed al-Thani (centre), Executive Director Ghasan Oueijan (left) and head coach Sami Salah Aldin address a press conference yesterday.



Al Bidda SC yesterday unveiled their six new foreign signings Morocco's Akram El-Hamdaoui, Edmilson Correia from Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria's Bright Enohakhare, Timothy Akinola from Britain, France's Yanis Bourbia and Yamin Maouchi.

League because all clubs are tough but we are looking forward to emerge on top and qualify for the QSL," he added.

Al Bidda SC's Executive Director Ghasan Oueijan echoed Sheikh Hamad's views. "We are making all out efforts to strengthen the side and have included new international players for the Second Division League as we will compete for the title," he said.

To strengthen its position and face the challenges of the Second Division, Al Bidda SC added six new players to its ranks: Akram El-Hamdaoui from Morocco, Edmilson Correia from Guinea-Bissau, Bright Enohakhare from Nigeria, Timothy Akinola from Britain, Yanis Bourbia from France, and Yamin Maouchi from France.

The players, who were unveiled at a press conference yesterday, were chosen after rigorous negotiations, bringing with them experience, skill, and a fresh vision for the team. Al Bidda's coach Sami Salah Aldin said: "Integrating these six players into our team reflects our big ambitions; we are here to participate, to compete, and to achieve success."

At the beginning of the current season, Al Bidda played a series of friendly matches and held a training camp in Turkiye, all in preparation for the challenges ahead. Moreover, in a new and ambitious step, the Club has also launched Al Bidda Academy.

"This represents a strategic project for the club with the aim of developing and elevating talented young footballers. Despite its recent formation, the academy boasts a specialised training team and modern techniques aimed at building a new generation of players equipped with the necessary skills and capabilities to excel in the sports field. The Academy aspires to be a central pillar in Al Bidda SC's strategy for the coming years, focusing on the technical, physical, and mental aspects of its players," the club said in a statement.

Furthermore, Al Bidda SC also announced a sponsorship partnership with Nakheel Landscapes. The three-year partnership will establish Nakheel Landscapes as the official sponsor for the club.

SERIE A

Inter humble Milan in derby

AFP
Milan

Inter Milan laid down an early title marker yesterday by handing out a 5-1 derby hammering to AC Milan and going it alone at the Serie A summit. Four wins from their opening four matches have Inter leading the pack with a perfect 12 points, two ahead of their other fierce rivals Juventus who earlier beat Lazio 3-1.

Milan are third, a further point back after being taught a humiliating lesson by their local rivals. Spurred on by the majority of a heaving and raucous San Siro crowd, Inter claimed their fifth straight derby win in all competitions thanks to a Henrikh Mkhitaryan brace, Marcus Thuram's rocket and two late strikes from Hakan Calhanoglu and Davide Frattesi.

Simone Inzaghi's side claimed the points with a display which showed why they got past Milan to reach last season's Champions League final and confirmed their status as early title favourites. Thuram also continued his fast start in an Inter shirt, the new man also crucial to Mkhitaryan's fifth-minute opener.

France forward Thuram bundled past Malick Thiaw before finding Federico Dimarco whose mishit shot was guided home by the former Armenia midfielder, who almost headed in a second six minutes later.

And Thuram then underlined Inter's superiority seven minutes before the break after a lightning breakaway started by Lautaro Martinez, collecting from Denzel Dumfries before cutting inside the hapless Thiaw and crashing in an unstoppable shot from the edge of the area.

The match looked dead and buried with 45 min-

utes to play but Rafael Leao halved the deficit in the 57th minute when he rolled in his second of the season after being brilliantly put through by Olivier Giroud. Milan's loud "away" support urged their team on, but Mkhitaryan silenced them with his deflected second of the evening after being fed by Martinez. Former Milan man Calhanoglu's 79th-minute penalty and a neat stoppage-time finish from Frattesi rubbed salt into the wounds.

Goals in each half from Vlahovic and another in the 26th minute from strike partner Federico Chiesa at the Allianz Stadium briefly pushed Juve top of the pile before Inter's derby delight. Massimiliano Allegri's Juve were going to concede top spot whatever the result at the San Siro but the coach will be encouraged by what he saw in front of an enthusiastic home crowd in Turin.

Allegri has paired Vlahovic and Italy star Chiesa up front this season and the attacking duo have hit it off, combining for seven goals in unbeaten Juve's opening four matches. Vlahovic has scored four times after a tumultuous summer dominated by rumours that he might be sold and replaced by Romelu Lukaku, now on loan from Chelsea at Roma. Chiesa, who missed Italy's two recent Euro 2024 qualifiers with a muscle problem, has started the domestic season in great form after struggling with injuries in recent years.

Lazio, who scored through a beautiful 64th-minute Luis Alberto curler, just before Vlahovic netted his second, are 15th following their third defeat of the season. Juve's win was a positive end to a difficult week in which star midfielder Paul Pogba was suspended for a doping violation and Italy defender Leonardo Bonucci announced legal action for what he called "humiliating" treatment by his former club.



Inter Milan's Henrikh Mkhitaryan (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring against AC Milan during the Serie A match at the San Siro Stadium in Milan yesterday. (AFP)

Al-Attayah out of Lebanon Rally after accident

Defending champion Nasser Saleh al-Attayah withdrew from the Lebanon International Rally, the fourth round of the Middle East Rally Championship, after a serious accident yesterday. The Qatari legend and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel came out safely from their stricken car and were in good health but the car suffered major damage, preventing them from completing the rest of the rally. Al-Attayah had won the prologue stage on Friday.



FIBA U-16 Asian Championship from today

Doha: Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) will host the FIBA U-16 Asian Championship 2023 at the Al Gharafa Club from today. As many as 16 teams are taking part in the competition eyeing the trophy on September 24 when the final will be played. Qatar are in Group B along with Iran, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

The details of the event were announced at a press conference attended by QBF President Mohamed Saad al-Mughaiseb, Asian Basketball Federation Secretary-General Hagop Kagerian, QBF Secretary-General Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari and Chairman of Media Committee Dr Khalid al-Qahtani.

"It is the second time that Qatar is hosting this event. We are looking forward to continue hosting events for youngsters who are future of the sport," al-Mughaiseb said. Meanwhile, Kagerian thanked the QBF for their efforts in hosting the tournament, saying the tournament is expected to throw up exciting games in presence of talented players who represent their clubs.

Speaking on Qatar U-16 team's readiness for tournament, al-Kuwari said the national team is well prepared to achieve best results.

CRICKET

UAE beat Oman in Gulf T20I

Doha: Captain Mohamed Waseem struck a quickfire 35 ball 80 to set up a 22-run win for UAE over Oman at the T20I Gulf Cricket Championship at West End International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

After Waseem's knock that included eight sixes, UAE posted 191-4 and confined Oman to 169-7 despite a 90-run innings from their skipper Aqib Illyas. Meanwhile, hosts Qatar opened their campaign on winning note beating Bahrain by 19 runs on DLS method in Friday's late night match.

The home team will return to action as they will take on Oman in today's first match to be followed by Saudi Arabia-UAE clash.

Draxler arrives to join Al Ahli



Germany international Julian Draxler yesterday arrived in Doha after leaving Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) to embark on a new chapter with Al Ahli. Draxler is scheduled to undergo his medical examination today with his signing set to be formalised. Al Ahli, on their social media handles, yesterday shared photos of their new acquisition upon his arrival in Qatar. Draxler follows in the footsteps of Marco Verratti and Abdou Diallo, who recently made moves to Al Arabi from PSG. The midfielder had spent the previous season on loan at Benfica and had not featured for PSG in the current season.