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Kohli, Rahul lead India out of peril to beat Australia at World Cup



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Martinelli fires Arsenal to late win, Liverpool held at Brighton

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Unstoppable Verstappen claims 14th win of season

Hamilton leaves race after running into Russell on first lap, McLaren's Piastri and Norris complete podium

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

A night after clinching his third consecutive world title, Max Verstappen was in no mood to take the foot off the gas as the Red Bull driver sauntered to his 14th win of the season at the Formula One Qatar Grand Prix.

On a night when the high humidity level forced the drivers to wear ice vests, fans at the Lusail International Circuit released a loud gasp of shock as seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton crashed out of the race on the very first lap after colliding with teammate George Russell.

But Verstappen, like so often this season, was oblivious to the drama behind as he dominated the 57-lap race to stay on course to break his own record (15) for most wins in a single season. With five races to go, the Dutchman needs just two wins to set a new mark.

Sprint race winner Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris finished second and third respectively, rounding off a good weekend for the McLaren team, rising from their P6 and P10 grid slots after losing lap times over track limits violations in qualifying.

"I think what made the race was my first stint," said Verstappen, who finished 4.8 seconds clear of Piastri. "After that I could just manage my pace, making sure that my tyres were always in a good window. But the McLarens were quick again today, I had to push for it, so it was definitely a tough race out there. It was a bit close for comfort I think in that last stint. But the pace was OK. Another win, unbelievable," added the 26-year-old.

The race became an intense and complicated one as the drivers were mandated for three pit stops due to tyre safety reasons after Pirelli warned of the risk of blowouts.

There was a change in the grid too with Red Bull's second driver Sergio Perez starting from pit lane after changing several power unit components and making significant repairs – including the preparation of a new chassis – after the Mexican's crash in the sprint.



Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani presents the winner's trophy to Max Verstappen (also inset) of Red Bull after his win in Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2023 at Lusail International Circuit yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Ferrari too suffered a blow as Carlos Sainz was ruled out of the race due to a fuel system issue developing on his car, meaning the Scuderia would only be represented by Charles Leclerc.

More drama awaited at the start and it was heartbreak for Hamilton. The Brit tried to go round the outside in the first corner, but in turn rammed into compatriot Russell, who himself was looking to make a move on Verstappen.

Hamilton was immediately out of the race, finding his Mercedes beached in the gravel on three wheels, while Russell dropped down the field and had to pit for a new front wing. While Hamilton, in frustration, blamed his younger teammate for the incident, he later accepted his fault and apologised to Russell.

Russell had started second on the grid with Hamilton third and looking likely to increase the 26-point gap between them and third-placed Ferrari in the constructors' standings.

"I just feel really sorry for my team, there was an opportunity today to get some good points," Hamilton later said. "I felt the tag from behind but I don't think George had anywhere to go. I'm happy to take responsibility. It's massively gutting, it's rare this happens to me."

To Russell's credit, the 25-year-old ended up fourth after having to make four pit stops in total. Ferrari's Leclerc was fifth and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso came sixth. Esteban Ocon was seventh for Alpine with the Alfa Romeo pair of Valtteri Bottas and Guanyu Zhou eighth and ninth and Red Bull's Sergio Perez demoted to 10th after a five-second post-race penalty for exceeding track limits multiple times.

Verstappen, meanwhile, was untroubled on the night with team boss Christian Horner lauding his champion over the radio by saying: "That was a proper quality drive."

At one point he had a 25-second advantage over Piastri, but the Australian rookie crawled back in the final stint. But it was not enough to put pressure on Verstappen, who set the fastest lap and cruised to his 49th career victory.

The only thing that troubled him was the Lusail heat, which touched 37 degrees on track at one point, with humidity making it worse. Verstappen later labelled the Qatar Grand Prix as "one of the toughest" races of his career as drivers struggled throughout in hot and tricky conditions.

Alonso asked for water to be poured over him at a pit-stop, while Williams' Logan Sargeant retired with dehydration as Verstappen and Piastri both laid on the floor of the cool-down room while waiting for the podium.

"[It is] one of (the toughest races of my career), and in the top five probably," Verstappen said. "I am already sweating quite a bit, but we will enjoy it quite a bit, but there are still a few races (in the season) that we want to try and win."

RESULTS

1. Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull) 1hr 27min 39.168sec, 2. Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren) at 4.833, 3. Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren) 5.969, 4. George Russell (GBR/Mercedes) 34.119, 5. Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari) 38.976, 6. Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin), 7. Esteban Ocon (FRA/Alpine) 1:02.390, 8. Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Alfa Romeo) 1:06.563, 9. Zhou Guanyu (CHN/Alfa Romeo) 1:16.127, 10. Sergio Perez (MEX/Red Bull) 1:20.181, 11. Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin) 1:21.652, 12. Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine) 1:22.300, 13. Alexander Albon (THA/Williams) 1:31.014, 14. Kevin Magnussen (DEN/Haas) one lap, 15. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/AlphaTauri) one lap, 16. Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Haas) one lap, 17. Liam Lawson (NZL/AlphaTauri) one lap

Retirements: Logan Sargeant (USA/Williams) lap 40, Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Mercedes) lap 1

Did not start: Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP/Ferrari)

Fastest lap: Max Verstappen - 1:23.778

World championship standings:

Drivers

1. Max Verstappen (NED) 433 pts, 2. Sergio Perez (MEX) 224, 3. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 194, 4. Fernando Alonso (ESP) 183, 5. Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP) 153, 6. Charles Leclerc (MON) 145, 7. Lando Norris (GBR) 136, 8. George Russell (GBR) 132, 9. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 83, 10. Lance Stroll (CAN) 47, 11. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 46, 12. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 44, 13. Alexander Albon (THA) 23, 14. Valtteri Bottas (FIN) 10, 15. Nico Hulkenberg (GER) 9, 16. Zhou Guanyu (CHN) 6, 17. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN) 3, 18. Kevin Magnussen (DEN) 3, 19. Liam Lawson (NZL) 2

Constructors

1. Red Bull 657 pts, 2. Mercedes 326, 3. Ferrari 298, 4. Aston Martin 230, 5. McLaren 219, 6. Alpine 90, 7. Williams 23, 8. Alfa Romeo 16, 9. Haas 12, 10. AlphaTauri 5



Mercedes' driver Lewis Hamilton slides off the track after crashing out of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix at Lusail International Circuit yesterday. *(AFP)*



MATCH REPORT

Kohli, Rahul lift India after spinners rattle Australia

The two star batters hit half centuries following devastating spin bowling by Jadeja, Kuldeep and Ashwin

AFP
Chennai, India

Virat Kohli and KL Rahul hit defiant knocks to lift India from a perilous three down for two runs to a six-wicket win over Australia in their opening Cricket World Cup match yesterday.

Chasing a tricky target of 200, India lost three batsmen, who all failed to score, inside two overs before Kohli (85) and Rahul (97 not out) put on 165.

Victory was secured with 52 balls to spare.

Spinner Ravindra Jadeja returned figures of 3-28 to help bowl out Australia for 199 in 49.3 overs in the 150th ODI meeting between the two cricket giants.

Australia's fast bowlers then came out all guns blazing to rattle the Indian top-order after left-arm quick Mitchell Starc sent back Ishan Kishan for a duck in the first over.

Josh Hazlewood struck twice in the next to remove skipper Rohit Sharma lbw and then Shreyas Iyer caught at cover also for nought to silence the home crowd of 32,531.

Hazlewood nearly made it four down when he got Kohli to top-edge a delivery only for Mitchell Marsh to drop a skier. Kohli was on 12 at the time.

Kohli made the most of the reprieve as the star batsman reached his 67th ODI half-century and raised his bat to acknowledge the loud cheers.

Rahul soon reached his fifty in the 28th over as India went to 106-3 and in control.

Kohli finally fell to Hazlewood caught out at mid-wicket and walked off to standing ovation.

Rahul hit the winning six with Hardik Pandya at the other end.

"I had just taken a shower and was hoping to put my feet up for half an hour after the fielding innings, but I had to come in," said Rahul of his unexpectedly early arrival at the crease.

"Virat said that I should play like Test cricket for a bit."

Australia captain Pat Cummins admitted his team had been "50 runs short".

"Facing the spinners was tough and it was the kind of wicket you had to get yourself in."

Five-time champions Australia won the toss and elected to bat first but faltered.

Jadeja stood out in his 10 overs of left-arm spin. Fellow spinner Kuldeep Yadav and fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah took two wickets each.

Australia lost an early wicket before veteran batsmen David Warner (41) and Steve Smith (46) hit back in a partnership of 69.

Kohli made an early impact with a diving slip catch to send back Marsh, for a six-ball duck, off Bumrah. The left-handed Warner reached 1,000 World Cup runs, passing Indian batting great Sachin Tendulkar's previous best landmark. Warner needed 19 innings to Tendulkar's 20. Kuldeep, a left-arm wrist spinner, broke the stand to send back Warner, caught and bowled.



India's Virat Kohli and KL Rahul run between the wickets during the 2023 ICC World Cup match against Australia in Chennai yesterday. Both hit half centuries as India won the match by six wickets. **Inset:** India's Ravindra Jadeja celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia's Alex Carey yesterday. *(AFP)*

SCOREBOARD

Australia

D. Warner c and b Kuldeep	41
M. Marsh c Kohli b Bumrah	0
S. Smith b Jadeja	46
M. Labuschagne c Rahul b Jadeja	27
G. Maxwell b Kuldeep	15
A. Carey lbw b Jadeja	0
C. Green c Pandya b Ashwin	8
P. Cummins c Iyer b Bumrah	15
M. Starc c Iyer b Mohamed Siraj	28
A. Zampa c Kohli b Pandya	6
J. Hazlewood not out	1
Extras (lb6, w6)	**12**
Total (all out, 49.3 overs)	**199**

Fall of wickets: 1-5 (Marsh), 2-74 (Warner), 3-110 (Smith,), 4-119 (Labuschagne), 5-119 (Carey), 6-140 (Maxwell), 7-140 (Green), 8-165 (Cummins), 9-189 (Zampa), 10-199 (Starc)

Bowling: Bumrah 10-0-35-2 (w4), Siraj 6.3-1-26-1 (w2), Pandya 3-0-28-1, Ashwin 10-1-34-1-3, Kuldeep 10-0-42-2, Jadeja 10-2-28-3

India (target 200)

R. Sharma lbw b Hazlewood	0
I. Kishan c Green b Starc	0
V. Kohli c Labuschagne b Hazlewood	85
S. Iyer c Warner b Hazlewood	0
KL Rahul not out	97
H. Pandya not out	11
Extras (b1, lb1, nb1, w5)	**8**
Total (4 wickets, 41.2 overs)	**201**

Did not bat: R. Jadeja, R. Ashwin, K. Yadav, J. Bumrah, M. Siraj

Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Kishan), 2-2 (Rohit), 3-2 (Iyer), 4-167 (Kohli)

Bowling: Starc 8-0-31-1 (w3), Hazlewood 9-1-38-3 (w1), Cummins 6.2-0-33-0 (w1, nb1), Maxwell 8-0-33-0, Green 2-0-11-0, Zampa 8-0-53-0

Result: India won by 6 wickets

Toss: Australia

PREVIEW

Williamson to miss out against Netherlands also

AFP
Hyderabad, India

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson will miss today's World Cup clash against the Netherlands but is expected to return to the team later in the week, said coach Gary Stead yesterday.

Williamson is still recovering after six months out with a knee injury although he did feature in the World Cup warm-up series last week.

He sat out New Zealand's nine-wicket rout of champions England in the tournament opener on Thursday and will watch from the sidelines again in Hyderabad today.

However, Stead said Williamson is expected to play in the third game of the tournament against Bangladesh in Chennai on Friday.

"He is progressing really well but his fielding needs to be higher and needs trust in his body," said Stead.

"We're confident he will be ready for the third game to start his tournament."

Williamson is the current squad's top scorer in ODIs with more than 6,500 runs and 13 centuries.

Stead said veteran fast bowler Tim Southee, who also missed the victory over England, is available for selection after recovering from a dislocated thumb.

Meanwhile, New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips yesterday stressed that the Black Caps must keep their feet on the ground after the convincing win over England.

Runners-up in the last two World Cups, New Zealand upstaged England in Ahmedabad, riding on brilliant centuries from Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra.

"We enjoyed the first win but obviously with the tournament having such a quick turnaround, we try not get too high when we win and not get too low when we lose," said Phillips.

Phillips said New Zealand will not take the Netherlands lightly despite the Dutch being the only second-tier Associate team at the 10-nation event.

"We approach every game the same way every time, every team is strong in their own right, especially on any given day," said the all-rounder. "The Netherlands have a lot of strong players, and we're going to have to still put our best foot forward, as I'm sure they will." Phillips praised the skill sets of the Netherlands' players.

"Obviously, they've beaten quite a few good opponents to be able to qualify for the tournament in the first place. So, they're a team definitely not to be taken lightly."

Phillips hailed Conway and Ravindra for their undefeated centuries in Ahmedabad, 152 and 123 respectively.

"They were absolutely brilliant," said Phillips of the two left-handers who shared an unbroken 273-run stand for the second wicket to overhaul England's 283-run target with 82 balls to spare.

"I guess from a team perspective it's really nice to know that those two boys are in some serious form and that's a good feeling."

Phillips denied he was surprised at Ravindra's stunning man of the match performance.

"Oh, no. I wasn't surprised at all," said Phillips of the 23-year-old batsman. "Obviously, I've played a lot of cricket with him back home and he actually plays a very aggressive brand of one-day cricket. Being up at the top of the order, he likes to play with a lot of flair. He plays that square drive incredibly well, which with the new ball is an absolute asset."



New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra (left) and Ish Sodhi attend a practice session in Hyderabad on the eve of the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup match against the Netherlands. *(AFP)*

Young Fraser-McGurk smashes fastest one-day hundred in 29 balls

Hobart, Tasmania: In a stunning piece of batting, South Australia batter Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed a 29-ball century against Tasmania at the Marsh Cup yesterday to register the fastest hundred in one-day cricket, eclipsing South Africa great AB de Villiers' previous record of 31 balls.

Replaying to Tasmania's mammoth 435-9, South Australia were dismissed for 398 at the Karen Rolton Oval in Adelaide, but it turned out to be a memorable outing for Fraser-McGurk, who hammered 125 runs from 38 deliveries, which included 10 fours and 13 sixes.

The 21-year-old was eventually dismissed by off-spinner Beau Webster in the 12th over of the match.

Fraser-McGurk reached his half-century in 18 balls, the quickest by an Australian in the 50-over format.

"I went out there with some good intent, had my plans and process, and seemed like everything went my way," Fraser-McGurk told reporters yesterday.

"I've made a few 30s playing in twos and stuff, felt like I've been hitting them reasonably well but probably not that well so definitely surprised myself," he added. The record also marked Fraser-McGurk's first century in any professional format.

"It's probably an innings I'll never see maybe ever again. It was some of the cleanest ball-striking I've seen and sometimes you've just got to tip your cap to players like that that can do that," Tasmania captain Jordan Silk said yesterday.

"Whilst it was frustrating to watch it was also amazing to watch."

Fraser-McGurk is also known as a terrific fielder.

FOCUS

Two nations, one World Cup dream for left-arm spinner Van der Merwe

AFP
Hyderabad, India

Having once played in the same South Africa team as Dale Steyn, AB de Villiers and Jacques Kallis, **Roelof van der Merwe** has finally made it to a World Cup – with the Netherlands.

The 38-year-old is a member of a select group of just 16 men to have turned out for two countries.

Van der Merwe appeared in 13 ODIs for South Africa between 2009 and 2010 before switching allegiance to the Dutch in 2019.

"I love competing, so I think that helps me stay fit, stay hungry for the game," said Van der Merwe yesterday. "I just love playing the game and competing against other teams and other players."

His four matches for the Dutch have yet to yield fireworks, with just two wickets, although he hit his first, and so far, only international half-century for his adopted nation against Zimbabwe in 2019.

He has thrived in shorter-form Twenty20, making 48 on his South Africa debut against Australia in 2009.

Three years ago, under the Dutch flag, he smashed 75 not out against Zimbabwe and pocketed four wickets.

Those skills have been in demand and has taken him to county and T20 cricket in England, the IPL with Royal Challengers Bangalore and Delhi Daredevils as well as the Caribbean Premier League.

"Whatever team I play for, I want to win. So, it doesn't change whether I'm playing in a World Cup or in a local competition," said Van der Merwe.

"I want to win games of cricket and I'll apply myself the best I can, whether it's on the field, giving advice, off the field training, I'm always well prepared and I just want to win games and nothing changes playing for the Dutch."

On his World Cup debut against Pakistan on Friday, he returned figures of 0-36 before being run out for four as the Dutch fought hard before slipping to an 81-run defeat. Today, they take on New Zealand. The runners-up in the last two World Cups started the 2023 tournament with an impressive nine-wicket demolition of defending champions England.

Van der Merwe said his team will not be over-awed by facing Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra who both hit undefeated centuries in the win over England.

"Those two guys played a great partnership in the previous game but you know we've got our plans to get them out," he said.

"New Zealand are a very organised, skilful team so we know we're up against a quality side."

New Zealand have beaten the Netherlands in all of their four meetings, including one in the 1996 World Cup in India. Three of those wins have been by thumping margins of more than 100 runs.

"If we play the way we play and execute how we want to then we can put them under pressure and win the game," added Van der Merwe.



FOOTBALL

Arsenal beat Man City in PL for first time since 2015

Gabriel Martinelli's 86th-minute strike earns Arsenal a 1-0 win



Arsenal's Brazilian midfielder Gabriel Martinelli celebrates after scoring the opening goal during the English Premier League match against Manchester City at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. *(AFP)*

Agencies
London/Munich/Madrid

Substitute Gabriel Martinelli fired a last-gasp winner to earn Arsenal a 1-0 victory over Manchester City yesterday, a result that moved Mikel Arteta's side level on points with North London rivals Tottenham Hotspur at the top of the Premier League.

Arsenal came into the match having not beaten City in the league since 2015, a run of 15 games – their longest winless streak against a single opponent in league history.

Ending such a barren run looked unlikely as City had the better of the chances in the first half, with Arsenal's Declan Rice clearing off the line to keep the champions at bay.

Arsenal did not have a single shot on target in the opening period, but upped the tempo after the break, even though City still created the better openings despite their Premier League top scorer Erling Haaland being kept quiet all afternoon.

The game appeared to be edging towards a stalemate before Martinelli struck four minutes from time, a deflection off City defender Nathan Ake taking the ball past keeper Ederson.

The goal sparked wild celebrations at the Emirates, as Arsenal moved above City into second place on 20 points, two above the champions, and trailing Spurs only on goals scored.

Arsenal were dealt a huge blow ahead of kickoff as it was confirmed the injured Bukayo Saka would miss a Premier League game for the first time since May 2021, ending a run of 87 consecutive appearances, the longest ongoing run in the competition.

Without the flying forward, Arsenal looked sluggish early on, with Croatian defender Josko Gvardiol denied by Rice's intervention, while Julian Alvarez almost diverted Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya's hesitant clearance into the net.

The crowd were doing their best to rouse a response from Arsenal, cheering every flying tackle with gusto and it seemed to help matters, with the hosts growing into the contest.

Promising openings fell flat, however, as Arsenal failed to have a shot on target in the opening half of a Premier League home game for the first time since March 2022. Martinelli's introduction livened things up, as he soon had the home side's first effort on target in the match, a fierce strike straight at Ederson.

With the international break to follow, the life seemed to be sucked out of the game before Martinelli broke City hearts.

It was a timely strike, ensuring Arsenal are yet to lose a Premier League game this season, last going on a longer unbeaten run to start a campaign in 2007-08.



Bayern Munich players celebrate after their match against SC Freiburg at the Allianz Arena, Munich, Germany, yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Coman double helps Bayern cut gap after Leverkusen go top

Kingsley Coman's double helped Bayern Munich stay two points behind Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen as the reigning champions beat Freiburg 3-0 at home yesterday.

With Leverkusen winning 3-0 against Cologne to go five points clear of the Bavarians just moments before kick-off, Bayern responded immediately and were 2-0 up at half-time.

Coman looped a cross goalwards looking for Harry Kane in the 12th minute but the ball drifted over Freiburg goalkeeper Noah Atubolu and into the goal.

Leroy Sane scored Bayern's second 25 minutes in, playing a pass to Kane on the left and slamming the England captain's return ball into the net.

The duo are building an impressive partnership, with five of Sane's seven goals this season assisted by the former Tottenham striker.

The former Manchester City winger had the ball in the net again on the stroke of half-time, lifting a dipping shot over Atubolu, but the stunning strike was chalked off by VAR for offside.

Coman scored again with five minutes remaining and once more had a slice of luck, his shot taking a big deflection to evade the outstretched arms of Atubolu.

Bayern will head into the international break in third, while Freiburg – who narrowly missed out on the top four last season – sit in midtable, with 10 points after seven matches.

Earlier yesterday, Xabi Alonso's Leverkusen continued their unbeaten start to the season with a comfortable win over derby rivals Cologne.

Leverkusen were superb in attack, goals from Jonas Hofmann, Jeremie Frimpong and Victor Boniface taking the side to a dominant victory against their struggling opponents. Leverkusen have now won nine of their 10 matches in all competitions this season, only dropping points in a pulsating 2-2 draw at Bayern.

Griezmann's late penalty earns Atletico 2-1 win

Antoine Griezmann scored a late penalty to give Atletico Madrid a 2-1 LaLiga home win over Real Sociedad yesterday, in a match in which VAR was again under the spotlight following two contentious handball decisions.

The hosts dominated from the start and Samuel Lino opened the scoring in the 22nd minute with a tidy finish between the goalkeeper and the near post after beating the offside trap following a brilliant long pass by Koke.

Atletico missed several chances, including two strikes off the post, one by Rodrigo de Paul and Axel Witsel from point-blank range, but Sociedad slowly started to take control of the match and almost scored when Mikel Oyarzabal's shot hit Jan Oblak's left upright.

In the 67th minute, referee Munuera Montero spent several minutes in a lengthy VAR check for a possible handball inside the box, but decided there had been no infringement.

Biles wins beam and floor golds to reach 23 world titles

Antwerp, Belgium: US superstar Simone Biles won a record-extending 23rd world title yesterday with gold in the floor final after also winning on the balance beam on the last day of the world gymnastics championships.

Despite putting a foot out of the mat, Biles' technically difficult floor performance achieved 14.633 points, with Brazilians Rebeca Andrade (14.500) and Flavia Saraiva (13.966) completing the podium.

Returning after a two-year break, the four-time Olympic champion finishes the competition in Antwerp, where she won her first world title a decade ago, with five medals including four golds, to bring her tally to 30 medals at world championships.

The 26-year-old won gold in the team and all-around events during the week, and sealed the beam title for a fourth time with a dazzling routine which earned her 14.800 points.

China's Zhou Yaqin, 17, scored 14.700 to take silver with Andrade, who beat Biles to gold in the vault on Saturday when the American fell, claiming bronze with 14.300.

In a high-level beam final, Biles landed every skill with near perfection.

The title was decided by a tiny margin, as teenager Zhou also impressed.

Gold only escaped her because she took a step back after her dismount and was penalised a tenth of a point.

Biles has made an impressive return to competition two years after "twisties", a temporary mental block whereby gymnasts lose their sense of where they are in the air, badly affected her Tokyo Olympics.



Simone Biles of the US competes in the Women's Floor Final during the 52nd FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships, in Antwerp, northern Belgium, yesterday. *(AFP)*

TENNIS

Swiatek hails 'really big' China Open victory



Poland's Iga Swiatek, the world No .2, holds the trophy after defeating Russia's Liudmila Samsonova in the final of the WTA China Open in Beijing yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Beijing

Iga Swiatek hailed a "really big" victory after she delivered a dominant performance to win the China Open yesterday, beating surprise package Liudmila Samsonova in straight sets to crown a resurgent run of form.

The world number two triumphed 6-2, 6-2 in Beijing to take the first China Open women's title since the pandemic, after Beijing lifted its isolationist zero-Covid policy.

The victory capped a strong showing for four-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek, who was deposed as the world's top-ranked player by Aryna Sabalenka last month.

The 22-year-old broke Samsonova's serve in the sixth game and sealed the opening set when the unseeded Russian slammed a forehand into the net.

Swiatek looked assured throughout and quickly notched another break in set two when her error-prone opponent fired another forehand wide.

And when Samsonova sent an ill-advised drop-shot into the net to hand her the victory, the Pole doubled over with emotion before a delighted crowd.

"For sure, this is really big for me. Winning this title is something I never would have thought at the beginning of the tournament," Swiatek said at a post-match news conference.

"(It) will give me confidence... that there's always a chance to overcome and work on what you do or what you're feeling," she said.

"You can always get better and sometimes it's pretty easy, but we pretend to make it more complicated in our heads," she added.

"I'm really happy that I just focused on hard work and it paid off – maybe not instantly, but I'm happy that after the US Open I just got back to basics and just worked really hard tennis-wise."

Swiatek was the favourite to win the final after handing US Open champion Coco Gauff her first defeat in 17 matches in the final four on Saturday.

Sabalenka had been knocked out in the quarter-finals by fifth-ranked Elena Rybakina, who was in turn dumped out by Samsonova in the other semi-final.

Ranked 22nd, Samsonova had racked up a string of impressive victories against higher-ranked players but the result of Sunday's final rarely looked in doubt.

The 24-year-old said after the match that Swiatek's sheer consistency – she barely made a mistake of note – had been a source of "stress".

"This is the stress that she (puts on) other players, that she doesn't make unforced errors," Samsonova said. "Every time, you need to do something more... It's not real, what you feel, but she makes you feel like this," she added.

"Me, I was playing some points very well, and others a disaster. That was the difference, I think."

The match brought to a close the first China Open since 2019, after Beijing lifted onerous travel restrictions that formed part of a longtime policy to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

The men's tournament wrapped up on Wednesday when Italy's Jannik Sinner beat world number three Daniil Medvedev to take the trophy.

FOCUS

Edgy Medvedev is out of Shanghai Masters



Russia's Daniil Medvedev (left) gestures during his singles match against USA's Sebastian Korda at the Shanghai Masters yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Shanghai

Defending champion Daniil Medvedev said missing one key opportunity had cost him a spot in the Shanghai Masters' fourth round after he was knocked out in straight sets by 26th-ranked Sebastian Korda yesterday.

The Russian fell apart in the second set after Korda won the first on a tiebreaker taken to the brink, with the match finishing 7-6 (10/8), 6-2.

"I should have won the tiebreak but didn't," said the world number three afterwards. "I was, for sure, down mentally after such a first set... In the tiebreak, he actually didn't play that good (compared to the rest of the match). I didn't use this opportunity and I'm going home."

Medvedev fell three games behind an emboldened Korda in the second set, but looked like he might be about to make a comeback with a blistering win in the fourth game. But the American fought back, taking the next game, and Medvedev grew increasingly agitated, gesticulating in frustration and smashing his racket.

"I feel awesome, I played an incredible match," said 23-year-old Korda at the end, thanking the crowd for their enthusiasm.

"It's been a really long year for me. A lot of injuries, a lot of time off," he said later at a press conference. "To finally get a really good win like this against a top-5 player is great for me."

Medvedev's elimination was watched from the courtside by tournament top seed Carlos Alcaraz.

Jack Sinner of Italy yesterday beat Argentina's Sebastian Baez.

Sinner won 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Sinner will next face Ben Shelton, after the American beat Roman Safiullin in three sets 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

World number nine Casper Ruud is also through and will face Fabian Marozsan, who celebrated his birthday by defeating Serbian Dusan Lajovic in straight sets on Sunday.

Poland's Hubert Hurkacz also advanced to the fourth round while world number seven Andrey Rublev defeated France's Quentin Halys 6-4, 7-5.

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FOCUS

Record-breaking China brings curtain down on biggest Games

HANGZHOU WAVES GOODBYE TO ASIAD WITH GLITTERY CEREMONY

AFP
Hangzhou

Hosts China racked up a record 201 gold medals before the curtain came down on two weeks of tears and triumphs at the Asian Games in Hangzhou yesterday.

The 19th and biggest Asiad concluded at the 80,000-capacity Olympic stadium with China handing over to Japan for 2026 at a celebratory closing ceremony.

Dancers holding lit-up props fanned out towards the audience in a performance evoking ocean waves while the words "love Asia" were projected on a big screen.

The Games are normally every four years but Nagoya-Aichi has a shorter run-up because Hangzhou was postponed by a year due to China's now-abandoned zero-Covid measures. Speaking at the closing ceremony, a spectator surnamed Xia told AFP that the Games made her feel "very moved and proud".

"The Chinese team did great," she said. Taiwan's Gu Shiau-shuang won the final gold earlier in the day when she successfully defended her title in women's karate.

But it was the hosts who dominated over much of the fortnight, their 201 golds beating the 199 they collected at Guangzhou 2010.

Their exploits across the 40 sports at the Games reinforced China's status as Asia's sporting superpower, topping the medals table at every Asian Games since 1982. The competition will be much stiffer in less than 10 months at the Paris Olympics.

With about 12,000 athletes, this was the biggest Asian Games in history and had more competitors than the Olympics.

The Games were China's chance to show it was business as usual following the Covid policies that largely sealed its borders.

Crowds waving mini Chinese flags regularly filled the 54 venues.

"Technically we have had one of the finest Asian Games ever," said Olympic Council of Asia acting director general Vinod Kumar Tiwari. "We have had 97 Games records, 26 Asian records and 13 world records, so the standard has been very, very high and we are very happy with it."

World records tumbled in shooting and weightlifting, with North Korea celebrating their return to the global sporting arena after four years away by hoovering up six weightlifting golds. But the hoisting of their flag – in contravention of World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) sanctions – was a running controversy in Hangzhou that was never resolved. North Korea's athletes, wearing dazzling white blazers, again waved their flag at the closing ceremony. The scourge of doping was never far away. Seven athletes failed drugs tests and more will likely be announced in the coming days. The Olympics on the horizon added extra spice. Nine sports, among them boxing, break dancing and tennis, served as qualifiers for Paris. Breakdancing was appearing at the Asian Games for the first time, ahead of its Olympic bow, while eSports was a huge hit on its full debut. Overwhelmingly young spectators packed out the futuristic 4,500-seat eSports arena and tickets were the most highly sought after at the Games.

Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok, who was followed by frenzied crowds from the moment he landed, won gold with South Korea in League of Legends – and earned an exemption from military service back home. Chinese swimmers Zhang Yufei and Qin Haiyang were named the Games MVPs and it was in the pool where the hosts were especially impressive.

Al-Buenain terms Qatar show as satisfactory

Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary-General of the Qatar Olympic Committee, termed Qatar athletes' show at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou as satisfactory and that they lived up to the expectations of the nation finishing with a tally of 14 medals with five gold, six silver and 3 bronze.

The Hangzhou Asian Games, which saw the participation of over 12,000 athletes from 45 countries, drew to a close with a pleasing closing ceremony yesterday. Al-Buenain said: "Without a doubt, the Qatar athletes delivered as they always do in such major events and achieved honourable results reflecting in the medals tally of 14 medals. A number of our athletes were also on the verge of winning medals had it not been for their luck.

"We feel satisfied with the results achieved, which reflect the development of Qatari sports in light of the unlimited support it enjoys from our wise leadership and the great attention given by the Qatar Olympic Committee, headed by HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, to all sports, in addition to the work done by federations and committees. We hope that the results achieved will act as an incentive for athletes to achieve more achievements in future participations," he added.

Regarding Qatar's haul at the Games, the QOC Secretary-General explained that the medals tally achieved was good and planned, as is the case with both the handball and beach volleyball teams winning the gold medal, and they proved their worth in excelling at the continental level in recent years, in addition to the gold for our hero and world and Olympic champion Mutaz Essa Barshim, who became the first player in the history of the Games to achieve the gold medal in high jump three times, as well as the gold won by 400m hurdles athlete Abderrahman Samba, who succeeded in making a strong comeback after his recent injury."

He also applauded the Qatar shooting contingent and squash player Abdullah al-Tamimi, who won his first medal at the Asian Games and shooter Reem al-Harshani who also claimed a bronze medal (which reflects the progress of women's sports).

Talking about the importance of the reception hosted by the Qatar Olympic Committee on the sidelines of the Games, al-Buenain said it helps build bridges of communication and consolidate relations with various sporting organisations around the world. Regarding benefiting from the experience of Hangzhou in organising the Doha Asian Games 2030, the QOC Secretary-General said: "We are proud to host the Asian Games in its 21st edition in 2030. It will also be a second time that Doha will be hosting the continental event after 2006 which had an impact and has greatly contributed to the development of the sports movement in the country and is still in everyone's memory as a milestone in the history of the Asian Games. We will do our best to present another exceptional edition."

(Agencies)



Qatari athlete waves the national flag during the closing ceremony of the Asian Games in Hangzhou yesterday.

MEDALS TALLY

Country	G	S	B	T
1. China	200	111	71	383
2. Japan	52	67	69	188
3. South Korea	42	59	89	190
4. India	28	38	41	107
5. Uzbekistan	22	18	31	71
6. Chinese Taipei	19	20	28	67
7. Iran	13	21	20	54
8. Thailand	12	14	32	58
9. Bahrain	12	3	5	20
10. North Korea	11	18	10	39
11. Kazakhstan	10	22	48	80
12. Hong Kong	8	16	29	53
13. Indonesia	7	11	18	36
14. Malaysia	6	8	18	32
15. Qatar	**5**	**6**	**3**	**14**
16. UAE	5	5	10	20
17. Philippines	4	2	12	18
18. Kyrgyzstan	4	2	9	15
19. Saudi Arabia	4	2	4	10
20. Singapore	3	6	7	16
21. Vietnam	3	5	19	27
22. Mongolia	3	5	13	21
23. Kuwait	3	4	4	11
24. Tajikistan	2	1	4	7
25. Macau	1	3	2	6
26. Sri Lanka	1	2	2	5
27. Myanmar	1	0	2	3
28. Jordan	0	5	4	9
29. Turkmenistan	0	1	6	7
30. Afghanistan	0	1	4	5
31. Pakistan	0	1	2	3
32. Brunei	0	1	1	2
33. Nepal	0	1	1	2
34. Oman	0	1	1	2
35. Laos	0	0	3	3
36. Iraq	0	0	3	3
37. Bangladesh	0	0	2	2
38. Cambodia	0	0	1	1
39. Lebanon	0	0	1	1
40. Palestine	0	0	1	1
41. Syrian	0	0	1	1

SPOTLIGHT

7th edition of Longines Hathab Qatar equestrian series from Oct 12

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 7th edition of Qatar's annual domestic equestrian series – Longines Hathab Championship will kick-off from October 12. The 14-leg series, which includes dressage and showjumping is jointly-organised by the Qatar Equestrian and Modern Pentathlon Federation (QEFMP) and Al Shaqab, will continue until March 2024.

Sheikh Ahmad bin Nooh al-Thani, Secretary-General, Qatar Equestrian Federation and Modern Pentathlon, and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the championship, said the aim in the new season is to raise the level of competitions and encourage the efforts of riders by widening the scope of competitions in both show jumping and dressage.

He said: "This year, the organising committee has decided to expand the competition for junior riders by adding the two more categories of future riders in all rounds and also adding the amateur category for show jumping, bringing the total number of competing levels in the event to seven permanent levels in each Qatar Equestrian Tour if Longines Hathab.

He added: "We have continued our support for dressage by maintaining the two previously approved categories and we look forward with confidence to enthusiastic and exciting competitions in the championship.

"We hope that these steps will motivate every rider, male or female, to do their best and provide the best."

The Supreme Organising Committee of the tournament also expressed its thanks and appreciation to the bodies supporting and sponsoring the tournament, such as the Sports and Social Activities Support Fund, Longines, ExxonMobil Qatar, and Al Salam company.

In the new season, the Supreme Organising Committee will be headed by Sheikh Ahmad bin Nooh al-Thani, Ali bin Youssef al-Rumaihi as Vice-President, Omar al-Mannai as Director of the Tournament, and members – Ahmed Jaber al-Mulla, Sheikha al-Qahtani, and Ahmed al-Hammadi.

It is worth noting that the Longines Hathab Championship – Qatar Equestrian Tours – is one of the most prominent local championships in Qatar which aims at supporting and develop the level of equestrianism in the country by providing a first-class competitive platform that gives participants the opportunity to develop their skills and capabilities, as well as enhancing cooperation and partnerships between local entities concerned with equestrian sports.


Secretary-General of Qatar Equestrian Federation Sheikh Ahmad bin Nooh al-Thani.



Al-Attiyah wins 50th anniversary edition of Cyprus Rally

Qatari driver Nasser al-Attiyah, along with French co-driver Mathieu Baumel won the 50th anniversary edition of the Cyprus Rally in Nicosia yesterday.

Driving a Volkswagen Polo GTi R5 car, al-Attiyah won his 8th title in Cyprus after completing 12 stages in 3:03:38.7. Finishing in second place was Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi, with co-driver Ata al-Hmoud of Jordan, in a Skoda Fabia R5.

They completed the rally 3 minutes and 21 seconds behind al-Attiyah. Third in the general classification were Christos Demosthenous and co-driver Kypros Christodoulou of Cyprus. They finished 6 minutes and 38 seconds behind the winner.



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and French co-driver Mathieu Baumel celebrate winning the 50th anniversary edition of the Cyprus Rally in Nicosia yesterday.