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Rohit the 'genuine hero' of India's run to World Cup final

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WORLD CUP

Head breaks South African hearts as Australia set up final with India

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MOTOGP

Qatar GP not a championship 'match point' for Bagnaia

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

Ahead of this weekend's Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar, MotoGP championship leader Francesco Bagnaia was asked what he would do if he became a world champion. The Ducati Lenovo Team rider, who holds a 14-point lead over Prima Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin, came up with a witty answer at the press conference as he held up a board which said: "I will organise my wedding better (less stress)!" Martin chipped in saying: "Maybe he can invite me."

Bagnaia is getting married to his fiancée Domizia Castagnini on July 20, but the thought of preparing for his big day is less stressful for the Italian compared to defending his title. With a maximum of 74 points still up for grabs in Qatar and in Valencia next week, Bagnaia is in a better place than his title rival Martin. In fact, the Qatar GP at the Lusail International Circuit will offer the 26-year-old his first opportunity to win a second MotoGP crown.

After beating Martin to third in last week's Malaysian GP, Bagnaia can emerge champion if he scores 23 points more than his rival in Qatar. This has happened only once this season, at the season-opening Portuguese GP when Bagnaia outscored Martin by 28 points with a sprint/grand prix double. If he has 12 points (or more) of an advantage over Martin after the Sprint tomorrow, it's match point on Sunday for championship leader.

Bagnaia, who shared a bonhomie with Martin at the press conference yesterday, said he was not thinking about wrapping



Title rivals Prima Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin (left) and Ducati Lenovo Team's Francesco Bagnaia at a press conference, on the eve of the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

up the title this weekend. "I'm not considering this weekend as a match point, honestly. I have to gain 23 points and that's too much in a single weekend," he said.

"Jorge is doing a really great job and it will be more important to think session

by session, to work like the past weekend in Sepang and try to be competitive. We know perfectly the tarmac has been resurfaced and could be a very great question for the tyres. I think it could be very demanding for the tyres because it's new. Let's

see. It's a track that I like, we have always been competitive here apart from last year, which was at the wrong moment of the season. But the lap record is still mine and I think our bike suits this track very well," the Italian added.

Bagnaia said his main goal for the rest of the season was to do better than Martin. "Yeah, maybe, it could be better because right now 14 points with the championship we are living is nothing. 37 points every weekend is a lot, and you can gain or you can lose a lot of points," he said.

"So, it will be important to be calm, work well and try to do the maximum. We saw last weekend he gained three points in Saturday and lost four on Sunday. So, it's very balanced and I think it will be another head-to-head."

Meanwhile, Martin vowed to give his all as he seeks to overturn Bagnaia's advantage. The Spaniard, who is seeking to make history as the first satellite rider to win the MotoGP crown, said he has nothing to lose.

The Pramac rider has already assured a runner-up position in the championship thanks to being 75 points clear of third place Marco Bezzecchi. "I don't know the maths exactly, I just know I need to recover points! So this is my target," Martin said yesterday.

"I'm already second in the championship, even if I don't race the next two rounds. So I'm already in second and I can just change that position to first. So I will take all the risk I can and maybe take some gambles to try to do it. I just need to attack and try to recover the most points. It's a good chance to acquire a lot of points. But there's also a good chance to lose a lot of points. So we need to be clever, fast and try to win. For sure there is a lot of pressure. If you make a mistake, you will lose the championship. So we need to be fast, but don't make any mistakes, so I guess it's a really complicated weekend. I think it will go to Valencia," the 25-year-old said.

WORLD CUP 2026 AND ASIAN CUP 2027 QUALIFIERS

Qatar rout Afghanistan as Almoez slams four goals

'India will be a stubborn opponent and they've improved a lot. It will be tough playing against them'



Qatar's Almoez Ali scores against Afghanistan during the Group A World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup 2027 qualifiers at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Four goals from Almoez Ali helped Qatar cruise 8-1 past Afghanistan in Group A of the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 at Khalifa International Stadium yesterday. The reigning Asian champions travel to the Indian state of Odisha where they face the Blue Tigers, while Afghanistan welcome Kuwait in Dammam for their second game of the group.

Qatar coach Carlos Queiroz said after the match his team is already focused for the game against India. "It will be a massive game against India. We start tomorrow to prepare. We need to be at our best to defeat them," the Portuguese said.

Almoez added: "India will be a stubborn opponent and they've improved a lot. It will be tough playing in front of their fans."

Yesterday, the home team needed just 11 minutes to open their account in the qualifiers through captain Hassan al-Haydos who arrived late in the box, picking up Akram Afif's pulled back pass and hammering it low into the back of the net.

Within less than 120 seconds, the Afghans restored parity after Mustafa Azadzoy supplied an excellent through pass for Amiruddin Sharifi who beat the offside trap and applied the finish past goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham.

Qatar's response was even faster as left-back Homam al-Amin whipped a cross from deep that was met by the diving header of Ali, who scored his 43rd international goal, moving clear off Mansour Muftah as Qatar's all-time top scorer.

Ali was again the creator in the 18th minute, this time advancing into the byline and sending a low cross for Mostafa Meshaal who collected it and finished with aplomb to make it 3-1. Before the half-hour mark, al-Amin made it a hat-trick of assists, making an overlapping run and picking up Afif's pass before finding Ali at the far post and the winner was left with the simplest of finishes for the fourth.

Ali completed his hat-trick in the 32nd minute, powering in from the penalty spot after goalkeeper Ovays Azizi had brought down Afif inside the box. Just before the break, Ali added his fourth of the night following a second penalty as Qatar went into the dressing rooms with a 6-1 lead.

Qatar were awarded a third penalty in the 52nd minute after a challenge on Pedro Miguel. Ahmed Alaeldin stepped up and sent the goalkeeper the wrong way, adding

Qatar's seventh goal of the game. Young forward Tameem Muftah, who replaced Ali earlier in the game, added his name to the scoresheet, sweeping home from close range following a cross from al-Amin who made it four assists on the night as Qatar wrapped up an 8-1 victory.

MANVIR STRIKE HELPS INDIA BEAT KUWAIT

Meanwhile, Manvir Singh struck 15 minutes from time to earn India a 1-0 win over hosts Kuwait as Igor Stimac's side claimed all three points in their Group A opener yesterday. Singh's first-time strike secured the Indians victory at the end of a keenly contested clash at the Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium, where many in the crowd had turned out to back the visitors.

Mohun Bagan striker Singh showed his ruthlessness to finish off a lightning quick move forward with a clinical strike after Lallianzuala Chhangte's ball across the face of goal. And the hosts' problems were compounded deep into injury when Faisal

al-Harbi was sent off for a high challenge on Chhangte, effectively guaranteeing Stimac's side left with the points.

STUBBORN PALESTINE HOLD LEBANON AT BAY

Palestine began their quest for a place at the 2026 World Cup with a goalless draw against Lebanon in their Group I World Cup qualifier in Sharjah yesterday. The match was played at Khalid Bin Mohamed Stadium in Sharjah because of a one-match stadium ban on 'host' Lebanon following unruly scenes in their qualifier against Syria in Beirut last year.

But with Palestine also displaced because of the current conflict with Israel in Gaza - they play their first 'home' game against Australia in Kuwait next week - the two sides stood for a minute's silence before the game for the victims killed in Gaza. It was the first meeting between the teams and saw a defensive Palestine largely on the back foot as the Lebanese created the best of the opportunities.



Afghanistan fans turned out in large numbers at Khalifa International Stadium.

SPOTLIGHT

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show kicks off today

The Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show will kick off today under the patronage of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of Al Shaqab.

The two-day event will unfold at Al Shaqab indoor and outdoor arena, marking a significant milestone for Arabian horse enthusiasts. This equestrian spectacle is poised to be an unforgettable experience, uniting a total of 272 horses, including 70 from outside Qatar. The inaugural edition of the show boasts a panel of judges who will bring their expertise to evaluate and appreciate the prowess of these equestrian teams, adding an extra layer of excitement to the competition: Renata Schibler (Switzerland), Josy Everars (Belgium), Helen Hennekens-van Nes (Belgium), Marek Trela (Poland), Robbie Den Hartog (Netherlands), Terry Holms (USA), Christine Valette (France), Soheil Sanati (Iran), Bassem Badr (KSA), Mohamed Mohsen (Egypt), Barbara Pfisner (Switzerland), Mohamed Hammad (Egypt).



Breeding & Show Manager, Al Shaqab, and Event Director Khalid al-Jehani said that Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show is classified as a B show by the European Conference of Arab Horse Organisations (ECAHO), allowing winning

horses to qualify for international shows of higher classification. This show not only showcases the beauty and grace of purebred Arabian horses but also celebrates the traditional and cultural significance of owning these magnificent creatures, reflecting the deep-seated love for Arabian horses in the community.

This show promises not only a world-class competition but also a celebration of the timeless bond between humans and these majestic Arabian horses. The two days of this event will be filled with thrilling competitions, breed presentations, and an opportunity for attendees to witness the grace and beauty of the Arabian horse.

Since its establishment in 1992, Al Shaqab's vision has been to build on Qatar's Arabian horse heritage and be a leading global centre for equine professionals. Al Shaqab's facilities, which are distinctively designed in the shape of a horseshoe, cover 980,000 square meters, with a state-of-the-art Main Arena comprising both an indoor and outdoor venue capable of holding over 5,000 spectators.



Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show has attracted 272 horses, including 70 from outside Qatar.

BOXING

Fury to fight Usyk for heavyweight crown on Feb 17

'This is a historic event. The whole world has been waiting for it'

AFP
London

Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk will clash in a "historic" fight for the undisputed heavyweight title in Saudi Arabia on February 17. British star Fury will put his WBC belt on the line, with the WBA, IBF and WBO titles held by Ukraine's Usyk also up for grabs in Riyadh.

The winner will be crowned the heavyweight division's first undisputed champion since Lennox Lewis from 1999 to 2000. Fury, 35, and Usyk, 36, were originally expected to clash on December 23.

But Fury's disappointing performance in a split-decision victory over MMA star Francis Ngannou last month forced a delay to the hotly-anticipated bout. He was left with a swollen eye and cut on the forehead after the contentious win against Ngannou.

Fury had already been criticised for failing to agree a deal with Usyk when a proposed meeting at Wembley in April couldn't be confirmed. The pair will finally step into the ring in 2024 as Fury looks to add to his record of 34 wins with one draw since turning professional in 2008.

"This is a historic event. The whole world of boxing has been waiting for many, many years, and they now have this fight," Fury's promoter Frank Warren told reporters at a press conference in London. "For the first time this century, we will have an undisputed heavyweight champion. As a promoter I've been banging my head against the wall. But now we



Oleksandr Usyk (right) and Tyson Fury face off during a press conference in London yesterday. (Reuters)

have the creme de la creme. These two undefeated heavyweight fighters."

In typically combative mood at the press conference, Fury referenced his 2015 victory over Usyk's fellow Ukrainian Wladimir Klitschko, which earned him the WBA, IBF and WBO titles. "I already relieved one Ukrainian of all the belts, and now I'm going to take them all back," Fury said. "Usyk's a champion, I'm a champion. It's going to be a fight for the ages."

Fury believes a victory over Usyk would cement his status as one of the all-time greats.

"He's a good boxer, slick. But I've seen people like him before, and when they fight the big man, they lose," he said. "I believe we're both destined to be here. I'm destined to become the undisputed champion, and more than that, cement my legacy."

Usyk kept his cool amid Fury's insults, which included taking swipes at his opponent's height and his ear-ring. "Yes I'm a little man. I'll speak in the ring," Usyk said.

Fury has held the WBC belt since he defeated Deontay Wilder in 2020 and has defended the ti-

tle three times. He stopped Dillian Whyte at Wembley in April 2022 and beat Derek Chisora at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium eight months later.

Usyk, who has won all 21 of his fights, has been the WBA, IBF and WBO title holder since defeating Anthony Joshua in 2021. The Ukrainian has defended his titles twice, defeating Joshua by split decision in Saudi Arabia last year and knocking out Daniel Dubois in August. Saudi Arabia has staged several leading boxing events in recent years, including Usyk's win over Anthony Joshua in 2022.

TENNIS

Sinner into last 4 with Djokovic at risk of exit

AFP
Turin, Italy

Jannik Sinner made history as the first Italian ever to reach the last four of the ATP Finals yesterday after Novak Djokovic beat Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (7/1), 4-6, 6-1.

World number four Sinner is guaranteed at least second spot in the Green Group thanks to Hurkacz, who played his only match of the season-ending tournament as a replacement for injured Stefanos Tsitsipas, claiming a set against Djokovic.

The Serbian world number one is now sweating on his semi-final place despite a second win from three matches, as his qualification hinges on the result of Sinner's final match with Holger Rune late last night. "It's hard but it's what I've chosen to do. I'm happy to have won the last match of the group, the rest is out of my hands," said Djokovic. "I finished the match well, let's see what happens next."

Sinner could deliberately lose against Rune and knock Djokovic out while still going through, denying the 24-time Grand Slam champion the chance of winning a record-breaking seventh Finals.

Although Hurkacz poured cold water on that notion, saying that his friend will go all out to win. "I think you're here to win matches, so that's what he's going to try to do," Hurkacz told reporters. "He qualified himself by winning his two first matches. He's obviously a great guy. Yeah, he's been playing really amazing tennis."

Being knocked out early would be a disappointing end to what has been an age-defying 2023 from the 36-year-old who won

three Grand Slams and took his 1000 Masters crowns to 40, another record.

However, a win over fellow young gun Rune would give Sinner first place in the group and likely mean missing on-form Red Group leader Daniil Medvedev in the semis. Djokovic now has to hope Sinner does beat Rune, who is more rested than the Italian after only having to play three games in his match with Tsitsipas on Tuesday before the Greek dropped out of the tournament injured.

He took control at the end of the first set when he rattled off nine points in a row to take a 6-0 lead in the tie-break and then seal the set. However, he threw away his serve to love in game five of the second set and two games later looked on in disbelief as Hurkacz rammed home four consecutive aces from 15-40 down to go to within one game of drawing level. Hurkacz easily saw out the set, drawing warm applause from the home crowd, and with the third set almost irrelevant the Pole collapsed against a visibly annoyed Djokovic.

On Wednesday night, Medvedev booked his place in the last four after beating Alexander Zverev 7-6 (9/7), 6-4, while Carlos Alcaraz cruised past troubled Andrey Rublev to get his campaign up and running. World number three Medvedev had to win in straight sets to claim a spot in the semi-finals in Turin with a match to spare and he saw off big-hitting German Zverev in a stodgy Red Group encounter.

He faces Carlos Alcaraz, a 7-5, 6-2 winner earlier in the day, in his final match and has the world number two's last-four hopes in his hands.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his group stage match against Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in Turin, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)

Hungary qualify for Euro 2024 with dramatic 2-2 draw against Bulgaria

Sofia: Hungary qualified for the Euro 2024 finals with a game to spare after a last-gasp own goal from Alex Petkov earned them a 2-2 away draw against Bulgaria in their qualifying Group G yesterday. The result put them on top of the group with 15 points from seven games, with an unassailable seven point lead over third-placed Montenegro, who have two games left to play.

Hungary took the lead through Martin Adam's close-range header following a free kick from captain Dominik Szoboszlai from the right after 10 minutes. Marco Rossi's squad seemed close to doubling their lead, but on Bulgaria's first chance, Spas Delev scored with a shot into the top right corner to make it 1-1 in the 24th minute.

The hosts were dealt a blow before halftime when they were reduced to nine men after red cards for Valentin Antov and Ilija Gruev, but the VAR intervened to overturn the latter and keep hopes of a Bulgarian comeback alive.

Hungary were also reduced to 10 men early in the second half when Milos Kerkez was sent off and suffered a major setback in the 78th minute as Kiril Despodov scored with a penalty to give Bulgaria a 2-1 lead. As Hungary got close to suffer their first defeat in a year, Petkov headed in his own goal from a corner seven minutes into stoppage time to send his team into their third consecutive European championship finals.

FORMULA ONE

Hamilton defends Las Vegas race after Verstappen outburst

AFP
Las Vegas

Seven-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton has defended the organisation of the Las Vegas Grand Prix after criticism from current world champion Max Verstappen. Red Bull's Verstappen had said the event was "99 percent show and one percent sporting event" and said the street track was "not every interesting".

Other drivers including McLaren's Lando Norris and Ferrari's Carlos Sainz had questioned the amount of commercial commitments that drivers have had to undertake around the race. The comments, after a glitzy opening ceremony with a drone show and performance from Australian singer Kylie Minogue, are unlikely to have pleased F1's American owners Liberty Media, who are also promoters of the Vegas race.

But Hamilton said that the growth the sport in the United States was a welcome development and praised the American investor and Formula One CEO Stefano Domenicali. "I hear there



are a lot of people complaining about the direction that Stefano and Liberty has gone. But they are doing an amazing job," said the Mercedes driver. "The sport continues to grow. It is a business and you will still see good racing here. It is a country to tap into and really captivate the audience," he said.

Hamilton said there was clearly a buzz around the event. "Everybody I know in Hollywood is coming and there will be a lot of business going on this weekend," he said.

"It will be a good spectacle to watch, even for those back home who have never been to Vegas. They will get to

learn what it is all about," he said.

The race will go along the famous 'strip', home to the city's top hotels and casinos. The return of F1 to Vegas after a 41 year absence follows the addition of Miami to the circuit while the US Grand Prix is held in Austin, Texas.

"We needed to have at least two races in the US, one wasn't enough, and this is one of the most iconic and unique cities that they have here," said British driver Hamilton, who conceded that the atmosphere around the Vegas race was very different to some of the established classic venues on the circuit. "It is a big show for sure, and it is never

going to be like Silverstone, but maybe over time, the people in this community will grow to love the sport," he said.

Verstappen had criticised the track saying he wasn't a fan of street courses in general. "It's 99 percent show and one percent sporting event," said the Dutchman, when asked to evaluate the return of the sport to Vegas after a 41-year absence.

"Not a lot of emotions to be honest. I mean I don't like... I just want to always focus on the performance side of things, I don't like all the things around it anyway," he said.

"I know of course there are some places that you know (it is) part of it, but let's say it's not my interest," he added. "Of course it will be great driving through the Strip, but then the layout itself is not the most exciting. An F1 car is a lot more fun with a lot of high-speed corners," said the Dutchman.

But Hamilton said he would wait until the drivers had competed on it, starting with practice sessions, before making any judgement. "Maybe the track will be good, and maybe it will be bad. It was so-so on the simulator. But don't knock it until you try it," he said.

FOCUS

Rohit is the 'genuine hero' of India's run to WC final

Former England captain Nasser Hussain says Rohit Sharma has led from the front with bold tactics

AFP
Mumbai

Virat Kohli and Mohamed Shami starred as India beat New Zealand to reach the World Cup final but Nasser Hussain believes captain Rohit Sharma has been their "real hero" of the tournament.

Unbeaten hosts India defeated New Zealand by 70 runs in Mumbai on Wednesday to make it 10 wins out of 10 this World Cup as they booked a place in Sunday's final in Ahmedabad.

Kohli scored a record 50th one-day international hundred in an imposing total of 397-4 that also featured Shreyas Iyer's rapid 105 off 70 balls before Mohamed Shami cleaned up with a stunning seven-wicket haul.

But it was 36-year opener Rohit, on his Wankhede Stadium home ground, who set the tone with a 29-ball 47 after winning the toss.

Hussain said Rohit, appointed India's white-ball captain in December 2021, deserved plenty of credit for India's run to the final.

"The headlines will be about Kohli, about Shreyas, about Shami. But the genuine hero of

this Indian side, the man who has changed the culture, is Rohit Sharma," Hussain told *Sky Sports* yesterday.

The former England captain, himself born in Madras (now Chennai), added: "It's one thing coming in the group stage, but can you do it again, can you play fearless cricket in a semi-final?"

"Their skipper went out there and showed everyone, showed his dressing room that they're going to carry on in exactly the same way."

Kohli may be the tournament's leading batsman with 711 runs, but Michael Atherton - another ex-England captain - said the manner in which Rohit, who has now scored 550 in this World Cup himself, batted on Wednesday was telling.

"For a team who have occasionally blinked when the critical moment has arrived in recent ICC events, often tip-toeing through an innings, Rohit led brilliantly, as he has throughout a campaign where he has eschewed personal milestones and batted selflessly against the new ball," Atherton wrote in *The Times*.

"It was not the number of runs that he scored, but the message



India's captain Rohit Sharma gestures during the ICC World Cup semi-final against New Zealand at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Wednesday. (Reuters)

he sent in getting India off to a flyer, making 47 in only 29 balls,

that was vital. Don't go into your shells, he was saying."

Yet in a match where 724 runs in all were scored, despite concerns

about a used pitch, it was paceman Shami who had the final say with an extraordinary return of 7-57 - the best by any bowler in a World Cup semi-final.

Out for the first four matches

Shami was out of the India team for the first four matches of the tournament and might not have featured at all but for an injury to Hardik Pandya.

Yet heading into yesterday's second semi-final between Australia and South Africa, he was the leading bowler at the World Cup with 23 wickets from six games at astonishingly low average of under 10 apiece.

England's 2019 World Cup-winning captain Eoin Morgan, who faced Shami during his career, said: "The level of control he has shown throughout this tournament to move the ball off the seam and in the air has been great to admire."

"Seven for 57 in a one-day international is unheard of, particularly in a World Cup knock-out game where there is a huge amount of pressure on him... To have someone like that at your disposal for Rohit Sharma adds more value to the strength of India."

SPOTLIGHT

NZ confident about future after last-4 exit

Reuters
Mumbai

New Zealand are confident they have the foundations in place to continue to compete with the elite at the World Cup even if they could be without Kane Williamson and a few other generational talents when the next edition comes around.

Skipper Williamson had no complaints about how the Black Caps were manhandled out of the semi-finals by India on Wednesday, possibly bringing to an end his hopes of ever raising the oldest limited-overs World Cup trophy.

The batting great, who has played in four World Cup semi-finals and two finals, will be 37 when southern Africa hosts the



New Zealand's Kane Williamson and Daryl Mitchell during the drinks break against India on Wednesday in Mumbai. (Reuters)

quadrennial 50-overs showpiece in 2027, while strike bowlers Tim Southee and Trent Boult will be 38.

Williamson laughed when the matter was raised at his post-match press conference -

"Are you going to talk about how old we are?, he joked - before saying he saw signs that the ageing world class talents were bringing along younger players.

"It's been an ongoing effort as a side to keep trying to get better and push the boundaries of where we can get to as a team and all those people are part of that," he said.

"You can only hope that, as we experienced from some of our leaders as young guys, that we can continue to bring players through. "Some good signs, certainly, in this last period of time. It's not

over just yet, but that's where the focus is."

Despite losing five of their last six matches at the tournament, Williamson was proud of what the Black Caps had achieved in India and accepted that they had simply been beaten by a better team at the Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday.

He refused to look for excuses in the injuries that restricted him to four matches, robbed the Black Caps of quick Matt Henry for the last two weeks and also hampered all-rounders Jimmy Neesham and Mark Chapman.

While New Zealand's bowlers did not produce their best in tricky conditions for seamers, Rachin Ravindra and Daryl Mitchell were the tournament's third and fourth highest run-scorers after Wednesday's match.

Mitchell gave New Zealand a brief glimmer of hope that they might be able to run down the victory target of 398 and reach a third successive final with a spectacular 134 from 119 balls.

The 32-year-old only started playing international cricket four years ago and joined his captain in warning against writing off New Zealand's many thirtysomethings just yet.

"For me now it's trying to make the most of playing for New Zealand for as long as I can and keep trying to move this Silver Fern forward," he told reporters.

"I love being part of this group and we've got a number of world class players who love being in that changeroom and love playing for New Zealand.

"I'm sure many of the boys will keep doing it for a while yet."

Al Wasmiyah Farm-owned Gubbass wins Burzan Cup



Jockey Jefferson Smith guides Al Wasmiyah Farm-owned Gubbass to victory in the Barzan Cup, the feature race at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Eighth Al Rayyan Meeting yesterday.

DOHA: Al Wasmiyah Farm-owned Gubbass with Jefferson Smith in the saddle, stormed to Barzan Cup triumph, wrapped up an exciting Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) Eighth Al Rayyan Meeting yesterday. The Georges Mikhalides-trained colt prevailed in the 4YO+ Thoroughbreds by half a length after a head-to-head battle in the final furlong at the Al Rayyan Racecourse. Earlier, the Saif Rashid Saif al-Khayarin-owned Lil' Frank made two out of two in Doha, winning the Thoroughbred Guineas for

3YO and giving trainer Hamad al-Jehani and jockey Jerald Mosse a second victory in the evening. QREC Acting CEO Bader Mohamed al-Darwish crowned the winners of both the feature races of the meeting that witnessed a total of 10 races. **8th Al Rayyan Meeting: Guineas & Barzan Cups Day**
WINNERS: Horse, Trainer, Jockey
1 - Barzan Cup, Thoroughbred (Gr3 QA), 4YO+ Gubbass, Georges Mikhalides, Jefferson Smith
2 - Thoroughbred Guineas, 3YO

Lil' Frank, Hamad al-Jehani, Jerald Mosse
3 - Purebred Arabian Guineas, 4YO
AJS Jamran, MHK al-Attayah, Szczepan Mazur
4 - Local Thoroughbred Guineas, 3YO
Matawar, Alban de Mieulle, Soufi-ane Saadi
5 - Al Gharafa Cup, Purebred Arabians, 3YO
Shemilwol, Jean de Mieulle, Faleh Bughanaim
6 - Sheraouh Island Cup, Purebred Arabians, 4YO+ Hareeb, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas

Delozier
7 - Thoroughbred Open Race, 3YO+
Taxiwala, Eng. Osama Omer E al-Dafea, Ronan Thomas
8 - Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95), 3YO+
General Panic, Rashid al-Jehani, Tomas Lukasek
9 - Purebred Arabian Novice Plate, 4YO
Fayq Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
10 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate, 3YO
Serengeti Sunset, Hamad al-Jehani, Gerald Mosse

Qatar Duty Free at the fore of MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023

DOHA: Qatar Duty Free (QDF) is named the founding partner of the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 as it plays a pivotal role in supporting the world-renowned motorsport event hosted at the newly upgraded state-of-the-art Lusail International Circuit. The final race weekend will take place from 17 to 19 November. Under the terms of the three-year sponsorship agreement signed in September 2023, QDF is officially assigned to support two major motorsport events hosted at the Lusail International Circuit, which include: The Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix, which took place in October of this year The MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar With this partnership, Qatar Duty Free will benefit from vast brand exposure to millions of people tuning in through global TV. In addition, the world-leading travel retailer will receive prominent brand visibility throughout the iconic racing venue. Senior Vice-President of Qatar Duty Free, Thabet Musleh, said: "We are proud to support the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar, an elite motorsport event and a very valuable addition to Qatar's sporting legacy. Our partnership with Lusail International Circuit took place this year, starting with Formula 1,

which was undoubtedly a great success. We look forward to continuing this successful partnership in the upcoming years, in which we will be fully committed to enhancing the fan experience at the Lusail International Circuit." The Lusail International Circuit has undergone comprehensive renovation and development earlier this year, offering an exceptional experience for the drivers and fans. Since its renovation, the circuit has hosted the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2023 and now the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023, both supported by Qatar Duty Free. Qatar Duty Free has shown an unwavering commitment to the sports industry in Qatar by supporting prestigious events such as the Qatar Women's Total Open, the Qatar Men's Exxon-Mobil Open tennis tournaments, and the Ooredoo Qatar Major Premier Padel Tournament. Last month, QDF was named the founding partner of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix, as part of its sponsorship agreement with the Qatar Lusail International Circuit. Featuring over 200 retail and dining outlets, Qatar Duty Free (QDF) is creating a new airport experience while reinventing airport shopping and dining for a new generation of travellers.



MATCH REPORT

Head breaks South African hearts as Aussies reach final

'IT'S HARD TO UNPACK ALL OF THAT. IT WAS A TENSE FINISH AND AN AMAZING GAME'

AFP
Kolkata

Travis Head starred with bat and ball as Australia set up a "special" World Cup final clash with India after a tense three-wicket win over South Africa in Kolkata yesterday. Chasing a tricky 213 for victory, Australia wobbled after Head hit 62 but Steve Smith (30) and Josh Inglis (28) helped the five-time champions reach their target with 16 balls to spare in the second semi-final in Kolkata.

"It's hard to unpack all of that. I didn't move for the past couple of hours. It was a tense finish and an amazing game," said Head.

As Australia reached an eighth World Cup final, South Africa were left to rue a fifth semi-final loss despite David Miller's 101.

It was particularly painful for the Proteas who had routed Australia by 134 runs in a group stage game at Lucknow four weeks ago.

Australia slipped to 137-5 and then 193-7 before Mitchell Starc (16) and skipper Pat Cummins (14) kept their nerve to steer the team home.

"It's going to be a special final, I still talk



Australia's Travis Head in action in the ICC World Cup semi-final against South Africa at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (Reuters)

of the 2015 as one of my career highlights and I wasn't even playing," said Cummins of the final in Melbourne eight years ago

when Australia defeated New Zealand. "So to be out there in a final, in India, world's biggest stadium...it's a very happy

changing room at the moment." The final is on Sunday at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad which boasts a

130,000-capacity. Two-time champions India made the final on Wednesday with a 70-run victory over New Zealand in Mumbai, taking their record at this World Cup to 10 wins in 10 games.

Left-handed batsman and part-time off-spinner Head stood out after taking two wickets and then with his 48-ball innings laced with nine fours and two sixes.

Australia were in trouble when they were five down as spinners Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi struck in quick succession to rattle the middle-order.

Maharaj bowled Head, who was dropped on 40 and 57, and Shamsi, a left-arm wrist spinner, trapped Marnus Labuschagne lbw for 18 and bowled Glenn Maxwell for one in his next over.

Australia started the tournament with two losses but registered their eighth straight win.

"The way we started with the bat and ball was the turning point, we always had to play catch-up," said South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma.

The conditions combined with the quality of the Australia attack. They were ruthless and exploited every bit of advantage, and really put us under pressure." Starc led the bowling charge with figures of 3-34 and Cummins also picked three wickets to bowl out South Africa for 212 in 49.4 overs.

Left-arm quick Starc struck in the first over to send back Bavuma, who had said he was not "100% fit" at the toss, for a fourth-ball duck.

Josh Hazlewood claimed the wicket of in-form Quinton de Kock for three as Cummins took a stunning catch.

De Kock, who will quit one-day international after the World Cup, ended with 594 runs including four centuries to sit behind the tournament's leading batsman Virat Kohli (711).

The new-ball bowlers kept up the attack with the wickets of Aiden Markram (10) and Rassie van der Dussen (six) as South Africa slumped to 24-4 and were 44-4 when rain interrupted play.

Klaasen and Miller hit back after the 45-minute rain break as the two put on 95 runs but Head broke through to bowl Klaasen for 47.

Head trapped Marco Jansen lbw on the next delivery to be on a hat-trick, which was saved by Gerald Coetzee, who put on a 53-run partnership with Miller.

The left-handed Miller smashed eight fours and five sixes in his 116-ball knock.

SCOREBOARD

South Africa		Australia	
Q. de Kock c Cummins b Hazlewood	3	T. Head b Maharaj	62
T. Bavuma c Inglis b Starc	0	D. Warner b Markram	29
R. Dussen c Smith b Hazlewood	6	M. Marsh c van der Dussen b Rabada	0
A. Markram c Warner b Starc	10	S. Smith c de Kock b Coetzee	30
H. Klaasen b Head	47	M. Labuschagne lbw b Shamsi	18
D. Miller c Head b Cummins	101	G. Maxwell b Shamsi	1
M. Jansen lbw b Head	0	J. Inglis b Coetzee	28
G. Coetzee c Inglis b Cummins	19	M. Starc not out	16
K. Maharaj c Smith b Starc	4	P. Cummins not out	14
K. Rabada c Maxwell b Cummins	10	Extras (lb3, nb2, w12)	17
T. Shamsi not out	11	Total (7 wickets, 47.2 overs)	215
Extras (lb4, w7)	1	Fall of wickets: 1-60 (Warner), 2-61 (Marsh), 3-106 (Head), 4-133 (Labuschagne), 5-137 (Maxwell), 6-174 (Smith), 7-193 (Inglis)	
Total (all out, 49.4 overs)	212	Did not bat: A. Zampa, J. Hazlewood	
Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Bavuma), 2-8 (De Kock), 3-22 (Markram), 4-24 (Van der Dussen), 5-119 (Klaasen), 6-119 (Jansen), 7-172 (Coetzee), 8-191 (Maharaj), 9-203 (Miller), 10-212 (Rabada)		Bowling: Jansen 4.2-0-35-0 (w4), Rabada 6-0-41-1 (w1, nb1), Markram 8-1-23-1 (w1), Coetzee 9-0-47-2 (w1, nb1), Shamsi 10-0-42-2 (w5), Maharaj 10-0-24-1	
Bowling: Starc 10-1-34-3 (w4), Hazlewood 8-3-12-2, Cummins 9.4-0-51-3 (w2), Zampa 7-0-55-0, Maxwell 10-0-35-0, Head 5-0-21-2 (w1)		Result: Australia won by 3 wickets	



Australia's captain Pat Cummins (left) and Mitchell Starc walk back to the pavilion after their win over South Africa at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Final frontier a step too far for edgy South Africa at 2023 World Cup

AFP
Kolkata

South Africa lost their fifth Cricket World Cup semi-final yesterday, going down by three wickets to five-time champions Australia in Kolkata. AFP Sport looks at those five losses:

— 1992: Mission impossible

South Africa, playing in their first World Cup following the end of the apartheid era, restricted England to 252-6 in 45 overs in their semi-final in Sydney before the rain washed away their dreams – and there was nothing they could do about it.

After a 12-minute rain delay, South Africa's target was adjusted from 22 runs off 13 balls to an impossible 22 off one. "It was and still remains a bit of a con," said South Africa batsman Brian McMillan.

— 1999: Choke's on us —

Set a target of 214 to defeat Australia in the semi-final at Edgbaston, the Proteas needed nine runs off the last over. Lance Klusener smashed fours off the first two balls to tie the scores. However, disaster struck on the fourth ball of Damien Fleming's over when Klusener set off for a single which left Allan Donald stranded and run out. Australia made the final courtesy of their better finish in the group stage. "We will never have the chokers tag off our back until we win an official ICC event," said Donald. "Until that happens, we will never be forgotten for what happened in 1999."

— 2007: Caribbean collapse —

Semi-final number three came in the Caribbean at Gros Islet at St Lucia and South Africa's opponents were again Australia. Like yesterday,



South Africa's captain Temba Bavuma reacts during the ICC World Cup second semi-final against Australia at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. (AFP)

the Proteas won the toss and chose to bat but lost their top four batsmen for 27 including skipper Graeme Smith for two. South Africa's innings folded for 149 and they went on to lose the match by seven wickets.

— 2015: Agony in Eden —

Another semi-final and more rain. This time the venue was Eden Park in Auckland where South Africa made 281-5 in 43 overs. New Zealand were handed a revised target of 298 and Grant Elliott made an undefeated 84 while Brendon McCullum and Corey Anderson hit fifties.

The Black Caps came through by four wickets with just one ball remaining when South African-born Elliott hit Dale Steyn for six.

South Africa were left to rue a series of costly errors in the field which opened the door for the Kiwis. "It

is hurting. It is going to take a while to recover," admitted South Africa skipper AB de Villiers.

— 2023: Head's a heartbreaker —

Australia beat South Africa again, this time by three wickets in a tense chase of 213 in Kolkata to set up a final against India. Australia wobbled after Travis Head's 62 but Steve Smith (30) and Josh Inglis (28) helped the five-time champions reach their target with 16 balls to spare and make their eighth final.

For South Africa, David Miller's 101 was not enough after the Proteas had slipped to 24-4. "Australia were ruthless and exploited every bit of advantage, and really put us under pressure. From 24-4, it was always going to be hard to get a competitive total," admitted captain Temba Bavuma.

WHO SAID WHAT

Kolkata: Who said what at the Cricket World Cup yesterday, the 43rd day of the 2023 tournament:

"It's hard to unpack all of that. I didn't move for the past couple of hours. It was a tense finish and an amazing game."

— **Australia's man of the match Travis Head for his 62 and two key wickets in the three-wicket semi-final win over South Africa which put them into Sunday's final against India.**

"We knew it would be a grind and a battle and that's what it was."

— **Head on the low-scoring semi-final.**

"After the broken hand I thought I wasn't going to be here. I just want to contribute for Australia and will have another chance in a couple of days."

— **Head again after his World Cup debut was delayed due to a broken hand suffered on the pre-tournament tour of South Africa.**

"Our character came through. We showed the resilience we talk about and a bit of dog fight. The way we started with the bat and ball was the turning point, we always had to play catch-up."

— **South Africa captain Temba Bavuma whose side were bowled out for just 212 and then allowed Australia to race to 60-0 in six overs.**

"The conditions combined with the quality of the Australia attack. They were ruthless and exploited every bit of advantage, and really put us under pressure. From 24-4, it was always going to be hard to get a competitive total."

— **Bavuma on his team's struggles.**

"Travis Head was crazy. He has a knack of finding a wicket when you need one. That was huge. I think it has been a feature of the whole tournament. There's been players who chip in with those middle-over wickets and Travis was the man today."

— **Australia skipper Pat Cummins on part-time off-spinner Travis Head whose two wickets included Heinrich Klaasen (47) when the batsman had put on 95 with David Miller.**

"I don't know really. The good thing is a few guys have been there in a final before so we can draw on that. A couple of other guys have played in T20 World Cups as well."

— **Cummins on the secret of Australia's success in reaching an eighth World Cup final.**



Australia's captain Pat Cummins (centre) celebrates with teammates after taking the catch to dismiss South Africa's Quinton de Kock during the ICC World Cup second semi-final at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)