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Noskova stuns Swiatek, Alcaraz breaks new ground



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Arsenal beat Palace, return to winning ways in Premier League

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MATCH REPORT

# Late own goal denies Jordan famous win over South Korea

‘OVERALL 2-2 IS A FAIR RESULT AND GIVES BOTH TEAMS A CHANCE TO WIN THE GROUP’

Reuters  
Doha

Jordan were denied a first ever victory over South Korea when a 91st-minute own goal from Yazan al-Arab gifted their opponents a 2-2 draw in their second Asian Cup Group E game at Al Thumama Stadium yesterday.

The result leaves both teams on four points from two games and opens up the group after Bahrain moved up to three points with a late winner in a 1-0 victory over Malaysia in the other group encounter.

South Korea had taken the lead with a penalty from Son Heung-min, but an own goal from Park Yong-Woo and a long-range strike from Yazan al-Naimat made it 2-1 to Jordan before the own goal denied the Arab nation a landmark win. “Overall 2-2 is a fair result and gives both teams a chance to win the group,” South Korea coach Jurgen Klinsmann told reporters.

“We took the tempo out of the game after going 1-0 up and lost battles on the field to Jordan, which made it difficult. But those are the games you learn a lot from. Going into the next round is a high priority, but it was a very intense game.”

Son was brought down in the box by Ihsan Haddad in the fourth minute. The Tottenham Hotspur forward stepped up to take the penalty but had to wait five minutes as the referee checked the replay and conferred with the VAR team.

He then kept his cool amid a crescendo of boos from Jordanian fans to score with a chipped effort down the middle.

South Korea had their first choice goalkeeper Kim Seung-gyu ruled out of the rest of the tournament with a knee injury and his



Jordan's Yazan al-Naimat celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during their AFC Asian Cup Group E clash against South Korea at Al Thumama Stadium in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)

replacement Jo Hyeon-Woo was tested several times with Jordan's players clearly instructed to shoot from range.

But Jo could do nothing in the 37th minute when Park headed the ball into his own net as he attempted to prevent centre back al-Arab from scoring for Jordan.

Jordan continued to pile on the pressure and just before halftime al-Naimat volleyed into the bottom corner to silence the South Korean fans.

“At the outset it’s an important draw against South Korea. It’s such a beautiful feeling,” al-Naimat said.

South Korea upped the ante in the second half but it took a full 45 minutes before they finally found an equaliser when Hwang In-be-



South Korea coach Jurgen Klinsmann reacts during the match against Jordan yesterday. (Reuters)



South Korea's Lee Jae-Sung looks dejected after Jordan's Yazan al-Naimat scored a goal. (Reuters)

om's shot was diverted into the net by al-Arab.

Al-Arab had celebrated South Korea's own goal earlier with a somersault and a wild roar near the corner flag, as if he had scored it himself, but he wore a sheepish look after putting the ball into his own net. South Korea nearly won it in the ninth minute of added time when the ball fell to Hong Hyun-seok at the far post on a set piece but the midfielder's shot found the side netting.

“It is normal to make mistakes at the beginning and the end of the match, South Korea took excellent technical decisions in attack,” Jordan coach Hussein Ammouta said.

“We spared no effort to preserve the result. Eventually we think it's a positive result. What's most important is the confidence and high spirits that will allow us to go forward (in the tournament).”

Bahrain took all three points from a nervy encounter with Malaysia to boost their qualification hopes when Ali Madan scored a 95th-minute winner.

Madan used the outside of his boot to shoot from the edge of the box, with his strike going through a crowd of defenders and beating the keeper to spark wild celebrations in the dugout while some of his team mates collapsed on the pitch in relief.

SPOTLIGHT

## Bahrain edge past Malaysia 1-0

Ali Madan scored in the final seconds as Bahrain edged Malaysia 1-0 in Group E of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

The win revives Bahrain's hopes of advancing to the knockout stage, with the West Asian side to face Jordan on Thursday while the defeat ends Malaysia's hopes, with the Southeast Asian side to conclude their campaign against South Korea.

Malaysia head coach Kim Pan-gon rang in the changes, with Dominic Tan and Shahrul Saad in a revamped defensive line-up with Corbin Ong and Mat-tew Davies on the flanks and they withstood Bahrain's early pressure.

Despite Bahrain starting on the front foot, it was Malaysia who had the first look at goal in the seventh minute when Corbin Ong's long throw-in was deflected into the path of Dion Cools, who couldn't get his shot on target.

Malaysia came close again shortly after when Faisal Halim weaved his way into the Bahraini box before relaying the pass to Paulo Josue who was dispossessed, with the ball then landing nicely for Arif Aiman, whose shot was saved by Ebrahim Lutfallah.

Malaysia grew in confidence and threatened again in the 20th minute with Josue finding space down the left flank to send a delightful cross to Arif, only for the Johor Darul Ta'zim midfielder to squander the opportunity.

Malaysia's Davies tested Lutfallah seven minutes later from distance while at the other end, Madan waltzed his way inside the box before rattling the up-right from an acute angle.

Bahrain almost took the lead in the 31st minute through Komail al-Aswad when he surged into the box and managed to slip the ball past goalkeeper Syihan



Bahrain's defender Abdullah al-Khalasi (centre) celebrates after teammate Ali Madan (not in the pic) scored against Malaysia during the AFC Asian Cup Group E match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha. (AFP)

Hazmi, only for Dominic to scramble the ball off the line as the score remained 0-0 going into the break.

Bahrain started the second half with the same intensity as they did the first but Abdullah al-Hashash, al-Aswad and Madan all saw their attempts go to waste.

Abdulla Yusuf Helal then squandered his chance to give Bahrain the lead in the 56th minute when he angled his headed attempt just wide off Mohamed Adel's cross from the right, before Yusuf Helal was denied again after seeing his shot blocked just after the hour

mark. Both sides could have scored as the match entered the closing minutes with Davies unlucky with his volleyed effort off substitute Akhyar Rashid's cross while Ali Hasan Isa shot his effort straight at the Malaysian custodian after he broke clear of the Malaysian defence.

Bahrain's persistence finally paid off when Madan struck with the outside of his left foot in the fifth minute of added time after Malaysia failed to clear a corner.

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**We were almost perfect: Iraq's Casas**

Aesus Casas declared Iraq's performance “close to the perfect match” after the Lions of Mesopotamia booked their place in the last 16 of the AFC Asian Cup 2023 on Friday with an impressive 2-1 win over four-time champions Japan at Education City Stadium.

Aymen Hussein scored both goals for Casas' side before Wataru Endo headed in a late consolation as the Iraqis notched up back-to-back wins that guarantee their progress to the Round of 16 ahead of their final group game against Vietnam.

“This was a great day for the Iraqi people but for us it's only one win,” said the Spaniard. “We have six points but we have to think about Vietnam. After today the players need to rest, to enjoy but I think my players are very smart. It's only one match today and after that we have to think about Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam.”

“This tournament is very hard. All tournaments are very hard, because in one tournament like this one mistake, bye-bye no more. We have to think only about Vietnam and, after Vietnam, the next opponent.”

Those goals capped a team performance that saw Iraq dominate in midfield with their intensity throughout the opening 45 minutes, leaving Endo and Hidemasa Morita chasing shadows for much of the first half.

“Football is fighting, it's the quality you most need to be competitive,” said Casas. “It's important to win a match. My way since I came to the Iraq national team is the same, also in friendly matches I chose the players who can be fighters but good players too. The difference at this level with the national team is you need balance between fighting and quality.”



TENNIS / AUSTRALIAN OPEN

# Noskova upsets Swiatek, Alcaraz breaks new ground

‘I think it was an unbelievable match for me. I really wanted to win this, so I’m just glad that I did it’

Reuters  
Melbourne

World number one Iga Swiatek crashed out of the Australian Open at the hands of Czech teenager Linda Noskova in the third round yesterday to further deplete an already weakened women’s draw heading into the second week at Melbourne Park.

While only three of the top 10 women’s seeds remain, the main contenders for the men’s title have all breezed into the fourth round with Carlos Alcaraz, Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev joining the charge on day seven.

Swiatek’s bid for a maiden title at Melbourne Park was brought to an abrupt halt when 19-year-old Noskova became the first teenager to down the top seed since Amelie Mauresmo beat Lindsay Davenport in 1999.

Noskova held her nerve after Swiatek had won the opening set, and on the big points in the third set, and only let emotions get the better of her after serving out for a 3-6 6-3 6-4 victory.

“I think it was an unbelievable match for me,” the world number 50 said. “Playing on such a court for a first time, playing with Iga for a second time, I really wanted to win this, so I’m just glad that I did it.”

Four-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek said she would have to analyse where she had gone wrong but was confident she could reset for the rest of the season.

“For sure I wish I could have played a little bit better in this



Czech Republic’s Linda Noskova shakes hands with Poland’s Iga Swiatek after winning their third round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. **Right:** Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz hits a return against China’s Shang Juncheng during their singles match in Melbourne yesterday. (Reuters/AFP)



tournament,” said the 22-year-old Pole. “I guess I’ll have to work on stuff to feel more comfortable next year.”

Alcaraz earlier reached the fourth round for the first time when Chinese teenager Shang Junchen pulled up injured while trailing in their uneven contest 6-1 6-11-0.

The second seed still had time to show off the skills that have already won him two Grand Slam titles and gave himself a decent rating out of 10.

“I’m feeling great. Probably seven, eight,” said the 20-year-old. “It’s a high score, but that’s how I feel. Every match that I’m play-

ing, I’m feeling better and better.” Daniil Medvedev, who had needed five sets to beat Emil Ruusuvuori in a second-round match that concluded in the early hours of Friday morning, made short work of Felix Auger-Aliassime with a 6-3 6-4 6-3 victory.

“Physically today was very tough,” said the third seed, twice a losing finalist in Melbourne.

“I want to try to go again to the final, try to have my chance of winning another Grand Slam. Just want to show good tennis, beat good guys, and hopefully get one more title.”

Sixth seeded German Zverev also went through in straight

sets after a 6-2 7-6(4) 6-2 win over American Alex Michelsen in the final match of the day.

While Shang fell short in his bid to become the first Chinese man to reach the fourth round of a Grand Slam since 1938, the country will have a presence in the second week after Zheng Qinwen beat compatriot Wang Yafan 6-4 2-6 7-6(8).

The 21-year-old received a surprise visit after the match from compatriot Li Na, who was the first Chinese player to win a Grand Slam and triumphed at Melbourne Park in 2014.

“I watched that final 10 times,” said the 12th seed. “She said, ‘Don’t think too much, just keep it

simple! I think that’s what I need to do right now.”

Zheng next plays Oceane Dodin after she prevailed in an all-French duel with Clara Burel 6-2 6-4.

French wildcard Arthur Cazaux joined Dodin and Adrian Panatta in the last 16 with a breezy 6-3 6-3 6-1 win over Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor to extend his Melbourne Park debut.

He will next meet the similarly big-serving ninth seed Hubert Hurkacz, who kept Poland’s flag flying with a 3-6 6-1 7-6(4) 6-3 win over Ugo Humbert.

Britain will also have a representative in the second week after Cameron Norrie ousted 11th seed

Casper Ruud 6-4 6-7(7) 6-4 6-3 to reach the fourth round for the first time.

Nuno Borges became only the second Portuguese player to reach the second week of a major when he battled back to beat Grigor Dimitrov 6-7(3) 6-4 6-2 7-6(2) and set up a meeting with Medvedev.

Ukrainian Dayana Yastremska will return to the fourth round of a Grand Slam for the first time since Wimbledon 2019 after her 6-2 2-6 6-1 win over Emma Navarro.

She next faces Victoria Azarenka, who battled back from 4-1 down in the second set to beat Jelena Ostapenko 6-1 7-5 in a battle of former Grand Slam champions.

GOLF

## Roaring McIlroy back in Dubai Desert Classic hunt

AFP  
Dubai

Rory McIlroy conjured up a magical third round 63 to reignite his quest for a fourth Dubai Desert Classic title yesterday.

After rounds of 71 and 70 the Northern Irishman appeared to be out of the running, going into the weekend trailing overnight leader Cameron Young by 10 shots.

McIlroy knew he needed to produce something special to defend his title and he did just that with his brilliant bogey-free nine-under par effort to leave him in a share of second.

The world number two executed a grandstand finish, making an eagle putt from the fringe from nearly 45 feet.

At almost the same time, Young made a double bogey on the par-3 seventh hole after hitting his tee shot into the water. That tied the two players on top at 12-under par.

American Young would later make three birdies on the back nine to finish on one-under par 71 and lead by two shots going into the final round.

McIlroy moved to 12-under par with the best round of the week so far, where he was joined by Poland’s Adrian Meronk (70).

Crowd favourite McIlroy, who secured his first professional win in Dubai in 2009 and played for the first time in the tournament as an amateur in 2006, matched his lowest round in the tournament in 13 appearances (first round in 2014).



Northern Ireland’s Rory McIlroy in action on day three of the Dubai Desert Classic yesterday. (@DubaiDCGolf)

“Because of the way the course is playing, I thought to myself, if I could shoot two rounds of 67s over the weekend, I would have a pretty good chance to at least contend,” said the man of the day.

“I’ve sort of nearly made up those 10 shots up in one day. So, I’m in a much better position than

I thought I would be,” said McIlroy, who could become the most successful player in the 35-year history of the Dubai Desert Classic with his fourth title win today.

“And obviously, that was a massive bonus at the last with the eagle. But yeah, I sort of expected if I played well today to still be

four or five behind going into tomorrow, I’d have some chance. Looks like I’ll be a little closer than that.”

McIlroy said he knew he needed to play well on the tougher front nine of the Majlis course, and he did that with five birdies, three of them coming in succession from the seventh onwards.

On the back nine, he took care of the three par-5s, making birdies on the 10th and 13th, before the eagle on 18th.

Young, who is yet to win on the top-tier tours but has 13 top-10s in the past two seasons, said he had expected McIlroy to do something outrageous.

“I saw it (McIlroy moving to top of the leaderboard). I kind of assumed. Someone like him, I feel like you expect him to do that. Figured he wasn’t going to be 30th for long,” said Young, who followed up the double bogey on the seventh hole with a bogey on the eighth. Meronk, who hit a shank on the fifth hole when his second shot went more than a 100 yards off target from where he made a bogey, was happy with his 70.

“I’m exhausted to be honest. The course wasn’t playing easy today. The greens were firmer and faster. Tough pin positions. But overall, good position going into Sunday, so I’m happy for that,” said the Dubai resident, winner of three DP World Tour titles in 2023.

China’s Li Haotong (69) and Denmark’s Rasmus Hojgaard (70) were tied fourth at nine-under par, while LIV Golf star Joaquin Niemann (67) improved to solo sixth position at eight-under.

CRICKET

## Australia keep faith in Smith as opener in Tests



Australia’s Marnus Labuschagne (left) and Steve Smith walk onto the field during day three of the first Test against West Indies in Adelaide on Sunday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Melbourne

Steve Smith’s first outing as a Test opener may not have gone to plan but Australia coach Andrew McDonald said he had the full support of the team and that it would take time for him to build a relationship with Usman Khawaja at the top of the order.

Smith, who moved up from number four following David Warner’s retirement, made 12 and 11 not out in the series opener against West Indies, which Australia won inside seven sessions.

Warner and Khawaja had played junior cricket together and shared a great chemistry at the top of the order, and McDonald said Australia would let the new opening partnership develop the same kind of rapport.

“I suppose it’s more just the connection of Usman and Smudge (Smith) over time,” McDonald said. “We’ve seen Davey and Usman’s connection and then the partnerships that they’ve been able to produce. They’re world-class performers at the top of the order and we think Steve Smith is one of the best problem-solvers in the game. We’ve said that leading into this and it makes sense for us that he’s at the top.”

West Indies fast bowler Shamar Joseph, who made his Test debut in Adelaide, dismissed Smith with his first ball in international cricket and claimed 5-94 in the first innings.

Another debutant, Justin

Greaves, claimed 2-36 but McDonald was confident Australian batters would do better in the day-night second Test in Brisbane, beginning on Thursday, having gained some familiarity with the new West Indies attack.

“Sight unseen is always difficult for batters, when you haven’t seen someone and gotten used to their rhythm and the cues they present,” McDonald said.

“Sometimes you do get drawn into shots that potentially you don’t play.

“We feel as though now that there’s less unknowns going into the second test match, we’ve had a good look at them, a lot of those little decision-making errors that may have crept in I think will iron themselves out.”

### Mitchell rested, Ravindra back for final T20 v Pakistan

New Zealand’s Daryl Mitchell will skip the final T20 International against Pakistan with fellow all-rounder Rachin Ravindra replacing him in the squad for today’s match in Christchurch, the home side said.

New Zealand have already taken a 4-0 lead in the five-match series and Mitchell would be rested as part of his workload management, New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said yesterday. Coach Gary Stead said: “Rachin is coming off a period of rest himself and will bring a valuable skill set to the group in this final match as he continues his return to cricket.”

Devon Conway missed Friday’s victory after testing positive for Covid-19.

### Report: Tommy Fleetwood turns down massive LIV offer

**New York:** Tommy Fleetwood turned down a contract in the tens of millions to join LIV Golf, per a *Telegraph Sport* report. After Fleetwood, a native of England, and Danish golfer Nicolai Hojgaard declined LIV Golf’s offers to join Jon Rahm’s team, the Saudi-funded circuit has turned its attention to Fleetwood’s countryman Tyrrell Hatton, per the report. Hatton, along with Fleetwood and Hojgaard, were teammates of Rahm’s on Team Europe’s

successful Ryder Cup squad in 2023. While the PGA Tour and DP World Tour are in talks about merging with Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment fund, LIV Golf is attempting to fill out its roster before its season starts Feb. 2 in Mexico. LIV Golf lured Rahm away from the PGA Tour last month with a reported \$600mn deal and nearly enticed Tony Finau to join Rahm’s team. However, Finau committed to the PGA Tour last month. Per the *Telegraph Sport* report,

Hatton hasn’t received a formal offer but has had discussions with LIV Golf. If Hatton and Rahm do officially join LIV Golf, they and other European players could face fines and bans, once they participate in the 14 LIV Golf events in 2024, under the current rules. The LIV Golf League announced its 14-event 2024 schedule, one that will be condensed by a month compared to the 2023 slate and have five new domestic venues as well as three different international locations.



SHOWJUMPING

# Von Eckermann wins 4-star Grand Prix at Doha Tour second leg

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

World No. 1 showjumper Henrik Von Eckermann won the feature CSI4\* Grand Prix-Jump Off (1.55m) event of Week 2 of Doha International Tour at Al Shaqab's magnificent Longines Outdoor Arena yesterday. Eckermann riding bay mare Glamour Girl topped the jump-off with a flawless 32.80secs ride to win a prize of Euros 50,000. The Swede finished ahead of Frenchman Simon Delestre on black gelding Dexter Fontenis Z (33.72secs) while Austrian Gerfried Puck on chestnut stallion Equitron Naxcel V ended up as third on the podium (34.72secs).

Thailand's Janakabhorn Karunayadhaj, who was on top before the jump-off, ended up as being fourth with chestnut mare Maxwin Kinmar Agalux clocking 37.29secs. The Grand Prix champions were honoured by Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiyah, President of the Asian Equestrian Federation.

Earlier, the CSI2\* Grand Prix was won by Jordan's Ibarhim Hani Bisharat astride Harvard. He topped the jump off flawlessly in 34.55secs. Australia's Gerfried Puck on



Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiyah, President of the Asian Equestrian Federation, and Sheikh Ahmad bin Nooh al-Thani, Secretary-General Qatar Equestrian Federation and Chairman Organising Committee Doha Tour, with podium winners of CSI4\* Grand Prix-Jump Off (1.55m) of Doha International Tour at Al Shaqab yesterday.

Idiaal Special H.J. was second (35.69secs) while Qatar's Khalid Mohamed AS al-Emadi was a close third riding Chikita O (36.01secs). The National Competition (1.00m) was won by Hadi Nasser al-Shahwani on



Henrik Von Eckermann celebrates after riding bay mare Glamour Girl to victory.

Al Dafna (39.44secs), ahead of Suhaim Hamad al-Yafei on Calydor (39.93secs) while Iman Arbuckle Saoud on Godete (42.15secs) claimed the third podium spot. The third and final leg of Doha Tour will be held from January 25-27.

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arsenal thrash Palace to ease back to winning ways

Toney inspires Brentford to victory on return from betting ban

AFP  
London

Arsenal breathed new life into their Premier League title challenge as a 5-0 win over Crystal Palace got the Gunners back to winning ways. Centre-back Gabriel did most of the damage before half-time as he headed in the opener then forced Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson into an own goal.

Leandro Trossard made it 3-0 on the hour mark before substitute Gabriel Martinelli struck twice in stoppage time. Victory moves Mikel Arteta's men level with Manchester City and Aston Villa, two points behind leaders Liverpool. "We wanted to start the second part of the season with a great performance, with a great result, and build that positivity and momentum again," said Arteta. "I think the boys did a good job today."

Arsenal had won just once in seven games prior to a two-week winter break. However, a warm weather training camp in Dubai looked to have refreshed last season's runners-up, even if they did have very obliging visitors in struggling Palace. The Eagles have won just once in 12 games to leave them still perilously poised above the relegation zone and pile the pressure on 76-year-old boss Roy Hodgson. Arsenal's lack of a natural goalscorer up front has been scrutinised during their downturn in form and the fact it was one of his defenders that ended a barren run in front of goal will remain a concern for Arteta.

No side has scored more goals from set pieces in the Premier League this season than Arsenal and it was two corners that undid Palace before half-time. Gabriel outmuscled Chris Richards to rise highest to meet Declan Rice's delivery with a downward header to settle the home side's nerves just 11 minutes in. Palace did not learn their lesson as Gabriel again got ahead of Richards to meet Bukayo Saka's corner eight minutes before half-time and the ball rebounded in off the unfortunate Henderson.

Hodgson was booed by his own fans after substituting Eberechi Eze during Wednesday's 1-0 FA Cup defeat at Everton to keep



Arsenal's Gabriel celebrates with teammates after scoring against Crystal Palace. (Reuters)

the England international fresh for the trip to the Emirates. The closest Eze came to making an impact was another long-range effort that Raya was forced to turn behind.

But to compound Palace's set-piece shambles, they then conceded from one of their own. Raya collected a cross into the box and quickly set Gabriel Jesus galloping free on the counter-attack. The Brazilian crossed for Trossard, who kept his cool to cut inside Nathaniel Clyne and smash home his seventh goal of the season.

Defeat leaves Palace still five points above the relegation zone. And a banner unfurled in the away end in the closing stages will do little to help Hodgson's case to remain until the end of the season.

Later, Ivan Toney scored on his return from an eight-month ban as Brentford snapped a seven-game winless run to beat Nottingham Forest 3-2.

Toney was suspended for 232 breaches of betting rules in May, but showed little sign of rust as he took just 19 minutes to make his mark with a clever free-kick and played the full game. However, it was Neal Maupay who scored the winner with a brilliant touch and volley 22 minutes from time that eased the Bees' fears of being dragged into the relegation battle.

Victory lifts Brentford above Forest into 14th, six points clear of the drop zone. Defeat compounded a difficult week for Forest after they admitted to breaching the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules (PSR) last season. Nuno Espirito Santo's men are now looking nervously over their shoulder as they sit just four points above the relegation zone and could be hit with a points deduction.

Everton have already been hit by a 10-point sanction this season for breaching PSR at the end of the 2021/22 season.

## Team QMMF finish second in qualifying at Abu Dhabi 6 Hours Challenge



Qatar's Team QMMF by HRT, comprising drivers Abdullah al-Khulaifi, Ghanem al-Ali, Ibrahim al-Abdulghani and German racer Julian Henses, yesterday secured a notable second place in the official qualifying round for the Abu Dhabi 6 Hours Challenge, part of the Middle East Endurance Championship season of 2024. The final race is scheduled to flag off at 8:15am Qatar time today at the Yas Marina Circuit. Being part of the fiercely competitive Porsche 911 GT3 (992 AM) category, the team will also be in action at the Hankook 24H Challenge at the Dubai Autodrome from January 26-28.

SERIE A

# Roma begin life after Mourinho with win over struggling Verona

AFP  
Rome

Daniele De Rossi got off to a winning start to life as Jose Mourinho's successor at Roma yesterday after his boyhood club beat struggling Verona 2-1 at an emotional Stadio Olimpico. First-half goals from Romelu Lukaku and Lorenzo Pellegrini were enough for eighth-placed Roma to see off Verona and give De Rossi a debut win after taking over on Tuesday.

Roma took advantage of fourth-placed Fiorentina not playing a league fixture this weekend due to their Italian Super Cup commitments in Saudi Arabia by moving to within two points of the Champions League positions.

Verona, who have serious financial problems and have unloaded seven players this month, sit just inside the relegation zone after

their 12th defeat in 21 matches. However Roma didn't have it all their own way as Michael Folorunsho pulled one back with a well-struck shot in the 76th minute which Roma goalkeeper Rui Patricio should have kept out.

Earlier Rome-born Folorunsho, who said pre-match that he is a Lazio fan, had a goal disallowed for a soft-looking foul, while Verona striker Milan Djuric smashed a penalty over the bar just after the hour mark. Former midfielder De Rossi, who played for nearly two decades at Roma, was brought in after Mourinho's sudden sacking.

A large portion of Roma's support is still livid at Mourinho's dismissal, with posters appearing in Rome demanding American billionaire owner Dan Friedkin sell the club. And the rancour was not dispelled by De Rossi's return, with boos and whistles accompanying the players to the pitch for their pre-match warm-up.

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

# Bounedjah salvages draw for Algeria against Burkina Faso

AFP  
Bouake, Ivory Coast

Baghdad Bounedjah headed home five minutes into injury time to earn Algeria a 2-2 draw with Burkina Faso at the Africa Cup of Nations yesterday, forcing their opponents to wait to secure a place in the last 16.

Mohamed Konate's opening goal for Burkina Faso was cancelled out by a first Bounedjah equaliser, but a Bertrand Traore penalty put the Stallions back in front to the delight of their many supporters in the crowd of over 33,000 in Bouake, Ivory Coast's second city.

At that point Burkina Faso were heading through, but Bounedjah equalised a second time at the death to take his overall tally of goals to three and join Emilio Nsue of Equatorial Guinea as the tournament's joint-top scorer.

Burkina Faso, the 2013 Cup of Nations



Algeria's Baghdad Bounedjah (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Burkina Faso during the Africa Cup of Nations Group D match in Bouake. (AFP)

runners-up who reached the semi-finals at the last edition in Cameroon two years ago, have four points from two games in

Group D and remain on course to qualify for the knockout phase before facing Angola next. Algeria, who were held 1-1 by

Angola in their opening game, have two points and a win against Mauritania on Tuesday will suffice for them to advance.

They needed Bounedjah's late goal, however, to stave off the spectre of a repeat of two years ago, when Djamel Belmadi's team went to Cameroon as reigning African champions but were knocked out in the group stage with just one point and one goal scored.

Nevertheless, Riyad Mahrez and his teammates clearly struggled in the sapping mid-afternoon heat and will welcome having an evening kick-off in their final group outing.

## ANGOLA EDGE MAURITANIA IN THRILLER

Gelson Dala struck twice as Angola defeated Mauritania 3-2 in an entertaining clash to close in on a spot in the last 16. Dala gave Angola the lead on the half hour in Bouake when a loose ball fell his way at a corner and his scruffy acrobatic effort

bounced over two defenders on the line. Sidi Bouna Amar hauled Mauritania level as he weaved through the Angola defence before producing an unerring low finish, but Dala responded with a goal of similar brilliance early in the second half. Mauritania then paid the price for failing to clear, with Gilberto winning the ball inside the area and watching his shot deflect in off centre-back Lamine Ba.

Aboubakary Koita slammed in from 20 metres to raise Mauritanian hopes of a comeback, but Angola held on as Neblu made a crucial save to deny Amar a second of the contest. Angola, who drew 1-1 with Algeria in their opening match, ended a nine-game winless run at the tournament dating back to 2012 and took over top spot in Group D with four points.

They sit above Burkina Faso on goals scored and will secure a place in the knockout rounds with a draw against the Stallions in their final group fixture on Tuesday in Yamoussoukro.



HE SHEIKH JOAAN BIN HAMAD AL THANI RIFLE DAY

# Simca Mille, Mkaee’lat Al Shahania and Abbes shine

Wathnan Racing-owned Simca Mille won the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day featuring 10 races yesterday produced thrilling action with Simca Mille, Abbes and Mkaee’lat Al Shahania claiming coveted titles at the Al Rayyan Racecourse.

As expected, the highly-anticipated meeting – one of the major events on Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club Meeting’s (QREC) annual calendar – brought the best out of the racers with Wathnan Racing-owned Simca Mille culminating a memorable day with HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle triumph. Under Mickael Barzalona, the Alban de Mieulle-trained won the 2200m Thoroughbred race by a neck ahead of Haunted Dream and Jeff Koons – both also owned by Wathnan Racing. Trainer De Mieulle returned with five victories from the eventful day which saw Barzalona riding four winners.

In the penultimate contest yesterday, multiple Group 1 champion Abbes, also trained by De Mieulle, retained the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, winning the Group 3 PA race for the second year. Barzalona guided the seven-year-old to victory after a surge in final 200m of the exciting 2200m race.

President of Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani crowned the winners of the last two races while Chairman of the Asian Equestrian Federation and QREC Vice-Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiya was also present.

Earlier, HE Sheikhha Yasmeen bint Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani’s Mkaee’lat Al Shahania emerged winner of the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, claiming a comfortably victory in the 1750m race for Purebred Arabians under Maxime Guyon. The title completed a double for trainer Rudy Nerbonne.

**24th Al Rayyan Meeting - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day WINNERS (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**

- 1 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle, Thoroughbreds**  
Simca Mille, Alban de Mieulle, Mickael Barzalona
- 2 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy (Gr3 PA), Purebred Arabians**  
Abbes, Alban de Mieulle, Mickael Barzalona
- 3 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy**  
Mkaee’lat Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Maxime Guyon
- 4 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Purebred Arabian Open Race**  
Ghadah, Jean de Mieulle, Christophe Soumillon
- 5 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Thoroughbred Open Race**  
Band Width, Alban de Mieulle, Mickael Barzalona
- 6 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani**



President of Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani crowned the winners of the last two races of The HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. Chairman of the Asian Equestrian Federation and QREC Vice-Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiya was also present.



Mickael Barzalona rides Wathnan Racing-owned Simca Mille to HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle victory yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm



Mickael Barzalona also led Abbes to HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy glory.



Mickael Barzalona also led Abbes to HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy glory.

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|--|---|
| <b>Trophy, Local Thoroughbreds</b><br>Horse: Harb, Rashid al-Jehani, Tomas Lukasek   | Come Quick, Bader al-Balushi, Maxime Guyon  |
| <b>7 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Thoroughbreds</b><br>Soldier's Gold, Alban de Mieulle, Mickael Barzalona | <b>9 - Local Purebred Arabian Novice Cup, 4YO+, 1400m</b><br>Toufik, Alban de Mieulle, Alberto Sanna        |
| <b>8 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Thoroughbred Sprint</b>  | <b>10 - Local Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Cup</b><br>Talga't Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier |

PREVIEW

## Mancini and Tarkovic inspired by Iraq’s stunning win over Japan

Head coaches Roberto Mancini and Stefan Tarkovic believe their respective sides can learn a lesson or two from Iraq’s 2-1 victory against Japan on Friday, as Saudi Arabia and Kyrgyzstan prepare to face-off in Group F of the AFC Asian Cup today.

Having come from a goal behind to defeat Oman 2-1 in their opening match, the Green Falcons need a win to book their place in the Round of 16, but for Mancini, the task will not be easy against a Kyrgyzstan side ranked 40 places below them, as shown by 68th-ranked Iraq defeating 18th ranked Japan.

“I think Kyrgyzstan are a good team,” said Mancini, who is managing Saudi Arabia in a major tournament for the first time, having joined in September 2023. “No one thought Iraq could beat Japan, but that is football. After many years in football, you continue to learn every day. The first lesson is that every game is difficult, and things can change at any point during the match and that’s why your concentration needs to be 100% every minute. “Sure, the first game is the most difficult, but it is behind us now. It is important for us to try to win the second too because we want to close this situation very fast and for this we have to play a very good game.”

The Italian tactician, who previously led his home country to winning Euro 2020, employed a three-man defence in all competitive matches since taking over the Green Falcons’ job, beating Pakistan 4-0 and Jordan 2-0 in the Joint Qualifiers before starting the AFC Asian Cup campaign with a 2-1 win over Oman, and Mancini believes the players have



Saudi Arabia's coach Roberto Mancini (left) and his Kyrgyzstan counterpart Stefan Tarkovic.

already started to adapt to his ways.

“After we started to play with this system, we conceded only one goal from a penalty, the defenders played very well in the last game, but we can play with four or five defenders, that doesn’t matter. What matters is the quality we put on the pitch and how we defend. The personality and the mentality we put in the match matters more. The atmosphere in our camp is very good and has always been from the start. We work well and the players at this moment are very happy, we want to continue like this all the way.

For the Kyrgyzstan, the 2-0 defeat against Thailand in their campaign opener came as a blow, but the central Asian side had also lost their opening match in UAE 2019 then recovered to advance to the last 16 on their AFC Asian Cup debut. Head coach Stefan Tarkovic



Saudi Arabia's coach Roberto Mancini (left) and his Kyrgyzstan counterpart Stefan Tarkovic.

wants his side to take inspiration from teams like Iraq and Syria to show their fighting spirit against a theoretically superior Saudi Arabia. “We came here to show our best performance and our best football,” said Tarkovic.

“The first match was not ideal, so we need to learn from our mistakes. The things we did wrong at both boxes, we were discussing how we can do better against Saudi Arabia and that is the most important thing.”

“Football is about balance. Saudi Arabia have their own qualities, we saw that against Oman. So we need to be very focused in attack, but without the attacking phase, there is a possibility to not get anything out of the game, so we need to find balance. Many teams impressed me in the tournament. I like teams with fighting spirit Yesterday, Japan controlled the game against Iraq, but Iraq won.”

## Oman coach upbeat ahead of Thailand clash despite defeat in opener

**Doha:** Branko Ivankovic has full faith in his Oman side to get the job done when they face Thailand in their Asian Cup Group F tie today. Satisfied with his team’s spirited performance despite the 2-1 defeat to Saudi Arabia in their opening match, Ivankovic is certain Oman have what it takes to bounce back and reignite their knockout stage hopes. “When we saw the draw, we knew that it was a difficult group. With all due respect to our next opponents, our primary objective is to win,” said the Croat. “We are fully prepared and want to be focused and play as good a game as we did against Saudi Arabia.”

Against three-time champions Saudi Arabia, Oman held on to their 1-0 lead for 78 minutes before conceding twice which – according to Ivankovic – was a clear indication of what his players are capable of. “We proved against Saudi Arabia that we are able to match any opponent we face. They are one of the top favourites and were the only team to beat the world champions (Argentina) last year (FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022). Against such a tough opponent, we lost out only in the 97th minute.

“I understand the anger and sadness of the fans but I have

a lot of belief in this team. I am proud of them and am not going to make unnecessary changes. Thailand had a terrific opening game and while there is pressure on us to bounce back, I think there is still work to be done. Oman have a very strong midfield and a lot of our work is to find ways to contain them. If you look at their earlier game, they got their lead and resorted to defending. It’s just that a team like Saudi Arabia is good enough to break that down and overcome the deficit and thus, we have a lot of work to do. “

Thailand kicked off their journey with a 2-0 victory against the Kyrgyzstan but head coach Masatada Ishii has refused to let his players get carried away. “Starting the competition on a winning note is obviously great and it gave us a fair idea of how well-prepared we are,” said Ishii, who led Kashima Antlers to the J1 League in 2016.

“But we were handed a heavy defeat by Japan (5-0 in a friendly) not so long ago. So, while I’m pleased to have collected three points, I think there is still work to be done. Oman have a very strong midfield and a lot of our work is to find ways to contain them. If you look at their earlier game, they got their lead and resorted to defending. It’s just that a team like Saudi Arabia is good enough to break that down and overcome the deficit and thus, we have a lot of work to do. “