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SPORT

PREVIEW

Australia fit and raring to go against Indonesia: Arnold

‘EVERY TIME WE GO ON THE PITCH AND PREPARE FOR A GAME WE EXPECT A TOUGH MATCH’

Graham Arnold gave his Australia squad a clean bill of health ahead of the Soccerroos’ AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Round of 16 clash with Indonesia at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today with striker Mitchell Duke available for selection.

Duke missed the 1-1 draw with Uzbekistan in the last round of Group B games on Tuesday due to a hamstring strain, but Arnold confirmed the Machida Zelvia forward would be available for his side’s opening match of the knockout rounds.

“He’s training fully today,” Arnold said of Duke, while Craig Goodwin has also recovered from a minor knee injury.

“There was a slight strain in his hamstring. He’s available for selection, which is the main thing.

“We’ve got a few players in that position to think about, and we’re just making sure that he’s ready to go.

“We don’t want him to be on the pitch and have something happen again, so we’re just making sure that that’s all right. Everyone else is 100 percent fit.”

Australia and Indonesia will be meeting at the AFC Asian Cup for the first time and have not faced off against one another since a qualifier for the 2011 tournament in Brisbane in 2010, which the Soccerroos won through a solitary goal from Mark Milligan.

Arnold’s team will go into the game as favourites but the former Sydney FC coach is wary of Shin Tae-yong’s side after their performances in the group phase, where the Indonesians notched up a 1-0 win over Vietnam.

“Indonesia have shown what the competition is about and the strength of the competition,” said Arnold.

“Every time we go on the pitch and prepare for a game we expect a tough match and we expect that tomorrow.

“We have to be at our best and we can’t have any slip up in the mental side of it.



Australia coach Graham Arnold.



Indonesia coach Shin Tae-yong.



Australian players during a team training session in Doha yesterday. Australia take on Indonesia in the first Round of 16 clash at AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 today. (@Soccerroos)

“It’s not a David v Goliath battle. It’s two teams that will go out there and give it their best.

“They’ve shown in this competition so far, against Japan and against Iraq, how strong they are, and obviously they won against Vietnam.

“We’ve watched all the games, we’ve done all our research, and we’re planning ourselves to win the game.”

Indonesia will be appearing in the knockout rounds of the AFC Asian Cup for the first time with the country making their first appearance since 2007, and coach Shin Tae-yong acknowledged the difficulties his side will face against a team 121 places higher in the world rankings.

“Tomorrow’s match for us is never going to be easy, especially because the Australia team is one of the strongest teams in the Asian Cup,” said the former Korea Republic international, who finished his playing career with A-League side Queensland Roar.

“They’ve got strength and power and I think in those aspects Australia is probably the strongest in this competition.

“We’re going to play with a strong mentality. We will never give up. We’re going to focus on the match until the referee blows the whistle after 90 minutes. We’re not going to have any regrets and we’re going to do our best.

“I lived in Brisbane for five years so I know the colour of the Australian football and the playing style,” Shin said through a translator ahead of today’s match at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. “However it depends on all the head coaches, the philosophy and what he wants, how he builds his team, his cohesion etc. If I compare the time I stayed in Australia and now, I think the Australian football also has been developing so far. So I just want to praise it, the Australian football compared to before. It’s very offensive football. But the Australian team may have weaknesses. I still will need to find a way to deal with this Australian team.”

SPOTLIGHT

Tajikistan confident ahead of UAE clash

Tajikistan may have sealed knockout stage qualification in their debut AFC Asian Cup campaign but head coach Petar Segrt said the Central Asian side are not satisfied just yet.

If anything, advancing to the Round of 16 has made Tajikistan even hungrier and, more importantly, placed them on an equal footing with the United Arab Emirates - who they meet today.

“The buzz around our historic win is now a thing of the past and I don’t want the players to feel that kind of pressure with every match,” Segrt said yesterday.

“Now, we are no longer a lesser team and whether our match against the UAE lasts 90 minutes or 120, I have full faith in my team and know they’re going to give their best.”

The Croatian said Tajikistan will face the UAE confident of winning, having played to a goalless draw with the 1996 AFC Asian Cup runners-up last year.

“We met UAE not so long ago and held them to a 0-0 game, but that was a friendly and they’ve changed a lot since then. However, the same holds true for Tajikistan. We will fight till the last minute and make the time away from our families count.

“We have had some minor setbacks with the team, with some small injuries and cautions but the UAE are not without trouble either. I can say with conviction that we have a 50-50 chance of reaching the quarter-finals.”

UAE head coach Paulo Bento acknowledged the threat posed by the crowds and agreed with Segrt on the two teams being equally capable of achieving victory.



UAE football players during a training session in Doha. (@UAEFNT)

“It would be a big mistake to take Tajikistan lightly after all they have done in the competition so far,” said Bento.

“They are very good at building their game from the back and have also displayed a good offensive approach, so I’m certain that they will demand a lot from our team.

“We are at the stage of the competition where we don’t get a do-over and thus, we are going to have to avoid giving into Tajikistan’s strong points. We are not considering ourselves favourites and will need to perfect several aspects of our game to come out superior.”

Meanwhile UAE defender Khalid al-Hashemi said past encounters against central Asian teams will help his side

find solutions against last 16 opponents Tajikistan.

In the 14 months leading up to the tournament, the UAE played friendly matches against Central Asian sides Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic.

They also faced Kazakhstan.

“It is an important match in the Round of 16, no team reaches this stage if they were an easy team to face,” said al-Hashemi. “Most of our friendly matches were similar teams, so we know their style and we know what to expect. We know they can be physical and tough to challenge. The friendlies help us a lot in preparing for how to play and how to get the win on the pitch.



Tajikistan coach Petar Segrt.

“We have to remain focused, follow the coach’s instructions and hopefully we can get the result.”

Back in 2019, the Whites faced another debutant side from central Asia in the Round of 16; the clash against Kyrgyz Republic at Zayed Sports City proved to be a hard-fought battle, with the Emiratis needing an extra-time goal from an Ahmed Khalil penalty to win it after the 90 minutes ended 2-2. The UAE went on to reach the semi-finals.

With Tajikistan the next opponents at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium today, al-Hashemi drew parallels with the previous tournament which he watched as a supporter, with his international debut only arriv-



UAE coach Paulo Bento.

ing three years later. In Qatar 2023, just like they did under Alberto Zaccheroni in 2019, the UAE have come under criticism the microscope from local media for what has been described as less than convincing performances.

“It was a good tournament which made us proud as Emiratis in 2019.

“In these tournaments, it is always about winning and qualifying, rather than performance.

“You could play the best game in your history and still not win, so it will not matter. You can play a game that doesn’t look great but you get that important result. For us, what matters the most is to win.”

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Dominant Sabalenka beats Zheng to retain Australian Open crown

Melbourne: Aryna Sabalenka produced an utterly dominant display to become the first woman in 11 years to retain the Australian Open title and send out a warning to her rivals with her second Grand Slam title yesterday.

The Belarusian blew away Zheng Qinwen 6-3 6-2 in 76 minutes with a show of power that overwhelmed the Chinese 12th seed, emulating compatriot Victoria Azarenka's 2012-13 feat by winning the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup back-to-back.

Sabalenka came into the match without having dropped a set at the year's first major and stayed perfect to join Ash Barty, Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova and Lindsay Davenport in the elite club of players to have done so this century.

"I'm speechless right now," Sabalenka said at her press conference. "I don't know how to describe my emotions. But definitely I'm super, super happy and proud of everything I was able to achieve so far. "Yeah, just happy with the level I played today. She's a great player and very tough opponent."

Sabalenka dropped only one set at last year's tournament and her dominance this year is a further reflection of the maturity and emotional control she has built in the last 12 months.

"I didn't want to be a player who won it and disappeared," Sabalenka said. "I wanted to show I'm able to be consistently there and I'm able to win another one.

"That's why no matter what the result, win or lose, we're always working hard, we're always looking for things to improve in my game."

Sabalenka's rip-roaring form has helped her reach at least the semi-finals at the last six majors including at Wimbledon last year, having missed the 2022 event at the All England Club due to Russian and Belarusian players being banned. Like last year, the trophy will not mention where Sabalenka comes from as she is competing without national affiliation under conditions imposed on Russian and Belarusian players in tennis since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

MONSTER GROUNDSTROKES

Sabalenka shrugged off the politics to roar through the tournament losing only 30 games along the way, with her biggest test coming against US Open champion Coco Gauff in a rematch of their title clash at Flushing Meadows.

Playing in her third Grand Slam final, Sabalenka unleashed monster groundstrokes to grab the contest by the scruff of the neck with an early break for 2-0.

Thousands of Chinese supporters in the stadium and millions more back home cheered Zheng on as she went 40-0 up on Sabalenka's serve only for the Belarusian to win five straight points and hold.

The charismatic 25-year-old Sabalenka has a massive Melbourne fan base of her own and she rode the vociferous Rod Laver Arena support to take the opening set, serving out at the second attempt after Zheng had saved four set points.

Zheng showed she was slowly growing in confidence by firing up her own big forehand amid the traditional rallying cry of "Jia You" - literally "add oil" - from her

compatriots in the crowd. All that did was fuel Sabalenka, however, and a clean crosscourt winner earned her a break point in the first game of the second set with Zheng's double fault handing it to her on a platter.

The contest was then briefly halted with when a protester unfurled a Palestinian flag and shouted anti-war slogans before being taken out of the stadium by force.

Zheng, who was bidding to match the 2014 feat of her idol and compatriot Li Na in winning the Australian Open, saw her hopes fade after two more errors on serve left her 4-1 down.

Sabalenka stumbled a little at the line but finally closed out the most one-sided final since Azarenka beat Maria Sharapova 6-3 6-0 in 2012 with another thunderous forehand winner on her fifth championship point.

She raised her arms in triumph before running to her team and patting the bald head of fitness trainer Jason Stacy, which she has been signing in marker pen as a pre-match ritual throughout the tournament.

Zheng, meanwhile, cut a disappointed figure as she pondered what might have been.

"I wasn't playing my best tennis, I wasn't feeling that good out there," she said.

"I think I can learn more with the loss today and then I hope next time I can come back as a better tennis player and come back stronger."



ARYNA SABALENKA

Age: 25
WTA Ranking: 2
Grand Slam titles: 2 (Australian Open 2023, 2024)

Nation: Belarus
Seeding: 2

ROAD TO AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2024 FINAL

First round: beat Ella Seidel (Germany) 6-0 6-1
Second round: beat Brenda Fruhvirtova (Czech Republic) 6-3 6-2
Third round: beat 28-Lesia Tsurenko (Ukraine) 6-0 6-0
Fourth round: beat Amanda Anisimova (U.S.) 6-3 6-2
Quarter-finals: beat 9-Barbora Krejickova (Czech Republic) 6-2 6-3
Semi-finals: beat 4-Coco Gauff (U.S.) 7-6(2) 6-4
Final: beat 12-Zheng Qinwen (China) 6-3 6-2

EARLY LIFE

- Born in Minsk. Began playing tennis at age six.

CAREER TO DATE

- Began her professional career playing on the ITF Circuit in 2012.
- Won three singles titles and one doubles title on ITF Circuit in 2015.
- Played first WTA qualifying event at Rabat in 2016 and played in her first WTA main draw at Dubai the following year. Ended 2017 ranked number 78 for first top-100 finish.
- Won two WTA titles at New Haven and Wuhan in 2018. First Top-20 season finishing ranked 11th.
- Won three WTA singles titles and three doubles titles in 2019, including first Grand Slam doubles title at the US Open with Belgian partner Elise Mertens.
- Won Doha, Ostrava and Linz titles for a joint Tour-leading record in 2020. Climbed one place in the rankings for her first Top-10 season.
- Won Abu Dhabi and Madrid in 2021 and reached the semi-finals at Wimbledon and the US Open.
- Reached the 2022 US Open semi-finals. Qualified for the WTA Finals for the second consecutive year where she defeated the top 3 players of the tournament - Jessica Pegula, Ons Jabeur and Iga Swiatek - and finished runner-up losing to Caroline Garcia.
- Won the Australian Open beating Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan) and reached Wimbledon and French Open semi-finals, finished runner-up at the US Open in 2023 after defeat by Gauff. Also won titles in Adelaide and Madrid.
- Reached career high ranking of number one in September, 2023.
- Won the Australian Open for the second consecutive year, beating Zheng Qinwen.

Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus poses with the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup after defeating China's Zheng Qinwen during their women's final of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Pope the batting hero on day three

England take lead but India move closer to win in the first Test

Reuters
Hyderabad

England vice-captain Ollie Pope produced an unbeaten 148 but India remained on course for victory in the opening Test at the end of day three at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium yesterday.

The tourists had risked a defeat inside three days after India, having built a lead of 190, re-dug England to 163-5 in their second innings in the second session of the day.

But Pope dug his heels in, hitting 17 fours in a 274-minute masterclass to produce arguably his finest knock even though India are confident of going 1-0 up in the five-match series.

Rehan Ahmed was keeping Pope company on 16 with England finishing the third day on 316-6, putting them 126 ahead with four wickets in hand.

"It was a brilliant day of cricket for us," England batter Joe Root said. "The way that Pope played in particular has been an absolute masterclass on how to score runs in this part of the world, when you're not used to playing here."

India, who have not lost a Test series on home soil since 2012, amassed 436 in their reply to England's first innings 246.

That left England with a mountain to climb and the touring batters did not retreat into any defensive shell.

Openers Zak Crawley (31) and Ben Duckett (47) scored freely, frequently employing the sweep shot - both traditional and reverse - to negate India's spinners. Crawley motored along at a run-a-ball rate but could not convert the start and edged a Ravichandran Ashwin ball to lone slip Rohit Sharma.

Duckett, then on 39, was lucky when Jasprit Bumrah's lbw appeal was turned down and India did not review that decision. Replays confirmed the ball would have hit the leg stump.

Not that it mattered - in his next over, Bumrah uprooted Duckett's off-stump and let out a roar.



England's Ollie Pope (left) plays a shot during the third day of the first Test against India in Hyderabad yesterday. (AFP)

SCOREBOARD

England 1st innings 246
India 1st innings (overnight 421-7)

Y. Jaiswal c and b Root	80
R. Sharma c Stokes b Leach	24
S. Gill c Duckett b Hartley	23
K.L. Rahul c Ahmed b Hartley	86
S. Iyer c Hartley b Ahmed	35
R. Jadeja lbw b Root	87
K.S. Bharat lbw b Root	41
R. Ashwin run out (Hartley/Foakes)	1
A. Patel b Ahmed	44
J. Bumrah b Root	0
M. Siraj not out	0
Extras (b5, lb6, w2, nb2)	15
Total (all out, 121 overs)	436

Fall of wickets: 1-80 (Rohit), 2-123 (Jaiswal), 3-159 (Gill), 4-223 (Iyer), 5-288 (Rahul), 6-356 (Bharat), 7-358 (Ashwin), 8-436 (Jadeja), 9-436 (Bumrah), 10-436 (Axar)

Bowling: Wood 17-1-47-0 (w2), Hartley 25-0-131-2 (nb2), Leach 26-6-63-1, Ahmed 24-4-105-2, Root 29-5-79-4

England 2nd innings

Z. Crawley c Rohit b Ashwin	31
B. Duckett b Bumrah	47
O. Pope not out	148
J. Root lbw b Bumrah	2
J. Bairstow b Jadeja	10
B. Stokes b Ashwin	6
B. Foakes b Axar	34
R. Ahmed not out	16
Extras (b10, lb6, nb6)	22
Total (6 wickets, 77 overs)	316

Fall of wickets: 1-45 (Crawley), 2-113 (Duckett), 3-117 (Root), 4-140 (Bairstow), 5-163 (Stokes), 6-275 (Foakes)

Bowling: Bumrah 12-3-29-2, Ashwin 21-3-93-2, Axar 15-2-69-1, Jadeja 26-1-101-1 (nb6), Siraj 3-0-8-0

FOCUS

Bopanna and Ebden overcome Italians to lift Australian Open title

Reuters
Melbourne

India's Rohan Bopanna and Australian Matthew Ebden dug deep to win the Australian Open men's doubles title yesterday with a 7-6(0) 7-5 victory over Italian duo Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori.

The second seeds fell to the ground after overcoming their Italian challengers before bowing to the crowd at the Rod Laver Arena.

Bopanna becomes the oldest male player at 43 to win a Grand Slam title, and the Indian finally tasted success in Australia in his 17th consecutive Open, having lost the mixed doubles final last year and in 2018.

"Age truly really is not even a number for this guy. He's young at heart, he's a champion, he's a warrior. He's fought hard by my side this whole past year" Ebden said.

Bolelli and Vavassori held their own in the opening set and earned their first break point at 5-5, but

the Indian-Australian pair rallied to save serve and ran out easy winners in the tiebreak, backed by the crowd. The second set looked to be headed the same way, going with serve and locked at 5-5, until Vavassori's serve was broken leaving Ebden to serve for the match.

"This could not have been possible if I did not have a fantastic Aussie partner by my side," Bopanna said.

It is the first Major win for the pairing, who lost last year's US Open final, and Bopanna will be world number one when the rankings are updated tomorrow, with Ebden at number two having played three more tournaments during the ranking period.

Ebden won the Australian Open mixed doubles in 2013 and the Wimbledon men's doubles in 2022 - when he lost in the men's doubles final in Australia the same year - while Bopanna won the 2017 French Open mixed doubles.

Vavassori was making his first appearance in a Major final, while Bolelli won the men's doubles title in Australia in 2015.



India's Rohan Bopanna (left) and Australia's Matthew Ebden celebrate with the trophy after victory against Italy's Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori during their men's doubles final of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

Australia pull ahead after bowlers Hazlewood and Lyon restrict West Indies

Brisbane: Australia wrestled control of the day-night second Test yesterday and find themselves 156 runs away from a series clean-sweep after bowling West Indies out for 193 on day three in Brisbane.

Kirk McKenzie top-scored with 41 for the visitors, who had a number of starts but were restricted in their second innings by economical seamer Josh Hazlewood (3-23) and spinner Nathan Lyon (3-42).

The hosts reached 60-2 from 19 overs at stumps, having boldly declared at 289-9 in their first innings after dismissing the West Indies for 311.

The Caribbean seamers, minus Shamar Joseph who was injured by a toe-crushing Mitchell Starc yorker, made good use of the night conditions but have an uphill battle ahead to defend a modest 216.

"One thing's for sure, we're going to fight to the very end," McKenzie told ABC radio.

Usman Khawaja was caught-behind for 10 off Alzarri Joseph (1-19), while Marcus Labuschagne added five before Justin Greaves (1-23) had him gobbled up in the cordon.

Steve Smith and Cameron Green remain unbeaten overnight on 33 and nine re-

spectively. Day three's first dismissal came by way of Green (1-37), who had touring captain Kraigg Brathwaite caught driving a full delivery after compiling a laboured 16.

SCOREBOARD

West Indies 1st innings 311
Australia 1st innings 289-9 declared
West Indies 2nd innings (overnight 13-1)

K. Brathwaite c Labuschagne b Green	16
T. Chanderpaul c Carey b Hazlewood	4
K. McKenzie lbw Lyon	41
A. Athanaze c Smith b Lyon	35

K. Hodge run out (Head)

J. Greaves c Carey b Hazlewood	29
J. Da Silva c Green b Starc	33
K. Sinclair not out	7
A. Joseph c Smith b Hazlewood	14
K. Roach lbw Lyon	0
S. Joseph retired hurt	1
Extras (b4, lb3, nb3)	3
Total (72.3 overs)	193

Fall of wickets: 1-13 (Chanderpaul), 2-63 (Brathwaite), 3-86 (McKenzie), 4-123 (Athanaze), 5-148 (Hodge), 6-157 (Da Silva), 7-184 (Greaves), 8-184 (A. Joseph), 9-185 (Roach)

Bowling: Starc 14.3-3-45-1 (3nb), Hazlewood 14-5-23-3, Cummins 12-1-39-0, Green 10-2-37-1, Lyon 22-6-42-3

Australia 2nd innings

S. Smith not out	33
U. Khawaja c Da Silva bowled A. Joseph	10
M. Labuschagne c Sinclair b Greaves	5
C. Green not out	9
Extras (w1, nb2)	3
Total (2 wickets 19 overs)	60

Fall of wickets: 1-24 (Khawaja), 2-42 (Labuschagne)

Bowling: Roach 6-0-18-0, A. Joseph 6-1-19-1 (1nb), Greaves 7-0-23-1 (1nb, 1w)

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar Masters tees off at Doha Golf Club on Feb 8

For the 27th edition of the event, all eyes will be on the player who lifts the Mother of Pearl Trophy

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Organisers of the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters have confirmed that the 27th Edition of the popular DP World Tour golf event will be held at the picturesque Doha Golf Club from Feb 8-11.

The Commercial Bank Qatar Masters is an annual golf tournament on the DP World Tour Calendar where many of the world's top golfers compete.

The highly anticipated event which will be announced at a press conference scheduled to be held at The Qatar Golf Association premises, at 11:00am, Tuesday the 6th of February is organised by The Qatar Golf Association (QGA), the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), Doha Golf Club and long-term Title Sponsor, Commercial Bank.

The tournament is considered Qatar's annual 'must-attend' sporting and social event, first held in 1998 and widely known for bringing together the world's best golf talent; the likes of Rory McIlroy, Sergio Garcia, Justin Rose, Rafael Cabrera-Bello, Branden Grace and Henrik Stenson have all com-



Hassan Nasser al-Naimi, President of Qatar Golf Association



Joseph Abraham, Group CEO of Commercial Bank



A view of the picturesque Doha Golf Club set to host the 2024 Qatar Masters from Feb 8 to 11.

peted in previous years.

The Commercial Bank Qatar Masters was attended by over 20,000 spectators in previous years and broadcast to a global TV audience of over 500 million households. For the 27th Edition of the event, all eyes will be on Doha as the biggest names in the sport will compete for the Mother of Pearl Trophy on one of the most challenging courses on The Tour, the Doha Golf Club.

In pursuit of a strategic vision, a decision of paramount importance has been taken: the rescheduling of the Qatar Masters to conclude

the season on the DP World Tour. This deliberate and calculated manoeuvre is anticipated to yield an unprecedented level of brand exposure and significantly amplify the tournament's viewership. This strategic shift aligns the event with a time when sports enthusiasts are most fervently engaged and tuned in.

The Commercial Bank Qatar Masters stands as a prominent fixture in Qatar's sports calendar, playing a crucial role in the growth of golf in the country since its inception. According to Hassan Nasser al-Naimi, President of

QGA, the event not only complements the expansion of golf but also actively encourages young Qataris to embrace the sport and glean insights from DP World Tour Stars.

Al-Naimi expressed that preparations for the upcoming tournament are progressing smoothly, thanks to the collaborative efforts of partners who have significantly contributed to enhancing the over-

all event experience for both players and spectators each year. Anticipation is high as al-Naimi looks forward to welcoming players, golf enthusiasts, and valued sponsors to Doha Golf Club for another edition of world-class golf scheduled for February 8th, 2024.

Joseph Abraham, Group Chief Executive Officer of Commercial Bank, stated: "As we continue our committed sponsorship of the

premier European tour golf event, the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, spanning the past 19 years, we strategically align with Qatar's Vision to emerge as a global sports hub and a host for significant international sporting events. As participants gather from around the world, I extend my heartfelt wishes for the very best of luck in this tournament, coupled with the hope for a successful event."

SHOWJUMPING

Alsharbatly shines as Doha International Equestrian Tour Championship ends

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Saudi Arabia's Abdullah Alsharbatly last night provided a fitting end to Doha International Equestrian Tour Championship 2024, clinching the CSI5* - 1.60m Grand Prix title with an exciting jump-off victory at Al Shaqab's Outdoor Arena.

After an error-free opening round, Alsharbatly, who was astride gelding Alamo, clocked 39.43 secs in the jump off to edge Santiago Lambre and pocket the winner's purse of €77,150. Partnering with stallion Chacco Blue II, Brazil's Lambre had to content with runner-up position with his time of 40.09 secs, collecting a cheque of €61,720.

Denmark's Rikker Belinda Barker, riding 12-year-old Tabalou PS, finished the jump-off in 41.78 secs to secure a podium finish and a prize of €46,290.

Earlier, on the last day of third and final round, French rider Simon Delestre in company with I Amelusina R 51 topped the CSI5* - 1.50m class with a time of 62.59 secs followed by Austrian Gerfried Puck, who rode Equitron Ornaat V, to second place with a time of 63.58 secs. Liechtenstein's Jennifer Hochstadter teamed up with Golden Lady to take third position completing the course in 64.52 secs.

The CSI5* - 1.40m class witnessed Japan's Mike Kawai and gelding Saxo de La Cour winning the title with a flawless show of 32.40 secs in the jump off.

Italy's Roberto Previtali on Hachiko was second with 29.85 secs (four penalties) while Jordan's Ibrahim Hani Bisharat was third fastest in 31.60 secs (four



President of the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF) Bader al-Darwish presenting the trophy to Saudi Arabia's Abdullah Alsharbatly at Al Shaqab Outdoor Arena in Doha yesterday.



QEF Secretary-General and Chairman of Doha Tour's Supreme Organising Committee Sheikh Ahmad bin Nooh al-Thani presenting trophy to Rikker Belinda Barker. **Right:** Top three riders pose for a photo.



penalties) as he partnered with mare Henriette.

Meanwhile, home fans also relished a victory as Qatari rider Faleh Suwead al-Ajami claimed the CSI2* - 1.35m class victory

with Steybun after a perfect round of 51.19 secs. Also yesterday, Denmark's Rikke Belinda Barker (Pico Hcc) was victorious in CSI2* - 1.45m class while Ireland's Lee Carey (Careful Habibty) grabbed

top honours in CSI2* - 1.20m class. More than 115 showjumpers representing 20 countries featured in the Doha Tour which turned out to a huge success on return after a six-year hiatus.

HORSE RACING

Dawi edges Alhafar in thrilling race to corner Ain Sinan Cup glory



Jockey Lukas Delozier guides Sheikh Iman bint Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani-owned Dawi to win the Ain Sinan Cup at Al Quda Racecourse.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

15th Al Uqda Meeting - Ain Sinan Cup Day

Sheikha Iman bint Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani-owned Dawi edged Alhafar in a thrilling feature to claim the Ain Sinan Cup, handing jockey Lukas Delozier a hat-trick of wins at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

The Rudy Nerbonne-trained horse maintained a fine pace in the 2000m Purebred Arabian Open battle to beat Alhafar, ridden by Szczepan Mazur, by three quarters of a length and grab top honours. Jefferson Smith rode Safi Al Zaman to third place in the contest.

Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Racing Manager, Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, crowned the winners of the feature.

Dawi's triumph capped a phenomenal day for Delozier, who had earlier led Dohah and Heater to victories in QREC's 14th Al Uqda Meeting that had seven races on the card.

- WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**
- 1 - Ain Sinan Cup, Purebred Arabian Open Race
Dawi, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
 - 2 - Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85)
Solitary Trees, Abdulla al-Mulla, Ivan Rossi
 - 3 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (30-50)
Dohah, Mohamed Khaled Elahmed, Lukas Delozier
 - 4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (0-75)
Valdarann, Mohamed Ali al-Saaq, Meteb Ali al-Marri
 - 5 - Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate
Al Kazim, Mohamed Salama Ashour, Jefferson Smith
 - 6 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate
Heater, Gassim Ghazali, Lukas Delozier
 - 7 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate
Kyleiba At, Mohamed Hussain Afroz, Carlos Henrique

FOCUS

ICSS provides technical assistance, operational support for Africa Cup of Nations

As part of its mission to protect major sporting events in all their dimensions, the International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS) continues to work in close collaboration with the Confederation of African Football (CAF) for the TotalEnergies CAF Africa Cup of Nations Cote d'Ivoire 2023, the largest football tournament in Africa running from January 13 to February 11, 2024.

Following the provision of capacity building on safety and security for the Local Organising Committee (COCAN) since September 2023, the ICSS has assisted in drafting key documentation for the tournament including a Stadium Stewards Handbook to support the operations of all deployed

Stadium Stewards. Moreover, upon request of CAF, the ICSS has deployed, since the beginning of the tournament, a team of Access Control Experts to monitor and support access control operations through assurance, mentorship, and real-time guidance.

The team has been travelling across Ivory Coast to the different host city stadiums attending matches throughout the tournament from the group stages to the finals.

Their findings are being documented which will leave a legacy for CAF and future host nations of the tournament.

Mohamed Hanzab, Founder and Chairman of the ICSS, said: "We feel honoured for having been chosen by CAF to contribute to the

safety and security of the largest major sporting events happening in Africa.

"We are making available all our capacities to supporting CAF's efforts to host a safe and secure edition of the tournament, through which we are keen to bring together best practices and lessons learnt through our involvement in many major sporting events over the past years, most notably the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022," he said.

For his part, Steven Fleming, Head of Sport Event Security of the ICSS, said: "It is a great honour and privilege for the ICSS to be involved in this most prestigious football tournament on the African continent. I would like to thank the CAF Safety and Security Depart-

ment led by Dr Christian Emeruwa for their assistance and support throughout our time here in Côte D'Ivoire.

"By the time the Tournament comes to an end on February 11th, we will have travelled to all host city stadiums and assisted the CAF Safety and Security Officers with the operational deliveries.

"We are primarily here to see firsthand the access control operations and advise where, from our previous experiences, we feel operations may be enhanced.

"It has been a great experience for us all, working with great inter-agency teams in beautiful stadia. We look forward to the remainder of the tournament and to continuing our relationship with CAF in future events."



FOOTBALL

South Korea v Saudi Arabia headlines Asian Cup last 16

THE KNOCKOUT STAGE OF THE REGION'S PREMIER NATIONAL TEAM EVENT KICKS OFF TODAY



South Korea coach Jurgen Klinsmann and player Oh Hyeon-Gyu during their team's AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 match against Malaysia at Al Janoub Stadium, Al Wakra. (Reuters)

Reuters
Doha

The Asian Cup enters the business end when the last-16 round kicks off today, with some shock results in the group stages leaving a few of the continent's heavyweights facing an uphill task if they are to make it all the way to the final.

Juergen Klinsmann's South Korea may have avoided a last-16 clash with Japan but they have it all to do when they take on Roberto Mancini's Saudi Arabia, with the winner of that game potentially facing Australia in the quarter-

finals. Klinsmann could only smile from the dugout when Malaysia scored an equaliser in the 15th minute of stoppage time to push South Korea down to second in the group, although he denied that was part of the plan to avoid Japan in the next round.

"The knockout stage is different from the group stage. Every team is difficult to play," Klinsmann said.

"So no matter who you meet in the round of 16, if you want to win this tournament, you've got to beat everybody. It's as simple as that.

"We've got to have fun, and Saudi Arabia is our next opponent so it will be a battle, but I don't think there's an easy team in this tournament."

Saudi Arabia guaranteed themselves qualification before their third group game but coach Mancini had come under scrutiny for his team selection, and the Italian saw his players score only four goals from 57 attempts in the group stage.

"We had a lot of chances which we couldn't take, but what is important to me is the performance. Our motto is to always play well and try to win," said Mancini, who guided Italy to European championship glory in 2021.

"This is football... but football is to score. In the last two games we had many chances, but I hope we are saving those goals for the next game."



Saudi Arabia coach Roberto Mancini on the touchline during his team's AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 match against Thailand at Education City Stadium, Al Rayyan. (Reuters)

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Japan are the number one ranked team in Asia but qualified in second place after they were stunned by Iraq, while coach Hajime Moriyasu said there is plenty of room for improvement having failed to keep a clean sheet in all three games.

"Even though we won the game (against Indonesia) there are many aspects we can improve on, defensively and offensively," he said.

"Buildup play from the back could have been better. We could have created more varieties of attack."

Bahrain coach Juan Antonio Pizzi will be seeking personal redemption when his side take on Japan, after he led Saudi Arabia to

a loss against the Japanese at the same stage in 2019.

The Spaniard was all praise for the level of the Japanese players, however, many of whom play in Europe's top leagues.

"They have high individual skills and potential but we have high confidence in our players, their focus and their effort," Pizzi said after Bahrain topped their group ahead of South Korea and Jordan.

"The Japan team is excellent and has experienced players who play in European leagues, but we're optimistic about our group.

"We have high morale in our team."

Iran were one of three teams to claim maximum points from the

group stage, along with Qatar and Iraq, but coach Amir Ghalenoei thinks his players can raise the bar in the knockout stage.

"One of our biggest problems is ourselves," Ghalenoei explained.

"We are a very good team tactically and technically and if we can have a very good game every time, then we can go far," said Ghalenoei, whose side face Syria.

"How many chances (we) created and how many chances the opponents created - by these two measures we've done a good job in the group stage.

"If our players can show their real quality in the knockout stage, we can be very dangerous," Ghalenoei said.

SPOTLIGHT

Battat leads Palestine on and off pitch at Asian Cup

AFP
Doha

Musab al-Battat has led Palestine on the pitch with his all-action performances and off it as the voice of a team who have battled the odds to reach the Asian Cup knockout rounds for the first time.

The 30-year-old captain will be the man his team look to once again for inspiration when Palestine face hosts and reigning champions Qatar in a daunting last-16 tie tomorrow.

Palestine's first time in the knockout rounds of the regional championship was sealed with their first ever victory in the tournament, 3-0 over Hong Kong.

The attacking defender set up two of the goals and was named man of the match.

"He is the kind of captain who leads by example," said Bassil Mikdadi, founder of the Football Palestine website.

"The story or the journey of Palestinian football over the last 10 years can be told through Musab al-Battat," added Mikdadi.

The right-back made his international debut in 2013 and is at his, and the team's, third Asian Cup.

The side ranked 99 in the world have progressed into the next round despite a deeply troubled build-up overshadowed by the Israel-Hamas war in the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

Some of the players have lost loved ones and have family trapped in Gaza. The team trained and played matches abroad in the build-up to their third Asian Cup.

As skipper and a highly respected senior player, Battat has been the public voice and face of the team in Qatar.

Wearing the traditional Palestinian keffiyeh headscarf along with his team tracksuit, he emerged at the opening ceremony to deliver the players' oath in front of more than 80,000 spectators.

Normally it would be the host nation's skipper who does it.

On the eve of Palestine's first game, which ended in a 4-1 defeat to Iran, Battat described what being at the Asian Cup meant to him and his teammates.

"We as players are part of the Palestinian people and live through the same suffering as the people," said Battat.

Battat plays for his hometown club of Shabab Al-Dhahiriya SC in the West Bank Premier



League and, except for a period in Egypt, has spent his whole career in Palestinian football.

He has won 61 caps, scoring once and making six assists, since his debut over a decade ago.

He has played every minute of the Asian Cup campaign and won more tackles than any other player at the tournament with 12, according to stats experts Opta.

He has also created seven chances - second only to Paris Saint-Germain's Lee Kang-in, with eight for South Korea.

Battat set up two of the goals against Hong Kong, flying down the right to deliver pinpoint crosses on both occasions which ended in headed goals.

Added to a 1-1 draw against the UAE, it was enough to advance to the next stage as one of the four best third-placed teams in the group phase.

"He's softly spoken but there's a ton of respect for him because of the work he puts in," Mikdadi told AFP in Doha.

"He's the toughest trainer on the pitch, super professional, takes care of his body, gets the right amount of sleep, eats right.

"He's the type of personality that people gravitate to because when they know it's time to get serious and get down to work, they look towards what he is doing and they follow his lead."

Battat was named man of the match against Hong Kong but, after delivering another captain's performance, said that it was not about personal accolades.

"We believed in our group (of players) and team spirit," he said.

"Reaching the last 16 showcased the spirit of the Palestinian players and we aim to maintain this spirit for future success."

Sixth-tier Maidstone stun Ipswich, Luton beat Everton in FA Cup

Liverpool: Maidstone manager George Elokobi said the "magic of the FA Cup is very much alive" after the sixth-tier side stunned Championship high-flyers Ipswich 2-1 as Luton struck at the death to dump Everton out in the fourth round yesterday.

Ipswich are 98 places and four divisions above Maidstone in the English football pyramid, but manager Kieran McKenna was left to rue making 10 changes.

The visitors' two goals were worthy of winning any cup tie as Lamar Reynolds produced a cool chip over Christian Walton as Maidstone surged upfield from an Ipswich corner just before half-time.

Jeremy Sarmiento looked to have restored order when the Ecuador international drilled low into the bottom corner on 56 minutes.

However, there was another twist in a fairytale story as Reynolds this time played provider for Sam Corne to fire in the winner 24 minutes from time.

"Our boys have run themselves into the ground and that is what we said, 'leave nothing in the changing room,'" said former Wolves defender Elokobi.

"This binds us for life, what our boys are achieving right now. What our boys are achieving now has not been done in over 100 years. The magic of the FA Cup is very much alive."

Pedro hat-trick for Brighton

Everton and Luton's priority is survival in the Premier League and the Hatters' 96th-minute winner at least ensured they both avoided a replay.

Vitaliy Mykolenko's own goal gave Luton a half-time lead that was cancelled out when stand-in goalkeeper Tim Krul allowed Jack Harrison's shot through his grasp early in the second period.

A bad-tempered affair appeared to be meandering towards a stalemate until Cauley Woodrow bundled home from a corner right at the death.

Joao Pedro scored a hat-trick, including two penalties, as Brighton beat Sheffield United 5-2 at Bramall Lane.

Facundo Buonanotte's fine strike and Pedro's first spot-kick put the visitors 2-0 up. But last season's semi-finalists were pegged back before half-time as Gustavo Hamer and William Osula struck for the Blades.

Another Pedro penalty restored Brighton's advantage before he completed his hat-trick and Danny Welbeck rounded off the scoring deep into stoppage time.

Championship leaders Leicester made light work of Birmingham as Jamie Vardy was on target in a 3-0 victory.

Leeds and Plymouth is one of at least four ties set for a replay after they drew 1-1 at Elland Road.



Maidstone players celebrate with their fans after winning the English FA Cup, fourth-round, match against Ipswich Town at Portman Road, Ipswich, eastern England, yesterday. (AFP)