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Pope and Hartley guide England home in thrilling win on day four



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Arab rivals Iraq and Jordan set for intense battle today in Doha

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SPORT

PREVIEW

‘Disciplined’ Qatar look to attack against Palestine

The hosts confident of advancing at the 24-team tournament where they have posted three wins

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Three games and no goals conceded by Qatar. That’s been the journey so for the defending champions at the AFC Asian Cup 2023. Though the home fans are thrilled at the results, Qatar coach Marquez Lopez yesterday seemed more than satisfied to see his players execute his ‘attacking’ game plan in a focused manner in all the three matches.

Winners at the 2019 edition of Asia’s premier national team tournament, Qatar will take on sentimental favourites Palestine at Al Bayt Stadium today knowing aggression once again will be key.

“I love attacking football, but we always have to find the right balance between attack and defence. It is to the credit of the players that we have yet to concede a goal, because they implemented my ideas on the pitch very well, so I’m thankful for them for absorbing the ideas well and being disciplined,” Lopez said at a pre-match news conference yesterday.

Qatar started the 24-team tournament with a 3-0 drubbing of Lebanon followed by hard-fought wins over China (1-0) and Tajikistan (1-0) as the hosts reeled off three back-to-back wins.

“We are happy with how we have played in the group stage. We were very competitive in every game, there are small changes to make and improve on, but overall, we played well and tried to give all players an opportunity to play,” the 59-year-old Spaniard said.

Ranked 99 on the FIFA computer, Palestine have won hearts and minds with their fighting spirit in all the three matches played in Qatar. Last week, Palestine booked their Round of 16 spot with a clinical 3-0 demolition of Hong Kong at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. Lopez was quick to acknowledge the feisty nature of tactics employed by Palestine.

“We see Palestine as a team that plays



Qatar coach Marquez Lopez



Palestine coach Makram Daboub

with bravery and power,” Lopez said yesterday. “We know their strengths and we will do our best to deal with them. We have a lot of respect for them as a team, but we want to do everything to get the result,” he added.

“I trust my players, not 100%, but 200%. I trust the work they do in training. It will be a difficult match, but we want to



Qatar squad during a training session.

qualify to the next round. As always, our main principle is to take it one match at a time,” Lopez said knowing his chief striker Akram Afif has scored three goals whereas Al Duhail forward Almoez Ali – the MVP at the 2019 edition of the AFC Asian Cup – has also been among the scorers.

Palestine coach Makram Daboub yesterday said his side will take to the pitch knowing Qatar team would be weighed down by expectation from the home fans.

“We are all united as team, we have a close relationship and that shows in the way we play on the pitch,” Daboub said yesterday. “We have been fully focused on qualifying and getting the first win in

Palestine’s history in the Asian Cup, not thinking about whether we face Qatar or any other team. It was very important for us to be in the Round of 16, so we were prepared to face any team,” he added.

“They are the home team and will have a lot of fans in the stadium, so there will be more pressure on them. We have already achieved our primary objective in this tournament so we will play with no pressure. We will do our best and play the same way we did in previous matches, keeping our upward trajectory. In 90 minutes of football, anything can happen.

“There is a ticket to the quarter-finals at stake. We respect Qatar as reigning

champions and hosts, but that doesn’t mean we are here just to be here. We want to win and everything is possible, we want to fight for our chances and hopefully we can win,” Daboub said.

“We played 5-6 friendly matches before the tournament where we scored goals but also missed a lot of chances, we faced some challenges, but we are convinced with the level of work we are doing. In the qualifiers we scored a lot of goals. I would say it is just down to lack of concentration at times or bad luck, but thankfully the goals came against Hong Kong, China at the right time and hopefully we can continue the same way,” he added.

MATCH REPORT

Australia brush aside Indonesia 4-0, first side to reach Asian Cup quarter-finals

Reuters
Doha

Australia beat Indonesia 4-0 in the first game of the Asian Cup knockout stage yesterday to advance to the quarter-finals after a feisty match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Indonesia had not beaten Australia in 43 years and, despite the south-east Asian side’s loud supporters vastly outnumbering the Australian fans in the tiny arena, it was Graham Arnold’s side who prevailed after capitalising on their chances.

“Credit to Indonesia, I think they made it tough. Physically, they were very big and strong. It was a tough game. The quality that we’ve got up front came through today,” Arnold told reporters.

“Asian Football is coming along with leaps and bounds. We expected that, that’s exactly what we said to the boys, ‘Be ready for a fight. Be ready for a physical battle.’ Because that’s what Indonesia is going to bring.

“The improvement I saw today was the individual belief... In a lot of ways (they played with) more freedom and were relaxed, that’s what I want. It’s good to have a

great system of play and it’s good to have great attacking patterns.”

Indonesia started the game on the front foot and gave their opponents an early scare with an effort on goal but Australia took the lead in the 12th minute when Jackson Irvine’s cross was deflected into the net by defender Elkan Baggott.

Australia weathered the storm as Indonesia attempted to find a way through their staunch defence, before Boyle gave them a two-goal cushion on the stroke of halftime when he connected with Gethin Jones’s cross to head in at the far post.

But goal celebrations were muted amid some concern as Boyle took a few moments to get back to his feet but the 30-year-old soon got up and dusted himself off before continuing.

“I honestly don’t know, I just blanked out for a second. These balls are quite hard,” Boyle said with a laugh.

“The ball was in the box and I threw myself at it... I fell weirdly and I was a bit dazed but I was alright to continue.”

The Indonesian fans in red and white tried their best to spur on their team but Australia remained composed, although they nearly found themselves in trouble when Jones deliberately tripped Rafael



Australia’s players celebrate their team’s fourth goal during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup match against Indonesia at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

Struick off the ball in retaliation.

The foul occurred right in front of Arnold, who angrily threw a water bottle to the turf expecting a red card. But the referee only cautioned Jones, who was immediately taken off by Arnold.

Craig Goodwin came on as a late substitute and the forward

made an instant impact when he pounced on a rebound to score in the 89th minute while towering defender Harry Souttar made it 4-0 moments later with a glancing header from a set piece.

Australia will play either Saudi Arabia or South Korea in the quarter-finals.

Indonesia were the lowest-ranked team in the knockout stage, sitting 121 rungs below Australia, and coach Shin Tae-yong said he was proud of his young side regardless of the four goals they conceded. “I don’t think we lost in terms of the performance level and one of the reasons was

the players did well. I gave them instructions how to play and they followed those very well, that was from our preparation,” the South Korean coach said. “We lost because there’s a level of difference, experience and concentration. Someday we’re going to play at a similar level against Australia.”

CRICKET

Pope and Hartley propel England to thrilling win

SENSATIONAL END TO THE FIRST TEST AS THE VISITORS BEAT THE HOME TEAM BY 28 RUNS

Reuters
Hyderabad

Ollie Pope and Tom Hartley scripted a remarkable turnaround and set up England's thrilling 28-run victory against India in the opening Test at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium yesterday.

India had looked to be in the box seat after taking a lead of 190 but Pope's epic 196 resuscitated England, who posted 420 all out in their second innings to roar back into the contest.

That left the hosts needing 231 to win the match but Hartley's 7-62 in his debut Test wrecked India, who were all out for 202 in an extended final session on the penultimate day.

Ravichandran Ashwin (28) and Srikar Bharat (28) added 57 runs for the eighth wicket to try to take the match into its final day but that was not to be.

"Incredibly proud," England captain Ben Stokes said of their remarkable fightback against India, who have not lost a Test series at home since 2012. "Before the series started, we knew how much of a beast India are at home but the way we responded to being so far behind, it was testament to everything we have said and lived and breathed over the last two years."

The second match of the five-Test series, in Visakhapatnam, begins on Friday.

England, having already conceded a chunky lead, had risked defeat inside three days when they slumped to 163-6 on Saturday.

England vice captain Pope went on to conjure up one of the finest knocks by a visiting batter as his team roared back into the contest.

Pope's knock, spread over six-and-a-half hours, was a masterclass in how to tame India's formidable spin attack in conditions tailor-made for their craft.

The 26-year-old looked immune to any pressure as he swept and scooped to disrupt the rhythm of the Indian spinners and



England's Tom Hartley celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India's Shubman Gill, caught out by England's Ollie Pope, during day four of the first Test in Hyderabad yesterday. (Reuters)

their field placements.

He got terrific support from England's lower order. Rehan Ahmed (28), playing his second Test, and debutant Hartley (34) frustrated India with their solid batting.

Pope's innings came to an end when he attempted a reverse-scoop against Jasprit Bumrah (4-41) and lost his stump in the process.

"To come here to India, toughest place as a batter, and put in a winning performance, it's head and shoulders above the rest," Pope said after collecting the player-of-the-match award.

The Englishman continued to hurt the hosts even as a close-in fielder as Hartley ran through the Indian batting line-up.

Yashasvi Jaiswal (15) stepped out to flick him to short leg and, two balls later, Shubman Gill perished at silly point with Pope taking both catches.

Rohit Sharma (39) had looked assured at the other end but Hartley dismissed him lbw to reduce India to 62-3.

Rahul (22) and Axar Patel (17) briefly resisted England, who took charge after a tumbling Stokes ran out Ravindra Jadeja with a backhanded flick from mid-on.

Hartley fittingly sealed England's win when he had Mohamed Siraj stumped.

"We have played four whole days of cricket, so it is hard to pinpoint one moment where it went wrong for us," a dejected Rohit said.

"Obviously, having taken a lead of 190 we thought we were really in the game.

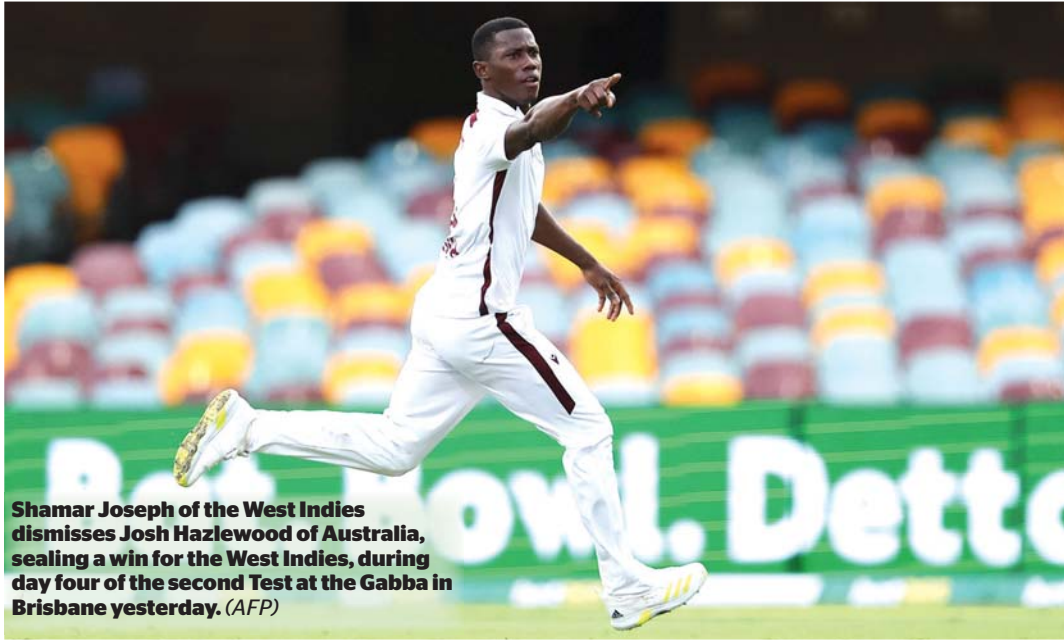
"I definitely thought 230 was gettable. There wasn't loads in the pitch but we just didn't bat well enough."

SCOREBOARD
England 1st innings

India 1st innings	436
England 2nd innings (overnight 316-6)	
Z. Crawley c Rohit b Ashwin	31
B. Duckett b Bumrah	47
O. Pope b Bumrah	196
J. Root lbw b Bumrah	2
J. Bairstow b Jadeja	10
B. Stokes b Ashwin	6
B. Foakes b Axar	34
R. Ahmed c Bharat b Bumrah	28
T. Hartley b Ashwin	34
M. Wood c Bharat b Jadeja	0
J. Leach not out	0
Extras (b16, lb10, nb6)	32
Total (all out, 102.1 overs)	420
Fall of wickets: 1-45 (Crawley), 2-113 (Duckett), 3-117 (Root), 4-140 (Bairstow), 5-163 (Stokes), 6-275 (Foakes), 7-339 (Ahmed), 8-419 (Hartley), 9-420 (Wood), 10-420 (Pope)	
Bowling: Bumrah 16.1-4-41-4, Ashwin 29-4-126-3, Axar 16-2-74-1, Jadeja 34-1-131-2 (nb6), Siraj 7-1-22-0	
India 2nd innings (target 231)	
R. Sharma lbw b Hartley	39
Y. Jaiswal c Pope b Hartley	15
S. Gill c Pope b Hartley	0
K.L. Rahul lbw b Root	22
A. Patel c and b Hartley	17
S. Iyer c Root b Leach	13
R. Jadeja run out (Stokes)	2
S. Bharat b Hartley	28
R. Ashwin st Foakes b Hartley	28
J. Bumrah not out	6
M. Siraj st Foakes b Hartley	12
Extras (b4, lb14, nb1, w1)	20
Total (all out, 69.2 overs)	202
Fall of wickets: 1-42 (Jaiswal), 2-42 (Gill), 3-63 (Rohit), 4-95 (Axar), 5-107 (Rahul), 6-119 (Jadeja), 7-119 (Iyer), 8-176 (Bharat), 9-177 (Ashwin), 10-202 (Siraj)	
Bowling: Root 19-3-41-1, Wood 8-1-15-0, Hartley 26.2-5-62-7 (nb1), Leach 10-1-33-1 (w1), Ahmed 6-0-33-0	
Toss: England	
Result: England won by 28 runs	
Series: England lead the five-match series 1-0	
Umpires: Chris Gaffaney (NZL), Paul Reifel (AUS)	

SECOND TEST

Joseph inspires West Indies to first Test win on Australia soil for 27 years



Shamar Joseph of the West Indies dismisses Josh Hazlewood of Australia, sealing a win for the West Indies, during day four of the second Test at the Gabba in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Brisbane

West Indies quick Shamar Joseph took 7-68 as he bowled through pain to give the tourists a first Test win in Australia since 1997 with an incredible eight-run upset on day four of the day-night match in Brisbane.

Forced to retire hurt from a toe-crushing Mitchell Starc yorker the previous evening, Joseph bounced back to claim six wickets in a session to help West Indies sensationally dismiss Australia for 207 in pursuit of their modest target of 216.

Australia's new opener Steve Smith, who made 91 not out, farmed the strike to protect Josh Hazlewood (0) when the Test hung in the balance, but it was to no avail. Joseph, playing his first Test series, sent Hazlewood's off-stump flying and he dashed off across the Gabba field with his tongue hanging out before celebrating with his team mates.

"Tears would have come to my eyes but I already cried when I got my five-wicket haul," said Joseph, who was named both Man of the Match and Man of the Series. "It's just happiness, when was the last time we won in Australia? I can't even remember. Today's a big day for us."

It was Australia's first loss in 12 pink ball Tests.

The West Indies, who arrived in Australia with a weakened and inexperienced squad, were given little hope of getting anything out of the series, a judgement apparently vindicated when they lost the first test by 10 wickets in Adelaide.

"I feel like we win the series even though it's 1-1," Joseph added. "It's really amazing for my team mates, I must give another shout out to them. They're really encouraging."

Australia skipper Pat Cummins had courageously declared at 289-9 with his side still behind the visi-

tors' first innings total of 311 before his bowlers dismissed West Indies for 193 in their second dig.

Cummins, who led Australia to a World Test Championship triumph last year, said he was disappointed at the defeat but paid full tribute to West Indies.

"That was a fantastic Test match and a fantastic series," he said.

"I thought in particular, Shamar, the way he bowled today was right up there and unfortunately we weren't good enough. We've all played enough to know that this game humbles you pretty quickly when you're thinking you're on top of the world."

West Indies last defeated Australia in a test in 2003 at Antigua.

SCOREBOARD	
Australia 1st innings	289-9 declared
West Indies 2nd innings	193
Australia 2nd innings	(60-2 overnight)
S. Smith not out	91
U. Khawaja c Da Silva bowled A. Joseph	10
M. Labuschagne c Sinclair b Greaves	5
C. Green b S. Joseph	42
T. Head b S. Joseph	0
M. Marsh c Greaves b S. Joseph	10
A. Carey b S. Joseph	2
M. Starc c Sinclair b S. Joseph	21
P. Cummins c Da Silva b S. Joseph	2
N. Lyon c Da Silva b A. Joseph	9
J. Hazlewood b S. Joseph	0
Extras (lb3, w3, nb9)	15
Total (50.5 overs)	207
Fall of wickets: 1-24 (Khawaja), 2-42 (Labuschagne), 3-113 (Green), 4-113 (Head), 5-132 (Marsh), 6-136 (Carey), 7-171 (Starc), 8-175 (Cummins), 9-191 (Lyon), 10-207 (Hazlewood)	
Bowling: Roach 10-1-28-0, A. Joseph 17-1-62-2 (5nb, 1w), Greaves 12-0-46-1 (1nb, 2w), S. Joseph 11.5-0-68-7 (3nb)	

Supreme Sinner beats Medvedev for maiden Grand Slam title in Melbourne

Melbourne: Jannik Sinner ushered in a new era at the Australian Open as the Italian capped off an outstanding fortnight with a superb comeback to outlast Daniil Medvedev and claim his first Grand Slam title yesterday.

Sinner came from two sets down to beat Medvedev 3-6 3-6 6-4 6-4 6-3 and become the first Melbourne champion for a decade not named Novak Djokovic, Rafa Nadal or Roger Federer in the first title clash since 2005 not to feature any of the "Big Three".

He dominated the tournament up to the final, with a thumping win over holder Djokovic in the semi-finals, but had to dig deep to take his place as the king and become the first Italian man to bag a major since Adriano Panatta won the 1976 French Open.

"It takes a little while to process everything," said the 22-year-old after becoming the youngest champion since Djokovic won the 2008 title on Rod Laver Arena.

"I'm extremely happy how I handled things. The situation on court was very, very tough.

"The most important part was the support I had throughout these two weeks. I felt that many people were watching also from home on the TV, so I just tried my best.

"I was a little bit in trouble today with two sets to love down and in a little bit over one hour. So I just tried to stay positive, trying to stick to the game plan, which I had to adjust a little bit."

Sinner's star has been on the rise and he primed himself for success on the big stage by beating Djokovic at the ATP Finals and the Davis Cup at the end of last year when he led his country to their second title in the team competition.

A Grand Slam triumph was the next step to keep pace with fellow young gun Carlos Alcaraz, who already has two, and Sinner went about his task in Melbourne efficiently.

But in Medvedev, he faced a man eager to erase the pain of two defeats in the Australian Open final - to Djokovic in 2021 and Nadal in five sets in 2022 - and the Russian showed no sign of having a mental hangover from those clashes.

Having become the first man since Pete Sampras almost three decades ago to reach the final after multiple comebacks from two sets down, Medvedev made a blazing start to ease through the opening set with a double break.



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the men's singles final of the Australian Open in Melbourne. (AFP)

It was only the third and fourth times that Sinner had dropped his serve in the tournament and he appeared to be troubled by the flat trajectory of his opponent's shots early in the encounter.

Medvedev's only previous loss in 51 Grand Slam matches on hardcourts after winning the opening set came at Melbourne Park against Nadal in the 2022 final and the 27-year-old nicknamed the "Ocotopus" soon got one tentacle on the trophy.

After wasting four chances to break in the second game that had five deuces and lasted nearly 12 minutes, Medvedev got his nose in front 3-1 on his way to wrapping up the second set as Sinner's hopes of responding faded with the setting sun.

But Sinner grabbed a break back and nearly got another late in the second set as Medvedev showed signs of frailty after more than 20 hours on the court before yesterday but the Russian pushed himself on with plenty of backing from the crowd.

The fourth seed missed a forehand pass at the net after a 31-shot rally in the 10th game of the third set but shrugged it off to break Medvedev and take the set, beginning his comeback in the clash which suddenly had a different feel to it.

"I like to dance in the pressure storm," Sinner said. "I like it because that's where most of the time I bring out my best tennis. I'm also quite relaxed on this occasion, because I always try to enjoy on the court.

"So I think pressure is a privilege, to be honest."

ICC restores Sri Lanka's membership 2 months after suspension

Dubai: Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) has been reinstated as a member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) after a two-month suspension, the ICC said yesterday.

The sport's governing body suspended the SLC on Nov 10 for government interference after Sri Lanka's ministry of sport dismissed the SLC board and replaced it with an interim committee following the country's

poor performance at last year's 50-over World Cup.

"The (ICC) board have been monitoring the situation since the suspension and are now satisfied that SLC are no longer in breach of membership obligations," the ICC said in a statement.

The SLC had filed an appeal against their suspension with the ICC on Nov 21.

On the same day, the ICC an-

nounced that Sri Lanka were free to participate in international cricket but moved the U-19 World Cup 2024 out of the country.

On Nov 27, Sri Lanka's sports minister Roshan Ranasinghe was sacked from his position by the country's president Ranil Wickremesinghe. Ranasinghe's successor Harin Fernando overturned the interim committee and restored the SLC board.

LA LIGA

Girona back on top with win at Celta

Sanchez's side move one point clear of giants Real Madrid

AFP
Barcelona

Shock Spanish title challengers Girona returned to the top of La Liga with a 1-0 at Celta Vigo yesterday. Michel Sanchez's side moved one point clear of Real Madrid, who beat Las Palmas on Saturday, although the Catalan team have played one more match.

Portu finished well in the 20th minute to send Girona ahead in a match they largely dominated but could not make safe by finding a second goal. Rafa Benitez's Celta, provisionally 16th, sit two points above the relegation zone.

Girona, in the top flight for only the fourth season in their history, continue to battle with Spain's giants for La Liga. "We knew we had to take advantage of the chances we had, in the first half we made a lot of chances to score, they had some too," said Girona winger Portu. "At this stage of the league the important thing is three points and competing."

Girona players and staff have been reluctant to admit the team is in contention to win the title. "The main thing for us is that we shouldn't be thinking too far ahead, that would be a mistake," added Portu. "We know that we are leaving teams behind us to get into the European places, we have to be realistic, and that's our objective."

On a rough pitch at Celta's Balaídos stadium, Girona took the initiative from the start. "We had a lot of personality to keep the ball in conditions that were difficult to play on," said Girona coach Michel. "They had chances, as did we, but I think we were fair winners."

Yangel Herrera hammered into the side netting as an early warning and Celta goalkeeper Vicente Guaita kept out an Artem Dovbyk header. The Ukrainian, La Liga's joint top goalscorer with Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham on 14 goals, came close on other occasions but could not add to his tally.

Girona's Paulo Gazzaniga saved well from Oscar Minguez before his team took the lead. Miguel Gutierrez found Portu, who manoeuvred well and stroked home at the near post.

Viktor Tsygankov fired over after being teed



Celta Vigo's Carlos Dotor (left) vies for the ball with Girona's Aleix Garcia during the La Liga match at the Balaídos stadium in Vigo, Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

up by his compatriot Dovbyk at the end of a slick team move. Celta threatened through Jorgen Strand Larsen, who headed against the crossbar, but that was as close as they came to an equaliser. Girona tightened up defensively in a hard-fought second half and Celta could not carve out any clear chances as the clock ticked down. "We had chances in the first half to equalise or even to go in front, and these kind of opponents don't let you off the hook," said Celta Vigo midfielder Renato Tapia.

Barcelona, third, lost 5-3 at home against Villarreal on Saturday, after which coach Xavi Hernandez said he would leave the club in

June. Girona's victory means reigning champions Barcelona are now 11 points off the top, in third place. Athletic Bilbao moved provisionally fourth after drawing 0-0 at Cadiz. Ernesto Valverde rotated after his team's extra-time win over Barcelona in the Copa del Rey midweek, and they started slowly.

Cadiz had the better of the first half with Athletic goalkeeper Unai Simon making two solid saves to deny Ruben Alcaraz and Ruben Sobrino. Mauricio Pellegrino's team secured a point from his first game in charge but it was not enough to take Cadiz, 18th, out of the relegation zone.

SPOTLIGHT

Liverpool through to FA Cup fifth round

Reuters
Liverpool, England

Liverpool cruised into the fifth round of the FA Cup with a 5-2 rout of Championship Norwich City yesterday, to kick off Jurgen Klopp's long goodbye at Anfield, while crowd trouble marred Wolverhampton Wanderers' 2-0 victory over West Bromwich Albion.

Twelve-time winners Manchester United gave up a two-goal lead before escaping Rodney Parade with a 4-2 victory over fourth-tier Welsh side Newport County. Liverpool's beloved manager announced on Friday that he would leave the Merseyside team at the end of this season, his ninth at the helm. "I get it, it's very emotional," Klopp said. "I just have to make sure that I don't get on that side of it. (And) in the games, we need to be warriors and not celebrate the old man on the side lines," he added.

The eight-time FA Cup winners had goals from Curtis Jones, Darwin Nunez, Diogo Jota, Virgil van Dijk and Ryan Gravenberch. Liverpool will next play either Watford or Southampton after that fourth-round game earlier yesterday ended in a 1-1 draw thanks to a last-gasp goal by Southampton's Stuart Armstrong to force a replay.

Ben Gibson and Borja Sainz scored for Norwich City, who are ninth in the Championship, 28 spots below Premier League leaders Liverpool in England's football pyramid.

Antony scored in the 68th-minute for last year's FA Cup runners-up Manchester United after Newport - ranked 76 places below United in England's football pyramid - had clawed their way back from two goals down.

Bruno Fernandes, 18-year-old Kobbie Mainoo and Rasmus Hojlund also scored for United, who conceded two goals in an FA Cup match against a fourth-tier side for the first time since 1970 (against Northampton Town).



Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk celebrates after scoring against Norwich City. (Reuters)

Wolves' victory in their fourth-round match at West Brom was interrupted for nearly 40 minutes due to clashes involving the two sides' supporters. Wolves were leading 2-0 when projectiles were hurled on to one end of the pitch in the 82nd minute, sparking a brawl in a corner at The Hawthorns. Matheus Cunha and Pedro Neto scored for Wolves

CITY HANDED LUTON TIE

Holders Manchester City will travel to Luton in the FA Cup fifth round, while non-league giant-killers Maidstone face Sheffield Wednesday or Coventry. Treble winners City won 1-0 at Tottenham in the fourth round thanks to Nathan Ake's late goal on Friday. Pep Guardiola's side now head to Kenilworth Road to take on a Luton team that won 2-1 at Everton on Saturday.

Maidstone pulled off one of the great upsets in FA Cup history by winning 2-1 at Championship high-fliers Ipswich on Saturday. The sixth-tier National League South club are the lowest ranked side left in the competition. Maidstone have already beaten two other league clubs in the FA Cup this season, having knocked out Barrow and Stevenage.

Chebli, de Jager shine at Qatar National Sprint



Mansour Chebli and Paide de Jager clinched two wins each in the opening round as the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMFF)-organised Qatar National Sprint season got off to a flying start, yesterday. At the Lusail Circuit Sports Club Karting Track, Chebli won the Open Class 1 and Production Class 1 in his Renault Clio, while Jager came on top in the Open Class 3 and the women's event in her Mitsubishi Eclipse. Jad Alawar won Open Class 2, while the remaining Production classes, 2 and 3 were won by Maher Serre and Francesco Fornaciari, respectively. The second round takes place on February 23.

HOW XAVI'S DREAM SOURED AT BARCELONA

Barcelona: Only a few months after lifting the Spanish title, Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez dramatically announced he would walk away from the club at the end of the season. The 44-year-old, who excelled in Barcelona's midfield during 17 years as a player, described the job as his "dream" in the years before he was appointed in November 2021.

After a 5-3 collapse against Villarreal on Saturday which left the champions 10 points adrift of league leaders Real Madrid, Xavi said coaching Barcelona was a "cruel and unpleasant" experience. Real Madrid thrashed Barcelona 4-1 earlier in January to win the Spanish Super Cup and Athletic Bilbao hammered the Catalans 4-2 on Wednesday to eliminate them from the Copa del Rey, paving the way for Xavi's decision.

Xavi took over in one of the toughest moments of Barcelona's history, a few months after their greatest ever player Lionel Messi left, with the club in dire economic straits. The coach, who won 25 trophies with Barcelona as a player in

767 appearances, led the team from ninth in the table to second in his first season at the helm, securing Champions League qualification.

Xavi followed that by winning the Spanish Super Cup in January 2023 and then Barcelona's first league title since 2019, with his project gathering speed. Humiliating consecutive group stage Champions League exits blotted his copybook, but Barca appeared to be improving after largely dismal spells under Quique Setien and Ronald Koeman.

Despite winning La Liga, some media and supporters grumbled that the team was not playing good football. Xavi, the symbol of Barcelona's possession game as a player under Pep Guardiola, was expected by supporters to deliver that kind of dominant football - and he insisted it was his aim.

Yet Barcelona won the title on the basis of their superb defence, conceding just 20 times in 38 La Liga matches. This season they have already let in 29 in 21 games. The collapse of that defensive strength and

worsening performances have led Xavi to walk away, he says to change a "negative dynamic" around the team he loves.

Several factors have played into Barcelona's struggles at the back this season. Perhaps stung by criticism of his team's dutiful but drab performances, Xavi brought in full-back Joao Cancelo on loan to play a more attacking brand of football.

Last season the defence featured three centre-backs - Jules Kounde, playing on the right, Ronald Araujo and Andreas Christensen, with Alejandro Balde at left-back. This season Xavi started with Balde and Cancelo and two centre-backs, foregoing stability for attacking thrust on the flanks.

Kounde had also tired of playing at right-back, often telling media he would prefer to play in the middle. Veteran holding midfielder Sergio Busquets departed at the end of last season, leaving a yawning chasm in the pivot role he made his own for 18 years. Barcelona could not afford their prime targets and settled for Oriol Romeu.

FOCUS

PSG and Jordan Brand unveil fourth kit

Paris Saint-Germain and Jordan Brand unveiled yesterday the final jersey of the 2023/2024 season. This latest range completes PSG's 2023/2024 dressing room and, for the second time in the history of football and the Club, features the emblematic elephant print.

The kit will be presented by the club's women's team on pitch during the return of the UEFA Women's Champions League and the reception of Ajax Amsterdam on January 24 at the Parc des Princes.

For this campaign, PSG women's players (Korbin Albert, Elisa DE Almeida, Grace Geyoro, Jackie Gronen and Sakina Karchaoui) travelled to the Qatar National Museum in Doha for an photo shoot. This symbolic venue, with its distinctive sand-pink architecture designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, offers a visually striking setting matching with colours inspirations of the kit.

This Fourth collection is accompanied by a Training and Lifestyle range, as well as an exclusive Air Jordan Legacy 312 Low, also featuring the elephant print, and for the very first time, the branding "Air Jordan" even appear on pieces from the lifestyle collection, marking a new stage in the partnership between the two brands. The Fourth jersey is now available in PSG stores in Qatar.



AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Last-gasp Bayo goal takes Guinea into quarters

AFP
Abidjan

Mohamed Bayo headed in a dramatic winner in the eighth minute of injury time as Guinea beat 10-man Equatorial Guinea 1-0 yesterday to advance to the quarter-finals of the Africa Cup of Nations.

The last-16 tie at the Ebimpe Olympic Stadium in Abidjan was heading for extra time when Bayo, of French Ligue 1 side Le Havre, struck right at the death to spark frenzied scenes of celebration among the Guinea team and their large support. It was a historic moment for the Syli National, who had never previously won a Cup of Nations knockout tie - they were runners-up in 1976, in an era when the final four played a round-robin format to decide the winner of the trophy.

They will now stay in Abidjan for a last-eight tie on Friday against the winner of game between Egypt and the Democratic Republic of Congo. "It means a lot. We knew that this could be a historic occasion," said Guinea coach Kaba Diawara, who was in tears at the final whistle. "Even if the way we did it was not beautiful, even if we did it in the last minute, we don't care. Winning is the only thing that



matters."

But Equatorial Guinea, who had midfielder Federico Bikoro sent off in the 55th minute, will wonder what might have been had captain Emilio Nsue not squandered a penalty midway through the second half. Their players slumped to the turf at the end while Guinea celebrated with their noisy support in a crowd of 36,340, as Abidjan's sizeable Guinean community turned out in force for the occasion.

Guinea had appeared to be handicapped by

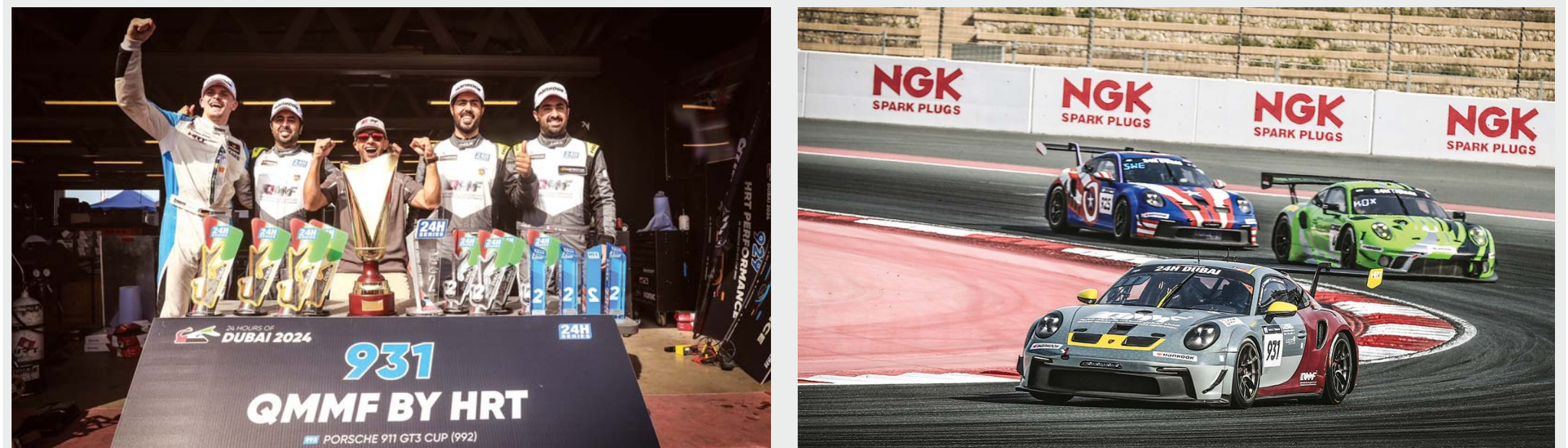
Diawara's decision to leave prolific VfB Stuttgart striker Serhou Guirassy - scorer of 17 goals in the German Bundesliga this season - on the bench at kick-off, with ex-Liverpool midfielder Naby Keita also dropping out. Guirassy had missed Guinea's first two group games and was replaced again here by Bayo.

The tie only came to life in the second half, with Guinea midfielder Mory Konate heading in a free-kick in the 53rd minute only for the goal to be disallowed for offside. Moments later came the red card, with Tunisia-based Bikoro being dismissed for a reckless follow-through that saw him plant his studs into Bayo's abdomen.

Guirassy was then introduced, but it was the 10 men of Equatorial Guinea who won a penalty on 67 minutes. The Somali referee was summoned to the pitchside monitor after Iban Edu went down under Sekou Sylla's challenge as he tried to connect with a Pablo Ganet free-kick. A spot-kick was duly awarded, but the competition's top scorer Nsue could not take the chance to net his sixth goal of this AFCON, sending his penalty against the post and wide.

It was to prove crucial, as Guinea instead made the extra man count by scoring right at the end of injury time when Bayo strained his neck to head in a cross by the impressive Ibrahim Diakite.

TEAM QMMF BY HRT TRIUMPHS AT 24H DUBAI



Team QMMF (Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation) by HRT achieved a significant victory in the fiercely competitive Porsche 911 GT3 (992 AM) class during the 24H Dubai, part of the 24H Series Middle East Trophy Challenge, at the Dubai Autodrome, yesterday. The accomplishment marks a milestone in Qatar’s endurance racing history. The team, consisting of Qatari drivers Abdulla al-Khelaifi, Ghanem al-Ali, Ibrahim al-Abdulghani, and German semi-professional racer Julian Henses, demonstrated their skills by completing 583 laps on the famed 5.4-kilometer track. Additionally, the team secured a commendable second place overall in the 992 category. Notably, a week prior to this victory, Team QMMF achieved their first triumph of the season at the Abu Dhabi 6 Hours Challenge held at the Yas Marina Circuit in the UAE, topping the same class.

MATCH REPORT

Tajikistan stun UAE on penalties to reach quarters

Goalkeeper Yatimov saves Canedo’s penalty in the shootout

By Sports Reporter
Al Rayyan

Tajikistan advanced to the AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals after a hard-fought 5-3 penalty shootout win over United Arab Emirates yesterday.

The match was forced into an additional 30 minutes after UAE’s Khalifa al-Hammadi scored in the fifth minute of second half added time to cancel out Vahdat Hanonov’s opener at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

Goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov was Tajikistan’s hero, judging correctly to deny Caio Canedo’s penalty when the shootout was tied 1-1 as the Central Asian side – ranked 106th in the world – extended their debut campaign to the quarter-finals, with either Iraq or Jordan their next opponents.

The UAE reached the semi-finals at the last two Asian Cups but Paulo Bento’s side bow out to a Tajikistan side ranked more than 40 places lower than them. Led by charismatic Croat Petar Segrt, Tajikistan drew with China and beat Lebanon in the first round to advance as Group A runners-up. Both teams showed plenty of attacking intent right from the onset with UAE having the first sights at goal.

The chance came within the opening minute as Fabio Lima’s free-kick was palmed away by Tajik goalkeeper Yatimov, followed by striker Canedo’s attempt from outside the box that sailed too high five minutes later.

However, it was Tajikistan who opened the scoring after defender Zoir Dzhuraboev’s inch perfect cross was headed into the bottom left corner of the UAE goal by Hanonov just as the match hit the half-hour mark.

UAE almost responded immediately with Zayed Sultan’s right-footed attempt from the centre of the Tajikistan box forcing Yatimov into making a diving save. The Emiratis spent the rest of the first half continuing to make forays into the Tajik penalty area, with charges from the likes of Canedo, Lima and Yahya al-Ghassani, but failed to find a way through.

The second half began in similar fashion



Tajikistan's Rustam Yatimov (left) celebrates with teammates after winning the shootout against United Arab Emirates in the round of 16 clash at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. (Reuters)



Tajikistan's coach Petar Segrt (right) consoles UAE goalkeeper Khalid Eisa after the match.

with both teams maintaining their offensive mindset but it was once again the tournament debutants who came close to dou-

bling their lead with Ehson Panjshabe and Alisher Dzhalilov forcing saves out of UAE captain Khalid Eisa. Tajikistan should have gone further ahead in the 60th minute when Parvizdzhon Umarbayev’s through ball found Dzhalilov just outside the box, but the Istiklol midfielder shot straight at Eisa.

Dzhalilov had another great chance 10 minutes later when Shahrom Samiev sped down the right flank before floating a beautiful cross but the number 10 wasted the golden opportunity by sending the ball wide.

The missed chances cost Tajikistan as UAE equalised right at the end, with defender al-Hammadi rising high to nod home Ali Saleh’s free-kick in the fifth minute of added time, taking the game to an additional 30 minutes.

Neither side looked eager to take risks in added time with Yatimov producing the only save of the shootout, before Alisher Shukurov scored the decisive spot kick to ensure Tajikistan’s dream campaign continued.

PREVIEW

Iraq, Jordan set for intense showdown



Iraq players train at Al Gharrafa yesterday, ahead of their round of 16 match against Jordan at the Asian Cup.

Iraq and Jordan are braced for a tough test when they meet in the AFC Asian Cup round of 16 at the Khalifa International Stadium today. The Lions of Mesopotamia head into the tie in impressive form, winning all three group stage matches – including against four-time winners Japan – while Jordan advanced as one of the four best third-placed teams.

Head coach Jesus Casas believes his Iraqi side have the quality to win the title, reminiscent of their triumph in the 2007 edition. “I think we are in the same position as in the beginning of the tournament. We are very confident after three matches; it was amazing to beat Japan. If we want to win the Asian Cup, we have to win four more matches. It won’t be easy, as there are strong teams but we are in a good position to win the title. We will fight to win this tournament,” said Casas.

“It’s going to be a very difficult match for both teams. Both have undergone challenging qualifications, and we share a similar style of play. We both want to win and Jordan won’t be easy opponents. We can win all matches if we give 200 percent effort in every game. In football, perfection is key and if we play a perfect match, winning is possible. However, mistakes can be costly as seen when Saudi beat Argentina (in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022). In football, anything is possible.”

Casas said his side will have the same attacking mindset as they did in the group stage. “Our style is very clear – we aim to be offensive, maintain control of possession, and create numerous chances. We won’t change our style. Against Japan, we tried to be offensive, and in the second half, they came back fighting. However, our approach remains clear – we want to attack.

“No, we are not the favourites; the favourites are Japan, Korea Republic and Islamic Republic of Iran. We are happy with what we have done, and the Iraqi players are proud of their performance. Jordan has a very good team, and one mistake can change the whole game. We must be careful.”

Despite having qualified as one of the four best third-placed teams, Jordan head coach Hussein Ammouta is optimistic about his team’s quarter-final chances. “We will face a very organised Iraqi team and we will try our best to win the match. Our focus is on the responsibilities and duties against Iraq, and we are determined to secure a victory. Iraq has good players - not only in attack but throughout the whole team,” said Ammouta.

“However, morale is very high, and everyone is united with big responsibilities on their shoulders. We have prepared very well, and our team is ready to give their best effort.”

Jordan have not defeated Iraq in their last five meetings, as well as losing 1-0 in their only previous encounter in the AFC Asian Cup - in the 2015 edition group stage but Ammouta promised an attacking approach. “No team that wants to win focuses solely on defence. We have a strong attack, and we aim to surprise Iraq. Of course, we want to strike a balance between both attacking and defensive aspects, paying attention to all the small details for a good performance in this challenging match.

“Our team has big aspirations. We’ve shown our true selves as a team and we aim to reach as far as we can, working hard to qualify for the next stage. We are actively working to strengthen our defence and limit the opponents’ spaces. I trust my team and defensive players.”



Jordan head coach Hussein Ammouta at a team training session.

South Korea’s Klinsmann still smiling as criticism mounts

Doha: South Korea have reached the Asian Cup knockout rounds but coach Jurgen Klinsmann has been criticised for everything from his tactics to his smile and captain Son Heung-min said the players have faced abuse.

The Koreans take on Saudi Arabia in the last 16 tomorrow with a toxic atmosphere threatening to envelop the team after a shaky start to their bid for a first Asian title in 64 years. An opening 3-1 win over Bahrain was followed by a 2-2 draw with Jordan that saw them need an injury-time own goal to salvage a point. Worse was to come when they conceded a last-gasp equaliser in a 3-3 draw with Malaysia - ranked 130th in the world - to finish as runners-up in Group E behind Bahrain.

Tottenham star Son said after the game that “comments that cross the line” had been aimed at his teammates. “It really hurts as a team-mate to see the boys in pain,” said Son.

Striker Cho Gue-sung and left-back Lee Ki-je have come in for particular criticism, with Cho missing a string of chances in three goal-less appearances. The 26-year-old gained huge popularity among South Korean fans following the 2022 World Cup and the

Denmark-based attacker has appeared in celebrity television shows.

Now he is accused of not concentrating on football and his Instagram account has been flooded with hundreds of critical comments. But fans and media have reserved their strongest ire for the German legend Klinsmann, who could be seen grinning on the bench after Malaysia scored their 105th-minute equaliser. A World Cup winner as a player, Klinsmann has faced heavy criticism ever since taking charge a year ago.

His refusal to live in South Korea has been a major bone of contention, as have his tactics, team selections and previous managerial record. As a coach he is best known for managing the United States in 2011-2016. Before South Korea came calling, his previous job was a 10-week stint at Hertha Berlin in 2019-2020.

Klinsmann admitted to being “a little bit angry” after the Malaysia game but he has remained relentlessly upbeat throughout the tournament. His sunny demeanour stands out even more when he is in the presence of stern-faced assistant Cha Du-ri, who often

stalks the touchline barking instructions to the players. Klinsmann said after the Malaysia game that he saw “a lot of positives”. “It was actually really OK apart from those two goals,” the 59-year-old said. “It is what it is.”

South Korea now face a stern test in the last 16 against Roberto Mancini’s Saudi Arabia. Klinsmann has been helped by the return of Wolverhampton Wanderers forward Hwang Hee-chan, who missed the first two games with injury but came on as a substitute against Malaysia.

Klinsmann also has an in-form player in Paris Saint-Germain’s Lee Kang-in, who has scored three goals in Qatar and emerged as one of South Korea’s key players. In Son they have Asia’s best player. But the coach’s optimistic outlook is not shared by the journalist Hong, who said the team’s last two performances in particular have been “chaotic”.

“Football fans in Korea think we are lacking leadership from Klinsmann,” he said. “In any match you need to show some positive movement, positive build-up or how to break down defensive teams. The Korean team at this Asian Cup hasn’t shown any of those things.”