

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2

Second century for Williamson as NZ extend their lead past 500



GOLF | Page 3

Commercial Bank Qatar Masters set to tee off at DGC

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Wednesday, February 7, 2024
Rajab 26, 1445 AH

GULF TIMES

SPORT

PREVIEW

‘Focused’ Qatar ready for formidable Iran in battle to reach Asian Cup final

THE DEFENDING CHAMPIONS ARE FULL STRENGTH FOR THE CLASH AT AL THUMAMA STADIUM

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

A ‘focused’ Qatar are feeling ready to deliver their best performance today when they take on three-time champions Iran in the semi-final of the AFC Asian Cup 2023.

The defending champions are on a 12-match unbeaten streak in the region’s premier national team tournament that has now reached the final phase.

Coach Marquez Lopez, who is barely seven weeks into his new job, has given a clear message to his players: enter the Al Thumama Stadium with the intention of winning what many predict will be a feisty last-four clash.

“We always play to win and that will be what we’ll be doing (against Iran),” Lopez said confidently yesterday at a pre-match news conference. “There’s no talk about trying to take this match into penalties,” the 59-year-old added. Qatar edged Uzbekistan in the quarter-finals in a heart-stopping penalty shootout in their previous match.

Lopez seemed buoyant at the news conference knowing he has his strike force of Akram Afif, captain Hasaan al-Haydos and Almoez Ali available for selection for the match to-night.

The three players so far have combined to score eight goals in the 24-team tournament.

“Of course we enter this match with big motivation, we are one step away from the final. We have a chance to reach a second straight final which is a big driving factor for us,” Lopez said.

“The players performed well in the previous matches and are extremely focused on continuing the winning streak,” the Qatar coach said in reference to his side’s wins over Lebanon, China, Tajikistan, Palestine and Uzbekistan on way to reaching the semi-finals.

Qatar produced seven consecutive



Qatar players celebrates winning their quarter-final against Uzbekistan.



Qatar’s Meshaal Barsham

wins at the 2019 edition when they won the AFC Asian Cup title with a 3-1 win over Japan in the final.

“We are one step away from reaching the final match of the Asian Cup (again). We are excited about the match and look forward to giving our best. We will give our best,” he added.

“We recognise that it’s going to be a very tough match,” Lopez added. “It’s our sixth game in a short period, so that will be physically demanding but

we are still hopeful of a good performance.

“Iran is a very strong team. We have not underestimated any team we have played in this competition so we will not start doing that against Iran,” he said.

“The attack of Iran is very strong and we are aware of this. We have plans for that and we will try to minimise their quality up front. We will be playing in front of our fans so that makes this match special,” the coach said.

Coach Ardeshtir Ghalehnoy said he told Iran players to forget beating four-time champions Japan in the quarter-finals three days ago.

“We know that tomorrow’s match is very important. All that we did until now is to reach the final match,” Ghalehnoy said at a news conference yesterday.

“I told the players to forget the Japan match, what is important now is to beat Qatar and reach the final. We know they are a good team, the defending champions and have spent a lot to improve the team,” he added.

“Sometimes you have bad performances, sometimes you have good performances but we’ve only had good performances so far. Even

against Japan, we didn’t concede a lot of chances. We may make changes for the game but the level of the team is almost the same, so the quality of the starting XI will not be affected. Tactics that we make in every match, 70%-80% are related to the strength of our team and the balance related to the opponent,” Ghalehnoy said.

The Iranian coach acknowledged that his side is up against a strong Qatar squad.

“Qatar reaching this stage means they are high quality. We cannot keep looking at the Japan result and think that will take us through,” Ghalehnoy said yesterday. “We have to be more concentrated, show more quality and cover more distance. With all that, I hope that we can reach the final for the first time in a long time,” he added.

“You can see from (Mehdi) Taremi’s reaction in the last two games and see how united we are as a team and how much we want to do well in this competition,” he warned.

Taremi, who plays for FC Porto, will return today to add muscle to the Iran side after a one-game suspension. Alireza Jahanbakhsh, Sardar Azmoun and Saman Ghodnos will be the other concerns for the Qatari side.

The match kicks off at 6:00pm.



Qatar coach Marquez Lopez



Iran coach Ardeshtir Ghalehnoy



Iran players are seen during a team training session in Doha yesterday. Iran face Qatar in the semi-finals of the AFC Asian Cup 2023 at Al Thumama Stadium today. (@afcasiancup)

Qatar determined to reach final, says Salman

Tarek Salman says Qatar will give it their all to overcome Islamic Republic of Iran when the two sides meet in their AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 semi-final at the Al Thumama Stadium today. Qatar are just two wins away from defending their title with defender Salman saying that while they are braced for a tough encounter, the determination is to stay on track for a second successive title.

“The players are well prepared and morale is exceptionally high. Everyone in the team is determined and committed to giving our all on the field,” said the 26-year-old Salman.

“We will be facing a team with players who play club football in top leagues.

“That alone serves as motivation for us to give 100 percent effort to win and bring joy to our fans,” Salman said.

“The motivation within our team is strong. Both

sides are determined to reach the final. However, we won the title in the previous edition and we want to repeat that success again.”

In the run up to the semi-finals, Qatar were only pushed to the limit at the last eight stage - needing a penalty shoot-out to see off the challenge of Uzbekistan but Salman said it was a valuable lesson.

“Despite doubts from some quarters about Qatar’s chances of reaching the final, our team is filled with confidence and excitement, fuelled by positive energy,” Salman said.

“Iran have not won the title in a long time and they will undoubtedly enter this match with heightened focus.

“Facing them will undoubtedly be another tough challenge but we are committed to deliver our best performance,” the Qatari said.

www.the-afc.com

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Impressive record
Iran have won their last six matches against Qatar, including a 1-0 win in the AFC Asian Cup 2015 group stage. Iran outscored Qatar 11-1 in those six games.

Good run
This will be Iran’s eighth AFC Asian Cup semi-final, the joint-highest with Korea Republic.

Semi-final win overdue
Team Melli, however, have not progressed past the semi-final stage in their last six attempts stretching back to 1980, with Japan defeating them at this stage in the 2019 edition.

Three-time winners
Iran won three consecutive editions between 1968 and 1976, a feat which no other team has managed. A fourth title will draw them level with Japan at the top of the all-time list.

Elite list
Qatar are the ninth team to reach the semi-finals of AFC Asian Cup in two consecutive editions.

Always on target
Qatar have not failed to score a goal in their eight AFC Asian Cup knockout stage games.

AQUATICS

Simoneau wins women's solo free, China add 2 gold

China's Quan Hongchan, Chen Yuxi deliver a perfect diving show to land the women's 10m synchro title

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Jaqueline Simoneau won Canada's first gold medal at the World Aquatics Championships Doha in the women's solo free competition, while China scooped further two gold medals on offer yesterday.

Simoneau topped the total difficulty and execution categories for a total score of 264.8207 points. Evangelia Platanioti of Greece, who had the best artistic impression score, was 11.5374 points behind Simoneau. Vasilina Khandoshka of Belarus was third.

It's the 27-year-old Simoneau's second medal of the world championships. She won silver in the women's solo technical on Saturday, finishing behind Platanioti. Simoneau's gold yesterday was Canada's first since Sylvie Frechette won the solo event at the 1991 worlds in Perth, Australia.

Meanwhile, China's Quan Hongchan and Chen Yuxi delivered a perfect diving performance to land the women's 10m synchro title at the Hamad Aquatics Centre.

Showing no signs of fatigue from their heroics a day previously, where Quan took gold and Chen silver in the individual 10m platform event, the Chinese duo



Gold medalists China's Chen Yuxi and Quan Hongchan pose during the medal ceremony at the end of the final of the women's 10m platform synchro diving event during the 2024 World Aquatics Championships at Hamad Aquatics Centre in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

raced into an early lead with first and second round efforts of 57.60 and 54.60 respectively.

Kim Mi Rae and Jo Jin Mi of North Korea finished second, while the third place wen to Great Britain's in-form Andrea Spendolini-Sirieix - who had already won mixed team gold and 10m platform silver in Doha - and her partner Lois Toulson.

Kim and Jo did their utmost to push for victory with a round five dive worth 75.84, taking them into a temporary first place while they waited for China's final effort. But they ultimately had to settle for silver, as Quan and Chen showed nerves of steel to land the highest-scoring jump of the competition,

87.36, to win the gold.

A thrilling finish saw Mexico's Gabriela Agundez Garcia and Alejandra Orozco Loza threaten to snatch the bronze medal with a superb final dive worth 72.96, but they were ultimately pipped to the final podium position by the Britain pair, who held their nerve with a score of 74.88.

Earlier, China won the team technical gold in artistic swimming. On Sunday, the Chinese won the team acrobatic event and added two more yesterday, meaning they have now taken four of the seven golds on offer in artistic swimming.

The Chinese team, which included twins Liuyi Wang and

Sheikh Joaan meets officials on sidelines of the World Aquatics Championships



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), yesterday met with a number of senior sports officials on the sidelines of the World Aquatics Championships 2024, currently taking place in Doha. HE Sheikh Joaan held individual meetings with Mohamed Khosravi Vafa, President of the Iranian Olympic Committee; Il Guk Kim, Minister of Physical Culture and Sports and President of the National Olympic Committee of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and Chu Jinqing, Vice-Minister of Sports and Vice-President of the Chinese Olympic Committee. During the meetings, Sheikh Joaan discussed with each of the officials potential sports co-operation and ways to support them in the future. The meetings were also attended by Mohamed bin Youssef al-Mana, First Vice-President of the QOC, and Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain, Secretary-General of the QOC.

Qianyi Wang, who had won the technical duet the day before,

scored 299.8712 points, well clear of defending champions Spain who

could muster only 275.8925pts. Japan took bronze with 275.8787pts.

CRICKET

Australia take just 6.5 overs to destroy woeful West Indies



Australian players celebrate their 3-0 victory in the series after defeating West Indies in the third ODI at the Manuka Oval in Canberra yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Canberra

Australia needed just 6.5 overs to thrash a woeful West Indies by eight wickets in an embarrassing end to their one-day international series in Canberra yesterday, with Jake Fraser-McGurk slamming 41 off 18 balls.

The hosts won the first game in Melbourne by eight wickets and the second in Sydney by 83 runs to clinch the series, with the West Indies playing for pride.

But after Australia skipper Steve Smith won the toss and sent them in on a humid day, they crumbled to 86 all out in the 25th over against an attack missing Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc. In reply, Australia recorded their shortest successful run chase in the format with 259 balls remaining to cap a stunning capitulation by the Caribbean side.

"It was a good performance, the bowlers put it in the right areas and everything seemed to work out. One of those days where everything came off," said Smith. "It's been good opportunity to expose a few players to international cricket and they've shown that they can play at

this level." Explosive 21-year-old opener Fraser-McGurk showed his immense talent in only his second match with five fours and three sixes in an electric 41 before he was caught going for another big hit off Alzarri Joseph. Aaron Hardie was the only other wicket to fall, caught behind for two off Oshane Thomas. Josh Inglis blasted an unbeaten 35 while Smith was not out six.

Earlier, paceman Xavier Bartlett took 4-21 to go with the 4-17 he bagged on his debut in Melbourne. Fellow fast bowler Lance Morris grabbed 2-13 before leaving the field with a side strain.

"Our batting let us down. It did for the entire series," said West Indies captain Shai Hope.

"We need to do some real soul searching to understand what's needed in certain conditions. Can't really put your finger on one thing, it comes down to mindset."

Bartlett struck early with Kjorn Ottley trapped lbw for eight and, while Alick Athanaze and Keacy Carty steadied the ship, they were in survival mode, with just 36 runs coming from the opening 10 overs.

Their partnership ended when Morris was introduced and grabbed his first international wicket, courtesy of Marnus La-

buschagne holding a spectacular diving catch at point to remove Carty for 10.

Hope needed a big score and drove Morris to the ropes, but he lasted just five balls before falling lbw to Shaun Abbott, leaving the visitors in trouble on 43-3.

Debutant Teddy Bishop soon followed for a duck, undone by the sheer pace of Morris whose fullish ball clattered the middle stump before he left the field midway through his fifth over.

Athanaze was the one shining light, making a battling 32 off 60 balls before mishitting a sweep off spinner Adam Zampa with Abbott collecting a simple catch. Two more wickets in three balls left the West Indies reeling, with Romario Shepherd out for a golden duck to Bartlett and Matthew Forde run out after a comical mix-up with Roston Chase. Bartlett then cleaned up the tail with two more wickets.

BRIEF SCORES:
West Indies 86 off 24.1 overs (A. Athanaze 32; X. Bartlett 4-21, L. Morris 2-13, A. Zampa 2-14) **lost to Australia 87-2 off 6.5 overs** (J. Fraser-McGurk 41, J. Inglis 35 not out) **by eight wickets.**
Series: Australia win 3-0.

FOCUS

Second century for Williamson as New Zealand extend lead past 500

AFP
Mount Maunganui, New Zealand

Kane Williamson crafted his second century of the match yesterday as New Zealand took complete command of the first Test on day three against under-strength South Africa.

Run machine Williamson was out for a rapid 109 as the home side reached 179-4 in their second innings at Mount Maunganui, extending their overall lead to 528 runs by stumps.

Daryl Mitchell was at the crease on 11 and Tom Blundell on five, with the Black Caps looking to declare early today with South Africa facing a mammoth target on a deteriorating Bay Oval pitch. The depleted Proteas were dismissed for 162 soon before tea in response to New Zealand's first innings 511.

The follow-on wasn't enforced, allowing the world's top-ranked batsman Williamson to craft another big score to follow his 118 in the first innings. It was the former skipper's 31st Test century but the first time he has reached three figures twice in the same match.

The 34-year-old played with aggression from the outset, striking 12 fours and a six in a 132-ball stay that signalled New Zealand's intent before he was stumped off the bowling of Proteas captain Neil Brand.

New Zealand coach Stead said Williamson's prolific form was "fantastic" for his team-mates, noting the role he played as a support act when Rachin Ravindra posted a maiden double century in the first innings.

As was the case in the first innings, Williamson survived a dropped catch in the outfield, with Edward Moore again the



New Zealand's Kane Williamson celebrates reaching his century during day three of the first Test against South Africa at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday. (AFP)

culprit when he was on 61.

Moore responded in the following over by catching Devon Conway for 29 off Brand's spin bowling, ending a partnership of 92 with Williamson after opener Tom Latham fell cheaply.

The second-string nature of South Africa's side was exposed when they lost their last six wickets for 82 runs yesterday.

The top score was 45 from Keegan Petersen who, in his 13th Test, is the most experienced batsman in the squad after most first-choice players remained behind to compete in a domestic Twenty20 competition.

SCOREBOARD	
New Zealand 1st innings 511	
South Africa 1st innings (overnight 80-4)	
E. Moore c Conway b Henry	23
N. Brand c Blundell b Jamieson	4
R. van Tonder lbw b Jamieson	0
Z. Hamza b Santner	22
D. Bedingham c Santner b Henry	32
K. Petersen c Williamson b Ravindra	45
R. de Swardt lbw b Henry	0
C. Fortuin c Southee b Santner	9
D. Oliver not out	15
T. Moreki b Santner	5
D. Paterson b Ravindra	1
Extras (b2, lb3, nb1)	6
Total (all out, 72.5 overs)	162
Fall of wickets: 1-26 (Brand), 2-26 (van Tonder), 3-30 (Moore), 4-74 (Hamza), 5-83 (Bedingham), 6-83 (de Swardt), 7-120 (Fortuin), 8-152 (Petersen), 9-161 (Moreki), 10-162 (Paterson)	
Bowling: Southee 13-3-41-0, Henry 14-6-31-3, Jamieson 15-6-35-2 (nb1), Santner 21-8-34-3, Ravindra 9.5-5-16-2	
New Zealand 2nd innings	
T. Latham lbw b Paterson	3
D. Conway c Moore b Brand	29
K. Williamson st Fortuin b Brand	109
R. Ravindra c Brand b de Swardt	12
D. Mitchell not out	11
T. Blundell not out	5
Extras (lb6, nb2, w2)	10
Total (4 wks, 43 overs)	179
Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Latham), 2-102 (Conway), 3-143 (Ravindra), 4-173 (Williamson)	
Bowling: Paterson 10-1-38-1, Moreki 8-1-16-0 (nb1), de Swardt 8-0-48-1 (w1), Olivier 4-0-19-0 (nb1), Brand 13-1-52-2 (w1)	

India overcome scare to reach Under-19 World Cup final

India overcame a major scare to stay on course for a record-extending sixth Under-19 World Cup title when they beat South Africa by two wickets in yesterday's semi-final. Indian captain Uday Saharan made a composed 81 to see his team to the brink of victory before he was run out with the scores level at Willowmoore Park. Raj Limbani hit the next ball for four to finish the game. Saharan and Sachin Dhas (96) rescued India from a precarious 32 for four in reply to South Africa's 244 for seven. They added 171 runs for the fifth wicket. Speaking through an interpreter at the after-match presentation, Saharan said he did not think about his team's precarious situation when he and Dhas came together. It was the second successive match in which Saharan and Dhas shared a big partnership. They

both hit centuries in putting on 215 for the fourth wicket against Nepal on Friday. Kwena Maphaka, South Africa's star left-arm fast bowler, dismissed Dhas and Avانش Aravelly in his final spell. But he and Tristan Luus, who had together engineered India's top-order collapse, had both completed their allocation of overs with 19 runs needed and three overs remaining. Maphaka, the tournament's leading wicket-taker with 21, took three for 32 and Luus claimed three for 37 - but their support bowlers failed to take any wickets.

BRIEF SCORES: SA 244-7 in 50 overs (Pretorius 76, Seletswane 64; Limbani 3-60, Khan 2-43) **lost to India 248-8 in 48.5 overs** (Saharan 81, Dhas 96; Maphaka 3-32, Luus 3-37) **by 2 wickets.**

GOLF

Commercial Bank Qatar Masters set to tee off at DGC

‘WE HAVE EIGHT PAST CHAMPIONS AMONG A 132-PLAYER FIELD, POPULATED BY MANY CIRCUIT REGULARS’

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Commercial Bank Qatar Masters returns to its traditional date as the European Tour’s annual golf tournament will be staged at the Doha Golf Club (DGC) from tomorrow till Sunday.

The event will serve as the fifth and final stop if the Middle Eastern swing. The tournament, won towards the end of last season by Sami Valimaki as he went on to earn a PGA Tour card, has a prize fund of \$2.5mn, of which \$425,000 will go to the winner.

Now back to its accustomed slot in the early weeks of the year, the event – an ever-present on the calendar since its inception in 1998 – promises to bring the curtain down on a dramatic stretch in this part of the world.

The field is headlined by the presence of four players from the top ten on the Race to Dubai Rankings. The in-form South African Zander Lombard is joined by compatriot and last week’s winner in Bahrain Dylan Frittelli, Rikuya Hoshino and Rasmus Hojgaard who have both enjoyed runner-up finishes so far this season.

While Finland’s Valimaki is not back to defend his title this week as he plies his trade at PGA Tour, there are a host of past champions in action this week at Doha Golf Club. In total there are no fewer than eight players who have held aloft the Mother of Pearl Trophy teeing it up.



FROM LEFT: Qatar Golf Association (QGA) board member Faisal al-Nuaimi, EGM, Marketing and Alternative Assets at Commercial Bank Hussein al-Abdullah, QGA Secretary-General Fahad Nasser al-Naimi, Head of Middle East European Tour Tom Phillips, Senior Tournament Director European Tour Mikael Eriksson and QGA Technical Expert Mike Shoueiry pose after the press conference yesterday.

Ewen Ferguson and Antoine Rozner, who won the tournament across back-to-back years in 2022 and 2021 respectively, are joined by Spaniard Jorge Campillo, who has also won the event since the turn of the decade.

Before them, Eddie Pepperell and Wang Jeunghun won in 2018 and 2017 respectively, while Ryder Cup player Chris Wood was a winner in 2013 and Alvaro Quiros celebrated success in 2009. South

African Darren Fichardt, back on the European Tour after progressing from the Final Stage of Qualifying School last year, is the oldest past champion having won in 2003.

At the press conference yesterday, Fahad Nasser al-Naimi, Secretary-General of the Qatar Golf Federation, was pleased with the strong field and said the Doha Golf Club was in perfect shape to host the event.

“We have eight past champions among a 132-player field, populated by many circuit regulars. I want to extend my gratitude to HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, for his continuous support to golf and the Qatar Masters. I also want to thank Commercial Bank for their sponsorship and unwavering commitment towards the tournament,” he said. Al-Naimi said Qatar will be re-

resented by Saleh al-Kaabi, with Ali al-Shahrani ruled out due to an injury. Saudi Arabia and Jordan will also have representation in the form of Othman al-Mulla and Shergo al-Kurdi respectively.

“The Qatar Masters is one of the most significant sporting events held in Qatar and is highly-rated by the International Federation of Golf due to the participation of prominent global stars. The Qatar Golf Association is committed to

organising the event annually, given its significance in the European Tour calendar,” al-Naimi said.

Hussein al-Abdullah, EGM, Marketing and Alternative Assets at Commercial Bank, said: “Commercial Bank has created a legacy that empowers possibilities and Qatar Masters bears witness to that. As we step into our 27th year as title sponsor of this event, I can’t help but feel proud of all the milestones we have achieved. Our mission will always centre around building a promising future for Qatar.”

He continued: “For us, golf transcends its prestigious image; it serves as a networking platform for individuals sharing a common interest in discussing current events and business opportunities. Through our commitment to advancing technology, Commercial Bank is investing in AI and digital services, ushering in a new era of financial innovation. This event serves as a hub where business professionals and golf enthusiasts converge, fostering connections and conversations in an upscale environment, shedding light on the Bank’s strides in digital offerings.”

Since it was founded in 1988, the Qatar Masters has been held at Doha Golf Club on all but two occasions. While the Peter Harradine-designed layout at DGC, part of the first wave of grass golf courses to have been built in the Middle East, measures in at 7,475 yards and features a double green on the par five ninth and 18th holes.

TENNIS

Collins stuns Osaka at Abu Dhabi Open

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Naomi Osaka’s comeback hit another roadblock as she suffered a 7-5, 6-0 defeat to former world number seven Danielle Collins in the first round of the Abu Dhabi Open on yesterday.

Osaka, 26, returned last month from a 15-month absence from the tour, during which she gave birth to her first child Shai, but has been handed some tricky draws and has lost three of her four matches so far this campaign.

Despite a close opening set that witnessed supreme serving from both players, Osaka struggled in her service games in the second set and failed to convert any of her six break point opportunities to fall to the American qualifier in one hour and 23 minutes.

“I know she’s still only a couple of matches into her comeback. But I think she’s playing well,” said Collins, who is currently ranked 71 in the world. “She played a good first set and was serving very well and doing some really great things out on court. I’m sure at this point it’s just kind of regaining confidence and getting more matches under her belt and getting back into the routine of tournaments and that stuff, which can be challenging. But I thought she played well overall.”

Japan’s Osaka won her first three meetings with Collins but had lost their most recent affair coming into Abu Dhabi, a straight-set defeat to the American in the first round of the 2022 US Open.

In windy conditions in the UAE capital, neither player was troubled on serve early on, with the first deuce of the contest coming in the 10th game as Collins served



Danielle Collins of the US hits a return against Japan’s Naomi Osaka during their match at the Abu Dhabi Open in Abu Dhabi yesterday. (AFP)

to stay in the set but the American shook off the pressure to hold for 5-5. Collins created the first break point opportunities of the match in game 11 and converted her second chance to inch ahead 6-5.

Despite hitting a couple of double faults, Collins managed to close out the frame on her fourth set point to take the lead in 54 minutes.

Each player dropped just two points behind their first serve in the opening set but it was Collins that capitalised on her chances, and with the wind in her sails, the former Australian Open finalist soon went up a triple-break 5-0 against Osaka in the second set.

Osaka tried to narrow the deficit but Collins played flawlessly on the break points, saving all six she faced on her way to a second-round meeting with the top-seeded Elena Rybakina.

Osaka is due back on court in Abu Dhabi later on Tuesday to team up with Tunisian Ons Jabeur in doubles against Chinese duo

Zheng Saisai and Wang Xinyu.

The 30-year-old Collins has announced this will be her final season on tour and has herself navigated some brutal draws in her first five weeks of 2024.

At the Australian Open, she beat three-time major winner Angelique Kerber before falling to world number one Iga Swiatek in round two. She has been handed two more grand slam champions in Abu Dhabi in the form of Osaka and 2022 Wimbledon winner Rybakina. Collins said wanting to live a normal life away from the constant travel and the daily grind on tour has been the main reason behind her decision to retire at the end of this season.

“At this point I feel like I’m ready for the next chapter and I’m really excited about it. I needed to have an end date and it gives my family and friends the ability to come support me in some final tournaments. I think that will be really special,” said the player from Florida.

FOCUS

Halep to appear before CAS to appeal four-year doping ban

AFP
Lausanne

Former world number one Simona Halep will appear before a three-day hearing of the Court of Arbitration for Sport starting yesterday to appeal her four-year doping ban, CAS confirmed.

The 32-year-old Romanian was suspended last September by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) after two separate doping infractions.

The two-time Grand Slam singles champion tested positive for roxadustat after the US Open in 2022 and was charged with a separate second anti-doping breach last year relating to irregularities

in her athlete biological passport.

Yesterday, CAS said the hearing will take place over three days starting today at their headquarters in Lausanne.

“The parties, witnesses and experts will attend the hearing both in person and remotely, including Ms Halep who will be present in person,” CAS said.

Halep has protested her innocence and refused to accept the ITIA decision which will keep her from playing professional tennis again until October 6, 2026.

The winner of the 2018 French Open and 2019 Wimbledon singles titles says she wants to “clear her name” and has claimed experts found she had accidentally taken a contaminated supplement.

But the ITIA said that while the tribunal accepted Halep had taken a contaminated supplement, they also “determined the volume the player ingested could not have resulted in the concentration of roxadustat found in the positive sample”.

Roxadustat is a substance that can be used legitimately to treat anaemia. But it is also on the World Anti-Doping Agency banned list as it is considered a blood-doping agent, which increases haemoglobin and the production of red blood cells.

The biological passport system is designed for the long-term monitoring of an athlete’s blood indicators with the aim of identifying irregularities that could indicate doping.

SPOTLIGHT

Global Champions Tour returns to Qatar for 2024 season kick off

The Longines Global Champions Tour and GCL team series is set to return to the Longines Arena at Al Shaqab in Doha, marking the much-anticipated kickoff for the 2024 season. Top-tier horses and riders will compete for supremacy as tickets are on sale for the event, which is scheduled to take place from February 29 to March 2.

For the 6th year running the 2024 season opener in Doha provides a unique opportunity for fans to gauge the form and strategy of the participating athletes, setting the stage for an electrifying championship race.

Attendees will experience the thrill of world-class show jumping and entertainment, kids village, shopping and a wide range of food and drink for all to enjoy.

Known for its unwavering commitment to excellence, Doha is a fitting stage for the launch of the 18th Longines Global Champions Tour season.

Spectators can expect a captivating blend of sport and entertainment against the backdrop of Qatar’s vibrant culture and hospitality.



As the horses take centre stage, riders from around the globe will vie for top spot in what promises to be a fiercely contested weekend of show jumping.

This event marks the launchpad for another exciting season, setting the stage for the world’s best show jumping in the heart of the Middle East.

Tickets for the event can be bought at <https://events.q-tickets.com/qatar/eventdetails/5926423210/longines-global-champions-tour-doha>

Six-time major winner Becker ends short stint as coach of Denmark’s Rune

Six-time major winner Boris Becker said he has stepped down as coach of Denmark’s world number seven Holger Rune with immediate effect due to “private and professional responsibilities”. Becker returned to the tennis circuit last October to coach Rune,

who went on to compete in the eight-player ATP Finals in Turin where his debut in the season-ending championship ended in the group stage. “We started this partnership with the initial goal to reach the ATP Finals (at the) end of last year but moving forward

I realised that in order for this to be successful, I would need to be available for Holger much more than I can,” Becker wrote in a social media post yesterday. “Due to professional and private responsibilities, I can’t give Holger what he needs now. I wish him only the

very best and I’m always going to be his n.1 fan. I truly appreciated this journey together.”

Becker, 56, was released from a British prison in December 2022 after having served eight months of a two and a half year sentence for hiding financial assets after he

was declared bankrupt. The three-times Wimbledon champion, who previously coached Novak Djokovic from 2013 to 2016, is currently barred from entering the UK. Meanwhile Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal will headline a new exhibition tournament in Saudi

Arabia, organisers said, as debate swirls about tennis’s push into the conservative country. The Serb and the Spaniard, with 46 major titles between them, will be joined by Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz and Australian Open winner Jannik Sinner at the 6 Kings Slam.

