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by 281 runs in
the first Test



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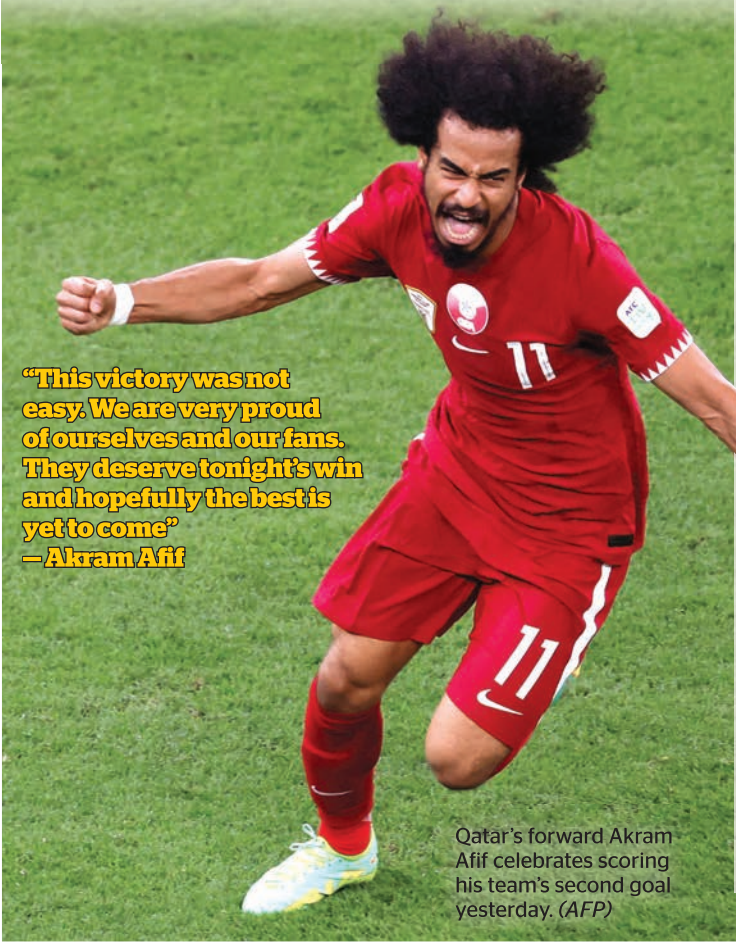
SPORT

MATCH REPORT

Braveheart Qatar storm into AFC Asian Cup final



Qatar's forward Almoez Ali celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the AFC Asian Cup 2023 semi-final against Iran. **PICTURE:** Shaji Kayamkulam



**“This victory was not easy. We are very proud of ourselves and our fans. They deserve tonight's win and hopefully the best is yet to come”
— Akram Afif**

Qatar's forward Akram Afif celebrates scoring his team's second goal yesterday. (AFP)

AFIF LIFTS DEFENDING CHAMPIONS TO A 3-2 WIN OVER IRAN

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

A pumped up Qatar yesterday battled the odds in glorious fashion to carve out a fighting 3-2 win over Iran to reach the final of the AFC Asian Cup for the second successive time.

Qatar, who are set to rise to 41 in FIFA rankings after their latest win, will take on Jordan in the final at Lusail Stadium on Saturday.

The defending champions last night were guided home with an exhilarating display from striker Akram Afif who scored once and set the ball rolling for the other two goals as the hosts stopped Iran from reaching their first final since 1976.

Afif probably scored the goal of the tournament in the 43rd minute when he hoodwinked four markers before he unleashed a curling right-footed drive that went to the left of Iran goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

The other two goals for Qatar were scored by Jassem Gaber in the 17th minute after being fed by a low cross from Afif from the right flank. Almoez Ali, the MVP from Qatar's historic 2019 title win, delivered the winning goal in the 82 minute after a cross from Hatem Aziz who was fed by Afif at Al Thumama Stadium.

With football icon David Beckham watching from the VIP enclosure, Qatar survived a fierce onslaught from Iran in the last 8 minutes of the feisty contest that saw 16 minutes of stoppage time added.

The semi-final had everything. A red card, a series of in-your face verbal battles among the players of the two sides across the two halves and after-match clashes on the touchline near the team dugouts.

The hotly-contested match saw Iran centre-back Shojae Khalilzadeh shown the red card following a VAR referral by the referee in injury time after a rough tackle on Afif who was clearly Qatar's X factor in the match.

“I'm very happy for everybody, the people of Qatar, the fans and the players. It was a complicated match but I think we played well. The players did not spare any effort,” a beaming Qatar coach Marquez Lopez told reporters after the match.



Qatar's Akram Afif scores their second goal. (Reuters)

“The players implemented my philosophy and ideas on the pitch so they deserve my thanks...Now we have one final step left to defend our title,” the 59-year-old added.

Qatar captain Hasan al-Haydos, who did not start the match, came on early in the second half.

The match started off with Iran silencing the 40,342 fans at Al Thumama Stadium when Iran's Sardar Azmoun scored with a bicycle kick in the fourth minute from inside the Qatar box.

Qatar's Gaber scored the equaliser shortly afterwards when he benefited from a heavy deflection off Saeed Ezatollahi inside the Iran box with the ball looping into the net to the right of keeper Beiranvand.

With the teams level, Afif produced a classic solo effort from close to the Iran box. Marked by four Iranian players, Afif swivelled and then after creating a tiny space, the 27-year-old Al Sadd star curled in a breathtaking shot that sailed into the net with swing and late dip. It was Afif's fifth goal of the tournament.

Iran's Jahanbakhsh converted an easy penalty that was the result of VAR referral by referee Ahmad Al Ali following a handball by

Qatar defender Ahmed Fatehi inside the box. In the dying seconds of the clash, Jahanbakhsh hit the Qatari goalpost to see his team's chances of equalizing in the tense semi-final evaporate into thin air.

Afif - who was the star for the home side - failed to take advantage in a one-on-one battle with Iran keeper Beiranvand seconds after the half-hour mark. Late in the second half, Afif fed Almoez an easy cross but the Al Duhail skipper failed to convert with only keeper Beiranvand to beat.

Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei apologised to team fans after the match.

“I want to apologise to the Iranian people because we had the responsibility to make them happy. The second half was the best performance we've had since I've been in charge of the national team,” Ghalenoei said.

He added: “But this is football, and if you don't take your chances then you will be punished. If you're looking for someone responsible for this defeat, it is me - not the federation or players. I think today was one of the worst days I've had in my life.”

Yesterday's win was Qatar's first in seven matches against their opponents ranked 20 in the world.

Points to remember before the final at Lusail Stadium

Looking to stay perfect
Qatar, in qualifying for their second successive AFC Asian Cup final, will be bidding to become only the fifth team to win back-to-back titles after Korea Republic, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Japan.

In exalted company
The Maroons have become the third side after Australia (2011 & 2015) and Japan (2000 & 2004) to make consecutive appearances in the Finals of the competition in the 21st century.

Fast off the blocks
Sardar Azmoun's fourth minute effort in yesterday's match is the fastest goal ever conceded by Qatar in the AFC Asian Cup.

Potent Azmoun
Azmoun's goal is the fastest in the knockout stages of the AFC Asian Cup by any Iran player and second fastest overall by any Team Melli player since the start of the 2007 edition of the competition after Karim Ansarifard's second minute goal in the group stage of the ongoing edition (vs Palestine on 14 January 2024).

Spot-kick kings
Iran scored three penalties in this edition of the AFC Asian Cup, the most a team has scored in a single edition of the competition (also Korea Republic in this edition and Japan in 2019) since 2007; in fact, Team Melli have now scored five such goals in competition since 2007 with Japan (eight) being only side to register more penalty goals in the AFC Asian Cup during the same period.

Super Afif
Having scored a goal and provided an assist, Qatar's Akram Afif (8 - five goals & three assists) is the leading goal contributor of the ongoing edition of the AFC Asian Cup; in fact, only the Qatari duo of Afif himself (11 in 2019) and Almoez Ali (10 in 2019) have recorded more goal contributions in a single edition since 2007.

Record in sight
Following his match-winning goal in the 82nd minute against Iran, Qatar's Almoez Ali (11 goals) has now become the second leading goal-scorer in AFC Asian Cup history; only Iran's Ali Daei (14) has registered more goals in the competition.



Qatar's players greet their fans at the end of the AFC Asian Cup 2023 semi-final against Iran at Al Thumama Stadium in Doha yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

NZ hammer South Africa by 281 runs in first Test

AFP
Mount Maunganui, New Zealand

Black Caps seamer Kyle Jamieson claimed four wickets yesterday to drive New Zealand to a 281-run win over South Africa with a day to spare in the first Test.

Dogged resistance from the tourists ended with their dismissal for 247 at Mount Maunganui as the Black Caps notched their second-biggest Test victory by runs.

New Zealand are a step closer to a maiden series win over South Africa after 17 previous failed attempts, dating back to 1931.

Given their struggles at Bay Oval, the vastly inexperienced Proteas will need a dramatic turnaround to win the second and final Test, starting on Tuesday in Hamilton. Captain Neil Brand was one of six South African debutants and conceded his team were well off the pace.

"It's very deflating," he said.

"We were completely outplayed by a very good New Zealand team. Our patience was tested on this wicket. Guys got in, then got themselves out, which is disappointing. Hopefully we can compete more in the second Test."

The tourists were forced to name a depleted tour squad with most first-choice players involved in their domestic Twenty20 competition. New Zealand took control with 511 in their first innings and never looked like losing when the tourists were dismissed for 162. The hosts declared at their overnight 179-4 before play began on Wednesday, leaving South Africa to chase an unrealistic target of 529. Jamieson ensured they never came close, taking 4-58 and producing key double-strikes at the start of the second and third sessions on Wednesday.

The most crucial wicket was



New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson (centre) celebrates the wicket of South Africa's Zubayr Hamza with teammates during day four of the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday. (AFP)

that of David Bedingham, who raced to a career-high 87 off 96 balls before he mistimed a pull shot to midwicket soon after tea. It ended a 105-run stand with Keegan Petersen, who also failed to control a Jamieson short ball on 16.

The day's response had begun disastrously for the tourists, when both openers departed inside the first four overs.

Brand was bowled for three by a late inswinger from his New Zealand counterpart Tim Southee while Edward Moore went for a duck after driving a Matt Henry delivery to cover.

A resolute 63-run stand for the third wicket was broken by Jamieson, who snared Raynard van Tonder at first slip for 31 before Zubayr Hamza's attempted pull shot on 36 flew gently to mid-on.

Spinner Mitchell Santner extracted turn to wrap up the tail and finish with 3-59, matching Jamie-

son's six scalps for the match.

Rachin Ravindra was named man of the match for his 240 in New Zealand's first innings.

"This rates highly for me, because of the time spent out there and the different people I battled with and the partnerships we managed to put down," Ravindra said after only his fourth Test appearance.

"That makes it a bit more special. It's extremely pleasing we got the job done."

SCOREBOARD
New Zealand 1st innings 511
South Africa 1st innings 162
New Zealand 2nd innings 179-4/d
South Africa 2nd innings
E. Moore c Conway b Henry 0
N. Brand b Southee 3
R. van Tonder c Latham b Jamieson 31
Z. Hamza c Southee b Jamieson 36

D. Bedingham c Santner b Jamieson 87
K. Petersen c Ravindra b Jamieson 16
R. de Swardt not out 34
C. Fortuin c Blundell b Phillips 11
D. Olivier c Mitchell b Santner 1
T. Moreki lbw Santner 6
D. Paterson c Williamson b Santner 15
Extras (b1, lb2, nb2, w2) 7
Total (all out, 80 overs) 247
Fall of wickets: 1-3 (Brand), 2-5 (Moore), 3-68 (van Tonder), 4-73 (Hamza), 5-178 (Bedingham), 6-181 (Petersen), 7-199 (Fortuin), 8-208 (Olivier), 9-223 (Moreki), 10-247 (Paterson)
Bowling: Southee 10-3-46-1, Henry 11-3-33-1, Jamieson 17-3-58-4 (w2, nb1), Santner 26-9-59-3, Phillips 9-1-30-1, Ravindra 7-2-18-0 (nb1)
Result: New Zealand win by 281 runs
Series: New Zealand lead 1-0.

FOCUS

Halep appears before CAS to appeal four-year doping ban

AFP
Lausanne, Switzerland

Former world number one Simona Halep appeared before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) yesterday to appeal her four-year doping ban in what is expected to be a three-day hearing.

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.

Halep, smiling and surrounded by her legal team, was seen entering CAS headquarters at the Palais Beaulieu in Lausanne, Switzerland but made no statement.

The CAS ruling will be delivered at a date yet to be announced.

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 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.



Former World No 1 tennis player Romania's Simona Halep arrives at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne yesterday, for her appeal against a four-year doping ban. (AFP)

Radwanska back on court on Padel Tour

Former world number two Agnieszka Radwanska is considering a new career as a padel professional after recently making her debut on the CUPRA FIP Tour in Spain.

Poland's Radwanska, who reached the Wimbledon final in 2012 where she lost to Serena Williams, played with compatriot Marta Domachowska, another former tennis professional.

They reached the last 16 of the tournament and Radwanska, who retired in 2018, said she would like to enter another event.

"I would still like to play on the FIP circuit, because padel is a sport I like and it is growing all over the world," the 34-year-old said of the racket sport that combines elements of tennis and squash.

"The good thing is that I don't need to plan the season from start to finish. If my schedule allows, I will be back on the court soon."

Radwanska said adapting from tennis was not as easy as some might think. "I find it a dynamic and fun sport: I play as soon as I can, even twice a week, compatibly with my role of mother," she said in an interview with the International Padel Federation.

"It is very difficult. Certainly in touch, having played tennis helps, volleys are not a problem. The problem is I would like to hit hard every time but I can't."

"Padel is a sport that never allows you to relax during the point, every point is a struggle."

Bumrah becomes first Indian pacer to top ICC rankings

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah yesterday rose to the top of the International Cricket Council's Test bowling rankings, becoming the first-ever fast bowler from the country to achieve the feat. The 30-year-old played a key role in India's series-equalling victory over England last week, with a match haul of nine wickets. Bumrah replaced his teammate, off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, at the top of the ICC table. While Bumrah climbed three places to reach the top, Ashwin dropped to third.

South African pacer Kagiso Rabada held on to second place despite being out of action in the ongoing Test series in New Zealand. Before Bumrah, only three Indian bowlers have been at the pinnacle of ICC's Test bowling rankings: Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, and the legendary left-arm spinner Bishan Singh Bedi, who passed away last year.

The previous highest-ranking Indian pace bowler was Kapil Dev, who held the second rank for a brief period between December 1979

and February 1980. Left-arm Zaheer Khan was number three from October to November 2020.

In the latest round of rankings, Indian opener Yashasvi Jaiswal leapfrogged 37 places to become the 29th-ranked Test batsman, on the back of his double century against England.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson, who led his team to victory against South Africa yesterday with a century in each innings, continued to dominate the Test batting rankings.

BOXING

Heavyweight champion Fury reveals five-fight plan

AFP
London

Tyson Fury has set out an ambitious five-fight plan, including a long-awaited bout against fellow British boxer Anthony Joshua, as the world heavyweight champion dismissed talk of retirement.

WBC champion Fury's unification bout with Oleksandr Usyk, the holder of the WBO, WBA and IBF belts, had been due to take place in Riyadh later this month.

But the eagerly anticipated contest was postponed until May 18 in Saudi Arabia after the British fighter suffered a deep cut above his eye in training.

Fury expects to have a rematch

with Ukraine's Usyk regardless of the outcome of their first fight, before facing former world heavyweight champion Joshua in one or two bouts and then Francis Ngannou, whom he beat in October.

"I keep hearing talk of people saying I should retire or I'm going to retire soon or whatever," Fury said on his Instagram feed yesterday, showing stitches above his eye.

"I ain't retiring - I've got two fights with Usyk for the undisputed, twice."

Fury, yet to face Joshua, added: "Then I'm going to fight AJ (Joshua) at least once, maybe twice, if there's a rematch - if he wants one after the first battering I give him."

"Then I'm going to fight Ngannou again."

"That's just the start. There's five fights for you to whet your appetite. I ain't going nowhere. I'm 35 years old and in the prime of my life."

Fury has won 34 fights with one draw since turning professional in 2008. His most recent fight was a controversial victory over former UFC mixed martial arts world champion Ngannou, making his professional boxing debut. Fury was knocked down but won on a split points decision.

Two-time former world champion Joshua is set for a non-title fight with Ngannou, also in Saudi Arabia, on March 8.

The last undisputed heavyweight boxing champion was Lennox Lewis, when he beat Evander Holyfield in 1999.

Tejada claims Tour Colombia 2nd stage



Colombia's cyclist Harold Tejada of the Astana Qazaqstan team celebrates after winning the second stage of the Tour Colombia UCI 2024 from Paipa to Santa Rosa de Viterbo, Colombia, yesterday. (AFP)

Woods to make season debut at Riviera

Tiger Woods will make his first PGA Tour appearance of the year at the Genesis Invitational at Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles, the golfer confirmed on Wednesday.

"Excited to be host next week," Woods posted on social media. The 48-year-old last competed in an official PGA Tour event at the 2023 Masters tournament in April but played in two events in December.

Woods played with his son

Charlie at the PNC Championship in Orlando on December 18 after playing in the Hero World Challenge in the Bahamas earlier in the month. The 15-times major champion, has struggled since suffering severe leg injuries in a 2021 car crash and he underwent ankle surgery after the Masters in April.

The Genesis Invitational is held from February 15-18 and Woods is the host of the event.

Last month Woods said he

was ending his long-standing partnership with sportswear company Nike and it will be interesting to see what equipment and clothing he features in at Riviera. After playing at the PNC Championship, Woods said he felt in shape to carry out his plan of monthly competitive action this year.

"I'll be able to walk and play," Woods said after the final round of the Orlando event.

"We've been working out hard,

been able to recover. We've been training every day, which is great. It's been nice to knock off a lot of the rust and some of the doubt that I've had because quite frankly I haven't hit a shot that counted in a long time," he said.

The Masters will be held at Augusta National the week of April 8. The 2024 schedule sees the PGA Championship in May, the US Open in June and the British Open in July.



WORLD AQUATICS CHAMPIONSHIPS DOHA

Magnificent Minisini fights back to clinch artistic crown

Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen secure their third consecutive women's 3m synchronised world title

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Italy's Giorgio Minisini added an individual world title to his glittering artistic swimming career with a stunning showing to capture the men solo free crown at the World Aquatics Championships Doha yesterday.

Minisini, a three-time duet world champion, had lost out to teenage sensation Yang Shuncheng of China in the men solo technical final on Monday. But the 27-year-old was not to be denied this time around as he clinched gold with a fantastic free routine yesterday. Defending champion Dennis Gonzalez Boneu of Spain earned silver, with Colombia's Gustavo Sanchez bagging bronze.

The gold medal in Doha marked a sensational return to the World Championships for Minisini who was forced to miss Fukuoka 2023 due to a season-ending knee injury. Minisini endured a long road to recovery after undergoing surgery to fix his knee shortly after the 2023 European Games where he won five medals. It was a tough period but Minisini has come back even stronger in Doha, claiming silver in the men solo technical before producing a magnificent performance to win men solo free gold at the Aspire Dome.

Minisini pulled off a dramatic display to Andrea Bocelli's "Hallelujah" as he created beautiful shapes in the water with amazing artistry and incredible height out of the water. He picked up a basemark for his final hybrid element but his total score was enough to take him to the top of the leaderboard, registering 210.1355, including 127.4355 for elements and 82.7000 for artistic impression to an increased difficulty of 33.800.

"In Fukuoka, I saw this event from my couch and I was dreaming about this moment since I had my knee injury," said Minisini. "So this is the conclusion of one chapter and we can start all over again. This competition really showed me how much I need to work on both - athletic side and mental side, mental management of the competition. Also, it was difficult to not have my coach on the pool deck so I needed to adapt. Now, my favorite part starts - I can cheer for my team from the



Italy's Giorgio Minisini performs during the men's solo free artistic swimming final during the World Aquatics Championships at Aspire Dome yesterday. (Reuters)

stands and have fun."

Meanwhile, Wang Zongyuan delivered a precision performance to retain his men's 3m springboard diving world title at the Hamad Aquatic Centre. His compatriot and reigning Olympic champion, Xie Siyi, took silver, while Osmar Olvera, who earlier this week sealed the men's 1m springboard title, settled for bronze.

Later, Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen delivered a diving master class to secure their third-consecutive women's 3m synchronised world title. The silver was won by Aussie pair Anabelle Smith and Maddison Keeney, while Great Britain's Scarlett Mew Jensen and Yasmin Harper clinched bronze with 281.70.

At the Old Doha Port, France's Logan Fontaine pulled the upset yesterday morning in the men's 5km. With all the attention on 10km champion Kristof Rasovszky of Hungary, and defending World champ Florian Wellbrock of Germany, it was nei-

ther of them standing on the podium for the men's 5km. Fontaine finished ahead of countryman Marc-Antoine Olivier, who won the silver in a big finish for French swimming as he added to his silver in the 10km from Sunday. The bronze went the way of Italy's Domenico Acerenza, who won his sixth career World Championships medal at age 29.

Four days after winning the 10km race on Saturday, Sharon van Rouwendaal of the Netherlands won the 5km women's title for her third career World Championships crown.

With the pressure off from the 10km, Rouwendaal won the open water double on Wednesday morning at the Old Doha Port by taking the 5km gold medal in the final sprint over Australia's Chelsea Gubecka. It was van Rouwendaal's tenth career medal at the World Championships at age 30, and her first in the 5km.

Van Rouwendaal came in at 57:33.9 with



China's Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen celebrate after winning the gold in the women's 3m springboard synchro diving event at the Hamad Aquatics Centre. (AFP)



China's Wang Zongyuan celebrates after winning the men's 3m springboard diving gold.

Gubecka claiming the silver at 57:35.0. Gubecka did not race the 10km on Saturday, having already solidified the Olympic qualification spot at last year's World Championships in Fukuoka.

"I did not expect to win another gold because I was so focused on the 10K and I felt very tired mentally after the 10k," van Rou-

wendaal said. "The body was quite good - the arms just had some problems and some issues with my hip and my leg in the last days. So I was like: Let's see when I am in the water. And when I was in the water, I was surprised I was in the front. I told myself: Let's just try something. And I took the risk and it has paid off."

FOOTBALL

Nigeria reach AFCON final after shootout victory over South Africa

AFP
Bouake, Ivory Coast

Substitute Kelechi Iheanacho scored to give Nigeria a 4-2 penalty shootout victory over South Africa yesterday after an Africa Cup of Nations semi-final thriller in Bouake. The match finished 1-1 after extra time and the three-time champions will face hosts Ivory Coast or the Democratic Republic of Congo, who were meeting late last night, in the final on Sunday.

Both regular-time goals also came from penalties with captain William Troost-Ekong scoring after 67 minutes for Nigeria and Teboho Mokoena equalised from a 90th-minute spot-kick. The Mokoena equaliser came after Nigeria thought they had scored a second goal through a tap-in from star forward Victor Osimhen.

But play was called back to the other end of the field after VAR alerted the Egyptian referee that South African Percy Tau had been fouled in the area, and the match official concurred. Khuliso Mudau had a chance to win the South Africa in added time at the end of regular time, but blazed over after goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali parried a Mokoena free kick.

South Africa finished with 10 men when Grant Kekana was sent off on 115 minutes for a last-defender foul. Nigeria entered the match with a perfect record against South Africa in the premier African football competition having won three previous meetings.

The Super Eagles beat Bafana Bafana (The Boys) 2-0 in a 2000 semi-final in Nigeria, 4-0 in a group match four years later in Tunisia and 2-1 in a 2019 quarter-final in Egypt. Nigeria coach Jose Peseiro made one change to the team that beat Angola 1-0, bringing in Bright Osayi-Samuel for left-back Zaidu Sanusi, who did not train on the eve of the match.

Star Napoli forward Osimhen started for the three-time champions after recovering from an ab-



Nigeria's players celebrate after their win over South Africa in the Africa Cup of Nations semi-final in Bouake, Ivory Coast. (Reuters)

dominal discomfort that delayed his arrival in Bouake from Abidjan. Some Nigerians in the stadium demonstrated their support for Osimhen by wearing replicas of the protective facial mask he still dons three years after suffering an eye socket injury.

South Africa coach Hugo Broos also made one change after victory on penalties over Cape Verde with central defender Siyanda Xulu recalled and Thapelo Morena dropping to the bench. South Africa had an equal number of shots at goal, but more on target, greater possession, and forced more corners in a tense, lively opening half.

Barely a minute after the kick-off, reigning African Player of the Year Osimhen knelt clutching his abdomen, but he continued after treatment and worked tirelessly. When pre-match favourites Nigeria were awarded a free-kick, Semi Ajayi headed tamely at goalkeeper Ronwen Williams, who

saved four shootout penalties against Cape Verde.

Percy Tau had a couple of half-chances for South Africa, but a weak shot and later a heavy first touch let him down before a 32,000 crowd. Nigeria goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali, who plays for South African top-flight club Chippa United, produced a good one-hand parry to foil Evidence Makgopa as half-time approached.

With the Super Eagles in the ascendancy, the deadlock ended midway through the second half when Mothobi Mvala fouled Osimhen and Troost-Ekong converted the penalty. Makgopa fired narrowly wide with 15 minutes remaining as South Africa chased an equaliser in the central Ivorian city.

Then came the disallowed Osimhen goal, the Mokoena equaliser, the Mudau miss and 30 minutes of end-to-end extra time action, including a red card for Kekana, before the shootout.

HORSE RACING

Goldinggreatstore wins Wadi Al Sail Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Sheikh Abdul Rahman bin Rashid al-Thani-owned Goldinggreatstore yesterday won the Thoroughbred Premium Maidens race to secure the Wadi Al Sail Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

The three-year-old colt, trained by Mohamed Ghazali claimed two-and-a-half-length victory in the 1200m after teaming up with jockey Ivan Rossi. White Christmas with Jefferson Smith in the saddle outpaced third-placed Insignia by a length to finish runner-up in the race.

Al Uqda Complex Manager Abdulaziz Jassim al-Boenain crowned the winners of the feature. The Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's 19 Al Uqda Meeting yesterday featured a total of seven contests.

RESULTS

19th Al Uqda Meeting: Wadi Al Sail Race Day
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

- 1 - Wadi Al Sail Cup, Thoroughbred Premium Maiden
Goldinggreatstore, Mohamed Ghazali, Ivan Rossi
- 2 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap
Ray'q, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
- 3 - Thoroughbred Handicap (50-70)
Little Lips, Gassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento



Ivan Rossi rides Goldinggreatstore to Wadi Al Sail Cup victory at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

- 4 - Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate
Kyleiba At, Mohamed Hussain Afroz, Carlos Henrique
- 5 - Thoroughbred Novice Plate
Dubawi Spectre, Gassim Ghazali, Louis Nomis
- 6 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate
Egaab Al Khail, Abdulaziz Hamad al-Marri, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri
- 7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (45-65)
Lahessar, Mohamed Ali al-Marri, Rashid Ali al-Marri

EQUESTRIAN SPECTACLE AND FAMILY FUN ACTIVITIES AT CHI AL SHAQAB

Doha: Al Shaqab, Qatar's leading equestrian centre, recently announced the eleventh edition of the highly-anticipated CHI Al Shaqab Presented by Longines, scheduled to take place from 22-24 February 2024. The unparalleled event promises to captivate spectators with its supreme equestrian displays, while offering a remarkable experience for families and providing premium VIP facilities.

From exhilarating show jumping competitions to dazzling dressage performances, this three-day event is set to showcase the ultimate display of talent, grace, and precision in the equestrian world. But also, to look out for this year is Al Shaqab's unwavering focus on family, the community and entertainment.

Whether you are a seasoned equestrian enthusiast or a first-time spectator, the arena is set to wow you with its exhilarating atmosphere and unforgettable moments. Families can look forward to an array of activities and entertainment options, including pony rides, interactive displays, engaging master classes, cultural performances, and much more, ensuring a fun-filled experience for all ages.

In addition to providing a complete family-friendly event, CHI Al Shaqab presented by Longines is committed to offering unrivaled VIP facilities to ensure a truly exceptional experience for its distinguished guests. From a luxurious VIP tent to lavish hospitality lounges, to exclusive access to the finest dining options and

premium seating areas in the heart of all the action, our VIP guests will be treated to impeccable service and an unforgettable ambiance.

"We are incredibly excited to bring back CHI Al Shaqab to Qatar," said the Event Director Mohamed al-Khayarin, "Our aim is to not only showcase top-notch equestrian skills but also provide a platform for families and the community to come together and enjoy a weekend of sporting excellence. With our carefully curated entertainment programs and VIP facilities, we are confident that CHI Al Shaqab presented by Longines will be an event to remember."

Full details and tickets are available now at www.alshaqab.com and www.q-tickets.com

FRITTELI AND HELLIGKILDE TEAMS WIN
COMMERCIAL BANK QATAR MASTERS PRO-AM



South African players Dylan Frittelli captained his side – featuring amateurs James Davis, Paul Farelli, Thani Aroonchote – to victory in the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters Pro-Am, the traditional curtain-raiser to the European Tour event, at the Doha Golf Club yesterday. Frittelli team won the AM shotgun event with a score of -30. In the PM shotgun event, Danish professional player Marcus Helligkilde's team comprised of amateurs Gurbax Singh, Satnam Singh, Tom Philips emerged winners with a score of -34. Technical Expert Qatar Golf Association Mike Shoueiry and the Organising Committee Member and Media Co-ordinator Walid Saad presented the trophies to the winners.

COMMERCIAL BANK QATAR MASTERS

Frittelli targets to carry South African legacy in Qatar

Frittelli returns to Doha Golf Club for the first time since 2017

Dylan Frittelli is hoping he can build on his long-awaited return to the DP World Tour winner's circle by continuing South African golf's good record at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, which begins today at the Doha Golf Club.

The 33-year-old ended a six-year wait for his third European Tour title with a two-shot victory at last week's Bahrain Championship. Frittelli later revealed he contemplated giving up golf during a difficult 2023 as he lost his full playing privileges on the PGA Tour last season after missing the cut or withdrawing from 23 events. He now returns to Doha Golf Club for the first time since 2017 with his sights set on becoming the sixth South African to lift the Mother of Pearl trophy since the inception of the Qatar Masters in 1998. "I remember watching as a kid this tournament," he said.

"Seeing (Retief Goosen) Ernie Els do well. I still remember Retief eagling the last hole (to win in 2017), he had a putt from the fringe early morning on a Sunday sometime when I was probably 12-13 years old. So, good memories of seeing that stuff on TV. I don't know if there is something in the course conditioning that favours South Africans in some way. We have got a lot of good players from our country anyway so hopefully one of us wins this week."

Since taking up a route back onto the European Tour for those who finished outside the top 125 on the FedExCup Fall Points List, Frittelli secured two top 20s in his first six starts of the season. With only five places per event available to players in that category, he was unsure of his spot in fields on the European Tour but victory in Bahrain means he is exempt until the end of the 2025 season.

"It is great to have some security," added the University of Texas alumnus. "For a couple of years, I know I can come out here and play any event that I want pretty much. I can plan my schedule pretty much now to have some down time and take some time off."

"It is kind of tough living in America, playing all around Europe, Asia and the Middle East but I can definitely control things a little more now. I am excited because now I have the option of (playing in) every tournament on the European Tour so I can pick the ones that I really enjoy and build a schedule that complements my game."

Following his first professional win since the 2019 John Deere Classic on the PGA TOUR,



Dylan Frittelli ended a six-year wait for his third European Tour title with a two-shot victory at last week's Bahrain Championship.

Frittelli sits eighth on the Race to Dubai Rankings. And ahead of the final event in the Middle East on the International Swing, he is now reaping the rewards for his perseverance.

"Last year in the States I didn't even have my C game mentally," he reflected. "I was really struggling on that side of things so I had to put in a lot of hard work there. Obviously that dovetails with the golf game; the swing, the putting with all the technical stuff too. I knew in my head going into that final nine holes that if I could be close with five or six holes I could definitely use my experience and mental toughness to see me to the end."

The Qatar Masters, 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 with \$450,000 500 Race to Dubai ranking points on offer for the winner. While

Finland's Valimaki is not back to defend his title this week, 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. 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 Tour after progressing from the Final Stage of Qualifying School last year, is the oldest past champion having won in 2003.

(europeantour.com)

ASIAN CUP

Champions mindset powered Jordan into final, says Ammouta

By Sports Reproter
Doha

Head coach Hussein Ammouta was proud of the mindset of champions his Jordan side produced in their stunning 2-0 victory over South Korea in their AFC Asian Cup semi-final on Tuesday.

Goals from Yazan al-Naimat and Mousa al-Tamari at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan secured Jordan's historic place in the final, where they will face defending champions and hosts Qatar on Saturday.

"Congratulations to everyone who contributed to our victory. The players were our main weapon, showcasing heroic performances throughout the tournament. Despite facing injuries, we managed to deliver a significant accomplishment," said the 54-year-old Ammouta.

"Our players demonstrated great initiative throughout the match. We agreed to start strongly, capitalising on the fact that South Korea have conceded eight goals in five matches. It was crucial to utilise our attacking abilities and seize the initiative to attack, especially against formidable opponents like them, who are known for their skilful players. We knew that our opponents would strike back, hence the focus remained on aggressive defensive tactics. However, it was our proactive approach and emphasis on attacking play that made us the more effective team. We displayed the mindset of champions, showing resilience and determination in every aspect of the game."

Despite starting the game aggressively, Ammouta admitted he had been concerned with the lack of goal scoring efficiency midway through the first half, but defensive composure led Jordan confidently securing a famous victory.

"Initially, there was concern over the five missed opportunities, as such misses can often lead to one conceding a goal. However, our team remained composed after scoring the second goal, maintaining control of the game. Today's victory differed significantly from our 2-2 group stage draw against the Korean team, particularly in terms of our defensive tactics. I emphasised to the players the importance of pressuring their attackers, which they executed effectively.

"While there are variables beyond our control, it's crucial for the players to adapt to the conditions on the pitch. Despite missing chances, the team gave their all in defence and attack. We embraced the opportunity, knowing we had nothing to lose, and it paid off. Today's success was a collective effort, with every individual contributing to the win. Our approach was not to give the opposi-

tion undue respect but to play with confidence and determination. Their commitment to winning individual battles ultimately led to our victory."

Jordan are one win away from securing a maiden AFC Asian Cup title with Ammouta saying the days leading up to Saturday's final will be utilised wisely. "We are grateful for the seriousness with which everyone approached their roles. With just three days to prepare until we play in the final, we must utilise this time effectively."

Ammouta hoped their surprise run to the final will spark broader development in the country's football and propel Jordanian players into the Premier League. South Korea's coach Jurgen Klinsmann and skipper Son Heung-min admitted that Jordan, the lowest-ranked team left in the tournament, fully deserved their semi-final victory on Tuesday.

No matter what happens on Saturday, the widely admired Ammouta says their landmark achievement must be the spark for something longer lasting in Jordanian football. "We need to invest in infrastructure, in the training and formation of our players to reach higher levels," he said. "We need to pay attention to age categories."

Ammouta says that change is already afoot, citing the example of the impressive al-Tamari, who together with al-Naimat terrorised South Korea's shell-shocked defence. Tamari, who set Naimat up for the opening goal on 53 minutes before slicing through the Korean defence for a second 13 minutes later, left Jordan's domestic league in 2018.

First came a move to Cypriot giants APOEL, before leaving for Belgian football two years later with Oud-Heverlee Leuven. Last summer, after 10 goals and nine assists for the top-flight Belgian side, al-Tamari sealed a free transfer to Montpellier in France.

Al-Tamari is the only member of Jordan's Asian Cup squad playing in Europe and Ammouta says for the national side to build on their success in Qatar more need to follow in his footsteps. "What you saw today was the fruit of several years of work," Ammouta said.

"We have Mousa al-Tamari in the French league and hopefully we will have four or five Jordanian players in the French league or the English Premier League. When you look at Japan or Korea you see players who are playing abroad and they have great value to their national teams. This is what we should start planning for – how will we produce players who will play in the world's biggest leagues? This a building block that's part of a bigger plan."

First, Jordan must upset the odds once again in the final in Doha. Ranked 87 in the world by FIFA, they will be the underdogs against Qatar.



Jordan's Moroccan coach Hussein Ammouta. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Knives out for Klinsmann after South Korea's 'shameful' exit

AFP
Doha

Jurgen Klinsmann's position as South Korea coach came under intense pressure yesterday after what local media called a "shameful" and "humiliating" Asian Cup semi-final defeat to Jordan. The Koreans crashed out 2-0 to a team ranked 64 places below them in the world and they failed to muster a shot on target despite boasting Son Heung-min in attack. The German Klinsmann, who came into the tournament vowing to win South Korea's first Asian Cup in 64 years, said after the deserved defeat on Tuesday that he would not quit.

He was backed publicly by some of his players, primarily the captain Son, who



said the 59-year-old coach will become "even stronger". But the reaction of fans and media was scathing, saying the Jordan collapse was just the latest example of questionable tactics and team selections.

Most of all, Klinsmann's army of detractors arrowed in once more on the way he wears a ready-made smile, even in defeat.

"While the players showed their disappointment and forced smiles, Klinsmann's face was filled with laughter," said the *Sports Hankook* website. "It was a scene that was extremely perplexing to comprehend, considering he is the coach of the Korean national team."

A World Cup winner as a player for Germany, Klinsmann was never a very popular choice in South Korea following his appointment a year ago. Asked on Tuesday if he would quit, Klinsmann said: "I am not planning to do anything."

He said he would analyse the tournament and talk to Korean football officials, but "apart from that, I am not thinking of anything".

He found a sympathetic ear in Tottenham star Son, who apologised to fans and said he felt sorry for Klinsmann. "Even before the tournament the perception of him was very negative, so I believe the coach must have felt a tremendous amount of pressure," said Son. "Despite the difficult circumstances he managed to cope well. I was deeply touched by how he took care of the players without showing any sign of frustration and never giving up until the end," he added.

South Korea lived on the edge throughout the Asian Cup, scoring late in games on four occasions on the way to the semi-finals. Korean media dubbed it "zombie football" for the way they kept coming back from the dead, but they were finally buried by a Jordan side who were simply better. Klinsmann has been under fire

in South Korea from day one because of his refusal to live in the country and his coaching record, which has never matched his stellar playing career. As a coach he is best known for managing the United States in 2011-2016, during which he won the continental Gold Cup.

Before South Korea came calling, his previous job was a 10-week stint at Hertha Berlin in 2019-2020. His relentless optimism has irked South Korean fans and media, and he was mocked for previously telling reporters to book their hotels in Qatar until February 10 – the day of the final.

Klinsmann said "a coach has to be positive", but his team's Asian Cup exit will test his powers to the limit. "I think there was a lot of good stuff that we saw," he said.

"This is a team that's growing, a team that still has to develop."