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# GULF TIMES SPORT



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FOOTBALL

## Dortmund beat PSV to make Champions League last eight

Dortmund secured quarter-final place for the first time in three years

AFF  
Dortmund, Germany

A third-minute goal from Jadon Sancho and Marco Reus' late strike sent Borussia Dortmund through to the Champions League last eight with a 2-0 win yesterday, sealing a 3-1 aggregate victory. Level at 1-1 after the last-16 first leg in the Netherlands, Sancho wasted no time in putting Dortmund ahead at the Westfalenstadion with a low shot from outside the area - his first Champions League goal since November 2021. Dortmund were shaky despite the early lead and needed a fair share of luck and some poor PSV finishing to progress, with Hirving Lozano's 53rd-minute effort hitting the post. PSV pushed forwards in stoppage time looking for an equaliser but instead gave away another goal, as Isaac Babadi's unfortunate slip allowed Reus to seal the win. The 1997 winners did enough against an outclassed PSV but will face stiffer challenges as they return to the quarter-final draw, to be held on Friday, for the first time since 2021. Dortmund, 20 points behind Xabi Alonso's unbeaten leaders Bayer Leverkusen in the Bundesliga and out of the German Cup, came into the game knowing the Champions League was their only



Dortmund's Jadon Sancho (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring the opening 1-0 goal during the UEFA Champions League last 16, second-leg match against PSV Eindhoven in Dortmund yesterday. (AFP)

hope of lifting silverware this season. Despite their poor domestic campaign, Dortmund have impressed in Europe, emerging first from a group featuring Paris Saint-Germain, AC Milan and Newcastle. PSV are unbeaten in the Eredivisie and cantering towards their first league title since 2018.

Having said on Saturday he "expects more from himself" after scoring his first goal since returning to Germany on loan from Manchester United in January, Sancho opened the scoring before the smoke of the pre-game flares had cleared. The out-of-favour England winger made the most of PSV's

failure to clear a bouncing ball in the box, collecting Julian Brandt's lay-off and picking out the bottom corner via the inside of the post. That goal put the wind in the hosts' sails, with Brandt and former PSV winger Donyell Malen denied by a brilliant double save from visiting goalkeeper Walter Benitez. Malen went close again before the interval, twice firing wide when he should have at least hit the target. The visitors were much improved after the break. Lozano, introduced at half-time, hit the post with a long-range effort. PSV upped the ante but were let down by their wastefulness in front of goal, with Luuk de Jong heading over two good chances. Substituted to applause with what looked like a thigh injury, Sancho was replaced by Reus with 15 minutes remaining. The Dortmund veteran looked to have laid on the crucial second goal for Niclas Füllkrug two minutes later against the run of play with a sublime cross from a free-kick, but the striker's volley was ruled out by VAR for the narrowest of off-sides. PSV's best opportunity to force extra time fell to De Jong in the fourth minute of added time, but the Dutch striker blazed over unmarked from only 10 yards out. Reus quickly made him pay, racing onto a loose ball and slotting calmly past Benitez to spark wild home celebrations.

HORSE RACING

## Safi Al Zaman claims Rodat Al Maida Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed FN al-Thani-owned Safi Al Zaman put in a classy performance to win the Rodat Al Maida Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. The seven-year-old horse, trained by Mohamed Salama Ashour, got stronger as the race went on, staying on powerfully to record a 3½ length victory under jockey Alberto Sanna, who chalked up his second winner in the evening after guiding Al Motasim to three-length win in the 1700m Thoroughbred Handicap. Soufiane Saadi also grabbed the spotlight emerging winner in three races during Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) 34th Al Rayyan Meeting, which decided seven races. The jockey recorded his first win in Local Thoroughbred Handicap - yesterday's opening contest, riding Jihad El Ahmad-trained Jabahat to almost three-length win before partnering with Meraj for Thoroughbred Maiden Plate trophy. Saadi completed his hat-trick with The Dunkirk Lads as the pair

earned a huge six-and-a-half-length victory in the 1200m Thoroughbred Handicap.

**RESULTS**  
**34th Al Rayyan Meeting: Rodat Al Maida Cup Day**  
**WINNERS** (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)  
1 - Rodat Al Maida Cup - Purebred Arabian Handicap 85-105 (Class 2)  
Safi Al Zaman, Mohamed Salama Ashour, Alberto Sanna  
2 - Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80)  
The Dunkirk Lads, Mohamed Ghazali, Soufiane Saadi  
3 - Thoroughbred Handicap (50-70)  
Al Motasim, Gassim Ghazali, Alberto Sanna  
4 - Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate  
Aldishen, M. al-Sulaiti, Abdelkabar Benlarbi  
5 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate  
Meraj, Gassim Ghazali, Soufiane Saadi  
6 - Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate  
Matwi Al Shajah, Mohamed Hassan al-Matwi, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi  
7 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (25-45)  
Jabahat, Jihad El Ahmad, Soufiane Saadi



Jockey Alberto Sanna guides Safi Al Zaman to Rodat Al Maida Cup victory at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm

## Russia rules out Paris Olympic Games boycott

Russia's sports minister yesterday said Moscow should not boycott the upcoming Paris Olympics despite the severe restrictions on its athletes over the Kremlin's offensive in Ukraine. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) in December suspended Russia from the 2024 Games, but gave the green light for Russian athletes to compete as neutrals as long as they do not actively support the Ukraine campaign. "We should not turn away, close ourselves off, boycott this movement," Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin said according to the state-run TASS news agency. "We should as much as possible keep the possibility of dialogue and take part in competitions," he added. Matytsin is not holding his breath for a softening in the IOC's stance when its executive commission meets next week. "We will see what the final decision of the International Olympic Committee will be (...) but so far the position is that there will be no new recommendations and regulations," he ventured. The IOC has always presented its decision as final, but still has to rule on the presence of Russian or Belarussian athletes at the opening ceremony. They have already been banned from attending the opening

ceremony of the Paralympics on August 28. Until Matytsin's intervention it had been unclear whether Russia would recommend its athletes to go to Paris anyway. Russia had slammed the IOC suspension for the July 26-August 11 Olympics but failed in an appeal to get it overturned last month at the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Matytsin said Moscow could not give "general recommendations" to all of its athletes because "each international federation has different approaches". "Some completely ban taking part (like World Athletics), some leave the right to take part in a neutral status," he said. He said despite the ban, the Olympic Games remains important to the country. "For athletes and our society it is very important to keep the dialogue and give our guys a possibility in a just fight to show what a great sporting country we are," he said. - 'To go or not to go?' - Russia has previously attacked the restrictions as humiliation and "discrimination" but stopped short of telling the country's sportsmen if they should go to Paris. Russian President Vladimir Putin has held off giving his advice on their participation this summer. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

## F4 Saudi Arabia Championship to kick off at Lusail International Circuit today

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The excitement of Formula 4 racing arrives in Qatar as the F4 Saudi Arabia Championship is set to kick off at Lusail International Circuit today. This marks the first time the championship takes place in Qatar, aligning with the Qatar National 2030 vision of hosting prestigious global sports events in Qatar. Moreover, the championship aims to empower youth and showcase their talent on an international platform certified by Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA). Spectators are invited to watch the races as future stars of motorsport take on the exciting track. There are only a limited number of spots, book your free spot now via the following link: [https://events.lcsc.qa/]. Be the first to secure the exclusive opportunity to be part of this event. The races will consist of free practices, qualifying sessions, and will conclude with 4 races over the course of the racing weekend, providing an immersive experience for both racers and spectators alike. Emerging Qatari racer, Jabor

**SCHEDULE**

**Today**  
8:00 pm - 12:00 am - Test Sessions

**Tomorrow**  
8:00 pm - 8:30 pm - Free Practice  
10:00 pm - 10:30 pm - Qualifying  
12:00 am - 12:30 am - Race 1

**Saturday**  
8:00 pm - 8:30 pm - Race 2  
10:00 pm - 10:30 pm - Race 3  
12:00 am - 12:30 am - Race 4

H al-Thani will be representing Qatar in the F4 races, aiming to make his mark on the international stage. Additionally, among the talented drivers participating from the Qatar Motorsport Academy are Tamim Hassiba, Taha Hassiba, Khalid al-Muftah, and Bader al-Sulaiti, who will be

testing their skills in the F4 cars this weekend in practice sessions. For enthusiasts looking to watch the races, they will be broadcasted live through the link [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCK1FJY-Eyte082UKnJXqGiA]. Tune in to catch all the action and witness the future of motorsport unfold.





GOLF

# McIlroy wants to ‘speed up’ PGA-PIF deal to reunite stars

AFP  
Miami

Four-time major champion **Rory McIlroy** wants talks on a PGA Tour merger deal with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) to conclude quickly, saying fans want star golfers reunited. Saudi-backed LIV Golf League, in its third campaign, has many star names who defected from the PGA Tour, including reigning Masters champion Jon Rahm and 2023 PGA Championship winner Brooks Koepka. Talks to finalise a controversial framework agreement from last June to unify the PGA and PIF have dragged beyond a December deadline, something McIlroy sees as a factor in television rating declines for PGA signature tournaments, down 30 percent for last week's event at Bay Hill. "I want the train to speed up so we can get this thing over and done with,"



McIlroy said on the eve of The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass in Florida. McIlroy said the PGA's signature events, with limited fields in big-money showdowns, "are not quite capturing the imagination this year compared to last year". "I think it's because fans are fatigued of what's going on in the game and I think we need to try to reengage them in

a way that the focus is on the play and not on talking about equity and all the rest of it," he said. "The sooner that this is resolved, I think it's going to be better for the game and better for everyone, the fans and the players." McIlroy said a major factor is that LIV and PGA players compete against each other only at major tournaments. "If I were a fan, I would want to watch the best players compete against each other week in, week out," McIlroy said. "If you just unified the game and brought us all back together in some way, that would be great for the fans, I would imagine. "I think that would then put a positive spin on everything that has happened here, and OK, get together, we all move forward, and I think people could get excited about that." PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan has been criticised since revealing the shock PGA-PIF deal and reigning Olympic champion Xander Schauffele

said Monahan "has a long way to go to regain the trust of the membership". Monahan has McIlroy's support as he continues what he calls "accelerating" talks with PIF. "I think some of the reaction to June 6 was warranted, but at this point it's eight months ago and we all need to move on," McIlroy said. "We all need to sort of move forward and try to bring the game back together." McIlroy cited Monahan's work during the Covid pandemic, on media rights deals and aligning with the DP World Tour. "People can nit-pick and say he didn't do this right or didn't do that right, but if you actually step back and look at the bigger picture, I think the PGA Tour is in a far stronger position than when Jay took over," McIlroy said. McIlroy, the 2019 Players champion, is hoping to rediscover his best form this week after failing to post a top-20 finish in his four PGA Tour appearances so far this year.

## Asian Tour to add event to help players qualify for Paris Olympics

**Macau:** The Asian Tour wants to add a lucrative event before June to help its players qualify for this summer's Paris Olympics, the head of the tour's International Series said yesterday. Rahul Singh was speaking ahead of this week's International Series Macau, where players are chasing a \$2mn prize fund and all-important ranking points. Only 60 players will reach Paris 2024 and with most countries having a maximum of two places, competition is fierce before the Olympic Golf Rankings (OGR) are finalised in June. Saudi-bankrolled LIV Golf has invested \$300mn in the Asian Tour - which unlike LIV receives world-ranking points - leading to the creation of the International Series. More than 20 LIV golfers have made the short trip over from Hong Kong for this week's event at the Macau Golf and Country Club, and Singh agreed many have ranking points on their minds. "We're seeing that with some of the LIV boys who sit on the cusp of Olympic qualification and the Asian Tour players who want to work their way into the top 60," he said. "And therefore we're looking actively right now at adding another International Series tournament before the cut-off, which is June 17." Singh declined to say where and when the event will be "because we haven't finalised it", but added: "We're actively trying to make that happen and the Olympics is one of the driving forces."

CRICKET

# Najmul guides Bangladesh to comfortable win

The Bangladesh captain scores polished century in 6-wicket victory

AFP  
Chittagong

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto struck an unbeaten century to guide Bangladesh to a comfortable six-wicket win in the first one-day international of a three-match series against Sri Lanka in Chittagong yesterday. Najmul hit 122 not out off 129 balls, and was ably supported by one of his predecessors as captain, Mushfiqui Rahim, who was unbeaten on 73, as Bangladesh raced to 257-4 in 44.4 overs after bowling out Sri Lanka for 255 runs. The pair added 165 in their unbroken fifth-wicket stand, saving Bangladesh from a potential mid-innings collapse, coming together at 92-4. Dilshan Madushanka took two early wickets and Pramod Madushan joined him to leave Bangladesh struggling at 23-3, in a little over five overs. Najmul put on 69 for the fourth wicket with Mahmudullah Riyad to stave off the initial danger. Lahiru Kumara broke the partnership by removing Mahmudullah for 37, but Najmul and Mushfiqui denied Sri Lanka further success. Najmul cut Kumara for a boundary to reach his third ODI century off 108 balls, and finished the game with a four off Maheesh Theekshana. "We knew that with the new ball, it's quite hard, so I just... took a little bit of time," Najmul said. "Later on, the wicket was very easy because of the dew." Earlier, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Is-



Bangladesh's Mushfiqui Rahim (right) and captain Najmul Hossain Shanto celebrate after winning the first one-day international against Sri Lanka at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

lam claimed three wickets each to restrict the Sri Lankan batsmen. Janith Liyanage top-scored with 67 off 69 balls, after Kusal Mendis made 59 off 75 balls in Sri Lanka's roller-coaster innings after they elected to bat first. The visitors got off to a rollicking start with openers Pathum Nissanka (36)

and Avishka Fernando (33) adding 71 in less than 10 overs. Tanzim claimed three wickets in quick succession to slow the flow of runs, finishing with 3-44. Mendis and Charith Asalanka (18) put on 44 runs for the fourth wicket to prevent a complete collapse. Liyanage joined Mendis

after Mehidy Hasan Miraz dismissed Asalanka. Mendis lamented the tourists' batting in the middle overs. "Pathum and Avishka batted really well in the first 10 overs," he said. "The middle order struggled a little bit after that. I think 280 plus would have been a better score on this surface." Taskin ended the promising innings of Mendis, forcing the Sri Lankan captain to give a catch to his Bangladesh counterpart Najmul at mid-off. Taskin, who finished with 3-60, dismissed Wanindu Hasaranga and Theekshana, but Liyanage ensured Sri Lanka still got to a decent score. Shoriful (3-51) removed Liyanage, before wrapping up Sri Lanka's innings in 48.5 overs. The visitors won the preceding T20 series 2-1. It was the first ODI between the teams since the World Cup last year in India, when Sri Lanka veteran Angelo Mathews became the first player in the 146-year history of international cricket to be dismissed timed out. The two sides meet again tomorrow, and wrap up the series on Monday.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Sri Lanka 255 all out in 48.5 overs** (Janith Liyanage 67, Kusal Mendis 59; Tanzim Hasan Sakib 3-44, Taskin Ahmed 3-60)  
**Bangladesh 257-4 in 44.4 overs** (Najmul Hossain Shanto 122 not out, Mushfiqui Rahim 73 not out; Dilshan Madushanka 2-44)  
**Toss:** Sri Lanka  
**Result:** Bangladesh won by six wickets  
**Series:** Bangladesh lead three-match series 1-0

SPOTLIGHT

## England star Brook pulls out of IPL after grandmother's death

AFP  
London

England batsman **Harry Brook** has withdrawn from the Indian Premier League following the death of his grandmother. Brook pulled out of England's recent Test tour in India in January, citing personal reasons. The 25-year-old has now revealed the reason was because his grandmother "was ill and didn't have long left". Brook yesterday confirmed he will not be joining up with Delhi Capitals, who paid £380,000 (\$486,000) to sign him in December. "I can confirm that I have made the very difficult decision not to play in the upcoming IPL," he wrote on Instagram. "I was so excited to be picked by Delhi Capitals and was so looking forward to joining up with everyone. "Whilst I don't think I should need to share my personal reasons behind this decision, I know there will be many asking why. So I do want to share this. "I lost my grandmother last

month - she was a rock to me and I spent a huge amount of my childhood in her home; my attitude to life and love for cricket was shaped by her and my late grandfather." Brook pulled out of England's five-Test tour to India before the squad flew out from their training camp in the United Arab Emirates. "I made the decision to leave the India Test tour the night before we flew from Abu Dhabi to India because I was told for the first time that my grandmother was ill and didn't have long left," he said. "Now that she has passed my family & I are grieving and I need to be around them. Over the last few years I have learned to prioritise my mental wellbeing and that of my family's, honestly nothing is more important to me than family." Brook, who has made four centuries in 12 Test appearances for England, played for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL last season. But the big-hitting star was released by Hyderabad, who paid £1.35mn for him, after a frustrating debut season in the IPL. Delhi Capitals are due to play their first match of the new season against Punjab Kings on March 23.



## INDIA'S ASHWIN RECLAIMS TOP BOWLER'S SPOT AFTER EMOTIONAL SERIES

**Dubai:** India's Ravichandran Ashwin reclaimed the top spot in the Test bowler's rankings yesterday following his nine-wicket haul in the fifth and final Test against England last week. It was a memorable 100th Test match in Dharamsala for India's spin spearhead, who finished as the leading wicket-taker of the series with 26 dismissals. Ashwin, who claimed his 500th Test wicket in the third test in Rajkot, replaced team mate Jasprit Bumrah at the top of the test rankings. Bumrah slipped to third place behind Australia's Josh Hazlewood, who moved up two rungs after claiming six wickets in the second test against New Zealand. It was the sixth time in his career that Ashwin rose to the top spot in ranking and it was an eventful series against England for the 37-year-old. The off-spinner temporarily withdrew



India's Ravichandran Ashwin with his family after receiving his 100th Test cap in Dharamsala on March 7.

from the Rajkot Test to be with his ailing mother in Chennai before he reunited with the squad on day four of the contest. Ashwin, on his YouTube channel, thanked

India captain Rohit Sharma for letting him to be with his mother in Chennai when the test was on. "Rohit is a special person, an outstanding leader, with a golden heart," the spinner said. "I saw it first-hand. I'd give my life for him on the field, that's the kind of captain he is." **Anderson says he's in 'best shape' ahead of England's home summer** James Anderson says he still has to show he deserves his spot in the England Test squad ahead of the home summer but the 41-year-old seamer believes he is in the "best shape" of his life. The first fast bowler to claim 700 Test wickets, Anderson is keen to add to his tally in three-match home series against West Indies in July and Sri Lanka in August-September. "I want to make sure I'm playing well and

earn my place in the team," the 187-Test veteran told the **BBC Testenders** podcast. "I'm not getting any worse. I'm definitely in the best shape I've ever been in. "I like where my game is at and I still have that enjoyment of turning up every day and trying to get better in the nets. "My place in the team is not a given so I've got to work hard to prove I'm worth a place in the summer." England's ultra-aggressive approach was heavily criticized after their 4-1 drubbing in India but Anderson said the team were in a "good place" under captain Ben Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum. "I really enjoyed this tour," Anderson said. "I've been on tours to India before where little cracks start appearing in the team and that's not happened this time. "We've stuck together really well, we really enjoy being together as a group and there is more to come from this team."

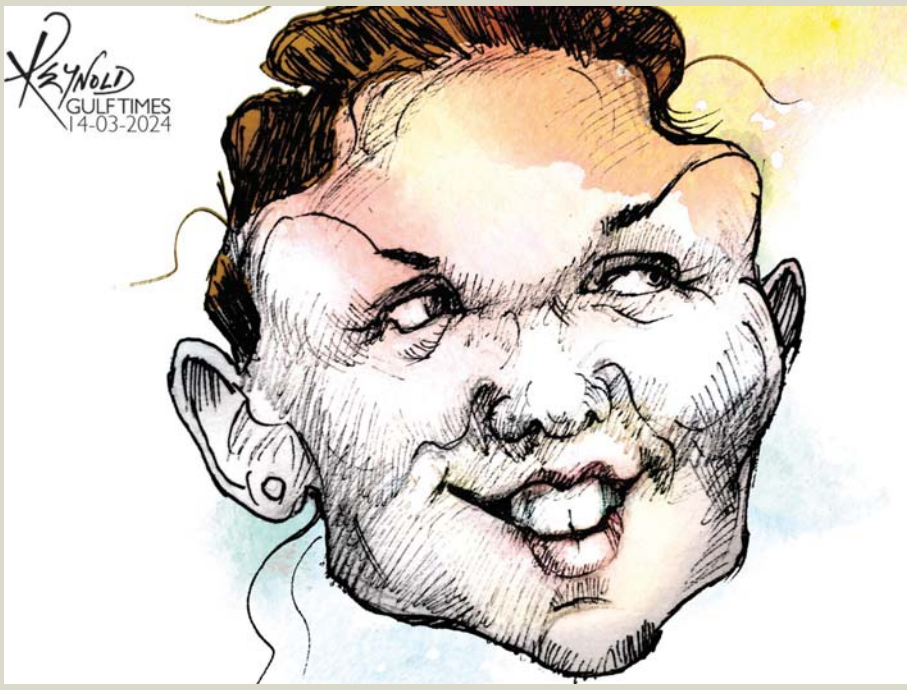


## 'Feels like I never left' - Halep back on court

**Simona Halep** posted a video yesterday of her practicing on the courts of the upcoming Miami Open in what will be her first competitive appearance since winning an appeal over a doping suspension. The Romanian former world number one had her four-year doping ban cut to nine months by the top court for global sport last week, making her eligible to return to competition immediately. "Feels like I never left," Halep wrote in an Instagram story with a winking emoji. "First day back, thank you @miamio-pen." The 32-year-old Halep, a former Wimbledon and French Open champion, was suspended in October 2022 after she tested positive for roxadustat - a banned drug that stimulates the production of red blood cells - at the US Open that year. She was also charged with another doping offence last year due to irregulari-

ties in her Athlete Biological Passport (ABP), a method designed to monitor different blood parameters over time to reveal potential doping. "I am thrilled to let you all know that I will be making my return to the WTA Tour in two weeks at the Miami Open," Halep wrote on Instagram prior to her first training session. "Thank you to the tournament for giving me this opportunity and I cannot wait to be back on court and competing. "See you all soon!" Miami will be Halep's first tournament since the 2022 US Open. Halep, who vigorously denied the charges against her, said that she would most likely have been compelled to retire if the initial four-year ban was maintained. "This ordeal has been a testament to resilience," Halep said on Instagram after the announcement by CAS last week. "The triumph of truth is a bittersweet

vindication that, albeit delayed, is immensely gratifying... In the midst of this challenging journey, my unwavering belief in the integrity of the truth and in the principles of justice has been my beacon. "Looking forward, I am eager to turn this page and rejoin the tour with renewed vigour and an invigorated spirit," Halep added. Halep reached the pinnacle of the sport twice, holding the world No. 1 ranking for a total of 64 weeks. Renowned for her aggressive counterpunching style, she's captured two Grand Slam titles: the 2018 French Open and the 2019 Wimbledon Championships. Her dominance is evident with 24 WTA Tour singles titles and a historic six titles in a single year (2013). Injuries have challenged her recently, but her talent and dedication are undeniable. The hugely popular Miami Open runs March 17-31.



### TENNIS

# Alcaraz, Sinner cruise into Indian Wells quarter-finals

Top seed seed Iga Swiatek beats Yulia Putintseva to set up last-eighth clash against Caroline Wozniacki

AFP  
Indian Wells, United States

**D**efending champion Carlos Alcaraz and Italian rival Jannik Sinner remained on course for a semi-final showdown after cruising into the last eight of the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters. Alcaraz sailed into the last eight as he took revenge on Hungary's Fabian Marozsan with a 6-3, 6-3 victory. In-form Sinner meanwhile booked his last eight berth with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 defeat of Ben Shelton. Sinner's win was his 18th straight victory dating to late last season, leaving him three wins away from his third title of the season after winning the Australian Open and Rotterdam. "I played really well in the tight moments," the 22-year-old world number three said as he lines up against Czech Jiri Lehecka in the quarters. "I knew I would not get much rhythm from him. I can be proud of how I played. The wind didn't make it easier but I tried to stay positive and it worked out." Sinner could face Spain's reigning Wimbledon champion Alcaraz in the semi-finals in California in what would be the latest instalment of a burgeoning rivalry. The duo fought an epic US Open quarter-final in 2022 and met in the semi-finals at Indian Wells and Miami Masters events last season. Alcaraz must navigate a quarter-final against sixth seed Alexander



Jannik Sinner of Italy gestures to his corner while playing Ben Shelton of the United States during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. **Right:** Iga Swiatek of Poland plays a backhand against Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan in their fourth round match. (AFP)



Zverev before any meeting with Sinner. Zverev reached the last eight after defeating Alex de Minaur 5-7, 6-2, 6-3 in two and three-quarter hours. Elsewhere Tuesday, Greek Stefanos Tsitsipas failed to reach a second career quarter-final here, with the 11th seed losing 6-2, 6-4 to rising Czech youngster Lehecka. The upset was the youngster's second in succession after dispatching fifth seed Andrey Rublev in the previous round. Tsitsipas, whose form has been modest so far this season, achieved the last eight during his 2018 debut at the Tennis Garden but has yet to duplicate that effort. In the women's fourth round, top seed seed Iga Swiatek swatted aside Yulia Putintseva 6-1 6-2 on

RESULTS	
Men - 4th round	
Jiri Lehecka (CZE x32) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x11) 6-2, 6-4	
Jannik Sinner (ITA x3) bt Ben Shelton (USA x16) 7-6 (7/4), 6-1	
Alexander Zverev (GER x6) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x10) 5-7, 6-2, 6-3	
Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x2) bt Fabian Marozsan (HUN) 6-3, 6-3	
Women - 4th round	
Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ) 6-1, 6-2	
Caroline Wozniacki (DEN) bt Angelique Kerber (GER) 6-4, 6-2	
Anastasia Potapova (RUS x28) bt Jasmine Paolini (ITA x13) 7-5, 0-6, 6-3	
Marta Kostyuk (UKR x31) bt A Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x22) 6-4, 6-1	

Tuesday to set up an Indian Wells quarter-final clash with former world number one Caroline Wozniacki. Swiatek got off to a slow start and saved four break points in the third game before finding her groove. The Pole then raced to a 5-1 lead,

prompting Putintseva to throw her racket to the floor in frustration, before wrapping the opener up in less than 30 minutes. Swiatek, the 2022 champion, made early inroads in the second set and while Putintseva started going for her shots more the

22-year-old world number one proved too strong for her Kazakh opponent. "I knew I had to keep my focus (in the second set), she was trying different stuff out there," said Swiatek, who dropped serve twice in the second frame. "But I just really wanted to play my game and focus on what I want to do. I'm glad I did that." Wozniacki, who returned to the tour last year after stepping away from the sport in 2020 to start a family, eased past fellow mother Angelique Kerber 6-4 6-2 earlier in the day. "She's a really experienced player," Swiatek said of the 2011 champion. "I think she's playing great after her maternity break, she was fighting to come back.

"I have huge respect. It's going to be a nice match." Wozniacki said she was relishing the opportunity to continue her run at Indian Wells, after making the quarters for the first time in four years. "I'm just enjoying myself and I'm just thrilled I get another match in front of all of you guys," she said. Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk defeated Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4 6-1 and next meets another Russian in Anastasia Potapova, who beat Jasmine Paolini 7-5 0-6 6-3. Kostyuk dropped only four points on serve in the match and broke Pavlyuchenkova five times to reach her first quarter-final at a WTA 1000 event.

## Stage set for Katara Ramadan Chess Open



A file photo from last year's Katara Ramadan Chess Open 2023 held in Doha. Qatar Chess Association president Mohamed al-Mudahka is also seen.

**DOHA:** The main round of the Katara International Ramadan Open Classic Chess Championship will start today. The event is being organised by the Qatar Chess Association (QCA) until March 23 with the participation of 86 players, both male and female, representing 16 countries, in the multi-purpose hall at Katara. The total prize money in the tournament is QR25,000, organisers said yesterday. The first round competitions will be held in the classic chess style of nine rounds according to the Swiss system, 60 minutes + 30 additional seconds for each move. The tournament will witness the participation of a number of Qatari national team players in

all age groups, namely Irfan Mohamed, Aisha al-Khulaifi, Khaled al-Jamaat, Ghada al-Khulaifi, Saif Ahmed, Fahd al-Mansouri, Turki al-Kuwari, Hamad al-Kuwari, Khaled al-Khulaifi, Rawda al-Qasabi, Fatima al-Hammadi, Asma al-Hammadi, Ali al-Nuaimi, Amer al-Hammadi, and Layan al-Qasabi, Abdul Aziz al-Mahasneh and Mohamed al-Subaie. Hamad al-Tamimi, Executive Director of QCA, confirmed that the tournament has become one of the most prominent events on the federation's annual calendar. He said the new edition will witness a large participation of national team players and international-ranked players. Al-Tamimi added in a special interview to Qatar News Agency

that the organising committee of the tournament has completed all arrangements for the start of the competitions. He said the chief target from the tournament is to help Qatar players gain experience in the presence of a large number of top players. Al-Tamimi thanked Katara for their support of the tournament. He said: "QCA is thrilled to partner with Katara. Our goal is to make these events annual fixtures, helping to develop the skills of Qatari chess players. This focus on player development aims to ensure a strong national team presence in the future. The combined tournaments have already unearthed promising young talents who will serve Qatar at various age group levels."

### SPOTLIGHT

## Paris mayor wants Russian athletes banned from Olympic Games 2024

Reuters  
Paris

**P**aris mayor Anne Hidalgo yesterday said she hoped Russian athletes would be banned from taking part in the Paris Olympics and their opening ceremony. Israeli athletes, however, should be fully welcome, she told Reuters in an interview, as organisers of the July 26-Aug 11 Games prepare to deal with issues arising from the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. The International Olympic Committee, which decides on such matters, is due to discuss at a next session the question of the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the opening ceremony. For now, Russian and Belarusian athletes cannot take part under their countries' flag, but are allowed to participate as neutrals - without flags or anthems being played. "I prefer that they don't come," Hidalgo said in an interview with Reuters. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said last week that Russian and Belarusian athletes joining the Paralympics would not be part of their opening ceremony. Asked about Israel's partici-



pation in the Olympics, Hidalgo said there was no comparison with Russia. "Sanctioning Israel in relation to the Olympic and Paralympic Games is out of the question", she said, "because Israel is a democracy." The IOC has not put any limit on the participation of Israeli athletes. The mayor of Paris confirmed that, ahead of the Olympics, a ceremony would commemorate the victims of the attack on Israeli athletes and team members at the 1972 Munich Olympics. **Peyton Manning to co-anchor coverage of Paris ceremony** Pro Football Hall of Fame member Peyton Manning is joining veteran Olympics host Mike Tirico and Grammy Award-winning singer Kelly Clarkson as the anchors of NBC's coverage of the

opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics in Paris. The trio made the announcement last night on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. "I took a little French in high school," Manning told talk show host Fallon. "And I told my mother I would take her to Paris one day. "Thirty years to the time I graduated, I'm taking my mom to Paris for the Olympics." Manning, 47, told *The Athletic* that he and Tirico began discussing the idea at the Kentucky Derby last May. "I kind of argued with him as to why he and NBC thought I was worthy," Manning told the outlet. "He said they were bringing in Kelly Clarkson to kind of give the perspective of the fan and wanted me to share the perspective of what these athletes are thinking about it."



FOOTBALL

# Arsenal’s defeat of Porto can fuel English title bid

‘THIS RESULT GIVES US A LOT OF MOMENTUM, A LOT OF BELIEF’



**FROM LEFT:** Arsenal's goalkeeper David Raya, Martin Odegaard, Bukayo Saka, Ben White and Declan Rice celebrate after winning the penalty shoot-out during the UEFA Champions League last 16 second leg match against Porto FC at the Arsenal Stadium in London. (AFP)

Reuters  
London

Arsenal's penalty shoot-out victory against Porto on Tuesday not only snapped their Champions League last-16 jinx but could also fuel their belief as they try to hold off Liverpool and Manchester City in the English league title race. David Raya's two penalty saves ensured Arsenal reached the quarter-finals for the first time in 14 years after a tense tie against the two-time European champions ended 1-1 on aggregate. It maintained the momentum that Mikel Arteta's squad have built up with eight successive Premier League victories and keeps them chasing silverware on two fronts. As the emotion poured out inside the Emirates it felt like a psychological turning point for Arsenal as they ended a run of seven successive last-16 exits in the Champions League. With no FA Cup involvement

this weekend and then the international break, Arsenal will not play again until March 31 when they go to Manchester City in a crunch title clash. But after overcoming a crafty Porto side they will now head to City with renewed belief. "The energy that it brings amongst the squad, amongst the club it's really powerful," Arteta said. Forward Bukayo Saka said the result sets Arsenal up perfectly for the rest of the season. "Right now, we're top of the league and we're into the quarter-finals of the Champions League, and we're going into the international break," the England international said. "This result gives us a lot of momentum, a lot of belief that we can go to the Etihad and get a good result." Former Arsenal defender Martin Keown said Arsenal's progress to the quarter-finals of the Champions League will be a huge confidence boost in the run-in. "It would have been a downer if

they had lost this tonight and gone into the City game, of course they are out of the FA Cup, but now this keeps it ticking along beautifully," he said. "The players grow from it, there's a lot of confidence now." Arsenal will discover their quarter-final opponents on Friday when they will join the likes of Man City, Paris St Germain, Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and Barcelona in the draw. Asked about the prospect of going one better than their sole final appearance in 2006, Arteta said: "I think it's still very far. Now I'm going to sit at home, I'm going to look at the other teams we have to play and start another big mountain to climb." Raya's penalty heroics also end debate over Arsenal No.1 spot Raya's penalty heroics also settled the debate over who is the club's first-choice goalkeeper. The Spain stopper dived full length to tip Wendell's spot kick onto his left-hand post and also saved from Galeno as Arsenal progressed to the last eight.

The dramatic shootout under the lights at the Emirates came with the teams locked at 1-1 on aggregate after extra time of a scrappy, tense encounter. Arsenal forward Leandro Trossard scored in the 41st minute to level the tie after Porto had won the first leg in Portugal with a last-gasp goal. But neither side could find a winner as a Champions League knockout match went to penalties for the first time in eight years. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta raised eyebrows when he brought Raya to the club on a loan deal from Brentford last August to compete with established number one Aaron Ramsdale. There was a feeling in some quarters that there was no problem to fix – with England international Ramsdale a firm favourite among fans. But Arteta had clearly seen something that prompted him to agree the season-long loan deal, with an option to make the move permanent for a reported £27mn (\$34.5mn).

FOCUS

## Napoli win one of best moments as Barca coach: Xavi

AFP  
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said beating Napoli to reach the Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday was one of his finest moments in his post. The Spanish champions won 3-1 at the Olympic Stadium to seal a 4-2 aggregate win against last year's Serie A winners, returning to the last eight for the first time since 2020. "There has been a lot of unfair criticism, (that we were) the joke of the Champions League, we had to play with that pressure," Xavi told a news conference. "We had to be better than Napoli and we were, it's a more than deserved qualification, it's one of my best moments as Barcelona coach." The coach said he would not change his mind about leaving at the end of the season, a decision he took in January. Since then the team have gone nine matches unbeaten. Centre-back Pau Cubarsi, 17, was given the player of the match award and Xavi lavished praise on the young defender, key in recent weeks. "He's a very rational kid, he's got a lot of brains, he's patient, he's very humble, he wants to improve," said Xavi. "His sudden emergence is wonderful for Barcelona and Spanish football – we're looking at a top-level defender for years to come." Like Xavi, Cubarsi said this was a match to remember. "This has been one of the best days of my life," Cubarsi told Movistar. "The team deserves this player of the match trophy, I'm so happy, but we're a group." Barcelona became the first team in the competition's history to start two players 17 or un-

der in a knock-out stage game. Xavi demanded the fans turn their temporary Olympic Stadium home on the city's Montjuic hill into a pressure cooker, and they duly obliged. Over 50,000 spectators marked the club's largest attendance this season. Francesco Calzona's Napoli wilted as the Spanish champions came out of the blocks flying. Electric 16-year-old winger Yamal made strong inroads down the right before the bright Lopez opened the scoring after 15 minutes. Cancelo fed Raphinha who cut the ball back into the area for Lopez, who tucked home. While he may lack the metronomic precision of Pedri, the midfielder provides thrust and an insatiable desire to shoot. Two minutes later and the Catalans doubled their lead against the shellshocked visitors, with Yamal starting the move by breaking loose in his own half on the counter-attack. The winger played in Raphinha and although the Brazilian hit the post Cancelo was running in to roll home the rebound. Napoli battled their way back in when Matteo Politano slipped in down the right, with Ronald Araujo playing him outside. The Italy winger crossed for Rrahmani who slotted home cleanly to pull Napoli back into the tie. Napoli were almost level moments later but Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen made a superb save, tipping over Giovanni Di Lorenzo's header. The Italians started the second half strongly, with Barcelona forced back into their own half, aimlessly clearing the ball. Xavi took action by bringing on Sergi Roberto and Oriol Romeu for Lopez and Andreas Christensen, aiming to freshen up the midfield and give his team new impetus.



Barcelona players celebrate their win in the Champions League last 16 second leg match against Napoli in Barcelona. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

## Klopp vows no U-turn on Liverpool exit despite return of Edwards

AFP  
Liverpool

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said yesterday the return of Michael Edwards as Fenway Sports Group's chief executive of football would have no bearing on his decision to leave Anfield at the end of the season. The German has spoken to Edwards, with whom he had a successful relationship as the club's sporting director until he left in 2022, but there will be no dramatic U-turn. Edwards spent more a decade at Anfield in a variety of roles and owners FSG targeted him for a new position to oversee the huge transition that will take place when Klopp leaves. Asked whether Edwards has asked him about reversing his decision, Klopp told reporters: "No, because – and it's very important in his job – he's not dumb. "That was not a subject to talk about. Can you imagine if I changed my mind now? Can you? Of course not. It would be like when I said I'd never (move to) another club in England and next year I signed for our neighbours or a club who needs a coach." The German, who described Edwards as a "top choice", said he had thought long and hard about his decision to step down as Liverpool boss. "I don't say these things without thinking about them before," he said. "It would mean I



realise only now how great this club is – I have known about it all the time. For me it is the best club in the world and I am still leaving anyway. That's what I've been trying to explain." Klopp, 56, was speaking on the eve of the second leg of Liverpool's Europa League last 16 match against Sparta Prague, when they will be defending a 5-1 scoreline from the first leg. When he announced his decision in January to leave Anfield, he spoke about laying the foundations for his successor. With the League Cup already secured, Liverpool are targeting four trophies – they are involved in a three-way Premier League race, have an FA Cup quarter-final against Manchester United on Sunday and appear certain to progress to the Europa League quarter-finals. "The club is in a really good place," said Klopp. "People will only measure that at the end of the season when

they have a look at what we really achieved, but that's not that important for the future – what we achieve this season is for now. "What's important for the future is how good is the team, how good are the players, how good is the structure, how good is the organisation? That's where my optimism comes from." Klopp's starting line-up against Sparta Prague could feature Mohamed Salah after the Egypt forward's two substitute appearances following his recovery from a hamstring injury. "It wouldn't have been impossible playing longer last game (Sunday's 1-1 draw with Manchester City)," Klopp said. "I am not sure he is ready for 90 minutes or that we should do 90 minutes, but he is ready to start. "There are 10 more Premier League games and hopefully a lot more cup and European games, so they are as important. Mo is completely fine with that."

### Al Hilal coach warns no celebrating yet despite world record

Al Hilal coach Jorge Jesus called their record of 28 consecutive wins "momentous" but warned it will mean nothing if they finish the season without silverware. Jesus's men reached the Asian Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday with a 2-0 victory at fellow Saudi big-spenders Al Ittihad in Jeddah. In doing so, Riyadh-based Hilal surpassed the previous record of 27 straight wins by a top-flight team, set by Welsh side The New Saints in the 2016-2017 season. Already the most successful team in AFC Champions League history with four titles, they went through 4-0 on aggregate and face Al Ain of the

United Arab Emirates in the last four next month. "Everyone at Al Hilal is delighted to achieve world football history by winning 28 consecutive matches," the veteran Portuguese Jesus said, according to the AFC website. "This is truly an incredible achievement and I want to thank everyone at the club for their part in this momentous winning record." But Jesus warned: "As I have said throughout this period, records do not matter as much as trophies. "It is up to everyone at Al Hilal to ensure that we close out the season as Saudi League champions and meet our targets in the cup competitions. "Only then can we truly celebrate."

MOTORSPORT

## QDRC third round from today

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Racing Club's (QRC) competitions are set to continue in Ramadan as the Qatar Drag Racing Championship (QDRC) returns after a three-month break today. The competitors will vie for top honours in the third round of the championship, sponsored by QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani. According to a revised schedule due to Ramadan, the qualifying trials will be limited to two sessions today, with elimination races set to take place tomorrow. The club opened the drag strip for participants last evening at 8:30pm as they tested their vehicles ahead of action. After the registration and technical inspection for partici-



pating cars and bikes at 7:30pm, the first qualifying session for all categories will start at 8:30pm followed by the second session at 10:00pm. The direct elimination stage for all categories tomorrow will start at 8:00pm. Meanwhile, the third Roll Race of this season will be held on Saturday. The event was added on the directives of QRC Director

Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani after racers in bike and cars category showed keen interest in the contest. The QRC will open its doors to fans of Roll Racing in a competitive Ramadan evening, marking the third event of this season for this type of race. According to the schedule, registration will start at 7:30pm, with the track opening at 8:30pm.