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Ferrari will be
closer to Red Bull
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says Leclerc

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AFC U-23 ASIAN CUP

Al-Mannai's last-gasp strike sends Qatar into quarters

Substitute al-Mannai's thumping header clinches all three points for the hosts as Jordan left stunned

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar sealed their place in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup knockout stage in dramatic fashion with a last-gasp 2-1 victory against Jordan at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday. Both teams looked set to share the spoils in their second Group A encounter until Mohamed al-Mannai headed in a free-kick deep in the 13th minute of added time, with VAR confirming the goal after a review to see Qatar become the first side to qualify from the group stage.

Determined to claim their first win after opening their campaign with a stalemate against Australia, Jordan put their hosts under pressure from the start and Baker Kalbouneh had a sight of goal after just 90 seconds, only to see his low shot saved.

Sief Darwish then had a shot blocked before Moustafa Mashal registered Qatar's first effort on target on 21 minutes when he met Khaled Ali's pass with a header but it was easily held by Ahmad Juaidi.

While the Jordanians saw more of the ball, they lacked a cutting edge upfront and were made to pay in the 40th minute as they fell behind. Saifeldien Hassan started a flowing move from left-back and after surging into the centre of the pitch, he picked out Ali on the right. The winger, in turn, released an overlapping Abdulla al-Yazidi and the right-back's attempted cross ended up in the far corner instead to break the deadlock.

Conceding the goal only served to spur on Jordan and they were rewarded for a bright start to the second half when, following a VAR review, Amer Jamous was adjudged to have been fouled in the box.

Aref Haitham stepped up and coolly sent Yousef Abdullah to the right and the penalty into the bottom left corner for the equaliser in the 52nd minute.

The home side tried to hit back immediately two minutes later and Juaidi had to be alert to tip over a fierce strike from distance by Hassan. A good opportunity was spurned by Haitham late on after he raced clear down the left but that miss was to be severely punished as the game moved into added time.

Substitutes Jassem al-Sharshani and al-Mannai combined to devastating effect after Qatar earned a free-kick on the right, with the former's inviting delivery met by a thumping header from his team-mate to



Qatar's Mohamed al-Mannai celebrates with his family member after scoring a dramatic winner against Jordan in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekkayil

clinch all three points as Jordan were left stunned.

TEGUH GOAL HELPS INDONESIA STUN AUSTRALIA

Komang Teguh's first half header earned tournament debutants Indonesia a 1-0 win over Australia at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Group A to reignite his nation's challenge for a place in the quarter-finals.

Ernando Ari Sutaryadi saved Mohamed Toure's 25th minute penalty before Komang's close range header 20 minutes later allowed Shin Tae-yong's team to pick up their first win of the campaign after an opening 2-0 loss against hosts Qatar.

The result leaves Australia on one point from two games having drawn with Jordan in their first match of the competition and Tony Vidmar's side needs to win against the Qataris in the final round of group matches on Sunday to have any chance of progressing.

Playing in front of a raucous band of Indonesian fans, Shin's side threatened as early as the second minute, Jeam Kelly's rising shot deflected wide after Rafael Struick's pull back had found the Persik forward with time to take aim.

As the half entered the final minute the Indonesians took the lead. Witan Sulaeman's corner was nodded by Kelly to



Abdulla al-Yazidi, who scored Qatar's opening goal, vies for the ball with Jordan's Mohammad Abu Taha yesterday.



Indonesia's Komang Teguh celebrates after scoring against Australia.

Nathan Tjoe-A-On on the edge of the area and his mishit shot was headed beyond Beach by Komang from six yards out.

Ernando denied Toure again seven minutes after the interval with a stop low to his right while Jacob Italiano's attempt was deflected wide for a corner

as the Australians steadily increased the pressure. Toure thumped his shot over the bar from the edge of the area with 15 minutes remaining and Vidmar introduced FIFA World Cup forward Garang Kuol in a late effort to find a way through, but the Indonesians held on.

ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

Chia-Hung sails into horizontal bar final at Doha World Cup



Chinese Taipei's Tang Chia-Hung in action during the horizontal bar qualification at the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup Doha at the Women's Sports Committee Hall yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Tang Chia-Hung of Chinese Taipei topped the qualification in men's Horizontal Bar at the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup Doha at the Women's Sports Committee Hall yesterday.

The 27-year-old has been in great form recently after he picked up gold medals in Cairo and Cottbus events with his new routine. Chia-Hung will be hoping he can repeat the same performance in the final, which will give him one of the two tickets on offer for the Paris Olympic Games.

The Doha event the final Olympic qualification tournament for apparatus specialists and will determine 20 newly-minted Olympians heading for Paris 2024. The two gymnasts with the highest points score on each apparatus capture a ticket to the Games, with the best three rankings points scores counting toward the final total. A maximum of one place per apparatus can be secured by the same nation.

Known as the 'King of Cat' for his rendition of the Yamawaki move, which involves a backward giant swing, a half turn, a front flip over the bar, and a regrasp, Chia-Hung tore his Achilles tendon in February 2023



A gymnast performs during the vault qualification.

during a simulated competition.

The injury prevented him from competing for about seven months, causing him to miss the 2023 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships in Belgium and the Hangzhou Asian Games. But Chia-Hung has recovered and is back to his best and looks set to book his berth for Paris games.

Lithuania's Tokyo 2020 Olympian Robert Tvorogal also kept his Olympic chances

alive as made it to the final after finishing sixth in the qualifications yesterday.

Kazakhstan's Milad Karimi, one of the favourites to win a medal here, accumulated 14.466 points to finish second behind Chia-Hung. Cyprus' Marios Georgiou, Arthur Barajas (Colombia), Isaac Nunez (Mexico), 2019 World champion Arthur Mariano (Brazil) and compatriot Caio Souza also made it to the eight-man finals.

In the parallel bars, Uzbekistan's Rasuljon Abdurakhimov and local favourite and former world champion Carlos Yulo of the Philippines qualified for the final along with Karim and Yuan-Hsi Hung of Chinese Taipei.

Brazilian duo Diogo Soares and Caio Souza and Italian duo Lay Gianni and Nocolo Mozzato also secured berths among the top-eight finishers.

Armenia's Artur Davtyan and Yulo made it to the finals in the vault event. Davtyan had a perfect landing on both his turns to accumulate 15.116 points, followed by Yulo's 14.966.

Others to qualify were Audrys Nin Reyes (Dominica), James Bacueti (Australia), Nocolo Vannucchi (Italy), Chen Chun NG (Malaysia), Aurel Benovic (Croatia) and Yavor Sharamkou. Both Benovic and Bacueti are still in the race for an Olympic berth.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Momota, 29, quits international badminton

AFP
Tokyo

Two-time world champion Kento Momota said yesterday he is retiring from international badminton aged 29, admitting he had never been the same since a serious car crash four years ago.

Japan's Momota was once badminton's undisputed king, winning 11 titles in 2019 and losing just six of the 73 matches he played that year. But in January 2020 the vehicle taking him to Kuala Lumpur airport crashed hours after he won the Malaysia Masters.

The driver was killed and Momota needed surgery to repair a fractured eye socket.

When he returned after a year out Momota suffered double vision and failed to regain the scintillating form that had taken him to world number one, although he did win two more titles.

"At the time of the accident I'd

be lying if I said I didn't think to myself, 'Why me?'" Momota told reporters in Tokyo yesterday.

Now ranked 52 and having missed out on a place at the Paris Olympics, Momota will retire from Japan's national team after playing at the Thomas and Uber Cup in China later this month. After that he will play only in domestic competitions in Japan and not on badminton's World Tour.

"There were a lot of tough times after that traffic accident," Momota added.

"I tried to get back to the way I used to play through trial and error, but there was a gap between my feelings and my body.

"That continued and I knew I wouldn't be able to get back to a level where I was competing with the world's best."

Smiling broadly throughout his 45-minute press conference but pausing often to choose the right words, Momota said he had no regrets about retiring from top-level badminton.



Japan's badminton star Kento Momota arrives for a press conference in Tokyo yesterday. Two-time world champion Momota said he is retiring from international badminton aged 29, ending a top-level career that never recovered from a car crash four years ago. (AFP)

"There was a lot of hardship and it wore me down, but I didn't want to blame the tough times on the accident," he added.

"I wanted to bounce back from

it and that attitude along with the support of people around me at least allowed me to get a foothold."

Viktor Axelsen, who supplanted Momota as the best men's player

in the world, said: "It has been an absolute pleasure sharing the court with you."

The reigning number one wrote on X: "I feel lucky to have been able

to compete with a player of your calibre."

Momota had targeted this summer's Paris Olympics but his national ranking was not good enough to earn him a spot in Japan's team.

He was banned from selection for the 2016 Rio Olympics for gambling at an illegal casino.

He lost in the opening round of the Tokyo Games in 2021 in a huge shock which he described as "nothing but a frustrating memory". "I don't think I was fully prepared for it but I had dreamed of playing at the Olympics for a long time so in that sense it was a good experience," he said.

Momota urged his Japan teammates to learn from his mistakes and keep calm when they step out onto the Olympic court in Paris this summer.

"I really felt how difficult it was to do the things you do normally, so don't think about the result, just give it your all so that you have no regrets," he said.

CRICKET

Mumbai wrap up tight win after Suryakumar's 78

The five-time IPL champions find momentum to post their 3rd win

www.iplt20.com
Mullanpur

Jasprit Bumrah (3/21) and Gerald Coetzee's (3/32) superb spells coupled with a scintillating 78-run knock from Suryakumar Yadav and brilliant fielding helped Mumbai Indians edge Punjab Kings by nine runs at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium, Mullanpur.

MI survived a splendid Ashutosh Sharma (61 off 28) blitz after Suryakumar's 78 (53) had helped the visitors post 192/7.

Bumrah and Coetzee then sparkled in the second innings, picking up three wickets each to help MI get back to winning ways.

Defending 193, Mumbai Indians got off to a splendid start, reducing Punjab Kings to 14/4 inside the first three overs. It was an eventful start for Coetzee in the first over as Sam Curran cracked a four off the first ball. The MI pacer, however, bounced back off the next ball as he had Prabhshimran Singh strangled down the leg side via a brilliant flying catch from Ishan Kishan.

Bumrah then arrived in style as he cleaned up Riley Rossouw with a spectacular full inswinger. Two balls later, an excellent review had Curran walking back as Bumrah strangled him down the leg side.

Coetzee then made things worse for PBKS, having Liam Livingstone caught and bowled in the next over.

Shashank Singh and Impact Player Harpreet Singh then stabilised things for a brief moment before a splendid diving catch and bowled by Shreyas Gopal sent back Harpreet in the seventh over.

Shashank tried to release some pressure with consecutive sixes off Gopal in the 9th over, but the home side lost another wicket



Mumbai Indians' Suryakumar Yadav watches the ball after playing a shot during the Indian Premier League match against the Punjab Kings in Mullanpur yesterday. (AFP)

post the Strategic Timeout as Akash Madhwal trapped Jitesh Sharma LBW.

Shashank and Ashutosh Sharma then got together and counter-attacked with a brisk 17-ball 34-run stand. But Hardik Pandya brought back Bumrah and he struck immediately, outfoxing Shashank (41 off 25) with a typical

slower one. Ashutosh, though, kept hitting powerful sixes. Harpreet Brar arrived and joined the boundary hitting party as the duo turned tables.

Ashutosh got to his maiden IPL fifty in style, off 23 balls, with a six over long off off Madhwal and then reverse swept the next ball over third man for a six. Brar

finished the over in style with a massive six downtown as the pair accumulated 24 runs off the 16th over to bring the equation down to 28 needed off 24. Bumrah came back to bowl a very good 17th over, conceding just three. Then Coetzee had the dangerous Ashutosh (61 off 28) caught at deep mid-wicket off a short delivery off the first ball of the next over to pull things back in MI's favour.

Coetzee conceded just two runs in the 18th over as the equation came down to 23 needed off 12. Brar and Harshal Patel added four from the first three balls of the 19th over from Pandya, but Brar departed off the fourth ball.

Rabada arrived and hammered the first ball for a six. Twelve runs were needed off the last over. Madhwal started off with a wide. Rabada then pushed the next ball to deep point and set off for a single and then a risky second. Mohamed Nabi, in the deep, though, was up to the task, and he replied with a superb throw.

Kishan, with his quick glove-work, disturbed the stumps in a flash as MI set off in exuberant celebrations

Earlier, Suryakumar went on the attack straightaway hitting two fours. At the other end, Rohit Sharma cracked a couple of fours and sixed inside the Powerplay. Suryakumar upped the ante in the last over of the Powerplay, smashing a four a six off Curran to take the score to 54/1.

The pair brought up the 50-run stand in the ninth over. Suryakumar took up the mantle of acceleration and also unleashed his favourite 'Supla' shot as he brought up his fifty off just 34 balls.

BRIEF SCORES

Mumbai Indians 192 for 7 (Suryakumar 78, Harshal 3-31) **beat Punjab Kings 183 all out** (Ashutosh 61, Shashank 41, Bumrah 3-21) **by 9 runs**

OBITUARY

Former England Test batsman Raman Subba Row dies aged 92

AFP
London

Former England Test batsman Raman Subba Row has died at the age of 92, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced yesterday.

At the time of his death, he was England's oldest living men's Test cricketer.

Subba Row played first-class cricket for Cambridge University and then joined the powerful Surrey side of the 1950s, which won seven successive County Championships.

Unable to secure a permanent first-team place at The Oval, he moved to Northamptonshire, where he was appointed captain in 1958.

In that year, Subba Row won the first of his 13 England caps and in 1961 he scored a century in both his first and last Tests against Australia.

In all, he scored 984 Test runs at an average of over 46.

After retiring to pursue a business career, he was the manager of England's tour of India and Sri Lanka in 1981.

Subba Row also served five years as chairman of the Test and County Cricket Board, the forerunner to the ECB, from 1985.

He later became one of the International Cricket Council's first match referees, overseeing 160 fixtures.

ICC general manager of cricket



Raman Subba Row essays a cover drive during a Test match. (www.ecb.co.uk)

Wasim Khan said: "It is sad to hear of the passing of Raman and I would like to extend deepest condolences on behalf of everyone at the ICC."

"Raman was a respected cricketer of his era, who went on to become the chair of the Test and County Cricket Board. He was also one of the earliest ICC match referees, officiating very ably in different parts of the world."

ECB chairman Richard Thompson said: "We are extremely saddened to hear of Raman's passing."

"He was a great cricket man and his remarkable cricket career saw success both on and off the field - as a player, official, administrator and chair of both Surrey and the Test and County Cricket Board."

LANNING DETAILS HEALTH ISSUES SHE FACED BEFORE RETIREMENT

Melbourne: Former Australia women's captain **Meg Lanning** said she struggled with weight loss and insomnia before her shock retirement from international cricket last year.

Lanning, who won the T20 World Cup five times and the 50-overs edition twice, pulled out of the Women's Ashes last year for medical reasons and quit the national team in November.

The 32-year-old told the Howie Games podcast that she was grappling with an identity crisis away from the sport and that her diet and training regime had become unbalanced.

"It sort of just spiralled," said Lanning, who described running up to 90km a week while eating only two small meals a day.

"I was not in a place to be able to go on tour and play cricket and give the commitment levels required for that Ashes series, mentally and physically. I got down to about 57kg from 64kg. The ratios were out of whack a lot. It was just all out of whack and I kept sliding. At some point, it's got to stop."

One of the game's most decorated players, Lanning also took a long break in 2022 before returning the following year to lead Australia to the T20 World Cup title in South Africa. She said she also struggled with insomnia and at one point was getting only a couple of hours' sleep each night.

"I dreaded night time because I knew I would go to bed and not be able to sleep," she said yesterday.

"That would make me so mad. I would just get more angry with myself. 'If you can't sleep, you can't do anything.'"

Lanning has continued to play domestic T20 cricket and the lucrative Women's Premier League in India but has ruled out a return to the national side.

Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Alyssa Healy replaced Lanning as Australia captain in December.



BOTTOMLINE

Heavy rains wipe out first Pakistan-NZ T20 clash

AFP
Rawalpindi

Heavy rain caused the first Twenty20 international between Pakistan and New Zealand to be abandoned after just two deliveries in Rawalpindi yesterday.

New Zealand skipper Michael Bracewell won the toss, which had also been delayed by 30 minutes, and opted to bat but no action was possible for two-and-a-half hours.

Umpires Ahsan Raza and Aleem Dar then announced a five-over-a-side game at 10:10 local time (9:10 GMT).

Pakistan pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi conceded two leg-byes to debutant Tim Robinson off the first ball before bowling the batsman with a sharp delivery off the next.

But as soon as the Pakistan fielders started celebrating the wicket, the rain returned to force an abandonment.

Fast bowler Mohamed Amir returned to international cricket after nearly four years, having come out of retirement last month, but his participation was limited to just fielding.

The 32-year-old retired in December 2020 after being dropped from the side but changed his mind last month and decided to restart his career, which had already been stalled by a match-fixing ban in 2010.

Pakistan handed T20I caps to batsman Usman Khan, spinner Abrar Ahmed and all-rounder Mohamed Irfan Khan, while Robinson debuted for New Zealand.

The remaining matches are in Rawalpindi on April 20 and 21 and in Lahore on April 25 and 27.

The series gives a chance to both teams to test their bench strength ahead of the Twenty20 World Cup to be held in June in the United States and the West Indies.

New Zealand are without nine of their key players, including skipper Kane Williamson, who are playing in the ongoing Indian Premier League. The next match is also in Rawalpindi tomorrow.

Al-Marri wins Small Tour at 12th round of Hathab



Mohamed Dhafi al-Marri astride Destiny 297 clinched the Small Tour class during the 12th round of the Longines Hathab at Qatar Equestrian Federation's outdoor arena yesterday. Al-Marri clocked 55.16 secs to win ahead of Faris Saad al-Qahtani (Hidiene) and Mohamed Abdulla Juma (Fito R), who registered times of 55.46 and 56.44 respectively. Also yesterday, Hadi Mansour al-Shahwani, who teamed up with Coco Chanel SB, triumphed in the 80cm Future Rider category, while Sultan Jassim al-Suwaidi rode Tabra Blue to win in the 60m Future Rider event. Hathab Deputy Director Faisal al-Kahla honoured the winners.

MOTORSPORT

Leclerc says Ferrari will be closer to dominant Red Bull

'I STILL THINK RED BULL WILL HAVE THE UPPER HAND THIS WEEKEND'

AFP
Shanghai

Charles Leclerc said yesterday that Ferrari will be closer to Red Bull at this weekend's Chinese Grand Prix, but he still expects his fight to be for the minor podium places.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez secured a dominant one-two in Japan two weeks ago with the Dutch triple world champion more than 10 seconds ahead of his Mexican teammate.

The Ferrari of Carlos Sainz was next, with teammate Leclerc trailing home in fourth, almost half a minute behind the winner.

"I think in the race we will be (closer), yes," Leclerc told reporters in Shanghai. "But let's see. It's been a very long time since we drove here."

Formula One is back in China for the first time in five years with a packed programme including a Saturday sprint race.

The Shanghai International Circuit has not been raced upon by the current generation of F1 cars and appears to have had the newly laid tarmac given a coat of paint to improve grip, raising a few eyebrows in the paddock.

"I think the track was painted or there's something strange on it so we will have to see how our car behaves with that and what the main

limitations are in the race," said Monaco's Leclerc.

The pecking order was very different at the last Chinese Grand Prix, in April 2019, when the race was won easily by Lewis Hamilton in a Mercedes one-two.

This time there will be just 60 minutes of free practice today morning ahead of sprint qualifying.

Leclerc has been in the top four in all four races this season, but is keen to nail qualifying better – especially important on a sprint race weekend.

"I still think Red Bull will have the upper hand this weekend," said Leclerc, who is third in the standings, 18 points behind Verstappen but only five behind Perez.

"We will just have to focus on ourselves because it can be very easy, as we have seen especially in qualifying in Suzuka, to not do a good job on the Saturday and then you don't go from fourth to fifth, you go from fourth to eighth.

"Sprint weekend with two qualifying to extract the maximum out of the car – it's going to be very important."

Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc rides his bike at the Shanghai International circuit yesterday, ahead of the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix in Shanghai. (AFP)



FOCUS

Verstappen says he's happy at Red Bull

AFP
Shanghai

Max Verstappen again publicly committed his long-term future to Red Bull yesterday, saying that as long as he was happy there was "no reason to leave".

There has been speculation the triple world champion could move to Mercedes to replace Ferrari-bound Lewis Hamilton next year after Red Bull team principal Christian Horner was accused of inappropriate conduct towards a woman colleague.

Horner was cleared of any wrongdoing ahead of the season-opener in Bahrain but the off-track scandal rumbled on for weeks. The Dutchman Verstappen is signed with Red Bull until 2028 but suggested earlier in the season that he would consider leaving if the team parted company with long-time mentor Helmut Marko.

Verstappen's father Jos has claimed that Red Bull faced being "torn apart" if Horner remained in position. However, the paddock chatter in Shanghai this week has been firmly back on racing, something that pleased Verstappen.

"After 2021 I signed a long deal with the team. The only thing I



said from the beginning was that I wanted to have a quiet, peaceful environment," Verstappen told reporters.

"Lately we have been talking about the car, so I am very happy about that already.

"That's also how it should be. And of course as long as I am happy with the team, there has never been a reason to leave."

Verstappen is chasing a fourth victory in five races in 2024 but admitted the weekend's Chinese Grand Prix will be an unknown quantity. The Formula One circus is back at the Shanghai Interna-

tional Circuit for the first time in five years with a sprint race tomorrow.

"With the new cars of course there will be a little bit of the unknown," said Verstappen. "Of course it is the same for everyone."

There is only one practice session on Friday before sprint qualifying, so Verstappen said it was important for the team to get the set-up nailed early. "We need to have a good FPI where we don't have to fine-tune too much on the car. That will really help," he said.

"Time will tell, I'm not too worried about it."

Hamilton doesn't need 'vindicating' over Ferrari switch

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton said yesterday he was shutting out the noise surrounding his move to Ferrari next year, saying he didn't need "vindicating" that it was right for him.

The Formula One veteran, 39, shocked Formula One in February when he said he would leave Mercedes at the end of 2024 after 12 years to join the Italian team.

Hamilton was asked yesterday ahead of this weekend's Chinese Grand Prix if Ferrari's strong start to the season – they have been consistently closest to the dominant Red Bulls – meant the decision to switch had been justified.

"I don't feel like I need my decision vindicating," Hamilton told reporters.

"I know what was right for me, and that hasn't changed since the moment that I made the decision. There's not been a moment where I questioned it. And I'm not swayed by other people's comments."

Hamilton said he had to endure criticism before when he left McLaren to join Mercedes in 2012.

"Even today, there's people continuing to talk shit and it will continue on for the rest of the year," he said.

TENNIS

Rock-solid Ruud racks up season-leading win in Barcelona

AFP
Barcelona

Casper Ruud racked up a tour-leading 26th win of the season yesterday by reaching the Barcelona Open quarter-finals.

The world number six from Norway eased past Jordan Thompson of Australia 6-1, 6-4 to move clear of Jannik Sinner for most wins in 2024.

Ruud, the runner-up to Stefanos Tsitsipas at the Monte Carlo Masters last weekend, raced into a 5-0 lead against Thompson.

He then clinched a break in the seventh game of the second set before moving onto victory in just 73 minutes.

Ruud will next face Matteo Arnaldi after the Italian world number 40 defeated Argentina's Marco Trungelliti 6-3, 6-0.

Seventh-ranked Tsitsipas clinched a 7-5, 6-3 triumph against Roberto Carballes Baena as the Greek extended his winning streak to eight matches.

"It's good to be on a streak like this," said Tsitsipas, whose title run in Monte Carlo was his first of this season.

"It tends to get tougher, the more you proceed. To maintain it is the most difficult part, so to

have that number so far is good. It adds confidence to me, I really like to be on a streak like this."

Britain's Cameron Norrie defeated Roberto Bautista Agut 6-4, 6-3 to make the last eight and record his 200th tour-level win.

"It's a big tournament with a lot of historic past champions, so I want to try and win this tournament," said Norrie of the Spanish clay-court event.

On Wednesday, Spanish veteran Bautista Agut had won his 400th career match by seeing off Andrea Vavassori in the second round.

"I know that yesterday Roberto got 400, so I'm halfway to his. To get 400 wins is impressive and I'll take that, a 200th win against a top player," added Norrie.

The Briton next faces Argentine 13th seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry for a place in the semi-finals. With Bautista Agut and Carballes Baena defeated, the tournament has no Spanish players left with 12-time winner Rafael Nadal having exited on Wednesday.

Australian fourth seed Alex de Minaur, the man who knocked out Nadal, was himself defeated yesterday, losing to world number 36 Arthur Fils of France 7-5, 6-2.



Norway's Casper Ruud celebrates after beating Australia's Jordan Thompson during the Barcelona Open in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

Defending champ Swiatek motors into Stuttgart quarter-finals

World number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek progressed to the quarter-finals of the WTA Stuttgart clay-court tournament by beating Elise Mertens in straight sets yesterday, her ninth win in nine career matches at the French Open warm-up event.

Swiatek beat the unseeded Belgian 6-3, 6-4 to maintain her bid to capture a third successive title in the German city and be handed the keys to a third luxury car from the sponsors after also winning the tournament in 2022.

"There's always space for a Porsche. If not, we'll make it. I'll build an underground garage," said Swiatek after playing her first clay-court match since lifting the French Open title last June.

The Pole burst out of the blocks to set up a 5-1 lead in the first set, before going 0-30 down but recovering to serve out the set.

Swiatek was broken early in the second but served her way back into the set, winning with a forehand on her fourth match

point after Mertens had saved the previous three. "This is not an easy tournament. Everyone is really motivated to win that car," Swiatek added.

The top seed will face either former US Open champion Emma Raducanu or Linda Noskova of the Czech Republic for a place in the semi-finals. Earlier, Elena Rybakina beat Veronika Kudermetova 7-6 (7/3), 1-6, 6-4, continuing her strong form in 2024.

The Kazakh world number four, who has already claimed titles at Brisbane and Abu Dhabi in 2024, beat the Russian in two hours 33 minutes.

"I know I have my weapon, my serve. I know I can always serve it out in tough moments. Not always, but this is a strength," Rybakina said.

Rybakina will be playing in her seventh quarter-final of the season today where she will face Jasmine Paolini who put out Ons Jabeur 7-6 (10/8), 6-4. Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova defeated Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 in her last 16 clash.

(AFP)

HORSE RACING

Fayq Al Shahania wins Musheireb Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Fayq Al Shahania, in the colours of HE Sheikha Iman bint Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani, extended his productive 2023/24 campaign with a second win in a row at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club yesterday. Saddled by trainer Rudy Nerbonne, the five-year-old landed the Mushereb Cup, a 1500m Class 2 Purebred Arabian Handicap (85-105), comfortably by one and a half lengths to complete a double on the card for jockey Soufiane Saadi.

Fayq Al Shahania had won the Aziz Purebred Arabian Handicap Cup during the HH Sheikh Mohamed Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy, 35th Al Rayyan Meeting of the season, on March 14. Saadi earlier in the day, rode Wathnan Racing's Arman to victory in the Local Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate for four-year-old+ contest. The Alban de Mieulle-trained grey colt finished three and half length ahead of Hassan bin Ali Hassan al-Matwi's Burkan Zakhir to emerge winner.

Abdulaziz Jassim al-Boenain, Al Uqda Complex Manager, crowned the winners.

In the penultimate race of the day, Injaz Stud-owned and Zuhair Mohsen-trained Kerindia won the Thoroughbred Fillies & Mares Plate contest for the three-year-old+. Jockey Faleh Bughanaim rode the four-year-old bay filly to finish ahead of Yousuf Mubarak YA al-Kuwari's Miracle Nation to win the 1400m race.

Zuhair Mohsen-trained Classic Order, in the colours of Hamad bin Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Attiya, won the Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95) for four-year-old+. Wathnan Racing's Just Bring It finished second.

Al Bida Racing's Taymoor Al Shahania won the Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate for three-year-olds. The Mohamed Khaled Elahmed-trained bay colt comprehensively defeated Umm Al Shukhut Farm's Deauville.



Jockey Soufiane Saadi rides Fayq Al Shahania to the Msheireb Cup yesterday.



Connections of Fayq Al Shahania celebrate after the five year-old horse won the Msheireb Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim

QATAR OPEN AMATEUR GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP

Pakistan's Omar stays in contention with a shot behind leaders

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Australia's Andrew Ikstrums, Olivier van Lelyveld of the Netherlands and Englishman E Calum Fitzgerald shared a joint one-shot lead in the opening round of the 2024 WAGR Qatar Open Amateur Golf Championship at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.

On a challenging day, the trio returned with cards of two-over-par 74 followed by Pakistan's Omar Khalid Hussain, who is one stroke behind the leaders and will look to stay in the hunt for the title to be decided tomorrow.

Trailing the leaders by two shots, Bahrain's Yousif Ali Janahi, Scotland's Paul Stewart, Canada's Rob Skinner and England's Chris Hughes are also in contention for the title after the first round.

Qatar's Saleh al-Kaabi, who was not at his best yesterday, shot five-over par 77 as he followed the quartet.

Around 100 golfers representing 30 countries are taking part in the tournament, which is in its 38th edition. The winner of the tournament will seal the coveted berth for the prestigious Commercial Bank Qatar Masters.

The event is one of the oldest golf competitions having launched back in 1983. It attracts



Pakistan's Omar Khalid Hussain shot a three-over 75 at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.

the world's best amateur golfers who showcase their skills at the picturesque venue.

Welshman Joe Jones, who won the last year's title, is not taking part in the 2024 edition.

EUROPA LEAGUE

Atalanta reach semis as Liverpool crash out

Liverpool could not overturn three-goal deficit from quarter-final first leg at Anfield

Reuters
Bergamo, Italy

Atalanta progressed to the Europa League semi-finals despite losing 1-0 to Liverpool yesterday as they triumphed 3-1 on aggregate to move one step closer to a first ever European final for the Serie A side.

Atalanta had stunned the Premier League club 3-0 in the first leg of their quarter-final last week at Anfield, levelling another huge blow to Liverpool's dreams of a fairytale ending in manager Jurgen Klopp's final season. Liverpool got off to a quick start in Italy as talisman Mohamed Salah scored from the penalty spot in the seventh minute, fuelling hope that a remarkable comeback was in the making.

But while Klopp's men looked little like the shaky side who were steamrolled by Atalanta at Anfield, Gian Piero Gasperini's team held on in what the manager had called the biggest game in the team's history to earn a semi-final place.

VILLA EDGE LILLE ON PENALTIES TO REACH CONFERENCE LEAGUE SEMIS

Aston Villa kept their bid for a first European trophy in over 40 years alive yesterday after beating Lille 4-3 on penalties following Matty Cash's late goal that forced extra time. Goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saved from Nabil Bentaleb and Benjamin Andre in



Atalanta players celebrate after their 3-1 win on aggregate over Liverpool in the quarter-finals of the Europa League in Bergamo, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)

the shootout to send Villa through after being whistled loudly by a crowd irked by his celebrations after his starring role in Argentina's 2022 World Cup final win over France.

There was a strange moment during the shootout when he was shown a second yellow card for more antics, but rules dictate that any bookings are reset before penalties commence.

Unai Emery's side won the first leg 2-1 last week, but Lille drew level in the tie when Yusuf Yazici steered home 15 minutes into the return clash in northern France.

Lille captain Andre glanced in a corner midway through the second half to leave the Ligue 1 club heading towards their first major European semi-final, but a defensive mishap in the closing minutes proved costly.

Cash hammered the ball home to bring Villa even at 3-3 on aggregate with three minutes left after Lille goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier spilled a looping cross following a collision with teammate Bentaleb. Chevalier redeemed himself with a sensational save from Douglas Luiz in extra time, reacting sharply to scoop the Brazilian's header over the crossbar after parrying a powerful shot from Leon Bailey.

But Martinez had the final say in the shootout after Chevalier saved Bailey's attempt, with Villa moving on to face Olympiakos or Fenerbahce in the last four. Last season's runners-up Fiorentina sealed a return to the semi-finals with a 2-0 win over 10-man Viktoria Plzen after extra time.

Cadu was sent off in the second half for a foul on the edge of the Plzen box and Fiorentina made the extra man count when Nico Gonzalez struck in the 92nd minute.

Skipper Cristiano Biraghi added a second on 108 minutes as the Italians progressed 2-0 on aggregate.

FA Cup replays scrapped from first round onwards

London: FA Cup replays will be scrapped from the first round onwards from next season as part of an agreement with the Premier League, the Football Association announced. The FA had already dropped replays from the fifth round onwards and said the move to ditch them from earlier rounds had been agreed "in light of changes to the calendar driven by the expanded UEFA (European) competitions".

From next season the Champions League will feature an extra 64 games, creating increased pressure on the domestic calendar. World governing body FIFA has announced an expanded 32-team Club World Cup for 2025.

But the English Football League (EFL), which oversees tiers two, three and four, said it would seek compensation over the "frustrating and disappointing" decision to scrap replays, which provided vital income for lower division clubs when they played bigger teams. The FA said all rounds of the FA Cup would now be played at weekends and there will be no Premier League matches on weekends set aside for the fourth and fifth rounds and the quarter-finals.

Teams from the third and fourth tiers of English football enter the FA Cup in the first round, with Premier League and Championship clubs joining from the third round.

The FA Cup qualifying rounds for clubs outside the top four tiers will still have replays. The changes, part of a six-year agreement, will also mean the removal of the mid-season break from the Premier League calendar.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Ancelotti proud as Real Madrid dig deep for revenge in Manchester

Reuters
Manchester

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti was beaming with pride after his team dug deep for long periods on Wednesday to keep Manchester City at bay and squeeze past them on penalties in the semi-finals of the Champions League.

"I love it when a team gives their all and sacrifices everything in big games like this one," he said after a pulsating two-legged quarter-final that ended 4-4 on aggregate before the Spanish side triumphed 4-3 in a penalty shootout.

It was sweet revenge for Real Madrid, who were thrashed 4-0 at the Etihad Stadium in their exit from the Champions League at the semi-final stage last year. "I believe that there was no other way to beat Manchester City here. I'm proud of what we did," added Ancelotti, who paced nervously up and down the touchline during the shootout until defender Antonio Rudiger scored the winning kick.

"By the time the penalty shootout came, we were totally convinced we'd

go through. You work, sacrifice and win however you can. We defended really, really well tonight. This was about survival. Madrid is a club based on always fighting to stay in situations where there seems to be no way out - but we always find a way."

Ancelotti said his counterpart, Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola, had been generous in defeat despite the frustration of seeing his team dominate possession but fail to win in Wednesday's second leg 1-1 draw. "Pep Guardiola is a gentleman, always has been. He congratulated us, wished us good luck and that's what a real gent does," he said.

After taking an early lead, Ancelotti's men were pressed back throughout the game, conceding late on but then hanging on through extra time until the penalties. "We started well and scored in the beginning but the game changed, they pressured us and our plan was not to defend that deep but it's a big game and you need to fight. We have seen Real Madrid do this many times before, a club that brings something out that nobody thought we would have."

NO REGRETS, SAYS GUARDIOLA

City manager Guardiola was gracious in



Real Madrid's Antonio Rudiger celebrates with teammates after scoring the winning penalty against Manchester City in the UEFA Champions League quarter-final. (AFP)

defeat. "Congratulations to Real Madrid, they defend so deep, with incredible solidarity," Guardiola said. "We did everything. I have no regrets about what we've done. Defensively, offensively, we played

exceptional in all departments, in everything, and unfortunately we couldn't win, so that's what it is."

After capturing their first treble - Champions League, FA Cup and Premier

League titles - last season, they appeared on track to become the first team in history to claim the three titles in back-to-back years. But despite completely dominating Madrid, firing 33 shots to Madrid's eight and taking 18 corners to just one for the visitors, Guardiola's men could not finish them off.

Kevin De Bruyne scored in the 76th minute to cancel out Rodrygo's 12th-minute goal, but both the Belgian and City's goal-scoring machine Erling Haaland squandered several scoring chances as the tie finished 1-1 on the night and 4-4 on aggregate.

Victory looked in City's hands when Luka Modric failed to convert Madrid's opening spot kick. But momentum swung when Bernardo Silva shot straight into keeper Andriy Lunin's hands, leaving Madrid's Nacho and Antonio Rudiger to seal the win.

City now switch their focus to their quest for another FA Cup title tomorrow when they clash with Chelsea in the semi-finals at Wembley.

Guardiola's team also have a two-point lead at the top of the Premier League with six games remaining.