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AFC U-23 ASIAN CUP QATAR 2024

Qatar stalemate dashes Australia's Olympics hopes

Marselino Ferdinan helps Indonesia register a 4-1 victory against Jordan to enter knockout stage

Australia exited the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 yesterday with Tony Vidmar's side failing once again to find the back of the net as the Olyroos shared a 0-0 draw with group winners Qatar to limp out of the tournament and miss out on a place at the Olympic Games.

The Australians had arrived in Doha targeting a second consecutive Olympic qualification after appearing in Tokyo three years ago, but one point from their opening Group A games against Jordan and Indonesia left their hopes hanging by the finest of threads.

Needing to win and hope Jordan defeated Indonesia, the result at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium was academic with Indonesia's 4-1 win ensuring Vidmar's team could not progress even if a first victory of the competition had been secured.

Qatar had already ensured their progress with back-to-back wins to start the tournament and when Mohamed Manai flicked his attempt towards goal in the fourth minute it appeared that Ili-dio Vale's side were in the mood to pick up a third win.

Manai went closer still from distance in the 13th minute, curling his effort narrowly over the crossbar. But as the half wore on it was the Australians who looked the more likely to score as they increasingly dictating the tempo and dominated possession.

Jacob Italiano powered through midfield from deep before laying possession off to Rhys Youlley, whose low right-foot shot was steered around the post by Ali Korayem. Four minutes later Jacob Farrell's inviting ball across the six-yard box caught Jordan Courtney-Perkins and Mohamed Toure



Qatar and Australia players are vying for the ball during the U-23 AFC Asian Cup Group A match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

flat-footed while at the other end Ryan Teague stepped in to dispossess Lotfu Madjer as the home side made a rare foray forward.

Italiano then wastefully fired over the bar with two minutes left in the half after Brook's pass found the winger in space behind the Qatar defence before, in injury time, the captain delivered a cross from the right that Nicolas Milanovic headed across the face of goal.

The Australians continued to dominate after the break, Brook

bending his effort over the bar while Alexandar Popovic's defensive header redirected Mahdi Salem al-Mejaba's shot to safety. Brook again went close soon after, side-footing high over the Qatar goal.

As the half wore on the Olyroos continued to be frustrated, never more than when Keegan Jelcic's 75th minute attempt was pushed onto the post by a diving Korayem.

That was as close as Vidmar's side would come to a goal and the result means Australia head home frustrated.

INDONESIA'S ADVENTURE CONTINUES

A standout performance from Marselino Ferdinan helped Indonesia march into the knockout stage of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 yesterday after a superb 4-1 victory against Jordan at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

Having already collected their first ever win three days ago against Australia, the tournament debutants ensured that their dream run would continue in the quarter-finals by sealing progress from Group



Indonesia players celebrate a goal against Jordan during their AFC U-23 Asian Cup match at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

A in second place behind Qatar.

Needing only a point to confirm their place in the last eight heading into this game, the red shirts of Indonesia signalled their intent by pouring forward from the get-go in front of a partisan crowd of 5,632. Leading the line, Rafael Struick was in the thick of the action early on and after testing Jordan goalkeeper Ahmad Juaidi twice in the fourth and 11th minutes, played a key role in the opening goal after being fouled by Amer Jamous in the box.

Marselino, scorer of Indonesia's first goal at the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 just over three months ago and one of nine in this U-23 side that were in their squad at Asia's crown jewel, stepped up to coolly send Juaidi the wrong way and find the bottom left corner in the 23rd minute.

That was the start of a man-of-the-match display from the KMSK Deinze attacker, who went on to play a part in the second goal and added the third.

For their part, Jordan struggled to test Ernando Ari in the Indonesian goal despite requiring nothing less than victory to avoid an early flight home, with Aref Haitham's scuffed effort in the ninth minute

their only shot on target in the first half. Indonesia were far more prolific and their lead was doubled in the 40th minute. Marselino drove at the Jordan defence before finding captain Rizky Ridho at the top of the box, whose deft first-time pass was caressed by Witan Sulaelman's left foot into the far left corner.

The third goal, in the 70th minute, was arguably even more pleasing on the eyes. Having played a one-two with Witan, Marselino finished off the move with a delightful touch past the onrushing Juaidi for his second of the night.

To their credit, Jordan refused to give up and after Ibrahim Sabra had fluffed his lines from close range in the 66th minute, they pulled one back when Waseem Alriyalat's shot from range was deflected past Ernando by Justin Hubner on 79 minutes.

But Indonesia were not done yet and their three-goal advantage was restored seven minutes later. Pratama Arhan's trademark long throws finally reaped dividends as his bullet delivery from the left was nodded in by Komang Teguh, who came off the bench to notch his second goal in as many games.

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PREVIEW

Saudi aim to keep perfect record against Iraq

Saudi Arabia are gunning to finish their AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 Group C challenge with a perfect record when they play Iraq at Khalifa International Stadium today. Six points from their earlier two matches mean Saudi Arabia should progress to the quarter-finals but head coach Saad al-Shehri wants the defending champions to maintain the momentum that saw them scoring nine goals past Tajikistan and Thailand.

Finishing top will mean a quarter-final against the Group D runners-up but Saudi Arabia will face Iraq without the services of suspended midfielder Eid al-Muwalled and right-back Mohamed Waheeb. "We are confident in all 23 positions, whoever we select," said al-Shehri. "It's important that we finish top of the group."

"The positioning is important for us and the selection will reflect that. We started rotating players (after getting into the lead against Thailand) and there's a possibility we will do that again. We were at our absolute best (against Thailand), whether in offence or defence. Hopefully against Iraq, we can continue to do the same."

Iraq revived their knockout stage chances with a 4-2 win over Tajikistan on Friday but need victory against Saudi Arabia to advance. Head coach Radhi Shen-

aishil is keeping his cards close to his chest on how he will approach the match as he attempts to spring a surprise.

"Our fate is in our hands now with the result against Saudi Arabia being key," said the 57-year-old.

"They are skillful and have been playing together for three years."



"And of course we will play with different players, formation and strategy. A lot of things will be different."

A win for Iraq will put them and Saudi Arabia on six points but progression will still be dependent on the result between Thailand and Tajikistan in the simultaneous.

In the other Group C match, Thailand will take on Tajikistan.

Head coach Ithsara Sritharo is committed to steering Thailand back to their strengths.

Following their 5-0 defeat to Saudi Arabia on Friday, Thailand find themselves tied on three points with Iraq, who bounced back into knockout stage conten-

tion after beating Tajikistan 4-2.

That means Thailand - if they want to advance to the quarter-finals for just the second time in three history - must clinch all three points at the Al Janoub Stadium.

Japan vs South Korea

South Korea head coach Hwang Sun-hong will take his team into their clash with rivals Japan today wary of the attacking talents of Go Oiwai's side as the pair battle for top spot in Group B.

A 2-0 victory over China for the Koreans and a win by the same scoreline over the United Arab Emirates by the Japanese mean the pair have already secured their places in the knockout rounds, with only the finishing order in the group to be determined.

"We have to take all factors into consideration before playing against Japan," said Hwang, who has injury concerns over several players including central defender Seo Myung-guan after he was substituted four minutes into the second half of the win over the Chinese.

"It is very difficult but we have to find ways to get through. Japan have good team organisation, they are top class, very good at high pressing and possess a good build-up system."

"They also have a variety of options available for every game and

this makes them difficult to play against. We have to be also cautious of their pace."

Lee Young-jun scored both of Korea Republic's goals against the Chinese to take his tally to three in two games so far and the next goal for the young Taeguk Warriors will be the country's 50th in total in the six editions of the competition.

With the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 doubling up as the confederation's qualifiers for the Olympic Games in July and August, both teams will be looking to further strengthen their case to be among the three guaranteed representatives in Paris.

The pair have appeared at every Olympics since 1996 and the meeting at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium could be a precursor to the tournament's decider with both among the favourites to lift the trophy. Japan won the last time the two countries faced off when the tournament was played in Qatar in 2016, with Takumi Asano coming off the bench in the final to score two late goals to help secure the title for the Samurai Blue.

Like Hwang Sun-hong's side, Oiwai's team are unbeaten in their opening two games of the current campaign and the former Kashima Antlers coach stressed he is giving no consideration to his team's position when they conclude their group commitments.

Middle-distance runner Abubakr qualifies for Paris Olympics



Qatar's top middle-distance runner Abdullah Abubakr qualified for this year's Paris Olympics following a brilliant show at the Athletics Championships held in Spain yesterday. Abubakr clocked 1:44.60 to win the 800m race and book his Paris ticket. The entry standard for the Olympics in the discipline is 1:44.70.

FOCUS

Jepchirchir and Munyao win in London



Winners of the men's and women's races, Kenya's Alexander Mutiso Munyao (left) and Kenya's Peres Jepchirchir pose with the trophy at the presentations for the 2024 London Marathon yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
London

Olympic champion Peres Jepchirchir won the London marathon in a women's-only world record yesterday as Alexander Mutiso Munyao's victory in the men's race made it a Kenyan double.

The race was preceded by 30 seconds of applause for Kelvin Kiptum, 2023 winner of the men's race, who was killed in a car accident in February.

A poignant day ended with two more Kenyan victories with Jepchirchir in particular putting down a marker ahead of her defence of her title at the Paris Olympics.

The field for the women's race was considered one of the best ever

assembled with three of the four fastest women in history competing.

The 30-year-old Kenyan came home in front of world record holder Tigst Assefa and Joyciline Jepkosgei to break the record mark without male pacemakers.

Jepchirchir's time of 2 hours 16 minutes 16 seconds smashed the women's-only course record of 2:17:01 set by compatriot Mary Keitany in 2017.

Retired British star Paula Radcliffe ran a time of 2:15:25 in a mixed-sex marathon in London in 2003, using male pacemakers.

"I was not expecting to run a world record," said Jepchirchir. "I knew it might be beat but I did not expect it to be me."

"I am so happy to qualify for the Olympics and I feel grateful.

I'm happy to be at Paris and my pray(er) is to be there and run well to defend my title. I know it won't be easy but I'll try my best."

Munyao got the better of Ethiopian legend Kenenisa Bekele to take the men's race in 2:04:01.

A three-time Olympic gold medallist on the track, Bekele was on course for his first win on the streets of London aged 41 but Munyao proved too strong in the closing kilometres to pull clear up London's famous landmark The Mall towards the finish line.

"At 40 kilometres I got some pressure from Bekele but I had a lot of confidence because I trained for this race," said Munyao.

"After 40 kilometres I thought I had enough energy to win. That's why I kicked and I knew I would win."

The 27-year-old also paid tribute to Kiptum, whose sudden death sent shockwaves through the sport. "I think about him and let him rest in peace. He came here in London and he won."

Behind the front two it was a great day for the British duo of Emile Cairns and Mohamed Mohamed as they finished third and fourth respectively to close in on a place at the Paris Olympics.

A record number of people are running the 26.2-mile (42 kilometre) route through the British capital with over 50,000 participants taking part.

Among them was new Manchester United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe, who faced a race against the clock to finish in time to see his side beat Coventry in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley on penalties.

CRICKET

Chapman guides New Zealand to shock win

The 29-year-old left hander smashes a 42-ball 87 in run chase

AFP
Rawalpindi

Mark Chapman hit a robust half century to help an under-strength New Zealand to a shock seven-wicket victory over Pakistan in the third Twenty20 international in Rawalpindi yesterday.

The 29-year-old left hander smashed a 42-ball 87 to anchor New Zealand's chase of 179-run target in 18.2 overs against the much vaunted Pakistan bowling attack, silencing a packed 16,000 holiday crowd.

Shadab Khan (41) and Babar Azam (37) were the main contributors in Pakistan's 178-4 after the hosts were sent in to bat by New Zealand.

Tim Robinson hit 28 off 19 balls and Tim Seifert 21 off 16 to set the tone for New Zealand's chase.

New Zealand were strongly-placed at 53-2 in the sixth over before Chapman and Dean Foxcroft (31) took over, adding a solid 117-run in a third wicket partnership to square the five-match series at 1-1.

Pakistan won the second game by seven wickets while the first match was washed out after just two balls - both were also in Rawalpindi.

Chapman, whose only T20I hundred came at the same venue last year, clobbered four sixes and nine fours in his eighth half century in the format. He was ably supported by Foxcroft.

Pakistan skipper Babar brought spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi on in the 15th over with 61 to defend, but Chapman cracked two fours. He then smashed two sixes and two more fours off Naseem Shah's next over to bring the target down to 21 of 24 balls.

Fast bowler Abbas Afridi, 2-27, dismissed Foxcroft, but by then New Zealand were just nine away from victory. Chapman and Jimmy Neesham (six not out) reached the target with ten balls to spare.

Earlier Shadab hit two sixes and four fours



New Zealand's Mark Chapman celebrates his fifty score during the third Twenty20 against Pakistan in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

while Azam hit four fours and a six. Opener Saim Ayub scored a 22-ball 32 and Muhammad Irfan Khan chipped in with a 20-ball 30 not out as Pakistan added 54 in the last five overs. Babar and left-hander Ayub gave Pakistan a brisk start of 55 as the duo played some aggressive shots.

Shadab and Irfan boosted the innings with a brisk 62-run stand for the fourth wicket.

For New Zealand, leg-spinner Ish Sodhi was the best bowler with 2-25.

The final two matches are in Lahore on April 25 and 27. Both teams are preparing for June's

Twenty20 World Cup in the United States and the West Indies.

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 178-4 in 20 overs (Shadab Khan 41, Babar Azam 37, Saim Ayub 32, Mohamed Irfan Khan 30 not out; I. Sodhi 2-25)

New Zealand 179-3 in 18.2 overs (M. Chapman 87 not out, D. Foxcroft 31, T. Robinson 28; Abbas Afridi 2-27)

Result: New Zealand won by seven wickets

Toss: New Zealand

Series: Pakistan 1, New Zealand 1, no result 1

CYCLING

Star Pogacar solos to superb Liege triumph



EF Education-EasyPost's Ecuadorian rider Richard Carapaz (left) and UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian cyclist Tadej Pogacar (centre) ride during Liege-Bastogne-Liege one day race, 254.5km round-trip from Liege to Liege via Bastogne, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Liege

Tadej Pogacar destroyed the field with a stunning solo attack to win Liege-Bastogne-Liege yesterday, the Slovenian's sixth Monument victory of his career.

Pogacar (UAE Team Emirates) attacked with 34km remaining of the 254km trek as the field tackled the iconic Cote de la Redoute and he then surged clear.

He finished one minute 39 seconds ahead of Romain Bardet while Dutchman Mathieu van der Poel won a sprint to claim third.

It was the second Liege vic-

tory for Pogacar and made up for last year when he crashed. He also departed the 2022 edition of the race after the death of his fiancée's mother.

"It was quite emotional for me all day riding on the bike, thinking of Urska's mother two years ago and we had to go home," Pogacar said. "Then last year when I broke my hand so the last two years were really difficult."

Pogacar said the plan to attack on the Cote de la Redoute had been worked out before the race.

"We rode hard on the climbs, and safe on the downhill and on La Redoute - we did exactly what we said and from then on it was suffering to the finish," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

Kolkata beat Bengaluru by one run in IPL

AFP
Kolkata

Kolkata Knight Riders survived a late charge by Royal Challengers Bengaluru batsmen to win by one run in an IPL thriller after Virat Kohli's angry outburst at his dismissal yesterday.

Bengaluru conceded 222-6 after electing to field first at Kolkata's Eden Gardens with Phil Salt smashing 48 off 14 balls and skipper Shreyas Iyer hitting 50.

Needing 21 to win in the final over by Mitchell Starc, Bengaluru's number 10 Karn Sharma hit the Australian left-arm quick for three sixes before being caught and bowled.

Wicketkeeper Salt then ran out Lockie Ferguson on the last ball despite a wide throw by the fielder as Bengaluru were bowled out for 221.

Bengaluru slipped early in their chase when Kohli, who made a seven-ball 18, fell caught and bowled off Harshit Rana.

But the former India captain looked confident the high full-toss was above his waist as the umpires checked for a no-ball.



Kolkata Knight Riders' Phil Salt plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (Reuters)

TV umpire Michael Gough declared it out after technology suggested the trajectory of the ball dipped below the waist of the batsman, who returned furious after exchanging words with the on-field officials.

"It was crazy. Rules are rules,

Virat and myself in that space thought the ball was higher than his waist," skipper Faf du Plessis, who was with Kohli at the other end when the drama unfolded, said. "You always find one team happy and the other not so with such decisions."

The drama did not help Bengaluru in their chase as the bottom-placed side in the 10-team table slumped to their seventh loss in eight matches.

Earlier Kolkata started strongly with Salt's explosive knock as the England wicketkeeper-batsman smashed seven fours and three sixes.

Fast bowlers Yash Dayal and Cameron Green took two wickets each to dent Kolkata's top and middle-order but Iyer kept calm to raise his fifty in 35 balls. He fell after a 40-run stand with Rinku Singh, who hit 24.

Andre Russell, who made 27 off 10 balls and Ramandeep Singh, who hit 24 off nine, finished with a flourish in an unbeaten stand of 43.

England batsman Will Jacks, who made 55, and Rajat Patidar, who hit 52, attempted to set up the chase in a 102-run third-wicket stand, which was broken by Russell.

BRIEF SCORES

Kolkata Knight Riders 222 for 6 (Shreyas 50, Salt 48, Green 2-35) **beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru 221** (Jacks 55, Patidar 52, Russell 3-25) **by 1 run**

GUJARAT PIP PUNJAB BY 3 WICKETS IN LOW-SCORING TIE



Gujarat Titans' Sai Kishore bowls during the Indian Premier League match against Punjab Kings in Mohali yesterday. (AFP)

Mohali: Gujarat Titans yesterday defeated Punjab Kings by three wickets after they bowled out the opposition for 142 in a low-scoring game in Mohali.

The spinners, Sai Kishore (4/33), Rashid Khan (1/15) and Noor Ahmad (2/20) sparked a collapse after PBKS had got off to a strong start with the openers adding 52 from 5.2 overs.

Mohit Sharma too bowled a crucial spell of 2/32 as GT bowled PBKS out for 142.

Gujarat looked in trouble at 103-5, but Rahul Tewatia steered the team home with five balls to spare as the left-handed batsman hit an unbeaten 36 off 18 balls.

Shubman Gill's composed 35 (29) set the platform for GT before Tewatia powered GT past the finish line. Chasing 143, Gujarat Titans lost Wriddhiman Saha in the fourth over as he mistimed his pull to mid-wicket off Arshdeep Singh. Gill and Sai Sudharsan then steadied the ship with a steady 41-run stand off 36 balls. PBKS,

though, bowled with discipline and didn't allow GT to run away with boundaries.

That discipline brought them a wicket as Gill went for a big one but mistimed his loft to long off in the 10th over, off Liam Livingstone. Spinner Livingstone was at it again in his next over as he cleaned up David Miller to jolt GT.

Earlier, Punjab Kings won the toss and elected to bat. Sam Curran continued to lead the side in the absence of Shikhar Dhawan. Player of the Match Kishore said: "Trying to give 120% for the team, playing after some time I was enjoying myself and giving my best. Be fearless and play for the team, whatever the result is. Into the wicket, change of pace was the way to go. Rashid and Noor bowled beautifully."

BRIEF SCORES

Gujarat Titans 146 for 7 (Tewatia 36*, Gill 35, Harshal 3-15) **beat Punjab Kings 142** (Prabhsimran 35, Brar 29, Sai Kishore 4-33) **by 3 wickets**

MOTORSPORT

Verstappen wins Chinese GP to increase title grip

'We survived the restarts well and the car was basically on rails and I could do whatever I wanted with it'

AFP
Shanghai

Max Verstappen rounded off a dominant weekend with victory in the first Chinese Grand Prix for five years yesterday to extend his world championship lead, a day after romping to sprint victory.

The three-time world champion was again in a league of his own as Formula One returned to the Shanghai International Circuit for the first time since 2019.

He finished 13.7 seconds ahead of Lando Norris with Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez third, a further six seconds back.

It looked odds-on that Red Bull would repeat their one-two in Japan a fortnight ago until two safety cars in quick succession mid-race.

After multiple pit stops Perez emerged behind McLaren's Norris and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc. Verstappen was only denied a maximum 34 points for the weekend when Fernando Alonso pipped him to the fastest lap after a late tyre change.

It was another masterful display from Verstappen, who was winning his fourth grand prix out of five in 2024 and the 58th of his career as he marches towards a fourth consecutive world title.

"It felt amazing. The whole weekend we were incredibly quick," said Verstappen.

"We survived the restarts well and the car was basically on rails and I could do whatever I wanted with it."

He increased his lead over Perez at the top of the world championship to 25 points, with Red Bull now 44 points clear of Ferrari in the constructors' fight.

"Those kind of weekends are amazing to feel and to achieve what we did this weekend is fantastic," added Verstappen, who won for the first time in China.

Norris was delighted to finish second, his best result in 2024,



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen is seen after winning the Chinese Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit yesterday. (AFP)

having started from fourth on the grid.

"Things came alive today. I don't know why, it was not the race I was expecting, but just got comfortable," said the Englishman.

The consistent Perez finished on the podium for the fourth time in five rounds this season but said the safety car denied him a place.

"It really cost us quite a bit. Fighting like that, the life of the tyre goes off dramatically," said Perez.

"But at least we got onto the podium. But it would have been good to be one and two. We were definitely lacking some pace."

The Ferrari pair of Leclerc and Carlos Sainz were only fourth and fifth after a disappointing weekend where they had hoped to be closer to Red Bull.

"I think it was the best we could have done," said Leclerc, who started from sixth on the grid.

Sainz, the only driver other

than Verstappen to win a race this season, said: "It was a tough race, we had an issue at the start going wide. Then we had to stop very early and I had to nurse the tyres home."

George Russell came sixth for Mercedes with Alonso finishing seventh after a spectacular late charge through the field from 12th after a final tyre stop 13 laps from the end.

"It was important to score some points and a bonus to get the fastest lap too," said Alonso. "We didn't have any more hard tyres available, so that's why we made a switch to the soft."

McLaren's Oscar Piastri was eighth, chased home by Lewis Hamilton who clawed his way up to ninth from 18th on the grid and Nico Hulkenberg in 10th for Haas.

China's first Formula One driver Zhou Guanyu was an enormous draw over the weekend as he made his home Grand Prix debut.

He was allowed to park his car on the grid in front of the grandstands after finishing 14th in the race and exited the cockpit in floods of tears to an ovation from the capacity crowd.

"I drove my heart out today, unfortunately not enough for the points but we go again next time," said an emotional Zhou.

"I am just so happy to see the whole crowd. No words. A mixture of emotions and a day to remember. Hopefully in the future more drivers from my country will be stepping in here."

Seven-time world champion Hamilton won the last time a race was staged in Shanghai in 2019, one of a record six wins at the circuit, but was just "grateful to get into the points" yesterday after starting from 18th.

"It was a tough race. Ultimately, I made a bad set-up change to the car yesterday and I paid the price for it," said Hamilton.

VERSTAPPEN COULD CONSIDER JOINING RIVALS MERCEDES: WOLFF

Shanghai: Red Bull's triple world champion **Max Verstappen** has more depths to him and so could consider a move to rivals Mercedes, even though he is currently in the quickest Formula One car, Toto Wolff, the German team's boss, said yesterday. Speculation that the Dutch 26-year-old might leave the current champions arose earlier this year after allegations against team principal Christian Horner of misconduct towards a female employee, which he was later cleared of although they stoked rumours of divisions within the team.

Former champions Mercedes have a vacancy, with seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton going to Ferrari in 2025. "There are so many factors that play a role for a driver joining. And clearly, when you look at it from the most rational point of view, you can say that it is the quickest car in the hands of the quickest driver," Wolff said after the Chinese Grand Prix.

"But I don't think that this is the only reason you stay where you are," he added. "Maybe there is some more depths to some people, that consider other factors too. I think Max has that." Red Bull won 21 of 22 races last season with the most dominant

car in the sport's history and the team's star driver won yesterday's race in Shanghai from pole for his fourth win in five races this year.

Wolff said that Mercedes had held conversations with many drivers over next year's vacant race seat.

"As for Max, no, we are not at the point where we would have discussed years or stuff," Wolff said. Team boss Christian Horner described Verstappen as a man driving "on another planet" following the Chinese Grand Prix. "At the end of the day, we know (Verstappen) has a contract until the end of 2028," Horner told reporters in response to Wolff's remarks.

"I don't think Toto's problems are his drivers. I think he's got other elements that he needs to be focusing on rather than, you know, focusing on drivers that are unavailable," he added.

The Mercedes team principal said he felt his team would make a particularly attractive proposition from 2026, when new chassis and engine regulations will come into play.

"If I was Max, I would stay at Red Bull in 2025, but I'm not Max," Wolff said.

"Because it's the quickest car but there are other factors."



OLYMPICS

Legend Lewis predicts 'tremendous' sprint competition in Paris

AFP
Walnut, United States

Nine-time Olympic gold medalist Carl Lewis is looking forward to "tremendous" sprint competition at the Paris Olympics, where he expects organisers to pull out all the stops.

"I think Paris is going to be fabulous, incredible," Lewis said Saturday at the Mt. SAC Relays east of Los Angeles.

"It's a wonderful country. It's a beautiful city."

"And I know they're going to integrate the culture and the ideas and being the 100th anniversary (of the 1924 Paris Games), I think it's going to be an absolutely fabulous Olympics."

Lewis, who established himself as an Olympic force when he won 100m, 200m, long jump and 4x100m relay gold at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and earned his final Olympic gold in Atlanta in 1996, said he's pleased to see athletes from a range of nations chal-

lenging in the sprints at the highest level. "It's their time and I love it," the 62-year-old said of the young athletes on the rise now. "I work at the University of Houston. So I'm working with athletes. I'm really happy to see the kids running hard, running well. I'm glad to see the sprints are more global, there are more athletes from around the world. I think it makes it better."

"And I think it's going to be tremendous competition," added Lewis, who noted that since Jamaican great Usain Bolt won back to back world titles in 2013 and 2015 four different men had won the 100m world title.

Noah Lyles became the latest to join that list last year with his triumph in Budapest. Lewis said that makes him the early favourite for Paris - but added it's too early in the season to make any hard predictions.

"I'm glad to see the sprints are more global, there are more people from around the world," Lewis said. "I think it makes it better and I think it's going to be tremendous competition."



Former US athlete Carl Lewis poses during the Mt. SAC Relays at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California. Lewis, an athletics legend with nine Olympic titles to his name, including four 40 years ago in Los Angeles, is expecting a "fabulous" Olympic Games in Paris. (AFP)

TENNIS

Ruud defeats Tsitsipas to win 'biggest title' in career

AFP
Barcelona

World number six Casper Ruud defeated Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-5, 6-3 to win the Barcelona Open yesterday, the biggest title of his career.

The Norwegian earned revenge after his defeat by the Greek world number seven in the Monte Carlo Masters final last weekend.

Ruud, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, had won 10 titles at 250 level with the 500-ranked clay-court event in Barcelona his 11th career triumph.

"For me it means a lot, this is my biggest title that I ever won in my career, it's something I've chased for a long time already," Ruud told *Teledorte*. "I've never won a 500 before or a 1000, I've been to a few finals but always came up a little bit short."

"I didn't start great during the match but luckily I was able to come back in and play really well in the end of the first and the second set."

The 25-year-old leads the tour with 29 wins this year but had lost in three finals before wrapping up his first title of 2024 when Tsitsipas, who lacked his usual spark, went long. "The last six, seven months I've taken a few steps in the right direction in my game and I'm glad it's paying off," added Ruud.

Ruud conceded a break in the opening game, which Tsitsipas consolidated for 2-0, giving the chance of a repeat of his first-set collapse in the Monte Carlo final.

Ruud's 91-minute victory ended a 10-match winning streak for Tsitsipas. "I wasn't playing my best tennis this week in Barcelona... throughout the whole week I didn't feel like my shots had the same effect as they did in Monte



Norway's Casper Ruud holds up the trophy after beating Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Barcelona Open final yesterday. **Right:** Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff wears traditional "Lederhosen" (leather trousers) dress and presents his trophy after defeating Taylor Fritz from the US in the final of the ATP Tour tournament in Munich, yesterday. (AFP)

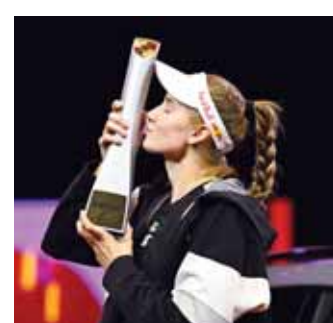
Carlo," said Tsitsipas. "Today it felt like I didn't have the mental capacity to even fight. Even if I wanted to push myself to fight, Casper was just too good today."

Struff beats Fritz in Munich for debut title

German fourth seed Jan-Lennard Struff broke through for his debut ATP singles title in his 218th tournament yesterday, beating American third seed Taylor Fritz in the final in Munich. The 33-year-old Struff won in straight sets, beating Fritz 7-5, 6-3 in the rain in the Bavarian capital. Fritz, ranked 15th in the world, 13 places higher than the German, already had seven titles to his name before yesterday's match.

"It's unbelievable, I've been waiting for this for so long. I'm 33 years old," the breathless Struff said a few moments after his triumph. "I've been here for so long, now I've finally done it."

Struff played his first ATP tour match 11 years ago and has won four doubles titles, but had never lifted a singles crown. "Unbeliev-



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina kisses her trophy after she defeated Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk in the final of Grand Prix WTA tournament in Stuttgart yesterday. (AFP)

Rybakina wins Stuttgart Open

Kazakh fourth seed Elena Rybakina defeated Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk in straight sets to win the WTA event in Stuttgart yesterday.

2022 Wimbledon champion Rybakina beat Kostyuk 6-2, 6-2 in one hour nine minutes, ending the 21-year-old Ukrainian's giant-killing run at the tournament. The world number four broke Kostyuk twice in the first set and twice in the second, fighting off three break points from the world number 27 to lift her eighth career title. Rybakina now holds a 2-1 record against Kostyuk.

"I want to congratulate Marta for a great tournament. You're playing really well and hopefully we play many more finals," Rybakina said. "The crowd, guys, it was an unbelievable week. It was nice to play every match here and fight. Your energy gives a lot during these tough matches."

The title is her third of 2024, having already won in Brisbane and Abu Dhabi and it is the first time she has won three WTA titles in one year.

FA CUP

Man United win thriller against Coventry on penalties

AFP
London

Manchester United survived one of the most astonishing FA Cup semi-final comebacks ever to beat second-tier Coventry City 4-2 on penalties after a spellbinding clash ended 3-3 after extra time at Wembley Stadium yesterday.

United were cruising to a record 22nd FA Cup final thanks to goals by Scott McTominay, Harry Maguire and Bruno Fernandes with Coventry barely managing to lay a glove on their illustrious opponents for 70 minutes.

But Coventry, playing in their first FA Cup semi-final since they won the Cup in 1987, fought back with goals by Ellis Simms and Cal-

lum O'Hare and with United rocking Haji Wright stroked home a stoppage-time penalty after an Aaron Wan-Bissaka handball.

Both sides hit the woodwork in a rollercoaster extra 30 minutes - Fernandes for United and Simms for Coventry, his effort bouncing down off the underside of the crossbar.

Coventry's 36,000 fans were sent into delirium when substitute Victor Torp poked home with almost the last kick of the game but what would have been a deserved winner was disallowed for a slender offside after a VAR check.

Casemiro missed a spot kick Ben Sheaf for United in the shootout but Andre Onana saved O'Hare's kick and fired his effort over the crossbar to leave Rasmus Hojlund with the job of sending United through and he coolly scored past

Bradley Collins. United's fans celebrated but they know they came within a whisker of calamity. They will now face Manchester City in the showpiece final on May 25 - the first time the same two clubs have contested the FA Cup final in consecutive years since 1885.

It was desperately tough on Coventry who looked down and out when Fernandes made it 3-0 before throwing caution to the wind to stun Erik ten Hag's side.

Coventry, managed by former United Cup winner Mark Robins, were the better side in extra time and the superb Simms struck the underside of the crossbar deep into extra time.

And when Torp tapped in it seemed the unthinkable had happened but Wright was adjudged to have been fractionally offside in the build-up to the goal.



Manchester United's players celebrate after the shoot-out win against Coventry City in the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley Stadium in London yesterday. Manchester United won the penalty shoot-out 4-2 after the game finished 3-3 after extra time. (AFP)

FOOTBALL

Liverpool bounce back to keep title bid alive

Aston Villa tighten grip on top four, Forest fume after Everton defeat

AFP
London

Liverpool got back on track after their week from hell as a 3-1 win at Fulham kept their Premier League title bid alive, while Nottingham Forest launched an astonishing rant at the officiating in their 2-0 defeat against Everton yesterday.

Jurgen Klopp's side crashed out of the Europa League quarter-finals against Atalanta on Thursday after suffering a damaging Premier League defeat at home to Crystal Palace last weekend.

The Reds' hopes of giving Klopp a glorious farewell were dwindling but they climbed back into the title race with much-needed first win in three league games.

Liverpool are now in second place, behind leaders Arsenal on goal difference and one point ahead of third placed Manchester City, who have a game in hand on their two title rivals.

Next for Liverpool is the Merseyside derby at Everton on Wednesday, while Arsenal host Chelsea on Tuesday and City travel to Brighton on Thursday.

Klopp responded to signs of fatigue from his team in recent weeks by dropping Mohamed Salah to the bench among five changes. And Liverpool took the hint with a more cohesive display by the banks of the River Thames in west London.

Trent Alexander-Arnold put Liverpool ahead in the 32nd minute with a superb free-kick that flashed into the top corner.

Fulham defender Timothy Castagne levelled from close-range after Liverpool failed to clear in first half stoppage-time.

Ryan Gravenberch restored Liverpool's advantage in the 53rd minute with a swerving blast from the edge of the area for his first Premier League goal.

Diogo Jota wrapped up the points in the 72nd minute, drilling a clinical low finish into the far corner.

Everton took a giant stride towards extending their 70-year stay in the English top-flight in a



Liverpool's Ryan Gravenberch (right) celebrates with Andrew Robertson after scoring a goal during their Premier League match against Fulham in London yesterday. (Reuters)

highly controversial victory over Forest. Idrissa Gueye and Dwight McNeil scored the goals that took the Toffees five points clear of the relegation zone. Forest remain just one point above the bottom three and were left dismayed at being denied three strong penalty appeals.

The club's official account on social media platform X called into question the Premier League's integrity by claiming the VAR official is a fan of relegation rivals Luton.

"We warned the PGMOL (referees' governing body) that the VAR is a Luton fan before the game but they didn't change him," Forest said in a statement said.

"Our patience has been tested multiple times. NFFC will now consider its options."

Aston Villa tightened their grip on Champions League football

next season with a 3-1 win over Bournemouth.

Villa shrugged off the exertions of having to go to extra-time and penalties in midweek to book their place in the Europa Conference League semi-finals against Lille.

Unai Emery's men even had to come from behind after Dominic Solanke opened the scoring from the penalty spot. Morgan Rogers' fine finish just before half-time proved to be the turning point.

Moussa Diaby slotted in from Ollie Watkins' pass to put Villa in front. Watkins was the provider once more for Leon Bailey to tap in to seal the points 12 minutes from time. Victory takes Villa six points clear of fifth-placed Tottenham.

Spurs have two games in hand but still have to play all of title challengers Manchester City, Ar-

senal and Liverpool in their final six matches.

David Moyes' future as West Ham manager looks more uncertain after they were thrashed 5-2 at Crystal Palace.

Fresh from their shock 1-0 win at Liverpool last weekend, the Eagles scored four times inside the first 31 minutes. Michael Olise headed in the opener before Eberechi Eze's spectacular acrobatic effort found the roof of the net. Emerson Palmieri's own goal made it 3-0 before Jean-Philippe Mateta struck twice for Palace either side of half-time.

Michail Antonio's strike and a Tyrick Mitchell own goal was scant consolation for West Ham as a miserable day rounded off a poor week after they were dumped out of the Europa League by Bayer Leverkusen.

BUNDESLIGA

Late Stanisic goal at Dortmund salvages Leverkusen's unbeaten run

AFP
Dortmund

Josip Stanisic scored in the seventh minute of stoppage time as Bayer Leverkusen extended their unbeaten run to 45 games in all competitions with a 1-1 draw at Borussia Dortmund yesterday.

Crowned Bundesliga champions for the first time last week, Leverkusen looked set to lose their unbeaten run when Dortmund's Niclas Füllkrug scored with nine minutes remaining.

As they have done so often this season however, Leverkusen scored late, Stanisic's goal coming from a corner deep into added time.

The goal was Leverkusen's 14th to come after the 90th minute this season and kept their dreams of becoming the first team to go unbeaten through a Bundesliga season alive.

Both sides looked heavy legged from their midweek European ties, with Dortmund and Leverkusen qualifying for the semi-finals of the Champions League and Europa League respectively.

Neither side managed to carve out a clear chance in the opening half, with Alex Grimaldo for Leverkusen and the hosts' Marcel Sabitzer going closest.

With less than 10 minutes remaining, Füllkrug put Dortmund on track to do what no other team has managed to do this season.

Sabitzer lofted a cross across the face of goal to Füllkrug, who rocketed a volley past Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky and into the back of the net.

Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso brought on Victor Boniface in search of a late goal and the Nigerian was shown a red card for his involvement in a scuffle, but it was overturned by VAR.

Late in stoppage time, Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel saved a Grimaldo free-kick, leading to a corner which was headed in by Bayern Munich loanee Stanisic.

The draw leaves Dortmund two points behind fourth-placed RB Leipzig in the race for the final guaranteed Champions League spot.

Dortmund travel to Leipzig



Bayer Leverkusen's Josip Stanisic celebrates after scoring the equalising goal during the Bundesliga match against Borussia Dortmund in Dortmund yesterday. (AFP)

next week and will be missing Ian Maatsen and captain Emre Can, who picked up yellow cards, through suspension.

Werder Bremen took a major step to ensuring Bundesliga football next season as Marvin Ducksch scored a brace in a 2-1 home win over high-flying Stuttgart.

The victory, Bremen's first since mid-February, lifts Ole Werner's side to 34 points, eight clear of the relegation play-off last season to stay in the top flight, Stuttgart sit third, three points behind second-placed Bayern Munich and six clear of fifth-placed Dortmund.

Stuttgart winger Jamie Leweling brought down Felix Agu in the box on 27 minutes and the referee pointed to the spot. Ducksch stepped up and slotted the ball past the outstretched hand of Stuttgart keeper Alexander Nuebel.

Former Bremen youth team player Deniz Undav, on loan at Stuttgart from Brighton, had a golden chance to equalise on the cusp of half-time, but headed against the crossbar.

9TH QATAR PENINSULA ARABIAN HORSE SHOW



Yazeed Al Rayyan of Al Saree Stud and Bidayat Ibn Salamah of Al Jaham Stud won gold in the Senior Stallions and Senior Mares Championship respectively at the 9th Qatar Peninsula Arabian Horse Show for Individual Owners organised by Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club (QREC) held over two days at the Longines Indoor Arena of Al Shaqab. The Senior Stallions silver went to Dhari Al Zubair of Fuwairit Stud while Shawaf Al Shaqab won the bronze. Maliha Al Waab of Al Sarah Stud won silver in the Senior Mares C/Ship class while Katharah Anayan of Anayan Stud picked up bronze. Among the other gold winners were Talal Al Waab (Colts 2-3 Years), Shgairah Al Doha (Fillies 2-3 Years), Mansour Al Arab (Yearling Colts), and Nour Al Nawaisi (Yearling Fillies).

