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**FOOTBALL**

# Wakrah clinch Qatar Cup after al-Yazidi strike sinks Rayyan

'The players gave their hundred percent for this title and we are delighted to win this tournament'



Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani presents the Qatar Cup to Al Wakrah coach Ali Rahma al-Marri and midfielder Ahmed Fadhil Hesaba yesterday. **PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil**



Al Wakrah's Nasser al-Yazidi (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Al Rayyan in the Qatar Cup final at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Substitute Nasser al-Yazidi's strike helped Al Wakrah beat Al Rayyan 1-0 in the final to emerge Qatar Cup champions yesterday. At the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, al-Yazidi came off the bench to score the only goal in the 80th minute as The Blue Wave emerged champions in their first attempt at reaching the final of the prestigious tournament since it was renamed in 2014. Wakrah had won the competition formerly known as the Heir Apparent's Cup in 1999.

The highly-entertaining final was full of thrills and glamour right from the onset, with the 8,163-strong capacity crowd adding much fervour to the excitement.

Al Wakrah coach Ali Rahma al-Marri said he and his team were 'delighted to win the Qatar Cup. He said: "We deserved to win the title. We gave our best in the final. The players gave their hundred percent and all the decisions we made were aimed at producing this result, and we are delighted to win this tournament. It's an outcome of sheer hardwork from the entire Al Wakrah team which includes our technical staff and all the other staff."

Al Wakrah appeared to have got an early lead in the ninth minute when Ayoub Assal found the back of the net with a low right-footed shot following a defence-splitting pass by Rabeh Yahia, but the goal was, however, stood down after a lengthy VAR check for offside.

Undaunted by the denial, Al Wakrah



Al Wakrah players and officials celebrate with the trophy after winning the Qatar Cup at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

continued to mount pressure on Al Rayyan, who were pegged inside their own half of the field for most part of the first half, and The Blue Wave were very close to scoring in the 20th minute following an impressive overlapping run by captain Mohamed Benyettou, if not for the calculated intervention of Shogo Taniguchi, who blocked what could have been an amazing solo goal.

Benyettou almost registered a goal again in the 26th minute with a sublime backheel flick, but Al Rayyan goalkeeper Fahad Younes read the situation well as he par-

ried the ball for a corner kick. Benyettou had another goal disallowed three minutes later after netting the rebound of Jacinto Dala's header that hit the upright following a goalmouth scramble from a corner kick. The goal was denied, after a lengthy VAR check, for offside, much to the disappointment of Al Wakrah fans, who were visibly upset by the decision.

Al Wakrah kept the momentum, with most of the chances falling to them, with goalkeeper Younes being called upon quite often, while Al Rayyan's scoring opportunities were quite few and in between.

Al Wakrah continued from where they stopped on the resumption of second half, with their forwards causing a series of headaches for the Al Rayyan defensive line-up. The game became more interesting as the clock ticked on and Al Wakrah goalkeeper Mohammed Al Bakri's quick response in the 64th minute prevented what could have been a stunning goal from Rodrigo Tabata, who had only the goalkeeper to beat in a one-on-one situation.

Al Wakrah's sustained efforts eventually paid off in the 80th minute through substitute al-Yazidi, who came in for Khalid

Al Sabah in the 76th minute, as he was well-positioned to finish off another defence-splitting pass from Dala with a low right-footed drive, which the on-rushing goalkeeper Younes had no answer for it.

With the goal, Al Wakrah became more aggressive upfront in an attempt to consolidate their lead, while Al Rayyan also upped their game as they searched for the equalizer. But, as much as The Lions tried, Al Wakrah's defence remained impenetrable, with goalkeeper Al Bakri making series of daring saves before the referee finally signalled the end of the encounter.

**PREVIEW**

## Markhiya, Shahaniya to fight it out in QSL play-off

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Markhiya will face Al Shahaniya today in the play-off to determine which team qualifies for the Qatar Stars League in the 2024-2025 season. The kick-off is at 7pm at the Al Thumama Stadium.

The Play-Off pits the 11th-placed team (Al Markhiya) in the final standings of 2023-2024 Qatar Stars League against the second-placed team (Al Shahaniya) in Second Division championship.

The match is of great importance for both teams as the winners will earn a berth in the 2024-2025 season league and the losers will play in the Second Division.

Al Markhiya had done well towards the end of Expo Stars League and recorded

many positive results to finish 11th with 18 points, whereas 12th-placed side Muaither got straightaway relegated to the Second Division.

Al Shahania coach Alvaro Mejia, speaking ahead of the match said his team will fight to beat Al Markhiya. "Al Markhiya are a team worthy of respect and we know it well, given that we previously faced them when they were playing in the second division league. They have high technical capabilities, but we will fight in the match to win, especially since it is a great opportunity for us to qualify for the first division league, and the match is a great challenge for me. Naturally, this is a great challenge for us to break the jinx and achieve victory over Al Markhiya."

Al Markhiya coach Madjid Bougherra said: "We go into this match as we did in all the last rounds of the league, as a major

final in which we must give everything in order to win.

"Al Shahania had a good season and finished second in the Second Division, so we respect them and will deal with them with caution. We will do our best to stay in the league. The Play-Off match has a special character and in such matches anything can happen, so the team must be extremely focused."

Bougherra will rely mainly on Iraqi Bashar Resan, Moroccan Driss Fettohi, Gambian striker Yusupha Njie, goalkeeper Louay Ashour and Talal Ali.

On the other hand, Al Shahaniya boast of Sierra Leone professional Alhassan Koroma, Abdulrahman Masaad and Abdulaziz al-Yahri among others.

Al Shahania and Al Khor were tied on 33 points in the Second Division but head-to-head record favoured The Knights.



Al Markhiya coach Madjid Bougherra (right) and midfielder Driss Fettohi address the media ahead of their play-off match against Al Shahania.

CYCLING

# Narvaez in the pink after foiling Pogacar to opening Giro stage

AFP  
Turin, Italy

Ecuadorian Ineos rider Jhonatan Narvaez won a ferocious struggle on the opening stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday to deny pre-race favourite Tadej Pogacar in the final sprint and snatch the overall leader's pink jersey.

Narvaez stayed on Pogacar's wheel and then surged clear in a three-way sprint after an eventful 140-kilometre stage to Turin, pipping Max Schachmann and Pogacar to the line.

Ineos team-leader Geraint Thomas came in 10th, ten seconds adrift with other contenders Ben O'Connor, Damiano Caruso and Danny Martinez.

Fancied Frenchman Romain Bardet, however, dropped 57sec, which at this early stage does not

yet rule him out but is far from ideal. Narvaez was delighted with the biggest win of his career.

"You don't get many chances like that," he said of taking the pink jersey.

After denying Pogacar an eighth win in just 11 days of competitive racing this year, Narvaez said the Slovenian had made a mistake.

"He launched his sprint too early, after a hard stage like that he went from like 200m. I waited for the 100m mark," said Narvaez, who allowed Pogacar to do all the work in his bid to become the first man to win the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France double since Marco Pantani in 1998. Pogacar was frustrated after the race.

"I had to do all the work on the hill and after that I knew Narvaez was a better sprinter. Tomorrow is better for us," he said of the mountainous run today.

UAE rider Pogacar burst from

the peloton with just 3km to go but, Narvaez clung to his back wheel and only overtook 50m from the line with Pogacar crossing in third place.

This year's Giro has a punishing start with plenty of climbs over the first two stages which immediately puts the main contenders for overall victory in the mix.

There were plenty of fireworks on the opening day as big names Bardet and Ineos' Thymen Arensman were dropped off the back of the peloton on the category two Maddalena Pass climb towards the end of the race.

A six-man break built a lead of just over two minutes with 70km remaining and on the Superga climb, which was being raced on the 75th anniversary of an air disaster which killed the entire Torino football team, one of the greatest ever Italian club sides.

That gap was extended by a

minute by the time Amanuel Gebregabriel crossed the peak of Superga, after which Frenchman Lilian Calmejeane then joined the Eritrean on the descent.

The peloton, which had been led for most of the day by Pogacar's UAE teammates, chopped that gap by half as they approached the Maddalena, a 7km climb with an average seven percent gradient.

Calmejeane claimed the King of the Mountains jersey on that climb but was caught with 10km remaining.

With the peloton trailing, Pogacar made a run at the stage win but he couldn't pull completely clear, and didn't have the pace in the finale to hold off Narvaez.

Today's second stage is another big one for the general classification contenders as 161km of racing climaxes with a category-one climb to Santuario di Oropa.



Team Ineos' Jhonatan Narvaez of Ecuador celebrates on the podium in overall leader's pink jersey after winning the stage 1 of the Giro d'Italia, the 140km race between Venaria Reale and Turin, yesterday. (AFP)

FORMULA 1

# Verstappen cruises to sprint race win at Miami Grand Prix

Team RB's Ricciardo finishes fourth after holding of Ferrari's Sainz

AFP  
Miami Gardens, United States

Red Bull's Max Verstappen cruised to victory in the Miami Grand Prix's sprint race yesterday finishing a full 3.3 seconds ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

The reigning three-times world champion and current championship leader, who is looking for a third straight Miami Grand Prix victory on Sunday, led from pole and was never challenged after a chaotic opening lap.

Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez was third as the world champions gave themselves a points boost ahead of qualifying later on Saturday.

Verstappen has won four of the five Grand Prix races so far this season and looks well set for a fourth straight world championship.

Dutchman Verstappen held off Leclerc's strong start to secure his place at the front but there was plenty of action and incident in the middle of the pack.

Haas's Kevin Magnussen and Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton jostled hard but in the end the Dane picked up three penalties, adding 25 seconds to his time, after frequently leaving the track and gaining advantage.

Hamilton also received a penalty, leaving him outside the points positions in 16th after speeding in the pit lane.

The safety car was brought out after the first lap which saw a start line incident involving Hamilton, Fernando Alonso, Lance Stroll and Lando Norris. But away from those skirmishes, it was business as usual for Verstappen, who adds another eight points to his season tally with the victory.

"I think my engine wasn't good in the start and so then I had to speed it a bit, luckily everything worked out in turn one," said Ver-



Sprint winner Max Verstappen of Red Bull receives the award from football legend Zinedine Zidane after winning the Miami Grand Prix sprint race yesterday. (AFP)

stappen. "Then we had the safety car just to calm things down a bit after that. Steadily we could increase the gap a little bit, but it wasn't entirely perfect so we still have a bit of work to do," he added.

"We can still fine tune the car a little bit, so hopefully we can improve for later on in qualifying and especially for tomorrow in the race".

Australian Daniel Ricciardo, of RB, finished fourth in the sprint after holding off Ferrari's Carlos Sainz.

"Every big result always feels like it is a needed one. It's a happy feeling, a powerful feeling....nice to keep a few people quiet," said Ricciardo.

Magnussen accepted his penalties were "well deserved" and Hamilton said he had enjoyed the duel. "I think that is pretty honest of him and I think that is pretty cool," he said.

"We had a good race. It was a little bit on the edge in some places, but that's what I love. I love racing hard and, for me, I wasn't really frustrated or anything," added

the British driver. Leclerc has had some disappointments of late in qualifying and felt he had gone some way to answering his critics.

"I'm happy because there is so much talk now and you are as good as your last race in this sport and you have two races in a row when you are bad in qualifying - and I haven't done a great job - people start to talk," said the Ferrari driver.

"But now we have to work on the consistency and try to stay at that level."

ATHLETICS

# Olympic champion Jacobs getting stronger in Florida's 'quiet life'

AFP  
Nassau, Bahamas

Marcell Jacobs took the radical decision to dump his coach, up sticks and move from Italy to the United States in his bid to arrive in Paris this summer ready to defend his Olympic 100m title.

That split from Paolo Camossi saw the 29-year-old Italian team up with Rana Reider, whose Florida training group also includes American Trayvon Bromell, Olympic 200m champion Andre De Grasse and Japanese sprinter Abdul Hakim Sani Brown.

"There's been a lot of change from last year," Jacobs said with no little understatement ahead of competing in this weekend's World Athletics Relays in Nassau. Jacobs, born in the US to an Italian mother and American father but raised by the former since infancy in Italy, stunned the athletics world with two golds in the Covid-delayed Tokyo Olympics. He went on to be crowned world 60m world champion and 100m European champion in 2022. However he then struggled with a series of muscular problems and flopped at last year's worlds in Budapest where he was eliminated in the semi-finals. "There was a lot of injury so I decided to change

everything," he said. "This year is Olympic year and I'm Olympic champion so I tried to do all to come back stronger than before."

Jacobs insisted, however, that heading to Paris as the defending title holder was not a bad thing. "No, I don't think it's pressure, it's a lot of motivation to arrive there and win again," he said. "I know it's not easy, I'll do my best to arrive there to win the gold medal again in the 100m and the 4x100m for sure."

"The first month was a little bit difficult because during my training in Italy, I would have an hour or an hour-and-a-half to warm-up, now after 30 minutes you have to go, go, go, go."

"There's a lot of difference. But I guess I like it. I see a lot of difference in my body."

Life in the United States was "very quiet", Jacobs added.

"I'm there with my family. I do training, home, home, training, nothing else. I'm really happy, the work is really good."

Jacobs enjoyed an opening run-out in his home town of Jacksonville last weekend, coming in second over 100m to Bromell, the two-time world bronze medalist. "That was just training. Now I'm here with my team, we are world relays champion, Olympic champions. We are really focused on these races (this weekend) and then I'll start my season."

## GETTING READY



Pakistan's Mohamed Amir takes part in a practice session at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday, ahead of Pakistan's Twenty20 series in Ireland and England later this month. (AFP)

CRICKET

# Du Plessis, Kohli help Bengaluru stay in IPL play-off race



AFP  
Bengaluru

Skipper Faf du Plessis and Virat Kohli helped Royal Challengers Bengaluru hammer Gujarat Titans by four wickets for their third successive IPL win yesterday.

Chasing a modest 148 for victory, Du Plessis, who hit 64, and Kohli, who made 42, laid the foundations with a stand of 92 in 35 balls as the target was achieved with 6.2 overs to spare at Bengaluru's M. Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Du Plessis' departure triggered a collapse as Gujarat hit back with wickets from Josh-

ua Little and Noor Ahmad to have the opposition in trouble at 117-6 when Kohli was dismissed. Wicketkeeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik, who hit 21, and Swapnil Singh, who made 15, made sure there was no more drama as they steered the team home in an unbeaten stand of 35.

"It was important we didn't look at the scoreboard when we went out to bat and try and play the way we play," said Du Plessis.

"It was a bit nerve-wracking, another wicket, another wicket. Probably not the best but you're trying to be positive, get your net run-rate up."

Bowlers set up victory after pace spearhead Mohamed Siraj removed the openers including skipper Shubman Gill early and Gujarat lost regular wickets to be bowled out for 147 in 19.3 overs. Siraj returned figures of 2-29 to be named man of the match but the pace bowler said he nearly missed the game after being "sick since last night".

It was Bengaluru's fourth win and third on the bounce in 11 matches as they jumped from the bottom of the table to seventh and keep their slim play-off hopes alive.

Gujarat's hopes are also hanging by a thread as they slumped to their seventh loss in 11 matches. "Very important to start from zero in our next match and move on from this game," Gill said. "Learn from mistakes and not repeat them. All about winning from here on."

Kohli, who reclaimed the top batting spot with 542 runs, came out roaring as he hit Mohit Sharma for two sixes in the opening over of the chase and Du Plessis soon joined in and moved ahead to raise his fifty in 18 balls.

The South African veteran smashed 10 fours and three sixes in his 23-ball blitz before being dismissed by Ireland left-arm quick Little. Little took two more wickets

including Glenn Maxwell for four as Bengaluru slipped to 107-4.

Little sent back Cameron Green and then Noor's left-arm wrist spin silenced the home crowd when he had Kohli caught behind, but the hosts had the last laugh when Singh hit the winning six. Earlier put into bat, Gujarat went three down for 19 inside six over before big-hitter Shahruck Khan, who top-scored with 37, stood strong in a 61-run stand with David Miller, who hit 30 off 20 balls.

Left-handed Rahul Tewatia hit a 21-ball 35 and put on another key stand with Rashid Khan to add respect to the total.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
Gujarat Titans 147 (Shahruck 37, Tewatia 35, Dayal 2-21, Vyshak 2-23) **lost to Royal Challengers Bengaluru 152 for 6** (Du Plessis 64, Kohli 42, Little 4-45) **by four wickets.**

## LA LIGA

# Real Madrid clinch title after Girona beat Barcelona 4-2

'We've had a spectacular Liga campaign. We've made few errors'

AFP  
Madrid

**R**eal Madrid earned what coach Carlo Ancelotti said was a "deserved" La Liga title yesterday after beating Cadiz 3-0 and Girona sealed it with a stunning 4-2 victory over Barcelona.

Ancelotti's side did their homework by beating Cadiz and after last season's champions stumbled against Girona, Los Blancos were crowned champions for a record-extending 36th time.

Girona's dramatic victory saw the Catalan minnows qualify for the Champions League for the first time in their history, in only their fourth season in Spain's top flight.

Ancelotti rotated heavily ahead of the Champions League semi-final second leg clash with Bayern, but his players still got the job done. Brahim Diaz netted in the 51st minute to put Madrid ahead and then set up Jude Bellingham, with Joselu tapping home a third.

"We've had a spectacular Liga campaign," Ancelotti told reporters. "We've made few errors and the advantage is deserved."

Madrid's comfortable win over Cadiz sent them 14 points clear of last season's champions Barcelona, in third, with only 12 left to play for.

Girona, second after their second 4-2 win over Barcelona this season, trail Madrid by 13 points.

"We leave our skins out there on the pitch to live moments like today's," Madrid striker Joselu told Real Madrid TV.

"There are young players who are very hungry for titles, veterans who are delighted to be here...and these are special moments."

With the Bayern second leg in mind, Ancelotti only selected captain Nacho Fernandez from the starting line-up that earned a 2-2 draw in Bavaria this week.

Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois started for the first time



Real Madrid's midfielder Jude Bellingham (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the La Liga match against Cadiz CF at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

after a nine-month lay off after a knee injury and kept a clean sheet.

Madrid midfielder Luka Modric became the oldest player to appear for the club in La Liga, at 38 years and 238 days, breaking late Hungarian great Ferenc Puskas' record from 1965 by five days.

The visitors, 18th and still battling to stay up, shaded the first half but Madrid's goals came in the second. Courtois made a superb save to deny Chris Ramos early in the second half and Madrid took the lead immediately afterwards.

Diaz received from the ever-green Modric on the edge of the area, turned slickly and curled an effort into the top corner.

Bellingham, on as a substitute for Turkish teenager Arda Guler, added the second soon after entering the fray at the end of a fine

team move. It was the England international's 18th league goal of the season, keeping him in contention to finish as the top scorer.

Madrid put the cherry on their cake after a superb run by Nacho.

Poised to depart at the end of the season, the Spaniard was hailed by the Bernabeu after setting up Joselu for a simple finish in stoppage time.

Los Blancos were able to celebrate after Girona came from behind twice to defeat Barcelona in a wild clash.

The Catalans took the lead through Andreas Christensen after three minutes but La Liga's top scorer Artem Dovbyk levelled with his 20th goal of the campaign just a minute later.

Robert Lewandowski sent Barcelona ahead with a penalty after

Lamine Yamal was felled, but substitute Portu made a huge impact in the second half for Girona.

Michel Sanchez's side netted two goals in two minutes to turn the game on its head. Portu netted the equaliser moments after coming on and then set up Miguel Gutierrez to put Girona ahead.

Portu sensationally volleyed home the fourth to ignite Girona's tiny Montilivi stadium and get the party started.

Girona played Champions League music over the stadium sound system to give their fans a taste of things to come.

"It's a shame, we sink with any negative situation," said Barcelona coach Xavi after Barcelona lost their crown.

"Like this it's impossible to compete."

## FOOTBALL

## Reus begins farewell tour while Bayern stumble in Stuttgart

AFP  
Berlin

**M**arco Reus scored what could be his last ever goal for Borussia Dortmund in a 5-1 win over Augsburg yesterday, while Bayern Munich stumbled to a 3-1 defeat away to Stuttgart ahead of their Champions League clash with Real Madrid.

Late goals from South Korea's Jeong Woo-yeong and the DRC's Silas Katompa Mvumpa saw Bayern suffer their first defeat in Stuttgart since 2007.

"It is what it is. This game was sandwiched between the two Real Madrid games and we're not going to waste a second thinking about it now. It's annoying, but nothing more than that," Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel told Sky after the final whistle. Stuttgart took the lead with a smash-and-grab goal just before the half-hour mark, Leonidas Stergiou prodding home after a dainty chip over the back line from Deniz Undav. Bayern then equalised in controversial circumstances, after Waldemar Anton brushed Serge Gnabry with his hand in the box, conceding what even Tuchel described as "a soft penalty".

Harry Kane converted the spotkick, taking his season tally to 36 goals, moving to within just four of Robert Lewandowski's Bundesliga record. But an 83rd minute header from Jeong put Stuttgart back in front before Silas sealed the win in stoppage time. "We had chances to go ahead today and we will need to take our chances better against Real Madrid," said Gnabry.

While Bayern head to Madrid with their tails between their legs, fellow Champions League semi-finalists Dortmund were in fine form ahead of their trip to Paris Saint-Germain on Tuesday. Ovarions for was a particularly emotional afternoon for Reus, who had announced on Friday that after 12 years at Dortmund he would leave at the end of the season.

Yousoufa Moukoko gave Dortmund the lead early on, flicking the ball in from close range after some chaotic defending from Augsburg. Donyell Malen doubled the lead on 20 minutes, heading home an in-swinging corner from English winger Jamie Bynoe-Gittens. Moukoko added another from



a corner shortly afterwards, before Ruben Vargas pulled one back for Augsburg against the run of play.

Dortmund remained unfazed, however, and Reus soon made it 4-1 with an elegant chip over goalkeeper Alexander Meyer.

Reus then set up Felix Nmecha for Dortmund's fifth in the second half, and hit the bar himself before leaving the pitch to standing ovations on 65 minutes. The veteran striker was later serenaded by Dortmund's Yellow Wall, but insisted he was focused on Tuesday's game in Paris.

"I can't describe what it feels like for these people to be singing your name like that. Hopefully we'll see each other again on June 1st at Wembley and have something even bigger to celebrate," Reus told Sky.

Elsewhere, Wolfsburg moved closer to safety with a 3-0 home win over Darmstadt while Werder Bremen were held 2-2 at home to Borussia Moenchengladbach. Two goals from Nick Woltemade saw Bremen come from behind after Robin Hack's early opener for Gladbach, but the visitors snatched a point when Florian Neuhaus smashed a late penalty into the top corner.

Two early goals from Patrick Wimmer and Jonas Wind and a late strike from Vaclav Cerny saw Wolfsburg cruise past already relegated Darmstadt.

Ralph Hasenhuettl's side are now nine points clear of the relegation play-off place, having played one more game than fellow strugglers Mainz.

Victory for Mainz against Heidenheim would now also be disastrous for second-from-bottom Cologne, who were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Freiburg in Saturday's late game.

Despite a spirited performance and several second-half chances, Timo Schultz's side failed to claim a much-needed win, and remain four points adrift of Mainz and the relegation play-off place with two goals to go.

## TENNIS

## Swiatek saves three match points to clinch Madrid Open title

AFP  
Madrid

**T**op-ranked Iga Swiatek avenged her loss to Aryna Sabalenka in last year's Madrid final by defeating the world number two to clinch her first title in the Spanish capital after a gruelling three-hour 11-minute battle yesterday.

Coming back from 1-3 down in the decider and saving three match points in total, Swiatek claimed a 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) victory to secure the trophy.

She has now won each of the WTA 1000 and 500 tournaments held on European clay at least once, to go with three French Open titles on the surface at Roland Garros. Swiatek has won her last eight consecutive finals and now joins Elena Rybakina with 30 victories this season.

In warmer temperatures but breezier than usual conditions at the Caja Magica, the pair traded breaks to kick off the final and were neck and neck until Swiatek drew a forehand error from Sabalenka to break for 6-5 and closed out the 61-minute opening set on her first opportunity.

Despite squandering a 2-0 lead early in the second, Sabalen-



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates with the trophy after winning the Madrid Open final against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka yesterday. (Reuters)

ka manifested a set point on Swiatek's serve in game 10, forcing a decider with a lightning-fast down-the-line forehand winner.

It was the fifth time in six matches this fortnight that Sabalenka found herself embroiled in a three-set duel and she was clearly ready to go the distance.

The defending champion broke for 3-1 in the decider, peppering Swiatek with deep, powerful shots, but her lead was short-lived. Swiatek saved a pair of

match points on her own serve at 5-6 as the high-quality affair fittingly went to a deciding tiebreak.

Sabalenka produced an ace to save match point at 5-6 in the breaker and saw one of her own slip away as Swiatek survived for 7-7.

Moments later, the Polish world number one flung herself to the ground in disbelief as she sealed a heroic victory on a long backhand from two-time champion Sabalenka.

## BEN YEDDER SCORES TWICE AS MONACO CLOSE IN ON CHAMPIONS LEAGUE RETURN

Wissam Ben Yedder scored twice as Monaco beat Ligue 1 basement club Clermont 4-1 yesterday to close in on a return to the Champions League.

The Principality side lost 3-2 to Lyon last weekend but ensured maximum points in their Louis II Stadium to consolidate second place with two games left this season.

Paris Saint-Germain have already been crowned champions and have the week off domestic duty. But in a four-way fight to qualify for next season's Champions League, Monaco have 61 points, six points ahead of fourth-placed Lille, who occupy the berth for

the Champions League qualifying round.

Lille welcome in-form Lyon to the Stade Pierre-Mauroy tomorrow. As Monaco took a giant step towards playing in the Champions League for the first time since the 2018-2019 season, Clermont are virtually doomed for a return to Ligue 2.

Takumi Minamoto got the hosts off the mark after a poor Maximiliano Caufriez clearance allowed the Japanese international to curl his eighth goal of the season into the top corner after quarter of an hour. Pascal Gastien's Clermont fought back with Mohamed Cham

pulling the visitors level after 34 minutes.

But just three minutes later Ben Yedder set up Breel Embolo for his first goal of the season on the Swiss player's first start this campaign after a serious knee injury.

The Monaco captain slotted in his team's third goal on 57 minutes, adding his second of the night with three minutes to go for his 117th club goal in all competitions. Meanwhile third-placed Brest, five points behind Monaco, will look to keep their Champions League push on track against Nantes, in 15th.

## FOCUS

## Sinner withdraws from Rome Masters

Reuters  
Rome

**J**annik Sinner has been forced to withdraw from the Masters 1000 event in Rome next week due to a hip injury he suffered at the Madrid Open, the world number two said yesterday, hampering his preparations for the French Open.

Sinner pulled out before his quarter-final against Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime in Madrid and the 22-year-old Italian said he was heartbroken to take the decision to skip his home tournament which runs from May 8-19.

"It is not easy to write this message but after talking again with doctors and specialists about my hip problems I have to announce that I will unfortunately not be able to play in Rome," Sinner wrote on social media platform X.

"Of course, I am very sad that I will not be able to recover, as it is one of my favourite tournaments ever. I was looking forward to coming back and playing at home in front of the Italian public."

Sinner is the second major loss for the tournament in Rome after Spain's world number three and claycourt specialist Carlos Alcaraz withdrew as he



recovers from an arm injury. Sinner was in fine form in the first few months of the season, winning his first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open before clinching trophies in Rotterdam and at the Miami Masters.

He began the claycourt swing with a semi-final run at the Monte Carlo Masters before his withdrawal in Madrid. The French Open begins on May 26.

## Wilson reaches second World Snooker Championship final

England's Kyren Wilson cruised into his second World Snooker Championship final with a 17-11 victory against David Gilbert at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre yesterday. Wilson, seeded 12th, took three of the four frames in the third session to wrap up a semi-final success that earned him another shot at the world title after his defeat in the 2020 final against Ronnie O'Sullivan.

Winning five frames in succession in their second ses-

sion on Friday had done the damage as Wilson turned a clash that was finely poised at 9-9 into a four-frame advantage he never looked likely to squander. English qualifier Gilbert did reduce the deficit to 14-11 with a break of 70 in the opening frame of the day, but after coming off worse in a lengthy safety battle in the next, his fate was effectively sealed. Wilson punched the air and blew a kiss to his family in the stand after potting the decisive blue.

SPOTLIGHT

# Cherif, Jumaa bag overall titles as Hathab concludes

Al-Marri and NK Cafe also bag showjumping top honours; dressage titles for al-Semaitt and al-Jalandani

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Cyrine Cherif clinched the Big Tour overall title, while Saeed Hamad Jumaa won the Medium Tour as the 7th season of the Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab concluded with 14th yesterday at the indoor arena of Al Shaqab.

The final leg of the annual domestic equestrian series was held over three days and saw exciting competition in all classes. The prestigious Hathab is jointly conducted by the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF) and Al Shaqab from October to May.

Bader Mohamed al-Darwish, President of QEF, Ahmed Salem al-Ali, Director of Programs at the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund, and Ahmed al-Hammadi, Director of the Commercial Department at Al Shaqab, crowned the overall champions of various classes.

The Big Tour title was bagged by Cherif, after she topped the overall standings with 255 points, ahead of Mohamed Khalifa al-Baker, who finished a close second with 249 points, while Khaled Mohamed al-Emadi was third with a tally of 231 points.

The Medium Tour top honours were bagged by Jumaa, who excelled in the individual class garnering a total of 250 points, while the NK Cafe team claimed the Medium Tour team competition with 255 points.

The Small Tour saw Mohamed Dhafi al-Marri ride his way to the top prize collecting a total of 251 points. In the Amateur category, rider Hadi Nasser al-Shahwani topped the rankings achieving 251 points.

In the Future Riders' category (Level 1), Mohamed Abdullah al-Marri stood on top with 261 points, while Khaled Jassim al-Suwaidi topped the second level with 246 points.

The Dressage best honours went to Maryam Ahmed al-Semaitt, who topped Level 1 rankings with 204 points.

The Level 2 dressage overall title was claimed by Abdullah Khaled al-Jalandani



Overall winners of the 7th season of Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab pose with Qatar Equestrian Federation President Bader Mohamed al-Darwish, Director of Programs at the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund Ahmed Salem al-Ali and Director of the Commercial Department at Al Shaqab Ahmed al-Hammadi after the conclusion of the final round at the indoor arena of Al Shaqab yesterday.

with a tally of 172 points.

Commenting on the Season 7 of Hathab, Sheikh Ahmed bin Nouh al-Thani, Chairman of the Organising Committee and Secretary-General of QEF, said the season was exceptional, especially since the results of the riders reflected positively with their participation in the various international tournaments in which they represented Qatar, stressing that the Qatar Equestrian Tour is one of the strongest equestrian tournaments in the region.

He added: "Every year we witness development in the championship in terms of technical and organisational aspects, in addition to the number of riders participating in the various categories of the championship, which confirms that Hathab represents an exceptional opportunity for riders to develop and develop their skills."

The final and concluding day of the 14th and final leg of Hathab saw Fares Saad al-Qahtani (riding mare Hidiene) win the Open Class with a time of 27.05 seconds, while Khaled Mohamed al-Amadi, astride mare Mira V/D Roshoeve, finished second in 27.51 seconds. Hamad Towaim al-Marri on gelding Baron ZH was third clocking 27.82 seconds.

The winners were crowned by Ali bin Youssef al-Rumaihi, Vice-Chairman of the Supreme Organising Committee of the Championship, and Faisal al-Kahla, Director of the Championship.

The Big Tour final round was won by Khaled Abdulaziz al-Eid (riding bay stud Q Hayen), who claimed the top two podium places achieving times of 84.13 seconds and 87.89 seconds respectively. Ghanem Nasser al-Qadi astride stud Morocco, came third with a time of 81.56 seconds.



Cyrine Cherif in action during the final round of the Hathab yesterday.

PREMIER LEAGUE

## Haaland hits four as Man City keep title pressure on leaders Arsenal

AFP  
London

Erling Haaland scored four times as Manchester City thrashed Wolves 5-1 to move within one point of Arsenal after the Premier League leaders beat Bournemouth 3-0 yesterday. City responded to Arsenal's victory just hours earlier with a goal blitz at the Etihad Stadium.

Pep Guardiola's side took the lead in the 12th minute when Rayan Ait-Nouri clattered into Josko Gvardiol, conceding a penalty that Haaland stroked past Jose Sa. Haaland bagged City's second in the 35th minute as he rose highest at the far post to meet Rodri's cross with a majestic header that looped over Sa.

Deep into first half stoppage-time, Nelson Semedo tripped Haaland to give City another penalty that was drilled home by the Norway striker. Hwang Hee-chan got one back for Wolves in the 53rd minute after a mistake by City keeper Ederson.

But Haaland, who was visibly unhappy to be substituted in the closing stages, made it 3-0 goals in all competitions this term less as he curled a fine finish into the far corner in the 54th minute. Julian Alvarez's 85th minute finish capped City's sixth consecutive league win, extending their unbeaten run in the competition to 20 games.

The reigning champions, who have a game in hand on Arsenal, will clinch an unprecedented fourth successive English title if they win their last three matches. They head to Fulham next Saturday before visiting Tottenham on May 14 and hosting West Ham five days later.

"It's three games, hopefully we win the first and the second and arrive to the third with our destiny in our own hands," Guardiola said.

Asked about Haaland's reaction to his substitution, Guardiola added: "He was frustrated with the referee. With the long balls sometimes they push him and he is pulled. "But Erling is back to business. Penalties are a guarantee but the second and fourth goals were unbelievable."

At the Emirates Stadium, Arsenal cruised to a fourth successive victory, with Bukayo Saka's penalty putting them ahead on the stroke of half-time. Leandro Trossard slotted past Bournemouth keeper Mark Travers in the 70th minute before Declan Rice capped a dominant display by blasting home in stoppage-time.

Chasing their first title since 2004, Arsenal's 26th Premier League victory this season equalled the club's top-flight record for a single campaign. "It was probably the best first half we've played all season," Gunners boss Mikel Arteta said. "We were unbelievable. Everything flowing, super composed on the



Manchester City's Erling Haaland shoots during the Premier League match against Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester yesterday. (Reuters)

ball. We generated so many chances, we could have gone three, four, five up easily."

Arsenal travel to Manchester United in their penultimate game next weekend before hosting Everton on May 19.

Burnley's hopes of avoiding relegation suffered a huge blow as Newcastle ran riot in a 4-1 win at Turf Moor. Vincent Kompany's second bottom side are five points from safety, with only two games left to avoid an immediate return to the Championship after last season's promotion.

Callum Wilson put Newcastle ahead with a 19th minute tap-in and Sean Longstaff doubled their advantage in the 35th minute. Bruno Guimaraes made it three in the 40th minute with a powerful strike before Arijanet Muric saved Alexander Isak's 50th minute penalty. Isak made amends five minutes later when he grabbed his 20th league goal this season, making Dara O'Shea's 86th minute header no consolation for bedraggled Burnley.

At Bramall Lane, fourth bottom Nottingham Forest took a giant step towards survival with a 3-1 win against already-relegated Sheffield United. Gonzalo Montiel brought down Ben Brereton Diaz and the Blades forward picked himself up to lash in the 17th minute penalty.

But Callum Hudson-Odoi grabbed Forest's equaliser in the 27th minute with a superb

strike that curled into the far corner. Ryan Yates slammed in Forest's second from close-range after 51 minutes and Hudson-Odoi curled home in the 65th minute. That gave the Blades an unwanted record as the first club to concede 100 goals in a 38-match Premier League season.

Forest, awaiting the result of their appeal against a four-point deduction for financial breaches, are three points ahead of third bottom Luton, who drew 1-1 with Everton on Friday. West London rivals Brentford and Fulham shared a four 0-0 draw.

RESULTS

Arsenal 3 (Saka 45-pen, Trossard 70, Rice 90+7) Bournemouth 0; Brentford 0 Fulham 0; Burnley 1 (O'Shea 86) Newcastle 4 (Wilson 19, Longstaff 35, Guimaraes 40, Isak 55); Manchester City 5 (Haaland 12-pen, 35, 45+3-pen, 54, Alvarez 85) Wolves 1 (Hwang 53); Sheffield United 1 (Brereton Diaz 17-pen) Nottingham Forest 3 (Hudson-Odoi 27, 65, Yates 51)

**Playing today (1300 GMT unless stated):** Brighton v Aston Villa, Chelsea v West Ham, Liverpool v Tottenham (1530)

**Playing tomorrow (1900):** Crystal Palace v Manchester United  
**Played Friday:** Luton 1 (Adebayo 31) Everton 1 (Calvert-Lewin 24-pen)

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

## Cherif and Ahmed inch closer to Paris Olympics qualification

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan's push to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics received a significant boost on Friday, when the Qataris topped their pool in the Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour Brasilia Elite16 and advanced to the quarter-finals of the tournament.

The Tokyo Olympic bronze medalists, who are playing just their second tournament in the year, are currently just the second team sitting above the qualification line with 7,200 points, but are now set to add at least another 760 with their quarter-final appearance in Brazil - they could even find their way into the FIVB Olympic rankings top ten in they continue winning over the weekend.

After starting their Pool A campaign with a two-set win over Chileans Noe Aravena and Vicente Netherlands' Alexander Brouwer/Robert Meeuwse vs. England's Javier Bello/Joaquin Bello.

Parque da Cidade on Friday to get another two victories.

They first upset top-seeded Dutch Stefan Boermans and Yorick de Groot in the tie-breaker (21-17, 21-23, 15-13) and then completed their perfect pool play campaign with a 2-0 (21-19, 21-14) victory over Americans Chase Budinger and Miles Evans.

The three other teams to top their pools in Brasilia, Germany's Nils Ehlers/Clemens Wickler, the Netherlands' Steven van de Velde/Matthew Immers and Brazil's Evandro Goncalves/Arthur Lanci, are also guaranteed in the quarter-finals of the tournament.

Their opponents will come from the Round of 12 duels, which will have Chile's Marco Grimalt/Esteban Grimalt vs. Brazil's Andre Loyola/George Wanderley, USA's Andy Benesh/Miles Partain vs. Boermans/De Groot, Poland's Michal Bryl/Bartosz Łosiak vs. Budinger/Evans and the Netherlands' Alexander Brouwer/Robert Meeuwse vs. England's Javier Bello/Joaquin Bello.



Cherif Younousse (right) and Ahmed Tijan topped their pool in the Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour Elite16 in Brasilia and advanced directly to the quarter-finals of the tournament.