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# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Gambhir backs  
struggling Rahul,  
New Zealand brace  
for trial by spin

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## Faisal scores brace in Qatar U-17's win over Mongolia

Qatar were made to work hard before securing a 2-0 win against Mongolia in their AFC U-17 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers Group F match at the Aspire in Doha yesterday. Zaid Faisal made a captain's contribution, scoring a brace to give Qatar a winning start to their campaign. The forward opened the scoring in the 18th minute but any perception of the floodgates opening were quickly diminished as Mongolia put on a resilient display. It took Qatar until six minutes from the end before they were able to add another through Faisal to confirm the three points. In another match yesterday, Japan thrashed Nepal 9-2. Next up for Qatar will be Nepal tomorrow with Mongolia facing Japan.



UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Raphinha nets hat-trick as Barca thrash Bayern 4-1

Haaland acrobatics light up Man City rout of Sparta Prague

Agencies  
Barcelona

Barcelona captain Raphinha scored a hat-trick to lead them to a commanding 4-1 home victory over Bayern Munich in the Champions League yesterday, ending a near decade-long winless run against the German powerhouses.

Raphinha's inspired night started when he gave Barca the lead a little over a minute after kick-off as he received a fine pass through by midfielder Fermin Lopez, beat the offside trap before rounding the onrushing Manuel Neuer and tapping into the empty net.

Harry Kane levelled the score with a volley in the 18th minute but Robert Lewandowski put the home side back in front in the 36th minute after a mistake by Bayern's defence and Raphinha extended Barca's lead with two goals from quick counter-attacks either side of halftime. Barca are ninth in the Champions League standings on six points from three games while Bayern are 23rd on three points after a second consecutive defeat.

### HAALAND BRACE

Erling Haaland's spectacular acrobatic effort lit up Manchester City's 5-0 win over Sparta Prague to move into third place in the Champions League table.

The Norwegian scored twice, including a backheel at shoulder height, as City ran riot against the Czech champions. Phil Foden, John Stones and Matheus Nunes were also on target for Pep Guardiola's men, who remain unbeaten in all competitions this season.

Sparta had taken four points from their opening two Champions League games against Salzburg and Stuttgart, but City were a step up in class too far for the visitors.

Foden's struggle for form and fitness has compounded City's injury problems with Rodri and Kevin De Bruyne sidelined.

But there were encouraging signs for Guardiola as, restored to the starting line-up, the England international drilled home the opening goal after just three minutes.

Haaland had nine efforts on goal in total but was frustrated in the first half as Sparta refused to let the floodgates open before the break. Peter Vindahl produced a stunning save low to his right to parry a powerful downward header from Haaland on 10 minutes.

Vindahl also denied Foden, while Haaland had another towering header hacked off the line.

For all the home side's dominance, Sparta would have levelled midway through the first half but for a brilliant save from Ederson to turn behind Veljko Birmancevic's strike on the counter-attack from a City corner.

Haaland did finally deliver City's second



Barcelona's Raphinha celebrates scoring a goal during the UEFA Champions League match against Bayern Munich at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

with an effort reminiscent of his strike against old club Borussia Dortmund two years ago that won Champions League goal of the season.

Savinho's chipped cross was slightly behind the 24-year-old, who contorted his body to strike the ball martial arts style and fire it past Vindahl. Stones nodded in a vital stoppage time winner against Wolves in the Premier League on Sunday and continued his hot streak in front of goal with a looping header from Nunes' cross.

Haaland then completed a three-goal blitz in 11 minutes at the end of a scintillating City counter-attack.

Slick passes from Rico Lewis, Foden and Nunes teed up Haaland to slot home his 44th Champions League goal in just 42 appearances in the competition.

Guardiola could afford the luxury of replacing his star number nine, along with Ilkay Gundogan and Bernardo Silva in the closing stages with City in the midst of a run of seven games in 21 days.

Nunes completed the rout from the penalty spot after he had been felled inside the area.

Victory takes City onto seven points from their opening three Champions League games, behind only Premier League rivals Liverpool and Aston Villa.

### NUNEZ EARNS LIVERPOOL NARROW WIN AT LEIPZIG

Liverpool's Darwin Nunez took full advantage of a rare start with the winner in his side's 1-0 victory at RB Leipzig as their 100% start in the Champions League continued yesterday.

With Diogo Jota ruled out because of injury, Uruguayan Nunez got his chance and delivered in the 27th minute by poking home Mohamed Salah's header. It proved enough to secure Liverpool's sixth away win out of six in all competitions this season and maintain an excellent start to new manager Arne Slot's reign.

Liverpool are second in the 36-team league phase with nine points, behind only Aston Villa on goal difference. Leipzig twice had goals disallowed and wasted several other promising moments as their wait for a first point goes on.

### RESULTS:

Atalanta 0 Celtic 0  
Brest 1 Bayer Leverkusen 1  
Atletico Madrid 1 Lille 3  
Barcelona 4 Bayern Munich 1  
Benfica 1 Feyenoord 3  
Manchester City 5 Sparta Prague 0  
RB Leipzig 0 Liverpool 1  
RB Salzburg 0 Dinamo Zagreb 2  
Young Boys 0 Inter Milan 1

GULF CLUB CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## Verratti salvages Arabi a point against Kuwait's Qadsia

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Arabi were held to a 1-1 draw by Al Qadsia of Kuwait in the opening match of the Gulf Club Champions League at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday.

Marco Verratti got Al Arabi the equaliser in the 71st minute after Igor Rossi had put the Kuwaiti side ahead in the 56th minute. The Dream Team began their campaign in the regional tournament in an attacking mode, with most of the pressing coming from them in the early minutes of the match.

But the tides appeared to be turning gradually in Al Qadsia's favour as the match wore on, with their central midfielder Daniel Ajibola, a Nigerian international in particular, proving to be dangerous with his often effortless incursion into Al Arabi's box, which caused some headaches for the Qatari side's defence.

Rodri Sanchez missed a golden chance of putting Al Arabi in front in the 25th minutes after his left-footed effort, following his brilliant move inside Al Qadsia's final third, went a bit wide off the mark.

Al Arabi appeared to regain the upper hand from thereon as they launched waves of relentless attacks on the Kuwaiti side's defence but for all their efforts, the match was stalemated going into the break.

The hosts began the second half from where they stopped, with

Sanchez again missing a sitter in the 51st minute after being perfectly set up by Ahmed Alaaeldin to the disappointment of the vociferous Al Arabi supporters.

Five minutes later, Al Qadsia got the opening goal through Rossi in the 57th minute after a brilliant pass by Alaaeldin. The goal was, however, contested by the Kuwaitis, as they claimed the ball was out of touchline before it was passed to Alaaeldin. But after a lengthy VAR check, the goal was allowed to stand.

Despite Al Arabi's attempt at getting the win, especially in added time, Al Qadsia's defence ensured that the spoils were evenly shared, with the game ending in a 1-1 draw.

Al Arabi coach Anthony Hudson later said, "I am satisfied with the performance of the team against Al Qadsia though we could have achieved a better result than a draw."

Al Qadsia coach Zeljko Petrovic said: "I believe the draw in today's match was fair. We faced a strong opponent, and the outcome of the game was realistic. The second group in the tournament is excellent. We will have tough matches ahead, but I believe the experience gained from these tournaments is what truly matters."



Al Arabi's Marco Verratti (right) and Al Qadsia's Daniel Ajibola vie for the ball during their Gulf Club Champions League match at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

PREVIEW

# Gambhir backs Rahul as NZ brace for trial by spin

'I think he is batting very well and had a decent knock in Kanpur'

Reuters  
Pune

India head coach Gautam Gambhir backed KL Rahul to regain his batting form, while New Zealand prepared for a trial by spin in the second test between the sides beginning today.

India's proud record of not losing a single Test series on home soil since 2012 is on the line after New Zealand beat them by eight wickets in the series opener in Bengaluru.

The hosts were bundled out for 46 in the first innings and a vastly improved 462 in the second was not enough to prevent New Zealand from going 1-0 up in the three-test series.

Rahul, who was trolled on social media after his scores of zero and 12 in Bengaluru, appears to have slipped behind Sarfaraz Khan in India's batting pecking order.

Sarfaraz smashed a rapid 150 in the second innings to justify his selection after Shubman Gill missed the match with a stiff neck.

Gambhir confirmed a fit-again Gill would resume his place but also backed Rahul, who smashed a half century against Bangladesh in Kanpur last month, to come good.

"Social media does not matter one bit," former India opener Gambhir told reporters yesterday.



India's Virat Kohli, Yashasvi Jaiswal (second from right), KL Rahul (right) and Dhruv Jurel (left) attend a practice session on the eve of the second Test against New Zealand at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune. (AFP)

"What the team management and leadership group thinks is very important.

"I think he is batting very well and had a decent knock in Kanpur on a difficult wicket.

"I am sure he also wants to score big runs and he has the capability of scoring runs. That's why he has been backed by the team..."

Given the presence of several left-handed batters in the New Zealand lineup, India are also considering playing off-spinner

Washington Sundar, the coach added.

Gambhir said finalising India's playing XI, which would be revealed at today's toss, was a "challenge" as well as indicative of the depth in the side.

He also praised India's fearless batting in the second innings despite the first-innings collapse.

New Zealand, meanwhile, expect an under-pressure India to revert to their traditional strength and roll out a turning track in Pune.

"We had a brief look at (the pitch) yesterday," said New Zealand all-rounder Rachin Ravindra.

"It definitely looked very dry, very spin-friendly.

"It's something we thought they'd do after that test. Honestly, we've just got to adapt to what's in front of us.

"For us, it's about adapting to what's in front of us, making that early read and hopefully we can make those changes if need be," Ravindra said.

WORLD CUP QUALIFIER

## Zimbabwe set T20I records in massive win

Reuters  
Harare

Sikandar Raza smashed an unbeaten 133 in 43 balls as Zimbabwe set a record innings score of 344 for four in their T20 World Cup sub regional Africa qualifier against Gambia yesterday, and went on to claim the largest win in the format.

Raza launched 15 sixes in Nairobi to score his maiden T20 International century and take Zimbabwe to a new highest total in 20 overs, beating the previous best mark of 314 for three by Nepal against Mongolia last year.

They bowled The Gambia out for 54 in 14.4 overs, earning victory by 290 runs, again eclipsing the previous record winning margin of 273 by Nepal against Mongolia.

Zimbabwe's 27 sixes in the innings is also a record, edging Nepal by one.

Raza reached his century in 33 deliveries and is the first player from Zimbabwe to make a ton in an international match in the format. Openers Brian Bennett (50) and



Tadiwanashe Marumani (62) put on 98 for the first wicket from 34 balls, before Raza and Clive Madande (53 not out) smashed an unbeaten 141 in 40 deliveries for the fifth wicket. No bowler was spared, but seamer Musa Jobarteh conceded 93 from his four overs, an unwanted T20 record.

Earlier yesterday, Canterbury opener Chad Bowes broke the record for the fastest double century in men's List A matches, reaching his double ton in 103 balls against Otago.

### New five-team T20 league starts in Guyana on November 26

Guyana: Franchises from cricket's five leading nations will be fighting it out for a \$1m prize money when a new T20 league kicks off in Guyana next month in further proof of the format's growing popularity.

Three-times Vitality Blast champions Hampshire Hawks are among the five teams competing in the Global Super League (GSL) to be played between Nov. 26 and Dec. 6, organisers said yesterday.

All the matches will be played at the Guyana National Stadium in Providence. Caribbean Premier League side Guyana Amazon Warriors, Rangpur Riders of Bangladesh,

Victoria in Australia, and Pakistan Super League team Lahore Qalandars are the other sides in the tournament.

"We are looking forward to welcoming the teams to our beautiful country where we are sure the action on the field will be fantastic," GSL chairman and former West Indies captain Clive Lloyd said in a statement yesterday. "These are five well known cricketing entities."

**The competing teams:**

- Hampshire Hawks - England
- Guyana Amazon Warriors - WI
- Lahore Qalandars - Pakistan
- Rangpur Riders - Bangladesh
- Victoria - Australia

## Asalanka stars as Sri Lanka beat West Indies in second ODI

**Pallekele, Sri Lanka:** Skipper Charith Asalanka struck an unbeaten half-century as Sri Lanka defeated the West Indies by five wickets in the second one-day international yesterday to clinch the three-match series.

Chasing a tricky 190, Sri Lanka reached the target with 34 balls to spare at the Pallekele stadium, with Asalanka making an unbeaten 62 off 61 balls.

The match was reduced to 44-overs a side after the start was delayed by two hours because of rain.

Sri Lanka lost two early wickets but they were rescued by a third wicket stand of 62 between Nisihan Madushka (38) and Sadeera Samarawickrama (38).

Asalanka then saw the team through with his doughty knock that included one six and seven fours.

He also brought up his 14th ODI half-century in the process and shared a stand of 55 with Janith Liyanage (24) for the fifth wicket.

This was Asalanka's second consecutive half-century, following his match-winning 77 in the first ODI.

The victory secured a 2-0 series win for the hosts, having won the opening game by five wickets on Sunday.

This was also the fifth successive bilateral ODI series win for Sri Lanka this year and the tenth

consecutive home series victory. "I am happy to score some runs and help the team win," said Asalanka. "It's been a dream run for us in the last couple of months. We want to keep winning."

The third and final match will be played at the same venue on Saturday.

"The series is lost but hopefully we can salvage some pride," said West Indies captain Shai Hope. "Our spinners need to take a leaf out of the Sri Lankan spinners' books."

Earlier, Sherfane Rutherford (80) shared a record 119-run partnership for the ninth wicket with Gudakesh Motie (50 not out) to lift West Indies from a precarious 58-8 after they were put in to bat in overcast conditions.

This was the highest ninth-wicket partnership for West Indies in one-day internationals, eclipsing the 85-run stand between Yanic Cariah and Alzarri Joseph against New Zealand in Barbados in 2022. Rutherford, dropped twice, hit four sixes and seven fours in his 82-ball knock.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Sri Lanka 190 for 5** (Asalanka 62\*, Joseph 2-30) **beat West Indies 189 all out** (Rutherford 80, Motie 50, Hasaranga 4-40, Theekshana 3-25, Fernando 3-35) **by five wickets**

FIRST TEST

## Miraz hits 87 as Bangladesh fight back puts them back into contest against South Africa

Reuters  
Mirpur

Middle order batsman Mehidy Hasan Miraz led a Bangladesh fight back with an unbeaten 87 on the third day of the first Test against South Africa yesterday to turn a precarious position into a tight contest.

Bangladesh were 283 for seven in their second innings when bad light brought play to a premature close at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, leading South Africa by 81 runs with three wickets in hand.

Mehidy and Nayeem Hasan (16 not out) will resume today, looking to set South Africa an imposing target on a variable pitch.

Bangladesh, who were 202 runs behind the visitors after the first innings, looked headed for an innings defeat when they lost three early wickets yesterday, slumping from their overnight score of 101-3 to 112-6 as Kagiso Rabada grabbed two scalps and Keshav Maharaj claimed the wicket of Litton Das.

Rabada had opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy caught for 40 at first slip in the fifth over of the day and then two balls later clean bowled



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz (left) plays a shot during the third day of the first Test against South Africa at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. (AFP)

Mushfiqur Rahim. Litton Das was caught behind by wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne off Maharaj but the original appeal was turned down. South Africa captain Aiden Markram almost ran out of time before requesting a review, which proved successful.

Mehidy and debutant Jaker Ali then offered stiff resistance with an aggressive approach and put on a 138-run partnership for the seventh wicket to see off Bangla-

desh's deficit and offer their side hope of a turnaround in fortunes.

Mehidy brought up his half century in 94 balls, followed by Jaker, who took 104 balls to get to 50. He was then snagged leg before wicket to Maharaj for 58.

Rain halted play as South Africa were about to be offered the second new ball and tea taken earlier than scheduled.

When they returned after a lengthy delay, the umpires said

the light was not good enough for South Africa to use their seamers.

Surprisingly, the visitors continued with a spin attack, instead of taking the bad light, allowing Bangladesh to add 16 runs in five overs before play was called off.

**BRIEF SCORES (Day 3)**

**Bangladesh 106 and 283 for 7** (Mehidy 87\*, Jaker 58, Rabada 4-35) **lead South Africa 308 by 81 runs**

BOTTOMLINE

## Captain Stokes forecasts spin battle in Pakistan-England decider in Rawalpindi



England's captain Ben Stokes (right) attends a practice session on the eve of their third and final Test against Pakistan in Rawalpindi. (AFP)

AFP  
Rawalpindi

England captain Ben Stokes believes the series-deciding third Test against Pakistan starting today will boil down to a spin battle on a Rawalpindi pitch likely to favour slow bowlers.

England piled up 823-7 to thrash Pakistan by an innings on a lifeless Multan pitch in the first Test, before the hosts bounced back with a 152-run win on a recycled and turning Multan track.

For the deciding match, Pakistan have kept the same combination of three frontline spinners in Sajid Khan, Noman Ali and Zahid Mahmood, with just one fast bowler in

Aamer Jamal. Pakistan have used industrial fans and heaters to dry the Rawalpindi pitch, hoping to replicate their spin-led success in Multan which ended a drought of home wins stretching back to 2021.

Stokes said his three spinners in Jack Leach, Shoab Bashir and the recalled Rehan Ahmed were equal to the challenge.

"I'll be backing the three spinners that we've picked," Stokes told reporters after a training session on the eve of the third and final Test.

"We don't know exactly how the wicket will play, but we've taken as much information from it as we can.

"We think the longer the game goes, the more spin will come into play."

Pakistan head coach Jason Gillespie, the former Australia fast bowler, also expects the near-bald pitch "to favour the slower bowlers".

The toss could be crucial, with both teams looking to bat first and maximise the impact of their spinners on a deteriorating pitch.

Pakistan have performed poorly in all formats in the past year, losing 2-0 in a home Test series to Bangladesh and crashing out of the ODI and Twenty20 World Cups in the first rounds.

A series victory over England would mark a stark change in fortunes.

"Over the last few years Pakistan's Test cricket hasn't been where we'd like it to be, so any win is a positive," he said.

MOTORSPORT

# Bigger and better QRC season to kick off today

FIRST ROUND OF QATAR DRIFT CHAMPIONSHIP IS THE SEASON OPENER

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar Racing Club (QRC) is ready for another thrilling season full of exciting competitions with the first event kicking off with the opening round of Qatar Drift Championship today.

The events are held under the patronage of QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani. The club held two days of testing to prepare for the new season last week.

The first day focused on drift racers testing their cars for readiness, while the second day was allocated to 4X4 freestyle racers.

The QRC said all preparations have been completed for what is expected to be an exceptional season. The new season is featuring diverse championships, intense competition, and efforts to attract a larger audience of motorsport enthusiasts.

This aligns with the vision of the QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid, who is dedicated to placing Qatar's motorsport on the global map.

Special attention has been given to the sports events calendar, aiming to elevate the club, diversify its activities, and attract more participants. QRC General Manager Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani said the club will feature the largest number of events in its history, which will strengthen QRC's status as the home of drag racing in the Middle East.

"This year, the club is organising



QRC General Manager Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani

two separate drag racing championships. The first is the Arabian Drag Racing League, which takes on an international flavour and features participation from global champions of the sport," he said.

The event consists of six rounds, with the first set for January 9 and 10, continuing until the final round in mid-February.

"The second championship is the Qatar Drag Racing Championship, consisting of five rounds where top drag racers from the Middle East compete.

The opening round will take place one week after the conclusion of the Arabian Drag Racing League, and it will conclude in the last third of March 2025," Sheikh Jabor said.

Additionally, the Qatar Sand Drag Competition will be held at the Sealine Sand Track, featuring five rounds starting in mid-



Action from last year's Qatar Drift Championship.

November and concluding in April 2025. Fans of freestyle and two-wheel stunts will enjoy a four-round championship, and the club will also host roll races and open the Motocross track for enthusiasts. Reflecting the growing global interest in electric sports, electric scooter races will also be part of the season, he said.

The season will also witness several electric scooter races, reflecting the growing global interest and significant development in electric sports in recent times.

"We made sure to finalise the sports events calendar for the new

2024/2025 season early on to give racers the opportunity to prepare for the competitions, as we are aiming for an exceptional season in every aspect. Our goal is to build an educated and aware community, and this approach reflects the vision of the club's chairman, His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, which is to continue building a youth base capable of steering Qatar towards more achievements that represent the Gulf region and Arab countries," said the QRC general manager, who is deeply passionate about motorsport.

"The club is always keen to

welcome Gulf, Arab, and foreign teams. Under the guidance of our club chairman, we ensure that these teams are provided with the right conditions, positively impacting the competitions. This fact is well recognized by everyone, and it has set our club apart, making it a shining beacon in the history of this sport at both Gulf and international levels."

He added: "In addition to the races, we are accustomed to organizing events and exhibitions related to cars and motorcycles at the club, with a focus on supporting young people and enthusiasts

of excellence and creativity. The goal is for the club to always serve as a platform that brings together car and bike lovers in one place along with companies and supporting entities.

"At the forefront of these events is the Qatar Custom Show, which we will organise for the 12th edition this season, from January 14th to 18th, 2025. We are also keen on hosting several gatherings for car owners and motorcycle groups. As usual, there will also be special events to celebrate National Sport Day and the National Day of the State."

## Chebli, Alawar win in final round of Qatar National Sprint



The 2024 Qatar National Sprint season concluded with the sixth and final round at the open parking lot beside Lusail Sports Arena. The popular series, organised by the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation, saw Mansour Chebli of Lebanon leading the way in Class O1, with a 46.632-second lap in his Renault Clio, followed by Charbel Chebli and Qatar's Ayad al-Okar. Class O2 saw Jad Alawar from Lebanon win in his Evo 8, while Amro Abdulla of Qatar came second in a Subaru. Class O3 was secured by Maher Serre in his Nissan 350Z, followed by Aleksandar Jokic and Paige De Jager. Qatar's Nadim Ziade took the P1 class with a 48.268-second lap, narrowly beating Mansour Chebli. In P2, Ziade continued to shine, securing another win with a time of 47.066. P3 was won by Francesco Fornaciari in a Lotus Exige. In the Women's event, Melina Jokic secured a dominant win with a time of 53.711 seconds, ahead of De Jager and Nasmee'a Christian.

## FORMULA 1

# Verstappen carries momentum back to a favourite track

Reuters  
Mexico City

**M**ax Verstappen has won five of the last six grands prix in Mexico and while Ferrari will fancy their chances this weekend, the Red Bull driver can take another big step towards a fourth Formula One title.

Verstappen arrives at the high-altitude Hermanos Rodriguez circuit 57 points clear of McLaren's Lando Norris with five rounds remaining. Norris described finishing fourth at last Sunday's US Grand Prix in Austin, with Verstappen third, as a 'momentum killer' in the title battle while Red Bull saw a potential turning point.

The result was the first time in five races that Verstappen had beaten Norris, and the Briton has yet to finish higher than fifth in Mexico. "We have historically done well here and I have always enjoyed driving at this track,"

said Verstappen of a layout that equals Austria's Red Bull Ring as his most successful.

"We made some good steps in Austin and saw some promising improvements with the car...it will be about keeping this momentum heading forwards and continuing to gain crucial points in the championship."

The constructors' title is far more open, with Ferrari poised to overtake Red Bull for second place after Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz finished one-two in Texas to reduce the gap to eight points. The pair swept the front row in Mexico last year, with Leclerc on pole.

Red Bull need Sergio Perez to produce the points in his home race and turn around a dire run of form that has seen him score only 150 points to Verstappen's 354.

Perez's tally is the lowest of any driver in the top four teams, with nothing better than sixth since Miami in May and serious questions raised about his future despite a contract extension for

2025 and 2026. "The important thing is to be able to shut out the noise off track and focus on the job in hand," he said. "Ultimately the special thing for me would be to deliver another podium for my fans and my country, at home."

With Ferrari looking strong, and Perez needed to help Verstappen in his battle with Norris, the Mexican's hopes of a top three finish even if he recovers his form would seem unlikely.

Leclerc and Sainz have plenty to be optimistic about as they chase Ferrari's fifth win of the season. Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton is the only current driver other than Verstappen to win in Mexico, the seven-times world champion taking his 2017 and 2018 titles there. "After a difficult weekend in Austin, we have the opportunity to bounce back immediately," said team boss Toto Wolff. "Our performance in Texas showed that there is inherent performance in the car. Our challenge is extracting this consistently"

## BASKETBALL

# LeBron, Bronny make NBA history with father-son appearance

**L**eBron and Bronny James made NBA history yesterday, becoming the first father-and-son duo to play alongside each other in a regular season fixture as the Los Angeles Lakers opened their campaign against the Minnesota Timberwolves. The duo, who played together briefly in a pre-season game earlier this month, took to the court together late in the second quarter at the Crypto.com Arena with the Lakers leading 51-35. An enormous roar went up from the home crowd as the James duo were brought onto the court by coach JJ Redick after the Lakers had surged into a double-digit lead.

In a perfectly scripted moment that was pure Hollywood, the James' double-act was watched at courtside by Ken Griffey Sr and Ken Griffey Jr, who made baseball history playing for the Seattle Mariners as father and son in 1990-1991. "We made history; now we get to watch history," said



LeBron James and Bronny James of the Los Angeles Lakers on defence during the second quarter against the Minnesota Timberwolves in Los Angeles, California. (AFP)

Griffey Jr, who joined his father to pose for photos with LeBron and Bronny James shortly before Tuesday's tip-off. Lakers officials had been coy before Tuesday's season-opener about where and when LeBron James and Bronny would play their first regular season fixture together.

However, NBA superstar LeBron James, who turns 40 in December, admitted in pre-game

remarks that he could scarcely contain his excitement at the prospect of realising his long-cherished dream of sharing a court with his son. "Just to run out the tunnel knowing that he'll be in uniform, run out the tunnel with him, see him warm up, and be out there with the rest of my teammates," James told reporters during a morning shoot-around on Tuesday.

## Al Ahli beat Al Shamal to enter Qatar Cup basketball semi-finals



With the help of Raekwon Deshawn Rogers match-high 25 (9 rebounds, 2 assists) points Al Ahli defeated Al Shamal 93-70 at the Gharafa Stadium to enter the semi-finals of the Qatar Cup basketball tournament yesterday. Bruce Massey Jr also scored 16 points, while Moustapha Ndao contributed 14. For Al Shamal, Brandon Desmond and Faris Avdic netted 22 and 13 points each. Al Ahli will take on Al Gharafa, while defending champions Al Arabi will meet Al Sadd in the semi-finals on Saturday.

## MOTORSPORT

## Isle of Man TT Legend Hillier set for Qatar International Baja

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Isle of Man TT legend James Hillier is heading to Doha next week to take part in the Qatar International Baja for the first time. The three-day event is based out of the Lusail Sports Arena and is the sixth counting round towards both the FIA World Baja Cup and the FIM Bajas World Cup.

Bournemouth-based Hillier, 39, is one of the world's leading motorcycle road racers but he also took part in the Malles Moto section of the 2023 Dakar Rally without service support. Better known for his successes at the Isle of Man TT and the North West 200, Hillier will face a totally different challenge across the winding gravel trails in Qatar, where outright speed needs to be combined with excellent navigational skills to achieve top results.

Hillier began riding at the tender age of four and started competing in trials two years later. By the age of 17, the Hampshire rider had moved into the Virgin Mobile R6 Cup, finishing fourth in 2004, before mov-



ing into the British Supersport and British Superstock 1000 Championships.

James had a fascination for road racing and his first appearance at the world-famous TT meeting on the Isle of Man came in 2008. He competed in a pair of Supersport events for Jackson Racing, finishing a modest 19th and 17th on his debut. Lapping with an average speed in excess of 119mph, he was awarded the prestigious Newcomers' Trophy during a successful 10-year spell with the Bournemouth Kawasaki Team.

Hillier went on to earn his first podium in 2012 and then claimed a win in the Lightweight TT. He now has five podium finishes to his name across the Supersport, Super-

bike, Senior and Superstock categories and is currently seventh fastest rider of all time with a best average speed of 132.414mph for the gruelling Mountain Course.

Hillier also has nine podiums at the North West 200, the highlight being a Superstock victory in 2019 when he earned the Man of the Meeting award. He is also a top 10 finisher at the Macau Grand Prix.

One of the main reasons that Hillier is competing in Qatar is to fine tune his off-road riding and navigational skills in advance of a second attempt at the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia with WTF Racing in January 2025. He has been tackling events such as the Setra Enduro during the course of the year to get his physical fitness up to speed before the epic desert challenge.

The Qatar International Baja is being organised by the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and will run under the chairmanship of QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai, QMMF's Executive Director Amro al-Hamad and board member Abdulrazaq al-Kuwari.

The full entry list for both the FIA and FIM sections of the Qatar International Baja will be announced today.



England's James Hillier (also left) is one of the world's leading motorcycle road racers.

## FOOTBALL

## Man United 'will succeed sooner or later': Mourinho

MOURINHO MANAGED UNITED BETWEEN 2016 AND 2018

AFP  
Istanbul

Jose Mourinho says struggling Manchester United "will succeed sooner or later" as the Fenerbahce boss prepares to take on his former club in the Europa League today. United manager Erik ten Hag is under pressure after a poor start to the season, which has included draws in their first two European matches - against Twente and Porto. But Mourinho, who has also managed a string of other high-profile clubs including Chelsea, Real Madrid and Tottenham, said United had potential and he wants them to succeed.

"Maybe you English guys think I'm bluffing, think I am playing mind games," he said at his pre-match press conference.

"I'm not playing anything - they have a better team than the results are showing. I studied them the maximum I could with my staff and my analysts. We watched everything in the Premier League, we watched everything in the two matches, Twente and Porto - there is work there. They will succeed sooner or later. Hopefully sooner and hopefully before one day I go back to the Premier League and they become my opponents. At this moment they are just my opponents for one match."

Mourinho, who managed United between 2016 and 2018, winning the League Cup and Europa League, was asked why his former club had struggled over the past decade. "Honestly, I didn't lose one minute thinking about it," he said. "I wish the best to Man Utd since the moment I left."

"I left with a good feeling for the club, with a good feeling for the fans and I want the best for them, so if things are not going amazingly well for them it's not something that makes me happy, but at the same time I have no time."

The 61-year-old suggested that during his own reign at Old Trafford, the United hierarchy had not had the same patience they were showing towards Ten Hag.

"What happened for sure, because it's very objective, is that they kept faith with the coach, they support the coach, who is staying season after season and that means stability, means trust and they are giving him conditions to keep developing his job," he said. "That was a difference in relation to me because as you know we won the Europa League, we finished second in the Premier League."

Mourinho, who was named as Fenerbahce



Fenerbahce coach Jose Mourinho during a training session in Istanbul yesterday, on the eve of the Europa League match against Manchester United. (Reuters)

coach in June following his sacking by Roma, said United would be at "maximum strength" for the match in Istanbul. "One thing are the results that Manchester United are having and another thing is the potential of the team," he said. "The potential of the team is high."

He added: "If I have to say now which are

the two biggest candidates to win the Europa League, I think it's easy - Manchester United and Tottenham. The Premier League is a different level of quality, intensity, pace, tactical culture - a different level of everything. Tomorrow, I think we are going to play against one of the two strongest teams."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Emery already one of 'Villa's greats': McGinn

AFP  
London

John McGinn says Unai Emery has already cemented his position as one of Aston Villa's greatest managers as the Spaniard celebrates two years in charge sitting atop the Champions League table. The former Arsenal boss, who was appointed on October 24, 2022, enjoyed an early anniversary present as his side went top of the Champions League table with a 2-0 win over Bologna at Villa Park on Tuesday for three wins out of three.

They are also off to their best Premier League start since 1998, with five wins from eight games putting them fourth in the table.

It is an extraordinary turnaround for the Birmingham-based club, who were deep in relegation trouble when Emery took over from Steven Gerrard.

Villa captain McGinn said Emery, who won the Europa League three times with Sevilla and once with Villarreal, had already proved himself among Villa's elite.

"We are excited. I think the manager is the only person who does not get excited," said the Scotland international, who scored the opening goal against Bologna. "He just focuses his full energy all the time, like he says every single day he is that demanding on us. He does not let us take our foot off the gas so we can use energy and enthusiasm, the excitement we have,



but his determination and intensity is unmatched. No matter what happens until now and whenever he leaves - we hope it's never - he will certainly go down as one of our club's greatest managers."

Villa followed up victories over Young Boys and Bayern Munich with a comfortable win over the Serie A side to make it nine points from nine in the Champions League. That could already be enough to ensure they make it through to the play-off round of the revamped competition, but their eyes are on finishing in the top eight and qualifying automatically for the last 16.

"We are proud of where we are, top of the league table at the minute," McGinn said before yesterday's fixtures. "It has put us in a great position to go and kick on. Our aim is obviously to qualify first and foremost for the next round, but if we can take it into the top eight and carry this on it would be brilliant."

## Arteta counts cost of Arsenal win as injuries stack up

London: Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said his side's growing injury list was becoming a worry after Riccardo Calafiori limped off near the end of a scrappy 1-0 win over Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League on Tuesday.

The London club started without captain and long-term absentee Martin Odegaard and forward Bukayo Saka and defender Calafiori now also looks like a doubt for Sunday's crunch Premier League game against Liverpool after injuring his knee. Jurrien Timber is also struggling to be fit for the visit of Liverpool while central defender William Saliba will be missing after his red card in the defeat at Bournemouth at the weekend.

"With Riccy he had to come off

because he felt something. I don't know the extent of it but it's not good news, it's a bit of a worry," Arteta, whose side have seven points from their opening three Champions League games, told reporters.

Arsenal fans will be happy to learn that full back Ben White's substitution at halftime was not injury-related but because he had picked up a yellow card. "It was my decision to take him out. He had a yellow card, we have played enough with 10 men in recent periods," Arteta said. "They had a lot of density, a lot of attacking players on that side and we didn't want to take any chances."

Arteta sounded pessimistic about the chances of Saka returning against leaders Liverpool.

## CHAMPIONS LAEGUE

## Ancelotti lauds 'extraordinary' Vinicius after win against Dortmund

Reuters  
Madrid

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti praised the 'extraordinary' Vinicius Jr on Tuesday after the Brazilian forward scored a second-half hat-trick to help them fight back from two goals down and thrash visitors Borussia Dortmund 5-2 in the Champions League.

Ancelotti told a press conference he was convinced that the 24-year-old Vinicius would win the Ballon d'Or award for the best player in the world on Monday.

"What I can say is that it's rare to see a player who plays a second half like Vinicius did. And not because of the three goals but because of his character; he's extraordi-

nary," Ancelotti said. "Vinicius is going to win (the Ballon d'Or), not for what he did tonight, but for what he did last year. These three goals are already going to count for next year's Ballon d'Or, that's for sure. He is a player who gets whistled at because he can make a difference."

In a rematch of last season's final, Ancelotti said there was no panic in the changing room after Real went into the halftime break two goals down, and that his side had the maturity and experience to understand what they needed to do to come back. "We lived it calmly, calmly (over the break). We changed the system and came back playing more intensely," Ancelotti said.

"Talking about scoring three goals might have seemed utopian, so we talked about small details like passing well, winning duels... We had to win the dynamic of

the game and from there you start to win the game. We were timid in the first half, we weren't intense on the ball and in the second half we did better with more quality, more pressure. It was the best second half of the season.

"We have to learn from what we did in the second half. The aim is to start the game and not wait for them to put two past us. I don't think we can play 90 minutes with the intensity of the second half but we can be more balanced."

## DORTMUND'S SAHIN TAKES BLAME FOR DEFENSIVE CHANGES IN LOSS

Meanwhile, Dortmund manager Nuri Sahin took the blame for the loss, saying that his decision to reinforce his defence while leading 2-0 had an impact in their first loss in the competition.

Dortmund went into Tuesday's game on the back of two consecutive wins to start the Champions League season but were thrashed by Real Madrid. The home side scored five goals following Sahin's decision to replace scorers Donyell Malen and Jamie Bynoe-Gittens with defender Waldemar Anton and holding midfielder Pascal Gross early in the second half.

"It's not easy to explain, of course. We, who I thought played well with the ball, really had a lot of solutions. The boys did well, scored two goals and then went into halftime and we knew it would be very long. The second half very, very long," Sahin said. "We noticed in the second half that we were being pushed back, we had defensive problems and I thought we should go to the three-man defence, and that didn't work out for us."