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FOOTBALL

Qatar's Afif named Asia's best again

'This second award is not the end of the road for me and the goal now is to keep working hard'



Qatar forward Akram Afif poses after winning the AFC Player of the Year award with Al Sadd President His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani, FIFA President Gianni Infantino and AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifah in Seoul yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Seoul

Qatari maestro Akram Afif was recognised for a stunning 2023/24 season with the AFC Player of the Year accolade yesterday at the AFC Annual Awards in Seoul. The 27-year-old became the first Qatari to win the award twice as he collected the gleaming trophy at the 28th edition of the ceremony, which was staged at the Grand Peace Palace of the Kyung Hee University in Seoul.

Having won his first AFC Player of the Year nomination in 2019, Afif made it two for two to become only the third player to win the award more than once after Japan's Hidetoshi Nakata (1997, 1998) and Uzbekistan's Server Djeparov (2008, 2011). He is the third Al Sadd SC player to win, with the other two previous Qatari winners, Khalfan Ibrahim (2006) and Abdelkarim Hassan (2018), also hailing from the same club.

"First and foremost, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my wife for her unwavering support and patience. Her efforts have been invaluable to this success. I also want to thank my teammates and all the national team coaches and administrative staff. It's not easy to win the award for second time but now I will try my best to win this award for a third time," Afif said after receiving his award from FIFA President Gianni Infantino. "This second award is not the end of the road for me and the goal now is to keep working hard for a third one," he added.

"Every single player played a crucial role in this (Asian Cup) victory, making it possible for us to achieve this win for the second time. We owe our thanks to the organisation in Qatar and the Asian Football Confederation as well for the success of the tournament. We are committed to striving for a third AFC Asian Cup victory (in 2027)," Afif noted.

Minister of Sports and Youth HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani praised Afif's remarkable achievement and Qatar's exceptional organisation of the Asian Cup. "This award is an achievement for Qatari youth and the distinguished position they have reached in the sports field. This achievement is the result of the continuous support provided by Qatar to the development and brilliance of its youth," HE Sheikh Hamad said.

Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani said: "We are proud of the individual and collective achievements of our champions and sports institutions at the continental and international levels, which prove the level of efficiency in the national sports system. On this occasion, we congratulate our national team captain Akram Afif for winning the Best Player in Asia Award for the sec-



ond time for the year 2023, and we also congratulate the Qatar Football Association for winning the Host Country Appreciation Award for the 2023 Asian Cup."

Afif, who had played a prominent role in Qatar's first ever Asian Cup success in 2019 by bagging 10 assists, took centre-stage when they retained Asia's crown jewel earlier this year. Afif revelled in the occasion on home soil by scoring eight goals and making three assists, memorably becoming the first player in tournament history to score a hat-trick in the Final, to ensure that his side lifted back-to-back titles in glorious fashion. He bagged the Most Valuable Player and the Yili Top Scorer awards – the fourth player to ever claim both in the same edition.

The stellar season continued for Afif, who recorded two goals and five assists to help Qatar progress to the third round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers and stay on track for a second FIFA World Cup appearance.

Silverware followed at club level as well with Al Sadd, where Afif has been a key figure since joining in 2018. He claimed the Best Player of the Qatar Stars League for a fourth occasion after helping Al Sadd to a record 17th title with 26 goals and 11 assists.

AFC ANNUAL AWARDS ROLL OF HONOUR:

AFC Player of the Year: Akram Afif (Al Sadd and Qatar)
Women's Player of the Year: Kiko Seike (Urawa Red Diamonds Ladies/Brighton & Hove Albion and Qatar)
Coach of the Year (Women): Park Youn-jeong (South Korea Women U20 and Korea)
Coach of the Year (Men): Go Oiwa (Japan U23 and Japan)
Asian International Player of the Year (Men): Son Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur and South Korea)
Asian International Player of the Year (Women): Ellie Carpenter (Olympique Lyonnais and Australia)
Asian Cup Host Appreciation Award: Qatar Football Association

FOCUS

QFA bestowed with inaugural AFC Asian Cup Host Appreciation Award

Fresh off the heels of staging the most successful ever edition of Asia's crown jewel, the Qatar Football Association (QFA) was honoured with the first-ever AFC Asian Cup Host Appreciation Award yesterday at the AFC Annual Awards Seoul in Seoul, South Korea.

Lauded by the AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifah, as Asian football's finest hour and a tournament of 'firsts', the QFA, the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Local Organising Committee and Qatari authorities were recognised for their outstanding efforts in setting a new benchmark of excellence for future editions to follow.

The AFC president said: "It is my great honour to present this AFC Asian Cup Host Appreciation Award to the Qatar Football Association and the Qatari authorities, and the whole of Asian football joins me in expressing our deepest gratitude to them for hosting what will be remembered and cherished in history as the greatest ever celebration of Asian football."

The 18th edition of the Continent's flagship men's national team competition was the first ever iteration to feature FIFA World Cup venues as the world's largest football community turned up in record numbers with more than 1.5 million supporters showcasing their passion across the 51 matches, making the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 the most-attended showpiece in history.

Not only did the tournament exceed the previous 1.04mn attendance record, it also saw the nine world-class stadiums achieve an average of 73% capacity – a 13% increase from the best-ever showing set in China in 2004. At the same time, social media engagement reaffirmed the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023™ as the most appealing and tuned-in edition



Qatar Football Association President Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain receives the award from AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifah.

in history, with digital impressions crossing the 7.9 billion mark.

Breakthrough innovations were also introduced at Asia's crown jewel with the successful staging of the first-ever AFC eAsian Cup, and the Semi-Automated Offside Technology (SAOT) and Video Assistant Referee (VAR) systems making their full debut, with women's match officials also appointed to the Continental showpiece for the first time.

تحذير

سيقام سباق باها قطر الدولي الجولة السادسة من كأس باها للاتحاد الدولي للسيارات وكأس العالم والجولة الثانية من كأس باها الشرق الأوسط للاتحاد الدولي للسيارات بتاريخ ٣١ أكتوبر و٢ نوفمبر ٢٠٢٤ بالمناطق التالية: **بوئيله / جنوب العطورية / وادي العلب / الجميلية / بوسدرة / جري الذياب / جنوب الزبارة / ام الما / زكريت / طريق الشحانية / جنوب طريق الشحانية / الخرسعة / ام باب / طريق ام باب / الكرعانة / الزرارة / سيلين / خور العديد / شمال العامرية** وسيتم استخدام الطرق الموضحة في الخريطة برحى اخذ الحيطه و الحذر الشديد اثناء القيادة أو التخييم في المناطق المذكورة.

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SPOTLIGHT

Time running out for India's Kohli, Rohit

Reuters
New Delhi

The inglorious end of India's proud home record has left the cricket-mad nation grappling with the reality it has long been dreading - that ageing stalwarts Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma might be approaching the end of the road.

Through three World Cup titles, two World Test Championship (WTC) finals, and a 12-year Test series winning streak on home soil, Kohli and Sharma, often together, have been integral to every major Indian success of the last 17 years.

Both quit T20 internationals after winning the World Cup in West Indies earlier this year and their diminishing returns in Test cricket

is a huge concern ahead of India's trip to Australia for a bumper five-Test series.

India will be hoping to avert a rare whitewash in the third Test against New Zealand starting on Friday with fans hoping skipper Rohit and batting mainstay Kohli will produce some runs before they fly off to Australia.

Opener Rohit, at his peak a free-scoring and elegant batter who helped India to their first two series triumphs in Australia in 2018-19 and 2020-21, has six single-digit returns and just one fifty from his last eight Test innings.

Kohli, widely considered one of the batting greats of the modern game, has managed just two centuries in the last five years and only two fifties in his last 12 innings in the longest format.



India's Virat Kohli (left) and Rohit Sharma celebrate after winning the T20 World Cup at the Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, on June 29, 2024. (Reuters)

The right-hander's average has dropped to 48.31 and his struggles against left-arm spin - he fell to New Zealand's Mitchell Santner in both innings of the second Test - has been conspicuous.

"Virat Kohli's Test record in the last two-three years has not been great against spin," his former India team mate Dinesh Karthik told www.cricbuzz.com

Kohli looked crestfallen after being bowled by a juicy full toss from Santner in the first innings in Pune, as if recalling how, in his prime, he would have sent the delivery racing to the boundary.

"It's obviously a recurring pattern where (left-arm) spinners have troubled him, and I think he will go and figure out what he needs to do to come out stronger," Karthik said.

"He is a man who is searching for answers."

It is not just Rohit and Kohli who have come up short, however, as India's usually strong and deep batting has been a major letdown

in the two Tests against New Zealand.

Skittled for a dismal 46 in Bengaluru and a paltry 146 in Pune, their failure to put decent scores on the board in first innings meant a comeback in either test was a tall order.

India have a slender lead over Australia in the WTC standings and another defeat in Mumbai would mean they would need to win four of the five test matches Down Under to reach their third consecutive final.

The next couple of months might also determine whether Kohli, who turns 36 next week, and Rohit, who is a year older, can extend their Test careers.

India's first Test in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy starts in Perth on November 22.

MATCH REPORT

De Zorzi, Stubbs maiden centuries lift South Africa

'To get to the three figures was a big relief, more than anything'

AFP
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Tony de Zorzi and Tristan Stubbs put South Africa in command on 307-2 and left Bangladesh floundering after day one of the second and final Test in Chattogram yesterday.

Both men made their maiden Test hundreds in a second-wicket partnership of 201 after the visitors won the toss and chose to take first use of a good batting pitch as they eye a series sweep.

De Zorzi was unbeaten at stumps on 141, with 10 fours and three sixes, and will resume alongside David Bedingham on 18.



South Africa's Tony de Zorzi plays a shot during the first day of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

Stubbs played a more conservative innings and hit the mark on his 194th ball by cutting Mominul Haque to the covers for a single.

"To get to the three figures was a big relief, more than anything", Stubbs said, adding it "definitely ranks as my favourite hundred".

Tajjul Islam was the only bowler to make a dent, first in the morning session by removing Aiden Markram when the stand-in skipper went for a big shot and holed out to Mominul Haque at mid-on for 33. He bowled Stubbs after tea for 106 when the batsman tried a back-foot punch to the leg side but missed the lowering delivery, which crashed into his stumps.

Bangladesh, desperate to take a wicket, have lost two of their three reviews for the innings.

They unsuccessfully appealed for lbw against De Zorzi off a de-

livery pitched outside leg and again for a caught behind when Stubbs tried to cut Tajjul away but missed.

'Early wickets'

"We need to come tomorrow morning and try to get early wickets to put ourselves in a position to bowl them out," said Bangladesh coach Phil Simmons, who took up the post just before the series.

South Africa made two changes to the side that won in Mirpur

as they look to seal the series. In came Senuran Muthusamy, an all-rounder who can bowl left-arm spin, and fast bowler Dane Paterson in place of Matthew Breetzke and Dane Piedt.

Bangladesh made three changes, bringing in batsman Zakir Hasan, fast bowler Nahid Rana and wicketkeeper Mahidul Islam Ankon for a debut.

Jaker Ali, who made his debut in the first match, is out after suffering a concussion while Nayeem

Hasan and wicketkeeper Litton Das were also omitted.

South Africa won the opening Test inside four days with fast bowler Kagiso Rabada taking 6-46 in the second innings.

Bangladesh have played 24 Tests in Chattogram but won only two with seven drawn.

BRIEF SCORES (Day 1)
South Africa 307 for 2 (De Zorzi 141*, Stubbs 106, Bedingham 18*)
vs Bangladesh

FOCUS

Bethell gets England call-up for NZ Test tour

AFP
London

England included uncapped spin bowling all-rounder Jacob Bethell in a 16-man squad announced yesterday for their upcoming Test tour of New Zealand, with wicketkeeper-batsman Jamie Smith omitted due to paternity leave.

Barbados-born Bethell, who made his T20 and ODI debuts against Australia last month, has only featured in 20 first-class matches and has a modest batting average of 25.44, without a century in any form of professional cricket.

Bethell is the only change to a Test squad recently beaten 2-1 in a three-match series away to Pakistan.

Speaking at the PCA Awards in London last month, where he was piped to the Young Player of the Year trophy by Smith, Bethell had laid out his ambitions to be an all-formats player for England, insisting that a Test call-up remained his ultimate ambition.

"It's nice to tick off two of them (ODIs and T20I) but definitely the best one's yet to come, hopefully. Test cricket has always been my dream, and I know it's taken a different shape in the last three years but, definitely, that's still my dream, to play Test cricket for England."

He is currently with the England white-ball squad in the Caribbean and, along with Rehan Ahmed and Jordan Cox, will join the Test team following their commitments against the West Indies.

Essex wicketkeeper Cox is now in line to make his Test debut in the absence of Smith, who will miss the three-match series which starts in Christchurch on November 28 to attend the birth of his first child.

England squad
Ben Stokes (capt), Rehan Ahmed, Gus Atkinson, Shoaib Bashir, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Jordan Cox (wkt), Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Jack Leach, Ollie Pope, Matthew Potts, Joe Root, Ollie Stone, Chris Woakes

Pakistan squad arrives in Australia for white-ball series



Former Pakistan captain Babar Azam arrives in Melbourne, Australia, yesterday. Pakistan take on Australia in three ODIs and as many T20Is in the next two weeks. (@TheRealPCB)

Injured Black Cap Williamson to miss third Test against India

New Delhi: Former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson will miss the third Test against India starting in Mumbai on Friday in the hope that his groin strain clears up in time to face England next month, New Zealand Cricket said yesterday.

The Blacks Caps on Saturday managed a first ever test series triumph in India without the master batsman, who has remained in New Zealand to work on his recovery from the injury he sustained in a recent series against Sri Lanka.

"Kane continues to show good signs, but isn't quite ready to jump on a plane and join us," coach Gary Stead said in a news release.

"While things are looking promising, we think the best course of action is for him to stay in New Zealand and focus on the final part of his rehabilitation so he'll be good to go for England.

"The England series is still a month away so taking the cautious approach now will ensure he is ready for the first Test in Christchurch," he added.

England's three-match tour of New Zealand begins at Christchurch's Hagley Oval on Nov 28 with further tests following in Wellington and Hamilton in December.



ANNOUNCEMENT

Australia's World Cup winner Wade retires from international cricket after 36 Test appearances

Reuters
Sydney

Australian wicketkeeper-batsmen Matthew Wade, who played in all three formats of the game for his country, announced his retirement from international cricket and a move into coaching yesterday.

The 36-year-old played 36 Tests, 97 one-day internationals and 92 Twenty20s for Australia, making his last appearance at the T20 World Cup earlier this year.

"I was fully aware my international days were most likely over at the end of the last T20 World Cup," the left-hander said in a Cricket Australia news release.

"Coaching has been on my radar over the last few years and thankfully some great opportunities have come my way, for which I am very grateful and excited."



Australia's Matthew Wade plays a shot during the second match of T20 series against West Indies in Brisbane on October 7, 2022. (AFP)

Wade played a number of different roles for Australia over a 13-year international career but it was as a finisher at the 2021

T20 World Cup that he played his most important innings, an unbeaten 41 that got Australia past Pakistan in the semis.

His finishing skills were not required in the final as Australia thrashed New Zealand by eight wickets in Dubai to win the title for the first time.

Wade would probably have played more Tests had it not been for the strong competition from fellow wicketkeepers Brad Haddin and Tim Paine but battled his way back into the side for the 2019 Ashes series, which Australia drew 2-2 to retain the urn.

The Tasmanian scored two of his four test centuries in that series as he accumulated 1,613 runs over his career at an average of a shade under 30.

"Matthew was a much-loved teammate in Australian teams across all formats over the past 13 years," said Cricket Australia's Ben Oliver.

"His resilience and adaptability were a feature throughout his career, and he should be incredibly proud of the impact that he had at international level."

SPOTLIGHT

Aspire launches new era of football technology with player app

Aspire Academy continues to help lead the way in Qatar's football development as it launched the innovative Qatar Player App yesterday.

The launch event, hosted at Aspire Academy's Football Performance Centre, was attended by the representatives of partners in the project, including the Qatar Stars League (QSL), the Qatar Football Association, and the clubs, who were represented by coaches, players and officials.

Ali Salem Afifa, Aspire's Deputy Director General, began the launch by emphasising the Academy's ongoing commitment to technological advancement in sports.

"This digital platform represents a significant milestone in Qatar's football development journey," said Ali Salem Afifa. "It embodies our commitment to nurturing talent through innovation and technology."

Miguel Heitor, Director of Football Development at QSL, followed with remarks highlighting the collaborative spirit behind the project.

"As QSL, we have been committed to presenting all the information and data to co-ordinate with Aspire to improve Qatar's football ecosystem further," Heitor explained.

"We have over 1,700 games assessed and analysed with event data and physical data, and there is nowhere in the Middle East or indeed worldwide with this amount of information."

"As QSL, we are helping to feed this information to all the stakeholders, to QFA, Aspire, and the main clubs with the intention of improving and enhancing football in Qatar."

During his comprehensive presentation, Valter Di Salvo, Director of Football Performance & Science at Aspire Academy, showcased how the custom application seamlessly integrates data from across Qatar's football ecosystem, including QSL clubs, national teams, and the Academy itself.

The system, developed over the last decade by Aspire Academy's Football Performance and Science department, sets a new benchmark in sports performance technology.



Andre Fornaziero, Head of Physiology at Aspire Academy, demonstrated the capabilities of the custom app, which will only be accessible to the players and the relevant club officials.

He showcased how players can instantly access their match statistics, review personal achievements, and analyse their performance through video replays.

The morning's proceedings

highlighted how the technology enables coaches to receive real-time wellness updates from their players, facilitating more informed training decisions. Players can study upcoming opponents' playing styles and tactical approaches, adding a new dimension to match preparation that was previously available only at the highest levels of professional football.

The Qatar Player App, which is a development of 2017's Qatar Football Analytics Dashboard, will continue to evolve in the future, with nutrition and injury tracking being just two ideas being considered.

Qatar's national team captain, Abdulaziz Hatem, who plays for Al Rayyan, has no doubts about how important the app will be for players.

"This is going to help us a lot by

giving us access to a lot of details. I'm going to get to know a lot about yourself, what you did, what you can improve, and in an easy way too, using an app on your phone," he said. "It's a very big opportunity for us to let us to improve. Over time will get used to using the app and they will make full use of it because this, it's very good for the players. His thoughts were echoed by Al Ahli coach Igor Biscan, who also played at the highest level in Europe.

"Massive compliments to all the people that were involved in making this application. It's a huge help for every coach, and I would say even for the players," he said.

"It's a great tool. It's a great help for every coach to be able to analyse and evaluate on a daily basis and then create the content to optimise the performance of your players."

"It's something really unique, and I believe that we might see something similar to this in some other countries, other leagues, and other organisations, which will be the best proof that this is something that everybody needs."

TENNIS

Alcaraz wins in straight sets in Paris

Jannik Sinner withdraws with bout of sickness

AFP
Paris

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz opened his campaign at the Paris Masters yesterday with a 7-5, 6-1 win over Chilean Nicolas Jarry.

After receiving a bye through the first round, Alcaraz flew into a 3-0 lead in his round of 32 match but was reigned back in by Jarry, before eventually claiming the first set 7-5.

However, Alcaraz was in commanding form in the second set, giving his Chilean opponent only one game as he raced to victory.

The 21-year-old Spaniard is the heavy favourite to win his first title on the hard court in Paris.

Alcaraz will face either Frenchman Ugo Humbert or American Marcos Giron in the round of 16.

Argentinean Francisco Cerundolo edged Russian sixth seed Andrey Rublev 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/5) in a two-set match that lasted nearly two hours 20 minutes.

Poland's 12th seed Hubert Hurkacz was also upset as he succumbed to a 1-6, 3-6 defeat to American Alex Michelsen, with play lasting just over 50 minutes.

Alex de Minaur beat Mariano Navone of Argentina 7-5, 6-1 to keep alive his chances of reaching the ATP Finals next month.

Holger Rune enjoyed a regulation 6-4, 6-4 win over Matteo Arnaldi, while the USA's Ben Shelton fought through in three sets against hometown hope Corentin Moutet. In another France-against-USA battle, 21-year-old French wildcard Giovanni Mpetshi



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in action against Chile's Nicolas Jarry in their Paris Masters match yesterday. (Reuters)

Perricard beat Frances Tiafoe 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-3. France's Richard Gasquet, who earlier in October announced his retirement from tennis after next year's French Open, bowed out of the Paris Masters with a 3-6, 4-6 loss to Belgian Zizou Bergs.

Meanwhile Jannik Sinner has withdrawn from the Paris Masters due to a virus, the world number one said. The 23-year-old has been replaced in the draw by Frenchman

Arthur Cazaux. "I'm very disappointed to tell you that I am not able to play here at this tournament. I came here very early to prepare and then I felt sick," Sinner said in a video message shared by the organizers.

"I have a virus at the moment, which will pass in the next two or three days. Body-wise, I am not ready to compete. I am very sorry for that. I will see you guys (in Paris) next year."

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show from Nov 6-9

DOHA: The Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show supported by Daam, The Social & Sport Contribution Fund will take place from the November 6-9 at the stunning Longines Outdoor Arena in Al Shaqab.

This event is a must-attend for Arabian horse enthusiasts, as it promises to leave a lasting impression with the participation of 265 horses, 65 of which will be from the GCC.

This year's competition will feature an esteemed panel of judges from various countries, fortifying the significance of the competition. The Judges are as follows: Elyas Ebrahim Faraj, Nikolaus Jung, Bruce McCrea, Cristian Moschini, Tamás Rombauer, Soheil Sanati, Anna Stefaniuk and Said Wafa.

The Disciplinary Committee will be made up of: Dr Vet Abdelwahab bin Ali Amira, Dr Vet Islam El Mahdy, Christine Keyser, and Dr Vet Laura

Mascagna. And the Ringmasters are: Bart Beckers and Dr Vet Ayman Saad. Khalid al-Jehani, manager of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show, expressed enthusiasm about the significant number of participants, noting that competition will be compelling as expected.

The horse show will span over four days, as horses will compete for valuable prizes.

The competition has also added a new category for foals. The show is classified as a B show, and is overseen by the European Conference of Arab Horse Organisations (ECAHO), which allows winning horses to qualify for international shows of higher classification.

Through the competition, Al Shaqab aims to highlight the rich cultural heritage of Arabian horses in order to instil knowledge and passion for purebred Arabians. This event also aims to promote the status of purebred Arabians, both locally and globally.

FOCUS

Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club horse shows conclude

Curtains fell on the first two horse shows organised by the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) at the indoor arena of Al Shaqab under the umbrella of the European Conference of Arab Horse Organisations (ECAHO).

The two events marked the opening of the horse show season and saw significant participation from Qatari farms, studs and individual owners, reflecting Qatar's leadership in this field.

Participants were keen to benefit from the regular organisation of such shows, indicating that we are set for a season filled with strong competition and a desire to win titles and prize money on offer for the winners.

The beginning was with the 4th Qatar Arabian Breeders Cup, which took place from October 24 to 26. Reserved to Qatari breeders only, it showcased many stunning displays of horses in front of an audience of owners and enthusiasts of this discipline. Over the three days, nine judges, four Disciplinary Committee members and two Ringmasters from around the globe officiated in the Show.

RESULTS

Yearling Fillies Championship: Durra Al Khor (Al Khor Stud)

Yearling Colts Championship: Azzam Umm Aludham (Nasser Mohammed al-Hajri)

Junior Fillies Championship: Haffana Al Jassim (Al Jassim Stud)

Junior Colts Championship: Omeir Al Sraiya (Al Sraiya Stud)

Senior Mares Championship: Al Kaydah Al Sraiya (Al Sraiya Stud)

Senior Stallions Championship: Arkan Al Sraiya (Al Sraiya Stud)

Yearling Fillies Championship: Rose Al Shahania (Al Jaham Stud)

Yearling Colts Championship: Araab Al Shaqab



(Nayif Aldossari)
Junior Fillies Championship: Sabha Al Khor (Al Dawasir Stud)
Junior Colts Championship: Ghazal Al Refaa (Al Sraiya Stud)
Senior Mares Championship: Misk Umm Aludham (Al Hazm Stud)
Senior Stallions Championship: Afas Al Rayyan (Al Sraiya Stud)

CYCLING

Tour de France 'comes home' as 2025 route unveiled

AFP
Paris

The 2025 Tour de France will be raced exclusively in France for the first time since the 2020 Covid edition with the 21 stages including two time-trials, a blockbuster final week in the Alps and a return to the finale on the Champs-Elysees.

After successive starts outside France, in Copenhagen in 2022, Bilbao in 2023 and Florence in 2024, the 2025 "Grand Depart" is in the northern French city of Lille. "We decided to bring the Tour home, it was high time after all the foreign starts," race director Christian Prudhomme said.

Entirely absent from the 2024 route due to the Paris Olympics, the 2025 edition has eight stages in the north and west and ends with

eight laps along the cobbles of the Champs-Elysees. The Olympics enjoyed a huge success with a long, arduous road race around Paris but organisers said it was too soon for the Tour to attempt that.

"We are in talks with the city hall and the police about the possibility of doing that some time," Prudhomme told AFP.

A fierce struggle for the first yellow jersey accorded to the overall race leader will be decided on a 185km race around Lille. Fans from across the border in Belgium can support a potential winner in double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel, who finished third in the 2024 Tour. "Evenepoel proved last year he is also a man of the Tour and we expect him to be active this year too," Prudhomme said.

The three-week extravaganza visits the northern ports of Dunkirk and Boulogne before heading



The director of the Tour de France cycling race Christian Prudhomme poses in front of the route and stages of the 2025 edition after its official unveiling in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

to Caen where a time-trial will pay homage to those who fell in the 1944 Battle of Normandy which

largely destroyed the city. Organisers were keen to explain the first week was tough. "A week in the

plains is not the joy ride it was in the old days," Prudhomme said. "We have cut the sprint stages and laid traps everywhere."

The race also makes a rare incursion into Brittany.

"France is a big country and the Tour doesn't always get to Brittany but this year both of the Tours de France, men's and women's, have major stages there," said the Brittany-born David Lappartient, head of the International Cycling Union and candidate for the IOC presidency.

Stage 7, which starts in Saint Malo, ends on the short steep climb on the Mur-de-Bretagne where in 2021 Mathieu van der Poel, the grandson of Raymond Poulidor - 12 times on the podium but never a winner or leader of the Tour - avenged the family debt.

"We need stages like this, going back over legendary ground so

that children can dream of the Tour as we once did," Prudhomme said. Nature lovers will spot Chinon on stage 10, and the Rhone Valley on stage 17.

Tradition holds that the Tour de France is won and lost in the Alps and this edition has been stacked with mountains in the third week.

The first mountains come as late as stage 10 in the Massif Central on July 14, France's national holiday.

A day off in Toulouse on stage 11 is followed by three blockbuster climb stages in the Pyrenees, then three more in the last week in the Alps with a plethora of legendary Tour mountains on the menu.

Defending champion Tadej Pogacar will again start as favou ite alongside two-time winner Jonas Vingegaard with Evenepoel, who won the white jersey for best young rider in his first Tour in 2024, snapping at their heels.

Sheikh Joaan attends ANOC Executive Council meeting

The Senior Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani attended the 90th ANOC Executive Council meeting held in Cascais, Portugal, yesterday. The meeting, chaired by Dr Robin Mitchell, President of the ANOC, was also attended by Dr Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee. During the meeting, discussions focused on some key topics including the ANOC strategic plan and the reports of the continental federations and the ANOC standing committees on their latest programmes and initiatives.



SPOTLIGHT

Al-Attiyah's late entry boosts Qatar International Baja

'It was not the plan to do this but the event is special to me'

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah has entered the Qatar International Baja at the last minute to further boost a massive international entry of cars, motorcycles and quads for this weekend's three-day event that is based out of the Lusail International Circuit, north of Doha.

Competitors from a staggering 33 countries will tackle the fifth round of the FIM Bajas World Cup and crucial counting rounds of the FIA World and Middle East Baja Cups.

Al-Attiyah has teamed up with Spaniard Pablo Moreno for the first time - the usual co-driver for his Dacia teammate Cristina Gutierrez - and will drive a Nasser Racing Team Taurus T3 Max in the Challenger category. His knowledge of the desert, coupled with the competitive pace of such lightweight prototype cross-country vehicles, could well see the multiple winner of the event start as one of the favourites for yet another win on home sand.

Al-Attiyah's record in the Qatar desert is second to none: he won the inaugural event way back in 2004 with Didier Le Gal in a Chevrolet Pro Truck, repeated that success the following year in a BMW X5 with Alain Guehenec and then stormed to victory in the 2011 Baja with Lucas Cruz in a SAM Mercedes 35CC when the event returned to the calendar as an official FIA candidate.

Between 2012 and 2020, the event ran to a longer format as a round of the FIA Cross-Country Rallies World Cup and al-Attiyah was victorious in 2012, 2014-2017 and 2019-2020, taking five wins with Toyota and two with the X-Raid Mini team.

A shorter format event ran as a round of the FIA Middle East Cup for Cross-Country Bajas in 2022 and al-Attiyah was again on the top step of the podium - a feat he repeated last season when the event was included in the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Bajas.

"It was not the plan to do this but the event is special to me," said al-Attiyah, who will test the car today. Driving the Taurus will be a new challenge for me here before we switch attention to our final preparations for a first Dakar with Dacia.

"I try to be with the Nasser Racing team to manage these things. I had an extra car in Spain at my camp there and the federation (QMMF) gave me the chance to compete. I win many times and maybe we try to win. Why not? The Qatar Baja always has a big surprise. It doesn't always mean a T1+ wins. Look at what happened at Portalegre in Portugal recently. This year, Challenger beat the T1+. It will not be easy to fight but I am trying to get a



Nasser al-Attiyah will team up with Spaniard Pablo Moreno for the first time.



A view of the parc ferme at the Lusail International Circuit.

better set-up for the future for my clients.

"Pablo is with our Dacia team. My usual co-driver Edouard (Boulanger) is having an operation to remove the metal from his back. It's a good time for this for him to recover before the Dakar. I talk with Dacia and Prodrive and we agreed to take Pablo. He knows the cars well and it's good experience for him in Qatar as well."

Meanwhile, the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) is also fielding a five-car team with three of the five crews registered for the FIA Middle East Baja Cup.

Al-Attiyah's brother Khalifa has entered the Baja with Brazilian navigator Enzo Bozzano, the recently-crowned FIA Middle East rally champion Abdulaziz al-Kuwari teams up with his brother Nasser and Nouef al-Sowaidi and Lithuanian co-driver Aisvydas Paliukenas crew the third Taurus T3 Max registered for the regional series.

Rashid and Ahmad al-Muhannadi also drive T3 Max machines with Poland's Szymon Gospodarczyk and Tamer al-Hijazdeen working as their respective co-drivers.

Qatari Ahmed al-Kuwari is running one of the latest Yamaha YXZ 1000R models under the Quaddy Racing banner with Manuel Lucchese and will be aiming to maintain his lead in the overall FIA Middle East Baja Cup. Abdullah al-Rabban is challenging for Stock category success in a Nissan Patrol, while Mohammed al-Atteya and Abdullah al-Khelafif drive a pair of Can-Ams in the SSV class.

QMMF officials have made very minor tweaks to the demanding desert route with the opening stage on Friday slightly increased to 246.41km and the second stage through the south of the country on Saturday also upped to 251.10km for a total competitive distance of 497.51km.

Competitors will attend administration and scrutineering checks at the Lusail International Circuit throughout today. Several leading drivers and riders will then attend the official pre-event press conference at 18.00hrs.

On-stage action gets underway with a timed Prologue stage of 9.9km starting at 13.45hrs for the motorcycles tomorrow.

WORLD PADEL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Easy victories for Spain, Argentina as Qatar lose again

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Favourites Spain and Argentina continued to excel in the men's and women's divisions of the FIP World Padel Championships at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex yesterday.

Meanwhile, hosts Qatar suffered their second consecutive loss.

Argentina - the most successful nation in the history of Padel World championships, and Spain - the title-holders - recorded clean sweeps against USA and UAE respectively. However, Qatar, who went down to Chile on Day 1 of the prestigious event, lost in straight sets yesterday to France.

In a seemingly one-sided clash in Group B, Spanish men swept past UAE, with the world's top pair Juan Lebron and Arturo Coello opening with a strong 6-1, 6-2 victory over S Icardo and I Jofre.

World No 3 Alejandro Galan and Miguel Yanguas followed with a hard-fought win against F Jurado and A Ayats to secure a 6-4, 7-5 result. Finally, Francisco Navarro and Jorge Sanz completed the sweep, blanking F al-Janahi and M al-Janahi with a quick 6-0, 6-0 win in just 33 minutes.

Argentina also followed in a similar fashion in Group A. In the opening match, Agustin Tapia and Federico Chingotto set the tone with a flawless 6-0, 6-0 win over

M Segura and S Castaneda Rubio.

C D Gutierrez and L Augsburg continued Argentina's winning streak with a 6-3, 6-3 win against V Di Francesco and N Agritelley. V G Libaak and A Chozas defeated R Ruiz Alvarez and W Agritelley 6-1, 6-3 to complete the sweep.

In Group C, France's men's team was too good for Qatar in their second match of the Championships. Jeremy Bergeron and Thomas Vanbaucé overcame Abdulla Alhijji and Mohammed Abdulla 6-0, 6-1 in 51 minutes in Game 1.

Maxime Joris and Bastien Blaque followed up with an impressive 6-1, 6-1 performance over Mohamed al-Khanji and Mohamed Saadon al-Kuwari, before Thomas Leygue and Theo Fonteny took down Ahmed Hassan and Jabbar al-Mutawa with a score of 6-0, 6-1 in 36 minutes.

In other key encounters of the day, Brazil beat Netherlands 3-0 while Chile won 2-1 against Uruguay.

On the women's side too, Spain and Argentina continued their winning streaks to jump to the top of their respective groups, while Italy and France also remain unbeaten.

Yesterday morning, France beat the Netherlands 3-0, Belgium defeated Denmark 3-0, Sweden overcame Uruguay 3-0, and Italy won 3-0 against Japan. Portugal also made a clean sweep against USA, while Brazil fought back to beat Germany 2-1.



Qatar players react during their match against France at the World Padel Championships at Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex.

FOOTBALL

Vinicius believes fighting racism led to Ballon d'Or snub

Reuters
Madrid

Brazil and Real Madrid forward Vinicius Jr said on Monday that he will keep on fighting racism even if his activism is what led to him not winning the Ballon d'Or, sources close to the player told Reuters.

Vinicius took to social media after finishing second in the prestigious award voting behind Spain and Manchester City midfielder Rodri. "I will do it 10 times if I have to. They're not ready," Vinicius posted on X after his La Liga side Real Madrid cancelled their plans to attend the ceremony in Paris, boycotting it in anticipation of the Brazilian not winning the men's award.

Asked what Vinicius meant with his post, his management staff told Reuters that he was referring to his fight against racism and that they believe it was what led to him not winning the award, saying that "the football world is not ready to

accept a player who fights against the system."

The 24-year-old Brazil international has been subjected to racial abuse on several occasions in Spain, leading to at least two convictions for racist insults in pioneer cases in the country. Real also won the men's club of the year award, and their manager Carlo Ancelotti was named men's coach of the year after winning the European and Spanish league double in a near perfect campaign last season.

Vinicius was instrumental in Real's Champions League-La Liga double along with 21-year-old Jude Bellingham, who scored 19 goals in a sparkling debut campaign and helped England reach the Euro 2024 final, and came third in the Ballon d'Or ranking.

Meanwhile, City manager Pep Guardiola said Rodri was a worthy winner of the Ballon d'Or but was reluctant to criticise Real Madrid's snub of Monday night's awards ceremony saying the decision was up to them.

Amorim set to become new Man United boss as Sporting confirm interest



London: Ruben Amorim is set to become the next manager of Manchester United with the Premier League club prepared to pay Sporting the 10m euros (\$10.79m) release clause, the Portuguese club said.

The news comes a day after the team sacked Erik ten Hag with United languishing in 14th place in the Premier League standings. The Portuguese coach could be in place for Sunday's league game against Chelsea at Old Trafford. "Manchester United FC expressed interest in hiring coach Ruben Amorim, with Sporting's board of directors referring to the terms and conditions set out in the employment contract in force between the company and the coach, specifically the respective termination clause and for the amount of

euro 10,000,000," a statement from the Lisbon-based club said.

United declined to comment. The 39-year-old Amorim, who emerged as a front-runner soon after Ten Hag's sacking, led Sporting to the Primeira Liga title in 2021, ending a 19-year league title drought, before winning a second last season.

Portuguese media reported his final game with Sporting would be on Tuesday evening against Nacional, and that Amorim is negotiating with United over his staff and salary. Amorim has been coveted by a number of clubs, including Liverpool where he was heavily linked with replacing Juergen Klopp last season with the club eventually choosing to hire Arne Slot instead. He also held talks with West Ham

United to replace David Moyes before opting to remain in Lisbon.

His appearance in London for talks with West Ham, just ahead of the Portuguese club's clash with rivals Porto, did not go down well with Sporting fans. He subsequently apologised for his actions.

Amorim would step into what is considered one of football's most scrutinised jobs at a club clamouring for a return to the glory days. Ten Hag, who was sacked a day after a 2-1 loss to West Ham, was the fifth permanent coach since the club's most successful boss Alex Ferguson, to attempt to take them there.

The Portuguese is no stranger to the Old Trafford pressure-cooker, having done a coaching internship under Jose Mourinho

at the club six years ago. He also has a fan in United captain and Portugal midfielder Bruno Fernandes who said earlier this month that "Since Mr Amorim arrived at Sporting, it has been one of the teams to play the best football."

Amorim, a former Benfica and Portugal midfielder who won three Primeira League titles with Benfica, is known for dynamic, offensive football. His teams can counter-attack quickly when in possession.

The manager laughed when asked about the reports at a Sporting press conference, saying he was expecting the question but was not prepared to talk about it. United's interim manager Ruud van Nistelrooy will be in charge of today's League Cup tie at home to Leicester City.