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CRICKET | Page 2

England win in Rajkot to stay alive in T20 series vs India



FOCUS | Page 3

Eliasch promises climate for change if elected IOC president

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MOTORSPORT

QMMF announces 29-car field for Qatar International Rally

Page 4

Sheikh Joaan meets World Triathlon President



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), met with Antonio Fernandez Arimany, President of World Triathlon who is currently visiting Doha. During the meeting, they discussed various aspects of development and opportunities for mutual cooperation between the Qatar Olympic Committee and World Triathlon. The meeting was attended by Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the QOC, and Engineer Abdulaziz Saud al-Tamimi, President of the Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

High-flying Gharafa take on rejuvenated Al Rayyan

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Two exciting Qatar Stars League clashes are set for today as in-form Al Gharafa take on a rejuvenated Al Rayyan at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, while Al Ahli seek redemption against struggling Al Khor at Al Khor Stadium.

Pedro Martins' Gharafa are riding a wave of confidence, having secured their sixth consecutive victory with a 2-0 win over Al Ahli. The winning streak has propelled the Cheetahs to second place with 27 points, just two behind leaders Duhail. Martins remains cautious ahead of the clash with Rayyan, who have improved significantly since the winter break.

"Our preparations have been good, and our goal is to continue achieving victories," Martins said yesterday. "Although Al Rayyan did not start the league well, they have strong capabilities and a good coach. It will be an interesting match."

Al Rayyan, under Artur Jorge, have climbed to sixth place following a 6-2 victory over Umm Salal and a goalless draw against Al Duhail. Jorge is optimistic about his team's prospects. "Our performance was good against Al Duhail, but results are crucial. We will go all out for a win to collect three points and improve our position," Jorge said.



Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins

At Al Khor Stadium, Al Ahli are determined to bounce back after their 2-0 defeat to Al Gharafa, which saw them slip to fourth place with 25 points. Coach Igor Biscan has called for an improved performance.

QSL ROUND 14 FIXTURES

Today: 4:30pm: Al Rayyan vs Al Gharafa at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium; 6:45pm: Al Khor vs Al Ahli at Al Khor Stadium

Tomorrow: 4:30pm: Qatar SC vs Al Shamal at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium; 6:45pm: Al Arabi vs Al Sadd at Al Thumama Stadium

On Friday: 4:30pm: Umm Salal vs Al Duhail at Grand Hamad Stadium; 6:45pm: Al Wakrah vs Al Shahania at Stadium 974

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar to host T100 Triathlon Worlds Final for next five years

Visit Qatar yesterday announced a five-year partnership with Professional Triathletes organisation

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Visit Qatar, the Professional Triathletes Organisation, World Triathlon and the Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation have announced the hosting of the Triathlon World Championship Finals Qatar T100 from 2025 to 2029. This comes as part of a five-year partnership agreement between Visit Qatar and the Professional Triathletes Organisation.

The inaugural Qatar T100 Triathlon World Championship Final will be held from December 11th to 13th, 2025. The swim leg will take place in the Arabian Gulf, while the bike and run legs will navigate through Doha and Lusail, passing several iconic landmarks such as the Lusail Stadium.

The multisport festival weekend will also offer a series of swim, bike, and run events for amateurs, including the chance for amateur athletes to participate in the new 100km triathlon distance (2km swim, 80km bike, 18km run) alongside the best professional triathletes in the world.

Commenting on the partnership, Eng. Abdulaziz al-Mawlawi, CEO of Visit Qatar, said: "We are delighted to partner with the Professional Triathletes Organisation to host the Qatar T100 Triathlon World Championship Final in our vibrant cities for the next five years. This event underscores Qatar's growing reputation as a premier sports destination, showcasing our commitment to hosting world-class international sporting events. Qatar's infrastructure, state-of-the-art facilities, and rich sports culture offers the perfect environment to host this event. This collaboration further strengthens Qatar's position as a global hub for sports tourism, inspiring both professional athletes and enthusiasts alike."

Antonio Fernandez Arimany, President of World Triathlon, who have designated the series as the 'Official World Championship Tour of long-distance triathlon', added: "The T100 Triathlon World Championship Final represents a new chapter for our sport, combining elite competition with global accessibility and participation. As we continue to grow triathlon around the world, confirming the presence of the Qatar T100 Triathlon World Championship Final on the calendar for the next five years is another major milestone for our great sport in this dynamic region. Part-



CEO of Visit Qatar Eng. Abdulaziz al-Mawlawi, President of World Triathlon Antonio Fernandez Arimany, CEO of Professional Triathletes organisation Sam Renouf, Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation President Abdulaziz al-Tamimi and other officials pose after the press conference in Doha yesterday.

nering with Visit Qatar and the Qatar Triathlon Federation to host this prestigious event in Doha ensures not only a world-class experience for professional athletes but also an incredible opportunity for the broader triathlon community to connect with our sport. Qatar's dedication to innovation and excellence aligns seamlessly with our vision for the T100 series, and we're excited to see triathlon thrive in this dynamic and inspiring destination. Mass participation events are once more thriving alongside the elite racing around the world and really building into a major movement in the Middle East."

Sam Renouf, CEO of the PTO, said at a press conference held in Doha: "We have always been clear about our strategy for the T100 Triathlon World Tour - to feature iconic locations and create a world-class destination for our series. This five-year partnership with Visit Qatar allows us to achieve that vision in one of the fastest-growing, family-friendly tourist destinations in the world, which welcomed more than five million visitors last year. Qatar's residents and visitors are showing increasing demand not only to attend world-class

sporting events but also to participate in them. The legacy of major events like the FIFA World Cup and Formula 1 has encouraged such demand. The season-long series will be known as the T100 Race to Qatar and will not only be a spectacular finale for our new professional series, but also provide opportunities for amateur swimmers, cyclists, and runners - from first timers to the inaugural T100 Age Group World Championships."

He added: "Qatar is a nation with a deep respect for its heritage, yet one that is firmly focused on the future. In addition to its role as a hub for global universities and cutting-edge health and research centres, the country has a rapidly growing sports ecosystem, including training, sports medicine, and wellness facilities. This aligns perfectly with the goals we have for the T100 series."

Abdulaziz al-Tamimi, Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation President said, "As President of the Qatar Triathlon Federation, I am thrilled to announce that hosting the Qatar T100 Triathlon World Championship Final over the next five years marks a significant milestone in strengthening

Qatar's position as a global hub for sports. This prestigious event aligns with our vision to elevate triathlon in Qatar and support our athletes in achieving international excellence."

"As a passionate triathlete, it has always been a dream to witness a world-class event like this in our homeland. Hosting this championship simplifies logistical challenges for athletes and reflects Qatar's commitment to fostering a vibrant sports culture. Developing our national team is a key priority, as we prepare our athletes to compete globally and proudly represent Qatar. The presence of elite triathletes offers opportunities for inspiration and growth, encouraging the community to embrace the sport," he added.

He concluded by saying, "This championship will inspire younger generations to adopt active lifestyles, aligning with Qatar's National Vision 2030. By hosting this event, we reinforce Qatar's legacy of organizing world-class sporting events that promote health, wellness, and resilience. We look forward to welcoming athletes and spectators from around the globe to share in this incredible experience and

celebrate the sport of triathlon together."

The list of athletes for the 2025 T100 Triathlon World Tour was announced earlier this month, with a remarkable group of Olympic champions and World Championship winners from 13 countries participating. The women's field will be led by American and Belgian Olympians Taylor Knibb and Marten Van Riel, who won the inaugural T100 Triathlon World Championship Finals in Dubai, becoming the first-ever T100 series world champions.

Each athlete will have to compete in at least five of the ten T100 races during the season, with their four best scores plus their result in the Qatar T100 Triathlon World Championship Final, where points will count double, contributing to their final T100 standing. Qatar's global positioning as a hub for international sports event continues to grow, with 2025 T100 Triathlon World Championship contribute to its sporting legacy. By hosting globally recognised events such as the Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix, and the AFC Asian Cup, Qatar has demonstrated its ability to captivate sport audiences and enthusiasts from around the world.

MATCH REPORT

England post win in Rajkot to stay alive in T20 series

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy bags 5-24 but India lose by 26 runs



England's captain Jos Buttler (third right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India's Washington Sundar during the third Twenty20 at the Niranjan Shah Stadium in Rajkot yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Rajkot

England secured a 26-run victory over India in the third T20 International yesterday as some sprightly bowling kept the tourists alive in the five-match series against the world champions.

Put into bat, England posted a modest 171-9 with Ben Duckett (51) and Liam Livingstone (43) providing major contributions.

India spinner Varun Chakravarthy claimed 5-24 but the English bowlers made their own mark and restricted their hosts to 145-9 to deny India an unassailable 3-0 lead in the series.

Beaten comprehensively in Kolkata and narrowly in Chennai, England had to win at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in what is their first series under Brendon McCullum as their white-ball coach.

India seamer Hardik Pandya dismissed Phil Salt in his first over but Duckett and England captain Jos Buttler (24) propped up England with a 76-run stand.



India's Varun Chakravarthy (left) celebrates with captain Suryakumar Yadav after taking the wicket of England's Jofra Archer in Rajkot yesterday. (AFP)

An in-form Chakravarthy continued to torment the England batters and dismissed Buttler caught behind to trigger a batting collapse.

Buttler was initially adjudged not out but wicketkeeper Sanju Samson convinced India captain Suryakumar Yadav to review the decision, which was overturned after replays confirmed the batter had gloved the ball.

Duckett raced to a 26-ball fifty but fell soon after to Axar Patel's left-arm spin.

Chakravarthy dismissed Jamie Smith and Jamie Overton with successive deliveries but a hat-trick eluded him.

Realising he was running out of partners, Livingstone counter-attacked hitting spinner Ravi Bishnoi for three sixes in an over. For India, seamer Moham-

med Shami conceded 25 runs in his three tidy, though wicketless, overs on his return to international cricket after a year on the sidelines with an ankle injury. Jofra Archer (2-33) dismissed Samson in his second over and then took a tumbling catch to remove the other India opener Abhishek Sharma, who made 24 and was looking dangerous.

Mark Wood got rid of Suryakumar and Adil Rashid sent back Tilak Varma to put England in charge. Pandya kept India's hopes alive with a defiant 40 but his dismissal in the 19th over effectively sealed the match in England's favour. The teams move to Pune for the penultimate T20 on Friday.

BRIEF SCORES
England 171-9 in 20 overs (B. Duckett 51, L. Livingstone 43; V. Chakravarthy 5-24, H. Pandya 2-33) **v India 145-9 in 20 overs** (H. Pandya 40, A. Sharma 24; J. Overton 3-24, J. Archer 2-33, B. Carse 2-28, A. Rashid 1-15)
Result: England won by 26 runs
Toss: India
Series: India lead the five-match series 2-1

SPOTLIGHT

India's Bumrah named cricketer of the year after stellar 2024

AFF
New Delhi

India pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah has been named men's cricketer of the year for 2024, the International Cricket Council announced yesterday, a day after he won the Test award.

Bumrah, 31, ended last year as the top wicket-taker in Tests with 71 wickets and inspired India to the T20 World Cup title in June.

"The year 2024 was incredibly special - winning the men's T20 World Cup 2024 in Barbados and also contributing as much as I could across all three formats of the game," said Bumrah.

"I dedicate this award to everyone who has believed in me, the power of hard work and dreams, and to bowlers worldwide who continue to inspire and strive for excellence."

Bumrah beat England batters Harry Brook and Joe Root as well as Australia's Travis Head to the award - the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, given by the sport's governing body.

He is fifth Indian to receive the award after Rahul Dravid (2004), Sachin Tendulkar (2010), Ravichandran Ashwin (2016) and Virat Kohli (2017, 2018).

Bumrah has claimed 443 wickets in 204 international matches since his debut for India in 2016.

New Zealand all-rounder Amelia Kerr was voted women's cricketer of the year to win the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy, after she



won the T20 cricketer of the year on Saturday.

Kerr becomes the first New Zealander to win the trophy after she inspired the White Ferns to their women's T20 World Cup victory in October last year.

The 24-year-old overcame South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt, Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu and Australia's Anabel Sutherland to win the award.

Owen puts Australia selectors on notice with BBL ton

Melbourne: The sky is the limit for Mitchell Owen after his "life-changing" century sealed a maiden title for the Hobart Hurricanes in Australia's Big Bash League, according to captain Nathan Ellis. Owen blasted 108 off 42 balls as the Hurricanes mowed down a tough chase of 183 set by the Sydney Thunder to secure the T20 trophy in front of delighted fans at Bellerive Oval on Monday. Reaching 100 in 39 balls in a clinic of clean hitting, Owen matched the fastest BBL century, set by former Perth Scorchers opener Craig Simmons in 2014. "It was pretty special innings and surreal for him having the whole of Ninja (Bellerive) Stadium chanting, 'Mitch Owen,'" Ellis said after the Hurricanes' seven-wicket win. "He went another level tonight," Ellis added. "I'm really proud of him and excited for him that he's going to have a pretty good next couple of days and soak up what has been a pretty life-changing tournament for him."

"He'll have white-ball cricket coming at him all over the world now so I'm excited for what's to come for him and it feels like the

sky's the limit." As a relatively obscure middle order batter, Owen had never been in conversations about playing for Australia but the 23-year-old's promotion to the top of the Hurricanes' order this season has put his name in lights. He is the only player to notch two centuries in this edition of the BBL, having also scored 101 off 64 balls against the Scorchers. He also topped the runs list with 452 at an average of 45.20, ahead of Sydney Thunder captain David Warner, the recently retired Australia great. The 6ft-4in (1.94m) batter's rise is timely given Australia's selectors are looking for new blood to carry the T20 squad forward, with the next World Cup scheduled in just over a year's time in India and Sri Lanka. Australia's ageing squad failed to make the semi-finals of last year's T20 World Cup, co-hosted by the United States and West Indies. Owen paid tribute to Ellis and the Hurricanes' coach Jeff Vaughan for their support. "I was just super clear when I went out there, I knew what I wanted to do and needed to do, and I was lucky enough it paid off," he said.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Allardice steps down as ICC CEO after four years

www.ESPNCricinfo.com
Dubai

Geoff Allardice has resigned as chief executive of the ICC after four years in the role, citing a desire to "pursue new challenges".

Allardice was appointed chief executive in November 2021, having taken over on an interim basis eight months previously when his predecessor, Manu Sawhney, was suspended.

He has worked at the ICC since 2012, initially as general manager of cricket after a previous role with Cricket Australia.

"It has been a privilege to serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the International Cricket Council," Allardice said. "I am incredibly proud of the results we have achieved, from enhancing the global reach of cricket to the commercial foundation put in place for ICC Members."

"I'd like to thank the ICC Chair, the board of directors and (the) entire cricket community for their support and collaboration over the past 13 years."

"I believe this is the right time for me to step down and pursue new challenges."

"I am confident that cricket has exciting times ahead, and I wish the ICC and the global cricket community every success in the future."

Allardice's decision to step down coincides with the early days of Jay Shah's term as ICC chair. Shah, the ex-secretary of the BCCI, took over from Greg Barclay on December 1.

"On behalf of the ICC Board, I want to sincerely thank Geoff for his leadership and commitment during his tenure as Chief Executive," Shah said.

"His efforts have played a key role in advancing cricket globally. We are truly grateful for his service and wish him all the very best in his future endeavours."

Allardice, like his predecessor Dave Richardson, maintained a lower profile as CEO than predecessors such as Haroon Lorgat or Malcolm Speed, but he was an instrumental administrator within the ICC.

The ICC said in a statement that its board will "initiate the next steps to identify" Allardice's successor, but it has not clarified if Allardice was leaving with immediate effect or whether he will stay until the end of the Champions Trophy.

PREVIEW

Smith set to pass 10,000 Test runs in Sri Lanka

AFF
Galle, Sri Lanka

Australian batting great Steve Smith begins a tour of Sri Lanka just one short of entering the elite club of 10,000 Test runs ahead of today's opening match in Galle.

Smith, who will captain the team for the two-match series in the absence of Pat Cummins, has amassed 9,999 runs in 114 matches at an average of more than 55.

The 35-year-old is all but assured of becoming the 15th batsman in the world - and fourth Australian after Ricky Ponting, Allan Border and Steve Waugh - to achieve the milestone.

Smith said the landmark would not be on his mind when he walks out at the picturesque Galle stadium overlooking the Indian Ocean.

"Honestly, I'm trying not to think about it too much," he told reporters yesterday.

Smith suggested it had played on his mind "a bit too much" during Australia's fifth and final Test against India in Sydney this month, where his 33 and four left him agonisingly short.

"Now it's just about focusing on the job at hand," he said.

Travis Head will open the batting in place of 19-year-old Sam



Australia's captain Steve Smith (left) poses with his Sri Lankan counterpart Dhananjaya de Silva on the eve of their first Test at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle yesterday. (AFP)

Konastas on a pitch that is expected to favour spinners and at a venue where Sri Lanka have won 27 of the 46 Tests played.

"Travis will bat at the top, but we'll finalise the XI after another look at the pitch tomorrow morning," Smith said. "The wicket has changed a bit since yesterday, so we'll weigh our options."

Australia, who have already set up a World Test Championship (WTC) final with South Africa at Lord's in June, will be looking to stamp their authority as the number-one Test team. Smith

was coy on whether wicketkeeper Josh Inglis, 29, was in line for his Test debut.

"He has solid defence, plays spin well, and scores all around the wicket," Smith said. "If he gets his chance, I'm confident he'll grab it with both hands."

Sri Lanka, led by Dhananjaya de Silva, will be looking to reclaim the Warne-Murali trophy, named after late Australia hero Shane Warne and Sri Lankan spin wizard Muttiah Muralitharan.

Sri Lanka hammered the visiting Australians 3-0 in 2016

but the last series in 2022 ended 1-1, with both matches played in Galle.

"The last time we won the Warne-Murali Trophy was in 2016, which was also my debut series. A lot of players from that campaign are still in the mix and we believe we have what it takes to repeat history," de Silva told reporters.

"Another incentive for us is the chance to finish third in the WTC standings if we win 2-0. That would be a tremendous achievement."

FOCUS

Eliasch promises climate for change if elected IOC chief

'We can't afford to take our eye off the ball for even just a second'

AFP
Paris

Johan Eliasch says he was as surprised as anyone that he threw his hat into the ring to succeed Thomas Bach as IOC president but he told AFP he is the right person to meet the disparate challenges that lie ahead, especially the pivotal issue of the environment.

Eliasch is a highly successful businessman and renowned environmentalist – making him a pertinent candidate in light of the recent wildfires in 2028 Games host city Los Angeles – and has been president of the International Ski Federation since 2021.

He hopes such a CV will dazzle his electorate, the International Olympic Committee members, when they choose one of the seven candidates to be Bach's successor in March this year, even if he has only been a member since July.

Eliasch may lack the profile of athletics icon Sebastian Coe and the inside knowledge of the IOC that Juan Antonio Samaranch Junior possesses after two decades as a member, but he believes he has the skillset required to run the most powerful body in sport.

"I have been an adviser to governments on protecting the environment and taking action on climate change," he told AFP in an interview this month.

"I have been very involved in technology, I have run a major company. I run the biggest winter sports federation, which provides 55 percent of all events in the Win-



ter Games. "The bottom line is if they are looking for somebody with a lot of experience and expertise I am your man."

Eliasch, who refers to himself as Anglo-Swedish as he has spent more time in Britain than his country of birth, said the new president arrives at a crucial moment. "We are at a crossroads where expectations are very high and if you get things wrong it will not be a soft landing, it will be a crash landing," he said.

"So it is important to have the right person steering us into the future and there are going to be some very big decisions coming

up in sport," Eliasch, who says as he will be 63 come the election, it will be "his last hurrah".

'SLIPPERY SLOPE'

On key issues such as the environment and sustainability he has a proven track record – for example, he founded Cool Earth, a charity dedicated to rainforest conservation in 2006.

"I was always passionate about nature," he said.

"There is an existential threat, though, centring round food, water and climate security.

"If you cut down rainforests in one part of the world rain falls in

different places, then agricultural land becomes non-productive and people start moving round, which provokes conflicts."

The art-loving Eliasch, a keen sportsman himself who has tried his hand at skiing, curling, tennis, golf and motor sports, said the LA fires were a taste of what is to come. "We can't afford to take our eye off the ball for even just a second, as far as climate change is concerned," he said.

"The LA fires – the destruction and heartbreak they've caused, and how close they've come to LA28 venues – it shows us the urgency, and how vigilant and prepared and well-resourced we must be to avoid, manage and contain these extreme weather events.

"Because the sad fact is we're going to see more of them in the future, not less."

On the thorny issue of Russia and the Olympics, he admires the work done by Bach. Russia as a nation state has been out in the sporting cold since President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Eliasch, though, believes it was right to allow Russians and Belarusians to compete as neutral athletes at the Paris Olympics last year.

"This goes to the very core of the Olympic movement, our ability to unite," he said.

"Here we can be part of the solution to facilitate a faster peace.

Yes we have to be sensitive to countries who have very strong opinions, but we must never compromise our neutrality.

"We must not tread in political waters as that is a slippery slope."

TENNIS

Raducanu clings to positives after early Singapore Open exit

Reuters
London

Emilia Raducanu refused to be too downcast after suffering an opening round exit at the Singapore Open when the British seventh seed lost 5-7 7-5 7-5 to the 101st-ranked Cristina Bucsa.

Raducanu progressed to the third round of the recently concluded Australian Open for the first time in her career before losing to five-times Grand Slam champion and Polish second-seed Iga Swiatek in straight sets.

Having dealt with a string of injuries since capturing the 2021 US Open, her only major, Raducanu went down in Singapore after a three-hour and three-minute battle against her Spanish opponent on Monday.

But the 22-year-old was happy with the way she handled

herself following the end of her partnership with coach Nick Cavaday, who stepped back from the role last week to prioritise getting back to full health.

"I have the positives (from) this week, coming here on my own with Yutaka and my mom, but I'm really proud of how I dealt and handled myself this week," Raducanu told ESPN after the match, referring to her fitness coach Yutaka Nakamura.

"I feel OK. I feel like I have certain things we all manage as the year goes on. I think it's pretty early in the season.

"For me to be playing this kind of match, all I need is time on court and a match-competitive situation, which I got today. I got it in abundance – over three hours of it – so, for me, it's really valuable because every match I play, I feel like it's a win.



Qatar to compete in Asian Winter Games in Harbin

Qatar will compete at the 9th Asian Winter Games, scheduled from February 7 to 14 in Harbin, China. The event will feature 1,275 athletes from 34 National Olympic Committees across Asia, battling in six sports across 11 disciplines. The curling team will launch Qatar's campaign on February 4, three days before the official opening ceremony. The Olympic Council of Asia first organised the Asian Winter Games in 1986, with Japan's Sapporo hosting the previous edition in 2017.

Qatar's 15-member delegation includes: Curling: Abdulrahman Qassim al-Yafei, Ahmed Saad al-Fahad, Nasser Abdulrahman al-Yafei, Mubarak Salem al-Marri, Mohammed Hassan al-Nuaimi, Naif Badr al-Rumaihi, Al Dana Ahmed al-Fahad, Sarah Hamoud al-Qait, Fatima Ahmed al-Fahad, Hasina Hassan al-Fahad, Mubarak Salem al-Abdullah, and Amna Hamoud al-Qait. Short Track Speed Skating: Mohammed Masoud al-Abdullah, Snow Skiing: Mohammed Khaled al-Kuwari, Snow Mountain Skiing: Khalifa Ahmed al-Majramd. (QNA)

ANNOUNCEMENT

QFA appoints Mejia as head coach of U17 team

QNA
Doha

Qatar Football Association (QFA) yesterday appointed Spanish coach Alvaro Mejia as the head coach of the Qatar U17 national team.

Mejia, a former Real Madrid defender and the ex-coach of Qatar Stars League side Al Shahania, has signed a three-year contract to lead the young squad through key international competitions.

Mejia tenure's first major task will be the FIFA U17 World Cup, which Qatar will host from No-

vember 5 to 27, 2025. The tournament will see the world's top youth teams compete in the Gulf nation, marking the first time Qatar will stage the prestigious event.

Significantly, this edition will be the first of five consecutive FIFA U17 World Cups Qatar is set to host through 2029, as part of a strategic partnership with FIFA to promote youth development and global football growth. Mejia's appointment underscores QFA's commitment to nurturing young footballers, with the ultimate goal of producing a competitive pipeline for Qatar's senior national team in future international competitions.



SPOTLIGHT

Mercedes 1955 'streamliner' set to smash F1 record at auction

Reuters
Fellbach, Germany

Asleek, long-nosed Mercedes raced by Stirling Moss and five-times Formula One world champion Juan Manuel Fangio in 1955 could become the most expensive grand prix car of all time at an auction in Stuttgart on Saturday.

The W196 R Stromlinienwagen ("Streamline car"), one of only four complete examples in existence, is being sold by RM Sotheby's on behalf of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS) at a target price of more than 50mn euros (\$52mn).

If it meets the estimate, it would also be the second costliest car ever sold at auction after a 1955 Mercedes 300SLR Uhlenhaut Coupe sports car that changed hands for 135mn euros in May 2022. The most expensive grand prix car sold at auction to date was another ex-Fangio 1954 Mercedes W196 that fetched \$29.6mn at Goodwood in 2013.

The IMS car is the first streamline-bodied W196 R to become available for private ownership and, in its open-wheel form, was driven to victory by Fangio at the non-championship Buenos Aires Grand Prix in 1955. Moss raced it with the streamline body at the Italian Grand Prix at Monza, retiring after setting the fastest lap at an average



A streamlined Mercedes raced by Stirling Moss and five times Formula One world champion Juan Manuel Fangio in 1955 is pictured in Fellbach near Stuttgart, Germany, on January 24, 2025. (Reuters)

speed of 215.7kph. Mercedes withdrew from factory-sponsored motorsport in 1955 after a Le Mans 24 Hours disaster that killed 84 people, returning to Formula One as an engine maker in 1994. The car is presented in its Monza livery with full documentation.

"Without any doubt, it's the most beautiful race car in the world and ever. Nothing can compare. It's simply a masterpiece of style and design," Marcus Breitschwerdt, head of Mercedes-

Benz heritage, told Reuters Television. "It is very fast. The top speed is actually above and beyond 300kph. "I wouldn't expect that it's too much of an effort to get it back to driving condition. And we gladly will offer whoever buys the car to do it for them."

The car, chassis number 00009/54, was donated to the IMS by Mercedes in 1965 and is being sold to raise funds for the museum's restoration efforts. The Indianapolis museum, which is

aiming to become more US-focused, is selling a total of 11 cars from its collection at three separate auctions this year.

The Mercedes 'Silver Arrows' dominated the immediate pre- and post World War Two era of grand prix racing with the W196 R a world-beater in 1954 and 1955.

The streamlined bodywork with enclosed wheels was used at high-speed circuits, with the open-wheeled version favoured for more twisty tracks.

Woods details 'difficult' decision to move Genesis to Torrey Pines

Tiger Woods admitted that it was "very difficult" to relocate The Genesis Invitational to Torrey Pines Golf Course in San Diego in the wake of the wildfires in California.

Riviera Country Club is in the hard-hit Pacific Palisades section of Los Angeles and was set to hold the Feb. 13-16 tournament, which is hosted by Woods and his foundation.

"The meeting we had was very difficult with the Watanabes (Riviera CC's owners)," Woods

said Monday after his Jupiter Links Golf Club team posted a 4-3 win in overtime against Rory McIlroy's Boston Common Golf squad in TGL action. "Riv is just not ready. We want to stay on the West Coast, and it narrowed those options down to possibly up near Pebble or to Phoenix or to Vegas or to San Diego or to Palm Springs. There were so many different options out on the table, and we were trying to be understanding to all the victims that these fires have caused, has brought to them.

"The fact that we were able to, with the city of San Diego, were able to stay within Southern California, with respect to the difficulties in LA, I think it's important that we were able to stay in Southern California because everyone who was born and raised out in Southern Cal can all relate to the fires. It's a difficult situation, and we want to be very sensitive to that." Woods was born and raised in Southern California. Torrey Pines, an annual tour stop since 1968, is the site of last

week's Farmers Insurance Open. The municipal course also hosted the 2008 and 2021 US Opens, won by Woods and Spaniard Jon Rahm, respectively. The PGA Tour said The Genesis Invitational is expected to return to Riviera in 2026. The course also is scheduled to host the golf events in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. "I think because we're in Southern California," Woods said, "I think we're going to be able to raise more money for all the losses that have incurred."

MOTORSPORT

QMMF announces 29-car field for Qatar International Rally

This year's 45th event ever to be held will also mark the 50th anniversary of the first Qatar Rally

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

The Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) has announced a 29-car entry and competitors from 17 countries for the 2025 Qatar International Rally from February 6-8. This year's 45th event ever to be held will also mark the 50th anniversary of the first Qatar International Rally. The 1975 rally was won by Great Britain's Peter Austin and his Qatari co-driver Hameed Abdel Rahman in a Mazda 929 Coupe. That laid the early foundations for the creation of the Gulf series and then the formation of the FISA Middle East Rally Championship in 1984. The second round of the 2025 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) follows on from last weekend's season opener in Oman and sees three regional rally champions heading the entry. The full list contains seven Rally 2 cars, one Rally 3, four Rally 4s, a Rally5, a dozen crews competing in the NR4 group and four SSVs in the T4 category. Nineteen teams are registered for the MERC.

The Qatari duo of the early season championship leader Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and Abdulaziz al-Kuwari top the field. They will be joined by fellow Qatari Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah, Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi and Saudi Arabia's Rakan al-Rashed in the Rally 2 machinery that competed last weekend in Oman, in addition to an SRT-run Skoda Fabia for Denis Krotov and a return to the event for Mads Ostberg. The latter will be partnered by Romanian co-driver Sergiu Itu, the regular co-driver for Simone Tempestini in the FIA European Rally Championship. Itu did compete with Ostberg in 2024, however, and finished second in Slovenia's Rally Nova Gorica. Rashid al-Muhannadi overcame late drama to finish fourth in Oman and he heads the four-car Rally 4 field in a Peugeot 208. Mohammed al-Marri and Saad al-Har-



Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah with Mads Ostberg and last year's event winner Pierre-Louis Loubet in Lusail.

qan are entered in a pair of similar cars and Indian driver Payyakkal Saneem Panikkaveetil will be hoping for better luck in his Ford Fiesta after a late retirement from round one. Last year's MERC2 champion Shaker Jweihan is the sole entrant in a Ford Fiesta in the Rally 3 group and Shadi El-Fakih continues the defence of his MERC4 title in a Renault Clio. The Lebanese finished ninth overall last weekend. Oman's Abdullah al-Zubair secured victory in MERC2 at the opening round in Sohar and heads an impressive field of Subaru and Mitsubishi drivers chasing showroom class honours. Eight of the 12 crews are registered for the MERC. Kuwait's Jassim al-Muqahwi, Oman's

Zakariya al-Aamri, the Lebanese duo of Jad al-Aawar and Ahmad Khaled, India's Mohamed Mansoor Parol and Jordanian drivers, Shadi Shaban and Ihab al-Shorafa, complete the registered driver line-up. San-Marino-based Simone Temeroli, Italy's Stefano Marrini and Cristiano Gabbarrini and local driver Mohammed al-Atteya will be chasing silverware in Qatar but are not in the hunt for MERC points. At the rear of the field, Saudi Arabia's Ibrahim al-Muhanna is chasing SSV class and Master Cup honours in his Can-Am. He is joined by female racer Yosra Jazzar in her Can-Am and the Italian duo of Mirko Carrara (Can-Am) and Marco Marotta (Yamaha) in the SSV class. Al-Muhanna will be co-driven by Hani al-Noumesi.

The event is being held under the chairmanship of QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai, senior committee member Abdulrazaq al-Kuwari and the QMMF's Executive Director Amro al-Hamad. Competitors will tackle 13 timed special stages and 212.68 competitive kilometres in a route of 626.14km.

ENTRY LIST

1. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/Lorcan Moore (IRL); Citroen C3 Rally 2*
2. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Candido Carrera (ESP); Skoda Fabia RS Rally 2*
3. Abdullah al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata Al-Hmoud (JOR); Skoda Fabia RS Rally 2*
4. Mads Ostberg (NOR)/Sergiu Itu (ROU); Skoda Fabia R5 Rally 2*
5. Rakan al-Rashed (SAU)/Hugo Magalhaes (PRT); Toyota GR Yaris Rally 2*
6. Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah (QAT)/Ziad Chehab (LEB); Ford Fiesta Mk II Rally 2*
7. Denis Krotov (KGZ)/Yury Kulikov (CYP); Skoda Fabia R5 Rally 2*
8. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Nancy al-Majali (JOR); Ford Fiesta Rally 3
9. Rashid al-Muhannadi (QAT)/Gary McElhinney (IRL) Peugeot 208 Rally 4*
10. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX*
11. Abdullah al-Zubair (OMN)/Taha al-Zadjali (OMN) Subaru Impreza*
12. Mohammed al-Atteya (QAT)/Savvas Laos (CYP) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
13. Ihab al-Shurafa (JOR)/Ahmad Jankhouth (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X*
14. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X*
15. Zakariya al-Aamri (OMN)/Mohammed al-Mazroui (OMN) Subaru Impreza N14*
16. Jassim al-Muqahwi (KWT)/Suleiman al-Helal (KWT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X*
17. Jad al-Aawar (LEB)/Vickien Kanledjian (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X*
18. Mohamed Mansoor Parol (IND)/Joseph Lenin (IND) Subaru Impreza*
19. Simone Temeroli (SMR)/Davide Simoncini (SMR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
20. Stefano Marrini (ITA)/Silvio Valentini (ITA) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
21. Cristiano Gabbarrini (ITA)/Alessandro Forri (ITA) Subaru Impreza WRX STI
22. Shadi El Fakih (LEB)/Joseph Kmeid (LEB) Renault Clio
23. Payyaakkal Panikkaveetil (IND)/Musa Sherif (IND) Ford Fiesta Rally 2*
24. Mohammed al-Marri (QAT)/Yannick Roche (FRA) Peugeot 208 Rally 4
25. Saad al-Harqan (QAT)/Pierre Delorme (FRA) Peugeot 208 Rally 4
26. Ibrahim al-Muhanna (SAU)/Hani al-Noumesi (SAU) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T4)*
27. Yosra Jazzar (SAU)/Faisal al-Suwayh (SAU) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T4)*
28. Mirko Carrara (ITA)/Stefano Tiraboschi (ITA) Can-Am Maverick X3 (T4)
29. Marco Marotta (ITA)/Lorenzo Rossi (ITA) Yamaha YXZ 1000R (T4)

*denotes registered for the MERC

FOOTBALL

First phase of Champions League set for frantic finale today

AFP
Paris

The new league phase of this season's expanded Champions League is all set for a frantic conclusion today, as 18 matches are played simultaneously across Europe and the likes of Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain battle to avoid an early exit. Here is what is at stake ahead of the final round of games in the league phase:

TOP 8 PLACES UP FOR GRABS

There is a real incentive for finishing in the top eight places of the giant, 36-team standings - those sides will skip the two-legged knockout round play-offs next month, getting some precious rest as they advance straight to the last 16 in March. Liverpool, with seven wins out of seven, and Barcelona are the only two teams to have already guaranteed a place in the last 16 after seven games in the league phase. Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, AC Milan, Atalanta and Bayer Leverkusen occupy the other six spots for now, but so much could change on the final night.

After all, Stuttgart in 24th position are only three points behind Leverkusen in eighth, with 15 sides in between them. Arsenal and Inter need only draw away to Girona and at home to Monaco respectively in order to secure their last-16 spots. With so little between teams in terms of points, so much could boil down to goal difference, setting up a potentially chaotic final night.

WHO COULD BE ELIMINATED?

Big names like reigning champions Real Madrid, last season's runners-up Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich and Juventus are all still hoping to clamber into the top eight, but are already guaranteed to at least be in February's play-off round. In fact, only nine of the 36 teams will come into the final matchday still fighting to secure qualification for the next phase, including former European Cup winners PSV Eindhoven and Benfica. The biggest name under threat is Manchester City, with the 2023 champions currently languishing in 25th position, one place and two points outside the qualifying spots. Pep Guardiola's team were beaten 4-2 away at PSG last week and have taken a single point from their last four games in the competition. "Today we don't deserve it," Guardiola said when asked following the PSG defeat if the new format was fair. "What is the argument that it isn't fair? I said to the players to accept it and recover. We have to recover our game, that is what we have to do."

There is jeopardy for City, but at the same



Manchester City are currently languishing in 25th position, one place and two points outside the qualifying spots. (Reuters)

time they know a win in their last match will take them through, and they will be expected to overcome Club Brugge at the Etihad Stadium. PSG's win at home to City eased their fears of being eliminated, although it could still happen - the French champions go to Stuttgart, where a draw will be enough to take both teams through.

For others, the heaviest price to pay for inconsistent results in the league phase will be having to go into the play-offs. "The table does not lie. At the moment we aren't a top team. Top teams don't lose as many games. But we still have the feeling that we're in a process and on a good path," said Bayern's Joshua Kimmich after his team's 3-0 loss at Feyenoord last week.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

The teams finishing from ninth to 24th in the standings will go into Friday's draw for the play-offs, with the first legs to be played on February 11 and 12 and the return matches a week later. The teams finishing between ninth and 16th will be seeded, and the draw will be based on a pre-determined bracket. This means the teams finishing ninth and 10th will face the side either in 23rd or 24th place, while 15th and 16th will face either 17th or 18th.

There is nothing to stop teams from the same country facing each other, and teams can also be drawn against opponents they already

met in the league phase. Much is bound to change on Wednesday, but based on the current standings PSG could play French rivals Lille in the play-offs, while Bayern or Real Madrid could play Juventus or Celtic.

FIXTURES

In Lisbon: Sporting (POR) v Bologna (ITA); In Eindhoven, Netherlands: PSV Eindhoven (NED) v Liverpool (ENG); In Bern: Young Boys (SUI) v Red Star Belgrade (SRB); In Stuttgart, Germany: Stuttgart (GER) v Paris Saint-Germain (FRA); In Klagenfurt, Austria: Sturm Graz (AUT) v RB Leipzig (GER); In Manchester, England: Manchester City (ENG) v Club Brugge (BEL); In Munich, Germany: Bayern Munich (GER) v Slovan Bratislava (SVK); In Milan, Italy: Inter Milan (ITA) v Monaco (FRA); In Dortmund, Germany: Borussia Dortmund (GER) v Shakhtar Donetsk (UKR); In Barcelona, Spain: Barcelona (ESP) v Atalanta (ITA); In Leverkusen, Germany: Bayer Leverkusen (GER) v Sparta Prague (CZE); In Turin, Italy: Juventus (ITA) v Benfica (POR); In Zagreb: Dinamo Zagreb (CRO) v AC Milan (ITA); In Salzburg, Austria: Red Bull Salzburg (AUT) v Atletico Madrid (ESP); In Lille, France: Lille (FRA) v Feyenoord (NED); In Birmingham, England: Aston Villa (ENG) v Celtic (SCO); In Girona, Spain: Girona (ESP) v Arsenal (ENG); In Guingamp, France: Brest (FRA) v Real Madrid (ESP)

SANTOS PRESIDENT TELLS NEYMAR IT'S 'TIME TO COME HOME'

Sao Paulo: Santos' president told Brazilian forward Neymar it was "time to return to (his) people" in a video published on social media yesterday. Club president Marcelo Teixeira took to Instagram to deliver the message to Neymar but did not officially confirm the 32-year-old's return to the club where he first broke through in 2009. "The time has come, Neymar. The time has come for you to return to your people. To your home, to our beloved club," said Teixeira. "Welcome back, Ney boy!... Come and be happy again in the sacred jersey. The Santos nation awaits you with open arms."

Neymar's contract with Saudi side Al Hilal was terminated by mutual consent on Monday, bringing to an end an injury-plagued 18-month stint in Riyadh.

The former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain forward played just seven matches for the club after joining Al Hilal in August 2023, despite a reported salary of around \$104mn a year.

Neymar came through the Santos academy and went on to make 225 appearances for the Brazilian Serie A side, netting 136 times. He joined Barcelona in 2013, winning the Champions League two years later as part of a star-studded team also featuring Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez.

In 2017, Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain prised him away from Barca with what is still a world-record transfer fee of 220mn euros (\$230mn).

Neymar is Brazil's all-time leading scorer with 79 goals in 128 matches, two ahead of fellow ex-Santos player Pele.

SPOTLIGHT

Arteta delighted as Arsenal win appeal over Lewis-Skelly red card

AFP
London

Arsenal have successfully appealed against the red card shown to Myles Lewis-Skelly in Saturday's 1-0 win at Wolves, meaning the 18-year-old escapes a three-match ban. The left-back was sent off in the first half for tripping Matt Doherty as Wolves broke clear from an Arsenal corner. Referee Michael Oliver was not asked to review the incident by the VAR much to the dismay of Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta. "Obviously (I'm) really happy that the decision has been made and Myles is going to be available for us," Arteta told a news conference yesterday ahead of Arsenal's Champions League clash with Girona. Former England captain Alan Shearer was one of a number of outspoken critics of the red card, describing it as "one of the worst decisions that I've seen in a long time".

Lewis-Skelly, who has im-

pressed in his breakthrough season with the Gunners' first team, is now free to face Manchester City and Leicester in the Premier League, either side of the second leg of Arsenal's League Cup semi-final against Newcastle. Despite playing for nearly half an hour a man down before Wolves' Joao Gomes was also sent off, Arsenal struck late through Riccardo Calafiori to remain six points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool.

After the match, Oliver faced threats and abuse on social media, which were investigated by police. "We have to try hard to eradicate (abuse) from the game," said Arteta. "It certainly damages our sport, so let's get it out."

Arsenal are aiming to seal direct qualification to the Champions League last 16 today at already-eliminated Girona. Third in the table, Arteta's side are highly unlikely to miss out on a top eight spot.

Arsenal have never won the Champions League and last lifted a major trophy in 2020 when they won the FA Cup.