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# GULF TIMES SPORT



**CRICKET**

**Khawaja, Smith tons power Australia to 330-2 in first Test against Sri Lanka**

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**GOLF**

## QGA to host 28th edition of Commercial Bank Qatar Masters

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Golf Association (QGA) announced the much-anticipated return of the prestigious Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, set to take place at the iconic Doha Golf Club from February 6-9.

As one of the most celebrated tournaments on the DP World Tour, this year's event marks the 28th edition of this historic competition. It is part of the International Swing, the second of five distinctive Global Swings that define the opening phase of the DP World Tour's 2025 season.

With a prize fund of \$2.5mn, the tournament promises unforgettable displays of skill and intense competition.

The Commercial Bank Qatar Masters stands as a premier stage for showcasing elite golfing talent, uniting the world's

top professional players in a thrilling environment.

Hamad al-Mana, President of the Qatar Golf Association, said: "The Commercial Bank Qatar Masters is a cornerstone of our sporting calendar, embodying Qatar's growing legacy as a premier destination for world-class events. Hosting this milestone 28th edition at Doha Golf Club is a testament to our commitment to excellence in golf. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Qatar Olympic Committee for their unwavering support over the years in making this tournament a resounding success."

"Their contributions have been instrumental in elevating this event to new heights and showcasing Qatar as a global sports hub. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to the title sponsor, Commercial Bank of Qatar, for its unwavering support and partnership, which we proudly celebrate as it marks 20 years since its inception. This collaboration has been

a cornerstone of the tournament's success, reflecting a shared commitment to excellence and the growth of the sport. Together with our partners, we eagerly anticipate welcoming players, fans, and the global golf community to this unforgettable celebration of the sport."

Joseph Abraham, Group Chief Executive Officer of Commercial Bank, remarked: "As we proudly continue our long-standing sponsorship of the prestigious Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, a flagship event on the European Tour, we are honoured to have supported this tournament for the past 20 years. Our partnership has consistently aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030 to establish the country as a global sports hub and a premier host for world-class international sporting events. With participants gathering from across the globe, I extend my warmest wishes to all competitors and look forward to a successful and memorable event."



Hamad al-Mana, President of the Qatar Golf Association.



Joseph Abraham, Group Chief Executive Officer of Commercial Bank.

**QATAR STARS LEAGUE**

## Draxler's wonder strike helps Ahli climb to third

Al Rayyan stage comeback twice to draw with Al Gharafa



Al Ahli's Julian Draxler scores incredible overhead goal against Al Khor during the Qatar Stars League match.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

A late but thrilling bicycle-kick from Julian Draxler saw Al Ahli edge Al Khor 1-0 in the Qatar Stars League at the Al Khor Stadium yesterday.

While it came as late as the 87th minute of the match, it thrilled the fans as Al Ahli's German professional essayed the fabulous 'reverse' kick to leave the rivals in awe as much as in shock.

The attacking midfielder found himself to be in a perfect position to go for the kick after receiving a perfect lob from Erik Alexander Hernandez. The move was initiated by Oumar Sekou who went around from the left to the right outside of the box before passing the ball to Hernandez. In the end, Draxler made the kick with his extended right leg to find the right corner of the net.

The win shored up Al Ahli into the third spot in the standings with 28 points to their credit, while the result gutted hopes of Al Khor, who remain at the bottom with 7 points.

Al Khor had till the end done well to hold against the challenge of The Brigadiers despite suffering the miss of a chance just past the hour mark when Ayman Hussein failed to

control a superb through cross from Spaniard Aitor Garcia Flores while being unmarked on the far left and with an open net to aim at.

With both teams battling hard, the breakthrough seemed elusive before Al Ahli made frantic efforts in the end to score, and eventually did. In the 85th minute, Al Ahli too had a close shave when an Oumar Sekou attempt saw the ball skim over the top centre of the crossbar.

Earlier in exciting action at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, Al Rayyan rallied to stage a comeback twice, including a stoppage-time penalty to dash Al Gharafa's big hopes with a 2-2 draw.

Adam Bareiro (14th minute) and Roger Guedes (90+2 minute-penalty) restored parity for Al Rayyan after Joselu (5th minute) and Amro Surag (55th minute) had put Al Gharafa ahead twice. The result saw Al Gharafa stay second in the table with 28 points while Al Rayyan are sixth with 18 points.

Al Gharafa began in earnest as Joselu scored, with his back to the goal, unexpectedly fending off Al Rayyan's Andre Amaro and unleashing a low but powerful left-footed shot that stunned goalkeeper Samy Beldi.

Al Gharafa seemed to be in the driver's seat with the lead as they kept Al Rayyan's defence on their toes with more daring raids but Al Rayyan gave them the needed push back, re-

sponding often with brilliant counter-attacks.

The game became even in the 14th minute when Bareiro finished off a move started by Mahmoud Trezeguet, who laid a defence-splitting pass to Murad Naji, who wasted no time in squaring the ball to the Paraguayan to fire home a left-footed shot from very close range to the bottom right corner.

Later, Trezeguet almost gave Al Rayyan the lead in the 31st minute, but his shot from outside the box slightly missed to the right despite goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar already beaten.

Al Gharafa reclaimed lead in the second half with Amro Surag blasting home from the right side of the box. The exquisite goal was assisted by Abdalla Yousif.

Trezeguet, who posed a major threat to Al Gharafa throughout the match, almost restored parity in the 60th minute, but this time his drive from outside the box, following a corner kick, went a bit too high.

Al Gharafa continued to maintain their lead in regulation time and just when it seemed that they were running away with the maximum points, Assim Madibo conceded a penalty two minutes into added time after fouling Trezeguet.

The subsequent spot kick was successfully converted by Guedes to ensure the spoils being shared.

**SPOTLIGHT**

## Qatar Foundation, QCTF launch 'Cycle Her Way' initiative

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation (QCTF), in collaboration with Qatar Foundation, has launched the initiative "Cycle Her Way", aiming to expand the participation of girls in cycling and encourage them to take up the sport. The initiative also provides opportunities for skill development, ultimately enabling them to join the national team and compete in championships.

The initiative was announced during a press conference hosted by Qatar Foundation yesterday morning, attended by Noura al-Emadi, coach of the Qatari women's national team, Alia al-Hamad, a member of the Qatari triathlon team, and Buthaina al-Khater, a community events and activities specialist at Qatar Foundation.

During the conference, Noura expressed her delight at the launch of this initiative, highlighting its importance in empowering girls and encouraging them to participate in cycling. She emphasised that the primary goal is to prepare a new generation of female athletes capable of competing in major championships, particularly the 2030 Asian Games.

Al-Emadi added: "I extend my gratitude to the Qatar Cycling and Triathlon Federation and Qatar Foundation for supporting this initiative, which will expand the selection pool for the national team.

This, in turn, will enhance our chances of competing and reaching podium finishes."

For her part, Alia, a member of the Qatari triathlon team, expressed her excitement about being part of the initiative's launch. She emphasized that cycling embodies a spirit of challenge and contributes to personal development, given the effort and perseverance it requires.

Al-Hamad stated: "Initiatives like this provide a fantastic opportunity for girls to engage in an exciting and challenging sporting experience. I want to send a message to those interested in entering the world of cycling: this initiative is your gateway to growth and excellence, especially with the strong support provided by Qatar Foundation to ensure its success."

Meanwhile, al-Khater, a community events and activities specialist at Qatar Foundation, praised the initiative and its role in promoting women's sports. She reaffirmed Qatar Foundation's ongoing commitment to contributing to initiatives that support women's participation in sports by providing all necessary resources in collaboration with various sports federations.

Al-Khater added: "Cycle Her Way will take place within the Foundation on the desert cycling track, as well as at Education City Stadium. We are dedicated to making this initiative a success, fostering a new generation of female cyclists who will strengthen the Qatari national team."



Noura al-Emadi (centre), coach of the Qatari women's national team; Alia al-Hamad (left), a member of the Qatari triathlon team; and Buthaina al-Khater, a community events and activities specialist at Qatar Foundation; during a press conference in Doha yesterday.

CRICKET

# Khawaja, Smith tons power Australia to 330-2 in Galle

Australian captain becomes 15th batsman in the world to reach the 10,000-runs mark in Test cricket

AFP  
Galle, Sri Lanka

Steve Smith stood unbeaten on 104 after crossing 10,000 Test runs and helped Australia pummel Sri Lanka alongside fellow centurion Usman Khawaja on day one of the opening Test yesterday.

Australia reached 330-2 in 81.1 overs when rain stopped play for the day after the tourists elected to bat first in Galle at the start of the two-match series.

Left-handed opener Khawaja, on 147, and skipper Smith put on an unbeaten stand of 195 to thwart the opposition attack in two wicketless afternoon sessions.

"We have played a lot of cricket in the sub-continent but not been able to put pressure on the opposition. But today, we definitely did that," Khawaja said.

He added, "Showed how fast we were scoring until they tried to bowl a bit negative line after tea."

Milestone man Smith got three runs off spinner Nishan Peiris to reach his third ton in four matches as he took off his baggy green and raised his bat to acknowledge the crowd's cheers.

Smith took the crease in the first session with 9,999 runs and calmly nudged his very first delivery to mid-on for a single off Prabath Jayasuriya.

He became the 15th batsman to 10,000 Test runs and only the fourth Australian to achieve the feat after Allan Border, Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting.

Smith survived an early reprieve in his knock when Jayasuriya grassed a sharp return catch in the same over, a chance Sri Lanka would come to rue.

He made the hosts pay dearly, crafting a sublime 35th Test century to reaffirm his stature as one of Australia's rock in the middle-order.

Khawaja reached his 16th Test hundred - his maiden ton on Sri Lankan soil - after a 17-match drought since his Ashes centu-



Australia's captain Steve Smith celebrates after scoring a century during the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle yesterday. Right: Australia's Usman Khawaja celebrates after reaching his century. (AFP)



ry in June 2023. The ton came with a flick off fast bowler Asitha Fernando to the fine leg boundary, a stroke brimming with elegance and relief.

The 38-year-old had a few heart-in-mouth moments when a couple of edges fell just short of fielders and a reprieve on 74 when he nicked Jayasuriya to the keeper, but Sri Lanka chose not to review the on-field decision.

Another opportunity slipped through Sri Lanka's fingers with Smith on 90 as Kusal Mendis, slow to react behind the stumps, spilled a bat-pad chance.

Earlier, Travis Head smashed 57 off 40 balls including 10 fours and one six to put Sri Lanka on the back foot right away.

Head, who replaced 19-year-old Sam Konstas as an opener for the Test, put on 92 runs with fellow left-hander Khawaja. The hosts finally found a breakthrough

when Head misfired an ambitious charge against Jayasuriya only to find the long-on fielder. Jeffrey Vandersay had Marnus Labuschagne caught at first slip for 20 with his left-arm spin.

"The wicket is not a usual Galle wicket. It's on the slow side," Sri Lanka's spin bowling coach Piyal Wijetunga told reporters. "When the wicket is not helping the bowlers, you should try to show more discipline and I don't think we bowled well today."

With three specialist spinners in the Australian XI, the tourists hold all the aces, especially with the pitch expected to deteriorate as the game progresses.

**BRIEF SCORES (First Test, Day 1)**  
**Australia 330 for 2** (Khawaja 147\*, Smith 104\*, Head 57, Vandersay 1-93) **vs Sri Lanka** (yet to bat)

PLAYERS WITH 10,000 RUNS OR MORE IN TESTS

Batsman	Career	Tests	Runs	100s	50s
S Tendulkar (IND)	1989-2013	200	15921	51	68
R Ponting (AUS)	1995-2012	168	13378	41	62
J Kallis (SA)	1995-2013	166	13289	45	58
R Dravid (IND)	1996-2012	164	13288	36	63
J Root (ENG)	2012-2024	152	12972	36	65
A Cook (ENG)	2006-2018	161	12472	33	57
K Sangakkara (SL)	2000-2015	134	12400	38	52
B Lara (WI)	1990-2006	131	11953	34	48
S Chanderpaul (WI)	1994-2015	164	11867	30	66
M Jayawardene (SL)	1997-2014	149	11814	34	50
A Border (AUS)	1978-1994	156	11174	27	63
S Waugh (AUS)	1985-2004	168	10927	32	50
S Gavaskar (IND)	1971-1987	125	10122	34	45
S Smith (AUS)	2010-2025	115*	10103	35	41
Y Khan (PAK)	2000-2017	118	10099	34	33



SPOTLIGHT

# Battle for IOC presidency enters the final stretch

Reuters  
Berlin

Only a few people around the world know the name Thomas Bach and even fewer can rattle off those of the seven candidates out to replace him in March after 12 years as president of the International Olympic Committee.

Yet despite that low profile, there is no bigger or more influential job in sport, and Bach's successor will wield extraordinary political and financial clout across every country in the world. When the IOC's 100-plus members, who include billionaires, global captains of industry, federation chiefs and royalty, go to the ballot in Greece on March 20 they will be effectively deciding on the direction much of the world of sport will take for the next eight years.

World Athletics chief and former Olympic 1,500 metres champion Sebastian Coe is the biggest name of the seven candidates. Standing against him are Zimbabwe's sports minister and former Olympic swimmer Kirsty Coventry, the late former IOC president's son Juan Antonio Samaranch, and international cycling chief David Lappartient. Completing the lineup are Prince Feisal al-Hussein of Jordan, international gymnastics federation head Morinari Watanabe and Olympic newcomer and multi-millionaire Johan Eliasch.

They will each present their case to replace 71-year-old Bach to the membership in Lausanne today, ahead of a final two-month push of behind-the-scenes lob-



bying. The IOC is by far the biggest and richest sports organisation in the world, dwarfing even world soccer's ruling body FIFA, and wields its influence over almost every major international federation, new sports and national Olympic Committees.

With multi-billion revenues from sponsors and broadcasters, it is far from limited to just hosting the summer and winter Olympics. The IOC has a direct or indirect say in every major international decision on sport, whether financial, political or structural.

Sports do not only depend on Olympic funding over the Games' four-year cycle, they are also reliant on the Olympic spotlight. New sports battle for Olympic recognition which brings a significant boost in publicity and awareness and can trigger new streams of revenue to fund growth.

In Bach's 12 years in charge, the German lawyer also developed close ties with many political leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron,

whose country hosted the 2024 Olympics, and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin was the first to congratulate Bach immediately after his election back in 2013, calling minutes after the vote as his country prepared to host the Sochi Winter Olympics, with an unprecedented cost of \$51bn.

Sochi was subsequently tarnished by revelations of a massive state-backed doping system in Russia that turned into the biggest international drugs scandal in decades and forced the country's athletes to compete as neutrals in several Olympics.

Dealing with Russia, and the issue of trans and DSD (differences in sexual development) athletes in sport, featured in most of the candidates' manifestos. But anyone thinking they will be primarily judged on their ability to bring peace and harmony, and promote sport and health around the world, is sadly deluded.

"In this presidential election everyone votes for themselves. It is about money. The share for each stakeholder. It is no sur-

prise that there are four federation presidents campaigning," an international federation chief, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters.

"Maybe it would have been more effective if there was only one representing the federations. But everyone has their own agenda in this election."

The IOC collected revenues of \$2.295bn from its top sponsors for the period 2017-2021, the second-biggest source of income for the Olympic movement, with broadcasters paying \$4.544bn over the same period.

Bach's departure comes with the organisation in a financially robust position, having secured \$7.3bn for 2025-28 and \$6.2bn for 2029-2032. More deals are expected for both four-year periods.

The IOC says it pumps about 90% of its revenues back into sports with payments to each Olympic federation, to national Olympic committees and athletes' scholarships among others.

Many of the smaller federations depend on that IOC contribution to get through the four years until the next Olympics.

More than half a billion dollars was split among the federations from the Tokyo Olympics, with the share from the Paris 2024 Games to top \$600mn.

Top earners like athletics, gymnastics and swimming get more than \$50mn. National Olympic Committees also received a total of \$540mn after the Tokyo Olympics.

The IOC covers 50% of the costs of running the World Anti-Doping Agency which it helped to set up more than 25 years ago.

## Prince Feisal says he can 'bridge gap' in Olympic Movement

Paris: Prince Feisal al-Hussein of Jordan says he can bridge continents and cultures if he becomes the first president of the International Olympic Committee from outside Europe and the United States.

The 61-year-old brother of King Abdullah II is a familiar face at the IOC but believes he can offer something radically different to the other six candidates bidding to succeed Thomas Bach of Germany.

"All the previous presidents have been either from Europe or from the US. We need to have people that can understand the globe and can better bridge between East and West, from the global South and the North," the prince said in a round table session with international media this week. "That's part of me. Culturally I am eastern, but I was also western-educated. I can help bridge that divide."

The 61-year-old wasted no time in tackling the question of why a prince would want to put himself on the line - and under scrutiny - to bid to become arguably the most powerful person in sport.

"I was born into a family where service was a lifelong commitment and it was something that you were brought up with," he said.

"My late father used to say, 'if you can do something to change the world, to make it a better place, then it is your duty to be able to do so'."

"The Olympic Movement is an extension of my lifetime in service. All the experiences I've had have culminated in a position where I can serve the Olympic Movement."

One of the thorniest questions he would face as Olympic chief would be whether to fully readmit Russia to the fold. Russia was banned from the Paris Olympics last year over the invasion of Ukraine, which President Vladimir Putin launched in 2022 days after the Beijing Winter Olympics closed.

**'Fundamental values'**

Following the invasion, Russia moved to incorporate the sports federations of four Ukrainian regions, in a breach of the Olympic Charter. "The issue of why Russia has been sanctioned, whether some people agree with it or disagree with it, was because of a viola-



tion of the Olympic Charter," the prince said. "If there is an opportunity, I believe in inclusion, not exclusion... so ultimately I would love for them to return but the Olympic Charter is what governs us all in the Olympic Movement. "Unless the membership decide to change the Charter, as president I will defend (it)."

"So if there is a respect for the Olympic Charter and no violation, why should I sanction them?"

"Whether that involves issues of ceasefire (in Ukraine) or whatever, that is for politicians to solve."

Any new IOC president will have to work with US President Donald Trump, with Los Angeles hosting the 2028 Summer Olympics and Salt Lake City awarded the 2034 Winter Games.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has been accused of taking a partisan approach to Trump after attending his inauguration, but the prince said he would not engage in "cheerleading".

"I am not willing to sacrifice the fundamental values that I have just to appease an individual," he said.

"If on the other hand this is what the IOC believes is the right way to move forward, then I am willing to respect that."

He said Trump was "a great sports lover" who would not stand in the way of the Olympics. "He has supported LA and he will support Salt Lake City."

The prince and his fellow candidates including former Olympic swimmer Kirsty Coventry, track and field icon and World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe and IOC veteran Juan Antonio Samaranch Junior will give presentations to IOC members in Lausanne today. The new president will be elected at an IOC session in Greece on March 18-21.

**Athletics Australia says it's making a 'bold' rebrand to 'Australian Athletics'**

Melbourne: Athletics Australia is rebranding to "Australian Athletics" - a move that might appear subtle to most people but which the sports federation said would provide a "bold, new identity" to allow it to capitalise on a golden era ahead. The change, unveiled with a new logo yesterday, ends the old brand's 36-year run. "Australian Athletics (AA) enters 2025 with a

bold, new identity, unveiling a rebrand that reflects the sport's evolution and growth, connects to its storied legacy, and sets its sights on an exciting future," AA said in a statement yesterday. Australia has enjoyed a resurgence in track and field in recent years, with their athletes winning seven medals at the Paris Olympics, including a first women's field gold to pole

vaulter Nina Kennedy. It was the nation's best Games haul since 1956 in Melbourne when the hosts took 12 medals, including four gold. Locally, the sport has enjoyed a massive boost in profile with the emergence of 17-year-old sprinter Gout Gout whose eye-catching 100 and 200 metres times last year went viral on social media and drew praise from Usain Bolt.

GOLF

# McIlroy prepares to fight at majors, Ryder Cup in 2025

McIlroy to make 2025 US PGA Tour debut at Pebble Beach Pro-Am

AFP  
San Francisco

**R**ory McIlroy is sharpening his focus for a “pivotal” 2025 campaign amid continuing uncertainty over “what the landscape of golf looks like going forward.”

McIlroy, preparing to make his 2025 US PGA Tour debut at the Pebble Beach Pro-Am this week, said he expects to cut back his schedule by some five events, with the Open Championship in Portrush and the Ryder Cup at Bethpage Black in New York looming large as he considers the season.

“I think every year’s a pivotal year,” the 35-year-old Northern Ireland star said. “I think there’s a couple of things this year that make it maybe a little more so for me.”

“The Open goes back to Portrush, so playing a major championship pretty much at home is a big thing.”

“Then playing an away Ryder Cup for me, I’ve alluded to this a lot, but I feel like winning an away Ryder Cup is one of the toughest things to do in golf at the minute. Obviously the Europeans have an opportunity to do that, which would be really cool.”

McIlroy’s 2024 included a runner-up finish to Bryson DeChambeau at the US Open, but it’s been 10 years since he captured a major.

The Masters at Augusta National in April will offer him another chance to compete his career Grand Slam, while the PGA Championship will be played at Quail Hollow - where he has won the Wells Fargo Champion-



ship four times. As he considers the best way to prepare for golf’s top events, McIlroy said he would play the minimum 15 US tour events needed to maintain his playing status, along with a select number of DP World Tour events.

“I played 27 events last year,” he said.

“I think to fulfil both minimums I need to play around 22 so that’s what I’ll do... That’s an extra 35 days at home, and that’s something that I want to do.”

McIlroy acknowledged that he’s making his plans in a climate of continuing uncertainty.

He believes the election of US President Donald Trump may have removed some obstacles to

a deal between the established tours and the Saudi-backed LIV Golf.

But even though he thinks a deal “should and will be done” he added: “It doesn’t solve the problem of what the landscape of golf looks like going forward.”

“I’d say the biggest impediment is maybe the differing visions of what golf should look like in the future,” McIlroy said.

With golf fans now also drawn by popular YouTube influencers and newer products like the tech-driven TGL that McIlroy and Tiger Woods launched this month, McIlroy said the PGA Tour should consider paring back.

“I think 47 or 50 tournaments a

year is definitely too many,” McIlroy said, noting that the TGL season lasts only two months.

“So to scale it back a little bit and maybe have a little more scarcity in some of the stuff that we do, like the NFL, I think mightn’t be a bad thing,” McIlroy said.

But McIlroy insisted that the push to engage fans should not “dumb down” golf.

“Golf is golf at the end of the day,” he said. “First and foremost we’re professional golfers. We want to go out there and shoot the best score possible that we can and try to beat each other.”

“Hopefully people find that entertaining, and if not, then I don’t know what to tell them.”

FOCUS

## Bradley names Furyk Ryder Cup vice-captain

Reuters  
New York

**U**S Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley, looking for leadership and experience, named Jim Furyk a vice-captain yesterday for his team that will try to reclaim the trophy from Europe this year at Bethpage Black in New York.

Furyk boasts a wealth of Ryder Cup experience having played in the biennial competition in nine consecutive editions from 1997 and serving as captain in 2018 and vice captain in 2016, 2021 and 2023. The 17-times PGA Tour winner joins vice captains Webb Simpson, Brandt Snedeker and Kevin Kisner on Bradley’s staff.

Furyk served as captain of the US team that last September won a 10th consecutive Presidents Cup against a line-up of international players from outside Europe.

“I had the privilege of playing for him in last year’s President’s Cup, and his exceptional leader-

ship, unwavering demeanour and wealth of experience made a huge impression on all of us,” Bradley said. “He knows what it takes to succeed in Ryder Cups, and I cannot wait to work alongside him as we prepare for Bethpage Black.”

Additional vice captains will be announced later.

The 54-year-old Furyk’s nine appearances as a player rank second all-time in US Ryder Cup team history while his 34 career matches in the event are tied for third.

In his stint as captain, Furyk’s team lost the 2018 event in Paris. He served as vice captain during victories in 2016 at Hazeltine National and in 2021 at Whistling Straits while being on the losing side in 2023 in Rome.

“I am truly honoured to be chosen as one of Keegan’s vice captains for the 2025 Ryder Cup,” said Furyk. “There is nothing in our game quite like the experience of representing the US in the Ryder Cup.”

The Ryder Cup is scheduled for September 26-28.

## Scheffler eager for return from injury at Pebble Beach

New York: After a freak accident in the kitchen kept him out of the first few PGA Tour events of 2025, World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler is set to return this week at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

Scheffler was just over two weeks removed from his victory at the Hero World Challenge in December when he badly cut the palm of his right hand while preparing Christmas dinner. The injury required surgery and sidelined Scheffler for The Sentry in Hawaii. He expected to return at The American Express in La Quinta, California, earlier this month, but he wasn’t ready yet.

“It was frustrating to be sitting at home, not being able to play golf, but (my wife, my son and I) got some good time at home just us three,” Scheffler told reporters yesterday ahead of this week’s tournament.

“It’s pretty rare for me to be at home throughout the day without really having much to do. I couldn’t really work out at first, there wasn’t really a whole lot I

could do, so it was nice uninterrupted time for us at home. But it was definitely still frustrating watching golf on TV and not being able to play.”

Scheffler will return aiming to build on a scintillating 2024 campaign that culminated with his third straight PGA Tour Player of the Year Award.

The 28-year-old highlighted his dominant year with victories at The Masters and The Players Championship and also captured an Olympic gold medal and the FedEx Cup title. Scheffler said he returned to a more normal practice routine in recent days to work out some lingering soreness in the hand. He also played a practice round against his caddie, Ted Scott, at nearby Cypress Point on Monday. “I took down Ted, so I got bragging rights for a while,” Scheffler joked. “Can’t afford to lose to your caddie because he’s just going to be reminding me that he beat me constantly, so I was glad to take him down.”

MOTORSPORT

# Hamilton unharmed after crashing during Ferrari Barcelona test drive



AFP  
Barcelona

**S**even-time world champion Lewis Hamilton crashed during the second day of his new team Ferrari’s private Formula One testing in Barcelona yesterday but was left unharmed.

The 40-year-old Briton, in his second test with Ferrari following 12 successful years with Mercedes, lost control of the 2023 car and hit the barriers at the Circuit de Catalunya.

A source close to the team told AFP Hamilton was “absolutely OK” and was still exploring the car’s limits. Hamilton is sharing

the car with team-mate Charles Leclerc as he gets ready for the 2025 season which begins in March with the Australian Grand Prix.

His two-year deal with Ferrari began last week when he powered through laps at the Fiorano test track near Ferrari’s Maranello base.

Ferrari will unveil their new car on February 19 at Fiorano, a day after the F1 season launch event in London to mark the sport’s 75th anniversary.

Ferrari’s team principal, Frederic Vasseur, was absent this week, staying in Maranello to focus on the development of their 2025 car.

Jerome D’Ambrosio, deputy team principal, and Loic Serra, technical director (both with prior experience working with Lewis

Hamilton at Mercedes), have been managing the team in his absence.

Hamilton’s recent incident marks a strange pattern: he has now had pre-debut crashes with McLaren, Mercedes, and Ferrari.

### McLaren boss calls for permanent F1 stewards

McLaren boss Zak Brown called for permanent stewards in Formula One after the governing FIA dropped former racer Johnny Herbert yesterday, arguing his work as a media pundit was incompatible with the role.

Brown, whose team won the constructors’ title last season, told the Autosport Business Exchange conference in London that McLaren would happily pay their

share of the cost of professional officials.

Stewards are largely unpaid volunteers, other than travel expenses, appointed by the FIA on race-by-race basis to ensure the rules are applied consistently and fairly during race weekends and handing out punishments as necessary.

“I don’t think we’re set up for success by not having full-time stewards,” said Brown.

“As far as paying for stewards, this will probably be unpopular amongst my fellow teams (but) I’m happy if McLaren and all the racing teams contribute. I think it’s so important for the sport. It can’t be that expensive. If everyone contributes it’s not going to break the bank.”

Herbert, a three-times race winner from 160 starts who competed for an array of F1 teams in the 1980s and 1990s and won the Le Mans 24 Hours, had been scheduled to officiate at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix on March 16.

The 60-year-old former Sky Sports F1 pundit angered four-times world champion Max Verstappen and father Jos last season for media comments about the Red Bull driver’s track behaviour.

“It is with regret that we announce today that Johnny Herbert will no longer fulfil the position of F1 driver steward for the FIA,” the governing body said. We thank him for his service and wish him well in his future endeavours.”

TENNIS

# Finally! Rublev earns first win of the 2025 season, advances to round 2 in Montpellier

www.atptour.com  
Montpellier

**A**ndrey Rublev is up and running in 2025. The No 10 in the PIF ATP Rankings earned his first win of the season yesterday at the Open Occitanie in Montpellier, where he overcame American Christopher Eubanks 6-4, 6-3 to reach the quarter-finals.

Rublev suffered opening-round exits against Fabian Marozsan and #NextGen-ATP Brazilian Joao Fonseca in Hong Kong and at the Australian Open, respectively.

However, the top seed was in control throughout his 66-minute clash against Eubanks at the ATP 250 indoor hard event in France, where he won 89 per cent (25/28) of his first-serve points, according to Infosys ATP Stats.

Rublev leads Eubanks 2-0 in the pair’s Lexus ATP Head2Head series and will next play Arthur Rinderknech or Nikoloz Basilashvili in the quarter-finals.

In first-round action on Day 3, American qualifier Aleksandar Kovacevic moved past sixth seed David Goffin 6-2, 3-6, 6-4, while Dutchman Jesper de Jong advanced after



French wild card Quentin Halys was forced to retire. De Jong, 24, led 7-6(7), 2-0 when play was stopped.

De Jong will meet Flavio Cobolli in the second round tomorrow.

### PTPA launches pro-bono legal aid for players facing doping allegations

The Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA) is launching a new pro-bono legal defence programme for players facing allegations of doping or corruption, the organisation said yesterday.

The PTPA, which was established by Novak Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil in 2020 to advocate for players, will provide support through law firms King & Spalding LLP and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP to players regardless of their financial resources.

The announcement comes after world number one Jannik Sinner and five-times major winner Iga Swiatek fell foul of doping rules last year but spent little time off the court as they quickly cleared their names.

The saga left some lower-ranked players without vast financial resources jittery, as others alleged a double standard in how the sport’s doping cases are handled.

Former British doubles number one Tara Moore told Reuters she spent a staggering \$250,000 in legal fees after she was provisionally suspended for 19 months for failing a drug test before being cleared of all wrongdoing in December 2023.

Moore was ranked 83rd in the world at the time her provisional suspension was announced in June 2022.

Moore, who co-founded the pro-bono programme with the PTPA, expects her expenses will climb as the International Tennis Integrity Agency told her it would appeal an independent tribunal finding of no fault or negligence.

ANNOUNCEMENT

# Djokovic withdraws from Serbia’s Davis Cup squad



Reuters  
Belgrade

**W**orld number six Novak Djokovic has pulled out of Serbia’s Davis Cup first-round qualifying tie due to injury, the country’s tennis federation (TSS) said. Djokovic, who was set to represent Serbia in their Jan 31-Feb 2 meeting with Denmark in Copenhagen, retired due to a hamstring injury in his Australian Open semi-final match against Alexander Zverev last week.

The 24-times Grand Slam champion

was booed by the crowd at Melbourne Park and he responded by posting a photo of an MRI taken of his left hamstring with the caption: “Thought I’d leave this here for all the sports injury ‘experts’ out there.”

Djokovic, 37, was part of the Serbian team which lifted the Davis Cup in 2010 following a memorable victory over France in Belgrade. “We are weakened by not playing Novak, but we are still going for the win. The Danes have a great player in Holger Rune, but our players are also great and I believe in my team,” Serbia captain Viktor Troicki said.

## HORSE RACING

## Doha Bu Thaila stays unbeaten with thrilling Al Waab Cup win

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**D**oha Bu Thaila, piloted by Soufiane Saadi, maintained her unbeaten run in Qatar, clinching a third consecutive win to secure the Al Waab Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. Wathnan Racing's four-year-old filly, trained by Alban de Mieulle, fought fiercely to edge out Lulwat Al Faisal by a neck in a gripping 1400m Local Thoroughbred Handicap feature. The victory sealed a double for Saadi, who earlier guided Osama al-Dafea-trained Ginkeau to triumph in the Purebred Arabian Handicap 75-95 (Class 3) race.

Meanwhile, Nasser Saeed al-Eida's Gold Fleece delivered another stellar performance, claiming her second straight win and the Keheilah Al Ajouz Cup in the 2100m Thoroughbred Open Race for fillies and mares. The nine-year-old, trained by Jassim Ghazali and ridden by Marco Casamento, stormed down the straight for a commanding two-and-a-half-length victory.

In other races, Alberto Sanna rode Road To The East to victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap 55-75, while AA Kindled Speed topped the Purebred Arabian Handicap 45-65 under Saleh Salem al-Marri. Emerald Eclipse, ridden by Faleh Bugha-



Soufiane Saadi guides Doha Bu Thaila to the Al Waab Cup victory. PICTURES: Juhaim

naim, claimed the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate, while Al Muthqafah secured the Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate with Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri in the saddle.

**RESULTS 11TH AL UQDA RACE MEETING - AL WAAB CUP**  
**WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**

1 - Al Waab Cup - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 50-70 (Class 3)  
Doha Bu Thaila, Alban Elie De Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi  
2 - Keheilah Al Ajouz Cup - Thoroughbred (Fillies and Mares) Open Race (Class 2)  
Gold Fleece, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento



Marco Casamento leads Gold Fleece to the Keheilah Al Ajouz Cup victory yesterday.

3 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 75-95 (Class 3)  
Ginkeau, Osama al-Dafea, Soufiane Saadi  
4 - Thoroughbred Handicap 55-75 (Class 5)  
Road To The East, Deborah Amanda Clare Mountain, Alberto Sanna  
5 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 45-65  
AA Kindled Speed, Ali al-Marri, Saleh

Salem al-Marri  
6 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6)  
Emerald Eclipse, Mohammed Ghazali, Faleh Bughanaim  
7 - Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (4yo Only) (Class 6)  
Al Muthqafah, Zuhair Mohsen, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri

## FOOTBALL

# Postecoglou is 'right man' for struggling Tottenham: Kulusevski

The injury-plagued Spurs side are languishing in 15th place in the points table

AFP  
London

**T**ottenham winger Dejan Kulusevski is convinced Ange Postecoglou is the "right man" to salvage their troubled season despite a disastrous run of results. Spurs slipped to a sixth loss from their last seven Premier League games against relegation-threatened Leicester on Sunday and are languishing in 15th place in the table.

Postecoglou said after the dismal 2-1 home defeat he was uncertain over his future as pressure mounts on the former Celtic boss. The Australian has battled a severe injury crisis over the past two months and will be without 12 players for today's Europa League match against Swedish side Elfsborg.

But he has repeatedly stated his belief that Tottenham - who are still in three cup competitions - can enjoy a "special" season. "Yeah, I agree with him," said 24-year-old Kulusevski, who has scored nine goals in 35 games in the current campaign. "It's easy to focus on the league, but we're doing really well in the cups. This is an important game (against Elfsborg) and if we win we go to the next round. I think we can do big things in these last four months."

A win against Elfsborg in their final Europa League group fixture would guarantee Tottenham a place in the last 16. They won the first leg of their League Cup semi-final against Liverpool 1-0 and are through to the FA Cup fourth round.

Asked why Postecoglou is the right man, Kulusevski told reporters: "Because we had games when we showed perfect football - football that not many teams can play in the world. We played beautiful games against (Manchester) United (wins in the Premier

League and the League Cup), against (Manchester) City 4-0, so I think he is the right man. We play for him. We want to win for him and to be honest we have similar ideas. I am very positive as a guy and I always want to play the football he wants. I have to fight for him because I believe in that football too. Yes, I think he's the right man."

Kulusevski admitted Spurs had made mistakes but said they were suffering. "We are 10 to 11 fit players in four competitions and that's not OK and that's why the team is paying that price in the league especially," he said. "You can look at the manager and the players but it's bigger than that, it's everything involved."

Postecoglou finally had some better injury news as he confirmed defender Micky van de Ven will feature against IF Elfsborg today. The 23-year-old Netherlands international has been out of action since picking up a hamstring injury in Tottenham's 4-3 home loss against Chelsea early in December. "Micky is good, he's good to go. We'll try to get him some match minutes. He's had a good week, 10 days with the team," Postecoglou told reporters.

Van de Ven has twice been ruled out for lengthy spells with hamstring problems but Postecoglou said he would have no hesitation about putting him straight back in. "I'm not wary, he's got to come back at some stage. We've done everything in our power," the Australian said. "He's ticked every box and been given clearance by the medical team."

There was less good news though for Tottenham with midfielder James Maddison facing two or three weeks out with a calf strain while Van de Ven's central defensive partner Cristian Romero is not yet ready to return. The club are also still without the likes of striker Dominic Solanke and goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario.



Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou arrives for a training session yesterday, on the eve of the Europa League match against Sweden's Elfsborg. (Reuters)

## Fire erupts outside Man City stadium before Champions League clash

**Manchester:** A blaze erupted outside Manchester City's Etihad Stadium after a merchandise stand caught fire just hours before last night's crucial Champions League tie against Club Brugge.

The fire broke out shortly before 6pm near the area where Pep Guardiola's side had been due to enter the stadium around 30 minutes later. Hundreds of fans had gathered outside the Etihad for a pre-match entertainment show which included on-stage interviews with City's new signings Omar Marmoush, Vitor Reis and Abdoukodie Kusanov.

The show had already begun with City's female players Rebecca Knaak and Aemu Oyama on stage at the time of the fire. The event was suspended as flames took hold of the stand and stewards moved fans away before fire services arrived on the scene.

Stewards and security staff quickly evacuated the area and a fire engine was on the scene within minutes. The fire soon appeared to be brought under control and it was announced that the stadium was open and fans could enter.

Three entrance gates inside the cordoned-off area close to the scene of the fire were still closed. The remainder of the pre-match show was cancelled, but the match was due to go ahead as scheduled. Premier League champions City must beat Brugge in their last match of the opening phase to advance to the Champions League play-off round.

## BUENDIA JOINS LEVERKUSEN SIGN 5 ON LOAN FROM VILLA

Aston Villa's attacking midfielder Emiliano Buendia has joined Bayer Leverkusen on loan for the rest of the season, the Bundesliga champions said. Argentina international Buendia has made 12 Premier League appearances off the bench for Villa this season, having missed nearly a year after suffering an anterior cruciate ligament injury in August 2023 that required surgery.

The 28-year-old has also played for Getafe and won the English second-tier Championship twice with Norwich City.

## VETERAN GERMAN COACH SCHAFER APPOINTED TO HELP AILING GHANA

Ghana have appointed former Africa Cup of Nations winning coach Winfried Schafer as a technical adviser to their team after failing to qualify for the 2025 finals in Morocco.

The 75-year-old German-born Schafer led Cameroon to the African title in 2002 and also previously coached Jamaica and Thailand. He established his coaching credentials at Karlsruhe in the Bundesliga.

Schafer will assist coach Otto Addo as Ghana revamped their technical team ahead of the resumption of World Cup qualification in March.

Addo has been kept on despite Ghana missing out of the Cup of Nations finals for the first time in the last 11 editions after a disastrous qualifying campaign, where they failed to win any of their six matches and finished bottom of Group F behind Angola, Sudan and Niger.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Bol to skip most of indoor athletics season

AFP  
Paris

**O**lympic 400m women's hurdles bronze medallist and world champion Femke Bol said yesterday she will miss this season's indoor individual events, apart from the European Championships, to prioritise her personal life.

Bol, 24, also won a gold medal in the 4x400m mixed relay and silver in the 4x400m women's relay in the Paris Games last summer but missed out on victory in her preferred event. "I'm training hard and preparing myself for another successful year on the track, but I also felt that I needed a bit more time away from competing," Bol said on Instagram.

"Therefore I have decided to not race individually this indoor season. It gives me the opportunity to have some more time processing everything that has happened and prioritise more things outside of the sports that are important to me," she added.

Bol's only indoor race this year is set to be in

her home country at the European Indoor Championships held between March 6-9. "However, I cannot and do not want to miss a chance to compete at a home championship!!!" she said without mentioning the world indoors in Nanjing, China held between March 21-23. "So I will be racing in Apeldoorn at the European Indoor Championships in the relays and lucky enough it's the first time there's also a mixed relay!" she added.

Bol set the world indoor 400m record of 49.17s to win the gold medal at the World Indoor Championships in Glasgow last year. She is a two-time world champion, four-time Olympic medallist and the European 400m record holder with the second-fastest time in history of 50.95s.

Bol has been an instrumental part of Dutch relays teams in recent years, helping the Netherlands to gold at four European Athletics Championships - two indoors and two outdoors - as well as gold at the 2023 World Athletics Championships and 2024 World Athletics Indoor Championships. And the 24-year-old ran an incredible sub-48 second anchor leg to take the Netherlands from fourth to first in the mixed 4x400m final at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.