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CRICKET | Page 2

Australia to play England in historic day-night Test at MCG



TENNIS | Page 3

Alcaraz rolls into fourth round as Gauff, Keys lead US charge

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FOOTBALL

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Page 4

SPOTLIGHT

We were excellent in win over Wasl: Sadd's Sanchez

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Felix Sanchez was a delighted head coach after his Al Sadd SC side showed their true colours to come from behind to defeat Al Wasl FC 3-1 on the night and 4-2 on aggregate to take their place in Monday's AFC Champions League Elite quarter-final draw.

Apart from the opening 10 minutes when they were put under tremendous pressure by the UAE side, Akram Afif-led Al Sadd produced a dominant performance with Sanchez now eyeing an extended run in the competition. "We achieved an important victory and qualified for the quarter-finals which we deserved," said Sanchez.

"We played an excellent match against Al Wasl, a big club. It is good to qualify for this stage, and we are moving in the

tournament step by step until we reach the furthest point we can reach. We thank the fans for their support and we promise them to continue to give our best, we are now among the best eight teams in Asia and we will strive to give more."

Afif showed why he's regarded one of Asia's finest talents after the 28-year-old kickstarted Al Sadd's revival after they had fallen behind to Fabio de Lima's strike by setting up Moustafa Mashal for the equaliser.

Jung Seung-hyun's unlucky own goal then put Al Sadd in front before Afif crowned an outstanding performance with a spectacular long range curler into the top corner with the attacking midfielder pleased to see the fighting spirit in the team.

"We succeeded in achieving our goal of qualifying for the quarter-finals of the continental championship after a period

of absence from this stage," said Afif.

"We played a strong match, Al Wasl are a strong team, and started the match well and scored an early goal, but we did not give up and we responded by scoring a wonderful three goals."

Disappointment was etched on the face of Al Wasl head coach Milos Milojevic, who rued how his side were not able to extend their dominance beyond the first 15 minutes as they exited the competition having reached the knockout stage for the first time.

"We played the first 15 minutes brilliantly, then it was a setback. This is football, if you are not focused you lose. We made small mistakes but they were very costly," said Milojevic. "The game after that became open and it was a style that suited Al Sadd and they scored three goals. We made small mistakes that had a big impact on the team and we lost as a result"



Akram Afif was at his best in Al Sadd's win over Al Wasl on Monday.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Yamal, Raphinha fire Barca past Benfica into last 8

Flick's side will face Borussia Dortmund or Lille in the quarters

AFP
Barcelona

Lamine Yamal and Raphinha dazzled as Barcelona thumped Benfica 3-1 yesterday, reaching the Champions League quarter-finals 4-1 on aggregate.

Raphinha netted either side of a stunning Yamal strike as the Catalans dominated in the first half, building on their 1-0 last 16, first leg win in Lisbon. Nicolas Otamendi had quickly levelled Raphinha's opener but the visitors were blown away at the Olympic Stadium as Barcelona progressed comfortably from the tie and produced some moments of brilliant attacking football.

Hansi Flick's side will face Borussia Dortmund or Lille in the quarter-finals as they aim to win the competition for the first time since 2015 and the era of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez. "We are candidates to win everything," Raphinha said, with the club in the hunt for a potential treble.

"For me the most important thing is what we did as a team and I am very happy with this victory," he continued, before praising teenager Yamal. "His goal was spectacular, it shows what Lamine is - he's a spectacular player with tremendous quality."

Flick said Barca would play for late club doctor Carles Minarro, who died suddenly on Saturday ahead of the team's match against Osasuna, which was postponed, and the players observed a silence in his honour before kick-off. "What happened made us arrive at this game even more determined to win," added Raphinha.

Five-time Champions League winners Barca took the lead after 11 minutes when Spain international Yamal burst into the area, chopped his way past Florentino and then mis-hit the ball across to Raphinha for a simple finish.

Benfica levelled within two minutes when Otamendi escaped Ronald Araujo to head home from a corner.

Barcelona goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny excelled in the first leg as the Catalans claimed an impressive win with 10 men after Pau Cubarsi's red card, but might have done more to keep out Otamendi's effort. However Barcelona, and particularly their wingers Yamal and Raphinha, were in sensational form and they quickly reclaimed their lead.

Yamal netted his first goal in seven matches, but it was worth the wait, with the 17-year-old cutting in from the right and arcing a sensational shot past Anatoliy Trubin and in at the far post from the edge of the box.

Raphinha grabbed his second before the break to give Barcelona a three-goal aggregate lead after a blistering run by Alejandro Balde.

The left-back won the ball back in his area



Barcelona's Raphinha (right) celebrates with Lamine Yamal after scoring his team's third goal during the UEFA Champions League last 16 second leg match against Benfica in Barcelona. (AFP)

and sliced open the Portuguese team on the counter, carrying it to the edge of Benfica's area before teeing up Raphinha.

It was the winger's 11th strike of the competition and he leads the scoring charts.

Bruno Lage's side were without injured midfielder Angel Di Maria but even with him beating Flick's Barca on this form would have been a difficult ask.

Fredrik Aursnes netted for Benfica in the second half but the goal was disallowed for

offside against Vangelis Pavlidis, who scored a hat-trick as Barca won 5-4 in their first meeting this season, in the league stage in January.

For the most part Benfica struggled to trouble Szczesny, and Barcelona came close to scoring a fourth when Frenkie de Jong poked wide on the stretch at the end of a razor-sharp team move. Barcelona now await their quarter-final opponent and can start preparing to visit Atletico Madrid in La Liga on Sunday, in a huge clash in the Spanish title race.

PREVIEW

Real face 'very high pressure' in Atletico clash: Ancelotti

AFP
Madrid

Carlo Ancelotti said Real Madrid will face immense pressure in their Champions League last 16 second leg derby at Atletico Madrid today, but backed his players to rise to the occasion. Champions Los Blancos hold a 2-1 first leg lead ahead of their visit to city rivals Atletico's Metropolitan stadium. The record 15-time winners boast a strong record against Atletico over the years in Europe, most notably beating them in the 2014 and 2016 finals.

"The motivation and the pressure will be very high," Ancelotti told reporters. "We're doing well, motivated like always in (the Champions League), it's a hard game and we know it. We have the confidence to continue in this competition, which is a very special one. It will be an even game, decided by small details, that's how (facing Atletico) has always been and it will be the same tomorrow."

The Italian coach said if the tie comes down to a penalty shootout, his team's mental strength will be more important than their technical ability. "I've had players who shoot penalties very well but they didn't have the right feeling going into a shoot-out," explained Ancelotti. "The mental aspect is more important than the technical side... I've won Champions Leagues with defenders who scored penalties."

Ancelotti, who led AC Milan to glory as a coach in 2003 and 2007, before lifting the trophy with Real Madrid in 2014, 2022 and 2024, also said he does not mind if one of his players is unwilling to take a spot-kick. "It's not bad if someone says they don't want to take one - you have to take the responsibility when you're feeling right," he added. Last season Atletico Madrid

fought back in the last 16 to beat Inter Milan on penalties after losing the first leg in Italy.

Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe missed penalties against Liverpool and Athletic Bilbao towards the end of 2024 during moments of low confidence, but has hit form since. However he failed to score in the first leg against Atletico on a quiet night for the French superstar and came in for criticism. The forward did not take part in the start of Madrid's training session with the club saying he had felt some "discomfort", but Spanish media reported he eventually joined his teammates and will be fit to play.

"Kylian wants to score in, and win, every game," said his compatriot, Real Madrid midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni.

"It's wild to hear (people say) he has had difficult days because he didn't score in a couple of games, if he scores tomorrow, everyone will say he's an incredible player."

"Kylian doesn't need advice from anyone, he's happy, he's scored a lot of goals and he will score a lot more."

Atletico midfielder Rodrigo de Paul said his team have to outscore Real Madrid rather than necessarily outplay them. "In football the best team doesn't always win, in the Bernabeu we had a great game, but there are situations that fall one way or the other," De Paul told a news conference. "90 minutes is very long and we will go through a lot of situations, we have to be smart."

Atletico coach Diego Simeone said his team were aiming to progress and go as far as the final. "I believe in my players, I have confidence in the squad, I know the heart my players have and we will go out there looking to stay in this Champions League," said the Argentinian. "Our objective is to play in the final."



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham (centre), Ferland Mendy (right) and Vinicius Junior share a laugh during a training session. (Reuters)

CRICKET

Australia-England historic Test to be played at MCG

150th anniversary match to be held under lights from March 11 in 2027

Agencies
Melbourne

Australia will play England under lights at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Test cricket in 2027, it was announced yesterday.

The match, from March 11-15, will commemorate the first ever Test, played between the two arch-rivals in Melbourne in 1877.

It will be the first time the MCG has hosted a men's day-night Test after a successful women's Ashes pink ball clash at the venue earlier last month.

This decision to schedule the Test was made to maximise Australian attendance, as the match will occur during standard school and work periods, and to enhance global television ratings, especially in the UK, by providing a favourable viewing time.

"The 150th Anniversary Test at the MCG will be one of the great cricket events and playing under lights will be a fantastic way to celebrate both our game's rich heritage and Test cricket's modern evolution," Cricket Australia's newly-installed chief Todd Greenberg said. "It will also help ensure more people are able to attend and watch what will be a fantastic occasion."

"The Centenary Test created many iconic performances including David Hookes' five consecutive boundaries off Tony Greig, Rick McCosker batting with a broken jaw and Derek Randall's defiant century, and I'm sure the 150th Test will create its own lifelong memories."



A view of the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground. Australia and England will play a historic day-night Test at this venue in March 2027. (@mccg)

"This season's Ashes Series will whet the appetite for this clash in exactly two years, and we look forward to celebrating this historic occasion further as it draws nearer," Greenberg added.

"Playing under lights will be a fantastic way to celebrate both our game's rich heritage and Test cricket's modern evolution."

Australia host England for five Tests starting in November this year.

The 150th Anniversary Test will follow Australia's home five-Test series against India in 2027, making for a blockbuster summer.

The Melbourne Cricket Ground was the venue for the 100th Centenary Test in 1977 where the Greg Chappell-led Australia beat

Tony Greig's England by 45 runs.

AUSTRALIA'S CRICKET SERIES FROM 2025 TO 2027

2025-26

June: World Test Championship final v South Africa - Lord's

June-July: Three Tests, five T20 tour of the West Indies

August: Three ODIs and three T20s v South Africa (To be played in northern Australia)

Oct: Three T20 tour of New Zealand

Oct-Nov: Three ODIs and five T20s v India

Dec-Jan: Five-Test Ashes series v England

Feb-March: T20 World Cup - India and Sri Lanka

March: Three ODI tour of Pakistan

2026-27

June: Three ODIs and three T20s tour of Bangladesh

August: One Test and three T20s v Afghanistan (northern Australia)

Sept-October: Three Tests and three ODIs tour of South Africa

Nov-Dec: Three ODIs and five T20s v England

Dec-Jan: Four Tests v New Zealand (Perth-Adelaide-Melbourne-Sydney)

Jan-Feb: Five-Test Border-Gavaskar Series tour of India

March: 150th anniversary Test v England (MCG). Two Tests v Bangladesh (reportedly set to be moved, but unconfirmed)

BADMINTON

Christie begins All England title defence with Leong win



World number two Jonatan Christie

Reuters
Birmingham

Indonesian world number two Jonatan Christie began his title defence with a 21-11 21-19 victory over Jun Hao Leong of Malaysia on day one of the All England Open badminton championships in Birmingham yesterday.

Third seed Christie continued a run of strong performances, having reached the semi-finals of the India Open in January before heading into the Indonesia Masters final, where he lost to Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand.

"I'm so glad I have the opportunity to be (coming here as) the champion," Christie said.

"Last year, I came here with nothing," he added.

"The first four tournaments of last year, I lost in the first and second rounds. I came here with nothing to lose, I just pushed myself 100% but this year is really different."

The 27-year-old, who won his first Super 1000 title at the 2024

event, will face India's Lakshya Sen in the last 16.

Top seed and 2018 winner Shi Yu Qi of China dispatched Indonesia's Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo 21-13 21-8 while compatriot Li Shi Feng, world number six, came from behind to beat Canadian Brian Yang 21-11 18-21 21-16.

In the women's singles, two-times world champion and last year's finalist Akane Yamaguchi powered through an intense first game to beat Thuy Linh Nguyen of Vietnam 21-19 21-12, as she hopes for better fortune in this year's tournament.

The Japanese world number three, winner in 2022, was forced to retire from the 2024 final due to a hip injury with Spain's Carolina Marin, who is yet to return to the sport after the Olympics, claiming the title.

Yamaguchi will play Indian world number 28 Malvika Bansod for a spot in the quarter-finals.

South Korean top seed An Se-young, the Olympic gold medalist in Paris, will face China's Gao Fangjie today as she looks to regain the title she won in 2023.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Australia highly unlikely to bid for the 2030 Commonwealth Games, says a top official

Reuters
Sydney

Australia is highly unlikely to bid to host the Commonwealth Games in 2030 as it is too close to the country staging the Summer Olympics in Brisbane two years later, a top official said.

The Scottish city of Glasgow will host a pared down version of the Games next year and expressions of interest are being sought for the centenary edition of the multi-sports gathering of mainly former British colonies in 2030.

"Realistically for us, 2030 is not on our radar," Australian Commonwealth Games Association chief executive Craig Phillips told the Australian Associated Press.

"If a government put their hand up and said 'We want to do it', we would certainly talk to them, but we're not really pursuing it."

"We think 2030 is just a bit too close when you look at what is re-



A general view shows Olympic rings and Spectaculars in Cortina at night, which will host the women alpine skiing competition part of the Milano Cortina Winter Olympic Games 2026, in Cortina, Italy. (Reuters)

quired from commercial partners, what is required from various levels of government. It becomes a little bit challenging with an Olympics and Paralympics coming."

The 2026 Commonwealth Games were supposed to take place in Victoria but the Austral-

ian state pulled out in 2022 because of escalating costs.

It was the second consecutive Games that the original hosts did not end up staging the event after the South African city of Durban was replaced by Birmingham, England for the 2022 edition after

running into financial problems.

Australia has already hosted the quadrennial Games twice this century and has topped the medals table at every edition since 1990, barring 2014 when England took the honours in Glasgow.

FOCUS

Maradona medical team on trial four years after football icon's death

AFP
Buenos Aires

Seven medical staff who treated Argentine football legend Diego Maradona in the days before his death went on trial yesterday accused of homicide.

Maradona died on November 25, 2020, aged 60, while recovering at home from brain surgery for a blood clot, after decades battling cocaine and alcohol addictions.

The defendants risk prison terms between eight and 25 years if convicted on the charge of "homicide with possible intent" - allegedly for pursuing a course of action despite knowing it could lead to the former footballer's death.

Outside the court, dozens of fans of the footballer gathered yesterday, waving banners calling for "justice" and singing songs in honor of the fallen star.

"Thank you all for coming," Veronica Ojeda, Maradona's former partner and mother of one of his sons, 12-year-old Dieguito, told the crowd as she fought back tears.

Maradona's older daughters, Dalma and Gianinna, entered the building without saying anything to the press or supporters.

In an opening statement yesterday, the prosecution said it intends to submit "solid" evidence that no member of the team "did what they were supposed to do" in the "horror theater" that was Maradona's deathbed.

"That's how Maradona died,"



Veronica Ojeda, ex-wife of late Diego Maradona, at the San Isidro court in San Isidro, Buenos Aires, yesterday. (AFP)

prosecutor Patricio Ferrari told the court, holding up a photo of Maradona shortly after his death, lying on his back in bed with a swollen abdomen.

Maradona was found dead two weeks after going under the knife,

in a rented house in an exclusive Buenos Aires neighborhood where he was brought after being discharged from hospital. He was found to have died of heart failure and acute pulmonary edema, a condition where fluid accumulates in the lungs. The passing of the star of the 1986 World Cup plunged Argentina into mourning in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tens of thousands of people queued to bid farewell to the former Boca Juniors and Napoli striker as his body lay in state at the presidential palace.

Nearly 120 witnesses, including members of Maradona's family and doctors who tended to him over the years, are expected to take the stand in the long-delayed trial in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro. The hearings are expected

to run until July. The defendants in the case are a neurosurgeon, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a medical coordinator, a nursing coordinator, a doctor and the night nurse. The day nurse who found Maradona dead is to be tried by jury separately. Prosecutors have accused his medical team of pushing for Maradona to receive home care, which proved "reckless" and "totally deficient."

They allege the footballer was abandoned to his fate for a "prolonged, agonizing period" before his death. A panel of 20 medical experts convened by Argentina's public prosecutor concluded in 2021 that Maradona "would have had a better chance of survival" with adequate treatment in an appropriate medical facility.

The house where he was being cared for notably had no defibrillator. Maradona's family claim that leaked audio and text messages among the team show the star's health was in imminent danger. Mario Baudry, a lawyer for the family, said the messages showed the carers' strategy was to ensure Maradona's daughters did not intervene "because if they did, they (the medical staff) would lose their money."

The accused all deny responsibility for the star's death.

In the La Paternal neighborhood of Buenos Aires where the player nicknamed "El Pibe de Oro" (The Golden Boy) revealed his prodigious talent as a player for Argentinos Juniors in the 1970s, graffiti urging "Justice for Diego!" was daubed on walls ahead of the trial.

NEW YORK KNICKS DOWN SACRAMENTO KINGS IN NBA



Sacramento Kings guard Devin Carter (right) drives to the basket against New York Knicks center Karl-Anthony Towns during the fourth quarter of their NBA game at Golden 1 Center. Knicks won 133-104. (Sergio Estrada-Imagn Images)

TENNIS

Alcaraz rolls into 4th round as Gauff, Keys lead US charge

Alcaraz seeking to become only the third man to win three straight titles at the Masters 1000 tournament

Reuters
Indian Wells, California

Carlos Alcaraz kept his Indian Wells "three-peat" campaign on track with a pristine 6-2 6-4 win against Canadian Denis Shapovalov in the third round on Monday, as a crowd of Americans fed off the home fans to reach the final 16.

The second-seeded Spaniard Alcaraz was never in doubt as he won the first five games, sending over 10 winners in the first set alone, as Shapovalov - who was fresh off a confident win in Dallas - struggled to find his usual intensity.

The four-times major winner never faced a break in a nearly flawless second set and he held to love in the final game, clinching the affair in under 90 minutes with a mighty overhead smash.

"I knew at the beginning of the match that I had to be really focused. I had to start the match really strong, knowing it was going to be a really tough battle," said Alcaraz. Alcaraz wants to become only the third man to win three straight titles at the Masters 1000 tournament after retired great Roger Federer and former number one Novak Djokovic, who crashed out in the second round.

"I'm just really pleased about my performance today, about everything I have done," said Alcaraz. "Few things that I have to improve, but I'm really happy."

Alcaraz will face Grigor Dimitrov in the round of 16 after the Bulgarian 14th seed beat Frenchman Gael Monfils 7-6(4) 4-6 7-6(2) in a three-hour battle.

Right-handed Dimitrov was 3-1



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain plays a forehand volley against Denis Shapovalov of Canada in their third round match during the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. (AFP)

up in the third set when his forehand smashed into his left thumb, leaving it bleeding. He continued after receiving treatment but lost the next three games, before fighting back to force a tiebreak and seal the win.

Belarusian world number one Aryna Sabalenka used her powerful serve to wallop Italian Lucia Bronzetti 6-1 6-2, bringing her best form to the tournament after suffering early exits at the Qatar Open and in Dubai.

It took little time for Sabalenka

to find her footing, as she sprinted through the first set and quickly recovered after dropping her serve early in the second. She will play British lucky loser Sonay Kartal next. "It wasn't as easy as the score looks like. It was tough conditions out there, and happy with the way I managed that," she said.

AMERICANS ADVANCE

Players battled tricky winds in the California desert, as Americans Coco Gauff, Madison Keys, Taylor Fritz and Ben Shelton gave the

home fans plenty to cheer about with compelling third-round victories. Third seed Gauff overcame late nerves to beat Greek Maria Sakkari 7-6(1) 6-2, getting over the finish line even as she produced six double faults in the final game before closing it out on her sixth match point with a forehand winner.

"Except the last game I thought I played a great match. Just trying to look at the positives," said Gauff, who had revenge on her mind after losing to Sakkari in the semi-final last year. "Obviously I was a bit

disappointed with the last game but that's just the perfectionist in me," Gauff said.

She will next play Swiss Belinda Bencic, whom she has beaten twice before, most recently in the round of 16 in Melbourne this year.

"It was a bit tricky conditions. I think we were both struggling a little bit with finding the rhythm, and I was just trying to stay solid on my end of the court," said Gauff.

Newly minted Australian Open champion Keys saved 12 of the 15 break points she faced to beat

Belgian Elise Mertens 6-2, 6-7(8), 6-4, securing her 14th straight match victory. The fifth seed, who lost to Mertens in their two previous meetings, fired five aces to set up a fourth-round meeting with Croatian Donna Vekic, and said she had come to expect another level from herself after her maiden major breakthrough.

"Overall in Australia I played some really good tennis, and I think the further away from it you get, the more you kind of forget about the lulls of matches and the moments where you weren't playing great," said Keys.

"As great as Australia was and all the wins that I got, there were still some moments in matches where I didn't play great or things got away from me. So just being really conscious of that," Keys added.

The 2022 winner Fritz overcame a slow start to beat Chilean Alejandro Tabilo 4-6 6-3 6-1 and said he expects a tough fight against Briton Jack Draper, who dimmed the Americans' joy as he beat home hope Jenson Brooksby in straight sets. "It's going to be a tough match. I think it's a tough draw to get him in the round of 16 as a top-4 seed. He's a very good player," Fritz told reporters.

"I think he's probably better than his ranking is, and yeah, we have had some tight ones."

Twenty-two-year-old Shelton got the crowd on their feet as he played with power and poise to defeat Karen Khachanov 6-3 7-5, battling with blisters on his hand.

Down a break in the second set, Shelton won the final four games of the match and clinched it with one of eight aces and a mighty cheer. He will play compatriot Brandon Nakashima in the round of 16.

CYCLING

Jorgenson takes Paris-Nice lead after Visma-Lease claim the third stage



Team Visma-Lease a Bike's Norwegian rider Per Strand Hagenes (left), Dutch rider Bart Lemmen, French rider Axel Zingle, Belgian rider Victor Campenaerts, Italian rider Edoardo Affini, US rider Matteo Jorgenson and Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrate on the podium after winning the 3rd stage of the Paris-Nice cycling race, a 28.4km team time trial between Nevers Magny-Cours Circuit and Nevers, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Nevers, France

Matteo Jorgenson helped power Visma-Lease a Bike to victory in the third stage of the Paris-Nice race yesterday, a team time trial around the town of Nevers.

The result saw the American all-rounder, the defending champion, back at the top of the overall standings ahead of teammate Jonas Vingegaard.

On the 28.4km circuit, the Dutch team finished 15 seconds ahead of Jayco-AlUla, with Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe a further 10sec adrift.

"I'm proud of the boys," said Jorgenson.

"I think we did the plan as well as we could and I'm happy with the commitment of everyone."

"I don't take it for granted to have six riders so strong and committed next to me. We wanted to use our two 'motorbikes', Per (Strand Hagenes) and Edo (Affini)."

"They did their turns before the steep climb and the goal was to have four of us on top. Then it was about navigating the last corners as fast as possible to the finish."

Jorgenson said he was excited to race with the leader's yellow jersey.

"I didn't wear it in race last year, I took it on the last day," he said. "I want just to feel what it is to race with the Maillot Jaune. It's iconic!"

Milan wins Tirreno-Adriatico second stage, Ganna holds lead
Jonathan Milan won the second stage of the Tirreno-Adriatico yesterday after charging over the line in an almost uncontested sprint finish.

Italian Milan crossed with his arms held aloft in Follonica after being brilliantly guided to the head of the pack in frantic final few hundred metres of a largely leisurely 192-kilometre ride from Camaiore, alongside the Tyrrhenian sea on mainland Italy's west coast.

The win was Milan's fourth of the season after claiming two stages on the UAE Tour - where he also topped the points standings - and one at the Volta a la Comunitat Valenciana.

"My team put me in the perfect situation as I hoped they would when we started this morning," said Milan, who won the points jersey at the Giro d'Italia the past two years. "It was a brilliant day, we always had everything under control," Milan added.

Milan is second in the overall standings, 19 seconds behind countryman Filippo Ganna who claimed the overall lead by storming to the opening individual time trial on Monday.

The 24-year-old moves three seconds above UAE rider Juan Ayuso who finished behind Ganna on Monday.

"Today's stage was one for the sprinters and it was just important

to stay out of trouble. I'm pleased with how it went" said Ganna. A slow run allowed Davide Bais and Alessandro Tonelli to reach fellow Italian and early breaker Manuele Tarozzi with 73km remaining, but the local trio were destined to get caught before the real action at the end of the stage. Once they were swallowed up, the sprinters jostled for position but Milan's Lidl-Trek team did such a good job leading their star man to the front that he had no rivals against whom to fight for the finish.

Today's stage is the first where the overall standings contenders will shine, with a hilly 239km hike between Follonica and Colfiorito.

Overall leaders

1. Filippo Ganna (ITA) INEOS Grenadiers 4:57:30
2. Jonathan Milan (ITA) Lidl - Trek +19
3. Juan Ayuso (ESP) UAE Team Emirates - XRG +22
4. Johan Price-Pettersen (DEN) Alpecin - Deceuninck +28
5. Antonio Tiberi (ITA) Bahrain Victorious +29
6. Derek Gee (CAN) Israel - Premier Tech +34
7. Mattia Cattaneo (ITA) Soudal Quick-Step +36
8. Soren Waerenskjold (NOR) Uno-X Mobility +37
9. Isaac Del Toro (MEX) UAE Team Emirates - XRG +38
10. Maikel Zijlaard (NED) Tudor Pro Cycling Team +40

AL THUMAMA RAMADAN CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Obaidli shines in Al Adaam's win over Al Nusoor in thrilling contest

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Adaam continued their winning streak in the second edition of the Al Thumama Ramadan Championship with a 2-1 victory over Al Nusoor. Omar al-Obaidli of Al Adaam was named the best player of the match for his stand-out performance.

In the second match of the day, a goalless draw was the result between Al Janoub and Tariq bin Ziyad. Mohammed Faisal al-Mir of Al Janoub earned the best player award for his impressive efforts.

Tonight, the tournament will continue with two exciting matches. The first will see group leaders Al Adaam face off against Al-Zaem at 8:30pm, followed by a match between Al Nusoor and Tariq bin Ziyad at 9:20pm.

The race for the top scorer title is also heating up, with Faisal al-Lanjawi from Al Adaam lead-



ing the pack with 5 goals, closely followed by Abdullah al-Khatib from Palestine with 4 goals. The best player award is set to be contested between this duo and Ziad Moawad Khader from Al Nusoor.

Youssef Ali Abdel Nour, the tournament director, expressed his satisfaction with the competition, noting that this year's edi-

tion has delivered on its promises of excitement, fun, and fierce competition. He added: "Several players have caught the eye with their exceptional technical skills, and I believe they will be the future of Qatari football. The main goal of the tournament is to uncover emerging talents and introduce them to the clubs."

CADILLAC F1 TEAM HAS AT LEAST SIX DRIVERS ON 2026 SHORT-LIST

London: The Cadillac team set to debut in Formula One next year has at least six names on a list of potential drivers and will decide on merit, principal Graeme Lowdon said yesterday.

The General Motors-backed team secured final approval last week for their entry as the sport's 11th outfit on the starting grid, providing a green light for discussions about the future line-up.

"The obvious question is whether we'll have American drivers and personally I see no reason why an American driver can't be selected on merit," Lowdon told reporters on a video call. "The overriding objective is merit."

Experienced F1 drivers without seats who could be in the frame include Zhou Guanyu, Valtteri Bottas, Sergio Perez and Mick Schumacher while American IndyCar star Colton Herta is regularly mentioned.

"Do we see experienced, capable drivers... very talented drivers, who currently aren't on the grid? Yes, we do," said Lowdon. "We are going to be quite busy talking to a few people. My phone has certainly been busy, that's for sure. There are easily half a dozen, if not more, candidates out there who offer extremely good credentials to be in Formula One or to be in Formula One again." Herta has yet to qualify for a super-licence, however, and Lowdon said he would have to secure that. "He's an incredibly talented driver. So, for

sure, it's not shock news that we would be looking to consider Colton alongside a whole bunch of other drivers as well," he said.

"He won't be the last driver where there's some uncertainty due to super licence points but we just have to live with that. That's a regulation. We just have to respect it."

Lowdon has had close links to Zhou, helping with his management, and the Chinese is now a reserve for Cadillac's initial engine partner Ferrari.

"I think Zhou's done an exceptionally good job under difficult circumstances over the last couple of years," said Lowdon.

"He doesn't necessarily need to explain the background of his abilities because I've had a front row seat to see all that. There's the correct checks and balances in place so there's no favouritism in any particular direction towards him or any other driver that we may have involvement with. There's some really good ones out there. Zhou included."

Alpine add a fourth F1 reserve with India's Maini
The Renault-owned Alpine Formula One team added a fourth test and reserve driver to their roster yesterday with the announcement of Indian Kush Maini. Formula Two driver Maini, 24, joins a list that includes Argentine Franco Colapinto, Estonian Paul Aron and Japan's Ryo Hirakawa.

SPOTLIGHT

Man United to leave Old Trafford for new 100,000-seat stadium

Stadium, which will be built on land surrounding Old Trafford, will cost around £2bn

AFP
London

Manchester United yesterday announced plans to build a new 100,000-capacity stadium close to their historic Old Trafford home, with co-owner Jim Ratcliffe promising it would be the "world's greatest" football ground.

The momentous decision by the Premier League club comes after an extensive consultation process on whether to develop their creaking current ground or move. The stadium, which will be built on land surrounding Old Trafford, will cost around £2bn (\$2.6bn) and the timescale for the project is five years.

United, 20-time English league champions, are one of the world's most iconic football clubs but have fallen behind rivals such as Manchester City, Arsenal and Liverpool over the past decade. They are having a dismal season under current manager Ruben Amorim, languishing 14th in the Premier League table and knocked out of both domestic cup competitions. British billionaire Ratcliffe himself this week told the BBC some of the club's players are "not good enough" and some are "overpaid".

Scaled models and conceptual images for United's new stadium were revealed at the London headquarters of architects Foster + Partners, appointed in September to design the stadium district.

"Today marks the start of an incredibly exciting journey to the delivery of what will be the world's greatest football stadium, at the centre of a regenerated Old Trafford," Ratcliffe said in a club statement. "Our current stadium has served us brilliantly for the past 115 years, but it has fallen behind the best arenas in world sport."

United said the stadium and a wider regeneration project had the potential to deliver an additional £7.3bn per year to the UK economy, including the possible creation of 92,000 new jobs. A joint task force was created last year to explore options for regenerating the Old Trafford area of Greater Manchester, with the stadium development at its heart.

It was led by Sebastian Coe, president of World Athletics and chief organiser of the 2012 London Olympics, and also included

the mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham. Omar Berrada, United's chief executive, said the club's long-term objective was to "have the world's best football team playing in the world's best stadium", promising further consultation with fans.

Old Trafford, United's home since 1910, is England's biggest club ground with a capacity of around 74,000 but criticism of the stadium has grown in recent years, with issues including a leaking roof.

The proposed new stadium will rank as Europe's second biggest, behind only Barcelona's Camp Nou, which will accommodate about 105,000 fans once an upgrade is completed.

The move to a new ground has been backed by former United boss Alex Ferguson, who won 13 Premier League titles during his reign of nearly 27 years that ended in 2013. "Old Trafford holds so many special memories for me personally, but we must be brave and seize this opportunity to build a new home, fit for the future, where new history can be made," he said.

United, whose struggles on the pitch are matched by problems off it, are around £1bn in debt and have yet to say how they will pay for the new stadium. But Berrada said yesterday he was confident the club would find a way to finance the stadium as it was a "very attractive investment opportunity".

Foster + Partners designed the new Wembley stadium and the Lusail stadium in Qatar, which hosted the 2022 World Cup final. Norman Foster, founder of Foster + Partners, said United's new stadium would feature an umbrella design sheltering a public plaza that is "twice the size of Trafalgar Square" in London.

The design will feature three masts described as "Trident", which the architects say will be 200 metres high and visible from 40 kilometres (25 miles) away. The Manchester United Supporters' Trust said it was vital that fans were consulted throughout the process.

The group said in a statement: "Will it drive up ticket prices and force out local fans? Will it harm the atmosphere, which is consistently fans' top priority in the ground? Will it add to the debt burden which has held back the club for the last two decades? Will it lead to reduced investment in the playing side at a time when it is so badly needed?"



An illustration of a proposed new 100,000-seat stadium, unveiled as part of the regeneration of the Old Trafford area. Manchester United announced plans to build a new 100,000-capacity stadium close to their historic Old Trafford home. (AFP)



Manchester United said the stadium and a wider regeneration project had the potential to deliver an additional £7.3bn per year to the UK economy, including the possible creation of 92,000 new jobs.

Qatar U-23 squad announced for friendly tournament

Doha: Qatar under-23 football team head coach Ildio Vale has announced the 29-player squad for the upcoming International U-23 Friendly Championship, set to take place in Doha from March 19 to 25. The tournament will feature teams from Croatia, Egypt, Thailand, Australia, and the UAE, and is part of Qatar's preparation for the U-23 Asian Cup qualifiers, scheduled for September 2025.

The Qatari team will kick off an internal training camp from March 12 to 25, with daily sessions leading up to the tournament's opening on March 19.

This championship marks an important milestone in the team's preparations for their upcoming challenges in the U-23 Asian Cup qualifiers.

The selected squad includes 29 players:

Goalkeepers: Jassim al-Sharshani, Mohammed al-Ishaq, Mohammed Fawzi, Karim Haidar, Sami Mazen, Ali Mohammed

Defenders: Noureddine Ibrahim, Issa al-Najjar (AI Ahli), Mubarak Shanan, Rashid al-Abdullah, Ghanem al-Menhali (AI Duhail), Nabil Arfan, Mohammed Hassan (AI Wakrah), Abdulrahman Mohammed, Abdullah al-Otaibi (AI Sadd), Abdul Aziz Hassan, Ahmed Hajanah, Marwan Baramil (AI Shama), Marwan Sharif, Tamer Bouri (AI Arabi), Ayoub al-Alawi (AI Gharafa), Moaz al-Wadi (AI Shahaniya), Ahmed Riyadh (AI Khor), Mohammed Khaled, Anas Abdulsalam (Calahorra, Spain), Bassam Adel, Tahseen Mohammed (Alcorcon, Spain), Awab Hussein (Cultural, Spain)

Forwards: Ali Mohammed, Hassan al-Gharib (Lusail).



Qatar under-23 football team head coach Ildio Vale.

FOCUS

Arsenal will keep 'fighting' despite Premier League stumbles: Arteta



Arsenal's Mikel Arteta (centre) takes part in a training session with his players at the club's training centre in Shenley, outside London, on the eve of their Champions League match against PSV Eindhoven. (AFP)

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta said Arsenal are focused on "fighting to win every game" even though their Premier League dream appears to be over as they eye the next round of the Champions League.

The second-placed Gunners trail Premier League leaders Liverpool by 15 points after Sunday's 1-1 draw at Manchester United extended their winless league run to three matches. It is a crushing disappointment for Arsenal, who have finished as runners-up to Manchester City for the past two seasons. They have also been knocked out of the FA Cup and League Cup.

Arsenal, who have one foot in the Champions League quarter-finals after their 7-1 first-leg away

win over PSV Eindhoven last week, host the Dutch side at the Emirates in today's reverse fixture.

"We are going to carry on fighting to win every game," Spanish coach Arteta said.

"There are the demands we put on ourselves in every competition. We are very much conscious that the demands for this football club are to reach the highest level and to win football matches. There's always improvement. We have talked about what we can do better, it's about execution. My job is to give the players as many tools so we can deliver again."

Despite missing injured forwards Bukayo Saka and Kai Havertz, Arsenal had six different scorers in their crushing victory over PSV. The Gunners, who have never won the Champions League, will face the winners of the tie between Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid in the next round should

they advance, as expected, today. "It's a competition that we have a lot of enthusiasm for. We have been very consistent and tomorrow can put us in an exciting position," Arteta said.

France international defender William Saliba is keen to help guide his side to their first trophy since Arsenal's 2020 FA Cup triumph against Chelsea.

"I think we are very close, we need to keep going," Saliba said, referring to Arsenal's trophy ambitions. "We can't stop working. When you're close and don't win trophies it's sad. With work we will make a big step and I am sure we will arrive there. Everyone wants to win the Champions League, it's a competition that's hard to win, anything can happen."

The Spanish manager also hinted at giving some of Arsenal's younger players game time against PSV.

MITROVIC MISSES AL HILAL'S AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE CLASH DUE TO IRREGULAR HEART BEAT

Riyadh: Former Newcastle and Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic was omitted from Al Hilal's matchday squad for yesterday's AFC Champions League Elite tie against Pakhtakor, after being found days previously to have an irregular heart beat.

The 30-year-old Serbian international marked his return to the team on Friday by scoring in the Saudi Pro League - his first appearance since the start of the year following a hamstring injury which caused him to miss 13 matches. However, on Monday Al Hilal said in a statement: "The medical staff has decided to rest Aleksandar Mitrovic from Sunday's training due to feeling fatigue and arrhythmias. He will be observed accurately by specialists, as his case will be monitored constantly."

Mitrovic joined Al Hilal from Fulham in August 2023 for a reported fee of about 50mn euros. He played a key role in the Riyadh-based club winning last season's Saudi Pro League by scoring 28 goals in 28 games. Mitrovic has added another 13 league goals in 14 matches this season, while he has five goals in six appearances in the rebranded Asian Champions League.

POGBA FREE TO RETURN TO PITCH AS DOPING BAN ENDS

Paul Pogba became eligible to competition from yesterday as the former France star's 18-month doping ban expired - but he needs to find a club. The player who graced the midfield of Manchester United and Juventus is hoping to put three chaotic years behind him and is searching for a new employer with a view to playing in the 2026 World Cup, with David Beckham's MLS side Inter Miami among his possible options.

The 91-times capped midfielder suffered through repeated



injuries and patchy form that led to his departure from United in 2022.

He returned for a second stint at Juventus, where problems continued to dog him. A failed drugs test after a game in Italy in August 2023 resulted in a four-year doping ban which was reduced on appeal.

Pogba blamed a food supplement prescribed by a doctor he consulted in the United States for the positive test. Juventus terminated his contract last November, but Pogba "is training at 1,000 percent, he's in good spirits, he has received many offers", a member of his entourage insisted.

His ultimate dream remains next year's World Cup, but a player who turns 32 this week would first have to convince France coach Didier Deschamps.

WIN AT WEST HAM A REAL BOOST FOR FINAL, SAYS NEWCASTLE BOSS HOWE

Newcastle United will go into the League Cup final against Liverpool in good heart, man-

ager Eddie Howe said after his team beat West Ham United 1-0 to move sixth in the Premier League on Monday.

The north east club have not won a major trophy for 70 years but did not let Sunday's showdown distract them as a Bruno Guimaraes goal in the 63rd minute kept them firmly in the frame to qualify for the Champions League. It was a timely boost for Newcastle who had lost three of their previous four Premier League games.

"One of our best wins of the season, not in terms of performance but desire and heart," Howe said. "We'll focus fully on Liverpool now. We'll take everything into consideration. I felt we were in need of a win to go into the final with a real boost and lift. Will do us the world of good. Also for our league table position today was vital."

Howe hinted that the wait ahead of the final has been a distraction for his players but that Monday's display showed the ingredients needed to be a successful team.