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CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Kvaratskhelia genius helps PSG beat Aston Villa

PSG take a significant two-goal cushion into the return leg

AFP
Paris

Khвича Kvaratskhelia scored one of the great Champions League goals as Paris Saint-Germain came from behind to beat Aston Villa 3-1 in the first leg of their quarter-final tie yesterday.

Morgan Rogers had given Villa a 35th-minute lead at the Parc des Princes to silence the home fans, but PSG were quickly back level through a fine strike by Desire Doue. Kvaratskhelia then took centre stage with a stunning strike on 49 minutes, before Nuno Mendes added a crucial third in stoppage time, giving PSG a significant two-goal cushion to take into the return in Birmingham next Tuesday.

Having eliminated Liverpool in the last 16, Luis Enrique's team are now in a very strong position to go on and reach the semi-finals for the second season running. Villa, who had Prince William in the Paris crowd backing them along with his son George, will need to produce a memorable fightback at home if they are to make the last four of Europe's elite club competition for the first time since they lifted the trophy in 1982.

However, they can perhaps take inspiration from what happened the last time their coach Unai Emery faced Luis Enrique in the Champions League. Back in 2017, Emery's PSG thumped Barcelona 4-0 at home in the first leg of a last-16 tie, only to collapse at the Camp Nou and lose 6-1 to Luis Enrique's Catalans.

The latter, now hoping to lead PSG to their first Champions League crown, was without suspended skipper Marquinhos here and also left Bradley Barcola on the bench for the first time in this European campaign. That meant Doue and Kvaratskhelia completed the home attack along with 52-goal leading scorer Ousmane Dembele.

Villa came into the game on a run of seven straight wins in all competitions, as Marco Asensio, on loan from PSG, was named as a substitute. The visitors were happy to defend in numbers and the first half took place almost exclusively in their half, with Dembele setting the tone from a sizzling early strike which was tipped over by Emiliano Martinez.



Paris St Germain's Khвича Kvaratskhelia scores against Aston Villa during the Champions League quarter-final first leg match at the Parc des Princes in Paris. (Reuters)

The Argentinian goalkeeper, a hero for his country in the 2022 World Cup final against France, was loudly jeered throughout by the home fans and had a busy night. However, Villa snatched the lead against the run of play in the 35th minute. Captain John McGinn robbed Mendes just inside the Villa half and picked out Marcus Rashford on the left. He then slipped in Youri Tielemans whose ball across the face of goal left Rogers with an easy finish for his 14th goal this season.

PSG hit back quickly though, with Martinez nearly spilling a Doue shot over the line before the equaliser came from the corner which followed. The hosts worked the ball from right to left to Doue, who stepped towards the penalty area before curling a fine strike beyond Martinez into the far corner.

It was the latest moment of magic from

the 19-year-old, who recently won his first cap for France, but his strike was eclipsed by that of Kvaratskhelia as the Georgian put PSG ahead four minutes after half-time. Emery had replaced Matty Cash at half-time with the right-back having been booked for a foul on Kvaratskhelia.

Axel Disasi came on but had no answer as Kvaratskhelia was released on the left by Fabian Ruiz and advanced into the box. The former Napoli winger mesmerised Disasi as he rolled his studs over the ball before smashing a shot past Martinez, in off the near post.

Villa sent on a raft of substitutes including Asensio as they tried to find a way back into the game, while Achraf Hakimi had an effort disallowed for the hosts. Dembele then released Mendes to make it 3-1 in stoppage time and leave PSG with one foot in the semi-finals.

FOOTBALL

Sensational Barcelona destroy Dortmund

AFP
Barcelona

Robert Lewandowski hit a brace to help a devastating Barcelona rout Borussia Dortmund 4-0 in a one-sided Champions League quarter-final first leg last night.

Hansi Flick's Barca are a step away from reaching the semi-finals for the first time since 2019 and extended their unbeaten run to 23 matches. The five-time winners took the lead against last year's runners-up through red-hot winger Raphinha before Lewandowski reached 40 goals for the season with his double.

Teenager Lamine Yamal was an unstoppable force throughout and deftly prodded home Barcelona's fourth as Dortmund collapsed. Barca, who last lifted the trophy in 2015 are aiming to seal a final four clash against Inter Milan or Bayern Munich when they visit Germany next Tuesday.

La Liga leaders Barcelona seized control from the start, with Gregor Kobel saving well from Yamal and Lewandowski. Spain starlet Yamal, 17, fired across the face of goal and then over as he ran riot, Dortmund unable to slow him down. Barcelona took the lead after Karim Adeyemi needlessly gave away a free-kick in a dangerous area, pulling Jules Kounde back by his dreadlocks while trying to burst forward on the counter.

Fermin Lopez whipped it to the back post, with Inigo Martinez nodding the ball towards Pau Cubarsi, who turned it towards goal. The young defender's effort beat Kobel and was heading over the line before the tournament's top scorer Raphinha slid in to make

sure, claiming his 12th goal.

The Brazilian winger faced a nervous wait while VAR worked to confirm his 25th-minute strike was onside. Yamal and Raphinha zipped forward in search of a second but could not get the final ball right, before Serhou Guirassy spurned a huge chance for the visitors to level.

With Dortmund's first slick attacking move of the game, the forward, who has 10 goals in the competition, was played in but snatched badly at a bouncing ball with just Wojciech Szczesny to beat. Guirassy narrowly failed to reach an Adeyemi cross before half-time and then smashed into the side-netting as Niko Kovac's side showed flashes of their potential.

Unsurprisingly Dortmund came to regret Guirassy's misses, with Lewandowski netting his 10th of the tournament early in the second half. Yamal clipped a cross to Raphinha, who looped a header over to Lewandowski at the far post to nod home from virtually under the crossbar three minutes after the interval.

Lopez struck the post and lashed inches over as Barcelona searched for a third to kill the tie off. It arrived after 66 minutes, with Lopez teeing up Lewandowski to drill home at the near post.

This was the former Dortmund striker's 29th goal in 28 matches against his old club. Yamal, who had toyed with Dortmund's defence all night, deservedly got on the scoresheet as the visitors left themselves wide open and Raphinha sent the youngster through on goal.

The only worry for Barca was Yamal asking to be replaced in the final stages, although he was smiling as he was afforded an ovation.



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski celebrates with Lamine Yamal after scoring against Borussia Dortmund. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

Lusail classics: the best of the Qatar MotoGP Grand Prix

As MotoGP hurtles to Round 4 of the season in 2025, it's the floodlights of Qatar that are set to illuminate the championship battle once more. However, the Lusail International Circuit has gained a reputation for hosting classics over the years, so here is a pick of five of the best.

2005: ROSSI VS MELANDRI IN THE FIRST OF MANY LAST-LAP LUSAIL DUST-OFFS

Just a year after the circuit welcomed MotoGP, it was back to once again showcase the most exciting sport on earth and it didn't disappoint. In a season that was being dominated by Valentino Rossi in his second season at Yamaha, Marco Melandri was emerging as a late contender for runner-up. In this desert thriller, the #33 battled hard with The Doctor and made a bold lunge on the last lap to hit the front into Turn 12.

However, he ran wide and although he came through for P2, he was denied a first premier class win again by Rossi, who edged closer to his seventh title by becoming the first rider to win ten Grands Prix in a season.

2013: A STAR'S DEBUT, ANOTHER STAR'S COMEBACK

A new era erupted for Round 1 in 2013 as Marc Marquez made his debut in MotoGP. Straight away competitive but not quite



Marc Marquez (left) and Andrea Dovizioso battle for lead during the Qatar MotorGP Grand Prix in 2017 at the Lusail International Circuit.

enough to challenge eventual Grand Prix winner and defending Champion Jorge Lorenzo, he found himself battling with

Valentino Rossi.

The Doctor was in his quest for title #10 by this point and had stepped away

from Ducati and back to Yamaha to try and achieve it. An early mistake at Turn 1 had sent Rossi back down the order but in classic 'Vale' style, he picked his way back through before it was him vs Marquez for P2. This time, it was the #46 that came out on top, but it wouldn't be like that 12 months later...

2014: MARQUEZ VS ROSSI... FOR THE WIN

Under the floodlights, a sizzling rivalry really glistened in the season-opening round as once again, the young pretender and now defending Champion Marquez went up against the veteran of Rossi. This time, a battle to behold for the win and both swapped paint countless times in the closing stages. With two laps to go, they swapped places four times, with the last effort being a bold attempt by Rossi at Turn 10 but to no avail. Marquez held on to start a winning streak of 10 Grands Prix, something never seen before or since from the start of the season.

2018: MARQUEZ VS DOVI, TAKE ONE

Another classic to start the season, something that had become a theme in 2017 and would continue until the close of 2019: Marc Marquez vs Andrea Dovizioso. Dovi led going into the final two laps from a hungry and determined Marquez, now without a win at Lusail since 2014 against Rossi, who was once again there in con-

tenion but this time in P3. As had so often been the case, it came down to a last lap scrap for supremacy between Marquez and Dovizioso, with the Italian in command all the way through the last lap, until the #93 dived to the inside at the final corner. Like countless times before, he ran wide and the #04 calmly retook the lead and started a new season as Championship leader. And there was more where that came from...

2019: MARQUEZ VS DOVI, TAKE TWO

So, following a similar pattern as the 2018 edition, it was again Dovizioso and Ducati who led Honda and Marquez through the final lap, although this time the #93 knew he couldn't wait until the final corner. He tried at Turn 10 but couldn't make it stick and looked at Turn 12, only for Dovizioso to close the door.

Down to the final corner, Marquez made a late dive to attack his arch rival but again, ran wide just like 12 months before, leaving the coast clear for Dovizioso to hit the front and hold him off to the line. Breathless all the way, it was another Qatar classic.

And that's not all; there's been plenty of iconic moments at Lusail and there's set to be many more. Can Alex Marquez (Gresini Racing MotoGP) take a first Grand Prix win at the same place Casey Stoner, Enea Bastianini and Fabio Di Giannantonio all managed it? Will Marc be able to bounce back or will it be back-to-back success for Pecco?

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Sudharsan helps Gujarat to top of IPL points table

Gujarat registered their fourth successive victory in five matches

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Opener Sai Sudharsan struck his third half-century of this season to guide Gujarat Titans to the top of the IPL table with a 58-run thrashing of Rajasthan Royals yesterday.

The left-handed Sudharsan smashed 82 off 53 balls as Gujarat posted 217-6 after being invited to bat first at their home at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

Pace bowler Prasidh Krishna then stood out with figures of 3-24 to help bowl out Rajasthan for 159 in 19.2 overs after Shimron Hetmyer top-scored with 52.

Gujarat registered their fourth successive victory in five matches to lead the 10-team table. Inaugural champions Rajasthan slipped to their third defeat.

Gujarat, who won the IPL in their debut season in 2022, had a disappointing start when Rajasthan's England import bowler Jofra Archer bowled skipper Shubman Gill with a 147kph (91.34mph) delivery that rattled the off stump.

But Sudharsan after a cautious start put on key stands, including a 80-run second-wicket partnership with England's Jos Buttler, who hit 36, to lay the foundations for the mammoth total.

"I always try to see what I can do better, trying to improve my awareness and skill," Sudharsan said after being named player of the match. "I feel I work a lot on basics that is helping me be a versatile batter."

Sri Lankan spinner Maheesh



Gujarat Titans' Sai Sudharsan plays a shot during the IPL match against Rajasthan Royals in Ahmedabad yesterday. Sudharsan scored 82. (AFP)

Theekshana broke through as he trapped Buttler lbw, a decision denied by the on-field umpire but Rajasthan skipper Sanju Samson successfully reviewed the call.

Theekshana struck another blow to cut short big-hitter Shahruckh Khan's knock on 36 when he got the burly batter stumped out.

West Indies left-hander Sherfane Rutherford began with a six off Theekshana but survived just three balls for his seven when Sandeep Sharma got him out.

Sudharsan kept up the attack until his departure in the 19th over off Tushar Deshpande who struck another blow six balls later

to send back Rashid Khan for 12. Sudharsan has amassed 273 runs in five matches and is second behind leading batter Lucknow Super Giants' Nicholas Pooran, who has 288 runs.

Left-hander Rahul Tewatia made Gujarat finish strong in his unbeaten 24-run blitz that got 16 runs from the 20th over off Sandeep.

Rajasthan lost regular wickets in their chase after opener Yashasvi Jaiswal got out in the second over to left-arm medium-pace bowler Arshad Khan. Jaiswal made six.

Samson kept up the flow of runs but found little support from

the other end as Nitish Rana, Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel got out with Rajasthan in trouble at 68-4 in the eighth over.

Samson and Hetmyer attempted to rebuild as they put together 48 runs but Krishna got the captain caught at short thirdman for 41.

BRIEF SCORES

Gujarat Titans 217 for 6 (Sudharsan 82, Buttler 36, Shahruckh 36, Deshpande 2-53, Theekshana 2-54) **beat Rajasthan Royals 159** (Hetmyer 52, Samson 41, Prasidh 3-24, Sai Kishore 2-20, Rashid 2-37) **by 58 runs**

REVIEW

LSG's Marsh, Pooran continue explosive starts

Reuters
Bengaluru

Mitchell Marsh and Nicholas Pooran continued their rollicking start to the Indian Premier League (IPL) season as the Lucknow Super Giants duo took the top two places in the batting charts with explosive fifties in their win over Kolkata Knight Riders.

Australian Marsh made 81 off 48 balls, his fourth half-century in five innings, while West Indies' Pooran scored an unbeaten 87 off 36 balls to guide the team to 238-3 before their bowlers secured a four-run win at Eden Gardens on Tuesday.

Marsh has 265 runs for the season, his best tally since his debut in 2010, while Pooran sits top of the run-scoring charts on 288, the pair putting together a 71-run stand against the defending champions.

"The incredible thing about Mitchell is he plays cricketing shots," Pooran said. "If you bowl full he's going to hit you over your head. If you bowl short he's going to hit you for a six. If it's a good ball he tries to get off strike."

"He takes the pressure off and it's nice batting with a guy like that. He's in good nick and we hope it continues throughout this tournament."

Pooran continued the carnage after Marsh's departure in the 16th over to finish with eight sixes and sev-



en fours. "We're blessed to have him," Marsh said.

"He's an incredible talent. You see someone like him hit as many sixes as he does but he's also really smart, he's a proper batsman and thinks that way. He's really awesome to bat with. It's been nice to get to know him. I've played against him a lot. I'm enjoying batting with him."

Lucknow are fifth in the table with three wins from five games, one place above Kolkata.

Arya's 39-ball ton thrusts him into IPL spotlight

Priyansh Arya has been earmarked for great days ahead and a possible place in the India team after the six-hitting specialist's match-winning century for Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League.

The uncapped left-hander Arya pummelled nine sixes in a 39-ball hundred to set up Punjab's 18-run victory over Chennai Super Kings at New Chandigarh on Tuesday. The 24-year-old Arya equalled the fourth fastest IPL century and though he fell soon after for 103 off 42 balls, he had rescued his team from 83-5 and they went on to amass 219-6.

itz and Team UAE's Joao Almeida. Cofidis' Alex Aranburu, Spain's national champion, completed the hilly 156.6 kilometre run from Zarautz to Beasain in just over three hours and 45 minutes, initially claiming first in the stage.

After Almeida almost crashed at a roundabout, Aranburu ripped past him and went solo in the final stages.

But the Basque was then disqualified for having gone the wrong way around the roundabout, meaning the second-placed Gregoire was handed the stage victory.

"It's a very strange feeling. I don't feel like I've won, someone (Aranburu) crossed the line first," Gregoire told Eurosport.

"I think the stewards did their job, they adjudged that he didn't need to take the roundabout on the right. It's still a win, I'll take it."

Schachmann came in three seconds behind Gregoire at the front of the lead peloton.

Stage four today takes riders 169.6 kilometres from Beasain to Markina-Xemein, with seven climbs, including the category 1 Izua pass.

SPOTLIGHT

IOC boosts women's football teams to 16 for LA 2028 Games

Reuters
Lausanne, Switzerland

The Los Angeles 2028 Olympics will feature an increase in women's soccer teams from 12 to 16, while the men's competition will be downsized from 16 to a dozen teams, the International Olympic Committee said yesterday.

The decision was part of a number of changes to the Olympic event programme with more mixed events across several sports and all team sports with at least the same number of women's and men's teams.

The IOC said the reason for the sharp increase in women's soccer teams was the rapidly growing popularity of women's team sports, especially in the United States, and that change in the competition format reflected that rapid growth.

"We wanted to do something to reflect that growth and equally with the United States being the home of the highest level of popu-

larity of women's football," IOC sports director Kit McConnell told a press conference.

He said the IOC had discussed the issue with both LA Games organisers and world soccer's governing body FIFA before going through with the changes.

The total number of players – men's and women's – would not change.

The United States, who will also host the 2026 men's and the 2031 women's World Cup, have won five Olympic gold medals in the women's competition.

The men's teams use mostly under-23 players at Olympic Games.

The LA Games will have a total of 351 medal events in all sports, 22 more than at Paris 2024 Olympics. Several sports, including archery, athletics, golf and gymnastics will be adding new mixed team events, with the total number of athletes unchanged at 10,500.

The five sports proposed by the LA Games organising committee – baseball/softball, cricket, flag football, lacrosse and squash – will have an extra 698 quota places.

Matic labels Onana 'one of worst goalkeepers in United history'

Manchester: Olympique Lyonnais midfielder Nemanja Matic has hit back at comments from Manchester United's **Andre Onana**, describing the Cameroonian as "one of the worst goalkeepers" in the club's history ahead of today's Europa League quarter-final.

United are having their worst season in the Premier League, where they are 13th in the standings, and winning the Europa League is potentially their only ticket to the Champions League next season.

Onana said "we are way better than them" when referring to the French club this week but Matic, who spent five seasons at United, was not impressed with the player's comments.

"If you're one of the worst goalkeepers in Manchester United's history, then you need to take care of what you are talking about," Matic told reporters yesterday.

"If David de Gea, Peter Schmeichel or Edwin van der Sar said that, then I would question myself. But if you are statistically one of the worst goalkeepers in Manchester United's modern history, then he needs to show that before he says (that)."

Soon after the press conference, Onana took to social media to say he would never be disrespectful to another club, but still took a shot at Matic, who did not win a trophy at United.

"We know that tomorrow will be



a difficult game against a strong opponent," Onana said in a post on X. "At least I've lifted trophies with the greatest club in the world. Some can't say the same," he added along with a picture of him kissing the FA Cup that United won last year. However, Matic had nothing but kind words for United boss Ruben Amorim – a former teammate when they both played for Portuguese side Benfica. "We all saw that he has potential, he has everything to become a good coach. In a few years he made big progress and I'm happy for him, especially because I played with him," Matic said. "It's always nice to see your ex-teammates doing well as a manager... He needs time (at United). In football today people don't have time, but I'm sure he has the right profile – a young coach with a lot of energy. He needs support."

FORMULA ONE

beIN reveals coverage plans for 2025 season

As the wheels of the 2025 Formula 1 World Championship prepare to roll into the Middle East for the first time this month, beIN SPORTS, the leading sports network in the Middle East and North Africa (Mena), has announced its comprehensive F1 coverage plans for the rest of the season.

As the exclusive rights holder in 24 Mena markets until 2033, beIN SPORTS is broadcasting every F1 grand prix live in Arabic and English across its channels. The network is presenting studio coverage in Arabic and English from all 24 races throughout the season, with extended coverage of the entire race weekend – practice, sprint, qualifying, and race – from the Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi Grands Prix.

The F1 season, which started in Australia last month, arrives in the Middle East this weekend at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir, before moving on to Jeddah Corniche Circuit in Saudi Arabia five days later.

The World Championship, which travels to North America, Europe, Asia and South America, will then return to the Mena region for a season-ending double-header in Qatar and Abu Dhabi on November 30 and December 7 respectively.

The network's Arabic F1 studio coverage features Paul Fadel presenting on beIN SPORTS 8 and beIN 4K from a dedicated Aug-

mented Reality set with analysis from motorsports experts Saadon al-Kuwari, Alaa Qubain, Hadi al-Katheri, Fadi Audi, and Ayman Abdelwahed, while renowned commentator Khodr al-Rawi narrates the live race coverage.

F1 reporter Stephany Saad returns to beIN screens this weekend and will be on-site at all the big races.

On beIN SPORTS 9, fans are provided an alternative viewing experience with a dedicated pit lane channel showing a split screen with race, drivers' view, live standings, and track layout.

beIN 4K provides race and studio coverage in full 4K ultra-high definition in Arabic, while beIN SPORTS ENGLISH 1 or 2 will continue to broadcast English-language studio coverage and commentary.

beIN SPORTS NEWS meanwhile will air a special segment ahead of each race weekend, building anticipation and discussing the track, standings, championship ramifications, and much more.

During the race weekend, the channel will regularly broadcast live reports from beIN's on site reporter, as well as sharing interactive social media insights and engagement.

Post-race, the free-to-air channel will run its Issue of the Day analysis show, summarising key moments, winners, podium, standout performances, and live reactions on the ground.

AFP
Barcelona

Romain Gregoire claimed stage three of the Tour of the Basque Country yesterday, while Max Schachmann maintained the yellow jersey as he came in second.

Soudal-Quick Step rider Schachmann increased his advantage at the top of the general classification over Red Bull's Florian Lipow-

CYCLING

Gregoire wins Tour of the Basque Country stage

TENNIS

‘Horrible’ Djokovic falls on clay, first win for Alcaraz

‘Horrible feeling to play this way, and just sorry for all the people that have to witness this’

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Novak Djokovic said he felt “horrible” as he crashed out of the Monte Carlo Masters yesterday, losing his opening second round match 6-3, 6-4 to Chilean Alejandro Tabilo.

Djokovic, 37, went into the tournament hampered by an eye infection that has been troubling him since the semi-finals in Miami at the end of March and admitting that he did not have “very high” expectations for Monte Carlo.

As it transpired a sluggish performance meant that Tabilo, who also beat Djokovic on clay in last year’s Rome Masters, faced few difficulties in claiming a rare 2-0 head-to-head record against the 24-time Grand Slam winner.

“It was actually more like the worst day (in the office),” said Djokovic. “I was hoping it was not going to happen, but it was quite a high probability I’m going to play this way. Just horrible. Horrible feeling to play this way, and just sorry for all the people that have to witness this.”

The Serb, who is chasing his 100th ATP title, has not won a tournament since taking gold at last year’s Paris Olympics.

Djokovic brushed off any fitness concerns and said his main focus for the clay season was the French Open. He is set to play in Madrid later this month for the first time since 2022.

“I expected myself at least to have put a decent performance. Not like this. It was horrible,” said Djokovic, who has only once reached the semi-finals in Monte Carlo since the last of his two titles in the principality in 2015.

“I did not have high expectations, really. I knew I’m gonna have a tough opponent and I knew I’m gonna probably play pretty bad. But this bad, I didn’t expect.”

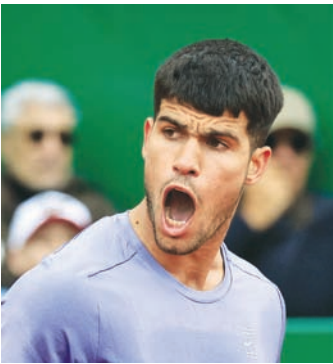
Tabilo, ranked 32 in the world, will face the winner of the match between Monegasque Valentin Vacherot and the Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov in the last 16.

Alcaraz ‘aggression’

Carlos Alcaraz, meanwhile, picked up his first ever win at the Monte Carlo Masters when he came from a set down to win his second round match against Francisco Cerundolo 3-6, 6-0, 6-1.

After a mixed American tour, with a semi-final in Indian Wells and an early loss to David Goffin in Miami, the 21-year-old Spaniard made a successful return to clay.

His only previous appearance in Monte Carlo in 2022 ended in a



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz reacts after a point as he plays against Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo during the Monte Carlo Masters match in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin yesterday. (AFP)

three-set defeat by Sebastian Korra. Alcaraz, ranked three in the world, made a slow start against the lively Argentinian who outlasted him in extended cross-court rallies.

After gaining an early break, Alcaraz gave up four games in a row which was enough for Cerundolo to go on and take the set.

From then on, however, it was all Alcaraz. He dropped just a single game over the next two sets as he blasted his way to victory in one hour and 38 minutes.

“I didn’t start well,” said Al-

caraz. “I made a lot of mistakes and I let him play inside the court, dominating the points.”

“I just knew that I had to do something else, play more aggressively, and play my own tennis: drop shots, going to the net and show more aggression.”

“The most important change was the return, I tried to return closer to the line and push him.”

The second seed booked himself a last 16 date against the German Daniel Altmaier, 84th in the world, who saw off the French veteran Richard Gasquet 7-5, 5-7, 6-2.

Gasquet, 38, playing for the last time in Monte Carlo, was given a warm reception by the crowds who have been watching him since he made his tournament debut as a 15-year-old wild card in 2002.

“I started with (Andre) Agassi and I’ll finish with Alcaraz,” said Gasquet who will retire from the circuit after the French Open next month.

“It’s a gap of almost 40 years, it’s enormous.”

Chile’s Alejandro Tabilo shakes hands with Serbia’s Novak Djokovic (back) after winning the Monte Carlo ATP Masters Series match on the Ranier III court at the Monte Carlo Country Club in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin yesterday. (AFP)



Zverev’s Monte Carlo exit assures Sinner of top rankings spot on Tour return



Monte Carlo: Jannik Sinner will return to the ATP Tour from his doping ban at next month’s Rome Masters as world number one after the Italian’s closest challenger Alexander Zverev crashed to an early defeat in Monte Carlo on Tuesday.

Sinner, 23, accepted a three-month ban in February following an agreement with the World Anti-Doping Agency, which earlier challenged an independent tribunal’s decision to clear him of any wrongdoing after he failed two drug tests.

Sinner’s absence from the circuit had opened the door for Zverev to replace him at the top of the rankings but the German failed to

get beyond the quarter-final stage at any of the six tournaments he played since the Australian Open in January. The world number two lost 2-6 6-3 7-5 to Sinner’s compatriot Matteo Berrettini in the Monte Carlo second round.

“I’ve not won many matches. So it’s been the worst period since my injury,” Zverev said, who will have to wait till later in the European claycourt swing for another chance to displace Sinner.

“I played a great first set, and once I got broken in the second set, I played 10 levels down. My ball is much slower.”

“I stop hitting the ball. “The same story the last few months. Nothing changes. So

it’s me who lost the match, once again... I thought my level was terrible, but that’s just my opinion.” Defending French Open champion and world number three Carlos Alcaraz, who also squandered the chance to reclaim top spot before Sinner’s ban ends on May 4, beat Francisco Cerundolo yesterday.

American great King gets Hollywood star treatment

American tennis great Billie Jean King has been honoured with her own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

King, a 39-times Grand Slam singles and doubles champion who has become an advocate for social equality, is the first woman

to be given a star in the new sports entertainment category. “The important thing is, I don’t want to be the last one,” the 81-year-old said. Stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame were previously reserved for those in cinema, television, radio, theatre and music.

King’s star is the 2,807th to be installed on the famous Hollywood strip since the custom began in 1960.

“My family loved music and movies. My mother would have loved this,” said King, the founder of the Women’s Tennis Association and trailblazer for gender equality in the sport.

King’s work to create the WTA and the famous ‘Battle of the Sexes’

match against Bobby Riggs was portrayed in the 2017 movie of the same name.

Unveiling the star during a ceremony, basketball great Magic Johnson paid tribute to King. “You always fight for what’s right,” Johnson told the tennis player.

“You lend your platform and your voice and your time and your money to bring about change.” Last September, King became the first individual female athlete awarded a Congressional Gold Medal - the highest honour presented by the US Congress - for her ‘courageous and groundbreaking leadership in advancing equal rights for women in athletics, education, and society’.

GOLF

AUGUSTA, GEORGIA: While life around Scottie Scheffler has changed since he sank the final putt to win last year’s Masters, he’ll keep the same approach and be open to adjustments as he heads out to defend the championship this week.

Besides adding an Olympic gold medal and a FedEx Cup to his mantle, the biggest change for Scheffler is that he became a father for the first time last spring.

“When you get home at the end of the day, Bennett is still going to do pretty much the exact same thing he always does when I get home,” he said yesterday of his young son. “My work is definitely not going to affect him and definitely going to give a bit of perspective.”

That said, Scheffler has maintained his focus to win a third green jacket after prevailing in two of the past three Masters.

“I think we’re in store for another great tournament,” he said.

How that transpires across the next few days could come with unexpected twists. Scheffler said weather conditions dictate various strategies for Augusta National.

Monday’s practice rounds were cut short due to heavy rain, and there are showers in the forecast for tomorrow’s second round.

“A lot of the strategy for this place I think changes with the conditions of the course,” he said.

The World No 1 had seven victories in 2024 but hasn’t won this year. He suffered a hand cut at home in December, requiring minor surgery and resulting in a delay to the beginning of his season. By now, he’s comfortable with how he has reached this point.

“When I step on the first tee on Thursday, I’m going to remind myself that I’ve done what I needed to do to play well, and it’s all about going out and compet-

ing now,” Scheffler said. “I really try not to look too much into the past.” Scheffler’s past in the Masters has come with great highs. He wasn’t able to pinpoint his most significant shot of his Masters career yesterday, though he suggested there would be several contenders on such a list.

“It’s really hard to figure out what would be my best shot because I feel like I’ve hit a lot of really important shots, especially on Sunday, in the couple that I’ve won,” he said.

Yet those titles don’t translate into any specific advantage in 2025, Scheffler said. “Last year doesn’t have a lot to do with this year,” he said, “outside of I can go back on some of the experience that I’ve had playing well on this golf course and reflect on that.”

Scheffler played the front nine on Tuesday and planned to tour the back nine yesterday in advance of the tournament.

The past couple of months have provided good tune-ups for Scheffler. He said there have been encouraging starts in tournaments, but none that he considers a great beginning. He said he’s trained himself to trust how he feels about his game rather than dwell on specific results. That’s why there’s a confident mindset this week.

“I feel very prepared for this golf tournament,” he said. “This is definitely the most prepared that I’ve felt all year.”

Scheffler tees off in the opening round at 10:15am today with Justin Thomas and reigning US Amateur champion Jose Luis Ballester of Spain in his group. (Reuters)

Scheffler feels the past is the past as he seeks 3rd green jacket



Scottie Scheffler of the US and compatriot Sam Burns on the 13th hole during a practice round at the Augusta National Golf Club, Augusta, Georgia, US, yesterday. (Reuters)

FORMULA ONE

Norris, Verstappen to renew battle this week

Reuters
Manama

Formula One leader Lando Norris has **Max Verstappen** breathing down his neck and only a point separating the pair ahead of a Bahrain Grand Prix that could trigger a change at the top on Sunday.

Verstappen dominated last year’s race at Sakhir, the now-four-times world champion leading from pole to flag with fastest lap as Red Bull celebrated a one-two finish for the second season in a row.

A third successive win for Verstappen at the desert circuit, even if a one-two now looks highly unlikely, would be another big statement after a victory in Japan last weekend that ended McLaren’s winning start.

“Bahrain (is a) completely different track, very tough on tyres... we still have work to do,” said Verstappen after Suzuka, the start of a triple header that ends in Saudi Arabia next week.

“But it (the Japanese GP) does show that if we really nail everything, we can be up there,” added the 27-year-old whose new teammate Yuki Tsunoda has yet to score after replacing New Zealander Liam Lawson.

McLaren will be chasing their third successive double podium, and third win in four rounds, at what is a home race for the team’s Bahraini owners.

Norris has led since he won last month’s opener in Australia, ending a Verstappen run at the top dating back to May 2022, and he and McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri remain hot favourites. Either could become the sea-



son’s first double winner - they and Verstappen each have a pole and win so far - but round four of 24 could also see Mercedes or Ferrari getting in on the act around a circuit all teams tested at in February.

“It doesn’t take much of a mistake from us - or certainly from myself - to let the others in,” said Piastri, who finished ninth in Melbourne after running wide and letting a podium slip through his fingers.

Mercedes’ George Russell, who made his Mercedes debut at Sakhir in 2020, was third in Australia and China while 18-year-old rookie teammate Andrea Kimi Antonelli became the youngest ever race leader and fastest lap setter last weekend.

Lewis Hamilton, now at Ferrari, has won a record five times at Sakhir - all with Mercedes - while teammate Charles Leclerc finished first in 2022.

Ferrari, stunned by a double disqualification in China, have yet to get on the podium this season although Hamilton did win the Shanghai sprint.

“We get the opportunity to see how much progress we have made with the SF-25 in terms of extracting its potential since we were last here for the pre-season test at the very end of February,” said team boss Fred Vasseur.

SPOTLIGHT

Arabian Camel Racing Festival set for intense competition

38 races scheduled today, including prestigious Shalfa and Dagger challenges in afternoon session



Connections of the winning camels pose with their trophies during the Purebred Arabian Camel Racing Festival at the Al Shahaniyah Racetrack yesterday.



By Sports Reporter
Doha

The second phase of the annual Purebred Arabian Camel Racing Festival, held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, starts today at Al Shahaniyah Racetrack.

The event, organised by the Camel Racing Organising Committee, features a total of 38 races for Thanaya camels (four-year-olds) — both female (Bakar) and male (Qadaan) — over a distance of 8km, spread across morning and afternoon sessions.

The morning session, starting at 5:30am, includes 22 races, with 12 races dedicated to Thanaya Bakar and 10 to Thanaya Qadaan. Among these, two races in each category are designated for general production camels, and two for Qatari production camels. Substantial financial prizes are allocated for the top 10 finishers in each race. In the Thanaya Bakar races, the first-place winner will receive QR150,000, with prizes decreasing to QR4,000 for the 10th place. For the Thanaya Qadaan races, the winner receives QR120,000, also decreasing to QR4,000 for 10th place.

In the afternoon session, beginning at 1pm, the excitement intensifies with six main races for the coveted silver Shalfa and silver Daggers. The first main race for Thanaya Bakar (Open category) will award QR1.5mn to the winner, while the second-place finisher receives QR800,000, the third QR400,000, the fourth QR200,000, and the fifth QR100,000. The second main race, for Thanaya Bakar Omaniya, carries the same prize structure, as does the third main race, designated for Thanaya Bakar

Production.

For the Thanaya Qadaan main races, the first race in the Open category offers a QR1mn prize for first place, followed by QR600,000 for second, QR300,000 for third, QR200,000 for fourth, and QR100,000 for fifth. The second race for Thanaya Qadaan Omaniya and the third for Thanaya Qadaan Production both follow this same prize format.

After the conclusion of the six symbol races, the afternoon session continues with 10 more races for Thanaya Bakar and Qadaan, all offering valuable cash prizes. The first-place prize for the Thanaya Bakar Omaniya race is QR250,000, while the Thanaya Qadaan Omaniya winner receives QR200,000. The other races in the session offer first-place prizes ranging from QR350,000 to QR180,000 and QR150,000, with awards down to QR6,000 for the 10th place.

AL SHAQAB AND UM AL ZUBAR SHINE BRIGHT IN OPENING BATTLES

Yesterday, the open Jidhan challenges for the prestigious golden symbols allocated to the camel racing teams of Their Highnesses and Excellencies the Sheikhs were held in a traditional evening as part of the grand annual festival for the Sword of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Al Shaqab Camels and Al Ryaisa Camels delivered an exciting performance, displaying fierce competition in the two main open races for female and male camels. Al Shaqab secured the most prestigious trophy of the night by winning the Golden Shalfa for the Open Jidhan Female race (first main round). Meanwhile, Al Ryaisa Camels, bearing their powerful red em-



blem, claimed the strongest male camel symbol, taking home the Golden Dagger for the Open Jidhan Male race.

The standout of the evening and the surprise of the festival so far was Um Al Zubar Camels, which delivered a unique and thrilling performance thanks to their strong lineup this season. They claimed both symbols in the races designated for Omani-bred camels (female and male), affirming their dominance over competitors in this grand annual festival. These two new trophies add to the two symbols they had already won in the Laqaya challenges the day before, bringing their total to four out of eight symbols. Al Shaqab now holds three symbols, while Al Ryaisa Camels have claimed their first.

In the first main race for Open Jidhan Female Camels, both Al Shaqab and Al Ryaisa Camels fielded their strongest contenders, alongside Um Al Zubar, Zabeel Camels, and other top teams. The race came down to a thrilling finish between the two giants,

Al Shaqab and Al Ryaisa Camels. In the final moments, “Doha”, led by the skilled trainer Jarallah Mohammed bin Aqeel, surged ahead to secure victory in the most competitive race of the evening, winning the coveted Golden Shalfa in 9:03.47 minutes. Close behind was “Kahal” of Al Ryaisa Camels, trained by Hamdan Mohamed bin Marweshid in 9:04.17 minutes.

In the second main race for Open Jidhan Male Camels, Al Ryaisa Camels came back strong after their earlier miss, and the red-embellished team made its mark by winning its first symbol of the festival. They dominated the race with a triple front-run, and “Lahab”, led by trainer Hamdan Mohammed Marweshid, secured the prized Golden Dagger with a time of 9:07.73 minutes.

UM AL ZUBAR SHINES WITH “AMAAL” AND “AL ADEED”

Um Al Zubar Camels dazzled in the third and fourth races designated for Omani-bred camels. The powerhouse team

turned the competition on its head and claimed the two precious trophies through “Amaal” and “Al Adeed”, under the guidance of seasoned trainers Mohammed Bakhit bin Maqarah and Zaid Mohsen Ali Andilal al-Marri.

“Amaal” delivered a stellar performance in the third main race, taking an early lead and flying to victory with the Golden Shalfa for Omani-bred Jidhan Female Camels, clocking 9:13.01 minutes. “Al Adeed” added the second trophy for Um Al Zubar and the fourth overall for the team in the festival, beating out Al Shaqab in a dominant race to claim the Golden Dagger in 9:14.77 minutes.

311 CAMELS IN THE MORNING JIDHAN RACES

The morning session of the grand annual festival featured 17 open Jidhan races over a 6km distance, with 311 camels participating. Al Ryaisa Camels delivered an exciting show in both the main female and male races under different trainers.

In the main female race, Al Ryaisa Camels’ “Mutaiba”, guided by trainer Sultan bin Mohammed al-Wuhaibi, gave a stunning performance and won the top prize of QR150,000, completing the race in 9:07.51 minutes. The same team’s “Al Tayara” and “Mar’ousha” came in second and third, respectively.

In the main male race, Al Ryaisa Camels claimed another win with “Sarab”, trained by Mohammed Atiq bin Zaytoun al-Muhairi, finishing in 9:09.27 minutes. “Al Ghazal” of Al Shaqab, led by Jaber bin Salem Faran al-Marri, came in second with 9:10.34 minutes, while “Mutaib” of Al Ryaisa Camels, under Ali bin Jamil al-Wuhaibi, took third place with 9:11.07 minutes.

HORSE RACING

Phoebus claims Al Wajba Trophy again

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Phoebus made it two wins in a row and his third in just six career starts with a determined victory in the Al Wajba Trophy on day one of the Qatar Gold Sword and Trophy (Div. 1 – Turf) at the Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

The bay colt, owned by Al Falah Stud and trained by Hamad al-Jehani, made his move around the home bend and powered past the long-time leader in the final 100m to clinch the win and emerge as a rising star in the making. Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, crowned the winners.

Earlier, Dark Trooper continued his impressive form, claiming his third victory in just four starts this season in the Sealine Sprint Trophy.

The 5YO gelding, owned by Wathnan Racing and trained by Alban de Mieulle, displayed his blistering pace in the final 100m, surging ahead to secure the win under jockey Soufiane Saadi, completing a quick-fire double for the owner and the trainer.

In a feat for the ages, Equinoxe etched his name in history delivering yet another unforgettable performance in the Local Thoroughbred Cup for 4YO+ over 2100m, soaring to victory for the fifth consecutive year.

The 8YO stalwart, owned by Wathnan Racing and trained by Alban de Mieulle, bided his time before launching a trademark late surge to secure the historic win under Tomas Lukasek.

The day’s opening Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Cup for 4YO over 1400m race saw Sejel wasting no time in announcing himself. The Al Shaqab Racing’s homebred colt built on his runner-up finish last outing and, in just his third career start, powered clear in the home straight to register an emphatic six-and-a-half length victory.

Trained by Jean de Mieulle, Sejel was guided by Olivier d’Andign, who picked up right where he left off the night before. The meeting will continue today with Div 2 races.



Alberto Sanna celebrates after leading Phoebus to victory in Al Wajba Trophy on day one of the Qatar Gold Sword and Trophy (Div. 1 – Turf) at the Al Uqda Racecourse. **PICTURE:** Juhaïm



41ST AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING – QATAR GOLD SWORD AND TROPHY (DIV 1)

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
Al Wajba Trophy - 3yo Thoroughbreds (Class 1)
Phoebus, Hamad al-Jehani, Alberto Sanna
Sealine Sprint Trophy - Thoroughbred Open Cup (Class 2)

Dark Trooper, Alban De Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi
Local Thoroughbred Cup (Class 1)
Equinoxe, Alban Elie De Mieulle, Tomas Lukasek
Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate Cup (Class 6)
Sejel, Jean de Mieulle, Olivier d’Andigne

Arteta hails Rice free-kick magic after Arsenal stun Real Madrid

London: Mikel Arteta admitted Arsenal defied the odds with their stunning 3-0 win against Real Madrid as Declan Rice’s free-kick magic left the Champions League holders in disarray. Rice inspired one of the greatest results in Arsenal’s storied history with two blistering free-kicks in the second half of the quarter-final first leg at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday. Mikel Merino scored the third goal for Arteta’s side as they moved within touching distance of a first Champions League semi-final appearance since 2009. It was an incredible moment for England midfielder Rice, who had never scored a free-kick in his career – a period spanning 338 previous matches – before the first of his thunderbolts flashed past Real keeper Thibaut Courtois.

Arsenal had also failed to find the net from a direct set-piece in almost four years, with their last coming via Martin Odegaard against Burnley in September 2021. Gunners captain Odegaard put his hands on his head in disbelief when Rice completed his set-piece double, while Arteta was equally surprised. “Declan’s been very determined because we have said in the last few months that we have not scored a direct free-kick in three-and-a-half years,” the Arsenal manager said. “So, to score two goals in 12 minutes of that magnitude and of that quality from the same player, a player that has never scored a free-kick before in his career, what are the odds? If there’s a player who can do it, how clean

he strikes it it’s Declan. But you have to execute it at the highest level. And against one of the best keepers in the world as well. It’s amazing.”

It was a cathartic result for Arsenal, who have endured a rocky season marred by their failure to keep pace with Liverpool in the Premier League title race. The north Londoners are 11 points adrift of Liverpool, leaving the Champions League as their last chance this season to win a first trophy since the 2020 FA Cup.

Few would have expected them to get past 15-time European champions Real before the first leg. But now Arsenal will travel to the Bernabeu for the return tie next week as firm favourites to progress to a last four clash against Paris Saint-Germain or Aston Villa.

“Beautiful. So proud of the team. I’ve never seen the stadium like this,” Arteta said. “For big European nights you need the big stadiums that create atmosphere and you need individual magic moments and there you go. That’s the beauty of whoever invented this sport.”

Arsenal famously knocked out Real in the last 16 on route to their only Champions League final appearance in 2006. Repeating that run to the final and winning the tournament for the first time would end any doubts about Arteta, who had been questioned at times during his team’s inconsistent campaign.

But the Spaniard, whose team blew significant leads in the title race over the previous two seasons, has no intention of taking victory for granted.