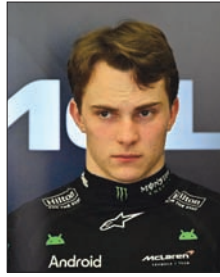


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McLarens dominate practice, Verstappen rues 'too slow' Red Bull



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Camel Handball Championship kicks off with colourful ceremony

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FOOTBALL
Superstar Salah signs contract extension with Liverpool until 2027

MOTOGP

Late charge puts Morbidelli on top in Qatar GP practice

Bagnaia was 0.145sec behind with Marc Marquez at 0.167sec. Martin was in 20th place, 1.568 slower

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

Francisco Morbidelli struck as time expired in the second practice yesterday at the Qatar MotoGP to edge the duelling factory Ducatis of Francesco Bagnaia and Marc Marquez at the Lusail International Circuit.

Championship leader Alex Marquez was fifth while Jorge Martin, on his first race-weekend ride for Aprilia, was a careful 20th. Morbidelli finished in 1min 50sec on his VR46 Ducati. Fellow Italian Bagnaia was 0.145sec behind with Marc Marquez at 0.167sec. Martin was 1.568 slower.

The VR46 team has been in fine form in recent weeks, with Franco Morbidelli and Fabio Di Giannantonio scoring podiums in Argentina and America respectively. Yesterday, Di Giannantonio was fourth and championship leader Alex Marquez was fifth on his Gresini Ducati. Frenchman Fabio Quartararo, on a Yamaha, was the fastest non-Ducati in sixth.

Both Bagnaia and Marquez, sure of a top ten time and direct pass to today's second qualifying round, opted not to change tyres during the final session. That meant they were effectively spectators as other riders launched late time attacks, but they will have more tyre options over the weekend when championship points are at stake.

Bagnaia, the double-world champion, has struggled to keep pace with his new stablemate this season. Marc Marquez had won all three sprints and two Sunday grand prix until he crashed while leading the last race, the Grand Prix of the Americas.

Bagnaia pounced to win in Austin, while Alex Marquez finished second once again to move to the top of the standings. Eight points separate the three riders.

Bagnaia was pleased with his outing yesterday. 'I'm happy about it, because all the work we have been doing since the first session in Thailand is giving us some happiness. Because we are working hard, we are taking little steps in every sessions, and in Austin we took a big step for the first time. And today we took another step. So, I'm happy,' he said.

Bagnaia riding style is suited for the Lusail circuit and the Italian confidence remained high yesterday. 'My confidence was very high, I was able to push, to feel the limit, which is something that is more difficult to feel. So, it was the best Friday, the best sessions since the start of the season, and we just have to keep going like this,' the Italian added.

In the morning, Marc Marquez dominated, more than half a second ahead of Di Giannantonio. At the back of the field, reigning champion Martin trailed in 20th out of 22 bikes, 1.824 seconds slower.

The Spaniard, who switched teams in the summer, broke his right hand and



VR46 Ducati MotoGP rider Franco Morbidelli in action during the practice session for the Qatar Grand Prix at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday.



Factory Ducati's Spanish rider Marc Marquez rides during the practice session. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

foot in a crash during pre-season testing in Malaysia in February and then broke his left hand as he prepared to return. He missed the first three races of the season.

'We were all a bit nervous about this debut,' Massimo Rivola, the Aprilia sports director, said after the first session. 'At the end it was OK, I'm happy. It was a first run at the end it was not bad. I saw him quite easy on the bike. Quite comfortable on the bike.'

Pedro Acosta was seventh for KTM ahead of Tech3 counterpart Maverick Vinales, while Gresini Ducati rookie Ferrn Aldeguer and LCR Honda's Johann

Zarco rounded out the top 10.

Zarco's late improvement demoted Yamaha's Alex Rins to 11th, and he'll face Q1 with the likes of factory Honda duo Luca Marini and Joan Mir, and KTM's Brad Binder - who crashed at Turn 1 in the closing stages. Jack Miller had a second crash of the day on his Pramac Yamaha late on, which left him 17th, while LCR's Somkiat Chantira - who was last - fell at the start of the session.

PRACTICE TIMES (top 10 go straight into second qualifying session today)

1. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 1min 50.830sec (Q).
2. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) at 0.145sec (Q).
3. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 0.167 (Q).
4. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 0.299 (Q).
5. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 0.406 (Q).
6. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 0.463 (Q).
7. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 0.561 (Q).
8. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 0.625 (Q).
9. Ferrn Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 0.785 (Q).
10. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 0.806 (Q).
11. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 0.836.
12. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 0.945.
13. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 0.954.
14. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 1.003.
15. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 1.118.
16. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 1.175.
17. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 1.194.
18. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 1.304.
19. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 1.350.
20. Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia) 1.568.
21. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha-Pramac) 1.585.
22. Somkiat Chantira (THA/Honda-LCR) 2.180



Ducati's Pecco Bagnaia was second yesterday, 0.145 secs behind Franco Morbidelli.



MotoGP legend and VR46 Racing team owner Valentino Rossi in attendance during the Qatar Grand Prix at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday.



LCR Honda's riders Johann Zarco and Somkiat Chantira at the Fan Zone, which was alive with crowds joining in various activities.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Duhail keep title race alive with win over Arabi, Sadd beat Al Khor



Al Duhail's Benjamin Bourigeaud celebrates after scoring against Al Arabi yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail pushed the title race of the Qatar Stars League season into the final round with a 1-0 win over Al Arabi at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday. The result also held title chasers Al Sadd's race to the Falcon Shield in check even as The Wolves blanked Al Khor 3-0.

French midfielder Benjamin Bourigeaud fetched the winner for the Red Knights, after being set up with a perfect pass from the left by Almoez Ali in the 22nd minute of the match. And although Al Arabi held little more possession of the ball than Duhail in the game, the Dream Team failed to find an equaliser.

Sadd are now up to 49 points (from 16 wins, a draw and 4 losses) while Duhail (15 wins, 2 draws and 4 defeats) are two points

away on 47. Now, the final round of matches next Friday will reveal the eventual champions of the season. Al Arabi remain 9th in the table with 23 points.

Duhail revived their slim hopes after their last week's 0-4 disappointment against Al Shamal with a hard fought win against Al Arabi. The Red Knights were measured and watchful being guided by their coach Christophe Galtier, who was back in the dugout after having missed the last match against Al Shamal.

Meanwhile, Akram Afif netted a brace in Al Sadd's win over Al Khor at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. Afif's goals came in the 41st minute (penalty) and 63rd minute after Rafa Mujica had opened the scoring in the 17th minute to move Al Sadd to 49 points in the standings, while bottom-placed Al Khor remained on 13 points.

Sadd went into the match knowing full well that a win could potentially hand them the title if Al Duhail were to lose, and

they gave it their best shot from the blast of the opening whistle.

Al Wakrah and Al Gharafa played out a 1-1 draw at Stadium 974. Farid Boul-aya scored for The Blue Wave in the 23rd minute, taking their points tally to 25 points, before third-placed Al Gharafa got their equaliser through Yacine Brahimi in the 29th minute.

Umm Salal sealed their Play-Off position in the with a 1-0 win over formidable Al Ahli at the Al Thumama Stadium.

Croatian forward Antonio Mance converted a penalty kick, coolly in the 40th minute to provide The Orange Fortress with the vital and match-winning lead. Al Ahli came close to the target on a few occasions, but could not force the issue.

The result took Umm Salal's points tally to 18 points and they remained in 11th place but well clear of the threat of the relegation spot. Al Ahli stayed fourth in the table with 35 points.

FOOTBALL

Liverpool star Salah signs contract extension to 2027

'IT'S GREAT, I HAD MY BEST YEARS HERE. I PLAYED EIGHT YEARS, HOPEFULLY IT'S GOING TO BE 10'

Reuters
Liverpool

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah has ended months of speculation about his future by signing a two-year contract extension at Anfield, the Premier League leaders said yesterday.

The 32-year-old, who joined the club in 2017 from AS Roma, could have left the club for free in the summer with his contract previously set to expire in June.

"I'm very excited. We have a great team now. Before also we had a great team. But I signed because I think we have a chance to win other trophies and enjoy my football," Salah told the club website.

"It's great, I had my best years here. I played eight years, hopefully it's going to be 10. Enjoying my life here, enjoying my football."

He paid tribute to the club's fans, and pledged to keep working hard to bring them results.

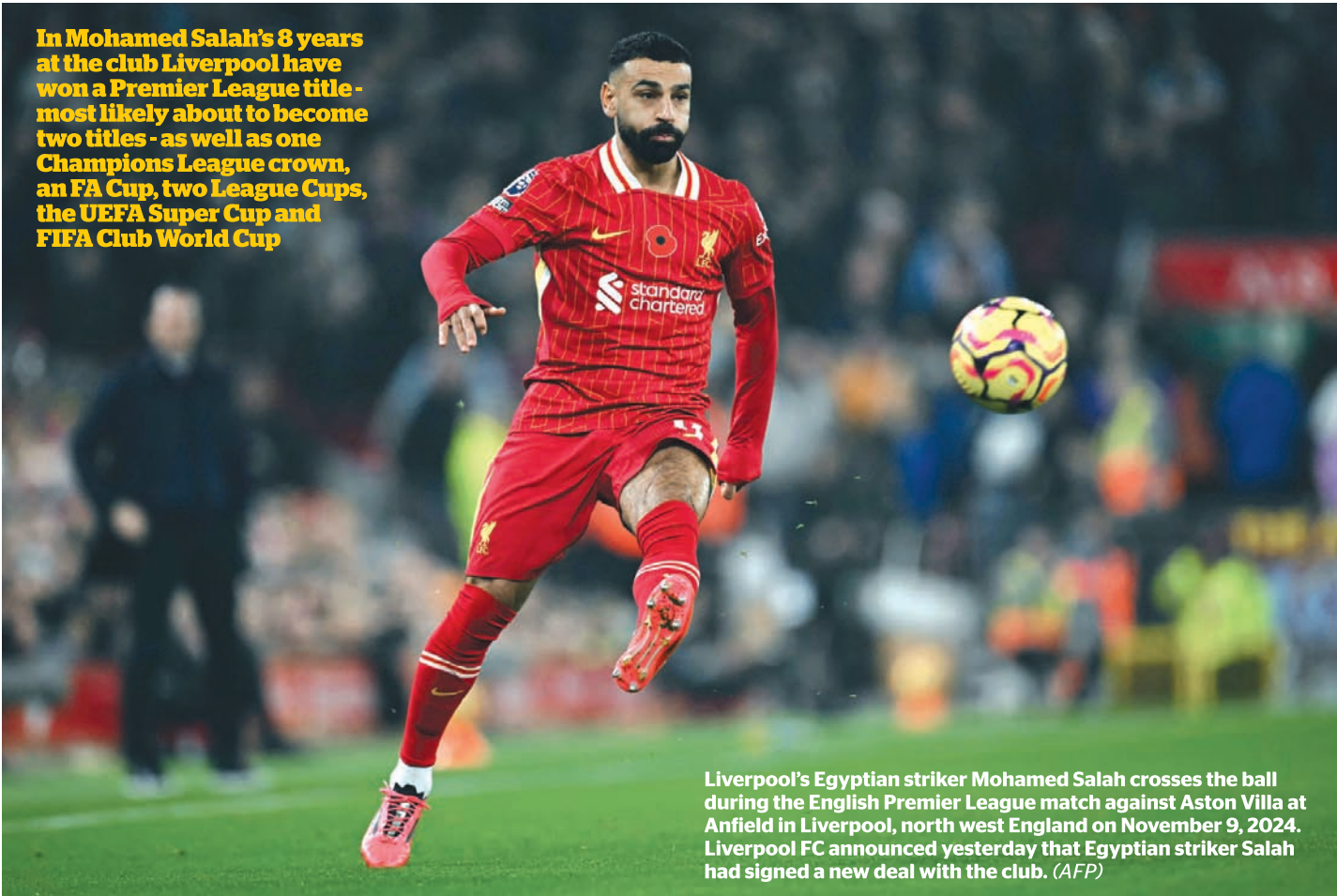
"Keep supporting us and we'll give it our best, and hopefully in the future we're going to win more trophies."

In his eight years at the club Liverpool have won a Premier League title - most likely about to become two titles - as well as one Champions League crown, an FA Cup, two League Cups, the UEFA Super Cup and FIFA Club World Cup.

He has been a stand-out performer for Liverpool this season, scoring 32 goals in all competitions and leads the race for the Premier League's Golden Boot with 27 goals.

Liverpool are 11 points clear of second-placed Arsenal with seven games left to play.

In Mohamed Salah's 8 years at the club Liverpool have won a Premier League title - most likely about to become two titles - as well as one Champions League crown, an FA Cup, two League Cups, the UEFA Super Cup and FIFA Club World Cup



Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah crosses the ball during the English Premier League match against Aston Villa at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on November 9, 2024. Liverpool FC announced yesterday that Egyptian striker Salah had signed a new deal with the club. (AFP)

"It's not going to be easy at all because Arsenal are also catching up. We'll give it our all and hopefully in the end we can win it," Salah said.

'THE STORY WILL CONTINUE'

British media had reported on Wednesday that Liverpool had made a breakthrough in nego-

tiations over a new deal for the Egypt international after months of deadlock. "My family also feels at home, we enjoy every moment in this city and every moment in the club," Salah said. "It's a special moment always when we play at Anfield. There is no place like that. The warmth you feel inside, the song before the game. Every time I

score a goal and they sing my song, it is something special, and the story will continue."

Salah, winner of the Premier League's Golden Boot three times, is also Liverpool's third-highest goalscorer of all time with 243 goals in 394 games. "But I'm proud when we win team trophies," he said. "When you win something

with the team and are scoring goals and you are involved, that's what people remember. Just individual awards without winning anything doesn't feel great."

PREMIER LEAGUE DREAM

Salah was reported to be the subject of interest from the big-money Saudi Pro League but is widely

seen as key to Liverpool's hopes of consistently winning silverware given his own form over the years.

Liverpool's last title came during the Covid-19-affected 2019-20 season, and Salah said he is hopeful of winning it more than ever this year, as his side were not able to celebrate it the way they wanted.

"Probably because last time we didn't celebrate it the way we wanted... we are closer than ever now that we can win it in a special way. The Premier League is very tricky... It's the hardest and the weirdest league in the world.

"We have to just stay humble and do our job properly and be ready to suffer, because that's what it will take to win the Premier League."

Liverpool manager Arne Slot said he had known for a while that Salah would be extending his deal but understands the relief Liverpool fans have felt after the announcement.

"For the fans, it was a pleasant surprise. But I knew for a bit longer that things were heading in the right direction," he told reporters in a news conference ahead of Sunday's Premier League home game against West Ham United.

"He has shown at this club for so many years in a row how much of a value he is for the club and the team. Like all our fans and his teammates, we are very happy that he has extended for two more years. And hopefully, he can show on Sunday again how important he has been for us all season."

Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk, who is out of contract at the end of the season, is also being tipped to extend his stay on Merseyside, while full back Trent Alexander-Arnold has been linked with a move to Real Madrid.

CRICKET

Narine sparkles as KKR hammer CSK



Kolkata Knight Riders' Sunil Narine (right) plays a shot during the IPL match against Chennai Super Kings at the M A Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Chennai, India

Sunil Narine starred with both the bat and the ball as Kolkata Knight Riders thrashed Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets to regain their winning momentum in the Indian Premier League yesterday.

Narine picked up three wickets with his off-spin before hitting 44 off 18 balls with the help of five sixes and two fours to help Kolkata overhaul a below-par Chennai 103-9 with as many as 59 balls to spare.

Five-time champions Chennai crashed to their fifth defeat in a row, leaving their fans mighty disappointed.

The total was Chennai's lowest at their home ground Chepauk and the third-lowest ever in the IPL.

Kolkata are now third in the points table with Chennai languishing in ninth position in the 10-team competition.

"We had our plans and that

worked well for us tonight," said Kolkata skipper Ajinkya Rahane yesterday.

"We still have a long way to go in the tournament... Last game we lost by four wickets, it was about starting from scratch."

Openers Quinton de Kock and Narine gave Kolkata a flying start before Chennai got a breakthrough in the fifth over.

Medium pacer Anshul Kamboj sent De Kock back for a 16-ball 23 but Narine carried on with aplomb.

Narine hit Ravichandran Ashwin for two sixes on the trot and by the time he was bowled by Noor Ahmad, victory was well within the sight of Kolkata.

"We need to look deep down inside. Challenge was there, but we needed to tackle," said Chennai skipper M S Dhoni.

"We didn't have enough runs on the board today."

Put in to bat, Chennai lost their openers Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra early, with just 16 runs on the board.

Chennai could have been in

deeper trouble but Narine dropped a sitter at mid-off, offering a reprieve to Vijay Shankar.

Shankar, who was dropped again on 20 by Venkatesh Iyer at mid-wicket, went on to make 29 off 21 balls with two fours and a six.

Rahul Tripathi, coming into the squad in place of the injured Ruturaj Gaikwad, was bowled by Narine for 16 to leave Chennai tottering at 65-4.

The rest of the Chennai order buckled under the pressure, making their way back to the pavilion without making any impact.

Dhoni, named skipper on Thursday after Gaikwad was ruled out of the rest of the season, also failed to weave his magic, trapped leg before for one off Narine (3-13).

Shivam Dube, hit an unbeaten 31 off 29 balls, to take the side past the 100-run mark.

BRIEF SCORES

Kolkata Knight Riders 107 for 2 (Narine 44, Noor 1-8) **beat Chennai Super Kings 103 for 9** (Dube 31, Narine 3-13) **by 8 wickets**

FOCUS

England cricket star Anderson given knighthood

London: Former England fast bowler James Anderson has been awarded a knighthood in ex-prime minister Rishi Sunak's resignation honours list. Anderson retired from Test cricket in July 2024 having taken 704 wickets, the most by a fast bowler in the history of the five-day format.

The 42-year-old is still playing for Lancashire but has missed the start of the English County Championship season with a calf problem.

"Congratulations Sir Jimmy Anderson. This is a really well-deserved honour for an England legend who has given so much to our sport," said Richard Thompson, chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board.

"His skill, determination, and sportsmanship have inspired millions of cricketers and fans alike, in England and around the world."

The resignation honours list is a tradition that gives outgoing Prime Ministers the opportunity to nominate people for honours.

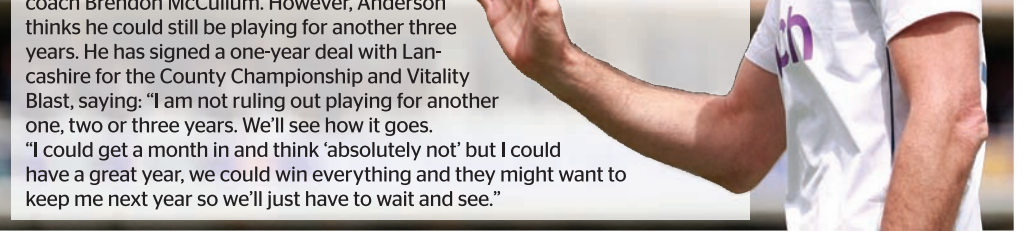
Only spin bowling stars Muttiah Muralitharan (800) and Shane Warne (708) took more Test wickets than Anderson.

He made his one-day international debut for England against Australia in December 2002 and his Test bow came in May 2003.

Anderson finished his international career having played 188 Tests and 194 ODIs. He was nudged into international retirement last year by England captain Ben Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum. However, Anderson thinks he could still be playing for another three years.

He has signed a one-year deal with Lancashire for the County Championship and Vitality Blast, saying: "I am not ruling out playing for another one, two or three years. We'll see how it goes."

"I could get a month in and think 'absolutely not' but I could have a great year, we could win everything and they might want to keep me next year so we'll just have to wait and see."



Islamabad United beat Lahore Qalandars in PSL



Islamabad United's Colin Munro (left) celebrates his fifty score (50 runs) with teammate Salman Agha during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) match against Lahore Qalandars at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. Islamabad began their PSL title defence with a winning start, posting a comprehensive 8-wicket thrashing of Lahore Qalandars. Jason Holder starred with the ball taking 4 wickets for 26 as Qalandars were bowled out for 139 in 19.2 overs. In reply, Munro made an unbeaten 42-ball 59 to guide United home with 14 balls to spare. (AFP)

FORMULA ONE / BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX

McLarens shine in practice, Verstappen feels 'too slow'

Oscar Piastri registers quickest lap of 1min 30.505s with Lando Norris only a tenth of a second adrift

AFP
Sakhir, Bahrain

McLaren were streets ahead of the pack in second practice at the Bahrain Grand Prix yesterday leaving Max Verstappen lamenting his "too slow" Red Bull.

Oscar Piastri posted a quickest lap of 1min 30.505s with his teammate Lando Norris only a tenth of a second adrift.

Mercedes' George Russell took third, albeit over five tenths of a second back in an ominous display of force by McLaren at a track where the Bahraini-backed team have yet to win in 21 visits.

Verstappen, who moved to within one point of championship leader Norris after his win in Japan last weekend, struggled to make any significant impact, the four-time world champion trailing in seventh, close to one second back.

"We're just too slow basically every lap, and it was honestly not a lot of fun out there in the long run," lamented the Dutchman. "The gap was quite massive," he added.

To add insult to injury immediately in front of Verstappen were two rookies - Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli and RB's Isack Hadjar, who both did brilliantly to finish fifth and sixth.

Red Bull's plight was not helped by the sight of Yuki Tsunoda coming in 18th, six places behind RB's Liam Lawson, the driver he replaced at Red Bull last time out.

Norris was keeping his feet firmly on the ground, suggest-



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen stands among fans before the second practice session ahead of the Bahrain Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir yesterday. (AFP)

ing the bare results didn't tell the whole story.

"Everyone just looks at the timesheets," the Briton said. "They have no idea on the information on who turns up (the engine)."

Russell though was in no doubt that McLaren had an edge, saying Piastri and Norris were "a big step ahead".

Second practice at the Bahrain International Circuit got underway as the sun set to make the session more meaningful than opening practice held in the searing mid-afternoon heat.

With the floodlights illuminating the track to give like-for-like conditions with today's qualifying and tomorrow's race it placed extra importance on the 60 minutes evening run out.

Verstappen, Russell and Charles Leclerc were among six established

drivers to lend their cars to rookies to gain valuable experience in F1 as per the sporting guidelines.

'The car is jumping'

Leclerc's teammate Lewis Hamilton, in the upgraded Ferrari kit-ted out with a new floor panel, put his foot down early to lead the timesheets.

Verstappen got his weekend up and running but was soon grumbling on the team radio: "The ride is very bad, the car is jumping a lot."

Things were worse over with Fernando Alonso, who told his Aston Martin engineer: "Change the steering wheel" as the veteran Spaniard headed back to the pits, the wheel literally coming off in his hands.

A human wall of Aston mechanics blocked any inquisitive com-



McLaren's Australian driver Oscar Piastri (also inset) drives during the first practice session ahead of the Bahrain Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir yesterday. (AFP)

petitors as they frantically worked to resolve the unusual and worrying issue.

Back on track Leclerc (who took fourth) pushed his teammate Hamilton (eighth) off the top of the time sheets to give early encouragement to the scuderia.

With plenty of action on track as teams tried to cram in effectively three practice sessions in one - today's third session is also unrepresentative being held in

daytime - the Ferrari duo dropped down the field as the McLarens rose to the surface. As Alonso, who will be having his 50th race for Aston tomorrow, rejoined the circuit, there was no change at the top as McLaren set out their stall for the business part of the weekend.

Earlier teams took the opportunity to use 'FP1' to give a half dozen rookies a shot as a 'Friday driver' as per the governing body's guidelines.

Verstappen had some down time with Ayumu Iwasa taking the wheel of his Red Bull. Luke Browning stepped into Carlos Sainz's Williams, ut had scary moment with his temporary teammate Alex Albon, the pair coming close with a quarter of an hour left of the session. The stewards investigated the incident, with Albon deemed guilty of impeding Browning and given a smack on the wrist with a four-figure fine.

TENNIS / MONTE CARLO MASTERS

Musetti fights to beat Tsitsipas to reach semis, Alcaraz wins



Italy's Lorenzo Musetti celebrates after victory over Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas following the Monte Carlo Masters quarter-final at the Monte Carlo Country Club yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Italian Lorenzo Musetti beat a "heartbroken" Stefanos Tsitsipas 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 yesterday to knock out the holder and reach the semi-finals of the Monte Carlo Masters.

Musetti fought back after losing the first set against the three-time tournament winner to tee up a last four tie with Australian Alex de Minaur.

The 23-year-old claimed his first victory over the Greek former world number three in five meetings.

"It has a special, let's say, flavour not just because he's the defending champion here, but because before today, I never won against him," Musetti told reporters.

"It was probably one of the toughest challenges that I've faced in my career so far.

"Regarding the match of tomorrow, I think there is no favourite.

"Tomorrow we'll gonna see who is the favourite one on the court, and when we will shake hands, there's gonna be a winner," the world number 16 added.

Tsitsipas missed out on defending his title having won in 2021, 2022 and last

year. "It's difficult to accept," Tsitsipas said. "I felt I had every reason to try and win. It is definitely heartbreaking," he added.

BAGELS FOR DIMITROV

Earlier, De Minaur produced a ruthless performance to dismantle an out-of-sorts Grigor Dimitrov 6-0, 6-0 in just 45 minutes, with the match finishing to a backdrop of boos from the crowd.

Dimitrov mustered just one winner in total, made 23 unforced errors and won only five points in the second set.

Carlos Alcaraz battled back from a set down to beat French rising star Arthur Fils in a gripping quarter-final.

The four-time Grand Slam champion, targeting his first Masters title since winning in Indian Wells last year, saved three break points in the 11th game of the second set en route to a dramatic 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory.

"I think his level is high right now and he puts a lot of pressure on his opponents," Alcaraz said of his beaten opponent.

"Today I could feel it but in some moments he just made a few mistakes and I tried to make the most of those points and wait for my chances."

He will face unseeded fellow Spaniard

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina today for a place in the final.

Alcaraz's only title this season remains the ATP 500 event in Rotterdam in February but he appears to be enjoying his return to clay.

The 20-year-old Fils, seeded 12th, suffered a third successive quarter-final loss at Masters events this season after going out in the last eight at Indian Wells and the Miami Open.

Alcaraz is a strong favourite to lift the title after early exits for Novak Djokovic and Alexander Zverev, at an event where he had lost his only previous match in 2022.

Alcaraz showed all of his battling qualities to get the better of Fils, in what is likely to have been their first meeting of many.

Earlier, Davidovich Fokina cruised into the semi-finals with a dominant victory over Alexei Popyrin.

World number 42 Davidovich Fokina, who was runner-up at the tournament in 2022 to Tsitsipas, swatted aside Australia's Popyrin 6-3, 6-2 in the last eight.

Davidovich Fokina was full of confidence after dumping out British fifth seed Jack Draper in the last 16 and put on another accomplished display.

GOLF / AUGUSTA MASTERS

Rose storms into Masters lead, McIlroy stumbles late

Reuters
Augusta, Georgia

Justin Rose used a red-hot putter to grab a three-shot lead over a trio of players that included defending Masters champion Scottie Scheffler on Thursday at Augusta National, where Grand Slam-seeking Rory McIlroy ran into trouble late.

Rose, twice a runner-up at the year's first major, needed just 22 putts en route to a seven-under-par 65 that equalled the Englishman's best start to a Masters.

"It was a really good day's golf on a golf course that was a stern test. I think if you look at the overall leaderboard, not many low scores out there," Rose told reporters.

"A lot of quality shots, and delighted the way I played."

World number one Scheffler, who this week is looking to become the fourth golfer to retain his Masters crown, was in a share of second place with 2024 runner-up Ludvig Aberg and Canada's Corey Conners.

The 44-year-old Rose, who went out with the late starters, wasted no time making a move as he kicked off his round with three consecutive birdies and added another three in succession around the turn before back-to-back birdies at 15 and 16.

The only blemish on the card for Rose, who with a win here would become the oldest first-time Masters champion since a 41-year-old Mark O'Meara won in 1998, came at the 18th where he made bogey after his tee shot missed the fairway.

Scheffler's round included a huge birdie putt from 62 feet at the par-three fourth and a pair of up-and-down par saves after brilliant chips out of greenside bunkers at both the seventh and 17th holes.

"Anytime you can keep a card clean out here it's a really good thing... I struggled for what felt like two pars today," said Scheffler.

"I had to make two really good up-and-downs.

"But, other than that, the golf course was in front of me most of the day, kept the ball in

play, did a lot of really good things out there."

MCILROY STUMBLES

Conners made a late move with birdies on three of his final four holes while Swede Aberg, playing in his second Masters, vaulted into contention with four back-nine birdies.

Fan favourite Bryson DeChambeau, a two-times major winner and one of 12 LIV Golf members in the 95-player field this week, was in a share of second place until a late bogey dropped him into a share of fifth place and four shots back of Rose.

World number two McIlroy, needing a Masters win to complete the career Grand Slam but who seems to be hampered by one poor round each week at the Masters, was three back of Rose before a crushing double-bogey at the reachable par-five 15th.

The Northern Irishman was cruising along with a clean card until everything changed at the 15th where his approach shot sailed over the green and he then watched helplessly as his chip rolled off the slick putting surface and into the pond.

McIlroy, who came into the Masters with two PGA Tour titles before April for the first time in his career and as a popular pick to win a first Green Jacket, then double-bogeyed 17 after missing the green and three-putting from 28 feet.

The four-times major winner settled for an even-par 72 that leaves him with plenty of work to do this week if he wants to become the sixth player to complete the career Grand Slam of golf's four majors.

Among the other notables, 2023 Masters champion Jon Rahm struggled to a three-over 75 while Xander Schauffele, seeking a third win in four majors following triumphs at last year's PGA Championship and British Open, opened with a 73.

Former champion and fan favourite Fred Couples, making his 40th Masters start, carded a one-under 71 that was highlighted by an eagle from 191 yards at the par-four 14th.

"Today I'm happy as a clam," Couples said after finishing the first round in a share of 11th place.



Justin Rose of England reacts to making par on the 18th hole during the second round of the 2025 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Georgia. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Camel Handball Championship begins with colourful ceremony

In the day's opening matches, Qatar thrashed Lebanon 24-16, Mauritania eased past Algeria 14-7

By Sports Reporter
Doha

A colourful ceremony marked the start of the 4th International Camel Handball Championship. A total of 17 countries have fielded teams in the three-day event currently being held at Libsear racetracks in Al Shahaniya.

The event is being held alongside the annual festival of purebred Arabian camels racing for the sword of HH the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Team delegations of the 17 nations participated in the tournament's opening ceremony yesterday. National flags were displayed alongside a march past of the athletes. Athletes from each country paraded into the arena astride their camels.

The opening ceremony captivated attendees with a seamless fusion of tradition and modernity. State-of-the-art sound and light shows illuminated the Libsear Racecourse, complementing the intricate decorations and authentic Arabic calligraphy that showcased the rich heritage and historical significance of the sport. Qatar's national anthem concluded the ceremony.

Top officials, including Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Kuwari, President of the Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR), and Dr. Hazam bin Nasser al-Maqarrih, Secretary-General of AUCR, joined a distinguished audience comprising federation members, international representatives, media personnel and eager spectators, all witnessing the commencement of this culturally significant tournament.

The ceremony successfully set a distinguished and exciting atmosphere for the competition to follow.

For the first time, the championship - now into its fourth season - has attracted participation from 17 teams from five continents, including hosts Qatar, alongside teams from the United States, Australia, Colombia, Bulgaria, Oman, Palestine, Morocco, Libya, Lebanon, Djibouti, Algeria, Somalia, Jordan, Tunisia, Iraq and Mauritania.

President of the AUCR al-Kuwari said: "We welcome everyone to Qatar. In the name of God and with His blessings, we announce the launch of the 4th International Camel Handball Championship. I announce the competition open."

This international handball tournament has drawn elite teams from across the globe, establishing itself as a premier sporting event. Participating nations have demonstrated extensive pre-tournament preparations, highlighting their commitment to high-level competition.

"The focus remains squarely on the podium, with each team vying to claim the championship title. The level of play is expected



A glimpse of the opening ceremony of the 4th International Camel Handball Championship at Libsear racetracks in Al Shahaniya yesterday.



Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Kuwari, President of the Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR), delivers his speech during the opening ceremony.



A Qatari player rejoices after scoring against Lebanon at Libsear racetracks at Al Shahaniya.

to be exceptionally high," al-Kuwari said. "The competitive atmosphere is intense, as teams showcase their honed skills and strategic plays. The tournament serves as a

platform for athletes to demonstrate their dedication and pursue victory at the highest professional level. The global representation underscores the sport's widespread appeal



Action from the match between Oman and the United States.

and the athletes desire to achieve the highest level of achievement," he added.

In the day's opening matches, Qatar thrashed Lebanon 24-16, Mauritania eased past Algeria 14-7 while Morocco downed Tunisia 13-9. In another match, Oman beat the US 25-16 in a thrilling contest.

According to the competition schedule, the semi-finals will take place today, followed by the final and award ceremony tomorrow. The AUCR has invited all camel handball enthusiasts to attend the matches and cheer for their favorite teams. The federation promised accompanying entertainment activities and comprehensive media coverage to ensure a delightful experience for everyone.

Top Algerian official praises Qatar's 'wonderful' Camel Handball Championship

Doha: The 4th International Camel Handball Championship yesterday received high praise from Mustafa Bin Hamouda, President of the Algerian Camel Racing Club and Chairman of the International Relations Committee of the Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR).

Bin Hamouda lauded the 'outstanding and wonderful' organization of the event, which officially commenced yesterday. "The championship is very special, and the organization is more than wonderful," Bin Hamouda said yesterday. "It also featured a focus on promoting heritage. This is a wonderful gathering that we are happy to host annually and hope it continues."

He highlighted the competitive nature of the tournament, noting: "Everyone witnessed the performances on the first day, and the similarity in levels is the greatest evidence of the strength of the competition. I expect that the competition for the title will not be easy at all," he added.

Bin Hamouda emphasized Qatar's excellence in hosting such sports events.

"Qatar has always provided us with creativity and sporting excellence, and this is no surprise to us," he said. "Camel racing and all the championships of the sport of our forefathers and grandfathers in Qatar are always very special," he added.

He also commended the leadership of the Arab Union for Camel Races. "Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Kuwari fulfilled all the promises he made when he ran for the presidency of the Arab Federation," Bin Hamouda explained. "And here we are reaping the fruits of a prosperous period for the Arab Federation, which has taken great strides towards advancing heritage sports and spreading camel handball as an international sport with fans everywhere," he added.

PUREBRED ARABIAN CAMEL RACING FESTIVAL

Al Shahaniya camels achieve hat-trick

By Sports Reporter
Al Shahaniya

The annual Purebred Arabian Camel Racing Festival for the Sword of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Amir of Qatar, witnessed a thrilling evening of racing at the Al Shahaniya Challenge Field, where the Golden Thanaya symbols were fiercely contested.

Al Shahaniya Camels and Umm Al Zubar Camels - two of the event's powerhouse - claimed a historic hat-trick, while the Presidential Camels, sporting their iconic red logo, captured one of the night's top honours by winning the Golden Shalfa for the Open Thanaya Bakkar.

"Reemas," owned by the Presidential Camels and trained by Sultan bin Mohammed al-Wahaibi, clinched victory in the opening round for open two-year-old camels, completing the 8km run in an impressive 11:57.66 minutes.

The maroon banner of Al Shahaniya swept the following rounds with commanding performances. "Wadeh," trained by Jaber bin Salem bin Faran, secured victory in the second main round for open two-year-old Qa'adan, clocking 12:01.37. "Ashaab," also from Al Shahaniya and trained by Salem bin Faran Al Marri, finished second in 12:05.72. In the third main round, Al Shahaniya Camels swept the podium, led by "Al Dhaby" who took the Golden Shalfa for Omani female camels in 12:00.96.

Umm Al Zubar camels continued their strong showing in the fourth round. "Al Waab," guided by trainer Nasser Hamad Misfer al-Shahwani, claimed the win in 12:09.90. Stablemate "Al Qubaidi" followed in second (12:15.33), while Al Shahaniya's "Mabhauj" finished third (12:15.75).

Mohammed Salem bin Faran, speaking after the coronation, expressed delight over the victories of "Wadeh" and "Al Dhaby."

"Winning symbols is no surprise for Al Shahaniya Camels," he said. "Both camels have proven themselves before e-" "Wadeh" at the Jandriyah Festival and "Al Dhaby" in Al-Wathba."

He added: "We dedicate this win to the people of Qatar and all fans of the maroon banner." Trainer Sultan Mohammed Al Wahaibi praised "Reemas" for her tenacity and performance. "She was seeded for this tough round and executed brilliantly. We're preparing well for the



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



finale and hoping for more success."

Racing resumed at Al Shahaniya for the eleventh day of the festival with 14 rounds over 8km in the morning. The Presidential Camels and Al Shahaniya Camels shared top honours.

"Syouf" trained by Sultan al-Wahaibi, won the main round for open Thanaya Bakkar, clocking 12:08.69, while "Baraka" followed in second. Al Shahaniya's "Masirah" came third (12:10.78). In the open two-year-old round, "Al Rayahi" (Al Shahaniya) won in 12:27.89, while the Presidential Camels finished second and third. The Presidential Camels returned in the third round with "Al Zoud" winning in 12:05.80.

Today, a total of 28 rounds (16 morning and 12 evening) will be contested across various categories including purebred camels.



HATHAB

Al-Marri and al-Eid claim top honours

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 11th round of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour delivered a thrilling evening of show jumping yesterday, featuring competitive action in both amateur and Medium Tour categories. Organised by the Qatar Equestrian Federation in partnership with Al Shaqab, the event took place at the Longines Arena and continued to showcase the depth of local equestrian talent.

In the 100cm Amateur Category, Mohammed Faisal al-Marri claimed double podium finishes, winning first place with a time of 28.99 seconds and securing third with a 30.01-second run. Youssef Abdulrahman al-Muftah took second place with a time of 29.9 seconds in a closely contested round. Abdullah Mohammed Al Marri, Director of the Qatar Equestrian Teams, presented the awards to the winners.

In the individual Medium Tour



round, Abdulaziz Fahad al-Eid triumphed aboard Cayenne with a blazing time of 54.36 seconds. Saeed Hamad Jumaa, riding Diesel, finished second in 55 seconds, while Rashid Tuwaim al-Marri took third on Navarone with a time of 57.23 seconds.

The Medium Tour team event was won by Doha Bank, who edged out Al Salam and Al Fardan. The winners of both team and individual events were crowned by Mr. Omar Al Buainain, Director of the Tournament Support Services Sector.

