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MOTOGP

Marc Marquez extends sprint streak with victory in Qatar

Marc's younger brother Alex of Gresini Racing once again had to settle for second place



Ducati's Marc Marquez reclaimed the lead of the MotoGP world championship after leading every lap from pole position to win the Qatar GP sprint race at Lusail International Circuit.

By **Sahan Bidappa**
Doha

Marc Marquez will take some stopping this season after the Ducati rider continued his brilliant start by winning his fourth consecutive sprint race at the Qatar Grand Prix last night. The Spaniard, who has traditionally struggled at the Lusail International Circuit, was in imperious form — having earlier taken pole position with an all-time lap record — and proved too strong on the night.

His younger brother, Alex Marquez of Gresini Racing, once again had to settle for second place — the fourth time he's done so this season. VR46 Racing's Franco Morbidelli finished third, while Alex's rookie teammate, Fermin Aldeguer, delivered an impressive ride to claim fourth — his best-ever result in MotoGP.

Marc's victory catapulted him to the top of the championship standings with 98 points, two ahead of Alex. And it's increasingly looking ominous for his rivals, as the 32-year-old is now the clear favourite for tonight's 22-lap Grand Prix — and perhaps for the rest of the season.

Marc had expected Alex and teammate Francesco Bagnaia to be faster than him this weekend. But aside from a brief swapping of places with Alex, Marquez was in total control of the 11-lap sprint at Lusail.

Bagnaia, meanwhile, endured a miserable day. First, he crashed in Qualifying 2, leaving him 11th on the grid. Then, he struggled for pace in the sprint, with the double world champion only able to salvage eighth place. Bagnaia now trails Marc



FROM LEFT: Gresini Racing's Alex Marquez, Ducati's Marc Marquez and VR46 Racing's Franco Morbidelli pose for a picture following the Qatar MotoGP Grand Prix sprint race at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday. FIM President Jorge Viegas and Lusail International Circuit CEO Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi honoured the podium winners.

by 21 points in the championship. "It's an unexpected weekend, honestly speaking, because as you know I normally struggle here in Qatar," Marc said later. "But I'm riding in a very good way, I was super consistent in the Sprint, controlling the gap. And then, in the last two laps, I slowed

down, but I feel very good with the bike. Tomorrow, let's see if we can improve very small things for the race."

Marc had a blistering start off the line, but there was a brief moment of drama at the start of lap two when Alex snuck through at Turn 1. The move didn't stick,

though, as Alex ran a little wide and Marc immediately pounced to retake the lead.

Alex kept the pressure on, repeatedly shaping for a move at the same corner over the next few laps, but Marc's pace proved decisive. "I tried in that first lap, I had a little bit more. I wanted to make the gap with

the riders behind me, to be more calm and then to fight with him," Alex said. "But he was better than me. It's just that he was more brave in some parts."

Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo got the launch he needed from the front row and slotted into third behind the Marquez brothers. But the Frenchman couldn't hold onto it for long, with Morbidelli charging through on the main straight to take over the final podium spot — and never looked back.

Lower down the order, reigning champion Jorge Martin was racing in his first sprint on the Aprilia after missing the opening three rounds due to injuries sustained in a pre-season crash.

Martin had started 14th on the grid but soon moved up to battle with Bagnaia, as rookie Ai Ogura also passed the Italian. However, Martin — still coming to terms with his new machine after switching from Pramac Racing to Aprilia — could not sustain that pace and eventually fell behind, finishing outside the points in 16th place.

Fabio Di Giannantonio completed the top six on the sister VR46 Ducati, while Trackhouse rookie Ai Ogura battled his way to seventh on his Aprilia. Marco Bezzecchi took the final point in ninth for the factory Aprilia team.

That came at the expense of KTM pair Maverick Viñales and Pedro Acosta, whose soft tyre choice saw them fade out of the points by the time the chequered flag fell. LCR Honda's Johann Zarco was the only retiree, pulling out on lap nine due to rear tyre issues. Factory Honda rider Joan Mir did not take the start due to illness. His physical condition will be assessed today before a decision is made on his participation in the Grand Prix.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar end Beach Games with 7 medals, receive flag for 2026 edition

Qatar officially received the flag to host the fourth edition of the Gulf Games, which will take place in Doha next year. The flag was handed over to Abdulhassan Hashem, Head of the Qatari Administrative Delegation at the Gulf Beach Games, during the closing ceremony of the event held in the Omani capital, Muscat, from April 5 to 11.

The event featured the participation of more than 300 male and female athletes from the six Gulf countries.

The third edition of the Gulf Games was previously held in Kuwait in 2022, where Team Qatar earned an impressive total of 52 medals: 16 gold, 21 silver, and 15 bronze.

Team Qatar concluded its participation in the 2025 Gulf Beach Games in Muscat with a commendable haul of seven medals, including three gold.

The gold medals were secured by the national beach volleyball team, represented by Sherif Younis and Ahmed Tijjan, along with equestrian athletes Ali Hammad al-Athba in the individual lance event and Rashid Fahad al-Dosari in the individual hanging rings event in tent pegging.

The team added a silver medal in athletics through Hamdi Ali, who excelled in the high jump.

Qatar also claimed three bronze medals: one in sailing, earned by Tamim Khalid Shams in the Optimist individual event for juniors, and two in tent pegging. The



bronze in the team hanging rings event went to Faisal al-Hajri, Rashid al-Dosari, Ali al-Athba,



and Ibrahim al-Hammadi, while Ali al-Athba added another bronze in the individual category of the same event. Qatar's delegation featured 18 athletes competing across five disciplines: beach volleyball, athletics, sailing, open water swimming, and equestrian (tent pegging).

FOCUS

Doha to host 17th Artistic Gymnastics WC

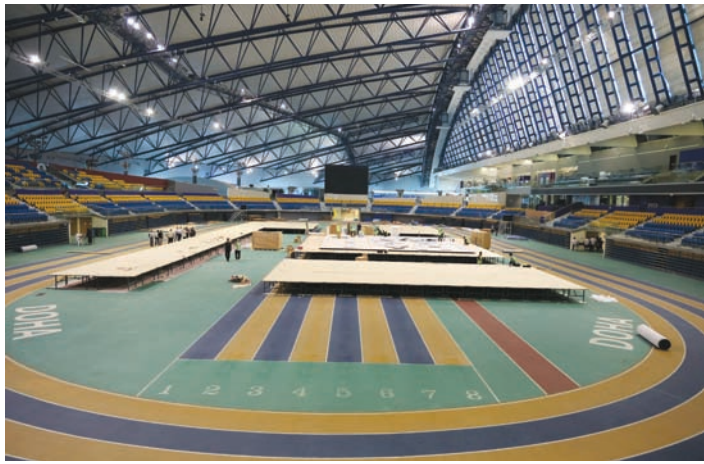
The Qatari capital is preparing to host the 17th edition of the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup (Tishan), set to take place at Aspire Dome from April 16-19, featuring a high-calibre lineup of Olympic-level gymnasts from around the world.

The organising committee, chaired by Ali al-Hitmi, President of the Qatar Gymnastics Federation, is working diligently to deliver a world-class event.

Committee members include Abeer al-Buainain, Secretary-General of the Federation and Championship Director, Assistant Secretary-General Mohammed al-Maraghi, and members Issa al-Hitmi, Abdulrahman al-Muftah, Nasser al-Hamad, and Mazen Taha.

The committee holds regular meetings to monitor all developments and ensure full readiness before the competition kicks off.

Al-Hitmi emphasised the exceptional importance of this year's edition, stating: "Our main goal is to showcase the civilised image of Qatari sport through gymnastics and to continue building on our past successes. We aim to deliver an even better edition, with strong



The 17th edition of the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup (Tishan), will take place at Aspire Dome from April 16-19.



Ali al-Hitmi, President of the Qatar Gymnastics Federation, talks to his committee members.

technical and organisational execution that cements Qatar's reputation as a global host."

Taha, the event's Technical Director, revealed the competition details, noting the participation of 150 gymnasts (100 men and 50 women) from 20 countries, alongside 35 international judges.

The qualifying rounds will be held on the first two days, followed by the finals on April 18 and 19.

A total prize pool of \$50,000 will be awarded, with \$5,000 allocated to each of the 10 apparatus events (6 men's and 4 women's events).

This year's edition is set apart by the participation of world-class names, including: Karbanov (Armenia): Silver medallist on the pommel horse at the Paris Olympics

Kazakhstan's star gymnast: Olympic silver medallist in vault

Tong Hong (Chinese Taipei): Bronze medallist on the high bar at the Paris Olympics

Ashaw Yaqian (China): National champion and Olympic silver medallist on balance beam

Abeer al-Buainain, the Championship Director, highlighted that such elite participation significantly raises the event's profile and appeal to fans and followers.

She also announced that *Al Kass*

TV has secured exclusive broadcasting rights for the finals on April 18 and 19, with additional coverage from several international networks.

On the digital side, the organising committee has launched a dedicated website that provides information on participating athletes, event schedules, rankings, and live updates.

A Facebook page was also created

to share real-time results as soon as each event concludes.

Qatar will be represented by Salma Nasser and Rakan al-Hareth, who are expected to gain valuable international experience through this event. Both athletes are currently competing in the World Cup in Croatia as part of their preparation for the Doha event.

Al-Hitmi expressed his regret over the limited Arab representation, with only Qatar and Jordan taking part this year:

"We had hoped for broader Arab participation, especially given the high calibre of this event."

Concluding his remarks, al-Hitmi emphasised that the championship is another opportunity to strengthen gymnastics culture in Qatar – a strategic goal of the federation since its founding in 2001.

He noted that the sport is growing so rapidly that accommodating all interested participants has become a challenge.

This year's "Tishan" Championship is more than just a sporting competition – it is a message of excellence, reflecting Qatar's progress in gymnastics and reaffirming its status as a global sports hub.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Abhishek blasts 55-ball 141 as SRH chase down 246

The opener hit ten 6s and fourteen 4s in his blazing century

AFP
Hyderabad, India

Opener Abhishek Sharma smashed 141 off 55 balls as Sunrisers Hyderabad pulled off IPL's second highest run chase of 246 to hammer Punjab Kings by eight wickets yesterday.

Abhishek and fellow left-handed opener Travis Head, who hit 66, put on this season's highest stand of 171 to set up the chase before hosts Hyderabad achieved the target with nine balls to spare.

The chase was behind Punjab's record of 262 against Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens last year.

Abhishek's score - his first IPL century - is the third individual score in the T20 tournament behind Chris Gayle (175 not out for Bengaluru) and Brendon McCullum (158 not out for Kolkata).

Shreyas Iyer's 82 and a late blitz of 34 by Marcus Stoinis steered Punjab to 245-6, but the total proved less as Hyderabad openers made their team move off the bottom of the 10-team table with two wins in six matches.

Abhishek tore apart the opposition bowling to reach his fifty in 19 balls.

Australia's Head fell to leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal after hitting nine fours and three sixes in his 37-ball knock.

Abhishek raised his century in 40 balls as he roared, punched the air and waved a piece of paper with a message "this one for the orange army" - the colour



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abhishek Sharma celebrates after scoring 141 runs in 55 balls as he walks back to the pavilion after his dismissal during the IPL match against Punjab Kings in Hyderabad yesterday. (AFP)

of Hyderabad. Punjab left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh sent back Abhishek, who hit 14 fours and 10 sixes, with 24 to win and Heinrich Klaasen got Hyderabad home with an unbeaten 21 off 14 balls.

Earlier Iyer struck his fastest IPL fifty in 22 balls before Stoinis hammered an 11-ball unbeaten 34 to boost the Punjab total.

New batting sensation Priyansh Arya and partner Prabhsimran Singh handed Punjab a quick start as the two smashed 53 runs in the first three overs.

Previous-match hero Arya, a left-hander known for his six-hitting prowess, departed after

his 13-ball 36 and Prabhsimran went out next, for 42, with Sri Lanka's Eshan Malinga getting his first IPL wicket on debut.

Quick fifty by Iyer
Iyer took on the bowlers and his quick fifty was better than his 23-ball half-ton for Kolkata Knight Riders against Hyderabad last year in qualifier 1.

Medium-pace bowler Harshal Patel struck regular blows including two in one over when he got Glenn Maxwell bowled for three and Iyer caught out at backward point. Patel returned figures of 4-42.

But Stoinis hammered pace spearhead Mohammed Shami for four straight sixes to finish off the innings in a 27-run last over.

Shami conceded 75 runs from his four wicketless overs to return the second most expensive spell in IPL after Rajasthan Royals' England import Jofra Archer had 0-76 in the second match this season

BRIEF SCORES
Sunrisers Hyderabad 247 for 2 (Abhishek 141, Head 66) **beat Punjab Kings 245 for 6** (Shreyas 82, Prabhsimran 42, Arya 36, Harshal 4-42) **by 8 wickets**

VINCE SMASHES CENTURY AS KINGS BEAT SULTANS IN PSL



Karachi Kings's English batsman James Vince celebrates after scoring a half-century during the PSL match against Multan Sultans in Karachi yesterday. Batting first, Multan Sultans scored 234 for 3 in 20 overs. Karachi Kings, in reply, reached 236 for 6 in 19.2 overs thanks to Vince's brilliant 101 off 43 deliveries. (AFP)

QUETTA GLADIATORS CRUSH PESHAWAR ZALMI BY 80 RUNS



Quetta Gladiators' Abrar Ahmed (left) celebrates with a teammate after taking the wicket of Peshawar Zalmi's Mohammad Haris during the PSL match in Rawalpindi yesterday. Batting first, Quetta Gladiators scored 216 for 3 in 20 overs. In reply, Peshawar Zalmi were bowled out for 136 in 15.1 overs. Leg-spinner Ahmed took 4 for 42 in four overs as Gladiators won by 80 runs. (AFP)

Markram, Pooran lift Lucknow

Lucknow, India: Opener Aiden Markram and Nicholas Pooran struck half-centuries as Lucknow Super Giants beat Gujarat Titans by six wickets for their third straight win in the IPL yesterday. Chasing 181 for victory on a sluggish pitch, Markram shared partnerships of 65 with fellow-opener Rishabh Pant and 58 with the left-handed Pooran as Lucknow achieved the target with three balls to spare at their home in Ekana Stadium. Markram hit 58 and Pooran smashed 61 to end Gujarat's winning streak of four matches in this edition of the T20 tournament. Gujarat dropped a place down from the top of the 10-team table with Lucknow behind in third with four wins from six matches. West Indies' Pooran struck his

fourth half-ton to go past Gujarat opener Sai Sudharsan as the leading batter with 349 runs; Sudharsan has 329. South Africa's Markram set the platform for the chase as he stepped up in the absence of his in-form opening partner Mitchell Marsh, who missed the match due to the illness of his daughter. Skipper Pant opened the batting with Markram but failed to strike form despite an early reprieve when Gujarat wicketkeeper Jos Buttler dropped a catch down the leg side.

BRIEF SCORES
Lucknow Super Giants 186 for 4 (Markram 58, Prasad 2-26) **beat Gujarat Titans 180 for 6** (Gill 60, Sai Sudharsan 56, Thakur 2-24, Bishnoi 2-36) **by 6 wickets**

SHOW JUMPING

Aleid wins Big Tour title in 11th round of Hathab

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Khaled Aleid claimed the Big Tour title upstaging Cyrine Cherif as the 11th round of the Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab concluded yesterday.

The event, organized by the Qatar Equestrian Federation in partnership with Al Shaqab, was held at the Longines Arena at Al Shaqab.

Aleid, riding bay stallion Q Hayen, clocked a flawless 69.68secs in the One round against the clock (125cm) event to claim the title ahead of overall leader Cherif, who on bay gelding Triple T Calamando Blue finished



a close second in 78.18secs. Faleh Suwead al-Ajami was third with a time of 73.76 seconds on bay stallion Quick Bill. Earlier, the top two position of the Open Class -



One round against the clock (150cm) - were claimed by Khalid al-Hadi, who clocked flawless 31.42 seconds and 31.59 seconds, riding bay gelding Carlton de

Sauvegeonn, and bay gelding Capoen respectively. Saeed Nasser al-Qadi took the third podium spot finishing in 31.77secs astride chestnut mare Fiori LS.

TENNIS

Alcaraz set to face Italy's Musetti in Monte Carlo final

'It's been a long time since I've had the chance to win a title on clay'

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Carlos Alcaraz booked his place in the final of the Monte Carlo Masters for the first time with a dominant 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 win over fellow Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina yesterday.

He will face Italian Lorenzo Musetti on the red clay in today's final after the 13th seed fought back to beat Australian eighth seed Alex de Minaur 1-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) in the second semi-final.

"I knew how well Davidovich Fokina had played in Monte Carlo so I had to be ready to fight," said Alcaraz.

Alcaraz, a four-time Grand Slam champion, is targeting his first Masters title since winning in Indian Wells last year and his first on clay since the 2024 French Open.

"It's been a long time since I've had the chance to win a title on clay and I can't wait to try my luck again here," said Alcaraz, who was beaten in the final of the Olympic tournament by Novak Djokovic in August.

"At the beginning of the week, the first tournament on clay, you have to get used to the conditions," he added.

"The ball comes different. You know, the play on clay is different..."

"I'm just really happy to get the level that I wanted at the beginning of the week."

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

Alcaraz quickly became the tournament favourite following early exits for top seed Alexander Zverev and Novak Djokovic, while world number one Jannik Sinner is still serving a doping ban.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz plays a backhand return to Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina during the Monte Carlo Masters match at the Monte Carlo Country Club in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin yesterday. (AFP)



Italy's Lorenzo Musetti throws his wristband to spectators as he celebrates after victory over Australia's Alex De Minaur. (AFP)

The victory also continues the uptick in his fortune at an event where he had lost his only other match in 2022.

Alcaraz won his only previous encounter with Davidovich Fokina, ranked 42 in the world, on the clay in Barcelona two years ago and he started quickly this time,

breaking early. Davidovich Fokina, who reached the last 16 of the Australia Open in January, broke back to make it 5-5 and then took the first set into the tie-break which he lost 7/2.

Alcaraz again broke early in the second set and this time there was no way back for 2022 runner-up

Davidovich Fokina although he scrapped hard, saving 13 break points and four match points.

Musetti, playing in his first Masters semi-final, seemed to suffer from nerves early on as he was broken by De Minaur in all four of his service games in the opening set.

But he settled down in the second set, grabbing a crucial break in the ninth game and successfully serving to force the match into a decider.

The 23-year-old got the better of a run of three consecutive breaks midway through the third set.

Musetti, a Wimbledon semi-finalist last year, failed to serve out the match, though, as De Minaur levelled at 5-5.

But the Italian held his nerve in the tie-break, securing a place in the biggest final of his young ATP career so far on his first match point when De Minaur netted a forehand.

GOLF

Rose leads star-studded Masters, DeChambeau and McIlroy chasing



Justin Rose of England lines up a putt on the 18th hole during the second round of the 2025 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Georgia. (AFP)

Reuters
Augusta, Georgia

Justin Rose topped a Masters leaderboard overflowing with star power on Friday, with Bryson DeChambeau one stroke back and world number one Scottie Scheffler and Grand Slam-seeking Rory McIlroy giving chase.

Rose, who began the day with a three-stroke lead, stayed hot with the putter to cruise through the front nine but had to work coming home as strong winds began whipping through Augusta National.

The Englishman mixed four birdies with three bogeys for a one-under-par 71 that brought him to eight under at the halfway point.

Given the glittering names atop the leaderboard, two-time Masters runner-up Rose said a fearless attitude will be required to capture the Green Jacket on Sunday.

"You're going to have to play great golf," he said. "Get out there, want it, go for it."

The 44-year-old former world number one is seeking to add a second major championship on the back end of a career that includes an Olympic gold medal and a lucrative FedEx Cup win.

DeChambeau (68) converted a challenging par-saving putt on 18 to stay one back of Rose.

The popular American was followed throughout his round by adoring fans, who erupted with cheers when he holed out from the bunker on the fourth for birdie.

Well-known for his power off the tee, it has been the two-time US Open champion's finesse with

the irons and putter that have impressed this week.

DeChambeau said he too was excited to go toe-to-toe with the game's best over the weekend.

"This is what golf is about," he said. "We've got a lot of great names up there. I'm looking forward to an unbelievable test of golf."

McIlroy moved past the pair of double bogeys on Thursday that threatened to derail his bid for a career Grand Slam with a thrilling second-round performance.

After a steady but unspectacular start, McIlroy came alive on the back nine with back-to-back birdies on 10 and 11.

The Northern Irishman made a bold decision from the pine needles at the 13th where he targeted the flagstick with his second shot, leaning over in relief when his ball cleared the tributary to Rae's Creek.

The 35-year-old then putted in for a game-changing eagle to help keep his goal of winning his first Green Jacket alive.

"I feel like I just did a good job of resetting," McIlroy said after his bogey-free round of 66 that was the low round of the day and left him tied for third with Canadian Corey Connors.

"I feel like that patience was rewarded with a nice little stretch there."

The normally consistent Scheffler got the worst of the windy conditions for a frustrating round that included several minutes seated beneath a canopy of magnolia trees on 18 while waiting to consult a rules official.

His bogey on the last dropped him into a tie for fifth place.

4TH INTERNATIONAL CAMEL HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Impressive Qatar storm into semi-finals

By Sports Reporter
Al Shahaniya

The Libsear Heritage Field in Al Shahaniya is buzzing with anticipation as the 4th International Camel Handball Championship Qatar 2025 reaches its thrilling final stages. After two days of intense competitions, the final four teams are set to battle it out for the coveted title with the grand finale scheduled for 7:15pm today.

The hugely popular championship, which began on April 11, saw teams from 17 nations representing five continents, showcasing the global appeal of this unique sport.

Today, the semi-finals will see hosts Qatar face off against Morocco, while Iraq clashes with Somalia. The losers of these matches will then compete for third place, leading up to the highly anticipated championship final.

The tournament has been a whirlwind of excitement, with teams displaying remarkable skill and determination. Morocco's



Action from Qatar's match against Australia on day two of the 4th International Camel Handball Championship currently being played at Libsear Heritage Village in Al Shahaniya. Qatar won 11-7.

initial victory over Bulgaria, followed by a decisive win against Tunisia, set the tone for the high-stakes competition. Other stand-out matches included Mauritania's

triumph over Algeria, Oman's victory against the USA, and Qatar's win over Lebanon.

The quarter-finals brought even more drama, with Morocco con-

tinuing their strong performance against Oman (17-15), and Iraq edging out Palestine (11-9). Somalia's dramatic penalty shootout victory over Mauritania, following



Dr Hazam al-Maqarib, Secretary-General of the AUCC.

a 12-12 draw, has been hailed as one of the tournament's biggest upsets.

Abdullah bin Mahmoud al-Kuwari, head of the local organising committee, has confirmed that all preparations are complete for the closing day.

The Libsear Heritage Field is adorned with national flags, and all logistical details have been meticulously arranged, promising a fitting finale to this exceptional

championship. The world watches as the final chapters of this thrilling tournament unfold.

"We were surprised by the strong performances of the teams participating in 4th the International Camel Handball Championship," Dr Hazam al-Maqarib, Secretary-General of the AUCC, said yesterday.

"The fourth edition, which concludes on Sunday, was different from all previous championships. Everyone was surprised by the technical level, the organisation, and even the shape of the trophy."

Al-Maqarib, Director of the championship, further elaborated: "We have set rules for participation, which have been translated into several languages. They are referenced by the Arab Union for Camel Races. They combine the special specifications of the stadium, the participating camels, the players, the referee, the competition mechanism, and the general and specific rules of the game, combining handball with the technical requirements specific to camels in particular."

FOCUS

Thrilling competitions continue at Purebred Arabian Camel Festival 2025



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Fierce competition and captivating performances marked the twelfth day of the annual Purebred Arabian Camel Festival for the Sword of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Held at the Al Shahaniya Racecourse, the day featured high-stakes races in the Hail and Zamoul categories, drawing 263 elite camels from across the GCC.

In the evening session, Saeed Jaber Abdullah Mohammed Al Harbi's Al

Sayha stole the spotlight in the open Hail race, clocking the fastest time of the day at 12:23:60 minutes and securing the top prize of QR350,000. Close behind was Wajdan, owned by Saif Ali Rashid Suwailem Al Ketbi, with a time of 12:25:23, followed by Ghazlan, owned by Mansour Mohammed al-Khayarin, at 12:27:28.

The open Zamoul race was won by Walam, owned by Hamad Rashid Hamad Ghadir al-Ketbi, with a time of 12:35:33. Al Ketbi also clinched victory in the Omani Zamoul race with Al Zawari (12:44:09), while Saif Ali Rashid Suwailem al-Ketbi's Al Madamiya led the Omani Hail round at 12:25:11.

Earlier in the day, 512 camels competed in 16 fiercely contested races across the Hail and Zamoul production categories. Intibah, owned by Hamad Nahyan Salem al-Ameri, delivered the fastest time of the morning at 12:23:29, winning the first production race. In the Zamoul production round, Muhaidh, owned by Mohammed Saeed Obaid al-Mazrouei, took the title with a time of 12:49:53.

The Qatari-bred competitions also stood out, with Mowaq (Mohammed Khalid al-Attiyah) and Al Hamam (Abdullah Hamad al-Attiyah) taking top honors in the Hail and Zamoul races, respectively.

FORMULA 1

McLaren's Piastri claims Bahrain pole as Verstappen struggles

Championship leader Norris, in the other McLaren, starts from the third row

AFP

Sakhir, Bahrain

McLaren's Oscar Piastri claimed pole position for the Bahrain Grand Prix yesterday with George Russell's Mercedes completing the front row as Max Verstappen had a trying evening at the desert circuit. Series leader Lando Norris, in the other McLaren, starts from the third row with Verstappen facing a tough time from the fourth row.

Ferrari introduced upgrades this weekend and they appeared to have had the desired effect with Charles Leclerc on the second row with company Mercedes' gifted rookie Kimi Antonelli.

Alpine are the only team to remain pointless but that could soon change with Pierre Gasly posting the fifth quickest qualifying time to start beside Norris. Norris leads Verstappen by just one point going into Sunday's nocturnal showdown in the Gulf kingdom. But the omens look good for Piastri with pole-sitters accounting for four of the last five winners in Sakhir.

The Australian has been in dominant form so far this weekend, bossing practice. "I felt confident out there all weekend. FP3 we had good pace, and Qualifying - the others caught up a little closer than I wanted, but I delivered the laps when it mattered so very, very happy.

"I have to get to Turn 1 in first so let's see what happens but I've felt comfortable all weekend. I can't thank the team enough for the car they have given me."

Norris cut a dejected figure, saying: "I'm just not quick enough."

For Piastri, placed third in the championship 13 points behind his teammate, this was only his second ever pole, the first coming in China last month when he went on to win. As for Verstappen, the writing was on the wall as his evening had begun badly. "There's something really wrong



McLaren's Oscar Piastri drives during the qualifying session at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir yesterday. (AFP)

with the car," the four-time world champion told his team as he went wide at turn 14 on his first shot at getting a time on the board in Q1, forcing him to abort.

With his new teammate Yuki Tsunoda having his lap time deleted for track limits both Red Bulls only had five minutes to avoid crashing out at the first roll of the qualifying dice. Verstappen kept his nerve to go through third behind Norris and Lewis Hamilton. Piastri, who had bossed practice, was fourth, with Tsunoda scraping through in 14th. Out in Q1 were Alex Albon (Williams), Liam Lawson (RB), Gabriel Bortoleto (Saubert), Lance Stroll (Aston Martin), and Ollie Bearman (Haas). The second ses-

sion was only minutes old when Esteban Ocon had a huge smash into the barriers in his Haas, triggering a red flag.

"I'm ok, sorry, really sorry, guys," the Frenchman told his team - which is more than can be said for his wreck of a car forcing his mechanics to call off any plans they may have had for Saturday night to get it race ready in 24 hours.

Once a crane had lifted Ocon's stricken vehicle off the track the session resumed.

Piastri led Norris into the top 10 shoot out. Verstappen went through in ninth, with Tsunoda rounding out the Q3 line-up.

Dropping by the wayside were Jack Doohan (Alpine), Isack Hadjar (RB), Nico

Hulkenberg (Saubert), Fernando Alonso (Aston Martin) and Ocon (Haas).

And so, crunch time arrived with the final flying laps to determine the first five rows of Sunday's grid. With less than two minutes on the clock Piastri nailed it nicely with a quickest lap of 1min 29.841s, a tenth of a second quicker than Russell.

The top 10 was rounded out by Carlos Sainz joining Verstappen on the fourth row in his Williams, with Hamilton and Tsunoda occupying the fifth row.

Verstappen has won the last two years in Sakhir while McLaren are seeking to secure their first win at the 21st attempt in what is in a way their 'home' race.

Arnautovic pushes Inter six points clear

Milan: Marko Arnautovic helped move Inter Milan six points clear at the top of Serie A with a goal and assist in yesterday's 3-1 win over Cagliari, ahead of their Champions League showdown with Bayern Munich.

Playing in place of Marcus Thuram with coach Simone Inzaghi looking ahead to Wednesday's quarter-final second leg with Bayern, Arnautovic lashed champions Inter ahead in the 13th minute. And the Austria international laid on a perfect sweeping pass 13 minutes later for Lautaro Martinez, who dinked home his 20th goal of the season in all competitions.

Yann Bissec's thumping header in the 55th minute made sure Inter would collect all three points at the San Siro, after Roberto Piccoli halved the deficit for 15th-placed Cagliari shortly after half-time. Inter now wait for the result of closest challengers Napoli's home fixture with Empoli on Monday, by which time attentions will be squarely on Bayern who they lead 2-1 following Tuesday's first leg in Germany.

"We'll go in that match with a lot of confidence even though we know that we'll be playing one of the three or four best teams in the world," assured Inzaghi. "We've need to repeat the pace, aggression and organisation of our performance in the first leg."

Arnautovic has played a bit-part role at Inter but has had an impact in recent weeks with crucial goals, Saturday's being his fifth in his last 10 club appearances. Inzaghi's team are gunning for a repeat of the Serie A, Champions League and Italian Cup treble they conquered under Jose Mourinho 15 years ago.

Arnautovic, 35, was on loan at Inter from FC Twente when Inter beat Bayern to win the Champions League in 2010, but he said "it was a bit like I was a fan cheering the team on".

"Obviously we believe in the treble because we're Inter, but there's a long way to go," said Arnautovic, who played just three times for Inter under Mourinho.

Venezia boosted their survival hopes by beating rock-bottom Monza 1-0 and moving to within two points of Lecce who sit just outside the relegation zone.

PREMIER LEAGUE

De Bruyne leads City comeback, Arsenal held by Brentford

AFP

Manchester

Kevin De Bruyne inspired a Manchester City fightback from two goals down to beat Crystal Palace 5-2, while Arsenal's 1-1 draw with Brentford yesterday edged Liverpool closer to the Premier League title.

In De Bruyne's first appearance at the Etihad Stadium since announcing his decade in Manchester will finish at the end of the season, the Belgian rolled back the years to save City's blushes. Palace found themselves 2-0 up after 20 minutes as Eberechi Eze slotted home Ismaila Sarr's pass before Chris Richards took advantage of poor City defending to head in from a corner.

Eze had a third goal narrowly ruled out for offside before De Bruyne stirred the City fightback. The 33-year-old fired in a free-kick off the post before heading down for Omar Marmoush to level just three minutes later. City were rampant after the break as De Bruyne teed up Mateo Kovacic on 47 minutes to complete the comeback.

Goalkeeper Ederson provided his fourth Premier League assist of the season for James McAtee to make it 4-2 before Nico O'Reilly's sweet strike rounded off the scoring. "The performance of Kevin - as he has done for many, many years in many, many games - he played fantastic," said City boss Pep Guardiola. "He helped us to break this momentum that was not good."

Victory lifts Guardiola's men back into the top four, with the top five in the Premier League this season qualifying for the Champions League thanks to the strong performance of English sides in European competition.

Arsenal paid the price for having one eye on their Champions League quarter-final against Real Madrid as a 12th league draw of the season left them still 10 points adrift of Liverpool. Mikel Arteta left Bukayo Saka, Martin Odegaard and Mikel Merino on the bench with the Gunners holding a 3-0 first leg lead over the European champions ahead of the return in Madrid on Wednesday.

It appeared the Spaniard would get away with that risk as Saka and Odegaard were introduced seconds after Declan Rice teed up Thomas Partey to open the scoring on the break from a Brentford corner. But the Bees hit back with a well-worked set-piece of their own when Nathan Collins headed Michael Kayode's cross down and Yoane Wissa flicked in his 16th goal



Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates after scoring against Crystal Palace during the Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. (Reuters)

of the season. "We play every three days and are used to it, so there is not an excuse of energy," said Arteta. "We had full control of the game and conceded a very poor goal. It was not good enough."

Liverpool could now seal a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title as early as next weekend should they win their next two matches and Arsenal lose at Ipswich.

Nottingham Forest's challenge for a Champions League place stumbled after a 1-0 defeat by Everton. Forest remain in third but have lost their last two games to allow the chasing pack back onto their tails. A forgetful game at the City Ground appeared to be meandering towards a stalemate until Abdoulaye Doucoure struck in the 94th minute to secure Everton's first win in seven games.

Aston Villa closed to within three points of Forest and climbed into the top five after Unai Emery's substitutes secured a 3-0 victory at already-relegated Southampton despite Marco Asensio having two penalties saved by Aaron Ramsdale.

Ollie Watkins was again left on the bench by Emery but made a stunning impact with a volley over Ramsdale from Yuri Tielemans' dinked pass 17 minutes from time. Donyell Malen then sealed the points with his third goal in as many league games. Asensio's second spot-kick was saved in stoppage time, but John McGinn pounced on the rebound.

Leicester scored their first league goals since January to snap a nine-game losing run, but a 2-2 draw at Brighton still did little to help the Foxes' hopes of survival.

BUNDESLIGA

Bayern Munich fail to make most of Leverkusen slip

AFP

Leverkusen

Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich were held to a 2-2 home draw with Borussia Dortmund, failing to take advantage of Bayer Leverkusen's slip-up earlier in the day.

After defending champions Leverkusen were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Union Berlin, Bayern knew a win would have moved them eight points clear with five games to play.

Dortmund took the lead through Maximilian Beier in the 48th minute but Bayern hit back with two goals in four minutes, before Waldemar Anton equalised for the visitors with 15 minutes remaining.

Usually the standout fixture on the German football calendar, the buzz around the match was comparatively muted. The visitors, who trail Barcelona 4-0 in their Champions League quarter-final, arrived in Munich sitting nine spots and 27 points behind in the table. Bayern, enduring an injury crisis, were camped out near Dortmund's

box for almost the entire first half.

Visiting goalkeeper Gregor Kobel needed to snuff out big chances for Kane and Michael Olise. Seemingly on the ropes at half-time, Dortmund opened the scoring three minutes into the second period, Beier heading through Bayern goalkeeper Jonas Urbig's legs to finish off a counter-attack. With Dortmund in the ascendancy and probing for a second, Kompany brought on Serge Gnabry and the move worked a treat.

The former Arsenal winger created the equaliser for former Dortmund midfielder Raphael Guerreiro on 65 minutes and then scored a goal of his own four minutes later, slaloming through the visiting defence before hammering home. Dortmund hit back to level again when Anton knocked in a rebound from a Serhou Guirassy shot.

Bayern remain six points ahead of Leverkusen and closing in on regaining the title. Nursing an ongoing Achilles injury, Bayern centre-back Kim Minjae was substituted in the second half, leaving the Bavarians with just one fit central defender.



Borussia Dortmund's Waldemar Anton (left) vies for the ball with Bayern Munich's Harry Kane. (Reuters)