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SPOTLIGHT

Marc survives brotherly shove to win Qatar MotoGP

Tech3 KTM rider Vinales demoted from shock second place to 14th for a tyre pressure infringement



Ducati's Marc Marquez celebrates on the podium with the trophy after winning the Qatar Grand Prix alongside second-placed teammate Francesco Bagnaia at the Lusail International Circuit. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil



Riders jostle for position as the lights go out at the Qatar MotoGP Grand Prix at Lusail International Circuit.

By Sahana Bidappa
Doha

Marc Marquez passed his toughest test of the season with flying colours, powering to a dramatic victory under the lights at the Lusail International Circuit in the Qatar MotoGP.

In a frenetic 22-lap race, the Ducati star survived a first-lap collision with his younger brother Alex and clawed his way back through the field to take the win, finishing 1.8 seconds ahead of Maverick Vinales. However, Vinales, riding for Tech3 KTM, was later handed a harsh 16-second penalty for a tyre pressure infringement, dropping him from a surprise second place to 14th.

That promoted Marc's factory Ducati teammate Francesco Bagnaia to second – an impressive recovery after starting 11th – while Franco Morbidelli, on the VR46 Ducati, secured the final podium spot, his second in three races.

Coming into the weekend, Marquez wasn't tipped to shine at Lusail – a circuit where he hadn't won in MotoGP since 2014. But the 32-year-old defied expectations, completing a dominant double with both the sprint and Grand Prix victories, making it seven wins in eight races this season. His only blemish remains a crash while leading in Austin.

Marquez's race nearly ended at Turn 1 on the opening lap, when he and Alex, riding a

Gresini Ducati, made contact. Marc lost a winglet from his bike and briefly dropped behind Morbidelli. He later admitted it was his fault. "Luckily both of us stayed on our bikes," he added.

At one stage, Marc found himself trailing Morbidelli, Bagnaia, and Vinales. But with strategic tyre management, he bided his time before surging back into the lead with seven laps to go, ultimately taking the chequered flag well clear of the field.

"I said before the race, I need to manage the tyres," said Marc. "For that reason, in the first part of the race I was quiet. When Pecco (Bagnaia) came up to me, I thought, 'Right, let's start to race.' Big surprise when Maverick overtook me – I thought it was (Pedro) Acosta because normally he is the fastest on KTM. He was super fast, but I had that margin for the end. Victory in Qatar is amazing," he added.

The victory moved Marc up to 123 points at the top of the riders' standings, 17 points ahead of Alex, while Bagnaia is third on 97 points.

Alex's night didn't improve after the early contact. The Spaniard was later involved in another collision – this time with VR46 Racing's Fabio Di Giannantonio – which saw both riders lose positions.

Alex immediately put his hand up to apologise, and the stewards handed him a long-lap penalty that dropped him down to 12th, ending his hopes of a podium after having finished second in every sprint and race this season. He eventually came home seventh.

Reigning champion Jorge Martin, returning to action for the first time since a series of bone-breaking pre-season crashes, slid out with eight laps to go.

Still troubled by his left hand, the Spaniard knelt in the gravel, head bowed in frustration. He was later taken to hospital for further tests.

Fabio Quartararo faded from the front row to finish eighth on his factory Yamaha, while Acosta and Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi completed the top 10. Luca Marini was 11th for Honda, with Tech3's Enea Bastianini, Yamaha's Alex Rins, KTM's Brad Binder and Trackhouse's Ai Ogura rounding out the points. Di Giannantonio was 16th after his clash with Alex.

PIQUERAS PREVAILS IN NAIL-BITING MOTO3 VICTORY

The Moto3 race delivered edge-of-your-seat action over 16 laps, with Angel Piqueras of FRINSA - MT Helmets - MSI emerging victorious. In an incredibly close finish, Taiyo Furusato from Honda Team Asia took second just 0.009 seconds behind, while Piqueras' teammate Ryusei Yamanaka completed the podium only 0.042 seconds off the lead.

The Moto2 class also delivered intense competition over 18 laps. Aron Canet, riding for Fantic Motor, claimed victory ahead of Deniz Oncü of Red Bull KTM Ajo, while pole-sitter Manuel Gonzalez from Liqui Moly Dynavolt Intact GP settled for third after leading from the front of the grid.

FOCUS

QMMF, LIC president lauds Qatar MotoGP success

Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, President of QMMF and Lusail International Circuit, and Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi, CEO of Lusail International Circuit, expressed their delight at the successful conclusion of yet another edition of MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar last night. The Grand Prix witnessed a thrilling finish with Marc Marquez finishing at the top of the podium, for the first time in Qatar since 2014.

Over 50,000 fans thronged the Lusail International Circuit over the weekend to watch the action. The total footfall figure being 50,321 (Pre-Weekend: 10,526; Saturday: 17,230; and Sunday: 22,565).

Applauding the successful hosting, al-Mannai, said: "As we conclude the MotoGP weekend at LIC, we are truly delighted to have hosted world-class motorsport action for fans in Qatar and the region. The success of this event further cements Qatar's position as a premier destination for international sporting competitions. With the track brimming with action from feeder series to the main Grand Prix, hosting such events not only builds on Qatar's rich sporting legacy but also inspires future generations. Our goal is to continue establishing LIC as one of the world's most recognisable



motorsports venues, and we look forward to welcoming more international events throughout the year."

Abdulaziz Ali al-Mohannadi added: "We are immensely proud to have hosted another successful edition of Mo-

toGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar. The level of competition we witnessed this weekend has been extraordinary, with some of the closest finishes in recent memory. Our state-of-the-art facilities have once again provided the per-

fect stage for these incredible riders to showcase their talents. The enthusiasm from fans has been overwhelming, and we're delighted to have delivered an unforgettable experience both on and off the track."

Qatar MotoGP results

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 41:29.186, 2. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) at 4.535, 3. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 6.495, 4. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 6.668, 5. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 7.484, 6. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 9.764, 7. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 12.895, 8. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 14.219, 9. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 14.368, 10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 15.137, 11. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 17.459, 12. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 17.563, 13. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 17.632, 14. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 17.800*, 15. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 18.758, 16. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 26.340, 17. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 26.925, 18. Somkiat Chantra (THA/Honda-LCR) 38.186

***penalised 16 seconds for tyre pressure Did not finish:** Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac), Joan Mir (ESP/Honda), Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha-Pramac), Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia)

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS:

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 123 pts, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 106, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 97, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 78, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 48, 6. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 38, 7. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 32, 8. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 30, 9. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 29, 10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 26

QATAR DRIVERS SHINE AT JORDAN BAJA



Qatari drivers once again showcased their prowess at the Jordan Baja, with Abdulaziz al-Kuwari securing the victory in the Challenger category while placing himself second overall. Al-Kuwari and his Spanish navigator Oriol Mena, in their Taurus T3 Max, finished a mere 11 seconds behind the overall winner Juan Cruz Yacopini of Argentina and collected maximum points in the FIA Middle East Baja Cup. Another Qatari driver, Khalifa Saleh al-Attiyah, was placed second in Challenger and second in the Middle East Baja Cup while finishing third overall. Beyond the front-runners, Ahmed al-Kuwari came third in the Middle East Baja Cup, Nouef al-Sowaidi fourth while Mohammed al-Harqan finished in fifth position, posting strong results for Qatar in the Middle East Baja Cup. In the SSV category, Qatar's Mohammed al-Attiyah secured a podium finish in the ME Cup standings. The Stock class saw Abdullah al-Rabban securing the victory, while Mohammed al-Meer added another trophy to the Qatari haul, finishing third.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Mumbai clinch thriller to end DC winning streak

KARUN NAIR'S SUPERB 89 GOES IN VAIN FOR DELHI CAPITALS

AFP
New Delhi

Spinner Karn Sharma returned figures of 3-36 as Mumbai Indians pulled off a stunning 12-run IPL win yesterday to end Delhi Capitals' dominant run this season.

Chasing 206 for victory, Delhi looked to be cruising at 135-2 when Karun Nair departed on 89 and leg-spinner Karn soon triggered a collapse to bowl out the hosts for 193 in their home Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

It was Delhi's first defeat after four wins in this edition of the T20 tournament. Five-time champions Mumbai got back to winning ways with just their second victory in six matches.

Needing 23 runs off the last 12 balls, Ashutosh Sharma raised hopes with two boundaries off Jasprit Bumrah but the last three balls of the 19th over threw up three run-outs as Mumbai celebrated.

The win dampened the return of Delhi's Nair, who hit a valiant knock off 40 balls in his first IPL match after three years.

Nair, 33, came in as an impact substitute with Delhi on 0-1 after Jake Fraser-McGurk fell to the first ball of the team's chase.

Nair, who hit an unbeaten 303 against England in a home Test in 2016 but soon lost favour with the selectors, reached his fifty – first after seven years in IPL – off 22 balls to set up the chase in a stand off 119 with Abhishek Porel.

Karn, coming in as impact player, broke the stand as he cut



Delhi Capitals' Karun Nair (right) is clean bowled by Mumbai Indians' Mitchell Santner as wicketkeeper Ryan Rickelton (left) reacts during the IPL match in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

short left-hander Porel's 33-run knock, and soon left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner bowled Nair to hurt Delhi.

Karn dismissed Tristan Stubbs for one and then caught and bowled KL Rahul for 15 as Delhi lost their way.

Earlier, Tilak Varma smashed 59 and put on a key stand with Naman Dhir, who hit an unbeaten 38, to help Mumbai reach 205-5.

South African left-hander Ryan Rickelton, who hit 41, put on a brisk opening stand with fellow opener Rohit Sharma to set

the pace. Rohit made 18 but failed to convert his start after being trapped lbw off Vipraj Nigam, and extend his batting flop in this season of the IPL. He has 56 runs from five matches.

Rickelton, a wicketkeeper-batsman, kept up the runs with Suryakumar Yadav, who hit 40 off 28 balls, before being bowled by left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

Suryakumar's entry made Varma change gears as he went after the bowling as the two hammered 60 runs.

Kuldeep claimed his second wicket to send back Suryakumar and Nigam dismissed skipper Hardik Pandya in the next over but the runs kept coming.

The left-handed Varma, who departed in the last over, then took the total past 200 with the help of Dhir.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 205 for 5 (Tilak 59, Rickelton 41, Kuldeep 2-23) **beat Delhi Capitals 193** (Nair 89, Porel 33, Karn 3-36) **by 12 runs**

SAM BILLINGS SHINES AS LAHORE HAMMER QUETTA



Lahore Qalandars' English wicketkeeper Sam Billings (left) reacts as Quetta Gladiators' South African batsman Rilee Rossouw is clean bowled by Bangladeshi bowler Rishad Hossain (not pictured) during the PSL match at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. Batting first, Lahore Qalandars scored 219/6 in 20 overs with Billings smashing 50 not out off 19 deliveries with four 4s and as many 6s. In reply, Quetta Gladiators were bowled out for 140 off 16.2 overs. Qalandars won by 79 runs. (AFP)

ANNOUNCEMENT

ICC creates fund for displaced Afghanistan women cricketers

Reuters
Dubai

Afghanistan's exiled women cricketers received a major boost yesterday with the game's governing body announcing a fund and task force to support them.

Afghanistan had 25 contracted women cricketers in 2020, most of whom have resettled in Australia with humanitarian visas due to restrictions at home under the hard-line Taliban government.

The International Cricket Council said after its board meeting in Harare that it had joined with the cricket boards of India, England and Australia to sustain their careers.

"As part of the initiative, the ICC will establish a dedicated fund to provide direct monetary assistance, ensuring these cricketers have the resources they need to continue pursuing the game they love," it said in a statement, with-



out giving any financial details. Australia and England have ruled out bilateral cricket with Afghanistan over the women's rights issue and play them only in ICC events like World Cups and Champions Trophy.

"We are deeply committed to fostering inclusivity and ensuring every cricketer has the opportunity to shine, regardless of their circumstances," ICC chairman Jay Shah said.

"In collaboration with our valued partners, we are proud to launch this task force and support fund to ensure displaced Afghan women cricketers can continue their journey in the sport."

BOTTOMLINE

Kohli's landmark fifty powers Royal Challengers Bengaluru to massive win

AFP
Jaipur, India

Batting great Virat Kohli struck his 100th half-century in T20 cricket to steer Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a thumping nine-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals yesterday.

England's Phil Salt set up Bengaluru's chase of 174 with his 33-ball 65 before fellow opener Kohli took charge to anchor the chase with an unbeaten 62 at Rajasthan's home in Jaipur.

The in-form Kohli smashed his third half-ton of this season and 66th in the T20 tournament to go level with Australia's David Warner.

Warner leads the fifty count in the T20 format with 108 half-centuries and Kohli second with 100 in 401 matches. Paki-

stan's Babar Azam is third with 90. Salt set the tone of chase by clubbing Rajasthan pace bowler and England teammate Jofra Archer for a four and a six in the opening over.

Salt hit a 28-ball fifty and put on 92 with Kohli before drilling spinner Kumar Kartikeya to Yashasvi Jaiswal at mid-wicket, but the wicket was only a blip in the chase. Kohli then shared an unbeaten stand of 83 with left-hander Devdutt Padikkal, who hit 40, to steer the team home with 15 balls to spare.

It is their fourth win in six matches and sends them into the top four of the 10-team table. Inaugural champions Rajasthan have slumped to their fourth defeat in six outings.

Rajasthan opener Jaiswal top-scored with 75 to guide the team to 173-4 after being invited to bat first.

The left-handed Jaiswal started cau-

tiously on a sluggish pitch but kept up the flow of runs with regular boundaries. He added 49 for the first wicket with fellow opener Sanju Samson and then 56 with Riyan Parag, who hit 30. Bengaluru spinner Krunal Pandya struck first when he got Samson stumped for 15 on a delivery that kept low outside the off stump.

Yash Dayal cut short Parag's knock and Bengaluru had their tails up when Australia pace bowler Josh Hazlewood sent back Jaiswal in the 16th over.

Dhruv Jurel stood firm and after an early reprieve, when Kohli dropped him at long-off, hit back with a brisk 35 not out to help the team finish strongly.

BRIEF SCORES
Royal Challengers Bengaluru 175 for 1 (Salt 65, Kohli 62*) **beat Rajasthan Royals** (Jaiswal 75, Jurel 35*) **by 9 wickets**



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli in action during an IPL match against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur, India, yesterday. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

Ooredoo Qatar Major Premier Padel 2025 tournament set for kick-off today

QNA
Doha

Hosted by Qatar Tennis, Squash and Badminton Federation (QTSBF), the main rounds of the Ooredoo Qatar Major Premier Padel 2025 is scheduled to run from April 14-19, featuring the world's top male and female players.

The tournament will be held at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, with the participation of 48 men's teams and 40 women's teams, on six specially equipped courts.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency (QNA), QTSBF Secretary-General Tariq Zainal, confirmed the completion of all necessary preparations for the competitions today, noting that all participating teams in both categories have arrived in Doha.

Zainal said that all committees working on the tournament have completed their preparations, in coordination with all sponsors, to reach full readiness and provide all the requirements for the tournament's success.



A view of the centre court at the iconic Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex where the tournament will be held from Apr 14-19.

ment's success. He noted the great turnout of players participating in the tournament, which reflects their confidence in the organisational level provided by Doha through its hosting of major international tournaments.

The secretary-general pointed

out that the Qatar Tennis Federation has previously successfully hosted the World Padel Championship on its courts, and the tournament held in Qatar in 2021 was the strongest and most prominent among all the padel tournaments held since then.

The Ooredoo Qatar Major Premier Padel 2025 will be the third major tournament hosted by Qatar Tennis Federation, following the successful hosting of the Qatar TotalEnergies Women's Open and the recently concluded Qatar ExxonMobil Men's Open.

World's top players

The tournament will feature the world's top padel stars, with Spain's Arturo Coello and Argentina's Agustin Tapia posing the biggest challenge for all competitors as the world's top ranked players.

The women's ranking is led by Spain's Ariana Sanchez and Paula Jose Maria.

For his part, Executive Director of QTSBF Saad al-Mohannadi said that creativity and excellence on the global sports map will continue this week with the hosting of the Ooredoo Qatar Major Premier Padel 2025, following the great success achieved after the hosting of the Qatar TotalEnergies Open for women's tennis and the Qatar ExxonMobil Open for men.

Al-Mohannadi noted Qatar's rapid return to global events with



The Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation yesterday announced the signing of a partnership agreement with Aspetar, the orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital in Doha, to join the list of official sponsors of the Ooredoo Qatar Padel Grand Prix 2025, which will start today and continue until April 19 at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex. The agreement was signed by Tariq Zainal, Secretary-General of QTSBF, and Khalid Ali al-Mawlawi, Acting Director General of Aspetar, in the presence of officials from both sides.

the launch of the padel tournament, which will see the participation of 48 men's teams and 40 women's teams.

TENNIS

Alcaraz wins his first Monte Carlo Masters trophy

'It's been a really difficult week with a lot of difficult situations'

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Carlos Alcaraz made the best possible start to his preparations for the defence of his French Open title, burning past the Italian Lorenzo Musetti in three sets yesterday to win his first Monte Carlo Masters.

The 21-year-old Spaniard, already a four-time Grand Slam winner, dropped the opening set but came back hard to take the next two at the cost of a single game as he cleaned up 3-6, 6-1, 6-0, albeit helped by a limping Musetti.

It marks a sixth Masters title for Alcaraz and is his most prestigious title since winning Wimbledon last year.

It was also his first win on clay since winning the French Open last season, although in mitigation he only had one tournament after that when he missed out on gold at the Paris Olympics.

"I'm just really happy to have won Monte Carlo for the first time," said Alcaraz who lost in his first match on his only previous appearance at the tournament in 2022.

"It's been a really difficult week with a lot of difficult situations.

"I'm really proud of myself, how I've dealt with everything. It's been a really difficult month for me on the court and outside.

"Coming here and seeing how the whole hard work has paid off, I'm really happy."

Alcaraz chose not to expand on his difficulties but they may be eased partly by this win which will lift him up to No 2 in the world rankings, ahead of Alexander Zverev but still behind the



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (centre) holds the trophy with his teammates after winning against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in the Monte Carlo ATP Masters final yesterday. (AFP)

suspended Jannik Sinner. However, this was no easy win in chilly conditions against a man playing in his first Masters 1000 final after taking down two top 10 players, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Alex de Minaur, to get there.

Musetti dropped his opening service but broke back straight away and took the fight to Alcaraz who, in spite of the odd blissful winner, appeared at odds with his game, making six unforced errors.

The Spaniard bounced back, however, lifting his game as he galloped through the second set 6-1.

That trend continued as Mu-

setti began to have problems with his right leg, receiving treatment when he was 0-3 in the decider.

He battled on but could not live with the intensity or physicality of Alcaraz's game.

"It is not the way I would have wanted to win a match," said Alcaraz.

"Lorenzo's been through a really tough week, long and intense matches.

"I feel sorry for him, one of the best results he has done. To end like this is not easy. Hopefully it's not serious and he's 100 percent soon."

Some consolation for Musetti is a rise to No 11 in the rankings

and the promise of more to come on the clay as the season gets underway.

"It was probably one of my best tournaments so far," said Musetti who took bronze at last year's Olympics behind Alcaraz and gold medalist Novak Djokovic.

"I'm disappointed I couldn't finish the match in the best way, for the crowd.

"You deserve it so I will keep going and try and come back for revenge," he added.

Both Alcaraz and Musetti will continue their clay court preparations at the Barcelona Open next week in the build-up to the French Open at the end of May.

F1/BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX

McLaren's Piastri powers to 'mega' win



McLaren's Oscar Piastri celebrates on the podium after winning the Bahrain Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit, Sakhir. (Reuters)

AFP
Sakhir, Bahrain

Oscar Piastri powered to victory at the Bahrain Grand Prix yesterday, coasting clear from George Russell's Mercedes to maintain McLaren's strong start to the season.

Pole-sitter Piastri kept his composure in an incident-packed race to give the Bahraini-backed McLaren team a first ever win at the 21st attempt in a race at their 'second home'.

Piastri, who also won in China last month, crossed the line 15.499sec clear of Mercedes' George Russell, who was under investigation for an issue with the DRS (drag reduction system), meaning he could take a five-second penalty.

Lando Norris in the other McLaren took third while Max Verstappen's trying weekend at the desert track ended with the four-time world champion only managing sixth place.

Norris, the winner of the season opener in Melbourne, leads the drivers' standings on 77 points, with Piastri overtaking Verstappen into second ahead of next weekend's race in Jeddah.

"That should be one hell of a party tonight. Mega weekend everyone. That was pretty damn fun," Piastri said after marking his 50th start in perfect style.

"I'm proud to have done it here in Bahrain as well. It's obviously a very important race for us given our owners and it's never been a track that has been kind to us so it's nice to finally have that first win for the team here," he added.

Taking the chequered flag under floodlights on a balmy yesterday evening in the Gulf kingdom was just reward after a weekend he had dominated, both in practice and in qualifying.

Norris, who started in sixth and picked up a five-second time penalty for being out of position on the grid, commented: "It was a tough race. I made too many mistakes with the overtakes and be-

ing out of position. It was a messy race from me and I'm disappointed not to bring home a one-two for McLaren because that would have been lovely at home, it's a tough one but still a few positives."

Charles Leclerc came in fourth with his Ferrari teammate Lewis Hamilton fifth ahead of Verstappen and Pierre Gasly earned Alpine's first points of the year at the fourth attempt.

Rounding out the top 10 were Esteban Ocon (Haas), recovering from a big smash in qualifying, Yuki Tsunoda in the second Red Bull, and Ocon's teammate Oliver Bearman.

As the sun dipped down over the Gulf the start lights went out on the fourth race of the season with Piastri roaring off from pole and getting his gloves off early to fend off Russell's Mercedes to turn one.

Norris got a dream getaway, jumping from sixth to third to muscle back into contention after a disappointing qualifying.

The anticipated news then arrived from the stewards about his start sanction and he was quickly 'boxed' to serve the penalty in the pits. He resumed 14th with a fifth of the 57-lap race completed.

After pitting, Piastri emerged with Ferrari duo Leclerc and Hamilton in front of him, as Norris scythed his way through the pack up into sixth.

The Australian was soon back in front when the two Ferraris were summoned in for a change of footwear.

Verstappen, winner in Japan last weekend, has not cut a contented figure in Bahrain, grumbling to his pitlane: "I can't even brake anymore, it's ridiculous."

At the halfway point Piastri led from Russell, with Leclerc nipping past Norris into third.

With the safety car then deployed to pick up debris at turn three Piastri took the opportunity to dive into the pits for a 'free' stop, followed by his closest pursuers.

The restart was manic, with mayhem behind Piastri as Norris muscled past Hamilton who pointed out "Lando passed me off the track?"

Japan book BJK Cup finals spot with win over Canada

Brisbane: Japan secured a second consecutive Billie Jean King Cup finals appearance with their 2-1 win over 2023 champions Canada thanks to Ena Shibahara and Shuko Aoyama's 6-3 5-7 6-2 win over Kayla Cross and Rebecca Marino in the qualifying doubles decider yesterday. Shibahara and Aoyama powered through the opening set 6-3, breaking twice for a quick 3-0 lead. Cross and Marino hit back in the second, edging it 7-5 to level the match, before the Japanese pair regained control

in the third. Canada's 18-year-old Victoria Mboko edged Japan's Ena Shibahara 6-4 6-7(8) 7-5 in a marathon opening clash. Mboko fired eight aces to take the opening set after racing to a 2-0 lead. In the second, Shibahara fought back, saving three match points in the tiebreak before levelling the contest. Mboko trailed early in the decider but recovered to break for 4-4, and after squandering three more match points, sealed victory with a forehand winner on her seventh. Japanese number one Moyuka

Uchijima breezed past Marina Stakusic 6-3 6-3 in one hour and 15 minutes to level 1-1 and force the doubles decider. Uchijima, ranked 77 places higher, won 13 straight points to take the opening set in a little over 30 minutes with a delicate dropshot. After Stakusic saved two break points at the start of the second, Uchijima pounced for a 4-2 lead and sealed victory.

US beat Slovakia 2-1
Bernarda Pera held her nerve to defeat Slovakian No. 1 Rebecca

Sramkova yesterday afternoon and secure the USA the last remaining spot at September's Billie Jean Cup at Gainbridge Finals in Shenzhen. After just shy of two hours on court, Sramkova tugged a backhand into the tramlines to prompt jubilant scenes on the visitors' bench in Bratislava's Peugeot Arena. The 7-6(2) 7-5 win gives Lindsay Davenport's inexperienced side an unassailable 2-0 lead in the weekend's final Group C tie, booking them a place at Shenzhen showpiece.

FOCUS

Qatar beat Iraq in final, win 4th International Camel Handball Championship

QATAR WON THE TOP PRIZE OF \$10,000 WHILE RUNNERS-UP IRAQ GOT RICHER BY \$9,000

By Sports Reporter

Libsear Heritage Village, Al Shahania

Hosts Qatar stunned Iraq 15-12 to win the 4th International Camel Handball Championship in fine style yesterday.

This was Qatar's second title win in four editions.

Qatar won the top prize of \$10,000 while runners-up Iraq got richer by \$9,000. Morocco finished in third place and won \$6,000. Earlier in the day, Morocco claimed third place after their win over Somalia (15-8) who finished in fourth spot.

Playing smart tactics, Qatar were tied 6-6 at the end of the first half and then cranked up pressure in the second to seal a historic win in front of a boisterous crowd. Playing under lights, the home team celebrated their win in jubilant fashion after the final whistle.

Earlier in the day, Qatar beat Morocco in the semi-finals 17-6 in a one-sided game. On Saturday, Qatar had shocked Australia 11-7 to reach the semi-finals.

President of Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR) Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Sheikh al-Kuwari and AUCR Secretary-General Dr Hazam al-Maqarhi congratulated the team on their 'brilliant performance'.

Following the final, the AUCR president and Vice-Chairman of the Organising Committee, crowned the winners.

President of Qatar Handball Association Ahmed Mohammed al-Shaabi was also present during the final day's proceedings. The ceremony was also attended by Hussein Mustafa Fathi, Chairman of the Ethics Committee of the



President of Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR) Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Sheikh al-Kuwari and AUCR Secretary-General Dr Hazam al-Maqarhi were joined by President of Qatar Handball Association Ahmed Mohammed al-Shaabi at the prize distribution ceremony of the 4th International Camel Handball Championship in Libsear Heritage Village, Al Shahania, yesterday.



International Handball Federation. A colourful prize distribution ceremony was marked by a short closing ceremony attended by all participating teams.

Qatar hosted a total of 16 teams

over three days in the championship. The participating countries from five continents included: the United States, Australia, Colombia, Bulgaria, Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Djibouti, Palestine, Libya, Jordan, Mauritania, Lebanon, Iraq, Tunisia, Somalia and hosts Qatar.

The final was officiated by a team consisting of Sultan al-Musaifari as first referee and Saad al-Dosari as line referee and Abdul Aziz as second line referee.

AUCR president al-Kuwari said yesterday: "The fourth edition of the championship was exceptional, and all teams performed brilliantly, from the beginning to the final match. We congratulate the winners and wish all teams the best of luck in future editions, God willing."

He added: "The fourth edi-

tion was different, with distinguished participation from countries around the world. This is the greatest evidence of the tournament's tremendous success in previous editions, which has given it a global standing. The sport of camel handball has witnessed great interest in recent times, and this tournament has contributed significantly to its spread. The number of participants is expected to increase in the next edition."

LIST OF AWARDS

Best Player: John Arthur Elliott (Australia national team)

Best Goalkeeper: Araibi Fadlawi (Iraq national team)

Top Scorer: Issa Takow (Somalia national team)

Fair Play Award: Bulgaria national team



Qatar camel handball squad celebrate after their win over Morocco in the semi-finals yesterday.



FROM LEFT: Top scorer: Issa Takow (Somalia national team); Best Goalkeeper: Araibi Fadlawi (Iraq national team) and Best Player: John Arthur Elliott. BOTTOM: Fair Play Award: Bulgaria national team.



FOOTBALL

Liverpool inch closer to PL title, Newcastle beat United

AFP

London

Liverpool are within touching distance of the Premier League title after Virgil van Dijk sealed a dramatic 2-1 win over West Ham, while Newcastle climbed into the top four with a 4-1 thrashing of Manchester United yesterday.

Luis Diaz's first-half strike at Anfield was cancelled out by Andrew Robertson's late own goal, but Van Dijk headed Liverpool's winner in the closing moments.

Arne Slot's side are 13 points clear of second-placed Arsenal with six games left.

The Reds can be crowned champions on April 20, if they win at Leicester and Arsenal lose at Ipswich.

Even if Liverpool don't seal the title then, it seems only a matter of time before they clinch a record-equalling 20th English crown.

After losing for only the second time in the league this season last weekend, 3-2 to Fulham at Craven Cottage, Liverpool returned to winning ways, despite an underwhelming performance, thanks to goalkeeper Alisson Becker.

"Alisson probably had his best game of the season today," said Slot. "(The winner) was a relief because to me it felt after West Ham scored and the way the second half went, it was maybe more that you could expect them scoring."

Mohamed Salah set a new Premier League record with his 45th goal or assist of the campaign, the most ever in a 38-game season, when he teed up Diaz to open the scoring on 18 minutes. Alisson twice denied Mohammed Kudus and saved a one-on-one from Jarrod Bowen, but was beaten by his own man four minutes from time.

Van Dijk made a hash of clearing Aaron Wan-Bissaka's cross, deflecting it into his own net off Robertson. Reds captain Van Dijk made amends three minutes later, rising to head in Alexis Mac Allister's corner as Liverpool closed in just a second league title since 1990.

Maggies' momentum

Newcastle shrugged off the absence of manager Eddie Howe, who was admitted to hospi-



Liverpool's Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk (centre) celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the English Premier League match against West Ham United at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. (AFP)

tal on Friday due to illness, with a second half demolition of struggling United at St James' Park. Alejandro Garnacho had cancelled out Sandro Tonali's opener against the run of play to ensure parity for the visitors at half-time.

But Harvey Barnes turned in Jacob Murphy's cross four minutes into the second period to spark a United collapse.

Barnes galloped through the Red Devils defence to fire his second into the top corner just after the hour mark.

Ruben Amorim had left out under-fire goalkeeper Andre Onana after two errors in Thursday's 2-2 Europa League draw at Lyon followed a war of words with former United midfielder Nemanja Matic.

Stand-in Altay Bayindir did his case for future selection no favours for the fourth goal as his clearance went straight to Joelinton, who headed down for Bruno Guimaraes to slot home.

Newcastle's fifth consecutive win takes them to within one point of third-placed Nottingham Forest, with a game in hand. United slip to 14th.

Postecoglou woe

Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou suffered more misery in a 4-2 defeat at Wolves yesterday. Wolves took the lead in the second minute when Rayan Ait-Nouri volleyed from the edge of the area. Tottenham conceded a second goal in calamitous fashion in the 38th minute as keeper Guglielmo Vicario pushed a cross into Djed Spence's face and the ball bounced off his team-mate into the net. Mathys Tel converted Brennan Johnson's 59th-minute cross to give Tottenham hope, but five minutes later Wolves striker Jorgen Strand Larsen tapped in after Cristian Romero was robbed by Ait-Nouri.

Richarlison bundled home for Tottenham in the 85th minute, only for Matheus Cunha to net a minute later after Lucas Bergvall carelessly lost possession. Tottenham are languishing in 15th place - which would equal their worst finish since 1993-94 - after a wretched display that heaped further pressure on Postecoglou. Wolves are 14 points clear of third-bottom Ipswich, who look destined for relegation despite holding Chelsea to a 2-2 draw at Stamford Bridge.

SPOTLIGHT

Mbappe sent off as Real beat Alaves 1-0

AFP

Vitoria, Spain

Real Madrid superstar Kylian Mbappe was sent off for an ugly lunge but his side still beat Alaves behind Barcelona at the top of La Liga.

Mbappe's dismissal put his teammates under pressure but Alaves were also reduced to 10 players in the second half when Manu Sanchez hacked down Vinicius Junior.

Eduardo Camavinga's first-half curling effort from the edge of the box was enough to split the teams as Madrid produced a gritty display to match Barcelona's single-goal victory over Leganes on Saturday.

"It was a hard game, tricky at first because of how intense our opponents were, and then after Kylian's red card the team pulled together," Real Madrid's Dani Ceballos told his club's television channel. Assistant coach Davide Ancelotti took the place of his father Carlo Ancelotti, who was suspended, in the Madrid dug-out.

"The win gives us confidence, we knew it wouldn't be easy and what happened in the game didn't make it easy," said Davide Ancelotti after the game.

"I haven't spoken with (Mbappe) after the game, he's not a violent guy and he said sorry, he realised the error he made, it's clearly a red card and he paid the price.

"I'm not justifying it, but it happened after he was fouled several times in a row."

Los Blancos began with Vinicius on the bench, with the Brazilian's inconsistent form and the upcoming Champions League battle against Arsenal in mind.

Carlo Ancelotti had called for his team to defend better after conceding 11 goals in the last four games, including the painful 3-0 quarter-final first-leg defeat to

the Gunners on Tuesday. That call may have fed into Mbappe's wild foul on Antonio Blanco which caused the striker's dismissal.

By then Madrid had taken the lead in a hotly-contested clash at Alaves' Mendizorrosa stadium.

The visitors appealed for a penalty early on when Arda Guler and goalkeeper Jesus Owono collided.

Raul Asencio's header hit Joan Jordan and bounced in but the goal was ruled out for an Antonio Rudiger foul on Owono.

Eventually, Camavinga curled home from the edge of the box after being teed up by Fede Valverde to send the Spanish champions ahead on 34 minutes.

Mbappe's red card four minutes later was a set-back for Madrid, who came under pressure in the second half.

'Together we are stronger'

Los Blancos fought off the hosts and brought on Vinicius and Jude Bellingham, who had also been given a rest.

Alaves were reduced to 10 men when Vinicius broke loose and Sanchez hacked him down with a poor challenge, which might have merited a red card even if the defender was not the last man.

That made life easier for Madrid in the final stages and they came closer to scoring a second than Alaves did to an equaliser. Valverde whistled a long-range effort inches wide of the top corner, while Madrid were also able to bring on midfielder Ceballos for a few minutes as he returns from injury.

The clean sheet will be a morale boost for Los Blancos, who can turn their attention to Arsenal's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday.

"The only chance that we have is (knowing that) together we are stronger," added Ceballos.

"Thanks to the fans for their continuous support, we need you more than ever."

Defeat left Alaves 17th, one point above the relegation zone.