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Sheikh Joaan meets Bangladesh Olympic Association president and WHOOP CEO

Doha: HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), met with General Wakeruz-Zaman, President of the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA), who is currently visiting Doha. The meeting focused on exploring ways to strengthen bilateral sports co-operation and promote the exchange of expertise between both committees in the period ahead.

The two sides discussed the ongoing progress of the Olympic movement in Bangladesh and the country's growing engagement at the continental level, reflecting its broader aspirations to cement a stronger presence on the Asian sports stage. HE Sheikh Joaan reaffirmed the QOC's commitment to supporting National Olympic Committees across Asia and globally through knowledge exchange and collaborative initiatives aimed at fostering sustainable sports development and the advancement of the Olympic Movement.

HE Sheikh Joaan also met Will Ahmed, Founder and CEO of WHOOP, for a forward-looking discussion on the role of innovation and wearable technology in enhancing athlete readiness and optimising competitive performance.

The meeting served as a platform to exchange insights on emerging trends in sports science, with a particular focus on smart monitoring tools and biometric data analysis. Discussions highlighted how these technologies are being used to improve recovery strategies, manage physical stress, and elevate sleep quality, all essential components of sustainable high-performance in elite sport.

This exchange reflects the QOC's ongoing commitment to adopting global best practices in innovation and sports technology, and to leveraging data-driven knowledge to empower athletes and elevate national sports performance.



FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Attiyah coasts to Rally Saudi win

Qatari ace claims a record-breaking 89th career MERC rally win



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera celebrate after winning the Rally Saudi Arabia in Jeddah yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera secured a comfortable victory at the inaugural Jeddah-based Rally Saudi Arabia yesterday. The Qatari ace won five of the day's six gravel stages to the north of the Red Sea city to earn a record-breaking 89th career MERC rally win, as he bids for a 20th FIA Middle East Rally Championship title.

His Autotek Skoda Fabia RS suffered one time-consuming puncture on the second stage of the final day but al-Attiyah hit back to win his third successive MERC event with Carrera by 1min 37.4sec. Al-Attiyah said: "It was nice to win the rally. But the good thing was that we had the rally back here in Saudi Arabia. I cannot wait for the next one in November. I want to do it in a Rally1 car!"

Finn Juho Hanninen and his co-driver Janni Hussi entered the event in a Toyota Yaris for test and research purposes on behalf of the Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT. But the duo won two stages and finished in a comfortable second position, although they were not registered for MERC points.

Hanninen added: "It was okay. We saw all the stages and we learned a lot. From that side it was a good journey. Nasser is the king of the Middle East. I knew that before coming here. The result was not that important. We learned so many things. It's nice to be second after Nasser. It was nice to see him again because we

competed together many years ago."

Saudi driver Rakan al-Rashed teamed up with Hugo Magalhees to finish on the final step of the podium with his Toyota and pick up valuable points in his quest to hunt down al-Attiyah with three rounds of the regional series still to run.

Qatar's Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and his Irish teammate Lorcan Moore moved briefly into third overall during the final morning before stopping to change a flat tyre mid-stage. That time loss pushed them back to fourth, a position they held to the finish to stay ahead of Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi and his British co-driver Ross Whittock. Three punctures had cost al-Rawahi dearly on day one.

Hamza Bakhshab switched from the cross-country discipline to tackle his first special stage rally in a Can-Am Maverick R and the Saudi finished sixth with Poland's Macin Pasek reading his pace notes.

Nasser Khalifa al-Aya is chasing glory in this year's new FIA MERC Master Driver category and the Qatari guided his Ford Fiesta to seventh and a useful haul of championship points. Oman's Abdullah al-Zubair dominated the MERC2 category from the start in his Subaru Impreza and moved firmly into title contention against fellow countryman Zakariya al-Aamri. Bassel Abu Hamdan returned to action after a lengthy lay-off to take ninth overall and Qatar's Rashed al-Mohannadi rounded off the top 10 in his Peugeot 208 and won the MERC4 category.

Yesterday's morning's action centred around the Al-Ghulah (11.70km), Asfan

(26.55km) and Thahban (8.46km) stages. All 22 starters began the opening stage, with Qatar's Saad al-Harwan and Mohammed al-Marri rejoining at the rear of the field after day one retirements. Al-Attiyah had the bit between his teeth to extend his advantage over Hanninen to 41.8 seconds with the fastest time. Al-Kuwari overhauled al-Rashed to take third place with the second fastest time but Joanna Hasoun retired with tyre issues after a puncture.

A puncture threatened to derail al-Attiyah's challenge in the second special, although the Qatari drove to the finish and dropped only 34.9 seconds to Hanninen, as the Finn reduced the lead to just 6.9 seconds.

Al-Rashed regained third place when al-Kuwari dropped three minutes with a puncture. Both Jassim al-Muqahwi and Mohammed al-Shorafa retired in the early part of the special and Saad al-Harwan completed the stage and was then sidelined.

The first run through the Thahban stage rounded off the morning's action and al-Attiyah was back in business with the fastest time. That enabled him to reach the service point in Jeddah with a lead of 23.6 seconds over Hanninen. Al-Attiyah said: "We enjoy a lot these three stages. We had a flat tyre from the beginning of stage eight. But we decided to push and not stop. If you change (the tyre) you lose the rally. There was damage to the rear right but we didn't lose too much time."

Al-Attiyah claimed the bonus points for winning the final Power Stage and secured a comfortable win to extend his lead in the Drivers' Championship.

FOOTBALL

Race for Amir Cup glory begins with round of 16 matches

QNA
Doha

The Round of 16 match of the 53rd edition of the Amir Cup will kick off today, and continue through next Wednesday, as teams compete for spots in the quarter-finals.

The draw for this stage divided the 16 teams into two tiers. The first tier includes the top eight teams from the league, while the second tier consists of teams that ranked 9th to 12th in the league, along with four clubs that advanced from the preliminary round, which involved eight Second Division sides.

In today's fixtures, Al Shahania take on Mesaimeer at Al Thumama Stadium, while Al Ahli face Qatar SC at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Al Shahania will aim to make a strong showing in the Amir Cup. Led by Spanish coach Jose Murcia, the team will rely on key players such as Dutch striker Pelle Van Amersfoort, who netted 13 league goals. Murcia confirmed his team's readiness to face Mesaimeer, adding that he is looking forward to continuing to achieve positive results to advance in the tournament, and that all the squad players are aware of the importance of the tournament and the difficulty of the upcoming match.

Mesaimeer, for their part, are looking to continue their solid form after defeating Al Markhiya 2-1 in the preliminary round. They also finished their Second Division campaign strongly, defeating Al Kharaitiyat 4-0 to end the season in seventh place with 12 points.

Mesaimeer coach Rashteh noted the difficulty of the match, while

affirming his team's readiness to face the challenge. Rashteh explained that his team's ambition is to continue its journey and reach the advanced stages, noting that this requires his players to exert maximum effort and remain focused throughout the match while avoiding making mistakes, especially defensively.

In the second match, Al Ahli will seek to build on a strong domestic season, having finished fourth in the league with 35 points. Croatian coach Igor Biscan will look to extend the club's positive momentum, counting on star players like Julian Draxler.

Alhi coach Biscan said: "We're very happy to be part of the Amir Cup. We're looking forward to facing Qatar SC — a strong and experienced team. We lost our last match, so we must show a different performance in this important tournament."

He added: "The match against Qatar SC is like a final for us. We have to give everything. Ahli hasn't reached the later stages in recent years, but we're motivated and fully focused this time. Yes, we lost a tough Qatar Cup semi-final.

"We played well but must be sharper, avoid mistakes, and be more practical. We couldn't make changes last season due to squad issues, but now we must defend well and not concede — that's key in knockout matches."

Qatar SC, who were runners-up in last season's Amir Cup after narrowly losing the final to Al Sadd, hope to go far this year despite finishing 10th in the league with 23 points. Moroccan coach Youssef Safri will turn to standout talents like Percy Tau and Ahmed Abdel Kader.



Al Ahli's coach Igor Biscan speaks at a press conference yesterday.

HORSE RACING

Kab Ghazal delivers commanding performance to clinch Asherij Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Kab Ghazal delivered a commanding performance in the Asherij Cup, a Local Purebred Arabian Handicap for fillies and mares over 1200m at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The seven-year-old mare, owned by Sharq Stud and trained by Mohd Ahmed Mohd Hasan al-Sulaiti, tracked the leader throughout before unleashing an impressive turn of foot in the home straight.

With Rashid Ali al-Marri in the saddle, she surged ahead to win comfortably by a length and a quarter. Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Racing Manager Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi crowned the winners.

In the penultimate race, Suheal Qatar stormed to win in the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (55-80) with an identical

margin under Youssef Lachhab, while Al Mustafiz with Lukas Delozier in the saddle topped the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (55-80) with a huge 10-length triumph.

Earlier, trainer Jassim al-Ghazali completed a double, while jockey Marco Casamento rode his third winner of the day as Al-Yaseen Zakhir triumphed in the Local Purebred Arabian Novice Plate.

They tasted their first win in day's opener when Little Heron claimed the Thoroughbred Handicap (45-65) title.

Casamento also guided Harba Alseej to win in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate.

In the Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80), Mohammed Ghazali-trained Due To Dance registered a commanding victory by two lengths and a quarter under Fayos Martin Borja.

RESULTS
46th Al Rayyan Race Meeting - Asherij Cup

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1 - Asherij Cup, Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-90)

Kab Ghazal, Mohd Ahmed Mohd Hasan al-Sulaiti, Rashid Ali al-Marri

2 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (55-80)

Suheal Qatar, Hamad Ateeq Mohammed al-Marri, Youssef Lachhab

3 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (60-80)

Al Mustafiz, Julian Smart, Lukas Delozier

4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80)

Due To Dance, Mohammed Ghazali, Fayos Martin Borja

5 - Local Purebred Arabian Novice Plate, 4YO+

Al-Yaseen Zakhir, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento

6 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate

Harba Alseej, Nayef Batal al-Otibi, Marco Casamento

7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (45-65)

Little Heron, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento



Jockey Rashid Ali al-Marri guides Kab Ghazal to victory in the Asherij Cup, a Local Purebred Arabian Handicap for fillies and mares over 1200m at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURE: Juhaim**

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Shepherd, Dayal help RCB to 2-run victory over CSK

BENGALURU PIP CHENNAI IN A HIGH-SCORING IPL CLASH

AFP
Bengaluru, India

An incredible final over from Yash Dayal and Romario Shepherd's late batting blitz helped Royal Challengers Bengaluru scrape past Chennai Super Kings by two runs in an IPL thriller to move top of the table yesterday.

In-form Virat Kohli, who made 62, and fellow opener Jacob Bethell put on 97 runs to lay the foundations of Bengaluru's 213-5 in their home at M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

West Indies' Shepherd boosted the total with his 14-ball 53 - the IPL's second fastest fifty. The quickest 50 is in 13 balls by Yashasvi Jaiswal in 2023.

Chennai's 17-year-old opener Ayush Mhatre attempted to trump the effort as he blasted 94 off 48 balls as part of a 114-run stand with Ravindra Jadeja, who hit 77 not out, but the team finished on 211-5.

Left-arm medium pace bowler Dayal kept his calm in the last over when Chennai needed 15 to win. He sent back skipper MS Dhoni and despite getting hit for six by impact player Shivam Dube off a no-ball, he gave away just 12 runs as Bengaluru moved closer to a play-off spot.

"I felt I should have converted a couple of more shots, and ease the pressure, so I will take the blame for it," said the 43-year-old Dhoni. "Shepherd in the death overs was excellent - whatever we were bowling, he was able to hit it for maximum runs."

Shepherd, who hit six sixes, tore into Khaleel Ahmed in the 19th over to smack 33 runs off the left-arm pace bowler and then



Royal Challengers Bengaluru' Romario Shepherd hits a boundary against Chennai Super Kings during their IPL match in Bengaluru, India, yesterday. **REUTERS**

got the team 21 runs in the 20th. Player of the match Shepherd said: "I had my opportunity today, was waiting for it for a long time. Wanted to give the team a good finish."

Five-time champions Chennai, who are already out of the play-off race, slumped to their ninth defeat in 11 matches to stay rock bottom of the 10-team standings.

Mhatre, who made his IPL debut for Chennai last month, registered his first fifty and went on to hit nine fours and five sixes.

Fast bowler Lungi Ngidi denied Mhatre a century and struck next ball to trap fellow South African Dewald Brevis for a duck, but the

hat-trick was avoided by Dhoni, who made 12.

The left-handed Jadeja stood firm but Bengaluru's disciplined bowling including Dayal's final over heroics steered the team to their eighth win as they hunt for their first IPL title.

England left-hander Bethell scored his first half-century for Bengaluru before Kohli struck his seventh fifty this season, leading the batting chart with 505 runs in 11 innings.

Bethell set the pace in the first over when he hit Ahmed for three successive boundaries and made the most of a dropped catch on 27 to reach his fifty with a four.

Bethell finally fell to Sri Lankan pace bowler Matheesha Pathirana after his 33-ball knock, but Kohli kept up the charge and raised his fifty.

England left-arm pace bowler Sam Curran cut short Kohli's knock after which the bowlers attempted to pull things back with three wickets until Shepherd exploded in the final two overs.

BRIEF SCORES
Royal Challengers Bengaluru 213 for 5 (Kohli 62, Bethell 55, Shepherd 53*, Pathirana 3-36)
beat Chennai Super Kings 211 for 5 (Mhatre 94, Jadeja 77*, Ngidi 3-30) **by 2 runs**

BADMINTON

HOLDERS China ready to face South Korea in Sudirman Cup final

Reuters
Xiamen, China

Defending champions China advanced to the final of badminton's Sudirman Cup with an unassailable 3-0 lead over Japan yesterday, setting up a final clash with South Korea as the hosts close in on a record-extending 14th title.

The Koreans, who are four-times champions, overcame fierce resistance from Indonesia to secure a 3-2 win in the second semi-final in the evening session.

China's world number two mixed doubles pair Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping beat Hiroki Midorikawa and Arisa Igarashi 21-11 21-17 in the opener. Top seed Shi Yuqi then crushed eighth-ranked Kodai Naraoka 21-8 21-16 in the men's singles.

Japan showed resilience in the women's singles, where Akane Yamaguchi, who had won 21 of her previous 33 encounters with Chen Yufei, pushed the Tokyo Games champion to three games but Chen held her nerve to prevail 17-21 21-9 21-16.

"I did feel that Akane's pace was very high in the first game and she consumed a lot of energy," Chen said. "After we changed ends, she was against the drift, and so it was harder for her."

"The most important thing for me, although I don't know if I'll play the next match, is that I have to ensure my best condition and have the best mental state to prepare for the final... both teams will be under pressure."

South Korean mixed doubles pair Chae Yu-jung and Seo Seung-jae had little trouble beating Indonesia's Dejan Ferdinansyah and Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti 21-10 21-15 in the opener.

Indonesia's 19-year-old tournament debutant Alwi Farhan then overcame Cho Geon-yeop 16-21 21-8 21-8 in the men's singles to level the contest, before Paris Olympic Games champion An Se-young beat Putri Kusuma Wardani in the women's singles to restore South Korea's lead.

But Indonesia bounced back in the men's doubles, with Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Bagas Maulana winning a close match.

It was the women's doubles pair of Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee who came to South Korea's rescue with a decisive win to secure their country's place in the final for the ninth time.

China are in their 16th straight final of the biennial mixed team championship, having won 13 of the last 15. But South Korea, who lost to China in the 2023 final, beat them in the showpiece clash in 2003 and 2017.

CYCLING

Martinez climbs into Romandie lead with penultimate stage win



France's Lenny Martinez (centre) celebrates winning the fourth stage and holding the yellow jersey of the Tour of Romandie UCI cycling World tour, a 128.4km from Sion to Thyon 2000, in Thyon, yesterday. **AFP**

AFP
Thyon, Switzerland

French rider Lenny Martinez pulled on the Tour de Romandie leader's yellow jersey after winning yesterday's hilly fourth and penultimate stage.

The 21-year-old crossed the line ahead of Portugal's Joao Almeida after a gruelling climb to the summit finish at Thyon 2000.

It was the eighth career win for the Bahrain Victorious rider and second on the World Tour after the Paris-Nice fifth stage.

"Every year I just get better and better, and here I am wearing the yellow jersey," said Martinez.

"To be the leader of such a stage race, and also to win a stage, is just incredible."

Second in Friday's stage, Martinez conquered the first four climbs of the day, making the difference in the final 20km of the 128km mountainous stage from Sion.

Martinez duelled with Almeida and Italian Lorenzo Fortunato over the final three kilometres before accelerating to the line.

"I have good acceleration, I know Joao does too and in the end it was a bit of a cool day," said Martinez of the drop in temperature and wet roads after a week of sunshine.

Overall, the Frenchman snatched the yellow jersey from compatriot Alex Baudin, to build a two-second lead on Fortunato with Almeida a further second adrift, heading into today's final 17km time trial to be staged in Geneva.

"I don't think it suits me 100 percent, but I'll give it my all, you never know," said the race leader, who will then head to the mountains to prepare for the Criterium du Dauphiné and the Tour de France.

Belgian Remco Evenepoel, dropped behind almost 9km from the finish line, but limited the damage and is still in ninth place, 1min 41sec behind Martinez.

SOUTH AFRICA'S HIGHLY RATED FAST BOWLER RABADA ADMITS TO FAILING DRUG TEST

Cape Town: South Africa fast bowler **Kagiso Rabada**, who returned home from the Indian Premier League last month, admitted failing a drug test and apologised for his actions yesterday.

Rabada, second in the world Test bowling rankings, said he was serving a "provisional suspension" but gave no other details. The 29-year-old left the Gujarat Titans a month ago with the IPL franchise saying at the time that he had to deal with an important personal matter.

"As has been reported, I recently returned to South Africa from participating in the IPL for personal reasons," Rabada said in a statement. "This was due to my returning an adverse analytical finding for the use of a recreational drug."

"I am deeply sorry to all those that I have let down. I will never take the privilege of playing cricket for granted. This privilege is much larger than me. It goes



beyond my personal aspirations." Rabada, who is now back in India, said he was looking forward to returning to the game he loves playing.

No formal suspension has been announced by either the IPL or the International Cricket Council. "Moving forward, this moment will not define me. I will keep doing what I have always done, continuously working hard and playing with passion and devotion to my craft," Rabada said. Rabada played in the Titans' first two matches in this season's IPL, taking two wickets before flying

back to Johannesburg. He is due to lead South Africa's attack in the World Test Championship final at Lord's next month. South Africa, who are appearing in the final for the first time, take on Australia from June 11-15. Rabada reached the milestone of 300 Test wickets in October.

Rashid seeks more control as Titans eye IPL play-offs
Gujarat Titans spinner Rashid Khan acknowledged it had been a tough Indian Premier League (IPL) season for him and that he must control his line and length better.

Rashid, 26, is the face of Afghanistan cricket and is a sought-after name in franchise leagues across the world for his accurate bowling and useful batting down the order.

Although fast bowlers have fared better in this year's 10-team league, Rashid's seven wickets from 10 matches is far fewer than fellow Afghanistan spinner

Noor Ahmed's 15 from the same number of games for Chennai Super Kings.

Fellow Gujarat spinner R Sai Kishore has claimed 12 victims in 10 matches and Rashid has been more expensive as well, conceding 50 in three wicketless overs against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Friday.

"I watch my bowling and analyse it and it gives me a clear idea," Rashid told an online press conference yesterday. "Even if you see my bowling yesterday, I didn't bowl even 40% of what I've been known for - (accurate) line and length."

"It was not that the batters played very good shots. It was about how I missed my line and length, and if I miss my line and length, any batter is going to score runs against me."

The first Afghan player to feature in the IPL, Rashid finished second on the wickets charts in 2023 with 27, one fewer than Mohammed Shami's 28.

ATHLETICS

Duplantis short of record, Tinch scorches in hurdles

The popular Swedish athlete fails in attempt at 6.28m as Tinch clocks 12.87 seconds in 110m hurdles

Reuters
Shaoxing, China

Armand Duplantis dominated the pole vault but was unable to improve his world record and American Cordell Tinch became the fourth fastest high hurdler of all time at the Shanghai-Keqiao Diamond League yesterday.

Olympic and world champion Duplantis soared 6.11m to win the competition comfortably from Greek Emmanouil Karalis (6.01m) but failed in his single attempt at 6.28m, a centimetre higher than the record he set in February.

"The jump did not feel that great, and the run did not feel that great either," the Swede said.

"(But) to have a good attempt while not feeling my best is actually a really good thing."

Tinch, who beat 110m hurdles world record holder Grant Holloway in the series opener in Xiamen last week, smashed Liu Xiang's meeting record with a scorching run of 12.87 seconds to match the best effort Dayron Robles managed in his career.

"It sounds pretty good," Tinch said of standing behind only compatriots Aries Merritt, Holloway and Devon Allen in the all-time list.

"I felt like I was going to run something fast (but) I didn't know it would be 12.8 fast."

South African Akani Simbine



Sweden's Armand Duplantis competes in the pole vault event during the Shanghai/Keqiao Diamond League athletics meeting in Keqiao, Shaoxing in China's eastern Zhejiang province yesterday. **Right:** USA's Cordell Tinch celebrates after the 110m hurdles event. (AFP)



backed up his win in Xiamen last week by running down Olympic silver medallist Kishane Thompson in the last few strides to win the 100m in 9.98 seconds.

Jamaican Thompson was second in 9.99 with Botswana's Letsile Tebogo, who won the 200m at the Paris Olympics, third in 10.03.

Karsten Warholm, who ran a world best time in the 300m in Xiamen, confirmed his fine form by dominating the more familiar 400m in a time of 47.28 seconds, even if he was not happy with his

race. "I hit a couple of hurdles," said the Norwegian world record holder. "You always want to use every occasion to send a message, the message I send is the potential is very good if I clean up my races."

In the 400m flat, American Christopher Bailey chased down Botswana's Bayapo Ndori on the home straight to win in 44.17 and reverse their positions from last week. Olympic champion Quincy Hall finished last in his first outing since his stunning triumph in Paris last year.

BATTLE GOES BACK-TO-BACK IN 200M

American Anavia Battle, the fastest woman over 100m this year, made it two wins out of two in the Diamond League 200m this season in 22.38 with Ireland's Rhasidat Adeleke second in 22.72.

Grace Stark won the 100m hurdles in 12.42, well shy of the 12.17 Olympic champion Masai Rusell clocked in Miami on Friday to record the second fastest time in history.

Twice Diamond League cham-

pion Berihu Aregawi just held off compatriot Kuma Girma at the line to win the men's 5,000m in 12:50.45 with Mezgebu Sime finishing third in an Ethiopian 1-2-3.

Their compatriot Tsige Duguma ran the fastest time of the season to win the women's 800m more than a second in front of Australian Sarah Billings in 1:56.64.

American Chase Jackson, who will go for a third straight world title in Tokyo in September, won the shot put with a throw of 20.54m, while Greek Elina Tzengko beat

a strong field with a throw of 64.90m to take the javelin.

Ukraine's Olympic and world high jump champion Yaroslava Mahuchikh spectacularly made it seven wins in her last seven Diamond League meetings with a leap of 2 metres.

There was more Ethiopian success in front of Australian Sarah Billings in 1:56.64. American Chase Jackson, who will go for a third straight world title in Tokyo in September, won the shot put with a throw of 20.54m, while Greek Elina Tzengko beat triple jump in 17.03m.

TENNIS

Sabalenka beats Gauff to claim Madrid Open title

AFP
Madrid

World number one Aryna Sabalenka defeated Coco Gauff 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) yesterday to win her third Madrid Open title.

Last year's runner-up cruised past the American, ranked fourth, in the first set before digging deep in the second to triumph in a tie-break, sealing victory as Gauff double faulted.

Sabalenka recorded her tour-leading 31st victory on Madrid clay, adding the WTA 1000 trophy to titles in Brisbane and Miami.

It was the sixth final she has reached this year and the 37th of her career, the fourth in five years at Madrid.

Last year Sabalenka was beaten by Iga Swiatek in the showpiece, whom Gauff defeated in the semi-final on Thursday.

The three-time Grand Slam champion ripped through the first set after Gauff managed an initial hold.

Sabalenka won the next 17 points and racked up a 4-1 lead with breaks in the third and fifth games, as Gauff struggled to cope with her immense power.

The 21-year-old American, who won the US Open in 2023, managed a break of her own to slow down the 2021 and 2023 Madrid champion.

Sabalenka broke again to wrap



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus poses with her trophy after beating Coco Gauff of the US in the 2025 Madrid Open final match at the Caja Magica in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

up the first set in 35 minutes with her second set point as Gauff sliced wide.

The American came out reinforced in the second set, switching up her serve more and secured a break in the third game, consolidating for a 3-1 advantage.

Gauff saved two break points as Sabalenka applied heavy pressure in the sixth game, holding for a 4-2 lead.

At 5-4 up and serving for the

set Gauff twice double faulted, handing her opponent three break points.

Sabalenka dropped her racquet in a comical moment during a rally on the second of those, the Belarusian looking at the crowd in bemusement, as Gauff saved all three.

After squandering set point Gauff saved another break point but Sabalenka eventually claimed the game at the fifth time of ask-

ing. The world number one battled through a tough hold for 6-5 but spurned a championship point as Gauff forced a tie-break.

Sabalenka secured two mini-breaks before Gauff fought back on serve, but eventually the 26-year-old took control, opening up three more championship points.

Gauff handed victory to this year's Australian Open runner-up on a plate with a double fault.

GOLF

DeChambeau surges to 4-shot lead in Incheon

Reuters
Incheon, South Korea

Bryson DeChambeau fired a 6-under-par 66 yesterday to seize a four-stroke lead heading into the final round at LIV Golf Korea in Incheon.

DeChambeau improved to 13-under 131 after carding his second consecutive bogey-free round at the Jack Nicklaus Golf Club. The Crushers GC captain is the solo leader after 36 holes for a record-setting third straight LIV Golf tournament.

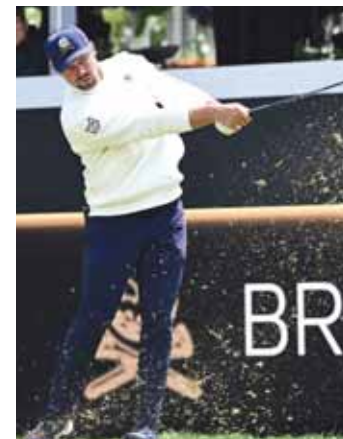
The previous two tournaments didn't end well for DeChambeau, who led by two strikes entering the final round in Miami last month before falling to Australian Marc Leishman. He led by one shot last week in Mexico City before Joaquin Niemann rallied to victory.

DeChambeau said he plans to keep it simple when asked what he needs to do to win this tournament.

"It's just to play like a kid, have a lot of fun, be smart, execute like you know how to, and just solidify the motion, make sure I'm moving through it right, and keep playing the golf that I know how to play," he said.

England's Richard Bland, the defending Senior US Open and Senior PGA Championship winner, shot a 69 yesterday to reside in second place at 9-under.

"This kind of course is tailor-made for him," Bland said of DeChambeau, the reigning US Open winner. "I've probably got to shoot something in double digits (under par) to get anywhere near him."



USA's Bryson DeChambeau of Crushers GC plays a shot at the 8th tee during the second round of the LIV Golf Korea at Jack Nicklaus Golf Club in Incheon yesterday. (AFP)

Bland sits one stroke ahead of the quartet of Charles Howell III (66), Jason Kokrak (67), South African Dean Burmeister (68) and first-round co-leader Talor Gooch (71).

As for the team competition, Smash GC resides in first place at 21-under - six strokes ahead of Torque GC, RangeGoats GC and DeChambeau's Crushers.

Anirban Lahiri of India followed a string of three straight birdies with an approach on the ninth hole that caromed off the flag, travelled across the green and rolled into the water. He followed up that double bogey with a triple bogey on the 10th hole and another double bogey on the 12th as part of his 7-over 79 yesterday.

"How brutal this game can be to anybody," Burmeister said.

NORRIS EDGES TEAMMATE PIASTRI TO WIN WILD AND WET MIAMI GP SPRINT RACE

Miami Gardens, United States: McLaren's Lando Norris won a chaotic sprint race at the Miami Grand Prix yesterday, pipping championship leader and teammate Oscar Piastri in a race delayed due to torrential rain.

Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton finished third while 18-year-old Italian Kimi Antonelli, who had started on pole for Mercedes, finished in tenth. Antonelli lost his lead at the first turn where Piastri forced him wide and when he returned to the track he was down in fourth. The race got underway after a 25-minute delay due to heavy rain which had impacted the formation lap.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc crashed out during the formation lap hitting the wall after aqua-planing. During the race, Fernando Alonso crashed into the wall after he was clipped by Liam Lawson and Carlos Sainz also crashed.

There was a contact incident in the pit-lane when Red Bull's Max Verstappen pulled out into Antonelli. The Dutchman was penalised 10

points for 'unsafe release' leaving him in 17th place. Norris, who won the Miami GP last year, came out of the pits just ahead of Piastri and was helped by the race ending under the safety car after the Alonso crash.

"My luck in Miami seems pretty good at the minute, so I'm happy," said Norris. "The pace was still very good but it's so difficult these races. Do you box early like Lewis, or stay out and hope for a Safety Car. I'd rather this happened tomorrow but I'll take it," he added, after a victory which reduced the gap on Piastri in the drivers' standings from ten to nine points.

Hamilton 'gamble' pays off

After his aggressive start and controlling the race for long stretches, Piastri was frustrated at not having the chance to fight back on the final laps but was turning his focus to yesterday's qualifying. "I did pretty much everything right. A bit disappointed to come away with second

but that's how it goes sometimes. Racing is a pretty cruel business. Hopefully that means I get a bit of luck this afternoon in qualifying and tomorrow.

"But, another great start and I had to get my elbows out in that one. Happy with what I did," Piastri said.

Hamilton benefitted from being the first of the frontrunners to switch to slicks and was delighted to be on the podium having won the sprint race in China.

"It's the first time we've been on track in the wet here and what a race it provided us," said the Briton.

"I really, really did struggle on the inters - everyone was struggling on them. I made that call at that end and I said I'm coming in because I was going nowhere. Take the risk, take the gamble and it paid off. I wish we had another couple of laps to give these guys a bit of a fight, but big congrats to McLaren," Hamilton added.



Sprint winner Lando Norris (centre) of McLaren is seen with teammate Oscar Piastri (left) and Lewis Hamilton (second right) of Scuderia Ferrari in Miami, Florida. (AFP)

FOOTBALL

Ahli beat Kawasaki Frontale to win Asian Champions League

AFP

Jeddah

Al Ahli were crowned champions of Asia at the third attempt after the Saudi Arabian side overpowered Japan's Kawasaki Frontale 2-0 in Jeddah yesterday. The Jeddah club, runners-up in 1986 and 2012, triumphed at their King Abdullah Sports City Stadium thanks to two goals in seven minutes towards the end of the first half from Brazilian Galeno and Ivory Coast captain Franck Kessie.

The Asian Champions League's latter stages have all taken place in Jeddah. With the win, Roberto Firmino, Edouard Mendy and Riyad Mahrez become the first players to capture both Asian club football's premier title and its European equivalent. The trio won the Champions League with Liverpool, Chelsea and Manchester City respectively.

"We are so proud," Al Ahli goalkeeper Mendy said. "Once we knew that the final eight would be in Jeddah, it was our goal to be champions in front of our fans. Since I came here 18 months ago, they supported us so much. As I said when I signed here, it's to make history, to continue to win trophies and make this club as big as it was before. The secret is the team effort. If someone makes the effort it will make it easier for the one next to him. We just played like this; you saw the fire, you saw



Al Ahli's Roberto Firmino lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning the Asian Champions League in Jeddah.

the spirit."

Al Ahli, who are majority-owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, are awarded \$10m for clinching the title. Matthias Jaissle's side went unbeaten through all 13 matches of the campaign.

Frontale, meanwhile, were contesting the final for the first time having never previously been beyond the last eight.

Al Ahli began on the front foot, summer signing Ivan Toney stinging the palms of Louis Yamaguchi on five minutes before

the Frontale goalkeeper then saved Ziyad al-Johani's close-range effort from the resultant corner. At the other end, Frontale's Brazilian forward Marcinho showed some fast feet down his side's left, before sending his effort inches past Mendy's far post.

Yet Al Ahli always looked the more dangerous. Toney lashed wide on the half-volley, defender Roger Ibanez curled narrowly off target and Firmino sent a volley straight at Yamaguchi. However, on 35 minutes, Firmino rolled a pass to winger Galeno, who curled a spectacular effort from 25 yards into the top corner.

Galeno, a winter signing from Porto for a reported 50m, has actually taken Firmino's spot in Al Ahli's Saudi Pro League squad, meaning the former Liverpool forward is not registered to play in the domestic league.

Three minutes before half-time, Firmino floated a cross into the Frontale six-yard box for Kessie to power home his header and double Al Ahli's advantage.

The assist lifted Firmino, the club captain, to seven in this season's Champions League - and to one behind Mahrez at the top of the tournament's assist charts. Frontale, who defeated Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr in the semi-final, did not have a shot on target in the opening 45 minutes.

In the second half, Firmino and Mahrez each flashed efforts well wide, with the former substituted on 74 minutes to rapturous applause. Not long after, Frontale substitute Tatsuya Ito fired two shots in quick succession inches off target. In the end, Al Ahli celebrated becoming only the third Saudi club to win the Champions League, after record four-time winners Al Hilal and two-time champions Al Ittihad.

SPOTLIGHT

Cherif, Ahmed clinch Beach Tour Doha Open

Qatari pair showcase outstanding performance to finish with an unbeaten record

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan proved unstoppable once again, outplaying Paul Burnett and Luke Ryan in the highly-anticipated final showdown of the AVC Men's Beach Tour Doha Open at the Al Gharafa Beach Complex to capture gold medal yesterday.

The 21-19, 21-13 victory over the Australia's third seeds and gold medalists at the Nuvali Open in Philippines handed the home pair their first-ever AVC Beach Tour title on home soil. Cherif and Ahmed had already beaten the Aussies 2-0 in the quarter-finals of the Samila Open in Songkhla, Thailand and the Qataris went on to capture the title in early April.

Following their well-rounded, unblemished performance in the four-day event, the Qataris deserved the win. Cherif and Ahmed showcased their outstanding performance to win consecutive five matches with remarkable unbeaten record and without dropping a set to their respective opponents prior to reigning supreme.

For Cherif and Ahmed, the success on home soil could be the similar feat they had repeated in their career. The Qataris had dominated the Asian Championships for three times (2018, 2019 and 2022) aside from clinching Asian Games twice, 2018 in Palembang, Indonesia and 2022 in Hangzhou, China and securing bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020, the first-ever Olympic medal for Qatar in beach volleyball. Last year, they also took bronze medal at the World Beach Pro Tour Finals on home soil.

Cherif and Ahmed proved they remain in great shape this year as they have won key outings. On April 10, they claimed gold medal for Qatar at the GCC (Gulf Co-op-



Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan pose with their medals after winning the AVC Beach Tour Doha Open at the Al Gharafa Beach Complex.

eration Council) Beach Games Muscat in Oman and six days after that, they topped the podium at the AVC Beach Tour Samila Open in Thailand.

With this achievement, Cherif and Ahmed earned 320 AVC ranking points and a cash prize of \$2,500, further solidifying their standing among Asia's elite and signalling strong preparedness for upcoming international competitions. The Australian runners-up received 288 points and a \$2,000 prize money.

In the third-place playoff earlier, Aus-

tralia's Ben Hood and Oliver Merritt, who claimed silver medal at the Nuvali Open, beat Thailand's Netitorn Muneekul and Wachirawit Muadpha, silver medalists at the last year's FIVB Beach Volleyball U19 World Championships in Phuket, Thailand, for bronze medal, 256 points and \$1,500 prize money.

Ali Ghanem al-Kuwari, President of both the Qatar and West Asia Volleyball Associations, presided over the awards presentation to give away medals and trophies. In attendance were Secretary-General

Youssef Ahmed Kano, Assistant Secretary Saeed Salem al-Jumani and Board Members Mohammed Salem al-Kuwari and Saeed Jumaa al-Hitmi as well as Mohammed Anbar al-Nasser, Member of the Beach Volleyball Committee, and Amna Barakat al-Kuwari, Chairperson of the Women's Sports Committee in Qatar and West Asia Associations.

Cherif and Ahmed are set to compete in the next AVC Beach Tour in China from May 8-11, followed by the Beach Volleyball Challenge Tournament, also in China, scheduled from May 14-18.

Second-string PSG beaten by Strasbourg

Paris: Strasbourg kept alive their hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League with a 2-1 win against a Paris Saint-Germain side showing 10 changes from their midweek victory away to Arsenal.

A Lucas Hernandez own goal put Strasbourg ahead on 20 minutes and Felix Lemarechal doubled the home side's lead in first-half stoppage time in Alsace, although Bradley Barcola pulled one back for PSG just after the break. Liam Rosenior's in-form Strasbourg are now unbeaten in 12 games going back to early February and this victory lifts them up to fourth in the table ahead of the rest of the weekend's fixtures.

"Despite all the changes, PSG still put out a strong team," said Englishman Rosenior. "We had to fight for every ball in the heat. The players ran for each other, celebrated winning tackles and headers. We have shown that courage all season. We are the second-best team in 2025 behind PSG. The progress my players have made is superb. You have to suffer to the maximum to beat a team like Paris, but it was worth it."

PSG have already wrapped up a fourth consecutive Ligue 1 title and saw their unbeaten record domestically this season come to an end last weekend. Coach Luis Enrique therefore rested all of those who started the 1-0 win away to Arsenal in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final on Tuesday, with the exception of Portuguese midfielder Joao Neves. Ousmane Dembele, who scored the winning goal against the Gunners, was missing from the squad altogether after coming off hurt in the second half of that game. It remains to be seen if Dembele, PSG's leading scorer with 33 goals this season in all competitions, will be fit for the return leg in Paris on Wednesday.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal suffer Bournemouth defeat ahead of PSG showdown

AFP

London

Mikel Arteta challenged Arsenal to use the "rage and anger" from yesterday's 2-1 defeat against Bournemouth as motivation for their Champions League showdown with Paris Saint-Germain.

Arteta's side took the lead through Declan Rice's opener on his 100th appearance for the club. But Dean Huijsen equalised in the second half and Evanilson completed the comeback to give Bournemouth their first ever away win over Arsenal. Beaten 1-0 by PSG in the Champions League semi-final first leg on Tuesday, Arsenal will need a much-improved performance in the second leg in Paris on Wednesday.

"We should have killed the game and we didn't. On top of that if you defend your box in two set-pieces in the way we have done you're in big trouble," Arteta said. "It was nowhere near the standards that we are used to. We wanted to generate the momentum and a really positive vibe today and we haven't. What we have created is frustration, rage and anger. Make sure we

use that on Wednesday?"

The second-placed Gunners also still require six points to guarantee Champions League qualification for next season via a top five finish in the Premier League. Arteta admitted this week that it was "very painful" to watch Liverpool celebrate winning the Premier League title last weekend.

The Gunners finished as runners-up behind Manchester City for the last two seasons and the Champions League is their last hope of a trophy this term. Arteta is still waiting to win the second trophy of his six-year Arsenal reign, with his last silverware coming in the 2020 FA Cup.

Aston Villa boosted their top five bid with a 1-0 win against Fulham. Unai Emery's side are back in the hunt to finish in the Premier League's top five thanks to Youri Tielemans' 12th-minute header at Villa Park.

Seventh-placed Villa extended their unbeaten run on home turf to 20 games in all competitions, lifting them level with sixth-placed Nottingham Forest and fifth-placed Chelsea on 60 points. After bouncing back from their dismal FA Cup semi-final loss to Crystal Palace last weekend, Villa will hope their rivals falter over the

weekend as the top five race heads for a dramatic climax.

Southampton wasted a chance to avoid a share of the lowest points total in Premier League history as Jamie Vardy's 199th Leicester goal inspired a 2-0 win at the King Power Stadium. Simon Rusk's bottom of the table team are trying to avoid finishing with just 11 points - which would match Derby's low mark set in 2007-08. But Southampton's hopes of getting a 12th point quickly faded against fellow relegated side Leicester.

After announcing last week that he will leave the club at the end of the season, the 38-year-old Vardy bagged a farewell goal as he put second-bottom Leicester ahead in the 17th minute. Leicester finally won for the first time since January as Ayew grabbed the second goal in the 44th minute. Southampton have now lost 28 of their 35 league games and have three matches left to avoid sharing the low points record with Derby.

Relegated Ipswich fought back from two goals down to draw 2-2 in Everton's penultimate match at Goodison Park. Kieran McKenna's third-bottom side trailed to Beto's 26th-minute goal and Dwight Mc-



Bournemouth's Evanilson (right) celebrates after scoring against Arsenal. (Reuters)

Neil's effort nine minutes later.

But Julio Enciso's 30-yard rocket reduced the deficit in the 41st minute and George Hirst equalised with 11 minutes

left. Everton's emotional last match at Goodison before moving to their new Bramley-Moore Dock stadium next season comes against Southampton on May 18.