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TENNIS

Swiatek defends coach
and psychologist despite
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AMIR CUP

Umm Salal beat Al Wakrah, Al Shamal upstage Al Arabi to enter quarter-finals

By Sports reporter
Doha

Al Shamal upstaged Al Arabi 3-1 while Umm Salal thumped Al Wakrah 4-1 to complete the quarter-finals of the prestigious Amir Cup football tournament yesterday.

At the Khalifa International Stadium, Umm Salal went up the lead against Al Wakrah quickly in the 7th minute as Abdulrahman Fayeze deflected in a fine lob cross from Omar Rabah.

The lead was doubled by Antonio Mance in the 19th minute following a goal-mouth melee. Mance chanced upon a fine flick from Marouane Louadni while being unmarked on the left of the goal.

Al Wakrah fought back, scoring in the 30th minute as Gelson Dala set up Khaled Mohammed with a fine ball in front of the goal.

Al Wakrah, however, were denied a second goal in the 35th minute as Farid Boulaya's strong kick on the run hit the crossbar.

Just before half time, Kenji Gorre added one more for Umm Salal (41st minute) as he broke through with a through ball to beat the rival goalkeeper to go into the break ahead at 3-1.



Umm Salal's Antonio Mance (second from left) scored a double against Al Wakrah in the Amir Cup Round of 16 match at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday.

Their fourth goal came in the 87th minute as Antonio Mance made a dash down the left to beat a defender, and later a hapless goalkeeper.

Later at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Al Shamal recovered from an early setback to shock Al

Arabi. The Dream Team was up the lead following a penalty and a spot kick strike from Luiz Martin in the 5th minute. Al Shamal broke through the rival defence in the 23rd minute as Mohammed Manai struck superbly from just in front of the goal.

The teams went into the break at 1-1.

Naim Sliti put Al Shamal ahead in the 59th minute, dashing in to pick on the ball, finding the left corner between defenders and the goalkeeper.

Baghdad Bounedjah made it



Al Shamal players celebrate a goal against Al Arabi yesterday.

3-1 for his side as he connected a Younes El Hannach cross just in time at the right post in the 86th minute.

Umm Salal and Al Shamal will clash in the quarter-finals. The other last eight meetings being between Al Sadd and Al Gharafa;

Al Shahania and Al Ahli; and between Al Duhail and Al Rayyan. The quarter-finals will be played on May 13 and 14 while the semi-finals are scheduled for May 18 and 19.

The Khalifa International Stadium will host the final on May 24.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

PSG see off Arsenal, to meet Inter in final

Ruiz, Hakimi score in PSG's 2-1 win over Arsenal in 2nd leg of semi-final

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) clinched a place in the Champions League final as goals by Fabian Ruiz and Achraf Hakimi gave them a 2-1 win over Arsenal in the second leg of their last-four tie yesterday, securing a 3-1 aggregate triumph.

Ruiz crashed in a shot from the edge of the area in the 27th minute at the Parc des Princes to leave PSG firmly in the driving seat after they had withstood an early bombardment from the visitors.

Already leading in the tie after Ousmane Dembele's goal in last week's first leg, PSG then saw Vitorinha have a second-half penalty saved.

However, Hakimi put the tie beyond Arsenal when he scored in the 72nd minute, even if Bukayo Saka did then pull one back for the visitors. PSG advance to a showdown in Munich on May 31 against Inter Milan, and it will be the second Champions League final in their history, five years after a defeat by Bayern Munich in Lisbon.

Arsenal, meanwhile, saw their European dream come to an end as they fell short of reaching what would have been their second final, 19 years after losing to Barcelona in Paris.

Still without a trophy since the 2020 FA Cup, all that is left to play for now for Mikel Arteta's side is securing a third consecutive second-place finish in the Premier League. There was an electric atmosphere all evening in Paris, and PSG were able to celebrate getting to a final in front of their fans for



PSG's players celebrate their victory in the Champions League semi-final second leg match against Arsenal at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

the first time, after their victory against RB Leipzig in the last four in 2020 was played behind closed doors during the pandemic.

There was a feverish mood in and around the ground pre-match, but PSG have tripped up in big Champions League ties plenty of times over the last decade.

In addition, their top scorer Dembele was not in the starting line-up having come off with a hamstring problem in the first leg.

Arsenal, with Thomas Partey back in midfield after missing the first leg through suspension, did their best to silence the raucous home support by throwing everything at the Parisians right from the off. Declan Rice headed just wide, and goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma denied Gabriel Martinelli from close range before

producing a stunning save low to his left to keep out a Martin Odegaard shot, all inside the opening eight minutes.

PSG did eventually settle, and they almost went ahead on 17 minutes when Desire Doue teed up Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, whose curling shot hit the far post. Then Doue wasted a great chance, shooting straight at David Raya in the Arsenal goal after Bradley Barcola had intercepted a loose ball.

But PSG did score before the half-hour mark, the goal coming in the wake of a free-kick awarded for a Rice foul on Kvaratskhelia.

Vitorinha's delivery was headed out by Partey but fell to Ruiz on the edge of the box, and he controlled before smashing in a left-foot shot as the ball bounced back up.

It was the ideal moment for the

29-year-old Spaniard to score his first Champions League goal.

Barcola failed to convert a good chance for the hosts to score again moments later, and Arsenal still had some hope going into the second half. Only another stunning Donnarumma save with his fingertips prevented Saka from pulling one back on 64 minutes, before PSG were awarded a spot-kick.

German referee Felix Zwayer gave the penalty after being summoned to the pitchside monitor when a shot by Hakimi brushed the outstretched hand of Myles Lewis-Skelly. Arteta was furious at the decision, yet Vitorinha's kick was turned away by Raya diving to his left. Nevertheless, PSG made it 2-0 on the night when Dembele, on from the bench, teed up Hakimi to finish in style.

HORSE RACING

Billboard Star shines brightest in Ain Khaled Cup thriller

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Billboard Star bounced back to winning form in impressive style, capturing the feature race – the Ain Khaled Cup for three-year-old Thoroughbreds over 1200m – at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The bay gelding, owned by Nasser Saif AR al-Kubaisi, tracked the early leader closely before showing grit and determination in the final strides to secure the victory.

Trained by Mohammed al-Ghazali and ridden by Soufiane Saadi, the win also completed a double on the card for both trainer and jockey. Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, Racing Manager at Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC), crowned the winners following the race.

RESULTS
47th Al Rayyan Race Meeting
- Ain Khaled Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1 - Ain Khaled Cup - 3yo Thoroughbred (Class 2)
Billboard Star, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Soufiane Saadi

3 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-85)
Al Mutaghatri, Julian Smart, Alberto Sanna

4 - Local Thoroughbred Novice Plate
Rayyan Bu Thaila, Jihad El Ahmad, Alberto Sanna

5 - Purebred Arabian Novice Plate
Al Ghassam La Gloire, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento

6 - Thoroughbred Handicap (55-75)
Silencer, Jihad El Ahmad, Alberto Sanna

7 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (50-70)
HM Zabraj, Nasser Ghazali, Marco Casamento

8 - Thoroughbred Handicap (45-65)
Funny Bunny, Ibrahim Saeed al-Maiki, Trevor Patel



Jockey Soufiane Saadi guided Billboard Star to the Ain Khaled Cup victory yesterday. **PICTURE: Juhaim**

FOCUS

India's Rohit announces retirement from Test cricket

ROHIT CAPTAINED INDIA IN 24 TESTS WITH 12 WINS, NINE DEFEATS AND THREE DRAWS

AFP
New Delhi

India captain **Rohit Sharma** yesterday announced his retirement from Test cricket ahead of the team's tour of England starting next month, but will continue to play the shorter 50-over format.

In 67 Tests, Rohit scored 4,301 runs including 12 centuries with a best of 212 against South Africa in 2019 and an average of over 40.

He captained India in 24 Tests with 12 wins, nine defeats and three draws.

"Hello everyone I would just like to share that I am retiring from Test cricket," the 38-year-old Rohit wrote on Instagram.

"It's been an absolute honour to represent my country in whites. Thank you for all the love and support over the years. I will continue to represent India in the ODI format."

Rohit, who quit T20 internationals along with Virat Kohli after India's World Cup triumph in Barbados last year, recently led the team to an ODI Champions Trophy title in Dubai.

India will begin a five-Test series in Eng-

land in June-July and the team now needs a new Test skipper. India's cricket board said, "Rohit Sharma has informed us of his decision to retire from Test cricket. A legend of the red-ball game. We will soon announce a new Test captain - it's time for the next generation to rise."

Rohit's last Test was in Melbourne last year when India lost to Australia by 184 runs. He stood down as captain in the fifth Test in Sydney due to poor batting form but India went on to lose the match and the five-match series 3-1.

Jasprit Bumrah was Rohit's deputy in Australia and led the team in the first Test, which Rohit missed due to the birth of his second child, and the final Test.

'Priceless'

Rohit managed just 31 runs in five innings of his three outings Down Under and the Indian media speculated that he could retire from Test cricket after the series.

The captain, nicknamed 'Hitman' for getting to big scores quickly - especially in white-ball, also had a poor home series against Bangladesh and New Zealand late last year.

Rohit's India won both the Tests against

Bangladesh, but New Zealand handed a rare 3-0 whitewash to the hosts. Rohit began his Test career in 2013, but it was five years later that he came into his own in the five-day format as a swashbuckling opener and later took over as captain from Kohli.

"As player and as captain, you were a joy and India will say a big thank you to you," veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle posted on social media.

"That century in Chennai, that one at the Oval, both priceless. You walked out against South Africa to open as if you had done it all your life. Will look forward to watching and, hopefully calling, some more great moments in your ODI career."

After India's defeat in Australia, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) mandated national players to participate in the domestic Ranji Trophy, forcing Rohit and Kohli to take field.

Rohit's batting woes continued as he made three and 28 against Jammu and Kashmir, but he was retained as captain of the ODI team.

Rohit is currently playing the Indian Premier League T20 tournament with Mumbai Indians and has endured a patchy season so far, scoring 300 runs in 11 matches.

KEYWORD
GULFTIMES
08-05-2025



'HITMAN' SHARMA: BIG-HITTING LEADER OF INDIA'S CRICKET DREAMS



Rohit Sharma rose from humble beginnings to captain cricket-mad India and redefined Test batting with his ability to score big hundreds as

he dominated opposition attacks.

The 38-year-old called time on his Test career yesterday after playing 67 matches and scoring 4,301 runs including 12 centuries since his debut in 2013. Rohit quit T20 international cricket in 2024 after lifting the World Cup and earlier this year led India to an ODI Champions Trophy title in Dubai. He will continue to play the ODI format but his declining batting form in the five-day format prompted his decision to call time on a career divided into two halves. As a youngster Rohit studied on a scholarship because his family was unable to afford monthly fees of a few dollars.

He overcame all odds to become a cricketing superstar, especially in the white-ball game, his feats including taking his country to World Cup glory in 2024.

He is also the only batsman to have scored three double-centuries in one-day internationals. Prior to his drop-off in form, Rohit gave India real firepower at the top of the innings and his selfless approach allowed the rest of the batsmen to play freely. But the man dubbed the "Hitman" for getting to big scores quickly in spectacular style failed to get past 10 runs in any of his five innings during India's tour of Australia late last year.

He described his performances as "disturbing" while there was also mounting criticism about his decisions as captain. Rohit missed the first Test in Perth for the birth of his second child, with Jasprit Bumrah assuming the captaincy and playing a starring role with the ball in a big India win.

With India trailing 2-1 in the series, vice-captain Bumrah was named to lead the team at the Sydney Cricket Ground as

the visitors battled to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Indian media mockingly noted that Rohit's 31 runs in three Tests was only one more than the Bumrah's 30 wickets.

"Rohit, because of captaincy and reputation... managed to hang on longer than he should have," the Times of India wrote. Rohit was also way below his brilliant best in the 3-0 Test series whitewash at home to New Zealand in November.

Just months before that, he lifted the World Cup in Barbados after India edged out South Africa by seven runs in a thrilling final to finally deliver the cricket-crazy nation a global title again.

Rohit signed off as India's highest scorer in the shortest format, plundering 4,231 runs including five centuries in 159 matches since his T20 debut in 2007. A five-time IPL winner for Mumbai Indians, Rohit took over the captaincy of the white-ball national team in 2021 from Virat Kohli. A year later, Rohit became Test skipper too. He left a lasting legacy in the shortest

format, having featured in all nine editions of the T20 World Cup.

He was part of MS Dhoni's winning team in the inaugural event in 2007, before clinching his second T20 crown 17 years later.

Rohit, who has been criticised for not having the athletic physique of some other players, has also amassed 11,168 runs at an average of over 48 in 273 ODIs.

But his Test record is less prolific as he only came into his own in 2019 when he revived his stop-start five-day career as an opener, hitting 176 and 127 against South Africa in the first Test in Visakhapatnam. In the third match of the same series in Ranchi, Rohit hit 28 fours and six sixes in a blistering innings of 212 which remained his highest Test score.

However his recent shortcomings have not detracted from Rohit's stature around the world.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan lauded him as the "man who has changed the culture" of the India team - and a "genuine hero".

CRICKET

Brevis, Dube guide Chennai to IPL win

AFP
Kolkata

South Africa's Dewald Brevis hit a 22-ball fifty as Chennai Super Kings beat Kolkata Knight Riders by two wickets yesterday, leaving the defending IPL champions in grave danger of missing the playoffs.

Chasing 180 for victory, Chennai slipped to 60-5 in the sixth over before Brevis hit 52 and impact substitute Shivam Dube made 45 to steer the team home with two balls to spare at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

Skipper MS Dhoni hit a six when Chennai needed eight off the last over and finished unbeaten on 17 with number 10 Anshul Kamboj hitting the winning four off Andre Russell.

The result left Kolkata's chances of making the playoffs hanging by a thread as they need to win their remaining two matches and hope other results go their way.

Five-time champions Chennai had already bowed out of the play-off race.

Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad set up victory with his four wickets that kept Kolkata down to 179-6.

In reply, Chennai openers Ayush Mhatre and Devon Conway both fell for a duck but IPL debutant Urvil Patel clobbered the Kolkata attack in his 11-ball 31.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy bowled Ravindra Jadeja but Brevis and Dube put the chase back on track in their carefully crafted stand.

Brevis took his time to get going before he blasted 30 runs off Vaibhav Arora, reaching his fifty with three sixes and three fours in



Chennai Super Kings' Dewald Brevis in action during an IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (Reuters)

one over. Chakravarthy soon cut short Brevis' blitz, but the left-handed Dube then found Dhoni for company and the two chugged along.

Arora dismissed Dube as Rinku Singh clung on to a steeping catch before taking another opportunity to dismiss Noor, but Dhoni and Kamboj got the team through to just their third win in 12 matches.

Earlier Kolkata lost opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz early on 11 before Sunil Narine (26) and skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who made 48, put on 58 runs to rebuild the innings.

Noor broke the stand with left-arm wrist spin to get Narine stumped by Dhoni and three balls later had Angkrish Raghuvanshi caught behind for one.

Rahane was joined by Manish Pandey but was denied his fifty by Jadeja's left-arm spin, spooning a reverse sweep to backward point.

Pandey stood firm and combined to add 46 runs with Russell, who hammered 38 off 21 balls before Noor struck again to have the big-hitter caught at long-off.

Noor removed Rinku for nine and despite Manish's presence Kolkata's total ultimately proved insufficient.

BRIEF SCORES

Chennai Super Kings 183 for 8 (Brevis 52, Dube 45, Urvil 31, Arora 3-48, Varun 2-18) **beat Kolkata Knight Riders 179 for 6** (Rahane 48, Russell 38, Pandey 36*, Noor 4-31) **by two wickets**

CYCLING

Title favourite Roglic eyes becoming oldest Giro d'Italia winner in history



Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe's Slovenian rider Primoz Roglic waves on stage during the opening ceremony and team presentation in Tirana, two days before the departure of the Giro d'Italia 2025 cycling race. The Giro d'Italia 2025 will depart from Durres, Albania tomorrow, and finish in Rome on June 1. (AFP)

Reuters
Rome

Slovenia's Primoz Roglic sets out to become the oldest winner of the Giro d'Italia when the year's first Grand Tour begins its 3,413km trek from Albania to Rome on Saturday.

With reigning champion Tadej Pogacar focussing on the Tour de France, the door looks wide open for a host of riders seeking to wear the maglia rosa (pink jersey) on June 1.

The absence of Slovenian Pogacar and Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard means 35-year-old Roglic will be favourite to regain the crown he won in 2023.

Backed by a strong Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe team, including 2022 champion Jai Hindley of Australia, four-time Vuelta a Espana winner Roglic could surpass the record of Fiorenzo Magni who won the Giro, aged 34 and 180 days, in 1955.

"We know how tough this Giro will be, and we're also aware that all eyes will be on Primoz," Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe chief of sport Rolf Aldag said.

"That's why we're heading to the start in Albania with a strong, well-balanced team.

"Primoz is in great shape, and the group around him is well-rehearsed and gives us tactical depth."

Roglic began the season in fine fashion by winning the Tour of Catalunya but with Hindley and also 2024 runner-up Dani Martinez in their starting list, Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe boast a three-pronged General Classification (GC) attack.

They will not have it all their own way though with several other teams featuring strong overall contenders.

Young Spaniard Juan Ayuso leads the UAE Team Emirates challenge in the absence of Pogacar having won the week-long Tirreno-Adriatico this season and going toe-to-toe with Roglic in a fierce battle in Catalunya.

The 22-year-old will be supported by a formidable team of domestiques and Britain's overall contender Adam Yates.

"Between myself and Juan I think we should be able to have a good crack on the general classification and try to defend the title, and I'm looking forward to getting started in what I hope will be a very competitive three weeks," Yates said.

While Ayuso seeks his maiden Grand Tour triumph, experienced trio Richard Carapaz, Mikel Landa and Egan Bernal cannot be ignored.

Spaniard Landa, 35, has often sacrificed himself in the service of others but will be the main man in the Soudal-Quick-Step team.

Ecuador's Carapaz (EF Education-EasyPost) has a Giro overall title and Olympic road gold on his palmares while Colombian Bernal (Ineos Grenadiers) has looked close to the form that took him to the Giro title in 2021.

Albania is hosting a Grand Tour for the first time with the first of three stages in the Balkan country being Saturday's hilly 160km stage from Durazzo to Tirana before Sunday's short time trial around Tirana. After a third stage featuring the race's first climb to 1,000 metres, the Giro heads back across the Adriatic to Lecce before snaking its way up the country.

The 108th edition of the race contains 52,000 metres of climbing - 10,000 more than last year - with two huge climbing days ahead of the Rome climax.

TENNIS

Amid struggles, Swiatek voices support for staff

'I am irritated by headlines talking about falling apart or a mental crisis'

Reuters
Rome

Iga Swiatek has failed to win a tournament in almost a year, but the Polish world number two has defended her coach and psychologist despite the poor run of results and losing her place at the top of the world rankings in a difficult period.

Swiatek parted ways with her coach Tomasz Wiktorowski in October after three years, adding Belgian Wim Fissette to her team and in November accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for banned substance trimetazidine.

The five-time Grand Slam winner has drawn a blank since winning last year's French Open, and her latest result saw Swiatek lose her Madrid Open title in a crushing 6-1 6-1 semi-final defeat to Coco Gauff last week.

"Sometimes I'm not happy with the way I play. It's natural, especially with my perfectionism. This can be seen on the court," Swiatek told Polish media outlet *SportoweFakty* in an interview.

"However, when I come off it, I can look at the season from a broader perspective.

"Then I find a lot of positives. Reaching the quarter-finals or semi-finals is a good result. Again, I am the most even player of the whole season."

Swiatek was asked if new coach Fissette was responsible for the lack of success.

"No, this is a very harsh and unfair statement," Swiatek said.



Poland's Iga Swiatek during training ahead of the Italian Open in Rome. (Reuters)

"I can only look at the coach from my own perspective, which is the only right one for me, that is, what our work looks like every day.

"The worse results coincided with many other challenges in recent months, also in family life. I found myself at a stage of my career where I had to reformulate my thinking about myself.

Swiatek believes others have improved rather than her regressing.

"The level of tennis in the world is getting higher and higher. The girls got to know my game, they developed themselves," Swiatek

said. "Coco Gauff, who has always been a great talent, is older today and has more experience. Aryna (Sabalenka) managed to make it through the semi-finals and began to win titles."

The 23-year old has been working with sports psychologist Daria Abramowicz for the last six years and Swiatek was asked if there was a moment when she thought their co-operation had run its course.

"No. People don't know it, but practically every year there are different challenges," Swiatek replied.

"When I was suspended, I

didn't want to go out on the court at all for a few weeks. It was the most difficult experience of my career. Daria is a constant support for me, a person I trust. This is my team, I decide who is in it.

"I am irritated by headlines talking about falling apart or a mental crisis. Of course, sometimes I get annoyed on the court. Sometimes I'm not as focused as I'd like.

"But I work, day in and day out, week in and week out, to be better.

"So there is no reason to make strange judgements or look for fatigue or burnout."

ATHLETICS

South African sprinter Simbine shrugs off 'nearly man' tag

AFF
Paris

In-form South African sprinter Akani Simbine insists he is no "nearly man" despite missing a podium finish in the men's 100m at the last three Olympics by a combined total of just eight-hundredths of second.

The 31-year-old finished fifth at the 2016 Rio Olympics before successive fourth places at the 2020 Tokyo and 2024 Paris Games.

While he was three-hundredths of a second off the pace in Rio and four-hundredths away in Tokyo, he missed out on an individual Olympic medal in the French capital to Fred Kerley by just one-hundredth of a second. His participation at the world championships have seen him place fifth (2017), fourth (2019) and fifth (2022) in the 100m.

Simbine did eventually bag a global medal by anchoring South Africa to Olympic silver in the 4x100m relay in Paris. He followed that up with world indoor bronze over 60m in Nanjing in March, a result that fired his season off and since then he has lined up three wins over 100m, including at the two opening Diamond League meets in China.

"People say that I'm the nearly man, I don't see it like that," Simbine told reporters ahead of this weekend's world relays in Guangzhou. "I see myself as an athlete that's never given up on achieving, that's never given up on trying to be the best.

"I really came into the season with a different mentality from last year. It was more of coming into the season with the mentality of being content, in a space where I'm happy as me as an athlete and not letting my achievements of track define me in my career."

Simbine added: "I know what my career has done, I know what my career is and I know what my career has shown to athletics.

"I've proved myself to be an elite athlete and I've proved myself to be an elite sprinter. I don't need a medal to kind of prove that. The medal is just a cherry on top. So having that tag as the nearly man, it's noise at the end of the day."



Tokyo worlds the goal

Simbine's three victories this season have all been in sub-10 second times, meaning he became the first sprinter to run under that barrier for 11 straight years, outdoing Usain Bolt's previous record of 10 consecutive sub-10 seasons.

Simbine will headline a South African sprint quartet seeking to reclaim gold in the world relays in Guangzhou this weekend after previously winning in Chorzow in 2021.

The early-season Chinese swing is but a step en route to the world championships back in Asia, this time in Tokyo in September.

"At the beginning of the season, we always set a goal for the major championship, which is Tokyo," he said. "And for me, that is to get on to the podium. But we're not even looking at it right now. We're just trying to make sure that we take each competition as it comes.

"We keep taking it week by week and trying to break the season down because it's such a long season. It's all geared up to be at our best in September and October."

Simbine credited his impressive start to the season to having had "a really great indoors" but said he wanted to peak later in the season.

"I'm not meant to be running 9.7 or 9.8 now in May. That doesn't make sense because we want to make sure we're at our best in September."

Looking even further ahead, Simbine admitted that a fourth Olympics, in Los Angeles, was on his radar.

"2028 is definitely the plan," he said. "But it might be my last Olympics. But we'll see. We'll see what the body says. If the body still allows after that, I will definitely stick around."

SNOOKER

Champion Zhao's world title can enhance Olympic bid, says WPBSA chief



China's Zhao Xintong poses with the trophy after victory over Wales' Mark Williams in the World Championship Snooker final at The Crucible in Sheffield, northern England on Monday. Zhao Xintong became the first Chinese player to win the World Snooker Championship as the qualifier completed his stunning march to the title with a 18-12 victory against Williams in the final. (AFP)

Reuters
Beijing

Snooker's hope to be included in the 2032 Brisbane Olympics is realistic and will be enhanced by China's growing power in the sport, according to one of the men behind the bid.

Zhao Xintong became the first Chinese world champion when he beat Mark Williams in the final on Monday, a breakthrough moment for a country in which snooker has boomed in popularity.

"Realistically, Australia is a target," Jason Ferguson, chair of the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association (WPBSA), told the BBC broadcaster yesterday.

"We're talking to all the multi-sport bodies. There's a lot of politics involved, but the size of snooker and how important China is to the IOC (International Olympic Committee), someone has to look at this and say 'this is now snooker's time'."

Snooker failed in bids to be included in the Tokyo and Paris Olympics but the sport's increasing global reach, especially in Asia, could make it more attractive to the IOC.

Ferguson has no doubt that the 28-year-old Zhao's triumph in Sheffield this week will further fuel its growth in China.

"This is one of the biggest occasions snooker has seen," he said. "Snooker in China is treated like any national sport. To see a world champion returning to China a national hero is really going to send the sport to another level."

Zhao targets more titles after historic world snooker triumph

Fresh off becoming the first Chinese player to win the World Snooker Championship, Zhao Xintong is eyeing more titles, hoping his continued success will inspire a new wave of talent in China.

The 28-year-old Zhao, nicknamed "the Cyclone", secured an 18-12 victory over Welsh three-times winner Mark Williams at the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield on Monday, capping a remarkable journey through turmoil and redemption.

Zhao's triumph sent ripples through China, as millions hailed a major breakthrough for the sport. He is one of five Chinese players to finish the season in the top 20.

"I did realise that my victory is important for Chinese snooker," Zhao told China's

state news agency Xinhua in an interview published yesterday.

"I believe I can win more tournaments in the future to attract more people to be involved in the sport. I will refresh myself and look forward to a brand-new start of my career."

Zhao was banned for 20 months in January 2023 after a match-fixing scandal that rocked the sport, the repercussions of which meant he was classed as an amateur at the championship event and needed to get through four rounds of qualifying to reach the Crucible - a gruelling run to the title that began on April 7.

"I did something wrong and I learned from it, but I have never lost faith in myself. I kept practising as usual and I followed the pro tour attentively," Zhao said.

"I have never thought about quitting snooker but coming back stronger."

Zhao said he was worried about being able to match the intensity in major events and had had no expectations going into the World Championship.

"After all, I haven't played in top-class tournaments for quite a long time... I was happy that I could reach the final stages and show up at the Crucible."

GOLF

Only 'positive vibes' for future majors with drought over, says McIlroy

Reuters
Flourtown, Pennsylvania

Understandably, Rory McIlroy has had a whirlwind couple of weeks. McIlroy captured his long-awaited Masters victory and completed the career Grand Slam less than four weeks ago.

What followed was a mix of celebration and commitments. He took the next week off from the PGA Tour to visit his parents in his native Northern Ireland, then played in the Zurich Classic of New Orleans team event, where he and Irishman Shane Lowry were defending champions.

He had obligations in New York after that, "bits and pieces" as he called them. The sort of commitments that come with the territory as one of the most famous and accomplished golfers on the planet.

"I'm excited to get back to be-

ing a golfer," McIlroy told reporters yesterday ahead of the Trusti Championship. "It's nice to get back into the routine again and get back to what I know how to do."

The signature event at the Philadelphia Cricket Club marks the first standard tour event for McIlroy since his Augusta breakthrough, and it will serve as his warm-up for next week's PGA Championship at the Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte. He's won that major twice - 2012 and 2014.

There's no doubt McIlroy will be on the hunt for his sixth career major win, but for the first time since his 10-year major drought, a weight has been taken off his shoulders.

"I'm obviously going to feel more comfortable and a lot less pressure, and I'm also going back to a venue that I love," McIlroy, 36, said. "It's nothing but positive vibes going in there next week with what happened a few weeks

ago and then with my history there and how well I've played at Quail.

"Yeah, it probably will feel a little bit different. I probably won't be quite as on edge as I have been for the last few years when I've been at major championships. I'll probably be a little bit better to be around for my family, and I'll be a little more relaxed. I think overall it will be a good thing."

While McIlroy is hungry for a return to routine, this week presents a deviation from the usual. This normally would be the week the PGA Tour is at Quail Hollow for the tournament formerly known as the Wells Fargo Championship - now the Trusti - which McIlroy has won four times.

With the course hosting the major instead, McIlroy will "defend" last year's title at Philadelphia Cricket Club's Wissahickon Course.

"It's a beautiful spot," McIlroy said. "I feel like we don't

play enough tournaments in the Northeast, but a lot of the Northeast golf clubs are smaller venues like this, and just with how big these tournaments have become over the years, it's very hard for a golf course like this to hold a big tournament."

As much as McIlroy wants to push his dramatic Masters win to the rear, he will continue to be asked about it for the rest of his career. He squandered a four-shot lead down the stretch, wound up in a playoff against Englishman Justin Rose and won with birdie on the first hole for his first major since 2014.

McIlroy said he always held the belief and hope that he would cross the Masters off his list.

"Look, I'm just glad that it's done," he added. "I don't want to ever have to go back to that Sunday afternoon again. I'm glad that I finished the way I did, and we can all move on with our lives."



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland talks to a fan during the Pro Am event prior to the Trusti Championship 2025 at The Wissahickon at Philadelphia Cricket Club in Flourtown, Pennsylvania. (AFP)

DIAMOND LEAGUE

Fraser-Pryce excited to return to Doha

Multiple Olympic and world champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce – one of the most decorated athletes of all time – will open her 2025 Wanda Diamond League season over 100m at the Jeteur Doha Meeting on May 16.

Fraser-Pryce, who has won more sprint titles than any other athlete in history, announced in January that this would be her final year of competition. The 38-year-old became the first Jamaican woman to win an Olympic women's 100m title at the Beijing Games in 2008 and successfully

defended her title in London 2012. She has won a record five global 100m titles to date, including at the 2019 World Athletics Championships in Doha (where she also won 4x100m relay gold), and was named Laureus World Sportswoman of the Year at the prestigious 2023 Laureus World Sports Awards.

Third-fastest of all-time over 100m with a best of 10.60s (Lausanne, 2021), she last competed at the Diamond League meeting in Doha in 2021 where she took victory in the 100m in 10.84s (+1.1m/s). "Doha holds a special place in my heart, and I'm

truly excited to return for this year's Diamond League," said the so-called 'Pocket Rocket' who clocked 10.94s (+3.1m/s) in her 2025 season-opener in Kingston (19 April).

"From the start of my career I've understood the power of the platform that track and field provides. I've been blessed to compete at the highest level for many years, and with that comes a responsibility to lead, inspire, and uplift the next generation, especially young girls who dream of becoming athletes, mothers, and business leaders. That legacy continues to drive me.

"My focus remains sharp, and I approach this season with the same levels of discipline, passion, and determination that have defined my career. Every race is an opportunity, and I'm committed to making each one count."

The Doha Meeting is the third meeting of the 2025 Wanda Diamond League. The series – which started in Xiamen on 26 April – comprises 15 of the most prestigious events in global track and field across four different continents and concludes with a single final across two days in Zurich (27-28 August).



EUROPA LEAGUE

Amorim eyes glory with 'worst' Man United team

'We know that this season was really disappointing for everybody'

AFP
London

Ruben Amorim says nothing will change if he wins the Europa League with the "worst" Manchester United team in Premier League history.

United are currently a lowly 15th in the 20-team table – and only scraped through to the last four of the Europa League after a remarkable comeback against Lyon.

But they now have one foot in the final after a 3-0 semi-final first leg win against Athletic Bilbao last week ahead of today's return encounter at Old Trafford.

An all-English final is in prospect should Tottenham Hotspur defeat Bodo/Glimt, giving the sides presently 15th and 16th in the Premier League a chance to win a continental trophy, with the considerable added bonus of qualifying for the Champions League.

"In the end of this season, we can be the worst (United) team in Premier League history with a European title, so it will change nothing," Amorim told a pre-match press conference yesterday.

"We know that this season was really disappointing for everybody. Nothing is going to change," added United manager Amorim, who took charge of the fallen English giants after replacing the sacked Erik ten Hag in November.

United may be well-placed but Amorim believes they must guard against their tendency to "lose our mind a little bit" if they are to reach a final that will be played at Bilbao's San Mames ground on May 21. Casemiro's header and two goals from skipper Bruno



Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim reacts with players and coaching staff during training in Carrington, Britain yesterday. (Reuters)

Fernandes in Bilbao put them in a strong position in Spain, with the hosts reduced to 10 men following Dani Vivian's red card.

All 133 teams in the competition's history to have scored three or more goals away from home in the first leg have gone through.

But Amorim is taking nothing for granted and believes United must score at least one more goal to book their place in the final.

"If you look at our season, anything is possible, so we have to understand one goal can change anything, the momentum of the game," he said.

"One sending off, you saw it a week ago, so we are prepared to fight to win the game not thinking

about the result. "Of course that matters and the way we are going to do things, especially when we start the game, but of course we are thinking about winning the game."

Athletic face a tough task, but United have lost 3-0 at Old Trafford three times so far this season and were beaten 4-3 at Brentford last weekend.

"We have to face the game (against Bilbao) as one more game," said Portuguese coach Amorim. "I feel that we need to score to go to the next round, so that is clearly the way we are going to face the game."

"Brentford, we are near the draw, but we suffer a goal and

another one quite fast. That can happen.

"That happened four times here in Manchester United, so we will have to suffer a little bit to go to the final. We are ready to suffer and we need to be better in the small details."

Amorim, asked if he knew which face United would show tomorrow, replied: "It's hard to say, and sometimes it's not what kind of team we will be tomorrow."

He added: "Sometimes even during the game we are one team, something happens and we lose our mind a little bit. But we are improving the way we play, we are more confident and we are ready to face this challenge."

FOOTBALL

QSL announces special arrangements for Qatar Cup final

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) announced the arrangements and preparations for Qatar Cup 2025 final between Al Sadd and Al Duhail on May 10 at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium of Al Sadd club (kick-off 7pm).

The announcement was made at a Press conference held at QSL Headquarters, attended by Hassan Rabiah al-Kuwari, Executive Director of Sales, Marketing and Communication at QSL, and Ahmed Salman al-Adani, Director of Competitions at QSL, in the presence of media representatives and Qatar Cup ambassadors.

Al-Kuwari said: "I welcome all attendees and congratulate both teams on qualifying for the final of the glorious Cup to which we attach great importance in terms of preparations and arrangements, in co-operation and co-ordination with all stakeholders and partners, to ensure a distinguished performance at all levels."

Tickets for the match went on sale on Monday, May 5, and are available only through QSL's official website (tickets.qsl.qa).

A dedicated fan zone will be active two hours before kick-off and will feature related facilities

and entertainment activities with the aim of providing a unique fan experience.

Valuable prizes will also be available through a raffle, including a car as well as cash prizes totalling QR10,000 for each participant in the Golden Goal half-time activation.

Al-Kuwari extended his sincere thanks and appreciation to all sponsors, partners, stakeholders, media organisations, Host Broadcaster and Qatar Cup 2025 Ambassadors.

Al-Adani said: "We congratulate both teams on their participation in the Qatar Cup 2025 final. We also emphasise that our preparations are going on well to ensure a distinguished final, in co-ordination with the two clubs and all relevant parties. We thank them all for their co-operation."

A technical meeting was held with representatives of both teams to discuss organisational procedures, match-day operations and coronation. It was emphasised that, in accordance with what was previously announced, if the match ends in a draw, extra time will be played for 30 minutes, divided into two halves. If the draw persists, penalty shoot-out will be enforced.



Executive Director of Sales, Marketing and Communication at QSL Hassan Rabiah al-Kuwari (right) and Director of Competitions at QSL Ahmed Salman al-Adani address the media yesterday.

BOTTOMLINE

Young Barca earn respect but crave trophies after Inter heartbreak

AFP
Barcelona

Hansi Flick's brilliant young Barcelona side won hearts in this season's Champions League and re-established themselves at Europe's top table, but fell agonisingly short of reaching the Munich final after one of the competition's greatest semi-finals.

Dusting themselves down from their painful elimination at the hands of Inter Milan on Tuesday, Barca will take pride in knowing the club are closer than ever to ending their decade-long drought in the continent's premier competition.

Barcelona lost 4-3 in extra-time in Milan, with the Italians progressing 7-6 on aggregate after a thrilling rollercoaster of a match in which they threw away a 2-0 lead. For the first time since 2019 the Catalans made the final four, but they were dreaming of more – a first Champions League trophy since 2015 and a potential quadruple.

"The players deserve respect, but we are playing to win trophies," said Flick, not content with merely restoring Barcelona's status among the elite. With the wizardry of Lam-

ine Yamal, the goals of Raphinha and brains of Pedri, pulling strings in midfield, Barcelona have enough to end their wait for the trophy in the post-Lionel Messi era.

An inspired Yann Sommer, a shaky Barca defence missing injured regulars Jules Kounde and Alejandro Balde, and Inter's experience ensured they did not.

"Of course (something special) has started, but we're not at the end – we had a really huge defeat now," said Flick.

"We're not satisfied about that but it's normal. We have to stand up, this is the message I want to give. We have to fight until the end of the season – and for next season."

Barcelona were two minutes away from booking their flights to Munich, leading 3-2 on the night at the San Siro in the pouring rain, but Francesco Acerbi's 93rd minute strike forced extra-time before Davide Frattesi won it for the hosts.

Arguably the best player in both legs of the tie was 17-year-old Spain star Yamal, but he showed his inexperience in stoppage time before Acerbi struck.

Rampaging down the right, yet again, Yamal crashed a shot against the post when he might have headed for the corner flag. In the



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal reacts after his team lost the UEFA Champions League semi-final second leg match against Inter Milan in Milan. (AFP)

first-half 18-year-old Pau Cubarsi, another graduate of Barcelona's La Masia academy, conceded a penalty with a risky challenge on Lautaro Martinez.

"We have a young team and we will improve of course," Flick told reporters. "This is our job, to make this team better and better."

Despite the mistakes they made, Barca's elimination was a far cry from the humiliations they have suffered in recent years – against Roma, Liverpool and Bayern most notably between 2018-2020, or dropping into the Europa League after that.

"We've given everything, this

year it wasn't to be, but we'll be back, don't have any doubt," Yamal wrote on Instagram. "We won't stop until we leave this club where it deserves, on the highest rung. I will fulfil my promise and bring (the Champions League) to Barcelona, we won't stop until we get it." Flick's side must pick them-

selves up quickly because on Sunday they face arch-rivals Real Madrid in a clash which could go a long way to deciding the fate of La Liga.

The Catalans lead the reigning champions by four points with four matches remaining and want to add the league title to their Copa del Rey and Spanish Super Cup triumphs. Real Madrid are fresh after their win over Celta last Sunday, while Barca played 120 draining minutes against Inter and leave Italy with their hearts broken.

"I think the team today, when they look in the mirror, when they arrive at home at three or four o'clock in the night, or in the morning, I think then they can be very proud," said Flick.

"(This defeat) must wake up the hunger to win the title, this is important for me."

Barcelona's players did their best to put on a brave face. "We've gone beyond expectations, we're Barca, there are no transition years, we have to win all the trophies we can," Eric Garcia told Movistar.

"Today we couldn't do it, but the team comes out strengthened." Madrid's impending visit to the Olympic Stadium will be a quick test of that.