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FOOTBALL

Sadd edge Duhail in shootout to clinch fourth Qatar Cup

Goalkeeper Barsham was the hero of the night, producing two crucial saves in the shootout



Al Sadd players celebrate with the Qatar Cup yesterday. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekkayil

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd clinched their fourth Qatar Cup title – and their second trophy of the season – after edging arch-rivals Al Duhail 3–2 in a dramatic penalty shootout, following a 2–2 draw in regulation time at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, presented the trophy to Al Sadd captain Hassan al-Haydos.

Goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham was the hero of the night, producing two crucial saves in the shootout – first diving to his left, then to his right. Al-Haydos, Akram Afif, Rafa Mujica, and Claudinho converted their spot kicks for Al Sadd, while Pedro Miguel missed. For Al Duhail, Almoez Ali, Edmilson Jr., and Benjamin Bourigeaud found the net, but Michael Olunga and Karim Boudiaf were denied by Barsham.

Al Duhail began the match on the front foot, putting Al Sadd under pressure with an aggressive

start. Barsham made a vital save in the first half to keep the Wolves in the game. The Red Knights eventually broke the deadlock in the 49th minute, when Olunga headed home from a corner.

Al Sadd equalised in the 63rd minute after Pedro Miguel was brought down during a corner. Claudinho calmly converted the resulting penalty to make it 1–1. But just three minutes later, Al Duhail regained the lead through Bourigeaud, who timed his run perfectly to slot in a Bassem al-Rawi cross from the right.

In the 86th minute, Mujica rose high to head home a Claudinho lob from the left, drawing Al Sadd level once again.

With no further goals in extra time, the contest went to penalties, where Al Sadd prevailed on home turf. This marks Al Sadd's fourth Qatar Cup triumph, having previously lifted the title in 2017, 2020, and 2021.

Coach Sanchez hails Al Sadd's spirit

Al Sadd head coach Felix Sanchez praised his team's resilience and character after their hard-fought victory.

“We played a strong match against a strong team,” he said. “We were behind twice and came back. I think we deserved the title.”

Sanchez lauded the intensity of the final and credited his players for their determination. “It was an enjoyable match for everyone. It went to penalties, and I’m really happy with the players, their performance, and their comeback.”

He reserved special praise for Barsham, saying, “Barsham was a star. We said if it went to penalties, he would help us and he did. He did it with the national team, and now again with Al Sadd.”

Barsham said: “I enjoy penalties. I stay optimistic and fearless,” he said. “It was a tough match – Al Duhail played really well.”

Veteran defender Boualem Khoukhi echoed his coach's sentiments: “It was a very tough match, but we deserved this title, especially in such a challenging season. We went behind twice against a strong Al Duhail side and still managed to win.”

Looking ahead, Khoukhi turned his attention to the Amir's Cup. “It's the most difficult and most important tournament. All teams will give it everything,” he said.



Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani and President of Al Sadd His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani present the Qatar Cup trophy to Sadd captain Hassan al-Haydos.



Al Sadd goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham celebrates with teammates after starring in the penalty shootout against Al Duhail in the Qatar Cup final at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

LA LIGA

Barcelona ready for Real test after Champions League exit: Flick



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal (centre) takes part in a training session on the eve of the La Liga match against Real Madrid at the Joan Gamper training ground in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Barcelona

Barcelona's players have discussed last week's Champions League elimination and are ready to put their disappointment behind them as they prepare to face La Liga title rivals Real Madrid, manager Hansi Flick said yesterday.

Barca, who suffered a 4-3 Champions League semi-final defeat by Inter Milan on Tuesday, lead the Spanish top-flight by four points over second-placed Real. With four matches left in the season, a home win today would move Flick's side one victory away from their 28th Spanish league title.

“We're doing well. After the defeat in Milan, everyone knows it's not easy... but we're doing things

right. We've talked about what we want to do in these two weeks,” Flick told reporters.

“There are four more games to go. El Clasico is important, we have to show how well we can play. The players are doing very well... We've been talking about what they are thinking, what they are feeling. We had to talk about it as a group. Everyone knows that in a Clasico you have to give 100%. You have to be active, intense, dominant. Real Madrid is a very good team, and we need the fans.”

Barcelona have conceded 10 goals in their last four games across all competitions, leading to questions over their solidity and the team's use of a high line when defending. Flick, however, is content with his back line. “When we started, I was clear about the philosophy... There have been games, especially at the beginning, where we saw doubts, but the team has adapted well,” he said. “They have also been improving and are happy with the style and how we want to play. When you see the quality of the players you are happy.”

Flick said striker Robert Lewandowski, returning from a hamstring injury, and full back Alejandro Balde would not start against Real.

REAL NEED TO PLAY A COMPLETE GAME TO BEAT BARCA, SAYS ANCELOTTI

Meanwhile, Carlo Ancelotti said his Real Madrid side will need to play a complete game to defeat Barcelona. “In this type of game you have to do things well. Barcelona are used to keeping the opponent in their own area, but no team is perfect,” he said. “It's a

game where there's a lot at stake and to win you have to manage everything well, defend well, attack well. We have to play a complete game.”

With so much at stake against their great rivals, Ancelotti will have little trouble getting his players fired up. “It's not difficult to motivate the players because it's the type of match for which the players already come out motivated and with a lot of confidence,” he said. “Playing with Barcelona is special. It will be the last ‘El Clasico’ of the season because Barca are not in the Club World Cup.”

Real have lost all three previous games against Barcelona in this campaign, including the recent Copa del Rey final, and exited the Champions League at the quarter-final stage against Arsenal having won the competition last season.

CYCLING

Tarling wins Giro time trial, Roglic in pink

AFP
Tirana

Welshman Josh Tarling won stage two of the Giro d'Italia yesterday, an individual time-trial in downtown Tirana on the second of three days in Albania.

In the overall standings, pre-race favourite and 2023 Giro champion Primož Roglič grabbed the coveted pink jersey from Friday's stage winner Mads Pedersen, who was an agonising two seconds short of clinging on.

The 21-year old Tarling of Ineos is a time-trial specialist and finished the 13.7km circuit in 16min 07sec, 1sec faster than Roglič and 3sec faster than Jay Vine.

Decked out in the British national time-trial jersey Tarling held his head in his hands as he watched Pedersen on the home stretch.

"Winning today is truly exceptional. Waiting for the other riders to finish the course was difficult. I don't want to go through that again," he joked.

"I was afraid of all the favourites. Primož was really impressive. So this first Grand Tour victory is a new step in my career," said Tarling, who came fourth at the Olympic Games and might have won but for a heavy fall in the rain.

Belgian star Wout van Aert had been expected to win this stage and claim the pink pullover but never put the hammer down as he struggled to overcome a stomach bug.

Of the main overall contenders most of them finished over 30sec down on Roglič, but with a relentless stream of hilly and mountain stages along the 3400km 21-day race, the Slovenian won't be getting excited yet.

Roglič leads his key rival Team UAE's Juan Ayuso by 16sec, as the 22-year-old Spaniard attempts to defend the title his team won with Tadej Pogacar in 2024.

Italian home hope Antonio Tiberi is 25sec down, Simon Yates of Visma is at 33sec and his twin brother Adam Yates of UAE is at 36sec.

Two former South American winners of the Giro Richard Carapaz of American outfit EF is 37sec

done on Roglič and Colombian Egan Bernal is at 48.

Those kind of gaps can go up in smoke over the space of a kilometre in the high mountains during the final week.

The final week of the Giro will be decisive with stage 16 featuring five Alpine mountains, and stage 20 ending with a gruelling climb up the Colle delle Finestre to the Sestriere ski resort, the moment when the winner is likely to emerge.

The world and Olympic time-trial champion Remco Evenepoel is absent from this Giro, as are two other handy time trial riders Filippo Ganna and defending Giro and Tour de France champion Tadej Pogacar.

Albania is hosting the first three days of the 2025 Giro with the Balkan nation enjoying a tourism boom.

Sunday's third stage at Valona will showcase some of Albania's prettiest coastline, while the stage itself is largely flat and will favour the sprinters who were dropped in the hills Friday, and who suffered through Saturday's individual effort.



Ineos Grenadiers' British rider Joshua Tarling poses on the podium after winning the second stage of the 108th Giro d'Italia cycling race, a 13.7km individual time-trial from Tirana to Tirana in Albania yesterday. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

Deja vu in France as Marc beats brother Alex in sprint

'I WAS RIDING WELL, LET'S SEE IF WE CAN FINISH THE JOB TOMORROW'



Ducati Lenovo Team's Spanish MotoGP rider Marc Marquez (left) celebrates with his brother BK8 Gresini Racing MotoGP team's Spanish MotoGP rider Alex Marquez after placing first and second of the France Moto GP Sprint race at the Le Mans Circuit yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Le Mans, France

Marc Marquez maintained his perfect sprint race record this season at the French MotoGP in Le Mans yesterday, with brother Alex once again filling the runner-up spot.

The Ducati factory rider replaced his younger sibling at the top of the world championship standings after extending his sprint race haul in 2025 to six from five.

"I was riding well, let's see if we can finish the job tomorrow (in Sunday's main race) – 'merci beaucoup,'" beamed Marquez, after taking the chequered flag waved by Tour de France cycling legend Mark Cavendish.

Home favourite Fabio Quartararo had set off from pole after lowering the lap record in qualifying. But the Yamaha rider struggled for pace to cross the line in fourth.

"Fabio was super fast at the start, I was pushing a lot and said to myself 'I can't follow him,'" said sprint king Marquez.

"Then he dropped a bit in pace and I began to feel better and better," he added.

SPRINT RACE RESULT	
1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 19mins 49.022sec,	2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) at 0.530s, 3. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 2.164, 4. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 2.840, 5. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 5.285, 6. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 7.939, 7. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 8.367, 8. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 8.930, 9. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 9.858, 10. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 11.599, 11. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 12.238, 12. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 12.458, 13. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 12.540, 14. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 13.610, 15. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 13.752, 16. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Team HRC) 15.381, 17. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 15.904, 18. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia) 27.507, 19. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 28.342, 20. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Yamaha-Pramac) 44.807
DNF: Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati), Brad Binder (RSA/KTM)	
World championship standings: 1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 151 pts, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 149, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 120, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 84, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 66, 6. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 56, 7. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 47, 8. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 37, 9. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 36, 10. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 33, 11. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 32, 12. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 32, 13. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 32, 14. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 29, 15. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 28, 16. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 19, 17. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 19, 18. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 12, 19. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 6, 20. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha-Pramac) 3, 21. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Yamaha-Pramac) 2, 22. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia) 1, 23. Somkiat Chantira (THA/Honda-LCR) 0, 24. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Team HRC) 0, 25. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Team HRC) 0, 26. Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia) 0	

could have got today," said Quartararo.

Quartararo held off the Marquez brothers at the start, triggering a delighted roar from the expectant home fans.

Francesco Bagnaia then crashed his factory Ducati early on lap two as Marc Marquez tried to keep tabs on Quartararo.

On lap four of 13 the six-time former world champion was all over the Yamaha leader's rear tyre.

stuck in the middle of a Marquez sandwich as Alex raced in third. The younger Marquez brother riding a Ducati satellite Gresini bike, nipped past the Frenchman on lap eight to finish second as he has done in every Saturday dash since the start of the season.

"Really happy to be second, another P2!" said Alex.

Rookie Fermin Aldeguer, Alex Marquez's Gresini teammate, claimed his first sprint podium in third.

when he ran into the rear wheel of the race winner on the cool down lap. There was no harm done and Marc Marquez made a point of congratulating the youngster with a hug.

"I feel incredible, it's a dream for me to be here with these top riders. We have the speed, we just need more experience," said the young Spaniard.

Marquez goes into Sunday's main race on 151 points in the riders' standings, with Alex on 149.

GOLF

Spieth seeks career Slam as rivals ponder Rory Slam chances

AFP
Charlotte

Inspired by Rory McIlroy completing a career Grand Slam at the Masters, Jordan Spieth hopes to finish his own career Slam in next week's PGA Championship at Quail Hollow.

Spieth won the 2015 Masters and US Open and captured the 2017 British Open but the 31-year-old American will make his ninth attempt at the career Slam and chase his first win since the 2022 PGA Heritage tournament.

It's a drought similar to that endured by McIlroy, who failed 10 times to complete the career Slam at Augusta National until he captured the green jacket last month, his first major win since 2014.

"Not only did he complete it but the time it took him to complete it, it was obviously a very challenging week for him. It was harder than maybe anybody ever trying to win a Masters," Spieth said.

"To be that far from his most recent major as well, and then to go do it, it was very inspiring."

Spieth, who underwent left wrist surgery last August, fired a final-round 62 at last week's Byron Nelson. He will play on the same Quail Hollow layout where he was 28th in his first shot at the career Slam in 2017.

Spieth has had five top-four major finishes since his last major win, including a share of third at the 2019 PGA at Bethpage Black.

The fact Spieth must chase history on a different course every year adds another layer of difficulty, McIlroy said, compared to what he had to achieve at the Masters, always played at Augusta National.

"It's hard, I think, for Jordan having to do. You have to go back to the same tournament every year for Jordan, but not the same golf course," McIlroy said.

"It's a little bit of a different proposition for him rather than me having to go back to the same venue every year.

"As much as you try to get yourself in the right frame of mind to just try to win the golf tournament and then let everything else happen, it's in there. Consciously or subconsciously, you feel that.



"You know that you're not just trying to win another tournament, you're trying to become part of history, and that has a certain weight to it.

"I've certainly felt that at Augusta over the years. I'm sure Jordan has felt that a bit going into each PGA that he's had a chance to do the same thing."

There's also a longshot possibility of a calendar slam by McIlroy, a "Rory Slam" adding the PGA, US Open and British Open to a 2025 trophy haul that already includes Pebble Beach, The Players Championship and the Masters.

Second-ranked McIlroy has won four times at Quail Hollow in PGA Tour events. He was the US Open runner-up in 2023 and 2024 and this year's Claret Jug will be decided at Portrush, a Northern Ireland course McIlroy knows well.

"Going back to Portrush is going to be incredible. Rory going back as the Masters champion now is going to take a little bit of heat off me," said Ireland's Shane Lowry, who won the 2019 British Open at Portrush.

Justin Thomas, a two-time PGA Championship winner who took his first major title at Quail Hollow, says McIlroy could be ready for a big run after winning the Masters.

"Rory was on a pretty decent run this year already," Thomas said. "I guess it's all relative of what a big run is, if that means more majors or more tournaments, but he has played better than everybody this year, even before the Masters."

Thomas also took motivation from McIlroy's Masters magic.

"Rory winning the grand slam was huge. It was inspiring to me," Thomas said. "If everybody keeps playing well and keeps putting themselves in position... we can just hopefully have more battles."

UAE batters get shy and retiring to dodge rain threat

United Arab Emirates batters retired out en masse in an effort to end their match against Qatar quickly with rain threatening to affect the Women's Twenty20 World Cup Asian qualifier in Bangkok on Friday. UAE reached 192-0 in 16 overs with captain Esha Oza making 113 off 55 balls before deciding to finish their innings early to avoid a washout.

Ending an innings by declaration is not allowed in T20 Inter-

nationals, however, so every batter had to pad up and walk to the middle before retiring without facing a ball. UAE then bowled out Qatar for 29 in 11.1 overs to secure a crushing win by 163 runs and remain top of Group B. The top team from each of the three groups will compete in a final 'Super Three' round, with the top two qualifying for next year's World Cup in England and Wales.

Cherif claims Big Tour title as champions crowned at Hathab finale



Bader Mohammed al-Darwish, President of the Qatar Equestrian Federation, crowned the overall winners of the eighth edition of the Qatar Equestrian Tour Longines Hathab at Al Shaqab yesterday. Cyrine Cherif claimed the Big Tour title, with Rashid Towaim al-Marri winning the Medium Tour. Fahad bin Jassim al-Thani bagged the Small Tour, while Jassim al-Jaham al-Kuwari, Abdulla Khalid al-Julandani, Moza Hamza al-Kuwari emerging winners in the dressage categories. Mohammed Faisal al-Marri topped the Amateur class, and young talents Hassan Ali Almarhoon and Nasser bin Hamad al-Thani topped the Future Riders classes.

QOC participates in executive board meet of GCC Olympic Committees Presidents' Council



The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) participated in the executive board meeting of the presidents of the GCC National Olympic Committees in Kuwait. The QOC delegation was led by Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani, Director of the Sports Sector, and included Mohammed Issa al-Fadala, Director of the Sports Affairs Department. The meeting was also attended by the secretaries-general of the GCC Olympic Committees. Discussions during the meeting focused on key topics, most notably the third edition of the GCC Beach Games, which was successfully hosted last month in Muscat, Oman. The meeting reviewed a report on the event, highlighting its organisation and outcomes. The meeting also addressed items on the agenda, including the upcoming 4th GCC Games - Qatar 2026, the 2nd GCC Youth Games in 2028, the Sports Law and Management Conference, the Unified Platform for Gulf Women's Sports, and the GCC Women's Sports Hackathon Program. The Executive Board approved a number of recommendations, which will be submitted for review at the 37th Meeting of the GCC Olympic Committees Presidents' Council, scheduled to take place today.

TENNIS

Sinner returns with rock-solid display in Rome

SWIATEK'S STRUGGLES CONTINUE AS COLLINS ENDS TITLE DEFENCE

AFP
Rome

Jannik Sinner made no mistake on his return to tennis yesterday after a three-month doping ban, sweeping aside Mariano Navone in straight sets 6-3, 6-4 at the Italian Open in front of thrilled fans in Rome.

World number one Sinner cruised past Argentina's Navone in one hour and 39 minutes in front of over 10,000 supporters at the Foro Italico to set up a third-round clash with lucky loser Jesper de Jong.

The Italian had not played since winning the Australian Open in January due to the suspension he accepted from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) the following month.

He twice tested positive for traces of banned substance clostebol in March last year, although WADA accepted that the 23-year-old had been accidentally contaminated by his physiotherapist.

And Sinner delighted a partisan and packed centre court in the Italian capital, shaking off the cobwebs as he eyes a run at Roland Garros later this month.

"I tried to give everything I have, you know, I think that's the only thing I can do. That's the only thing I can control right now," said Sinner. "It's an amazing feeling. It's a special feeling. I never take things granted. And yeah, I'm just happy to be back."

The three-time Grand Slam winner's last clay court match was his epic semi-final defeat to rival Carlos Alcaraz at last year's French Open, and while the crowd matched such a big occasion on Saturday, the tennis did not.

Alcaraz was a short walk away at the Stadio Olimpico to watch his footballer friend Patric play for Lazio while Sinner took on world number 99 Navone.

And the Spaniard, who faces Laslo Djere on Sunday night, would not have been surprised to hear that Sinner dealt with Navone in a perfunctory, unflashy manner to begin his comeback in style.

It was a good day for Italian fans who also watched Rome-born Matteo Berrettini beat Jacob Fearnley in straight sets, 6-4, 7-6 (7/0) in his first match at his home tournament in four years.

Former Wimbledon finalist Berrettini, who withdrew from the Madrid Open with the latest in a long line of abdominal injuries, will face Madrid champion Casper Ruud in the third round with the Norwegian beating Alexander Bublik 6-4, 4-6, 6-3. Women's sixth seed Jasmine Paolini made it a hat-trick of Italian wins by sweeping aside Ons Jabeur in straight sets to set up a last 16 clash with Jelena Ostapenko.

Elsewhere in the men's draw Andrey Rublev was dumped out at



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning against Argentina's Mariano Navone in the Italian Open match at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)



Poland's Iga Swiatek (right) with Danielle Collins of the US at the end of their match in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

the first attempt by Hungary's Fabian Marozsan, while fourth seed Taylor Fritz also exited after going down 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/3) to fellow American Marcos Giron.

Iga Swiatek failed to get past the third round in her bid for a fourth Rome title, an uncharacteristically bad display against Danielle Collins ending in a 6-1, 7-5 defeat.

World number two Swiatek was barely recognisable from the player who has won four French Open titles, being broken four times in

the first set and failing to impose herself at all on unfancied Collins, against whom she had previously won eight of nine meetings.

"I'm doing something wrong. So I need to just regroup and kind change some stuff," Swiatek told reporters.

Veteran Collins, 31, will now face Elina Svitolina in the last 16 as the world number 35 hunts an unlikely second WTA 1000 title after winning in Miami last year.

Swiatek's early exit is a major

shock and another worrying sign for the Pole ahead of Roland Garros as she was also thrashed in straight sets by Coco Gauff in the semi-finals of the Madrid Open earlier this month.

The 23-year-old's elimination opens up her side of the women's draw with Naomi Osaka, who could have been her opponent in the quarter-finals, facing fifth seed Madison Keys in the last 16 after beating Marie Bouzkova 4-6, 6-3, 6-3.

FOOTBALL

Lazio snatch draw with 10-man Juve in battle for top-four finish

Reuters
Rome

Lazio substitute Matias Vecino struck a stoppage-time equaliser to earn a 1-1 draw at home to 10-man Juventus in the battle for Champions League qualifying places in Serie A yesterday.

Juve broke the deadlock in the 51st minute through Randal Kolo Muani, who nodded past goalkeeper Christos Mandas, before Vecino levelled with a header six minutes into added time.

Juventus had defender Pierre Kalulu sent off on the hour mark for a foul on striker Taty Castellanos.

With two games left, Juventus once more missed a chance to strengthen their grip on fourth place after they were held 1-1 by seventh-placed Bologna last weekend.

Juve are now level on 64 points with Lazio in fifth and a point above sixth-placed AS Roma, who can move above them into fourth when they visit third-placed Atalanta (68) tomorrow.

Juventus have won only two of their last six league games. Lazio, who are on a seven-game unbeaten league run, had their first attempt on target through Fisayo Dele-Bashiru in the third minute but his low effort at the

near post was kept out by goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio.

The first half was largely short on action after that but following the break Weston McKennie crossed from the left and French forward Kolo Muani put the visitors in front.

However, Igor Tudor's side were down to 10 men shortly afterwards when Kalulu was shown a straight red card for lashing out at Castellanos.

Lazio were on the front foot from then on and Juve's Manuel Locatelli had to clear Pedro's effort with about 15 minutes left before Di Gregorio saved Mario Gila's header after a corner.

The hosts were then awarded a penalty just before the end after Juventus keeper brought Castellanos down chasing after the ball near the goal line on the right side of the box.

However, the referee reversed his decision after a VAR check showed the Argentina forward was offside.

Di Gregorio then made another great save to keep out a Castellanos header late in added time but had no chance when Vecino pounced on a rebound to score from close range.

Juve were still without suspended striker Kenan Yildiz and only had nine players on the bench, with midfielder Teun Koopmeiners and defender Andrea Cambiaso also out injured.



Lazio's Matias Vecino celebrates after scoring during the Serie A match against Juventus in Rome yesterday. (Reuters)

ARNOLD EAGER TO STEER IRAQ TO 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

Graham Arnold is confident he can help Iraq qualify for the World Cup finals for the first time in 40 years after he was appointed as the country's national coach on Friday. Asked whether Iraq can make the cut for the 2026 tournament which will be co-hosted by Canada, Mexico and the US, the Australian told the federation's website: "That's my goal. That's what I want to do. I haven't come here to not be successful, and everyone in this room has to believe that. We can do it." Iraq's only appearance at the tournament was in 1986, when they were eliminated after the group phase. Arnold replaced Spaniard Jesus Casas whose contract was terminated by the local soccer governing body in the wake of a 2-1 loss to Palestine in March. That result left the Iraqis in third place in the standings in Group B, four points adrift of leaders South Korea and one behind Jordan with two games left. The top two nations in each of Asia's three qualifying groups advance automatically for the World Cup while the teams in third and fourth progress to another round of preliminaries. "What is important is we all believe we can win the next two games, that is my first objective for Iraq," he said. Arnold's first game in charge will be against South Korea in Basra on June 5. They then face Jordan in Amman five days later.

WORLD ATHLETICS RELAYS

Qatar miss out on 4x400m final, set for second shot at Worlds berth

By Sports Reporter
Guangzhou, China

Qatar's men's 4x400m team failed to qualify for the final at the World Athletics Relays in Guangzhou, China yesterday. The quartet of Abderrahman Samba, Bassem Hemeida, Ashraf Hussen Osman and Ammar Ismail Yahia Ibrahim finished third in the heats, missing out on a chance to secure early qualification for the World Championships, set to be held in Tokyo this September.

While Qatar missed their first opportunity to qualify, they will have a second shot today. All non-finalists will compete in additional qualifying heats, with the top two from each of the three groups securing World Championships berths. In case they fail to secure Tokyo 2025 spots from Guangzhou, Qatar can also qualify based on their position in the top performance lists during the qualification window, which runs from February 25, 2024 to August 24, 2025. Only two teams from the top lists from each event will make the cut.

On the opening day in Guangzhou, quotas were on offer to the top two teams in each heat in every relay event (except the 4x100m). The two teams also made the finals and will race for World Championships lane seeding and medals today.

It was a thrilling three-way battle between Belgium, Great Britain and Qatar in heat 3. The three teams were within one stride of each other going into the final leg. Qatar's Ammar Ismail Yahia Ibrahim tried to force his way between Belgium's Alexander Doom and Britain's Charlie Dobson but was ultimately unsuccessful.

The latter two ran side by side down the home straight as Belgium took the win in 3:01.35, 0.03 ahead of Britain. Qatar finished in 3:03.97.



Qatar's Bassem Hemeida and Belgium's Robin Vanderbemden in action during the 4x400m relay heat 3 at the World Athletics Relays in Guangzhou, China. (Reuters)

ITALY, CANADA AND JAMAICA SPARKLE IN MIXED 4X100M RELAY'S GLOBAL DEBUT

Meanwhile, Italy, Canada and Jamaica reached the mixed 4x100m relay final in the event's global debut while heavyweights the United States experienced mixed fortunes.

Victory in 41.15 seconds in the first heat amid challenging conditions in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou following a spell of rain earned the Italians a place in the medal round to be held today.

They will be joined by France, who finished second in 41.28 seconds, while pre-

race favourites the US saw their hopes of advancing fade when Jada Mowatt and Kendal Williams botched their baton exchange during the second changeover.

Jamaica's mixed sprint quartet clocked 41.04 seconds to edge out Britain by a hundredth of a second in the next heat and they could deploy three-times Olympic champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and former world champion Yohan Blake in the final.

Canada crossed the line in a scorching 40.90 seconds to second-placed Australia's 41.15 seconds in the third heat to send out a warning to their rivals. The



Qatar's quartet of Abderrahman Samba, Bassem Hemeida, Ashraf Hussen Osman and Ammar Ismail Yahia Ibrahim finished third in the heats.

Americans made up for their error by easing into the mixed 4x400m final, thereby also sealing their spot in the event at the world championships in Tokyo in September.

The world record-holders will be joined in the Guangzhou final by Belgium, Australia, Ireland, Britain and South Africa as well as the two fastest non-automatic qualifiers Kenya and Poland.

Spain went quickest in the women's 4x100m relay ahead of Jamaica and Belgium, clocking 42.18 seconds, while South Africa dominated the men's event with Akani Simbine anchoring his team

to a joint world leading time of 37.84 seconds.

Japan, who were assured of a place in the worlds as hosts, matched South Africa's effort in their heat to finish in front of Olympic champions Canada.

The US women's team shrugged off the increasingly damp conditions to top the timings in the 4x400m race while the men's quartet were third in their heat and will have to wait until Sunday to book their spot in the worlds.

South Africa's men were quickest again in that event with a world leading time of exactly three minutes.

FOOTBALL

Kane tastes first title as Bayern see off Mueller

Holstein Kiel and Bochum relegated from the Bundesliga after both fell to defeats

AFP
Munich

Harry Kane opened the scoring ahead of lifting his first career silverware as Bayern Munich beat Borussia Moenchengladbach 2-0, with veteran Thomas Mueller playing his last home game for the club. Bayern officially won the title on Sunday when defending champions Bayer Leverkusen held to a 2-2 draw at Freiburg, but were presented with the Bundesliga shield in front of their home fans at full-time.

Kane opened the scoring 31 minutes in, heading in a curling Michael Olise shot for his 25th goal of the league campaign. With Bayern lacking their usual energy, Gladbach had several chances to equalise but were let down by poor finishing. Olise tapped in from close range to score a goal of his own in the final minute, sealing the occasion. In his 750th game in all competitions for the club, Mueller - who will leave Bayern after 25 years in the summer - went close to scoring but had his shot saved in the 57th minute.

The 35-year-old was subbed off with seven minutes remaining, hugging his teammates as reserves and members of staff rushed to form a guard of honour. Mueller won a record 13 Bundesliga titles and two Champions Leagues at Bayern.

Mueller said: "I can't really work it through in my mind at the moment," but said he was touched by "75,000 hearts which were beating just a little bit for me". Kane's long-time England and Tottenham teammate Eric Dier, who will join Monaco in the summer, was also given a send-off before the match.

RB Leipzig's top-four hopes were dashed with a goalless draw at Werder Bremen as Holstein Kiel and Bochum were relegated from the Bundesliga after both fell to home defeats. Leipzig had only missed the Champions League once in eight seasons since



Harry Kane lifts the Bundesliga trophy as his Bayern Munich teammates celebrate in Munich yesterday. (AFP)

their debut promotion in 2017 but struggled against a Bremen side pushing for a return to Europe after a 15-year absence.

Leipzig's Xavi Simons went closest to scoring, hitting the post with 68 minutes gone and forcing a save from goalie Michael Zetterer two minutes later.

The result means Jurgen Klopp, the new football chief at owners Red Bull, will oversee his first off-season without the promise of the Champions League.

Leipzig need to beat Stuttgart in their final match to have any hope of reaching the Europa League, while Bremen's European hopes are now purely mathematical given their poor goal difference.

Heidenheim's 3-0 win at Union Berlin on Saturday, thanks to a brace from Adrian Beck and a Jan Schoepfner goal, secured at least the relegation play-off spot for the 16th-placed side. Kiel, promoted to the top flight for the first time this season, needed to win to keep their hopes alive and scored first but conceded twice to go down 2-1 against Freiburg.

Lasse Rosenboom's counter-attacking opener was cancelled out by a Johan Manzambi equaliser just before half-time. Lucas Hoeler replaced Manzambi at half-time and scored early in the second period, heading in from close range to give Freiburg the lead. The victory puts Freiburg in pole

position to play Champions League for the first time next season.

Freiburg sit four points clear of Borussia Dortmund, who have two games to play. Bochum's four-year stint in the Bundesliga came to an end after a 4-1 loss to Mainz, who scored through Germany duo Nadiem Amiri and Jonathan Burkardt, along with Philipp Mwene and Paul Nebel. Bochum, who had just two points in December but kept their hopes alive with a run of good results including wins over Bayern Munich and Dortmund, picked up just two points from their last eight games. Bayer Leverkusen host Dortmund today in coach Xabi Alonso's last home game with the club.

Postecoglou 'hopeful' Son will return for Spurs against Palace

London: Ange Postecoglou says he is "half hopeful" that captain Son Heung-min will return today as he makes plans for Tottenham's showdown with Manchester United in the Europa League final.

Son, 32, has missed the club's past seven fixtures with a foot injury, including both legs of Tottenham's 5-1 aggregate win against Norwegian champions Bodo/Glimt in the Europa League semi-finals. "Everyone got through OK the other night. Half hopeful that we get Sonny some minutes tomorrow so he'll be the only one that sort of can come back in," Spurs boss Postecoglou said. "I think what we do know about Thursday night, playing on an artificial pitch (in Norway) takes a lot out of the players, it's fair to say they were sore."

Defenders Cristian Romero, Micky van de Ven and Destiny Udogie are expected to be rested against Palace. Tottenham are a lowly 16th in the Premier League ahead of their match against Palace - a point and a place below United. But they reached the semi-finals of the League Cup and have a chance to win their first silverware for 17 years in the Europa League.

The Australian will bring up a century of fixtures as Tottenham boss in the Europa League final against United in Bilbao on May 21. "It'd be a nice little bow there for that 100 and it's been a really full 100," he said. "It's fair to say I've experienced just about every emotion in it and hopefully the one main emotion we're all after will be the joy at the end of it."

"We have had a ridiculous injury-riddled season coupled by the fact we've done really well in two competitions and that is 60 games. So, it has felt - and certainly for me personally it has felt - like a really, really long season. But you just get energy and realise what happened the other night and you're so close to achieving something special that it all dissipates into the background."

SPOTLIGHT

Champions League race hots up as Man City held, Aston Villa win



Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins (left) celebrates with Jacob Ramsey after scoring against Bournemouth. (AFP)

AFP
London

Manchester City were held to a shock goalless draw by Premier League basement club Southampton yesterday while Aston Villa beat Bournemouth as the race for Champions League places hots up.

Pep Guardiola's dethroned champions were expected to waltz to three points on England's south coast and pull level with second-placed Arsenal on 67 points. But although the FA Cup finalists dominated possession and had 26 shots, they could not break their opponents down, despite

the return of top-scorer Erling Haaland. Third-placed City, who play Crystal Palace in next week's FA Cup final, remain well-placed to finish in the top five, which would secure qualification for the Champions League next season.

But Villa, in sixth spot, are now just two points behind them, on 63 points. There was an explosion of joy among the home fans at the final whistle even though Southampton's relegation fate was sealed weeks ago. The point for managerless Saints takes them to 12 for the season, meaning they have avoided the tag of being the joint-worst team in Premier League history. They are now one point clear of Derby's tally of 11 in the 2007/08 campaign.

Ollie Watkins' goal in the dying seconds of the first half gave Villa a narrow win at Bournemouth. In scoring, England forward Watkins became the club's all-time top goalscorer in the Premier League, his 75th goal taking him past Gabriel Agbonlahor's tally of 74.

Villa's Jacob Ramsey was dismissed after a second yellow card with about 10 minutes to go, adding a touch of jeopardy. Antoine Semenyo flashed a shot just wide and Emiliano Martinez saved smartly from Evanilson but the 10-man away side held on to secure a crucial three points. Unai Emery's team, who suffered the crushing disappointment of defeats in the Champions League quarter-finals and FA Cup

semi-finals in recent weeks, can still finish the season on a high.

Elsewhere, Brentford and Brighton both won to keep alive their European ambitions. Brentford beat already relegated Ipswich 1-0 for their fourth straight win, climbing to eighth in the table, which may be enough for European football next season. Kevin Schade headed home from Bryan Mbeumo's corner in the 18th minute for his 11th Premier League goal of the season.

Brighton beat Wolves 2-0 at Molineux and are behind Brentford only on goal difference. Danny Welbeck scored a first-half penalty and Brajan Gruda added a second in the 85th minute. Everton beat mid-table Fulham 3-1.