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FIFA ARAB CUP 2025

Qatar drawn in Group A with 2021 finalists Tunisia

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS ALGERIA PLACED IN GROUP D ALONG WITH IRAQ AT THE REGIONAL SHOWPIECE



FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 coaches pose after the draw ceremony held in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 23 nations vying to be crowned FIFA Arab Cup champions have learned their path to glory after the tournament draw was conducted at Doha's Raffles Hotel.

Drawn from across the Arab world, the 11 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) nations and 11 Confederation of African Football (CAF) nations, along with hosts Qatar, will tussle for regional supremacy at the second edition of the tournament, set to take place from 1-18 December.

The 14 lowest ranked nations on the April edition of the FIFA Men's World Ranking will enter at the qualification stage, with the winners of those matches then joining hosts Qatar, defending champi-

ons Algeria and the seven other highest-ranked nations in the final stage.

Those single-leg qualifiers, which will take place in Qatar on 25 and 26 November, are also seeded and are arranged on an inter-confederation basis.

That septet then join the group stage with some headline matchups revealed at the tournament draw. Among those are two of the semi-finalists from the previous edition four years ago, Qatar and last edition's finalists Tunisia who will clash in Group A.

A pair of nations that caught the eye at the last FIFA World Cup, Morocco and Saudi Arabia, feature in Group B while Jordan, runners-up at the last edition of the AFC Asian Cup tussle with African royalty in the shape of Egypt in Group C. Qatar and either Palestine or Libya will have the honour

of opening the tournament.

"This edition may be even more technical than the last. Many players and fans across the Arab world are eagerly anticipating it. With teams likely fielding local talent, especially Tunisia and Morocco, I expect a very close and highly competitive tournament," said Qatar Football Association's Head of Communications Ali al-Salat.

The previous edition of the FIFA Arab Cup, held in Qatar in 2021, was a resounding success.

It was an exceptional tournament played in the same stadiums used for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, featuring high-quality football and record-breaking attendance. A total of 571,605 spectators attended the 32 matches, averaging nearly 18,000 per match.

Algeria claimed the title by defeating Tunisia 2-0 after extra time in the final at Al Bayt Stadium, in

FIFA ARAB CUP
QATAR 2025

GROUPS

GROUP A	
	QATAR
	TUNISIA
	SYRIA / SOUTH SUDAN
	PALESTINE / LIBYA
GROUP C	
	EGYPT
	JORDAN
	UAE
	KUWAIT / MAURITANIA

GROUP B	
	MOROCCO
	SAUDI ARABIA
	OMAN / SOMALIA
	YEMEN / COMOROS
GROUP D	
	ALGERIA
	IRAQ
	BAHRAIN / DJIBOUTI
	LEBANON / SUDAN

front of more than 60,000 fans. The FIFA Arab Cup 2025 holds significant importance as the second edition of the tournament since it transitioned under FIFA's direct management.

Qatar is set to host not only the 2025 event, but also the subsequent 2029 and 2033 editions, underscoring its commitment to football in the region.

A notable aspect of the 2025 tournament is the record-breaking prize money that has been announced by the Local Organising Committee. This significant financial investment elevates the FIFA Arab Cup's standing, placing it among major international football competitions.

Ahead of the draws, FIFA President Gianni Infantino addressed the 550 guests in attendance with a video message.

"The FIFA World Cup 2022 was an incredible success - the best FIFA World Cup ever - and it followed twelve months after another historic event in Qatar: the first ever FIFA Arab Cup. I know Qatar will once again brilliantly rise to the challenge of staging

these exciting FIFA tournaments. The hospitality and facilities in this country are exceptional, and every team will have the best conditions in which to prepare," said Infantino.

"The presence of five newcomers in the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025 draw represents everything that FIFA aims to do: make the game truly global and give everyone the chance to shine on the world stage. I look forward to seeing the next generation of stars taking their opportunity to make their debut on the global stage, following in the footsteps of the many great players who featured in this tournament early in their careers," he added.

The total prize money for the tournament will exceed \$36.5mn (approximately QR132.9mn). This substantial prize pool aims to enhance the tournament's stature and foster further development of football in the Arab world.

The final match of the Arab Cup 2025 will be a special occasion, taking place on December 18. This date holds particular significance for Qatar, as it coincides with

FOCUS

Intriguing match-ups set in U-17 World Cup draw

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The draw for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025 has been made and has thrown up a host of fascinating contests.

The draw took place in Doha yesterday with the help of assistants Julian Draxler, who won the 2014 FIFA World Cup with Germany, and former Qatar U-17 player Abdulaziz al-Sulaiti.

The newly-expanded tournament will feature 48 nations for the first time. They were drawn into 12 groups of four teams.

Mouthwatering match-ups include a blockbuster battle between Belgium and Argentina, hosts Qatar facing Italy, and defending champions Germany taking on Colombia.

Qatar U-17 coach Alvaro Mejia said: "This is the World Cup, and we have some of the best teams participating. We're up against strong opponents, but we'll do our best to compete."

"As for preparations, we're giving it everything. This is a new experience for both myself and



Coaches and representatives of the teams pose after FIFA U-17 Qatar World Cup draw ceremony held in Doha yesterday. (Reuters)

the players. Qatar is playing a vital role in developing young talent, and this tournament is part of that process. By gaining this kind of experience early, these players will be better prepared to

compete at the highest level in the future."

This year's groundbreaking edition of the tournament kicks off on November 3, with the state-of-the-art Aspire Zone

complex to be its beating heart. The centralised hub of football history will foster a festival atmosphere over the 25-day competition, creating an inspiring environment for the teams to ex-

cel and a family-friendly experience for fans to enjoy, serving up a unique blend of fun activities, global flavours and world-class football.

All of the participating teams

will harbour ambitions of turning out at Khalifa International Stadium on 27 November, when one of the jewels of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will provide a stunning backdrop to the final and the stage on which the U-17 world champions will be crowned.

THE DRAW

Group A: Qatar, Italy, South Africa, Bolivia

Group B: Japan, Morocco, New Caledonia, Portugal

Group C: Senegal, Croatia, Costa Rica, United Arab Emirates

Group D: Argentina, Belgium, Tunisia, Fiji

Group E: England, Venezuela, Haiti, Egypt

Group F: Mexico, Korea Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Switzerland

Group G: Germany, Colombia, Korea DPR, El Salvador

Group H: Brazil, Honduras, Indonesia, Zambia

Group I: USA, Burkina Faso, Tajikistan, Czechia

Group J: Paraguay, Uzbekistan, Panama, Republic of Ireland

Group K: France, Chile, Canada, Uganda

Group L: Mali, New Zealand, Austria, Saudi Arabia.

CYCLING

Verona bags sixth win for Lidl as Giro hits mountains

AFP
Asiago, Italy

Spain's Carlos Verona of Lidl-Trek won stage 15 of the Giro d'Italia yesterday while Team UAE's Isaac Del Toro remains in the overall lead after a mountainous 219km stage from Fiume Veneto to Asiago.

Verona's solo triumph was the 32-year-old's first-ever win on a grand tour and Lidl-Trek's sixth stage win on the 2025 Giro – Mads Pedersen, with four, and Dan Hoole taking the other five.

The victory came, however, on a day that started badly for Lidl-Trek with the retirement of team leader Giulio Ciccone who pulled out injured after a difficult day in the saddle on Saturday.

Verona peeled away on the final climb and held a slender advan-

tage over the peloton all the way to the line.

The 21-year-old Del Toro did enough to hold on to the lead, the Mexican remaining 1min 20sec ahead of Simon Yates with Spaniard Juan Ayuso third, six seconds further adrift – small change given the mountains ahead.

“The whole country is behind me. It's incredible, like a dream,” said Del Toro, who took the lead a week ago, and is now being followed by an increasing number of Mexicans arriving in Italy to support him.

Egan Bernal's Ineos team were a chief protagonist during an eventful stage, with attacks on both big climbs.

“We have nothing to lose on this Giro, and everything to ride for,” Bernal said.

Second-placed Yates of Visma kept his powder dry the first time

Bernal accelerated on the Monte Grappa 21km climb but Del Toro skipped after him with ease.

Yates followed them on their second doomed attack on the final climb, more aimed at killing off the fading hopes of pre-race favourite Primoz Roglic.

The Slovenian, who fell heavily on Saturday, suffered further serious damage to his aspirations, dropping out of the top five after losing another 1min 30sec.

Monday is a rest day ahead of a challenging final week culminating in Rome on June 1.

The time gaps across the top 10 riders should be shaken up from stage 16 with five monster climbs and a summit finish as the 21-day marathon enters the Alps.

The pure climbers such as Bernal, Yates and Richard Carapaz could cause more havoc there.

“The third week is where the

action is,” said former Giro and Olympic champion Carapaz yesterday.

This is followed by another mountain run that is an invitation to the downhill daredevils with two huge descents on stage 17.

The decider might be stage 19 with another five-mountain slog, while stage 20 has a giant 18.5km climb at 9.5 percent gradient to over 2000m altitude.

Ayuso and Del Toro have time, youth and a strong posse in hand, but former Grand Tour winners are lurking.

Yates, who won the Vuelta a Espana in 2018, is six seconds ahead of Ayuso, while 2019 Giro winner Carapaz of EF is a further 31sec off.

Another Giro winner, and 2019 Tour de France champion, Bernal is another 1min 30 back and poised to strike in a gruelling final week.



Lidl-Trek's Spanish rider Carlos Verona celebrates after victory as he crosses the finish line of the 15th stage of the 108th Giro d'Italia cycling race of 219kms from Fiume Veneto to Asiago yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Chennai end IPL with big win over Gujarat Titans

‘I AM NOT SAYING I AM DONE, NOT SAYING I AM COMING BACK’

AFP
Ahmedabad

Opener Devon Conway and Dewald Brevis hit half-centuries to help bottom-placed Chennai Super Kings end their IPL campaign with a crushing 83-run win over Gujarat Titans yesterday.

New Zealand's Conway hit 52 and South African Brevis made 57 off 23 balls to fire Chennai to 230-5 after they elected to bat first at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

The bowlers then combined to dismiss Gujarat, who have already qualified for the playoffs, for 147 in 18.3 overs. Chennai ended with four wins in 14 matches with debate raging once again over the future of their veteran MS Dhoni, who took over as leader midway after injury to regular captain Ruturaj Gaikwad. The 43-year-old Dhoni has been linked with retirement but chose to keep his cards close to his chest after the game.

“I have four-five months to decide, there's no hurry,” said Dhoni.

The former India captain, who turns 44 in July, has had an underwhelming IPL season scoring just 196 runs down the order. However, he has again shone with his wicketkeeping, pulling off several fine stumpings.

“Need to keep the body fit,” said Dhoni. “You have to be at your best. If cricketers start retiring for their performance, some of them will retire at 22. I will go back to Ranchi, enjoy a few bike rides.

“I am not saying I am done, not saying I am coming back. I have the luxury of timing.”

Gujarat, Punjab Kings, Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Mum-



Chennai Super Kings' Dewald Brevis plays a shot during the IPL match against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

bai Indians are certain of filling the top four places, but are fighting to finish in the top two spots which offer two shots at reaching the final on June 3. Gujarat end the group stage with 18 points. Punjab (17), Bengaluru (17) and five-time winners Mumbai (16) have one match left.

The spotlight was on Gujarat captain Shubman Gill, who took the field a day after he was named captain of the Indian Test team.

He was the first batter out for 13 off nine balls in Gujarat's chase that never took off due to regular wickets. Gill said the defeat was a “hard pill to swallow”.

England's Jos Buttler fell for 13 and West Indies left-hander Sherfane Rutherford out for a duck as Gujarat slipped to 30-3. Gill's partner Sai Sudharsan, who has been included in the Test team for India's five-Test tour of England starting with the opener on June 20, made 41 but the rest of the batting fell flat. Medium-pace bowler Anshul Kamboj and Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad took three wickets each.

The batters set up victory after the left-handed Conway and 17-year-old opener Ayush Mhatre, who hit 34 off 17 balls, gave Chennai a strong start.

Mhatre fell but Conway kept up the charge with Urvil Patel and then Shivam Dube before Brevis took over to boost the total.

Brevis, who got out on the final ball of the innings and was named player of the match, and the left-handed Ravindra Jadeja, who hit an unbeaten 21, put on 74 from 39 balls to pummel the opposition attack and set up the win.

BRIEF SCORES
Chennai Super Kings 230 for 5 (Brevis 57, Conway 52, Prasidh 2-22) **beat Gujarat Titans 147** (Sai Sudharsan 41, Kamboj 3-13, Noor 3-21) **by 83 runs.**

Klaasen ton powers Hyderabad to huge IPL win over Kolkata

South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen struck his second IPL century yesterday as he powered Sunrisers Hyderabad to a mammoth 278-3, and a 110-run win over Kolkata Knight Riders.

With both teams already out of the play-off race, Hyderabad elected to bat first and registered the third highest total of the T20 tournament, with Klaasen hitting an unbeaten 105 off 39 balls in Delhi. Klaasen, who was promoted to number three, stole the limelight with seven fours and nine sixes in a complete show of domination by Hyderabad after opener Travis Head hit a 40-ball 76. Three-time champions Kolkata, who won the IPL last year, were bowled out for 168 in 18.4 overs to end this edition placed eighth out of 10 teams. Hyderabad finished with 6 wins and seven losses.

“Very pleased, it's been a long season of disappointment,” Klaasen said after his knock.

“Luckily, I stuck to my processes and found my form now. The franchise spent a lot of time and money to play this brand of cricket, and it was up to us to step up to the mantle.”

Hyderabad, who won their only IPL title in 2016 under Australia's David Warner, have the top four totals in IPL to their credit.

Hyderabad amassed IPL's highest ever total of 287-3 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru last year. They fell one short of that score – 286-6 –



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Heinrich Klaasen celebrates after scoring a century during the IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

against Rajasthan Royals this year. Hyderabad scored 277 versus Mumbai Indians in 2024. Hyderabad's Australian import Head came out roaring with opening partner Abhishek Sharma, and the two handed the team a blazing start of 92 in 6.4 overs. Klaasen reached his ton in 37 balls for the joint third-highest IPL ton. West Indies' Chris Gayle hit a hundred in 30 balls in 2013 and Rajasthan's 14-year-old opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi in 35 balls this edition. Abhishek fell for 32 before Head put on 83 runs with Klaasen as it rained sixes at Feroz Shah Kotla ground. Head fell

to West Indies spinner Sunil Narine, but Klaasen kept up the charge with Ishan Kishan and carried his bat through. Kolkata were never in the chase with Manish Pandey top-scoring with 37. Skipper Ajinkya Rahane said “no regrets” as they take positives from a disappointing season.

BRIEF SCORES
Sunrisers Hyderabad 278 for 3 (Klaasen 105*, Head 76, Narine 2-42) **beat Kolkata Knight Riders 168** (Pandey 37, Rana 34, Unadkat 3-24) **by 110 runs.**

FOOTBALL

Lopetegui announces Qatar squad for Iran and Uzbekistan ties

By Sports Reporter
Doha

New Qatar head coach Julen Lopetegui yesterday announced a 27-player squad for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers against Iran and Uzbekistan, set to take place early next month.

Qatar will face Iran in Doha on June 5, marking Lopetegui's first match in charge since taking over from Luis Garcia. The reigning Asian champions will then take on Uzbekistan on June 10 in Tashkent in what will be their final fixture of the third round of Asian qualifying for the FIFA World Cup.

Qatar have endured a challenging campaign in this stage, missing out on the two automatic qualification spots. Currently sitting fourth in their group with 10 points, Al Annabi are looking to secure their position and advance to the fourth

round. Fifth-placed Kyrgyzstan are four points behind them.

The fourth round will feature the third- and fourth-placed teams from each of the three third-round groups, while only the group winners will book direct qualification to the 2026 World Cup. Iran lead the group with 20 points followed by Uzbekistan on 17 and the UAE in third with 13 points.

SQUAD: Saad al-Sheeb, Meshaal Barsham, Salah Zakaria (goalkeepers), Akram Afif, Pedro Miguel, Boualem Khoukhi, Ahmed Suhail, Tarek Salman, Mustafa Tariq, Ismail Mohammed, Edmilson Junior, Almoez Ali, Bassam al-Rawi, Karim Boudiaf, Homam al-Amin, Asim Madibo, Ahmed al-Janehi, Abdullah Youssef, Amro Siraj, Mohammed Muntari, Hazem Ahmed, Abdulaziz Hatem, Ahmed al-Rawi, Ahmed Fathi, Jassim Jaber, Abdul Rahman Mustafa and Mohammad al-Mannai.



Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui is seen with national team players during a team training session in Doha yesterday. Qatar are preparing for two 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying matches against Iran on June 5, 2025 followed by a game against Uzbekistan on June 10.

SPOTLIGHT

Pope prays for runs against India, Australia

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

England vice-captain Ollie Pope may have done his short-term prospects no harm with a Test century against Zimbabwe but the Surrey batsman now wants to show he can score runs against the very best bowlers in world cricket.

Pope's dominant 171 was the highest of three individual centuries in an England total of 565-6 declared that paved the way for an innings win over an outgunned Zimbabwe inside three days at Trent Bridge. England skipper Ben Stokes gave a wholehearted endorsement of his deputy, insisting questions were not being asked about Pope's place in the team amid speculation his position at number three was under threat from Jacob Bethell.

But sterner tests await Pope and England, with two of their toughest series on the horizon – an upcoming five-match Test campaign at home to India followed by an Ashes tour of Australia. The 27-year-old Pope averages a modest 35.49 over his 56-Test career, but that drops to 24.60 against India and an even more concerning 15.70 in five Ashes appearances.

“I completely own that my

numbers aren't good enough against those guys (India and Australia) and I accept that,” said Pope following his run-spree in Nottingham.

“But I think I am a better player to deal with the competition ahead this summer. Hopefully over the next year I can prove that. I did that a little bit in India last year (with a match-winning 196 in Hyderabad) and look forward to doing it this summer and winter. “I've been trying to work on my all-round game and everything that will make me successful in Test cricket. It's about putting my best foot forward and play a big innings, whether we are playing Zimbabwe, India or Australia. That's always the plan.”

Pope is renowned as a good team man, stepping up to lead England when Stokes was injured last year before deputising as stand-in wicketkeeper in New Zealand. By keeping, he allowed Bethell to impress in Pope's usual number three slot. But Pope does not mind the competition. “It'll be good to have him back in the squad and the selectors can make their decision,” said Pope. “I try not to read what's in the media and focus on scoring my runs. It's all noise to us, we have a tight-knit unit and we will keep chatting amongst ourselves.

FORMULA 1

Norris wins ‘dream’ maiden Monaco GP



McLaren’s British driver Lando Norris looks at the trophy on the podium after winning the Formula One Monaco Grand Prix at the Circuit de Monaco, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Monaco

Lando Norris resisted intense pressure to claim a well-deserved victory for McLaren ahead of Ferrari’s local hero Charles Leclerc in yesterday’s strangely chaotic and tactical Monaco Grand Prix.

The Briton came home 3.131 seconds clear of last year’s winner with championship leading McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri taking third. Four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull came next ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Ferrari. Norris became the first McLaren winner in Monaco since Hamilton, in his first title-winning season of 2008. It was his first Monaco triumph, his second this year and the sixth of his career.

French rookie Isack Hadjar finished sixth for the RB team ahead of Esteban Ocon of Haas, Liam Lawson in the second RB and the

Williams pair Alex Albon and Carlos Sainz. “Monaco baby, yeah baby!” screamed Norris from his car during his slowdown lap after closing to within three points of Piastri in the title race.

“It feels amazing. It’s a long and gruelling race. I was nervous into the last corner and we pushed, but we won in Monaco so it doesn’t matter how you do it.

“I’ve realised a dream today!” The race began on a clear, dry and sunlit afternoon with the teams choosing a wide range of tyres ahead of the first mandatory two-stop race.

Norris made a solid start from pole, but went close to sliding off at Ste Devote. He held on to resist Leclerc before a quartet of tail-enders – including Yuki Tsunoda and Pierre Gasly made early stops.

A skirmish involving Kimi Antonelli and Gabriel Bortoleto was followed by early use of a virtual safety car (VSC) which prompted the first stops, but most stayed out with Norris hanging on in front.

Yellow flags waved again on lap eight when Gasly lost control of his Alpine at the Nouvelle Chicane and ran into Tsunoda’s Red Bull, damaging his front left wheel. He limped back to the pits and retired.

The disrupted order was affected by off-set strategies as teams sought to control one car’s pace to create space for a pit-stop for the other. This ploy required Hamilton, Lawson and Sainz, among others, to sacrifice their races, in the process slowing the field and creating traffic jams.

Hamilton pitted on lap 18 and Norris on 20, the race leader re-summing in fourth as Hadjar, making the most of RB’s tactics, pitted for a second time and returned in eighth. By lap 30, despite the pit-lane chaos, it was ‘as you were’ at the front with Norris leading Leclerc, Piastri and Verstappen – and Hamilton fifth, despite his three-place penalty.

Obeying team orders, Hamilton built a deficit of 14 seconds behind Verstappen, to create a gap

for Leclerc’s second stop before Alonso retired at the Rascasse.

After more pit stops and with 25 laps to go, Verstappen led Norris from Leclerc and Piastri fourth, but the champion had a stop to make as attention switched to incidents that saw George Russell and Antonelli cut the chicane to pass a deliberately slow Alex Albon. Russell refused to hand back the place and was given a drive-through penalty. “I prefer not to speak,” he said, clearly furious.

For Mercedes, it was a day to forget. “It’s not way we want to race,” admitted Williams’ chief James Vowles, having schemed his men to ninth and 10th. Verstappen hung on in front on his old tyres, hoping for a red flag stoppage to gift him a cheap stop as he backed off and compressed the front group into the closing laps. He knew, too, that he faced a 30-second penalty if he did not stop again and would finish fourth anyway before he came in ahead of the final lap to re-join behind the top trio.

TENNIS

Roland Garros pays tribute to retired ‘King of Clay’ Nadal

‘WITHOUT DOUBT, THE MOST IMPORTANT TENNIS COURT OF MY CAREER’

AFP
Paris

Rafael Nadal was given a rousing reception as the ‘King of Clay’ stepped onto Court Philippe Chatrier for the final time yesterday in a ceremony to celebrate his career at the French Open.

The 38-year-old, who retired from tennis last November, was serenaded by the Roland Garros crowd, with spectators wearing different coloured T-shirts to create the message “14 RG, Rafa”.

Nadal dominated the French Open after winning on debut as a teenager in 2005, lifting the trophy a record-breaking 14 times.

The Spaniard finished with a remarkable 112-4 win-loss record at the clay-court Grand Slam.

He last won the title in 2022 and played his final match on the Paris clay last year when he was defeated by Alexander Zverev in the first round.

“I don’t know how to start... I’ve been playing on this court for 20 years. I suffered, I won, I lost. I have lived many emotions here on this court,” an emotional Nadal told the crowd after watching a video of his career highlights at Roland Garros.

Nadal’s family and friends watched from the player’s box, along with many of his former coaching staff, including his uncle Toni.

“Without doubt, the most important tennis court of my career,” Nadal added to cheers.

“It’s been an incredible story that began back in 2004 when I came to Roland Garros for the very first time. I could barely walk on crutches due to a foot injury. I climbed to the top of the court and looked out and couldn’t wait to play here.”

Nadal won the title the very next year after that injury setback, downing Mariano Puerta in the final. Nadal’s long-time rivals Novak Djokovic, fresh from winning his 100th ATP title on Saturday, Roger Federer and Andy Murray all joined him on the main Chatrier court.

The trio walked out after Nadal’s speech to greet their fellow former world number one, to a deafening roar from the fans.

“After all these years fighting for everything, it’s unbelievable how time changes the perspective of things,” Nadal said to the other members of the ‘Big Four’.

“All the nerves, pressure, strange feelings when you see each other when you’re rivals, it’s completely different when you finish your career.

“We built amazing rivalries but I think in a good way, we fought hard for titles but were good colleagues and respected one another...”



Record French Open winner Spain’s Rafael Nadal poses with a commemorative plaque along with tournament director Amelie Mauresmo and president of the FFT Gilles Moretton during his tribute ceremony yesterday.



Former players Andy Murray (left), Roger Federer (second from left) and Serbia’s Novak Djokovic (right) pose with former player Rafael Nadal during a ceremony to honour his career on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. (AFP)



Rafael Nadal’s father Sebastian Nadal (left), wife Maria Francisca Perello (second from right) and son Rafa Junior attend a ceremony to honour Nadal’s career yesterday. (AFP)

“It means a lot that you’re all here. I really enjoyed a lot pushing myself to the limit every single day to compete with all of you.”

Nadal hung up his racquet following the 2024 Davis Cup Finals in Malaga, initially denying him an opportunity to wave goodbye to his adoring fans in Paris. His tally of 14 victories at a single Grand Slam appears unlikely to be beat-

en, with Margaret Court’s 11 Australian Open titles second on the all-time list. Nadal was presented with a special trophy commemorating his French Open record, with a mark of his footprint carved into the clay. The 22-time Grand Slam champion received a send-off after his final match at the Davis Cup, but French tennis federation chief Gilles Moretton said

earlier this year that “the tribute was not, in my opinion, what it should have been.”

He said he had gone to visit Nadal at his home in December along with Roland Garros tournament director Amelie Mauresmo to discuss plans for yesterday’s ceremony.

Meanwhile, Aryna Sabalenka got her French Open campaign up and running with an emphatic victory. Sabalenka needly just an hour to sweep aside Russian Kamilla Rakhimova on the opening day of the tournament. The Belarusian kicked off the schedule under the roof on Court Philippe Chatrier with a ruthless 6-1, 6-0 win, making a strong start to her tilt at a first French Open title.

China’s Zheng Qinwen, who won Olympic gold last year at Roland Garros, overcame a tough first-round assignment as she beat former finalist Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4, 6-3.

FOCUS

Mastercard welcomes QNB as ‘Official Race Partner’ of McLaren

Mastercard, a primary partner of the McLaren Formula 1 Team, secured QNB an exclusive opportunity to leverage its McLaren partnership assets for Monaco Grand Prix

Through this unique collaboration with Mastercard, QNB, the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa, has served as an ‘Official Race Partner’ of the McLaren Formula 1 Team for the event.

Building on their shared focus on innovation and passion for creating unforgettable moments, Mastercard and McLaren Racing’s global collaboration kicked off last year in Las Vegas.

Together, the two brands are setting a new benchmark for connecting with fans worldwide, offering them a way to truly immerse themselves in the sport.

The collaboration saw QNB’s branding placed on the McLaren MCL39 and driver visors, providing global brand exposure to millions of viewers around the world at Monaco Grand Prix.

“There is nothing quite as exhilarating as a Formula 1 race, so it’s no surprise that motorsports is now one of the fastest-growing passions worldwide. And the McLaren F1 Team stands out for its innovation, performance and unmatched fan community,” said Raja Rajamannar, Chief



Marketing and Communications Officer, Mastercard.

“Our global partnership with McLaren Racing brings the spirit of Priceless to this incredible sport – creating powerful opportunities for our customers to engage with a passionate and diverse fanbase. We are thrilled to extend these benefits to QNB, our longstanding and valued customer.”

“At QNB, we are pursuing an ambitious pathway from regional leadership to the ranks of the world’s top banks. We are delighted to leverage our strong relationship with Mastercard to become part of the McLaren Racing family. The presence of our branding at one of the most prestigious events on the Formula 1 calendar will give a significant boost to our global brand visibility and recognition,” said Yousef Mahmoud al-Neama, Chief Business Officer of QNB Group, QNB.

MOTOGP

Bezzecchi wins after Quartararo heartbreak

AFP
Silverstone, United Kingdom

Italy’s Marco Bezzecchi won an incident-packed British MotoGP yesterday for his first win since India in 2023 in a race at Silverstone that had two starts.

The 26-year-old Aprilia rider came home ahead of France’s Johann Zarco (Honda LCR), backing up his surprise win in France a fortnight ago, with championship leader Marc Marquez (Ducati) just snatching third. Marquez extends his lead in the standings over his younger brother Alex.

The unluckiest rider was France’s 2021 world champion Fabio Quartararo, who had taken pole for the third successive race and looked set for his first win since 2022. However, a technical problem on his Yamaha ended his race on the 12th lap. His misery contrasted to the joy on the exuberant Bezzecchi’s face.

Zarco at 34 is the oldest rider on the circuit, but he is revelling in what is proving to be an Indian summer for him. All the riders were able to take part in chapter two of the race – including both the Marquez brothers who had crashed out – as three laps had yet to be completed.

Alex had gone on the opening corner and Marc on the second lap when he was leading.

However, a red flag came out because there was oil on the



Aprilia Racing team’s rider Marco Bezzecchi celebrates with his trophy after winning the British GP in Northamptonshire yesterday. (AFP)

track – resulting from a collision between Franco Morbidelli and Aleix Espargaro. Alex Marquez was understandably more cautious on the restart but still overtook Quartararo before the Frenchman retook command. Quartararo got a buffer too as Jack Miller on a satellite Yamaha bike surged into second on the second lap and Zarco moved into third.

The pressure appeared to get to the two Ducati riders.

They both went too wide on a corner on the third lap dropping Marc Marquez and two-time world champion Francesco Bagnaia well down the field.

Bagnaia’s race finished on the fourth lap, the Italian coming to grief down on his knees in the gravel his head raised to the heavens and shaking his hands in despair.

ITTF WORLD TABLE TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS FINALS DOHA 2025

China unbeatable as Chuqin, Yingsha clinch world titles

QOC president Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani attends final day's proceedings at Lusail Sports Arena



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), attended the final day's action of the ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals – Doha 2025, at Lusail Sports Arena yesterday. The championships, which ran from May 17-25 across Lusail Sports Arena and Qatar University, featured 640 male and female athletes representing 127 countries from all five continents. The final day was also attended by Dr Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee, Petra Sorling, President of ITTF, Khalil Ahmed al-Mohannadi, President of the Qatar, Arab, and Asian Table Tennis Federations, and Senior Executive Vice-President of ITTF, along with a number of dignitaries and senior representatives of the Olympic and sports movement from across Asia and beyond.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

China's Wang Chuqin, the World No 2, etched his name into table tennis history, securing his maiden men's singles World Championship title with a dominant 4-1 victory over Brazil's World No 3, Hugo Calderano. The final, a high-quality affair, saw Chuqin prevail with set scores of 12-10, 11-3, 4-11, 11-2, 11-7.

The triumph not only marks a significant milestone in Wang's burgeoning career but also sees him achieve a remarkable feat: becoming the first left-handed men's singles champion in over three decades. This groundbreaking victory harks back to 1993, when Frenchman Jean-Philippe Gatien last claimed the prestigious title.

For Wang, the win carried an added layer of satisfaction, serving as sweet revenge for a narrow 3-4 defeat he suffered against Calderano just weeks prior in the semi-finals of the ITTF World Cup in Macao.

This time, however, the Chinese star left no room for doubt, showcasing impeccable physical preparation and flawless tactical execution to secure his well-deserved crown.

From the outset, Wang imposed himself with relentless pressure, denying Calderano the chance to settle into his offensive rhythm. Utilising heavy topspin, particularly from his forehand side, Wang consistently forced Calderano away from the table and into defensive positions.

His strategic targeting of the Brazilian's crossover point – the awkward zone between forehand and backhand – left Calderano

guessing and often off-balance, producing weak returns that Wang punished with clinical precision.

Although Calderano came into the final riding a wave of momentum – unbeaten since the start of the ITTF World Cup – he struggled to find answers against Wang's intensity. The Brazilian had his moments, including a 10-7 lead in the opening game and a solid win in the third, but Wang swiftly regained control and dictated the pace in the latter stages.

Despite the loss, it was a landmark tournament for Calderano. His silver medal is the first-ever for Brazil and Latin America in the men's singles at the World Championships, a historic achievement that further cements his status as the trailblazer of Pan American table tennis.

For Chuqin, this victory is a defining milestone – an emphatic arrival on the grandest stage of all,



and a testament to his growth as one of the sport's most formidable and complete players.

YINGSHA WINS WOMEN'S SINGLES TITLE

World No 1 and defending champion Sun Yingsha successfully retained her women's singles crown in a pulsating seven-game final against compatriot Wang Manyu, in what will be remembered as one of the all-time classic matches in World Championship history. Yingsha won 11-6, 12-10, 8-11, 5-11, 12-10, 11-13, 11-7.

The nearly 90-minute contest was a rollercoaster of momentum swings and high-quality rallies, with both players showcasing extraordinary skill, tactical depth, and mental resilience.

Yingsha came out of the gates firing, dominating the opening two games with clinical precision. But Manyu responded brilliantly,

adjusting her tactics to play more aggressively, especially by stepping around for her powerful pivot forehand. The change paid off as she took the next two games in convincing fashion to level the match at 2-2.

The fifth game proved to be a turning point. Manyu earned a game point at 10-9, but Yingsha responded with three straight points under pressure to seize the game 12-10 and regain the lead.

In the sixth, Yingsha looked poised to close out the match with a 10-6 advantage, only for Manyu to mount a remarkable comeback. Displaying immense grit, Manyu saved four match points – helped in part by a fortunate edge ball at 9-10 – before taking the game 13-11 to force a decider.

Yingsha appeared out of rhythm in the early stages of the final game and trailed 5-7. However, showing the poise and champion's mental-

ity that has defined her rise to the top, she flipped the momentum with a stunning six-point run – her longest streak of the match – to take the game 11-7 and seal a dramatic victory. With this win, Yingsha not only defended her World Championship title but also joined an elite group of women who have achieved back-to-back titles on the world stage. The victory further solidifies her status as the pre-eminent force in women's table tennis today.

WINNERS AT ITTF WORLD TABLE TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS FINALS DOHA 2025

Men's Singles: Wang Chuqin
Women's Singles: Sun Yingsha
Men's Doubles: Shunsuke Togami/Hiroto Shinozuka
Women's Doubles: Wang Manyu/Kuai Man
Mixed Doubles: Wang Chuqin/Sun Yingsha

FOOTBALL / PREMIER LEAGUE

Celebration time at Anfield as Liverpool lift trophy

AFP
Liverpool

Virgil van Dijk lifted the Premier League trophy after Liverpool's 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace yesterday as the Reds held a title party with their own fans for the first time in 35 years.

Arne Slot's side wrapped up their record-equalling 20th English crown with a demolition of Tottenham in April, but the long-awaited trophy presentation was saved for the final game of the season.

Liverpool's last title in 2020 was won during the Covid-19 lockdown, meaning the trophy was held aloft by then-captain Jordan Henderson in front of an empty stadium.

The Reds made the most of their first title celebration in a packed Anfield since 1990 as the 61,000-capacity crowd partied along with the great and good of Liverpool's illustrious past.

Alan Hansen, who captained Liverpool in their last trophy lift at a full Anfield in 1990, presented the silverware to current Reds skipper Van Dijk.

Kenny Dalglish, Liverpool's manager 35 years ago, was watching from the stands, as was Jurgen Klopp, who masterminded the Reds' Premier League triumph in 2020 before leaving last year.

Fireworks, smoke and red ticker tape filled the air as the trophy was paraded around Anfield, with the famous Kop stand adorned with banners and flags emblazoned with slogans hailing their heroes.

Even Trent Alexander-Arnold – the Liverpool right-back controversially set to leave in a wide-



Liverpool's Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk lifts the Premier League trophy at the end of the English Premier League match against Crystal Palace at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (AFP)

ly-expected move to Real Madrid – was embraced by fans on his final appearance for his boyhood club.

Alexander-Arnold had been booed after coming on as a substitute for the recent draw with Arsenal in the first game following his announcement that he will depart when his contract expires in June.

With Anfield in party mood, tearful Alexander-Arnold was granted a fond farewell as he was cheered when he came off the bench in the second half, the Liverpool-born defender responding by kissing his badge.

Liverpool failed to win any of their four games after sealing the title. But that couldn't detract from the festive atmosphere, which was in full swing before the game even kicked off as Slot's team

were given a guard of honour onto the pitch by Palace's players, before the Reds returned the favour to salute the FA Cup winners.

Mohamed Salah ensured Liverpool avoided defeat in their finale when he bundled home in the 84th minute. Salah's 29th goal this season equalled the Premier League record of most goal involvements in a season, previously held by Andy Cole and Alan Shearer, who both achieved 47 in a 42-game season.

The Egypt forward finished as the Premier League's golden boot winner for a record-equalling fourth time.

RESULTS

Bournemouth 2 (Semenyo 74, 88) Leicester 0

Fulham 0 Manchester City 2 (Gundogan 21, Haaland 72-pen) Ipswich 1 (Broadhead 52) West Ham 3 (Ward-Prowse 43, Bowen 55, Kudus 87)

Liverpool 1 (Salah 84) Crystal Palace 1 (Sarr 9) Manchester United 2 (Diallo 76, Eriksen 87-pen) Aston Villa 0 Newcastle 0 Everton 1 (Alcaraz 90)

Nottingham Forest 0 Chelsea 1 (Colwill 50)

Southampton 1 (Stewart 56) Arsenal 2 (Tierney 43, Odegaard 90)

Tottenham 1 (Solanke 17-pen) Brighton 4 (Hinshelwood 51, 64, O'Riley 88-pen, Gomez 90+3)

Wolves 1 (Munetsi 75) Brentford 1 (Mbeumo 20)

** Home team first

FOCUS

PSG beat Reims to win French Cup



PSG's Brazilian defender Marquinhos raises the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning French Cup final against Stade de Reims at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris, on Saturday. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain warmed up for their Champions League final showdown with Inter Milan by winning the French Cup on Saturday as Bradley Barcola scored twice in a comfortable 3-0 win against Reims.

Barcola netted twice in the space of four minutes early on to quickly extinguish whatever hopes Reims had of causing an upset at the Stade de France, and Achraf Hakimi added another goal before half-time.

It was exactly the kind of smooth preparation coach Luis Enrique would have been hoping for ahead of the season-defining game against Inter in Munich on May 31, when PSG will be hoping to win the Champions League for the first time.

"It was a really great evening. We got the job done quickly and we are pleased with the victory," Barcola told broadcaster *France*

2. "We knew we had to do the job in order to prepare in the best way possible for the (Champions League) final, we did it, and now we can go into the next match full of confidence."

PSG's victory, watched over 77,000 at the national stadium, allowed them to complete a clean sweep of the domestic honours for the second time in as many seasons since Luis Enrique became coach in 2023.

They added the French Cup to the Ligue 1 title as well as the Champions Trophy, France's equivalent of a Super Cup.

PSG have now won the French Cup a record 16 times, including eight times in the last decade alone.

The next most successful club in the history of the competition are Marseille, who won the last of their 10 titles in 1989.

"Now we have three of the four titles we could have won, and on the 31st I hope after the game we will all be celebrating going down in the history of the club," added Luis Enrique.