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SPORT



FOOTBALL

Al Shamal thrash Umm Salal to move to second spot in Qatar Stars League

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FOOTBALL

Qatar to host Arab stars for region’s biggest event

Arab Cup Qatar will carry a total prize money exceeding \$36.5mn

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Only 30 days remain for the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar, as excitement builds for the Arab world’s biggest tournament taking place from December 1-18.

The prestigious tournament returns to Qatar for a second time, following the successful delivery of the Arab Cup in 2021, which was the first time that the tournament was held under the auspices of FIFA. This year’s edition has set a new benchmark with the total prize money exceeding \$36.5mn (approximately QR132.9mn), with the Arab Cup now joining the ranks of the world’s major international football tournaments.

A total of 16 teams will have a chance to lift the coveted Arab Cup trophy. Nine of the highest ranked teams have qualified automatically, while 14 teams will vie for the remaining seven spots in a series of qualifiers. Current champions Algeria will look to defend their title, whereas hosts Qatar will look to lift their first Arab Cup trophy. Ticket sales went live on September 30, with fans from across the region gearing up to see their favourite teams in action. Tickets were in highest demand amongst supporters of the Qatar, Jordan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt national teams.

Arab Cup tickets can be purchased exclusively on: www.roadtoqatar.qa This includes tickets for the qualifiers taking place ahead of the tournament on November 25-26 in Qatar, which will see fans eagerly rooting for their national teams in the determining matches.

Ticket prices start from QR25. Supporters can also purchase a Follow My Team ticket,



The Arab Cup returns to Qatar for a second time, after the country hosted it in 2021.

which will enable them to attend all matches of their team of choice during the group stage. All tickets are digital and include accessible seating options for disabled fans.

As Qatar gets ready to welcome the world once again, regional and international fans making their way to the country can choose from affordable travel packages by national carrier Qatar Airways.

Throughout the competition, fans will be treated to a variety of entertainment and cul-

tural activities around Qatar. All venues are connected seamlessly by public transport and will offer a barrier-free experience to all.

The tournament will kick off on December 1, 7:30pm, at Al Bayt Stadium featuring hosts Qatar and the winner of Palestine vs Libya. The final will be held on December 18, 7pm, at the iconic Lusail Stadium. Other stadiums that will host matches during the tournament are Ahmad Bin Ali, Education City, Khalifa International Stadium and Stadium 974.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar eye strong start against Italy in U-17 World Cup opener

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Hosts Qatar will look to make a strong impression when they kick off their FIFA U-17 World Cup campaign against Italy tomorrow at Aspire Zone. Drawn in Group A, the other teams Qatar will face are South Africa and Bolivia.

Making their eighth appearance in the competition, the young Maroons are determined to build on their best-ever finish – fourth place in 1991 – under the guidance of coach Alvaro Mejia.

Zaid Faisal Ktit, a talented all-round centre-forward known for his intelligent movement and composed finishing, will be one of Qatar’s key players as the hosts aim for a deep run in the tournament. After the training session yesterday, Ktit said: “Italy are a

strong team but all teams in this tournament will be tough. Of course, we will have to play well and we are looking forward to it.”

Tameem al-Qadi, the Al Sadd youngster, added: “We will play a great game. Italy is a tough team, but there are no weak teams in the World Cup. It’s a proud moment for us to represent our country on home soil, and we will do our best in all the matches.”

Meanwhile, Brazil coach Eduardo ‘Dudu’ Patetuci praised the organisation and atmosphere in Doha, saying: “The atmosphere here in Qatar is great, the environment is wonderful, and we’re very happy to be here. It’s going to be a beautiful World Cup.”

Saudi Arabia manager Abdulwahab Alharbi expressed confidence in his side’s preparation, adding: “The team has been preparing for two years, and in the last three months, we’ve seen major improvement. InshaAllah, they will do well.”



Qatar’s U-17 players Zaid Faisal Ktit (left) and Tameem al-Qadi.

FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP QATAR

Aspire Zone pitches named after prominent Qatari footballers

In recognition of Qatar’s long legacy of young footballers who have achieved numerous successes, FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar matches will be played on Aspire Zone pitches named in their honour. The players chosen reflect the rich history of Qatari football and will inspire a new generation of young stars.

The footballers chosen are:

PITCH 1 - MOHAMMED GHANIM

Mohammed Ghanim is recognised as one of the most talented footballers in Qatar’s history. He rose to prominence in the 1970s when he was chosen as the Most Valuable Player during the third edition of the Gulf Cup held in Kuwait in 1974.

On the club level, he was part of the Al Ahli team where he was the first captain to lift the coveted Amir Cup trophy in 1972, when he led his team to an emphatic 6-1 win over Al Rayyan at the historic Doha Stadium.

PITCH 2 - IBRAHIM KHALFAN

Known as an artist on an off the pitch, Ibrahim Khalfan played for Qatar’s national team in different age groups. Most notably, Khalfan played a crucial role in leading the country to its historic second-place finish at the 1981 FIFA World Youth Championship. As a player for Qatari side Al Arabi, Khalfan was recognised as the midfield mastermind behind three consecutive Amir Cup titles between 1977 and 1979.

PITCH 3 - BADER BILAL

The former striker was also part of the famous Qatari side that claimed runners up at the 1981 World Youth Championship. Bilal also played a critical role in leading club side Al Sadd to an Asian Club Championship title in 1988-89, scoring several times throughout the tournament.

PITCH 4 - KHALED SALMAN

Khaled Salman is recognised as one of the



A total of 104 matches will be played across the eight pitches at Aspire Zone during the U-17 World Cup from November 3-27.

most prominent Qatari footballers. In the 1981 World Youth Championship, Salman scored a famous hat-trick against powerhouses Brazil, earning Qatar a spot in the final. Salman also represented Qatar at the 1984 Summer Olympics, and scored two goals against France. Salman also led club side Al Sadd to their first ever Asian Club Championship title in 1988-89.

PITCH 5 - KHALED BALLAN

The late Khaled Ballan marked a notable debut with the Qatar national team in the 1970 Gulf Cup in Bahrain, where he was awarded the Player of the Tournament title. Ballan played throughout the 1970s

and spent his entire career at Qatar Sports Club, formerly known as Al Esteglal, winning the Qatari league several times.

PITCH 7 - MANSOUR MUFTAH

Mansour Muftah is regarded as one of the best Arab goal scorers in his era, becoming the first player to win the Arabian Golden Boot twice in 1981-82 and 1985-86. Muftah is also recognised as the all-time leading goal scorer in the Amir Cup and in the Sheikh Jassim Cup, earning the nickname “The Fox” for his speed and technique. With a record score of 317 goals in 324 matches for both club and country, the top goalscorer award for Qatar Stars League,

was renamed to the “Mansour Muftah Award” in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Qatari football.

PITCH 8 - MAHMOUD SOUFI

The late Mahmoud Soufi is celebrated as the country’s top scorer in the history of World Cup qualifiers with 12 goals in 20 matches. Soufi was instrumental in leading Qatar to their first ever Arabian Gulf Cup title in 1992. Soufi also played for several prominent clubs in Qatar, earning the title for top goal scorer in various seasons.

PITCH 9 - ADEL MALLALA

The stalwart defender Adel Mallala rep-



resented Qatar in various international competitions throughout the 1980s, most notably the Arabian Gulf Cup, Summer Olympics and AFC Asian Cup. Malalla played for Qatari side Al Ahli throughout his entire career, helping them win several Amir Cup titles along the way.

A total of 104 matches will be played across the eight pitches during the U-17 World Cup set to take place from November 3-27.

Tickets can be purchased exclusively from www.roadtoqatar.qa Fans must also download the RoadtoQatar mobile app to present purchased tickets and access tournament venues.

Tickets are available as a Day Pass, enabling fans to attend multiple matches a day as well as fan zone activities. Fans can also purchase a Prime Pass, which will enable them to reserve seats for high demand matches.

Supporters of the Qatar national team can avail the Follow My Team ticket, which will enable them to attend all matches of the Qatari U-17 team during the group stage.

All tickets will be digital and will include wheelchair accessible seating options for disabled fans. Accessible seat requests must be sent to: accessibility.u17fw@sc.qa

FOOTBALL

White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 concludes with great fanfare at Al Rayyan SC

The first edition of the White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 concluded with fanfare at Al Rayyan Sports Club stadiums from Oct 25 to 30. The tournament brought together an elite group of emerging talents from around the world.

The six-day tournament witnessed strong competition among international teams from three continents and ten countries.

Egyptian academy 'Right to Dream' was crowned champions of the first edition after defeating Dutch team Ajax Amsterdam 2-0 in the final match of the U-14 category. The third place went to the Belgian team Royal Antwerp, completing the podium. Ajax player Noud Coopmans won the "Best Player" award for his remarkable performance throughout the competition.

With this distinguished conclusion, the White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 has established its position as a global platform for discovering and developing rising stars, reinforcing Qatar's status as a leading destination for hosting and organising international age-group tournaments.

Sheikh Saud bin Khalid al-Thani affirmed that the White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 represented a qualitative step and a distinguished initiative in supporting Qatari football, especially in the youth category. He praised the ambitious vision behind organising this first-of-its-kind tournament and its strategic goals aimed at developing and honing talents, providing them with the opportunity to compete against diverse global footballing schools.

On the sidelines of the White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 closing ceremony, Sheikh Saud stated that the tournament, in its first edition, was a unique experience by all standards. It included renowned teams from Europe and the Arab world and contributed to creating an exciting competitive atmosphere that combined skill and passion with a high sporting spirit. He added that the success achieved by the tournament since its inception confirms the validity of the idea



Players of Egyptian academy 'Right to Dream' savour their title win.

and the sincerity of the commitment to investing in future generations of players.

Sheikh Saud likened the tournament in its early stages to "a seed that needs care and follow-up to grow and flourish," stressing that beginnings are always difficult, but they carry the promise of a fruitful future.

He said: "What has been achieved today is the foundation upon which the future of the tournament will be built. We are confident that the upcoming editions will witness greater development and wider reach, both in terms of organisation and the scale of international and regional participation."

He added: "I sent a message to the youth and the organisers of the tournament that this initiative deserves support and encouragement, and we stand behind them firmly because we believe that hard work and passion make the real difference."

Sheikh Saud revealed that the next edition of the tournament will be more comprehensive in terms of participation. He noted that some teams apologised at the last minute

for not participating in the first edition, but the expected turnout next year will be much larger. It is planned that the tournament will include teams from GCC countries, in addition to other Arab teams from Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, giving it a broader Arab and international character.

Sheikh Saud continued: "We aspire for the upcoming editions to carry the distinctive character of prestigious academies worldwide and for the tournament to become a leading platform that combines global expertise with local ambition, contributing to enhancing Qatar's position as a preferred sports destination that attracts talents and football institutions from various countries."

In his discussion about the White Oryx Academy, Sheikh Saud praised the academy's role in supporting young talents, considering it an important tributary for Qatari football and a promising source for discovering a new generation of players capable of representing Qatar in regional and international forums.

He said: "What distinguishes this academy is that it represents

a bold and unique model in the local sports scene. It operates with self-funding and limited support from some institutions, yet it has succeeded in imposing its presence and forging its path with confidence, whereas such initiatives are often the responsibility of major, officially state-supported academies."

Sheikh Saud expressed his deep appreciation for those in charge of the academy, asserting that they possess the will, vision, and passion to achieve success.

He said: "We believe that the academy will become a true beacon for Qatari football and a cornerstone for talent development in the near future, God willing."

Sheikh Saud concluded his speech by emphasising that such tournaments and initiatives are an extension of Qatar's approach to investing in human potential, especially in the sports sector.

He pointed out that what White Oryx offers now is a living example of faith in the capabilities and ambitions of Qatari youth to carve out a place for themselves among the greats in the world of football.

Ahmed al-Mughaisib, CEO of



Sheikh Saud bin Khalid al-Thani watching the final.



Players of Egyptian academy 'Right to Dream' and Dutch team Ajax Amsterdam during the final.

"The Different League" company, said that the first edition of the White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 became an important milestone in the journey of developing Qatari football.

He noted that the tournament reflects Qatar's distinguished position on the global sports map.

The first edition of the White Oryx Cup Doha 2025 embodied a unique model for age-group tournaments, gathering 16 clubs and academies from Europe, Africa, and Asia under one umbrella.

It transformed into a global platform for discovering and honing emerging football talents in the

U-14 category. The list of participants included an elite group of prestigious clubs and reputable academies, among them: Southampton, Norwich City, and City Select Academy from England; Girona from Spain; Royal Antwerp and Club Brugge from Belgium; Sporting Lisbon from Portugal; Stade Brestois and OGC Nice from France; Red Bull Salzburg from Austria; Dinamo Zagreb from Croatia; Juventus from Italy; Ajax Amsterdam from the Netherlands; and Right to Dream Academy from Egypt; alongside Al Rayyan Sports Club and White Oryx Academy from Qatar.



CRICKET

WC final as possible turning point: Kaur

AFP

Mumbai, India

Winning the ODI World Cup could be a turning point for the women's game in cricket-crazy India, captain Harmanpreet Kaur said yesterday, and encourage more girls to take the field.

Hosts India face South Africa in the final in Mumbai today, with both teams hoping to win the women's one-day showpiece for the first time in its 52-year history.

India have been runners-up twice, in 2005 and 2017, and reached their third final after beating seven-time champions Australia in a thriller.

"Last time when we reached the final and came back to India, we saw a big change," Kaur told reporters.

"Women's cricket moved ahead and we saw

many girls on the ground. So I am sure that if we win this final, we will see many more changes and we will see more cricket, not only on the international level but also on the domestic level."

"So I think we are really looking forward to that moment when we will see women's cricket in a more serious manner and we will see more girls (playing)," she said.

Indian players like Kaur and Smriti Mandhana have become household names in the world's most populous nation since the Women's Premier League T20 tournament began in 2023.

Jemimah Rodrigues played a champion's knock with an unbeaten 127 to help India chase down a record 339 against Australia in Thursday's semi-final.

"I think it's a proud moment for me and the entire team," Kaur said.

"I am sure the entire country must be also very proud of the way we have played the last two games and, yeah, it's a big day"

South Africa, led by Laura Wolvaardt, beat

four-time winners England to reach their first ODI World Cup final.

Wolvaardt said the pressure on the home team could work in South Africa's favour.

"I think with the whole crowd behind India, probably a sold-out stadium, it's going to be a very exciting opportunity," Wolvaardt said.

"But at the same time, I think it puts a lot of pressure on them as well. So yeah, I think it sort of plays in our favour, hopefully"

Kaur said a new winner will be good for the sport.

"Because of that we are seeing more excitement," she said. "And for us to reach the final is also very special, not only for us but for the Indian fans who have been a big support for us"

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur and South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt pose with the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup trophy in Mumbai yesterday. (@cricketworldcup)



PAKISTAN BEAT SOUTH AFRICA TO TAKE T20I SERIES 2-1

LAHORE: Babar Azam scored a superb 68 from 47 deliveries to take Pakistan to victory over South Africa by four wickets in their third and final Twenty20 International in Lahore yesterday and clinch the series 2-1. Pakistan elected to bowl first and restricted the visitors to 139 for nine in their 20 overs, before chasing down their victory total with six deliveries remaining.

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 140 for 6 (Babar 68, Agha 33, Bosch 2-24, Williams 2-26) **beat South Africa 139 for 9** (Hendricks 34, Shaheen 3-26, Tariq 2-26, Faheem 2-28) **by four wickets**



NZ BEAT ENGLAND FOR ODI SWEEP



New Zealand won the match by 2 wickets to take the three-match series 3-0. (AFP)

WORLD AQUABIKE CHAMPIONSHIP

Poret, Hansen, Medori and Mariani emerge winners

Hawair wins Runabout GP2 Asian Continental Championship title; Grand Prix of Qatar victories for Estelle Poret, Reiterer, al-Sharshani and al-Mulla; Moto 3 successes for Drange, Bossche, Medori, al-Mulla and Kaloti in Doha

Agencies
Doha

Estelle Poret, Oliver Koch Hansen, François Medori and Roberto Mariani clinched UIM-ABP World Aquabike Championship titles in their final Motos at the Old Doha Port Grand Prix of Qatar yesterday.

Poret prevailed in Ski Ladies GP1 for the first time and Koch Hansen took his maiden Ski GP1 title. Medori earned a third world Runabout GP1 title with a stunning Moto 3 win after a shell-shocked series leader Jérémy Perez hit technical trouble on the parade lap and was unable to start the final Moto on time.

Italian Roberto Mariani overcame a fierce late challenge from Team Abu Dhabi's Rashed al-Mulla to seal the Freestyle crown.

Emirati Amer Hawair took the top step of the final Runabout GP2 Asian Continental Championship podium from Saudi Arabia's Moto 3-winning Daoud Kaloti and Qatari Mohamed Abumaali. Estelle Poret headed into her final Moto showdown with Jasmiin Ypraus defending a 15-point lead in the World Championship. Despite winning Moto 2, Benedicte Drange's fuel pump failure in Moto 1 had ruled her out of challenging for the world title, although she had a 16-point cushion over Naomi Benini in the battle for third. Drange sealed her sec-



Amer Hawair in Runabout GP2 Asian Championship action.

ond win of the weekend by 8.426 seconds and Ypraus passed Poret to take the runner-up spot but the final place on the podium was enough for Poret to earn her first world title. Poret also did enough to take honours in the Grand Prix with Ypraus and Drange finishing second and third in the World Championship.

A vital podium finish in Moto 2 enabled Oliver Koch Hansen to start the final Ski GP1 heat with an 18-point lead over Jeremy Poret in his quest for a maiden title. Japanese rider Toshi O'Hara had already confirmed the bronze medal position with the runner-up spot in Moto 2 and had a slim chance of finishing second.

Medori takes third Runabout GP1 title; GP win for al-Sharshani
Jeremy Perez's hard-earned Moto 2 victory in Runabout GP1 enabled the Frenchman to take the start of

the final heat on pole position ahead of his friend and title rival François Medori. A crankshaft failure had cost the Corsican dearly on Friday afternoon and he trailed by nine points heading into the showdown.

The battle for third place was wide open with György Kasza leading the way from Pierre-François Savelli, Linus Lindberg and Andrzej Wisniewski.

But disaster struck Perez on the parade lap when his Easy Rider ski stopped and the distraught Frenchman was not able to take the start. Medori needed to pick up just nine points to be World Champion for the third time, although he started at the back of the field. Perez had to suffer the ignominy of watching the Moto unfold from the shoreline before starting the race a lap behind the rest of the field.

His only consolation was being



Roberto Mariani delivers another spectacular freestyle show in Doha



Qatari riders in action yesterday.

safe in second place in the World Championship. Kasza took the hole shot from Qatar's Waleed al-Sharshani, Savelli, Yousef al-Abdulrazzaq and Tory Snyder.

Medori was already up to ninth and then climbed to sixth heading into lap two. The leading Hungarian continued to pull clear of the pursuing Qatari and al-Abdulrazzaq made his way into third. Medori made it past the Qatari to claim second and

he maintained his pace over the closing laps to confirm the world title with a stunning late heat victory by 4.082 seconds. Kasza finished third behind overall Grand Prix winner al-Sharshani and the Hungarian was also third in the final World Championship standings and second in the GP.

Freestyle world title for Mariani; al-Mulla wins Grand Prix
Team Abu Dhabi's Rashid al-Mul-

la had reduced Roberto Mariani's Freestyle lead to just seven points with his dominant display in the first Moto on Friday evening. Massimo Accumolo was assured of the bronze medal and could still catch both his main rivals in the second Moto that rounded off Qatar's return to the championship. Mariani confirmed the world title with on-water activities that netted him 223 points and al-Mulla did enough to earn 251 points and take the Grand Prix win with a double back flip to finish his stunning session.

Hawair wins Asian Runabout GP2 title; Moto 3 win for Kaloti

Emirati Amer Hawair headed into the last of the Runabout GP2 Asian Continental Motos with a 10-point cushion over fellow countryman Khalid al-Maazmi and an advantage of 12 points over a tying Daoud Kaloti and Mahmoud Abumaali.

The racers held their positions into lap five and al-Maazmi held on to take the chequered flag ahead of Kaloti, Mohamed Mahmoud Abumaali, Hawair and Mahmoud Abumaali.

Fourth place was sufficient for Hawair to win the inaugural Runabout GP2 Asian Continental Championship title but he was later promoted to third when al-Maazmi received a 40-second penalty for a start infringement and Kaloti claimed the Moto win by 19.783 seconds from Mohamed Abumaali.

TENNIS

Sinner crushes Zverev to reach Paris Masters final, brink of No. 1

AFP
Paris

Jannik Sinner moved to within one win of reclaiming the world number one ranking with a 6-0, 6-1 dismantling of Alexander Zverev in the Paris Masters semi-finals yesterday, setting up a final clash with Felix Auger-Aliassime.

The Italian raced to a remarkable thrashing of reigning champion Zverev at La Defense Arena in just 61 minutes. "I saw it straight away from the first couple of points that he was struggling physically," the 24-year-old Sinner said after a fourth straight win over Zverev.

"It's not the way you want to win a match but at the same time for me personally I'm happy to be in the final, it means a lot."

Sinner will replace rival Carlos Alcaraz at the top of the rankings if he beats Canada's Auger-Aliassime today. "If it happens good, if not, it's next time," said Sinner. "It's not changing that much if you become number one in the world for one or two weeks."

"So in any case, from my side and my point of view, it has been an incredible season."

Auger-Aliassime reached the second Masters 1000 final of his career by beating in-form Kazakh Alexander Bublik in the first semi-final. Sinner and Auger-Aliassime have split their four previous meetings, although the world number two has won the past two including in this year's US Open semi-finals. "It's always good to play him," Auger-Aliassime said of facing Sinner.

"I feel like he pushes players to be very, very disciplined tactically and to execute their game almost perfectly in order to win."

Four-time Grand Slam champion Sinner is now on a 25-match



Italy's Jannik Sinner plays a forehand return to Germany's Alexander Zverev during their Paris Masters semi-finals yesterday. (AFP)

winning streak on indoor hard courts. He is targeting his fifth title of the season after last weekend adding the Vienna Open trophy to his Australian Open, Wimbledon and China Open triumphs.

Third seed Zverev made a dreadful start yesterday and Sinner needed just 15 minutes to take a double-break and a 3-0 lead, sealed by a crushing cross-court winner. A wild forehand saw Zverev broken for a third successive service game, before Sinner wrapped up the set with an ace.

It was the first time Zverev had lost a set to love since the 2023 French Open semi-finals against Casper Ruud. The German showed some resilience in the first game of the second set, though, staving off a break point as he finally got on the board. But the resistance was short-lived, as Sinner broke in the third game when Zverev ballooned another groundstroke.

Sinner completed the demolition when Zverev, who had earlier called for the trainer, dumped another shot into the net. "If you're not at 100 percent, if you're not playing well, if you're not feeling well, you have no chance," said Zverev.

Ninth seed Auger-Aliassime clinched a 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 victory

as Bublik crumbled from 4-1 up in the second set of his maiden Masters 1000 semi-final.

"All finals of Masters 1000s are a dream, but (especially) in Paris, a tournament with so much history and important past champions," said Auger-Aliassime.

Auger-Aliassime climbs above Lorenzo Musetti into the eighth and last qualifying spot for the ATP Finals in Turin this month.

The 25-year-old can seal his second appearance in the season-ending tournament with victory in today's showpiece match.

Bublik, who made the French Open quarter-finals in Paris earlier this year, can no longer reach the Finals despite winning four ATP titles this year.

A tight first set flew by without a single break-point opportunity, before two weak forehands into the net from Bublik allowed Auger-Aliassime to win the tie-break.

The match burst into life early in the second set when Bublik edged a flurry of three breaks to boost his hopes of forcing a third set. But Auger-Aliassime reeled off five successive games and took his first match point with a thumping cross-court forehand.

was broken and belief when the world doubted me," Bopanna said in a post on Instagram announcing that he was hanging up his racquet. He said that, while he "may be stepping away from competition", he planned to give back to the sport by helping "young dreamers from small towns". "My gratitude is endless and my love for this beautiful game will never fade." Bopanna, from the small town of Coorg in southern India's Karnataka state, has said his long career had taken a toll on his body and left him with "no cartilage" in his knees. "My mind doesn't feel rushed."

BOPANNA RETIRES FROM TENNIS AFTER TWO DECADES

India's Rohan Bopanna announced his retirement from tennis yesterday, bringing an end to a sporting career that spanned more than two decades. Bopanna, now 45, celebrated becoming the oldest number one in men's doubles history in 2024 by winning the Australian Open with his partner Matthew Ebden. His previous Grand Slam win was in the 2017 French Open mixed doubles with Canada's Gabriela Dabrowski. Bopanna won 26 men's doubles titles since turning professional in 2003, according to the ATP Tour. "Tennis hasn't been just a game for me. It has given me purpose when I was lost, strength when I

QATAR FREE-STYLE DRIFTING CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Qahtani wins opening round

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Abdullah al-Qahtani won the opening round of the Qatar Free-Style Drifting Championship for the 2025-2026 season held on Friday.

After nearly three hours of thrilling action, al-Qahtani with a total of 44 points edged out Saud al-Marri by just three points, while Ahmad al-Musnad secured the third place, surpassing Ahmad al-Banna by a single point. Rashid al-Banna claimed fifth place. The round was held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, chairman of Qatar Racing Club (QRC) and in the presence of a large crowd that filled the stands.

Registration and technical inspection took place on Thursday to check the cars and ensure their readiness for competition.

The organising committee set a number of standards and requirements that all participants had to meet in order to compete in this round – some related to the vehicles, such as the necessity of installing a roll cage, properly securing the car battery, and having a functional seat belt,



Director General of QRC Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani crowned the winners.

among other points; and others related to the drivers, focusing on safety elements such as wearing a racing suit, helmet, and using a proper seatbelt, among similar conditions.

Before the start of Friday's competition, a briefing session was held between the drivers and the judging panel, during which several important technical and procedural points were clarified.

According to the competition's structure, each driver was given one chance to enter the

track and perform a set of required manoeuvres – including drifting, reverse driving, figure-eight spins, and reverse manoeuvres – within a total time limit of four minutes. There was also a specific score allocated for the overall style in which each driver performed their routine.

At the conclusion of the event, Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, Director General of QRC, crowned the winners. The second round is scheduled to take place on December 26.

SWIATEK STARTS WTA FINALS WITH FAST WIN

Iga Swiatek made a ruthless start to her WTA Finals campaign, handing Madison Keys a 6-1, 6-2 defeat on day one of the season-ending championships in Riyadh yesterday. The Polish second seed claimed a tour-leading 62nd victory of the year and improved to 7-2 head-to-head against Keys. Swiatek is seeking a second WTA Finals crown, having lifted the trophy in Cancun two years ago. Meanwhile, Keys qualified for the tournament for the first time since 2016 and is one of four Americans in the eight-player singles field in Saudi Arabia this week. The pair share the Serena Williams Group alongside Amanda Anisimova and Elena Rybakina, who will square off later in the day.

"It feels great to be back in Riyadh especially that we've been switching places the last few years," said Swiatek, who is competing in the Finals for a fifth consecutive season.

"Honestly, I'm happy about everything; all the things that I practised, I got it together today, playing with the right balance between playing solid and aggressive."

"I put in the work in Warsaw before the tournament. That gives me for sure confidence to go forward and develop as a player."

Swiatek played a near-flawless match to kick off proceedings at the King Saud University Indoor Arena, sealing the win in 61 minutes.

Keys, the reigning Australian Open champion, hadn't played a match in over two months – since her first-round loss at the US Open – and was understandably rusty at the start, getting broken at love in

the opening game of the contest. Swiatek won 20 of the first 23 points to build a 5-0 advantage, painting the lines with some inch-perfect groundstrokes off both wings.

Keys finally got on the board with a much-needed hold in game six but that didn't stop her opponent from wrapping up the first set in 23 minutes. The duo exchanged breaks at the start of the second frame but it was Swiatek who once again grabbed the momentum, forging ahead 5-2. Keys saved two match points on the Swiatek serve as the Pole showed signs of shakiness trying to close out the contest. But it was only a brief lapse, as Swiatek swatted away a pair of break points en route to a dominant victory.



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning WTA Finals match against Madison Keys of the US in Riyadh yesterday. (Reuters)

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Al Shamal thrash Umm Salal 5-0 to go second

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Al Shamal handed Umm Salal a 5-0 thrashing in the Qatar Stars League at the Al Khor Stadium yesterday to go second in the table behind leaders Al Gharafa.

Their fifth win of the league took Al Shamal's tally to 17 points to be second in the standings, ahead of Qatar SC on goal difference. Umm Salal with a sixth loss are in 11th with 6 points while Al Gharafa are at the top with 19 points.

Umm Salal were also reduced to 10-man in the 88th minute when Diyab Haroon Taha was sent off for a foul against Baghdad Bounedjah.

In what a forgettable day for them, Umm Salal also suffered from two goalkeeping errors at the start which saw Al Shamal go up with a 2-0 lead before they added three more to the scoreline. Al Shamal led 3-0 at half time.

Alex Collado (11th & 54th minutes), Issoufou Dayo – Own Goal (18th minute), Baghdad Bounedjah (38th minute), and Moufak Awad (90th minute) contributed the goals.

Umm Salal goalkeeper Jehad Mohammad Hudib had a horror when a powerful Collado kick went through his hands and legs. Seven minutes later, there was more trouble as Hudib failed to read a back pass from Dayo, getting beaten to his right as the ball

rolled into the net. Bounedjah added a third scoring from in front of the goal off a fine assist from Collado.

In the second half, Collado struck again from top of the box with his left-footer finding the left corner of the net. Just ahead of added time, a Bounedjah free kick was blocked by a leaping Hudib but Moufak Awad lunged forward to kick the ball in to complete a 5-0 rout. On a day when nothing seemed to go right for Umm Salal, a second half free kick also hit the right post before falling away in what was the only glimmer of hope.

Ahli beat Saliya

Earlier at the Grand Hamad Stadium, Al Ahli scored a 2-1 win over

Al Saliya to move to 9th spot. Al Saliya with 6 points are in tenth.

Julian Draxler scored a brace (27th & 90 +1 minute - penalty) to bounce Al Ahli back to winning ways while Al Saliya's only goal was scored by Youssef Sinana (45 + 3 minute) via a penalty.

Draxler's made a stunning right-footed shot from the right side of the box to open the scoring, while Al Saliya's Sinana restored parity via a spot kick just before half time after Al Ahli's Hilal Mohammed handled the ball in the danger area. With the match heading for a draw, Draxler, once again, made the difference as he scored from the spot at the stroke of regulation time to give The Brigadiers an important victory.



Al Shamal's Alex Collado (right) celebrates after scoring one of his two goals against Umm Salal in the Qatar Stars League at the Al Khor Stadium.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal cruise against Burnley as Forest hold United

Chelsea beat Tottenham Hotspur 1-0 as Pedro ends goal drought

AFP

London

Arsenal brushed Burnley aside 2-0 yesterday to surge seven points clear at the top of the Premier League as struggling Nottingham Forest held in-form Manchester United to a 2-2 draw.

Chelsea edged Tottenham 1-0 to climb to fourth in the table while champions Liverpool prepared to host Aston Villa in the late kick-off, desperate to end a four-match losing streak that has derailed their title defence.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal have won five league games in a row to position themselves as firm favourites to end their painful two-decade wait to be crowned English champions. Viktor Gyokeres headed the Gunners ahead following a Declan Rice corner in the first half at Turf Moor for his first league goal since mid-September - yet more joy for the set-piece specialists.

England midfielder Rice himself headed home to double the visitors' lead in the 35th minute and put them in total control. "The first half was exceptional - we scored two goals and gave nothing away," Arteta told the BBC.

"That was the platform. We had to make a few changes and didn't have that much control in the second half. Defending was exceptional again, we didn't give anything."

Arsenal, who have now won nine games in a row in all competitions, have enviable options in attack but their team is built on a rock-solid defence that has conceded just three league goals in 10 games this season.

Ruben Amorim's Manchester United, seeking their fourth straight league win, were on track to climb to second in the table when leading 1-0 at the City Ground courtesy of Casemiro's first-half opener.

But Forest, who had not scored a league goal since September 20, roared back after the break as their confidence flooded back. Morgan Gibbs-White headed the home



Arsenal's Declan Rice scores against Burnley in the Premier League in Burnley, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

side level in the 48th minute before Nicolo Savona tapped in just two minutes later to complete a dramatic turnaround.

But Amad Diallo levelled with a sweet volley in the 81st minute to rescue a point for United, who have been much improved in recent weeks after a poor start to the season. Amorim, marking a year since his appointment as United manager, was disappointed to drop points but encouraged by his team's mentality.

"I feel in the recent past if we had had this situation (from 1-0 up to 2-1 down) we would have struggled so much more than today," he said.

"My feeling is we played well

but we dropped a little bit of energy. When we have the full energy we are the better team. My players are giving everything but we have the potential to do better."

Forest, who last month appointed Sean Dyche as manager to replace the sacked Ange Postecoglou, remain in the relegation zone, four points behind 17th-placed Burnley.

Chelsea maintained their hex over Spurs, winning 1-0 courtesy of a goal from Joao Pedro for a fifth straight Premier League win against their London rivals.

Enzo Maresca's men now trail third-placed Tottenham on goal difference alone.

Rock-bottom Wolves, reduced

to 10 men in the first half following the dismissal of Emmanuel Agbadou, are an alarming eight points from safety after a miserable 3-0 defeat at Fulham, with manager Vitor Pereira under mounting pressure.

Crystal Palace returned to winning ways courtesy of a header from Jean-Philippe Mateta and an own goal from Brentford's Nathan Collins, which made it 2-0.

The evergreen Danny Welbeck netted his sixth Premier League goal of the season and there were also two for Diego Gomez as Brighton pummelled Leeds 3-0.

Bournemouth, second in the Premier League, travel to face Manchester City today.

BUNDESLIGA

Understrength Bayern sail past Leverkusen before PSG clash

AFP

Berlin

Bayern Munich cruised to a 3-0 home win over Bayer Leverkusen yesterday despite benching Harry Kane and several others ahead of Tuesday's trip to European champions Paris Saint-Germain.

Chelsea loanee Nicolas Jackson grabbed his first Bundesliga goal, Serge Gnabry opened the scoring and Bayern forced an own goal, all in the first half.

Bayern coach Vincent Kompany benched Kane for the first time in any competition this season, as well as forwards Michael Olise, Luis Diaz and defender Dayot Upamecano.

The absences did not bother Bayern, who have begun the season in fearsome form. The victory was Bayern's 15th in 15 games, extending their own record for the best start to a season in the history of Europe's top-five leagues. Gnabry opened the scoring with 25 minutes gone, catching former Liverpool centre-back Jarell Quansah napping to score on the counter.

Jackson headed in a cross while unmarked on the penalty spot shortly after. Just before half-time, France centre-back Loic Bade cut the ball into his own net while trying to control a Raphael Guerreiro pass.

The defeat ended Leverkusen's unbeaten run away from home at 37 matches, a Bundesliga record.

Leverkusen had not lost to Bayern in the league since September 2022, a run which included their unbeaten league and cup double in 2023-24.

The victory restored Bayern's five-point lead atop the table.

In the Champions League, Bayern, who have won three from three, sit second in the table on goal difference behind PSG. RB Leipzig's teenage forward Yan Diomande scored one goal and forced another as his side beat Stuttgart 3-1 at home.

Leipzig returned to second spot after Dortmund had leapfrogged the Red Bulls with a

1-0 win at Augsburg on Friday. Asked if Leipzig were Bayern's main challengers, captain David Raum said his side were "only focusing on ourselves", but added: "We don't have to hide the mentality and the momentum we currently have."

Leipzig and Stuttgart enjoyed several chances in an exciting opening half before Diomande forced a breakthrough just before halftime. The 18-year-old Ivorian dribbled down the right and delivered a low cross which Stuttgart defender Jeff Chabot turned into his own net.

Eight minutes into the second half, Diomande danced through three Stuttgart defenders before blasting a low shot into the bottom corner. Tiago Tomas scored for Stuttgart to cut Leipzig's lead but Romulo made sure of the win when he pounced on an error from visiting goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel and tapped home.

Leipzig were thumped 6-0 by Bayern in their league opener but since then have claimed 22 of a possible 24 Bundesliga points.

Diomande was one of an array of talented newcomers to join the side in the summer as the club focused on youth in Jurgen Klopp's first transfer window as football coordinator of Leipzig's parent company Red Bull.

Eintracht Frankfurt's struggles continued with a 1-1 draw at last-placed Heidenheim, days after Dortmund boosted them out of the German Cup.

Frankfurt's Danish defender Rasmus Kristensen scored in the second half to cancel out Budu Zivzivadze's opener. The draw leaves Frankfurt in sixth, having won just once in their past seven matches in all competitions. Union Berlin and Freiburg played out a scoreless draw in the German capital, with both sides having goals struck off by VAR.

Elsewhere, Borussia Muenchengladbach won their first Bundesliga game since March with Haris Tabakovic bagging a brace in a 4-0 victory at St Pauli. Jens Stage scored an equaliser with four minutes left as Werder Bremen snatched a 1-1 draw at lowly Mainz.

Villarreal crush Rayo to move second, Atletico beat Sevilla

BARCELONA: Villarreal continued their strong start to the La Liga season by thrashing Rayo Vallecano 4-0 to climb above Barcelona into second place provisionally yesterday.

Atletico Madrid earned a comfortable 3-0 win over Sevilla to tighten their grip on fourth and pull level on points with Barca. Marcelino Garcia Toral's Villarreal moved within four points of Madrid with their emphatic home win over Rayo.

Villarreal's key man was playmaker Alberto Moleiro, who joined from Las Palmas in the summer. He scored a fine individual goal and set up another at the Estadio de la Ceramica.

"I'm very happy, I'm finding my form more and more, and my teammates make things easy for me," Moleiro told DAZN.

"We knew that (we could go second), we have to keep focusing on our next game."

Veteran striker Gerard Moreno opened the scoring after 22 minutes, netting for the second consecutive game.

The 33-year-old forward escaped Pep Chavarria in the box with some clever footwork and fired into the far corner.

Moleiro added a superb second after the break, driving forward from his own half, and as Rayo stood off him, he slotted home from outside the area. The midfielder teed up Santi Comesana for the third two minutes later. Ayoze Perez grabbed his first goal of the season for Villarreal's fourth, as he begins to find form after injury. "We were not good in our defending, marking, it's a game where we can keep learning," said Rayo goalkeeper Augusto Batalla.

"We can't go crazy because of a bad afternoon, that's what today was and we have to continue."

Atletico Madrid cruised to victory against Sevilla at the Metropolitan stadium with goals from Julian Alvarez, Thiago Almada and Antoine Griezmann. They pulled level with Barcelona on 22 points. Diego Simeone's side grew into the game but could not find a way past Odysseas Vlachodimos in the first half, while Nico Gonzalez also struck the post.

LIGUE 1

Ramos header earns PSG late win over Nice

AFP

Paris

Substitute Goncalo Ramos scored with a powerful header in the 94th minute to earn European champions Paris Saint-Germain a late 1-0 win over Nice in Ligue 1 yesterday.

Ramos finally turned PSG's overwhelming possession into three points at the Parc des Princes and Luis Enrique's side can now switch their focus to the visit of Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Tuesday.

The victory means PSG will remain Ligue 1 leaders regardless of

other results this weekend. The introduction of Ramos in the 72nd minute in place of Senny Mayulu proved the injection of attacking thrust they needed.

Ramos, making his 100th appearance for PSG, forced a fine save from Nice goalkeeper Yehvann Diouf shortly before his decisive goal.

Then, as the seconds ticked down, the Portuguese international connected from close range with a corner from Lee Kang-in that was glanced on by the head of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

Ramos gave the corner flag a karate kick in celebration as the home fans roared their approval.



PSG's Goncalo Ramos (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the Ligue 1 match against Nice in Paris yesterday. (AFP)