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Shabab Al Ahli  
to secure  
first win



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QATAR 2025

## FOOTBALL

# Italy edge spirited Qatar in U-17 World Cup opener

Impressive wins for Japan and Tunisia, while Argentina and Portugal rallied for hard-fought victories



Qatar's Adam Friakh (left) and Destiny Elimoghale vie for the ball during the FIFA U-17 World Cup match.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar's passionate fans created a raucous atmosphere at Mansour Muftah Pitch in Aspire, urging their team forward from start to finish, but Italy held firm to claim a hard-fought 1-0 victory in their opening match of the FIFA U-17 World Cup.

A fine first-half strike from Samuele Inacio — who finished coolly after a precise through ball from Benit Borasio — proved decisive for the Azzurri.

The young Maroons battled bravely to level the score, showing greater attacking intent after the break. Omar al-Marzouki came close with a powerful effort cleared off the line in the 50th minute, while Issa Walid narrowly missed the target with a late shot in the 87th. Despite Qatar's spirited second-half display, Italy's disciplined defence ensured all three points stayed with the European side.

Qatar's next match is against South Africa on Thursday, while their last group tie is against Bolivia on Sunday. Reflecting on the result, Qatar coach Alvaro Mejia praised his players for their commitment and attitude despite the defeat. "We played against a really good team, but the idea was to go out and compete. We competed. I am proud of the players and now we are going to come back against another strong team in South Africa," he said.

In another Group A match, South Africa beat Bolivia 3-1. Goals from Emile Witbooi, Neo Bohloko and Shaun Els earned 10-player South Africa a superb win. Bafana Bafana were dealt a significant blow when Sive Pama was sent off midway through the first half, but Witbooi soon fired them in front before Bohloko added a second from close range. Bolivia pulled one back through Jesus Maraude's Panenka-style penalty, but Shaun Els' late breakaway effort put the result beyond doubt.

Meanwhile, Japan and Tunisia collected impressive wins while both Argentina and Portugal rallied for hard-fought victories. In Group B, Japan opened a sixth straight U-17 World Cup with 2-0 victory over Morocco. The Asian giants looked to have opened the scoring in the first half when Anthony Motosuna headed home, but he was adjudged to have fouled goalkeeper Chouaib Bellaarouch.

They wouldn't be denied for long, though, as Hiroto Asada drove through the heart of the Morocco back-line and set up Taiga Seguchi, who unleashed a terrific first-time effort into the far corner. Minato Yoshida thought he'd netted a second soon after, only for play to be pulled back for handball. They would eventually

make the game safe in the dying embers, with Daigo Hirashima rifling in from just inside the box.

Portugal overcame a sluggish start to thrash New Caledonia 6-1. New Caledonia jumped out to a shock lead when a video review led to a penalty, and Ezekiel Wamowe converted the spot-kick. But Anisio Cabral spearheaded the comeback, equalising via a header and then giving his side the lead early in the second half with an easy finish. Stevan Manuel, Mateus Mide, Mauro Furtado and Jose Neto tacked on goals as well to complete the scoring.

In Group C, ten-player Costa Rica claimed a hard-fought 1-1 draw against United Arab Emirates. The game sparked into life just after the half-hour, as Isaac Badilla was sent off for a last-player tackle on Faysal Mohammed.

UAE made use of their numerical advantage shortly after the break, as Mayed Adel bundled home a corner. That lead lasted barely three minutes, though, with Yerlan Sosa's centre causing chaos in the UAE box, allowing Nick Bennette to lace home from just beyond the penalty spot.

In another Group C match, Senegal and Croatia played out a goalless draw. The Europeans dominated the first half and ought to have taken the lead deep into it. Patrik Horvat saw his shot from the edge of the area parried by Vincent Gomis straight to Jona Benkotic, who cleared the crossbar with the goal gaping. Both pushed in the second period, but neither side could find the breakthrough.

In Group D, Argentina squeezed past Belgium 3-2 in an early contender for match of the tournament. Diego Placente's men hit the front through a neat Ramiro Tullan finish, only for Arthur De Kimpe to strike back with a rasping drive.

A well-worked Stan Naert goal then gave the Belgians the lead on the hour mark, as Ali Camara squared for the forward to tap in. The game was turned on its head inside four crazy minutes, though, with Facundo Jainikoski netting before fellow substitute Felipe Esquivel drilled in another fine goal. Belgium sub Rene Mitongo then passed up two great chances to level, allowing the South Americans to collect all three points.

Tunisia delivered a commanding performance to cruise past Fiji 6-0. The North Africans hit their stride beginning at the half-hour mark, with Wassim Slama beating the goalkeeper at the near post with a clever shot and then a superb strike from Fedi Tayechi.

Slama got his second by pouncing on a rebound, followed by a powerful right-footed finish from Anisse Saidi. Saifedin Haj Abdallah made it five with a composed curler from inside the area and Tayechi put on the finishing touches with a strike in the waning minutes.



Eight matches were played on the opening day of the FIFA U-17 World Cup at the Aspire Zone pitches.



## تحذير

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Qatar fans were in full force to support their team against Italy.



REVIEW

# Unforgettable performances by Shafali



SPOTLIGHT

## India fans, players hail new era but challenges remain

Historic World Cup win evokes massive interest and opinions

AFP  
New Delhi

India's historic Women's World Cup victory has sparked an excitement which it is hoped will inspire the next generation and draw new fans to the sport.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expected to meet the winners tomorrow, believes the "historic win will motivate future champions to take up sports".

Hosts India defeated South Africa by 52 runs on Sunday, claiming their first-ever Women's World Cup.

At the top level, gender parity has long been championed by former Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah, who introduced equal match fees for men and women.

The 50-over World Cup also boasted a record \$13.88mn prize purse, eclipsing the men's total from two years ago.

Shah, now International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman, hailed the win, citing the BCCI's "increased investment, pay parity with male cricketers (and), overhaul of the coaching staff".

Former India skipper Mithali Raj described it as the culmination of years of effort.

"For every person standing behind a young girl who dares to dream of wearing India's colours, this is a pivotal moment, a reminder that dreams do come true," she wrote, posting a photograph of herself embracing the trophy.

### 'WOMEN'S FAST-GROWING INFLUENCE'

Despite the triumph, women's sports in India still have far to go and the impact of the World Cup win may be gradual.

"The gender gap is stark, especially during adolescence and early adulthood," according to a 2024 State of Sports and Physical Activity report, backed by global consultancy firm Dalberg.

"The largest gender gaps unsurprisingly occur when caregiving responsibilities increase," it adds, citing household chores and care of children or the elderly.

The UN children's agency, in partnership with the ICC, sought to use the World Cup to "create equal opportunities for every girl and boy", Unicef representative to India Cynthia McCaffrey said.

"As a cricketer, I know how the sport is a great equaliser," India's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana said, who joined the Unicef campaign.

Women now make up more than a third of India's estimated 655 million sports fans.

A 2024 Deloitte and Google study found women - 236 million

AFP  
New Delhi

Shafali Verma was initially dropped from India's Women's World Cup squad but the opener returned as an injury replacement to star in the title win and etch her name in history.

The 21-year-old batter scored an attacking 87 and took two crucial wickets with her part-time off-spin against South Africa in Sunday's final in Mumbai. She was named player of the match for her all-round blitz as India won their maiden Women's World Cup title at a packed D Y Patil Stadium.

Verma has given India many blazing starts since her international debut aged just 16 but fell out of favour with the selectors in the 50-over format because of patchy form.

However, fate had different plans and an injury to in-form opener Pratika Rawal in the last league match forced India to replace her with Verma.

Verma made just 10 in India's stunning victory over holders Australia in the semi-finals but rose to the occasion in the title

clash with her career-best ODI score. "I said at the start that God has sent me here to do something nice, and that reflected today," Verma said.

"It was difficult but I had confidence in myself - that if I can stay calm, I could achieve everything."

On a day when Verma could do no wrong, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur handed her the ball in the 20th over and she delivered immediately with the wicket of Sune Luus, caught and bowled for 25.

She then got Marizanne Kapp caught behind on a ball sliding down the leg side in her next over.

"We had spoken to her that if needed she will bowl one or two overs and in reply she said, 'I am ready to bowl 10 overs,' Kaur revealed. "That showed her confidence in bowling. I gave her the bowl at a crucial time and the back-to-back breakthroughs was the turning point for us."

It has been a roller-coaster ride for Verma, who is from the conservative northern state of Haryana.

As a nine-year-old she played in a boys' tournament after cutting her hair short so she could get a game.

"I told my father that I will go and play disguised as my brother (who was sick) and even had his name on my back," Verma told AFP in 2020.

"I played and became man of the match and series."

She also described how her father Sanjeev was cheated out of all the family's money by an imposter who promised him a job.

Fast forward to the present, and her ODI average was modest at 22.55 before Sunday's heroics when she surpassed her previous 50-over best score of 71 not out.

The 49-ball 50 was Verma's first in three years, but at 21 years and 278 days she was the youngest to hit a half-century in a Women's ODI World Cup final.

In 2019, Verma was picked for the Velocity team in the women's T20 Challenge - a precursor to the Women's Premier League - and walked onto the field with Indian cricket great Mithali Raj.

She shared the dressing room with international stars including England's World Cup-winning all-rounder Danielle Wyatt, who called her the next "superstar" of Indian cricket.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## Trott to step down as Afghanistan coach after T20 World Cup

Reuters  
Kabul

Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott will leave the position after next year's Twenty20 World Cup, the country's cricket board (ACB) said yesterday.

Former England international Trott, who was appointed in July 2022, led Afghanistan to the semi-finals of last year's T20 World Cup, a year after they narrowly missed out on a top-four finish in the league stage of the One Day International World Cup.

"The tenure of Head Coach Jonathan Trott will officially conclude following the ICC T20 World Cup 2026, set to take place in February," the ACB said in a statement.

"This decision comes as part of ACB's long term strategic planning for the next phase of the national team's growth."

Afghanistan stunned defending champions England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka at the 2023 ODI World Cup, picking up four wins in the



tournament. They fell two points short of a place in the semi.

Wins over Australia and Bangladesh helped Afghanistan reach their maiden World Cup semi-final in the 20-over format in 2024, before losing to South Africa.

"I am proud of what we have accomplished together, and I will always remain a supporter of Afghan cricket. I wish the team and the Afghan people continued success in the years ahead," Trott said in a statement.

Next year's T20 World Cup will take place in India and Sri Lanka, with the final set for March 8.

PREVIEW

## International cricket returns to Faisalabad with Pakistan-SA ODIs

AFP  
Faisalabad, Pakistan

International cricket is set to return to Faisalabad's Iqbal Stadium after 17 years with the three-match one day international series between Pakistan and South Africa from today.

The central city in Punjab province last staged an international match in 2008 when Pakistan and Bangladesh played an ODI.

Pakistan endured a six-year exile from international cricket in the aftermath of a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009. The national team were forced to play their international matches on neutral venues in the United Arab Emirates before the deadlock was broken gradually from 2015 onwards.

But Faisalabad was left out as an international venue due to lack of facilities which have gradually improved in the last three years.

Pakistan's newly appointed ODI skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi hailed the decision to host matches in Faisalabad.

"It's a special occasion that Faisalabad is hosting an international match after 17 years," said Shaheen yesterday. "It will be good for the fans of the city."

The ODIs are the tail end of the tour by South Africa who drew a two-match Test series 1-1 and lost 2-1 in the Twenty20 internationals. Shaheen admitted captaincy was a big responsibility for him.

"It is an honour for me to lead the country," said Shaheen, whose first stint as T20I captain ended after a 4-1 defeat in New Zealand last year.

With Shaheen, Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah in the attack and Ba-



Pakistan's Babar Azam attends a practice session on the eve of their first ODI against South Africa at the Iqbal Stadium in Faisalabad yesterday. (AFP)

bar Azam, Fakhar Zaman and Mohammad Rizwan in the squad the home team will be at full strength.

South Africa, however, will be without their injured regular skipper Temba Bavuma and seven key players including pace duo of Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen who are rested. The captaincy is entrusted to newcomer Matthew Breetzke who hit the highest-ever score on ODI debut of 150 which came against New Zealand in Lahore earlier this year. Despite the under-strength squad, Breetzke put up a brave face.

"We are missing the core group of ODI players that we usually have but in saying this there is an opportunity for the younger guys to step up and take the challenge," said Breetzke. South Africa's star opener Quinton de Kock will make a comeback to ODI cricket after reversing his 2023 retirement before the tour. The remaining matches are on Thursday and Saturday, also in Faisalabad.



India's Harmanpreet Kaur and teammates celebrate with the trophy after winning the ICC Women's World Cup final against South Africa in D Y Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai, India. (Reuters)

### INDIA ANNOUNCES \$5.75MN REWARD FOR WOMEN CRICKET WORLD CUP WINNERS

**New Delhi:** India's cricket board yesterday announced a cash reward of \$5.75mn for the women's team after their triumphant World Cup campaign. Hosts India beat South Africa by 52 runs in front of a sell-out home crowd at Mumbai's D Y Patil Stadium on Sunday to lift their first one-day international (ODI) World Cup. Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Devajit Sainia told AFP that the money was awarded "as a token of appreciation for the women's team", and

would be spread across the players, support staff and selectors involved. The Indian women, who triumphed at the third attempt after finishing runners-up in 2005 and 2017, have already received \$4.48m in prize money from the International Cricket Council (ICC) - a 239 percent increase from the \$1.32mn awarded to Australia in 2022. This edition of the Women's World Cup boasted an overall purse of \$13.88mn, eclipsing the total \$10mn for the last edition of

the men's championship. India toiled in the league phase and suffered three successive defeats, but clinched the last semi-final spot, before knocking out record seven-time champions and heavy favourites Australia three days ago. Fans celebrated the victory at home and on the streets, with crowds in Delhi waving Indian flags and setting off fireworks. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the "historic win will motivate future champions to take up sports".

fans, or 36 percent - are shaping the sports market, debunking the notion of a male-only fanbase.

India's Women's Premier League (WPL), staged first in 2023, delivered the BCCI roughly \$700mn in franchise and media rights alone.

### 'GIRLS ARE NOT FRAGILE AND PEOPLE KNOW THAT'

Young women cricketers say the World Cup success will strengthen their sport.

At a net session in a New Delhi cricket academy, a bouncer slammed into Armeet Kaur's helmet, prompting a flurry of concerned apologies.

The 20-year-old brushed them off and told the bowler to carry on.

The next ball, she stepped out

of her crease and lofted it clean.

"Girls are not fragile," she said. "And the good thing is that people know that now - after seeing women's cricket on TV. That matters because what people think does have a bearing on the world."

Kaur credited systemic changes in women's cricket for India's success.

"Now the money is almost at par with men's cricket, and there are more tournaments for women at all levels," she said.

"The good thing is that people no longer discourage girls from playing."

The World Cup drew record viewers: the first 13 matches attracted more than 60 million viewers, five times the 2022 edition.

While modest for the world's most populous nation, it signals growing interest in women's cricket.

That means Indian girls can see cricket as a viable career. "I started playing because it was my passion," said Ishita Singh. "But now I want it to be my full-time profession."

Singh, 20, said she could confidently claim to be speaking on behalf of many of her peers.

"There were only two of us in the academy when I started playing some eight years ago," she said. "Now there are so many."

But Singh said she wished there were even more.

"Not enough girls play in India still," she said.

"And I want that to change," Singh added.



AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

# Duhail thrash Shabab Al Ahli to secure first win

afc.com  
Doha

**A**l Duhail secured their first win after defeating Shabab Al Ahli 4-1 in their AFC Champions League Elite tie at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

It was a stunning victory as UAE's Shabab Al Ahli had come into the tie very much in form, having accumulated seven points from their earlier matches while Al Duhail had only managed a draw from their preceding games.

Al Duhail survived an early blunder when Federico Cartabia pounced on Bogdan Planic's stray pass to find Sultan Adil but keeper Bautista Burke came to the rescue, denying the forward inside the opening minute.

Luis Alberto turned the tables on Shabab Al Ahli a minute later when he threaded a sublime pass to Edmilson Junior on the left flank with the Brazilian cutting inside before unleashing a rasping shot, touching the fingertips of keeper Hamad al-Meqbaali before nestling into the bottom right corner.

The Qatari outfit thought they

had a penalty in the fourth minute following Benjamin Bourigeaud's apparent handball inside the area but the decision was ruled out for a free-kick at the edge of the box, which Cartabia sent wide.

Al Duhail continued to dominate, coming agonisingly close when Krzysztof Piatek struck the post after a clever exchange with Marco Verratti. Their pressure paid off in the 39th minute when Benjamin Bourigeaud had the time and space to send a curling effort from just above the box past al-Meqbaali off Edmilson's corner.

Shabab Al Ahli refused to give up and reduced the deficit three minutes later with Breno Cascardo converting Cartabia's corner with a glancing header.

Shabab Al Ahli started the second half brightly, with Guilherme Bala firing narrowly wide from distance in the 52nd minute, while Yuri Cesar saw his close-range effort blocked following a period of sustained pressure.

Al Duhail, however, put the brakes on Shabab Al Ahli's momentum in the 57th minute with Adil Boulbina latching on to Benjamin Bourigeaud's cutback and rifling his shot into the corner.

Shabab Al Ahli escaped going further behind in the 65th minute when al-Meqbaali was forced to tip over Bourigeaud's effort from just above the box before the shot stopper guessed the right way to deny Piatek from the spot after Mateus Henrique conceded a penalty for bringing down Edmilson.

The Emiratis threatened through Kauan Santos in the 76th minute, who saw his stinging free-kick palmed away by Burke while at the other end, al-Meqbaali was kept on his toes, denying Luis Alberto from distance. Boulbina denied his second after hitting the left post in the 79th minute with Al Duhail completing the emphatic win through Luis Alberto's strike in stoppage time.

In another match, Saudi side Al Hilal yesterday beat Qatar's Al Gharafa 2-1 at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium. For Al Hilal, Salem al-Dawsari opened the scoring in the 9th minute. Kaio Cesar doubled lead in the 66th minute. Ayoub Mohammed al-Ouwai reduced the margin of defeat for Al Gharafa by scoring in added time (90 + 8).

**Al Sadd to meet Al Ahli today**  
Al Sadd will have to be at their

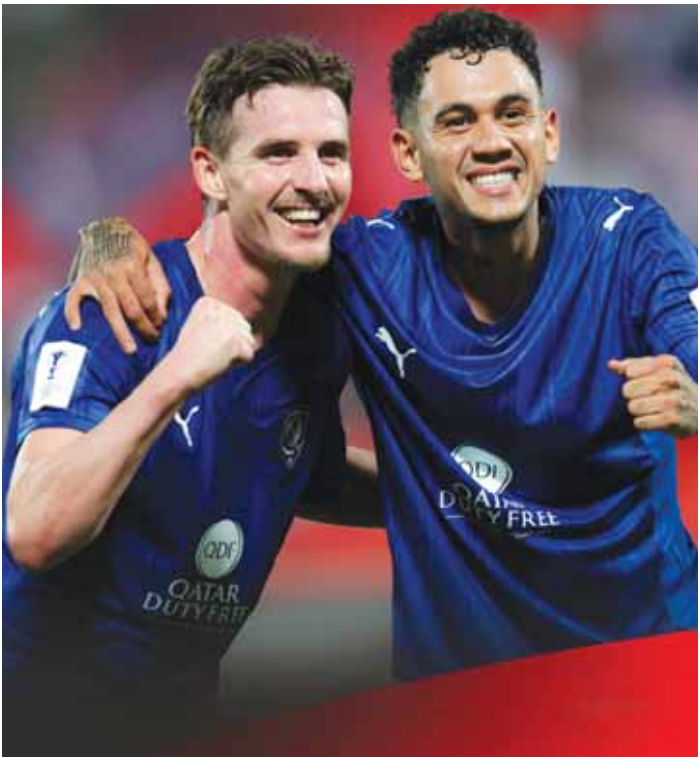
best if they are to secure a win against Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia in their AFC Champions League Elite clash at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today.

Victory has proved elusive for Qatar's Al Sadd in the ongoing campaign while Al Ahli's title defence is progressing serenely with the side from Saudi Arabia on seven points and well placed to advance to the Round of 16.

Al Sadd, the 2011 champions, found their unbeaten start ended by Al Hilal SFC on Matchday Three, with the Saudi Arabian side cruising to a 3-1 win. The defeat brought to fore Al Sadd's troubles this season, with the Qatar Stars League title defence in trouble and only with two points to show on the continental stage.

Winless in their last four AFC Champions League Elite matches (stretching back to last season), Al Sadd will head into the tie having lost their most recent meeting with Al Ahli – a 2-1 defeat in last season's League Stage.

Al Ahli will take some stopping as the titleholders are unbeaten in their last 21 matches – the longest streak in the competition's history.



Al Duhail's Edmilson Junior (right) celebrates with teammate Benjamin Bourigeaud their victory over Shabab Al Ahli 4-1 in the AFC Champions League Elite tie at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium yesterday.

WTA FINALS

# Rybakina downs Swiatek in Riyadh

Kazakhstani moves top of group after victory over the second seed



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina returns the ball to Poland's Iga Natalia Swiatek during their WTA Finals match in Riyadh yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Riyadh

**E**lena Rybakina punched her ticket to the WTA Finals last four with an impressive 3-6, 6-1, 6-0 victory over second-seeded Iga Swiatek in round-robin play in Riyadh yesterday.

After cruising past Amanda Anisimova in her opener on Saturday, Rybakina claimed her second win of the week to guarantee herself the top spot in the Serena Williams Group.

Also yesterday, Anisimova rallied back from a set and a break down to triumph 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 in her all-American battle with seventh-seeded Madison Keys, who has been eliminated from the competition.

"Madi was playing so well, it

was quite a battle out there," said the fourth-seeded Anisimova. "I'm happy I turned things around in the second set and kind of turned the frown upside down. It was an exciting match and it was nice to have a little bit of a fight out there."

Rybakina was the last of the eight singles players to qualify for this season's WTA Finals, and she did so by clinching the title in Ningbo and reaching the semi-finals in Tokyo in the last two weeks of qualifying tournaments of the regular season. She has now won each of the last eight matches she has played.

"I've been playing really well the last few weeks. I was improving each match and of course the results were following after," said the 2022 Wimbledon champion.

"It's a great opportunity to play here against the top players. I'm re-

ally excited about the next matches and hopefully I can bring the same intensity and the same game."

Rybakina went into the clash having lost all four of her previous meetings with Swiatek in 2025, and it looked like she might suffer a fifth straight defeat to the Pole when she dropped the opening set in 35 minutes. But the Kazakh sixth seed adjusted tactically, utilising her kick serve and big forehand to maximum effect to sweep 12 of the next 13 games and complete the upset in one hour and 37 minutes.

"It's always very tough to play against Iga, she brings so much intensity on the court. In the second set, I pushed myself, the serve improved and I'm happy I stepped in and played much better," said Rybakina. "Mentally I'm happy I stayed focused no matter if I lost the first set, I was still trying to

stay aggressive."

Swiatek will have to battle it out with Anisimova to secure second place in the Serena Williams Group and a place in the final four.

"I will have to watch and analyse, but I just think I wasn't that solid in getting back those fast long shots, and she was more aggressive and also more solid in finishing the rally, but I will have to watch to understand fully," said Swiatek of her defeat to Rybakina.

Making her WTA Finals debut this week, Anisimova was down a set and 1-3 before she seized the momentum by taking the next seven games en route to a one-hour 43-minute victory.

The result means Keys has no chance of advancing to the semi-finals. The Australian Open champion hadn't played in two months before coming to Riyadh as she dealt with an adductor injury.

FOCUS

## QREC to organise 3-day auction for purebred Arabian show horses at Al Shaqab from Nov 6

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**T**he Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) will organise a three-day auction for purebred Arabian show horses from November 6 to 8 at Al Shaqab.

A total of 108 horses will be offered over the three days, representing a wide range of categories including colts, fillies, mares and stallions.

Saad Ali al-Kubaisi, Chairman of the Auction Committee, said holding the auction at this time of the year provides an excellent opportunity for prospective buyers to acquire the bloodlines on offer, as most of the horses come from renowned local studs and farms. "Qatar enjoys a distinguished regional and international reputation in the field of Arabian horse show discipline", he noted.

"This auction presents a valuable opportunity for owners to

acquire exceptional bloodlines and benefit from the high quality of these horses, whether to compete in upcoming shows or to enhance their own breeding programmes."

Al-Kubaisi added that many of the horses offered for sale descend from famous bloodlines belonging to major farms and studs such as Al Shaqab, Al Rayyan and Al Nasser.

"This diversity will certainly attract owners and breeders' eager to benefit from the auction in line with QREC's objectives, especially given the increased number and variety of horses presented across the different categories," he explained.

QREC organises several horse auctions throughout the season, including for racehorses and for purebred Arabian show horses. Each year, QREC also highlights the prestigious Arqana Sale held in Paris on the opening day of the events associated with the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe weekend.

### Al Shaqab to host third edition of Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show

Al Shaqab will host the third edition of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show from November 5 to 8 at Al Shaqab Outdoor Arena. The event is supported by Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (DAAM). This event is considered one of the premier gatherings for enthusiasts of purebred Arabian horses, with the current edition featuring the participation of 284 horses competing for prestigious awards. The event will be further enhanced by a distinguished international judging panel, which includes: Ali al-Sha'arawi, Emma Maxwell, Mark Veray, Marek Trella, Michaela Weidner, Mohammed Machmoum, Nasha't Hijazi, and Robijn den Hartog. The Disciplinary Committee consists of Dr Laura Mascagna, Dr Bassem Badr, Malak Benamar, and Dr Youssef Abu

Samra, while the ring masters are Bart Beckers and Mohammed Hammad. Khalid al-Jehani, the Show Director, expressed his delight at the high level of participation, noting that the competition is expected to be intense and exciting. The show will be held over four days and is classified as a Category B event under the supervision of the European Conference of Arabian Horse Organisations (ECAHO), giving the winning horses the opportunity to qualify for higher-ranking international shows. Through this event, Al Shaqab aims to strengthen the cultural heritage of the purebred Arabian horse, promote local and international interest in the breed, and contribute to the growth and development of the Arabian horse's global stature.

## DJOKOVIC CONFIRMED FOR ATP FINALS, SAYS ITALIAN FEDERATION BOSS

Seven-time champion Novak Djokovic, who has been out of action for three weeks, will compete in next week's ATP Finals in Turin, the president of the Italian Tennis Federation confirmed yesterday. After his defeat in the semi-finals of the Shanghai Masters 1000 against Valentin Vacherot on October 11, the 38-year-old skipped the Paris Masters, which ended on Sunday. He is set to return to competition this week in Athens with a second round match against Alejandro Tablo. "We have confirmation that Djokovic will be in Turin," federation chief Angelo

Binaghi said on Rai Gr Parlamento radio, scotching suggestions that the Serb would withdraw from the event as he did last year. The ATP Finals is the traditional season-closer bringing together the eight best players of the year. Djokovic, who first appeared at the event in 2007, currently ranks fourth in the annual rankings. He has made the semi-final at all four Majors this season and also reached the final of the Miami Open. In May, he lifted his 100th ATP title in Geneva, becoming the third player in the Open era to achieve that. Confirmation of

Djokovic's participation means that there is only one place left open for the ATP Finals, which will be contested between Felix Auger-Aliassime and Lorenzo Musetti. They are ranked eighth and ninth respectively in the annual rankings and are separated by 160 points. Musetti, who, unlike Auger-Aliassime, is playing this week in Athens, can pip the Canadian, who was a finalist in Paris, to the final slot by winning the Greek tournament. Auger-Aliassime announced he would skip the ATP 250 tournament in Metz, where he could have stamped his ticket to the upcoming

ATP Finals. By reaching the title-decider in Paris, the 25-year-old Canadian moved into the final qualifying berth in the race to the season-ending tournament in Turin. However, his 6-4 7-6 (7/4) loss to Sinner prevented him from sewing up his spot at the eight-man event as he sits just 160 points ahead of Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in ninth place. "I won't be going," Auger-Aliassime told reporters in the French capital. "I've been struggling with a lot of physical issues this week. I'm not going to make the same mistakes I made in the past. My physical

condition and health are really my priority, above qualifying." "If I qualify, great. If not, Lorenzo will deserve his place," added Auger-Aliassime, who could make a second appearance at the ATP Finals.

**Sinner, Alcaraz to meet in South Korea exhibition match**  
Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz will face off in an exhibition match in South Korea in January ahead of the Australian Open, organisers said yesterday. Italy's Sinner usurped his rival from Spain as world number one after winning

the Paris Masters for the first time on Sunday. The two best players in men's tennis will meet in the "Hyundai Card Super Match" on January 10 in Incheon, near Seoul. "For domestic tennis fans it will be the very first opportunity to see the two top-ranked players compete," said a Hyundai press release. Alcaraz, who has complained about there being too many matches on the ATP Tour, leads their head-to-head record 10-5. Sinner will defend his Australian Open title in the first Grand Slam of 2026, which begins in Melbourne on January 18.



FOCUS

# Arsenal: The unstoppable Premier League force?

AFP

London

Five straight wins, just three goals conceded all season. Can anybody stop “nearly men” Arsenal ending their interminable wait to win the Premier League?

The Gunners, who last claimed the English league title under Arsene Wenger in 2004, are six points clear of second-placed Manchester City after 10 games and seven ahead of defending champions Liverpool.

Arsenal fans will be wary of over-confidence after watching their side finish as runners-up in the past three seasons, twice to City and once to Liverpool.

But the bookies have installed the London club as firm favourites this year and football analysts Opta's supercomputer gives them a 71 percent chance of winning the title.

Former Manchester United and England defender Gary Neville, now a leading pundit, believes the league is Arsenal's to lose even though the calendar has only just

ticked over into November. “Arsenal would have to beat themselves not to win it this season,” he told NBC Sports, describing them as the best team in the league. “They're the most consistent team and they've been building up to this now for three or four seasons.”

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta, wary of his side's recent history of coming up just short, is understandably more cautious, warning that the season is still young. “You want to win big trophies, you certainly have to instil that feeling amongst the team, the club and around it, and we're in a really good position at the moment,” he said.

“But we know how early it is and how difficult every game is.”

Arsenal have a lot of things going for them: a rock-solid defence, enviable squad depth and inconsistent rivals.

Their defensive numbers are astonishing, with goalkeeper David Raya, and the back four of Jurrien Timber, William Saliba, Gabriel and Riccardo Calafiori unrivalled.

In 15 matches across all competitions this season, they have kept an astounding 12 clean sheets,

with no goals conceded in their past seven games.

The Gunners have conceded just three goals in the Premier League and have faced just one shot on target in their last four league matches.

Arsenal's attacking numbers are also impressive, boosted by an eye-catching 12 goals from dead-ball situations. Only Manchester City have scored more than their overall tally of 18 league goals, with 20. Arsenal can also boast impressive strength in depth after an outlay of around £250mn (\$328mn) in the summer transfer market.

It means they have been able to shrug off a daunting injury list including long-term absentees Gabriel Jesus and Kai Havertz, while captain Martin Odegaard, Noni Madueke and Bukayo Saka have all missed chunks of the season. “This year, I feel we're a very strong group and we've got a lot of quality,” England forward Saka told Sky Sports.

“We've suffered a lot of injuries already, but the players that have come in have shown that we can all keep the level at the highest,

and that's what it's going to take for us to go all the way.”

Neville says Arsenal, crucially, are not over-reliant on any single player as they chase a 14th English top-flight crown.

“Everywhere they are properly doubled up with the same level of quality or only a small drop-off,” he said. “It is the manager who just has to retain his composure and get himself over the line.”

City and Liverpool, who have dominated the Premier League in recent seasons, are the only realistic challengers to Arsenal and it would be foolish to rule either side out. But City have been inconsistent while Liverpool's win against Aston Villa on Saturday followed a terrible run of four straight league defeats.

“I don't think City are going to get to a level that they have previously and come back at Arsenal,” said Neville.

“Pep Guardiola's a genius but he's just not got the players in the team that are performing. Liverpool are the only team (who could challenge Arsenal) but they would have to get back on track very quickly.”



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta with Christian Norgaard during their training session in London yesterday. (Reuters)

COMMENT

## Trent should be remembered for ‘great’ Liverpool moments, says Slot

AFP

Liverpool

Liverpool boss Arne Slot says he will give Trent Alexander-Arnold a warm welcome when Real Madrid visit Anfield today, even if the right-back receives a frosty reception from his formerly adoring fans.

The England international, a boyhood Reds fan, ran down his contract to join the Spanish giants in June for a nominal fee.

The 27-year-old played a huge role in the Reds' return to the top of English and European football under Jurgen Klopp and Slot, winning two Premier League titles and the Champions League. “I have great memories of the player and of the human being,” said Slot, who won the Premier League during his only season working with Alexander-Arnold.

“I have memories working with him, which were only positive and I have memories when I was watching him in front of the television, which are only positive as well. I can remember multiple great moments of him wearing the Liverpool shirt.”

The Dutchman told reporters on Monday: “He will get a warm welcome by me. Let's first wait and see if he's on the pitch tomorrow, and how our fans will react.”

The England international was booed by Liverpool fans

at times during his final few months at the club as his expected departure approached.

Liverpool have badly missed his presence in a difficult start to Slot's second season, with six defeats in their past eight games.

But the move to Spain is also yet to work out for Alexander-Arnold, who has been hampered by a hamstring injury and has found himself on the bench a number of times.

Real Madrid boss Xabi Alonso is expected to keep faith with Federico Valverde at right-back from the start of Tuesday's blockbuster Champions League clash. Just under a year ago Liverpool beat the 15-time European champions 2-0 at this stage of the competition.

However, Madrid arrive on Merseyside in far better form this time around, with French striker Kylian Mbappe in scintillating form.

Los Blancos are five points clear of Barcelona at the top of La Liga and have a perfect record of three wins from three games in the league phase of the Champions League.

“They have always been a big force in this competition,” said Slot. “A very good team, but we are a very good team as well.”

Slot confirmed Alisson Becker, Alexander Isak and Jeremie Frimpong are out injured, with only Isak in contention to return to face Manchester City in the Premier League on Sunday.



Real Madrid's Trent Alexander-Arnold lays a wreath for Diogo Jota at his memorial outside Anfield yesterday. (Reuters)

PREVIEW

# PSG-Bayern clash will show who's best, says Vitorinha

‘I think you have to believe you can do it and then need a perfect game’

AFP

Poissy, France

Portuguese midfielder Vitorinha said Paris Saint-Germain's home clash with undefeated Bayern Munich in the Champions League today will be a meeting between “the two best teams in Europe”.

PSG come into the sternest test yet of their European title defence top of the French Ligue 1 and with three wins from three so far in the league phase. But their opponents, Bayern, have started their season with a European record 15 wins in 15 outings, and sit second behind only PSG in the standings in the continent's elite club competition.

We are the two best teams in Europe. Bayern are in fantastic form. We're also doing well, continuing our momentum from last year,” Vitorinha said.

But as for who is mightiest between the two heavyweights, the 25-year-old said today's match will tell. “The answer will be given tomorrow. We have to talk on the pitch,” he told reporters. “When you're a player, you want to play in this type of match because everyone wants to see it, and people will say, ‘this team is better because they won’”

PSG coach Luis Enrique was, however, more temperate in his build-up to the game. “To find out who is the best team in Europe, we have to wait until the end of the season and see how many trophies each team wins,” the 55-year-old said. “Right now, it's clear they are very strong... It's incredible that they've won their last 15 matches. We already have trouble winning three or four matches.”

If PSG have been less dominant



Paris St Germain's Vitorinha during a training session in Poissy, France. (Reuters)

than Bayern domestically – drawing three matches and losing one in 11 league outings – Enrique said supporters should still “trust” his side to show they can best the Bavarians. “Do you think that I or the supporters should assess our team? I don't think so, we deserve to have a little trust,” the Spaniard said. “But tomorrow (Tuesday) at the Parc des Princes with our supporters, we have the confidence we need to overcome their pressing game.”

**Bayern need perfect game against PSG: Coach Kompany**

Bayern coach Vincent Kompany

said his side will need to play a perfect game against holders PSG if they are to have any chance of protecting their record-breaking start to the season.

“I think you have to believe you can do it and then need a perfect game,” Kompany said. “It's a classic answer. They are the winners of last season's Champions League and favourites this season. But we still have to believe in our chances.”

Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, who scored in PSG's win over Bayern Munich in the Club World Cup quarter-finals, is available for the match. “With PSG it is

the collective. It is not enough to concentrate on one player,” Kompany said. “There is an individual aspect...but what makes this team so strong is they are working as a team in all phases of the game.

“The reality is we have similar conditions. It is not only about dominance but what the team communicated until now and we have communicated the same things and we have to see what will happen now. That is what people want to see. Whoever wins tomorrow will take a big step to get under the top eight (and qualify for the knockout stage),” Kompany said.

SPOTLIGHT

## Van de Ven, Spence apologise as Frank defends Spurs ‘foundation’

AFP

London

Tottenham Hotspur boss Thomas Frank said that Micky van de Ven and Djed Spence have apologised for snubbing their manager and heading down the tunnel after Saturday's 1-0 defeat to Chelsea.

Spurs were booed off by their own supporters after failing to win for a fourth consecutive Premier League home game. Van de Ven, who started the game as captain, and Spence have been two of the better performers in an inconsistent start to Frank's reign in charge.

But they barged past Frank at full-time as he tried to get them to acknowledge the home fans. “Micky and Djed came into my office yesterday and just said they wanted to say sorry for the situation,” said Frank. “They didn't want it to look bad or any misconception that you can get in this beautiful media world. So there was no disrespect meant at all towards me or the team. They were just frustrated with the performance from us and the booing during the game,” added the 52-year-old Dane.

Despite their poor home form, Spurs sit fifth in the Premier League and are unbeaten after three games in the Champions League. Victory at home to FC Copenhagen on Tuesday would

put Spurs in a strong position to make the knockout phase of the Champions League for only the second time in six years.

Winning the Europa League last season masked an otherwise disastrous campaign that saw Ange Postecoglou sacked despite ending the club's 17-year trophy drought.

Tottenham finished 17th in the Premier League – their worst season in English football's top-flight since being relegated from the old First Division in 1976/77.

“Of course, we are coming on the back of a bad performance -- there is a big flashing light right now. Everyone has a little bit of a struggle to look

past that to see some of the very good performances we have had this year as well,” added Frank.

“If anyone had said that we would now be 17 points after 10 games and unbeaten in the Champions League - everything is not perfect - but there is a decent foundation. Everyone would have taken that situation where we are now in terms of 22 (league) defeats last year (season) and finishing 17th.”

Lucas Bergvall is set for a spell on the sidelines after suffering concussion in the early stages of the Chelsea game, but Spence and Mohammed Kudus should be fit to feature against Danish champions Copenhagen despite picking up knocks.



Tottenham Hotspur manager Thomas Frank speaks during a press conference in London. (Reuters)