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Sabalenka beats Anisimova in pulsating WTA Finals semi



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Krotov and Dabrowski open up leads after stage one

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**SPORT**

SPOTLIGHT

Islamic Solidarity Games open in Riyadh with glittering ceremony

By Sports Reporter  
Riyadh

Prince Faisal bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, Governor of Riyadh, officially opened the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games yesterday at the Janadriyah Camel Racing Track in the Saudi capital.

The opening ceremony was attended by HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, First Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), alongside several presidents of Islamic National Olympic Committees.

Also present were Mohammed bin Yousef al-Mana, First Vice-President of the QOC, and Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, Second Vice-President of the QOC.

The ceremony featured an impressive blend of artistic and technical performances celebrating Saudi culture and shared Islamic heritage, in a festive atmosphere that balanced tradition and modernity. It also included the parade of participating nations.

The Qatari flag was carried in the parade by volleyball player Mubarak al-Kuwari and fencer Zakaria al-Abdullah.

The sixth edition of the Islamic Solidarity Games, which runs until November 21, features more than 3,000 athletes from 57 countries competing in 23 sports: athletics, fencing, 3x3 basketball, swimming, handball, table tennis, camel racing, volleyball, karate, Muay Thai, judo, weightlifting, futsal, wrestling, taekwondo, e-sports, wushu, boxing, equestrian show jumping, duathlon, jiu-jitsu, para-athletics, and para-powerlifting.



The Qatari flag was carried in the parade by volleyball player Mubarak al-Kuwari and fencer Zakaria al-Abdullah.

Qatar is represented by 82 athletes competing in 16 sports: athletics, duathlon, 3x3 basketball, karate, equestrian, wrestling, volleyball, handball, taekwondo, table tennis, judo, weightlifting, camel racing, swimming, fencing, and para-athletics.

Qatar enjoys a proud history in the Islamic Solidarity Games. Its medal journey began at the 2005 Makkah edition, where it won its first gold medal, followed by five medals in Palembang 2013.



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, First Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees and President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, attended the opening ceremony of the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh yesterday.

Meanwhile, the men's table tennis team – Ahmed Saadawi, Mohammed Abdulwahab, and Abdullah Abdulwahab – will meet Iran in the group stage.

The Qatari volleyball team having lost both their matches, take on Chad today.

In swimming, Ali Tamer will compete in the men's 50m freestyle, Mohammed Aziz Ismail in the 50m butterfly, while Mohammed Mahmoud and Hamza al-Shaalan will race in the 100m breaststroke event.

Fatna Boukhaous will face Mozambique's Chinidi Tasmani in the women's under-57 kg round of 16.

FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP

Brazil and Zambia progress as England hit Haiti for eight

El Salvador picked up a historic point against Colombia, Egypt and Venezuela shared spoils

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Brazil and Zambia sealed knockout round spots, while England and Mexico each collected their first wins at the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar yesterday. Meanwhile, El Salvador picked up a historic point against Colombia, Egypt and Venezuela shared spoils, as did Germany and North Korea. There were also no goals to be found between Switzerland and South Korea.

BRAZIL 4-0 INDONESIA

Brazil are through to the next round after posting a clean sheet victory over Indonesia. Brazil got the scoring started early when a free kick played in was headed into the air and Luis Eduardo thumped in the second header.

The South Americans doubled their advantage with a bit of good fortune, as Kayke's shot took a touch off the leg of Indonesia's Putu Panji and skirted into net. Felipe Morais made it three by controlling a ball off his chest and firing a right-footed shot into net. A stunning long-range strike in the second half from Ruan Pablo then completed the scoring.

ZAMBIA 5-2 HONDURAS

Zambia punched their ticket to the Round of 32 with their second win of the tournament after doubling up Honduras. Zambia took an early lead when Jonathan Kalimina flighted in a cross and Kelvin Chipelu met it with a powerful header.

The Honduran defence then failed to deal with a deep cross, allowing for a composed right-footed finish from Felix Phiri. Zambia added a third on a bouncing header from James Sibeebe, but Honduras would pull one back when Yeison Arriola swept in a right-footed shot.

Suddenly, the Central Americans were within one when David Flores nodded home Darell Oliva's long throw-in, but Zambia would halt the Honduras comeback with a goal from a free kick.



Chizaram Ezenwata (right) came off the bench to hit a hat-trick as England eased to victory over Haiti at the Aspire Zone.

back on Billy Daka's knockdown header and Abel Nyirongo's inside-the-area strike.

ENGLAND 8-1 HAITI

Chizaram Ezenwata came off the bench to hit a hat-trick as England eased to victory over Haiti, who are now eliminated. Luca Williams-Barnett tapped the Three Lions in front in the first minute, before Reigan Heskey's penalty doubled their advantage.

Haiti pulled one back through Franco Celestin's header, but Reggie Walsh soon re-established England's two-goal cushion. Alejandro Gomes Rodriguez then lashed in before Ezenwata slotted home. Williams-Barnett showcased silky footwork to add a classy sixth before two more clinical Ezenwata strikes completed the rout.

EGYPT 1-1 VENEZUELA

Ten-player Egypt held on to claim a point

against Venezuela. The South Americans broke through when captain Marcos Maitan escaped his marker to head home a corner from the back post. Egypt responded with a header of their own shortly after the break, with Hamza Abdelkarim nodding in a pinpoint Mohamad El Shamy centre. The Pharaohs' momentum was halted on the hour-mark, though, with Mohamed Hamad seeing red for a high boot on Marco Libra. Ahmed El Kass' side defender resolutely from there to earn a valuable point.

MEXICO 1-0 COTE D'IVOIRE

Mexico got their campaign up and running thanks to a battling victory over Cote d'Ivoire, who dominated possession and had numerous chances but could not find the finishing touch. In an entertaining opening half, Mexico defender Michael Corona came to his side's rescue in stop-



Zambia punched their ticket to the round of 32 after their win over Honduras.

page time when he expertly blocked a goalbound header from Hubert Yao. The Ivorians continued their relentless attack after the break but Mexico secured the three points when Ian Olvera rose to head in a Gael Garcia cross.

SWITZERLAND 0-0 SOUTH KOREA

Switzerland stayed atop Group F on goal difference following a tense draw with Korea Republic. The Europeans dominated the opening half but could not capitalise on the opportunity. There was drama late on when Kim Yegeon smashed the ball into the side netting on 78 minutes and Kim Ji-woo then had a powerful effort well saved by Theodore Pizarro as the Swiss held off a dangerous Korean surge.

EL SALVADOR 0-0 COLOMBIA

Colombia were left to rue a number of missed chances as they were held by El

Salvador, who in turn claimed their maiden tournament point. Captain Cristian Orozco came closest in the first half with a low drive which Oliver Sigernes did well to turn around the post. Santiago Londono then had a goal ruled out for offside, before smashing the post with a close-range shot.

GERMANY 1-1 NORTH KOREA

Substitute Han Il-bok rescued a point for North Korea with a sublime effort nine minutes from time. After a tense opening half, the game transformed in the 62nd minute when Wisdom Mike gave Germany the lead after being set up by Benjamin Ley following some intricate passing play, which carved open the Korean defence. The Asian side fought back and maintained their position at the top of the table after Han picked up the ball on the right and guided it into the top corner with a delightful left-footed effort.

CRICKET

# Weatherald eyes debut as opener debate continues

‘I’d be really excited to partner up with him at some point’

Reuters  
Melbourne

Australia's Jake Weatherald says he is excited about the possibility of opening the batting with Usman Khawaja in the first Ashes Test against England later this month, even if he was not his senior teammate's first choice.

While the uncapped Weatherald is not assured of his place at the top of the order for the opening match in Perth, the significance of being selected in Australia's 15-man squad was not lost on the 31-year-old.

"It is a pinch-yourself moment," he said in Hobart yesterday.

"As a kid in Australia, you grow up wanting to play professional sport; representing Australia in cricket is the highest honour, and something that I've aspired to my whole career."

Khawaja had singled out Matt Renshaw as his preferred option to open alongside him, but when his Queensland teammate did not make the squad he subsequently backed Weatherald.

"He didn't have me in four days ago," quipped Weatherald, whose rich form in domestic cricket prompted his Ashes section.

"You get the backing of someone like that who's played so much first-class cricket, so much Test cricket. He's made so many hundreds for Australia and is such a respected cricketer within our community."

"I'd be really excited to partner up with him at some point."



Jake Weatherald ... ready for his Test debut

Speaking to Fox Cricket on Thursday, Khawaja had praised Weatherald's consistency.

"I've played a lot of cricket against him ... he's a terrific player. Conditions last year were pretty hard at Shield cricket, and he was a standout," said the 38-year-old.

"You can see the wickets were green, but he found a way to score runs, both leg-side and off-side."

"He's very strong square of the

wicket, cut shots, pull shots, but he also knows how to score down the ground.

"When he is playing well, he's a guy who knows how to keep the momentum going and score runs," Khawaja said.

Australia are hoping all-rounder Cameron Green can bowl his full quota, which would allow them to slot him in at number six and clear the decks for Weatherald and Khawaja to open with Marnus Labuschagne at his preferred number three position.



Usman Khawaja

Weatherald and Khawaja to open with Marnus Labuschagne at his preferred number three position.

"Obviously my personal opinion, but I think our best team is always when Marnus is scoring runs at No. 3," Khawaja said.

"I think of it as an opposition player. I put myself out of the Australian cricket team and I think, 'Well, if I was the English captain, what team wouldn't I want?' And it's always when you have Marnus scoring runs at three, Smith four, and Head five."

"At the moment, that's our best side."

Khawaja, who celebrates his 39th birthday next month, was also asked about his future in the Test arena.

"At the end of the day, I want to go out there, score runs, and win games for Australia, and win the Ashes for Australia," he responded.

"Hopefully we'll do that. And when that happens, we'll see where everything's at."

The first Ashes Test begins on November 21.

COMMENT

## Former Test quick Harris fires Broad-side at England's Ashes hopes

Reuters  
Melbourne

Former Test paceman Ryan Harris has dismissed Stuart Broad's scathing assessment of Australia's quality ahead of the Ashes and tipped England to leave the country without the coveted urn once again.

Broad rated Pat Cummins's side as "probably the worst Australian team" since that which lost 3-1 in 2010/11, while judging Ben Stokes's outfit the best since that triumphant England campaign.

Harris, who played in three Tests of that series, said the former England quick was well wide of the mark on both counts.

"No way. He has got to be joking if he thinks this is the worst Australian side since those Ashes," the 46-year-old told Reuters.

"Obviously, he's in the media, so he's drumming up the hype."

"We had some pretty good players but they were just better. England were unreal, relentless with the bat and the ball."

While praising the quality of the current England squad's bowling, Harris questioned how anyone could compare them with the formidable England outfit captained by Andrew Strauss.

"Their batting is unproven. Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett on our wickets. Joe Root's been a number of times and hasn't scored a hundred, has he?" said Harris, who took 57 Ashes wickets at an average of 20.63 across three series.

"So there's a lot of unproven stuff there. Broad is obviously drumming up interest but you can't just sit there and say they're the best team since whenever, because they haven't been out here and played - and the ones that have, haven't (won)."

Australia have won the last two



home series 4-0 and whitewashed England 5-0 in 2013/14.

Now a Sheffield Shield-winning coach of South Australia, Harris expected the hosts to retain the urn though he rated England a good chance to end their 15-year wait for a Test match win in the country.

England's hopes of doing better than that will rest largely on the all-round performance of talismanic captain Stokes, who took 17 wickets against India in the recent home series.

Harris tipped Stokes for a big Ashes despite his relatively modest batting and bowling record in Australia next to his lofty career standards.

Harris said Australia must target Stokes, just as the 2013/14 side did to opposing skipper Alastair Cook, England's batting hero from the 2010/11 triumph.

"We've got to make sure we put Stokes under pressure," said Harris. One thing that we've done successfully in the past is put the England captain under pressure.

"We did that with Alastair Cook, not allowing him to dictate how he wants to play and get them off to good start."

"It will be similar with Stokes if we can contain him with the ball."

The opening match of the five-Test series begins on November 21 in Perth.

FORMULA ONE

# Leader Norris grabs pole for Brazilian GP sprint race

AFP  
Sao Paulo

Series leader Lando Norris grabbed his first sprint pole position of the season yesterday to keep his title hopes on track as he topped qualifying ahead of Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli and his McLaren teammate and rival Oscar Piastri.

The 25-year-old Briton, who leads Piastri by one point in the drivers' championship with four Grands Prix remaining, clocked a best lap in one minute and 9.243 in the final seconds of a tense session at a warm Interlagos.

Antonelli was second, 0.097seconds adrift, with Piastri 0.185 behind in third ahead of George Russell in the second Mercedes and two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin.

Max Verstappen, who is 36 points behind Norris in the title race, was an unhappy sixth for Red Bull, the four-time champion grumbling about the balance of his car, ahead of Lance Stroll in the second Aston Martin, and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, Red Bulls' rookie Isack Hadjar qualified in ninth place ahead of Nico



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris drives during the sprint qualifying at the Jose Carlos Pace racetrack, aka Interlagos, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, yesterday. (AFP)

Hulkenberg of Sauber with seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton 11th in his Ferrari.

"A good day for me today," said Norris, who regained the championship lead for the first time in six months by winning in Mexico two weeks ago.

"It's a long weekend and it's only Friday - and it's forecast to be windy and wet so we have to be prepared for that." "It was a little

bit tougher than I would've liked," said Norris.

"It's always tricky when you've got the medium and the soft and knowing how much more to push - or not to push sometimes, but we did the job we needed to do, which was to be fastest today."

"It's trickier than Mexico and I've not been feeling quite as comfortable. Therefore, it's a great result."

Verstappen briefly took command in 1:10.107 but it was soon overhauled by Russell and then both Norris and Piastri while Ferrari struggled with Lewis Hamilton 10th and Leclerc 12th.

Verstappen managed to split the McLarens in the final seconds, reminding them of his threat in the title race, before SQ2 began with local hero Gabriel Bortoleto leading out in his Sauber.

By then, the temperatures were falling from 20 (air) and 43 (track) and that, with a strengthening breeze, brought changing conditions.

On first runs, Alonso set the pace in 1:09.330, a lap-time that remained untouched ahead of Norris and Piastri.

Verstappen went through in eighth from SQ2, complaining that "the car is completely broken, it's just undrivable!" Hamilton was also unhappy and was noted for a 'yellow flag infringement'.

This left Russell to clock the first fast lap on softs in 1:09.556, a time beaten by Antonelli and then Norris in 1:09.271. Piastri was three-tenths off in fourth as they prepared for their final runs in the shootout for sprint pole.

## F1 STAR HAMILTON DISMISSES FERRARI EXIT CLAIMS



Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton arrives ahead of practice at the Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace, Sao Paulo, Brazil, yesterday. (Reuters)

**Sao Paulo:** Lewis Hamilton on Thursday dismissed claims that he may not be racing for Ferrari beyond next year after a hugely disappointing 2025 season following his move from Mercedes. The seven-time champion has gained an unwanted record after going 20 races without a podium finish, the longest in Ferrari history, and is only sixth in the drivers' championship with 146 points, 64 fewer than team-mate Charles Leclerc.

Following another disappointing outing at last month's Mexico City Grand Prix, where he was hit by a harsh 10-second penalty in the race, rumours began to circulate that he could be replaced by 20-year-old Briton Oliver Bearman, a Ferrari protege currently with Haas. Bearman, who finished fourth in Mexico and has enjoyed a strong rookie season, also dismissed talk of him succeeding Hamilton as unrealistic.

Hamilton, 40, said: "I have a pretty long contract. Normally, when you do a contract, it's usually the year before (that) you

start to talk about it. And I'm a little bit far from that right now."

Rumours about Hamilton intensified during a roller-coaster season with Ferrari that has seen him fail to gain a podium finish - he has never failed to score fewer than five before in his previous 19 years in F1 - and push for changes in Ferrari's working practices.

This has been accompanied by speculation about the future of team boss Fred Vasseur and added to by the recent departure from Ferrari of his former performance engineer Riccardo Corle.

Hamilton was more forthcoming on Thursday about his call for the sport's ruling body the International Motoring Federation (FIA) to upgrade penalty procedures, following several controversial incidents in Mexico.

Hamilton was the only one of several drivers who cut across the grass and rejoined the track who was punished. He said there was a lack of clarity and transparency.

MOTOGP

# Alex Marquez emerges fastest in practice ahead of Portuguese Grand Prix

AFP  
Portimao, Portugal

Alex Marquez posted the fastest time on his Ducati-Gresini in yesterday's qualifying practice for the Portuguese MotoGP which was disrupted by light rain. The Spaniard, already assured of finishing second in the championship this season, was 0.030 seconds faster than Italy's former double world champion Francesco Bagnaia of Ducati. KTM's

Pedro Acosta finished third with Marco Bezzecchi of Aprilia fourth. "I got here in Portugal in the right mood. I'm relaxed but still with the right tension for a MotoGP weekend. We need to flow here riding wise and we managed to do so from the early laps. We're good, the team is working well as always and today's two sessions were positive," Marquez said.

In the riders' championship, only five points separate Italy's Bezzecchi, third overall, from his compatriot Bagnaia, in fourth - with as many as 37 points up for grabs today now and to-

morrow. Marquez's stablemate Fermin Aldeguer finished in 8th spot in yesterday's practice.

"We hit our Q2 target with excellent feeling from the get-go. I was a little nervous yesterday thinking about this track - and with the chance of rain. But we adapted pretty well to the track and gelled with the bike. We're probably even in a better place pace wise compared to the time attack, but we can improve the latter as well tomorrow," Aldeguer said. With two rounds remaining this season, Acosta is still in

contention for a final podium finish - but he trails by 31 points. Injured Spaniard Marc Marquez, already assured of the title in the premier category, and his compatriot, 2024 world champion Jorge Martin of Aprilia, did not make the trip to Portugal.

BK8 Gresini Racing's Spanish rider Alex Marquez during the second MotoGP free practice session of the Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao yesterday. (AFP)



TENNIS

# Sabalenka beats Anisimova in pulsating semi

RYBAKINA SINKS PEGULA TO REACH WTA FINALS TITLE MATCH

AFP  
Riyadh

**W**orld number one Aryna Sabalenka had to dig deep to overcome fourth-seeded Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in a high-octane semi-final at the WTA Finals in Riyadh yesterday.

The Belarusian four-time major winner roared her way to a championship showdown with Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina, who battled past fifth-seeded Jessica Pegula 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 earlier at King Saud University Indoor Arena.

Sabalenka clocked 12 aces and saved six of nine break points to book her place in the final for a second time in five appearances at the season-ending championships.

"She always pushes me to play my best tennis," said Sabalenka, who gave Anisimova a warm embrace at the net after the match.

**The 26-year-old Rybakina has a shot at clinching her biggest title since 2022 Wimbledon**

"Honestly, I wouldn't care if I would lose this match because we both played an incredible match and we both deserve to be in the final.

"I'm super happy to get the win. I told Amanda that she should be proud of her season, she played incredible tennis the whole season, but it's just the beginning for her. There are many good things coming her way for sure."

Both undefeated through four matches so far this week in the Saudi capital, Sabalenka and Rybakina have a chance of earning a record \$5.235mn with a victory in yesterday's final.

Rybakina claimed a 10th consecutive win on Friday by defeat-



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka reacts during her WTA Finals semi-final against Amanda Anisimova of the US yesterday. (Reuters)

ing Pegula to reach the championship match at the WTA Finals for the first time in three appearances.

"When I came here, I didn't have many expectations. I'm very happy the way I played in Asia but at the same time, I was quite

tired," said Rybakina, who won the title in Ningbo and made the semi-finals in Tokyo to secure the last qualifying spot for Riyadh at the very last chance.

"So, for me, it was okay, last week, last push, let's see what's going to happen. And yeah, I didn't expect to go that far."

Two of the biggest hitters on tour, Sabalenka and Anisimova have built one of the most riveting rivalries in today's game, and were squaring off for a fourth time this season (Roland Garros, Wimbledon, US Open, Riyadh), and 11th time overall. Sabalenka saved all five break points she faced and converted two of the eight she created to scoop a highly-competitive opening set in 60 minutes.

Anisimova came out blazing in the second frame, breaking twice for a 4-0 gap.

The American was punishing Sabalenka's second serve and pouncing on ever short ball that came her way. She was broken while serving for the second set but recovered immediately to take the contest into a decider. The moment of truth came in game seven for Sabalenka, who pulled off some incredible shots to break Anisimova for a 4-3 advantage.

With both of them unleashing missiles from all corners of the court, it was Sabalenka who found her best when she needed it the most to claim her fifth victory from 11 meetings with Anisimova.

In the first semi-final of the day, Rybakina fired 15 aces and won 73 percent of her first-serve points on her way to a hard-fought win.

The 26-year-old Rybakina has a shot at clinching her biggest title since 2022 Wimbledon.

The Dubai resident is just the third player representing an Asian nation - behind Zheng Qinwen and Li Na - to reach the final of this event.

FOCUS

## Djokovic sets up final showdown with Musetti

Reuters  
Athens

**N**ovak Djokovic cruised into the Athens ATP final with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Yannick Hanfmann yesterday and will meet Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in the final after he beat Sebastian Korda 6-0, 5-7, 7-5.

The 38-year-old Serb took 79 minutes to dispatch the German qualifier and will a motivated Musetti today, who must win the final to secure a place at the ATP Finals in Turin. "I think it was the best tennis I've played this tournament," Djokovic added. "It came at the right time. Hanfmann poses a great threat because he serves big, has a big game, so I needed to really stay focused."

Djokovic broke his four-match semi-final losing streak. He had fallen in the last four at Roland Garros, Wimbledon, the US Open and Shanghai.

His last semi-final victory was at the Geneva clay-court event in May when he went on to beat Hubert Hurkacz in the final for his 100th career singles title. The only men with more are Roger Federer (103 titles) and Jimmy Connors (109). After missing an early opportunity to break the German qualifier at 2-1 in the first set, Djokovic broke at 3-2 and won the set 6-3. In the second set, Djokovic dropped serve at 2-1, but immediately responded to level the score at 3-3.

Djokovic broke Hanfmann again in the next game and held serve to win before a noisy, supportive crowd at the event which this year took the place of the

short-lived Belgrade Open on the ATP schedule.

"Thank you for filling out this amazing stadium again," Djokovic told the fans. "I've played in some of the most beautiful indoor arenas in the world, but I can definitely say this is one of the top three I've ever played in."

**Kyrgios hoping to turn the page on knee injury**

Nick Kyrgios says he has a new lease on life on court after being amazed at sudden improvement in his long-term knee injury and the Australian hinted at a Grand Slam comeback at Melbourne Park if he makes it through a series of exhibition matches.

The 2022 Wimbledon finalist has dropped to 652nd in the world after playing only six matches in three years due to a succession of wrist and knee injuries, and would need a wildcard from organisers to compete at the Australian Open in January. "I don't know whether to call it a miracle or anything, but my knee feels like it's gotten younger by a couple of years," Kyrgios told the Australian Associated Press on Thursday.

The 30-year-old said that earlier in the year he was at the point where did not have any hope of being able to play the Australian Open again, or getting back to the point where he felt comfortable enough with his body to compete. "But something in the last month, I don't know what it is. I was with my masseuse and physio last night and something really has changed with my knee," he said. "It's not swelling. It's not feeling bad after a session."



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates winning his semi-final against Germany's Yannick Hanfmann yesterday. (Reuters)

GOLF

## Fleetwood in tie for lead at halfway stage in Abu Dhabi



England's Tommy Fleetwood plays a shot on the 10th hole during the Abu Dhabi Championship yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Abu Dhabi

**T**ommy Fleetwood produced another strong round on Friday to head into the weekend at the Abu Dhabi Championship tied for the lead with fellow Englishman Aaron Rai.

Fleetwood started his second round with three birdies in a row and carded seven in total, shooting a six-under 66 to climb to 14-under for the tournament.

The two-time former winner and reigning FedEx Cup champion began the day in a five-way share of the lead but soon hit the front after catching up with early starter Nacho Elvira. Fleetwood's lone bogey came at the 15th but he gained that stroke back on the next hole with a putt from 12 feet.

"Really good day. I got off to the perfect start. Birdie, birdie, birdie," said Fleetwood.

"That was good, especially when you've had a good round

the day before. They always say it's hard to follow up a good round with another good one, or a low one with another one."

Fleetwood is level with Rai, who delivered the highlight of the day with an albatross at the par-five second hole. "I actually caught it a little bit clean off the face, the line was great. I think it probably pitched around the front edge and chased its way down there," said Rai, who holed out from around 220 yards. "We couldn't see it from back on the fairway, so it was a nice surprise."

Rai carried that momentum through his round and added five birdies to sign for an eight-under 64. "It was really good. Struck it really well tee-to-green. Had a lot of chances. Just felt very stress-free overall," he said. Richard Sterne, Andy Sullivan and Nicolai Hojgaard are two shots behind at the head of the chasing pack.

Shane Lowry, who matched Ryder Cup team-mate Fleetwood on Thursday, dropped off the pace with back-to-back bogeys to close

out round two as he recorded a three-under 69. Rory McIlroy is six shots off the top as the Northern Irishman carded another four-under 68. Matt Fitzpatrick and Robert McIntyre are a further shot behind.

**Leading second-round scores**

130 - Tommy Fleetwood 64-66, Aaron Rai 66-64

132 - Andy Sullivan 65-67, Nicolai Hojgaard (DEN) 65-67, Richard Sterne (RSA) 64-68

133 - Ignacio Elvira (ESP) 65-68, Alejandro del Rey (ESP) 69-64, Shane Lowry 64-69, Keita Nakajima (JPN) 65-68

134 - Elvis Smylie (AUS) 66-68, Li Haotong (CHN) 69-65, Jacob Skov Olesen (DEN) 69-65, Kristoffer Reitan (NOR) 67-67, Daniel Hillier (NZL) 66-68, Alex Noren (SWE) 65-69, Laurie Canter 69-65

135 - Jordan Smith 68-67, Marco Penge 67-68, Nicolai von Dellingshausen (GER) 65-70

136 - Martin Couvra (FRA) 70-66, Richard Mansell 66-70, Calum Hill 67-69, Rory McIlroy 68-68

## Elite senior mares and stallions steal the spotlight at Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show



Jamellat Nudrah, owned by Nudrah Stud, topped the Senior Mares 7A category on the third day of the Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show. AJ Dalilah finished second, while Sabha Al Khor was third at Al Shaqab's outdoor arena. In the Senior Mares 7B category, Thorya Al Hawajer, owned by Al Thamer Stud, took first place. Amirata finished second, while Huwaida ERD placed third. The Senior Mares 7C category concluded with Bint Sultan in first place, D Fala in second, and Gamar TS in third. In the Senior Stallions 8A category, Ash'al Al E'zz, owned by Al Thamer Stud, ranked first, followed by Wajeesh Aljassimiya in second, and WI Kanz in third. In the Senior Stallions 8B category D Wasel, owned by Abdulrahman Mesfer al-Otaibi, take first place, followed by Badi Athbah in second and RB Suhail in third.

## SHIN, HATAOKA STAND ATOP LEADERBOARD IN JAPAN

South Korean Jiayi Shin recorded a 5-under 67 to grab a share of the lead at the LPGA's Toto Japan Classic yesterday.

She started the round a stroke behind opening-round leaders Nasa Hataoka and Miyu Yamashita of Japan at Seta Golf Course in Otsu in the western part of the country. Consecutive birdies on holes 15 through 17 sent Shin to the top of the leaderboard. Hataoka shot a 68 yesterday to stand tied with Shin at 11-under 133 after two rounds. Yamashita (69) is one stroke back and has a solo hold on third place. "Well, yeah, I'm pretty solid whole day," said Shin, who is ranked No 60 in the world. "And then I think I had a good focus on the golf course because the wind blowing hard and then they change every time, so hard to read the wind directions, but, you know, today I playing with Miyu Yamashita and Nasa Hataoka and they both playing pretty well on the LPGA, so before when I starting, I really excited to play with them."

Three Japanese golfers sit two strokes off the lead at 9-under and in a tie for fourth place - Shuri Saku-

ma, who finished the second round with a 66, along with Ai Suzuki (67) and Sayaka Takahashi (67). Japan's Yuna Araki followed her opening-round 70 with a 66 and is three strokes back a 8-under. Yamashita dropped a stroke with a bogey on the par-3 third hole but recovered with four birdies on the back nine. "In the first couple holes, the ball was pretty rough, putter," Yamashita said. "In the back nine getting better."

Still, she said she is playing some of her best golf of 2025.

"I'm still adjusting my swing a little bit, but I feel really comfortable with my swing and getting better and better, so that works very well."

In all, three strokes separate seven players. Shin said she embraces the packed leaderboard.

"I really like it because I love playing with the pressure."

"...Now, I'm at the top, so I try to - I just keep focusing myself and my golf and just the results just following I think."

"Just do my best," she concluded.

MOTORSPORT

# Krotov, Dabrowski open up leads after Qatar Baja stage 1

Despite losing time near the stage start, al-Attiyah finished overall fifth and topped Challenger category

By Sports Reporter  
Lusail

Denis Krotov and the rampant Polish rider Konrad Dabrowski moved into the outright lead in the car and motorcycle categories after the opening 220.31km stage of the Qatar International Baja through the northern and extreme western deserts of the country yesterday.

A time penalty cost Martin Prokop and navigator Viktor Chytka the fastest time on Thursday's Prologue but the Czech duo took full advantage of their starting position to win the car stage in the latest version of the Ford Raptor they will use at the Dakar Rally in January. But lightning struck twice for the former WRC star and he incurred a further 2min 21sec in penalties for a jump start and an additional one minute for failing to stop in a neutralisation. He duly lost the outright lead to the X-raid Mini JCW Team duo of Krotov and his navigator Konstantin Zhiltsov. Last year's winners in Qatar held a virtual advantage through the early kilometres and now lead overnight by 2min 42.4sec.

FIA World Baja Cup leader Juan Cruz Yacopini and his Spanish navigator Dani Oliveras were third in their Toyota Hilux. Dania Akeel did her FIA Middle East Baja championship ambitions the world of good by rounding off the top four in her Toyota.

Yacopini said: "We made a pretty nice stage. Dani did a good job. I think we can push a little bit more if we feel more comfortable with the rear of the car."

Despite losing time near the stage start, Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah pushed hard for the remainder of the stage to move into fifth and top the Challenger category standings from the QMMF Team's sixth-placed Abdulaziz al-Kuwari. Tenth-placed Khalifa Saleh al-Attiyah lost around 13 minutes to his rivals after a time-consuming stoppage with a puncture and suspension issues.

"It was a good day for us," said al-Kuwari. "We were the fastest of the Challenger Middle East and second behind Nasser. We saw Khalifa (al-Attiyah) stop in the stage. We were behind him and he's my rival in the championship. Not easy for navigation but we achieved the mission today."

Frenchman Ronan Chabot delivered a strong performance to hold seventh in the



Defending champion Denis Krotov in action at the Qatar International Baja.

second of the Overdrive cars and Akeel's regional title rival Miroslav Zapletal was eighth in his Ford F-150 Evo. Despite incurring some penalties, Emirati Khalid al-Jafra held 15th and boosted his ambitions of securing the FIA World Cup Baja Challenger title by staying over a minute ahead of main rival Sergei Remennik.

Young Mohammed al-Marri grabbed the early advantage in the SSV class, the Qatari finishing less than half a minute ahead of runaway FIA World Baja Cup category leader Mitchel van den Brink. Matthias Ekstrom. Mohammed al-Attiyah and Paul Severn were in close attendance but Oman's Hamed al-Wahaibi was forced to retire his Can-Am after sustaining three flat tyres.

Qatar's Abdullah al-Rabban held a lead of over 22 minutes over Saudi rival Majed al-Thunayyan in the Stock category for series production cross-country machines in his Nissan Patrol.

Dabrowski was the class of the bike field

from the outset. The KTM rider started 10th on the road, overtook all his rivals and finished the stage 20min 13.6sec in front of Germany's Philip Horlemann. British Husqvarna rider Alex McInnes moved up to second overall with Horlemann in third. MX Ride Dubai's Mohammed al-Balooshi completed the stage in fourth with Makis Rees-Stavros and Robbie Wallace rounding off the top six.

A broken brake caliper over the closing kilometres dropped Australia's Andrew Houlihan down to 14th. Al-Balooshi's closest FIM World Bajas Cup title rival Rafic Eid struggled all day with the navigation and the rocks and held 15th.

Emirati Abdulaziz al-Ahli managed to pull away from Saudi racer Hani-Noumesa as the stage progressed to lead the quad category by around 28 minutes. Qatar's Yaghoob Azadi and Abdulaziz al-Atawi were unable to complete the day's route.

Today, the second stage runs for 234.19km and is split into five timed sections by a series of neutralisations. It takes in some of the most spectacular terrain in southern Qatar, including a series of stunning dunes near the Inland Sea.



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+ denotes registered for the FIA Middle East Baja Cup

## POSITIONS AFTER SS1

### Cars (top 10 only)

1. Denis Krotov (KGZ)/Konstantin Zhiltsov (KGZ) Mini John Cooper Works Rally 3.0i; 2hr 07min 43.1sec
  2. Martin Prokop (CZE)/Viktor Chytka (CZE) Ford Raptor; 2hr 10min 25.5sec
  3. Juan Cruz Yacopini (ARG)/Dani Oliveras (ESP) Toyota Hilux IMT Evo; 2hr 10min 31.6sec\*
  4. Dania Akeel (KSA)/Sébastien Delaunay (FRA) Toyota Hilux; 2hr 16mi 18.7sec+
  5. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Fabian Lurquin (BEL) Taurus T3 Max; 2hr 16min 21.1sec
  6. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)Stephane Duplé (FRA) Taurus T3 Max; 2hr 17min 43.1sec+
  7. Ronan Chabot (FRA)/Xavier Panseri (FRA) Toyota Hilux; 2hr 24min 32.8sec
  8. Miroslav Zapletal (CZE)/Marek Sykora (SVK) Ford F-150 Evo; 2hr 26min 30.9sec\*
  9. Francisco Barreto (POR)/Paulo Fiuza (POR) Taurus T3 Max; 2hr 29min 01.6sec\*
  10. Khalifa Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Bruno Jacomy (ARG) Taurus T3 Max; 2hr 29min 29.0sec+
- \*denotes registered for the FIA World Baja Cup

### Bikes (Top 10 only)

1. Konrad Dabrowski (POL) KTM 450 Rally; 3hr 13min 36.7sec
2. Alex McInnes (GBR) Husqvarna Rally Replica; 3hr 34min 56.7sec
3. Philip Horlemann (GER) KTM Rally Replica 450; 3hr 35min 37.6sec
4. Mohammed al-Balooshi (UAE) KTM 450 RR; 3hr 39min 42.1sec
5. Makis Rees-Stavros (GBR) KTM EXC 450; 3hr 39min 44.3sec
6. Robbie Wallace (GBR) Honda CRF 450R; 3hr 42min 08.4sec
7. Leoncio Sosa (MEX) KTM 350 ECX; 3hr 44min 28.2sec
8. Michael Anderson (POR) KTM Rally Replica; 3hr 46min 07.1sec
9. Jean Loup Lèpan (FRA) KTM 450 Rally; 3hr 47min 40.0sec
10. Hans Christian Dovland (NOR) Husqvarna FR450; 3hr 47min 43.4sec

### Quads

1. Abdulaziz Ahli (UAE) Yamaha Raptor 700R; 4hr 00min 52.2sec
2. Hani al-Noumesa (KSA) Yamaha Raptor; 4hr 28min 50.2sec
3. Abdulaziz al-Atawi (KSA) Yamaha Raptor 700; 8hr 00min 00.0sec
4. Yaghoob Azadi (QAT) Yamaha Raptor 700R; 8hr 00min 00.0sec

## QATAR STARS LEAGUE

# Al Gharafa edge Qatar SC to stay top



Al Gharafa players celebrate after Seydou Sane sealed a comeback win with a powerful strike in the 90th minute against Qatar SC.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Gharafa strengthened their grip at the top of the Qatar Stars League (QSL) with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Qatar SC at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday.

The victory took The Cheetahs' tally to 22 points, keeping them in first place, while Qatar SC remained third on 17 points, behind Al Shamal, who moved up to second with 18 after a 2-2 draw with Al Wakrah earlier in the day.

Despite being reduced to 10 men after South Korean defender Jang Hyun-soo was sent off in the 38th minute for a reckless challenge on Joao Pedro, Al Gharafa showed character to come from behind and claim all three points.

Just three minutes after the red card, Pedro put Qatar SC ahead with a spectacular overhead kick in the 41st minute, controlling the ball on his chest before firing past the goalkeeper following a free kick into the area.

Al Gharafa rallied in the second half, with captain Yacine Brahimi converting a penalty in the 60th minute after Aron Gunnarsson was brought down inside the box by Presnel Kimpembe.

Seydou Sane then sealed the comeback in the 90th minute with a powerful strike from the edge of the area to send the home fans into celebration.

Earlier, Al Shamal held Al Wakrah to a dramatic 2-2 draw thanks to Mohammed Omar's stunning stoppage-time equaliser. Baghdad Bounedjah had given Al Shamal the lead in first-half injury time (45+1), before Al Wakrah hit back quickly through Amine Zahzouh's 51st-minute penalty and Ayoub Assal's strike two minutes later.

Just as The Blue Wave looked set to take all three points, Omar rescued Al Shamal in the seventh minute of added time (90+7) with a thunderous right-footed shot from outside the box into the top corner, ensuring the spoils were shared. The result lifted Al Shamal to second with 18 points, while Al Wakrah slipped to fourth on 15.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Liverpool perfect opponents for 1,000th game, says Guardiola

Reuters  
Manchester

Pep Guardiola takes charge of his 1,000th game as a manager when his Manchester City team face Liverpool tomorrow and he says he could not wish for a better fixture to mark the milestone. "Liverpool have been the biggest rival in this country and it could not be better, to be honest," Guardiola told reporters. "I think we pushed Liverpool to be better and Liverpool pushed us to be better. That's for sure. If I had to choose one rival for this personal milestone, that would be the best."

Guardiola's City were involved in two titanic title battles with Juergen Klopp's Liverpool in 2018-19 and 2021-22 – both times City prevailing by a single point. "Liverpool, especially with Juergen, have been the biggest rival," he said. "I always had the feeling of how much we respected each other."

Former Spain midfielder Guardiola is regarded as one of the best coaches of all time, winning a combined 12 domestic league titles with Barcelona, Bayern Munich and City as well as three Champions Leagues and numerous other cups.

Guardiola spoke of his pride at being inducted into the League Managers Association (LMA) Hall of Fame 1,000 Club alongside 38 other managers who have worked in England including Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger. "The journey, the experiences, have been unbelievable," Guardiola, whose first game as a coach was for Barcelona B in the Spanish fourth-tier in 2007, said.

"The numbers are insane. It's difficult to reach it, and if I started again I would not reach it. It's been a lot of hard work, a lot of dedication, passion, love, and in that nobody beat me. I love that game, and I love to scrutinise the secrets of what we can do to opponents. Hopefully Sunday we can continue."

Guardiola has won 715 out of his 999 games and was asked his thoughts on being labelled the best manager ever. "They are completely right!" the 54-year-old joked. "The influence of every manager has been through history. Of course, I can say I've been part of that because the numbers explain, I've had success and it's been nice to watch my teams. But I never started thinking 'I want to be the best!'"



Pep Guardiola's Manchester City will face Arne Slot's Liverpool in the Premier League.

While his win rate is more than 70%, Liverpool have been a tough nut for Guardiola to crack since he arrived at City in 2016, first under Klopp and now Arne Slot. He has only won seven of his 24 meetings against Liverpool, losing 10, including home and away last season as Slot's side dethroned City as champions.

While many of those clashes have been pivotal in title chases, Sunday's game could determine which of the two clubs are more likely to try to chase down Arsenal who could have a nine-point lead over City by the time of kick-off at The Etihad. "If (Arsenal) continue this way, not conceding goals or even clear chances it will be almost impossible (to catch them)," Guardiola, who has won six Premier Leagues with City, said.

"But you always expect you can be better and they can drop points. The only thing we can do is win our games to be close and they have to come here. But of course it's exceptional what they are doing for two or three seasons and every time it's closer, closer. But we are in early November. "You don't win the title in November, but you can lose it."

Despite the importance of Sunday's game, Guardiola said midfielder Rodri, who has just returned from injury, is unlikely to be risked.

**SLOT URGES PATIENCE AS ISAK RETURNS TO TRAINING WITH LIVERPOOL**  
Alexander Isak will return to Liverpool training ahead of this weekend's showdown against Manchester City but manager Arne Slot has pleaded for patience with the club's record signing.

Isak, who signed in September from Newcastle for a British-record fee of £125mn (\$164mn), has not played since coming off at half-time of the Champions League win in Frankfurt last month.

"He will train for the first time today with the team again, after being three weeks out," Slot said at his pre-match press conference.

"I know that I said three weeks ago that his pre-season has ended so now it's time for us to see where he is. But I have to come back to those words, because if you are three weeks only with the rehab, that doesn't bring you back to the levels he was three weeks ago."

Swedish international Isak has played just eight games for his new club since arriving at Anfield on transfer deadline day, and is yet to score a Premier League goal.

Slot said the 26-year-old, who has been sidelined with a groin injury, would need time to get match fit.