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FIFA ARAB CUP QATAR 2025

Own goal shock: Palestine beat Qatar in stoppage-time

‘It is a historic day. It is a great day. I say congratulations to all the players and to our fans’

By Rizwan Rehmat
Al Khor

It was heartbreak for the home fans as Palestine yesterday picked up three points when an own goal by defender Sultan al-Brake in injury time saw hosts Qatar go down 1-0 at Al Bayt Stadium.

With both teams struggling to find the goal in regulation time, the thousands of Al Annabi fans were left dejected when al-Brake deflected a loopy cross from outside the box into his own net just seconds before the final whistle.

Palestine coach Ehab Abu Jazar danced in absolute joy when the goal crashed into the net.

“I thank Allah. It is a historic day. It is a great day. I say congratulations to all the players and to our fans,” Abu Jazar said yesterday. “We snatched a precious victory against a strong Qatari national team who are the Asian champions. We dedicate the victory to our people, the martyrs, the wounded and the prisoners back home,” he added.

Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui yesterday was a frustrated man after the match.

“We are sad. I am very unhappy (that) we lost in the last session. I am not happy with our performance. We can do better. They (Palestine) put more effort, more passion and in the end they won. Football is like this. They got some chances and they won in the last session,” Lopetegui said in an interview with official broadcaster Al Kass Sports Channel after the



Palestine's Mohammed Saleh celebrates with teammates following an own goal by Qatar's Sultan al-Brake during their FIFA Arab Cup match at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor yesterday. (Reuters)

match. “We want to forward (in the tournament). We have to believe. We have to improve, for sure. We had a lot of problems going into the match. We have a lot of injuries. But then we have to handle all this, we have to manage. We can do better,” the Spaniard added.

From the moment the whistle echoed through the vast expanse of Al Bayt Stadium, the narra-

tive was written by the reigning AFC Asian Cup champions. Qatar wasted no time in asserting their authority, seizing control of the pitch and forcing Palestine into a desperate defensive shell.

The opening exchanges felt like a relentless wave of maroon shirts crashing against a white wall. Qatar's Ahmed Fathy and Mohamed Manai were the first to test the waters, launching early strikes

intended to break the deadlock. However, they found an immovable object in Rami Hamada. The Palestinian custodian was alert from the start, denying the Asian champions an early celebration.

Lopetegui was compelled to swap experienced Assim Madibo for Issa Laye early on, but the change did little to halt Qatar's momentum. They controlled proceedings, with Lucas Mendes

coming closest to breaking the deadlock, only to be denied by Hamada.

The pressure mounted in the second half as substitute Edmilson Junior set up Al Brake, who fired wide, before Akram Afif saw a penalty shout rejected.

Goalkeeper Hamada was called into action again to tip a stinging Mohammed Muntari shot over the bar, while Palestine's Ahmad

Alqaq wasted a clear chance by firing high. However, there was a cruel twist in the tale.

Deep into stoppage time, Palestine claimed the win against the run of play when Al Brake tragically deflected an Alqaq cross into his own goal.

Palestine will next play Tunisia while Qatar will take on Syria, with both matches to be played on Thursday.



Qatar's Akram Afif in action with Palestine's Musab Battat at Al Bayt Stadium. (Reuters)

PREVIEW

It's Queiroz vs Renard as Oman feel ready to take on mighty Saudi challenge today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Oman coach Carlos Queiroz yesterday said his team will play for a win against regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia when the two teams meet in their opening match at the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025.

The vastly experienced Portuguese coach said the team is fully prepared and focused on controlling the game while limiting Saudi Arabia's attacking threat.

“The team's goal is to advance to the next stage while delivering a performance worthy of Omani football. The coaching staff is working on developing the players' abilities and providing opportunities for new players to gain experience,” Queiroz said at a press conference yesterday.

“The Oman team gave their all during the World Cup qualifiers despite the limited time and numerous challenges. My team has an opportunity against Saudi Arabia to do well. It's either victory or we learn something. We will do everything we can to achieve a positive result, and I have great confidence in the coaching staff and the players,” the Portuguese said.

Queiroz did not shy away from the harsh reality facing the squad: the absence of seven key players. Yet, rather than using this as an excuse, he framed it as a testament to the team's depth, affirming that those remaining were ready to fight



Carlos Queiroz

for the badge. Midfielder Abdullah Fawaz, who was also present at the press conference, yesterday confirmed the squad's readiness, emphasising their aim to secure a positive result and make their fans proud. Group B also features Morocco and Comoros.

When asked about the team morale, Fawaz represented the heartbeat of the locker room. He didn't sugarcoat the challenge; he acknowledged the formidable nature of the Saudi team. However, his message was one of quiet confidence.

“Our goal is clear: to go as far as possible,” Fawaz said, looking out at the cameras yesterday. He ended the session with a solemn promise to the supporters who would be watching from the stands and at home “We promise our fans that we will give our all to make them happy,” he said.



Hervé Renard

As the microphones were turned off, the message was clear: The Omani team is not just coming to play; they are coming to grow, to fight, and to prove themselves.

THE GREEN FALCONS TAKE AIM AT OMAN

While Oman spoke of resilience, the Saudi Arabian camp projected an air of focused ambition. Hugely popular French tactician Hervé Renard took centre stage to address the media, fully aware of the weight carried by the upcoming clash at Education City Stadium.

Renard, a manager who thrives on the big stage, framed this Group B opener as more than just a tactical contest. He described it as a special occasion – a true “Gulf Derby” steeped in a rich history of fierce encounters between the two neighbouring nations.

Addressing the break in domes-

tic football, Renard noted that the suspension of the Saudi League had given the national team a crucial window to regroup. The preparation, he insisted, has been meticulous.

“The tournament is of great importance to us,” Renard stated yesterday. “There is no room for a slow start. For Saudi Arabia, the objective is to secure a victory immediately to build the momentum necessary to go deep into the tournament,” he added.

Despite his confidence, the French coach was careful not to underestimate the opposition.

He warned that Oman is a “tough match,” characterising them as a highly organised squad with dangerous players.

However, he countered this warning with a vote of confidence in his own dressing room, expressing total trust that his players would deliver their absolute best when the whistle blows.

Sitting beside Renard was the man tasked with guarding the net, goalkeeper Nawaf al-Aqidi. His demeanour mirrored that of his coach – calm and prepared.

Al-Aqidi reinforced the sentiment that the squad is ready, not just for the opener, but for the long haul in Qatar. He spoke of a collective desire to honour the prestige of the Arab Cup.

“We strive to make the Saudi fans happy,” Al-Aqidi said, closing the session with a pledge to deliver a performance worthy of the Green Falcons' reputation.

Syria edge Tunisia 1-0 with second-half strike



Syria's Omar Maher Khribin celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates during their FIFA Arab Cup match against Tunisia at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

DOHA: Omar Khribin's second half free-kick earned Syria a hard fought 1-0 over Tunisia in their FIFA Arab Cup 2025 Group A tie at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday. Syria meet Qatar next on Thursday, while Tunisia take on Palestine.

It was one way traffic from the start with Tunisia's Ismael Gharbi proving to be a handful for the Syrian defence with his dangerous runs and teasing crosses. Tunisia's pressure had Syria scrambling again in the 10th minute when Ferjani Sassi broke into the box with Ali Maaloul then flashing a cross across the face of the goal while Gharbi skied his attempt from just above the box. Syria lived dangerously again in the 18th minute with Oussama Haddadi's glancing header off a corner swirling across the

face of the goalmouth before going out of play. Syria, who were content with soaking up the pressure, had a chance in the 27th minute off a free-kick but Mohammad Alsalkhadi struck his delivery straight into the path of Tunisia keeper Ayman Dahmen. The West Asian side's early pressure on Tunisia earned them a free-kick in the 48th minute after Oussama Haddadi's foul on Alsalkhadi, leaving Khribin to bend his set-piece around the wall and past Dahmen.

Tunisia came fighting back two minutes later with Moutaz Nefati sending a delightful lob for Gharbi, who saw his volleyed attempt just sailing over the bar, while Syria keeper Shaher Alshaker made a fine stop to deny Firas Chaouat's flick 14 minutes later. That was to be it for Tunisia as Syria sealed the win.

FOCUS

‘As easy as making tea’: Latest Kohli masterclass dispels doubts

Virat Kohli dispelled any doubts about his enduring quality with the 50-over World Cup on the horizon after a match-winning century for India against South Africa. The 37-year-old struck 135 off 120 balls - his 52nd one day international hundred - to guide the hosts to a 17-run win in the opening match of the three-game series in Ranchi on Sunday.

Kohli, who now plays only the 50-over format after retiring from Tests and T20s, starred alongside fellow veteran Rohit Sharma, 38. Their futures have been widely debated, with chief selector Ajit Agarkar recently noting that it was rare for players to remain dominant while featuring in just one format of the game.

But Kohli's latest knock - his 83rd international century across formats - silenced any immediate doubts about his longevity. The batsman is targeting the ODI World Cup in 2027. "I don't see any reason to talk about his future," batting coach Sitanshu Kotak said.

"It's just the way he's batting, it's just brilliant... The way he's performing, the way he maintains his fitness, there are no questions about anything."

Kohli shared a 136-run stand for the second wicket with Rohit, who hit 57 for his 60th ODI half-century, as India piled up 349-8.

Kohli looked in especially imperious touch, hitting 11 fours and seven sixes in a fluent display.

Questions about a possible Test comeback resurfaced after India's recent 2-0 series loss to South Africa, but Kohli reiterated his commitment to the ODI format. "Yes, that's how it's always going to be," he said. "I'm just playing one form of the game."

With 554 international matches under his belt, Kohli, popularly known as 'King Kohli' for his prolific run-scoring, said experience and mental sharpness guided his preparation now.

"You know, I've never been a big believer of a lot of preparation, if that makes sense," he said.

"All my cricket has been mental. As long as I feel mentally I can play the game, I work physically very hard every day of my life.

"It's got nothing to do with cricket anymore. It's the way I live."

Senior cricket journalist Ayaz Memon said the performance was a statement of intent from India's senior duo.

"Rohit and Kohli have served notice again that their ambition of playing the 2027 ODI World Cup is not misplaced," he said in a social media post.

Former opener Virender Sehwag said: "Virat Kohli has once again shown that making runs for him is as easy as we make tea.

"Kohli is not chasing records, records are chasing Kohli. His hunger and passion remain the same today. King stays king!" (AFP)



India's Virat Kohli plays a shot during the first ODI against South Africa at the JSCA International Stadium in Ranchi on Sunday. (AFP)

PREVIEW

NZ out to dominate West Indies again as Test series begins

New Zealand aims to start WTC campaign strong at home

Reuters
Christchurch

New Zealand will be looking to extend their dominance over the West Indies and get their World Test Championship campaign off to a flying start when they host the Caribbean islanders in the series opener starting at Hagley Oval today.

The Black Caps, who beat the tourists 3-1 in Twenty20 series and swept their one-day series 3-0 in November, will be confident of similar dominance in this month's three tests in Christchurch, Wellington and Tauranga.

New Zealand won the inaugural WTC title in 2021 and know how vital it will be to win test series in familiar conditions if they are to earn the chance to get to the 2027 final, especially after four losses in seven home tests in 2024 scuppered their last campaign.

"I think if you look traditionally around the last couple of editions of the World Test Championship, being successful at home is critically important," said Rob Walter, who will take charge of the team for the first time in a test series after replacing Gary Stead as coach.

"It's not the be all and end all, because we've started to see our teams can win away from home... but certainly, winning at home is important... so we're looking to start strong and start quick and lay down a marker early."

West Indies, swept by Australia and India in their last two red-ball series, last won a test in



New Zealand captain Tom Latham during a net session at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday. (@BLACKCAPS)

New Zealand almost 31 years ago in early 1995 but always have the ability to upset the odds with a bit of individual brilliance.

Skipper Roston Chase said he would be delighted if West Indies were able to spring a surprise but would be satisfied with continued incremental progress.

"Ideally, when you come to any series, the goal is to win, but I just want the guys to play the same way they did in the ODIs and the T20s, where they played good, exciting cricket," he told reporters in Christchurch yesterday.

"That's just the main goal for us, to play some good cricket and make the kiwis work as hard as possible. Obviously, if we can get the upper hand early and try to put them under pressure from the first game, I think that'd be great."

While the return of veteran paceman Kemar Roach will bring a bit more fire to the West Indies attack, New Zealand's seam-attack will have a fresh look in the absence of Kyle Jamieson, who has been rested, and the injured Will O'Rourke and Ben Sears.

Jacob Duffy and Zak Foulkes, who both made their test debuts against Zimbabwe earlier this year, will join Matt Henry and re-called 32-year-old Blair Tickner as seam options.

"I think it's a really exciting group that we've got," said skipper Tom Latham.

"Yes, there's a few injuries and guys that aren't with us anymore, but we've seen the likes of Foulkes, Duffy and Tickner... come into the international scene and being able to perform straight away, which is really exciting"

SPOTLIGHT

Labuschagne backs under fire Khawaja ahead of second Test



Reuters
Sydney

Marnus Labuschagne has backed Usman Khawaja ahead of the second Ashes Test and made it clear he will not be moving back up the order even if Australia decide to drop the struggling opener.

Khawaja struggled with back spasms during Australia's dramatic victory over England in the series opener in Perth, failing to open either innings and contributing only two runs to his team's cause.

Travis Head's match-winning century as Khawaja's replacement as opener has reinvigorated the debate over the top of the Australian order, but Labuschagne bridled yesterday when asked if he had any advice for the lefthander.

"I don't think he needs advice," Labuschagne told reporters at Brisbane's Gabba, where the second test starts on Thursday.

"He's 38, he's been around the block a long time ... he's an amazing player.

"And the way he's gone about his game, the way he's gone from a number three, four and then to open the batting, and the way he's done that and navigated some tricky scenarios. He's just been awesome.

"So I don't have any advice for him on it, because... in first-class (cricket) this year, he's batted beautifully. The way he's been batting is awesome."

Ironically, the heated debate about Australia's opening part-

nership over the 22 months since David Warner retired from Tests has previously focused entirely on who should bat with Khawaja.

Labuschagne and Steve Smith have filled the gap left by Warner on a temporary basis but the 31-year-old suggested yesterday that the time for such experiments was over whatever was decided about Khawaja.

"I think we can pretty much be sure that Steve or I won't open," he said.

Labuschagne, who normally bats at number three, was dropped from the Test side during the tour of West Indies in June and July after a poor run of form only to storm back into the team with a string of centuries in domestic cricket.

In Perth, he scored a modest nine runs in the opening innings before securing his 24th Test half-century in the company of Head to get Australia across the line for an eight-wicket victory.

"I personally took a lot away from that," he said.

"To be able to go out there and finish the game off, build that partnership with Trav and be able to play some really free-flowing cricket was really exciting."

Meanwhile Khawaja returned to the batting crease for the first time since the Perth Test. Following a session of physiotherapy and light fielding on Sunday, Khawaja faced a more rigorous assessment yesterday.

Australia's medical staff monitored him through running and stretching drills before clearing him for a 30-minute net session during the team's day-time practice.

COMMENT

Carse says England bowlers have plans to tackle Head in Brisbane Test

Reuters
Brisbane

England fast bowler Brydon Carse said his team has firm plans to counter the threat posed by Travis Head after the Australian made a blistering century at the top of the order to set up an eight-wicket win in the Ashes series opener in Perth.

Middle-order batter Head opened in place of the injured Usman Khawaja in Australia's second innings and the aggressive left-hander made a century in 69 balls - the second-fastest in Ashes history - en route to a match-winning 123.

Head told reporters ahead of the second test beginning in Brisbane on Thursday

that he was prepared to reprise that role, but Carse said the visitors will be ready regardless of who comes out to bat early.

"I think that was a phenomenal knock by a high-quality player," Carse said yesterday. "If he does open the batting again, we've got set plans we'll look to use."

"But again, I don't think anything changes from a mindset thing. He had an incredible day out that afternoon... whatever we're presented with, we'll stick to our plans."

England are looking to hit back after their eight-wicket defeat inside two days in Perth, where Carse took five wickets in a losing cause.

There are concerns surrounding Mark Wood's fitness ahead of the Test, but Carse said the bowling unit is settled even if his

fellow pacer is deemed unfit for the day-night, pink-ball test.

"I'll still be adaptable to whatever the situation brings," the 30-year-old said.

"Obviously again different challenges this week, where we could be bowling under lights at different times.

"But I think as a bowling group we're quite settled in and where we're going to bowl and what our role is in the side."

Boycott urges England to 'use their brains' in quest to level Ashes

Geoffrey Boycott has urged England to "use their brains" as Ben Stokes's men go in search of an Ashes series-levelling win in this week's second Test in Brisbane.

England fell 1-0 down in the five-match series following a humiliating eight-wick-

et loss to Australia inside two days in last month's first Test in Perth. Batting collapses cost England dear as the tourists lost five wickets for 12 runs in their first innings and four for 11 in their second. Former England opener Boycott insisted Stokes's men could win at Brisbane's Gabba ground with a more measured approach.

"But it doesn't help our chances of success if Ben Stokes keeps encouraging our batsmen to attack, attack with one finger hovering over the self-destruct button," Boycott wrote in his *Daily Telegraph* column.

"Nobody is asking the players to stop being positive because they have given us some marvellous, thrilling and entertaining cricket. All we ask is for them to use their brains and realise there are times

when they should throttle back and be aware of situations and bat accordingly."

Boycott, 85, an Ashes winner in both England and Australia, also addressed Stokes's apology for a "slip of the tongue" after the all-rounder responded to criticism from former players of the team's limited pre-series preparations by referring to "has-beens".

"To call past players 'has-beens' was disrespectful especially as some of those 'has-beens' played in teams that won the Ashes in England and Australia," said Boycott. "I am glad Ben has half apologised, saying it was a slip of the tongue, because none of this team have won the Ashes in Australia. Get the job done, because then you don't need to say anything and you can bask in all the glory coming your way."

SPOTLIGHT

Duplantis, McLaughlin-Levrone crowned ‘Athletes of the Year’

AFP
Monaco

Swedish pole vault star Armand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis and US track sensation Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone were named athletes of the year by World Athletics in Monaco on Sunday.

Duplantis, 26, set four pole vault records in 2025 as he won world titles both indoors and outdoors.

He was unbeaten in 16 competitions and became the first men’s pole vaulter in modern history to go undefeated for two successive years.

Duplantis cleared 6.30m at the world championships in Tokyo after successfully retaining his title as he broke the world record for the 14th time in his career.

It is the third time that Duplantis has scooped the overall prize for the world’s top athlete. He also won it in 2020 and 2022.

McLaughlin-Levrone ran the second fastest time ever on her way to claiming the world 400m title.

She smashed the championship record and nearly eclipsed a

40-year-old world record set by Marita Koch of the former East Germany.

Already a double Olympic 400m hurdles champion, McLaughlin-Levrone became the first woman since 1985 to break the 48-second barrier in the 400m in Tokyo after fully turning her attention to the flat race. She also won the 4x400m.

Her time of 47.78sec trails only the 47.60sec run by Koch four decades ago, a record that is widely viewed with suspicion because of a state-sponsored doping programme at the time.

Koch never failed a drugs test and has always maintained she did nothing wrong. McLaughlin-Levrone, 26, has not been beaten in either the 400m or 400m hurdles for two years.

She is the first athlete to win world titles in both events. The American previously won the overall athlete of the year accolade in 2022.

Kenya’s Emmanuel Wanyonyi won the men’s track award after adding the 800m world title to his Olympic gold, with McLaughlin-Levrone taking the equivalent female award.

Australia’s Nicola Olyslagers



President of World Athletics and former British track and field athlete Sebastian Coe, Prince's Albert II of Monaco pose with winners of the World Athletics Awards 2025 in Monte Carlo, Monaco. (AFP)

joined Duplantis in being named field athlete of the year after winning high jump titles indoors and

outdoors. Kenyan long-distance runner Sabastian Sawe took the men’s out of stadium prize fol-

lowing his wins at the London and Berlin marathons. Spanish race-walker Maria Perez won the wom-

en’s equivalent as she defended her world titles in the 20km and 35km walks.

FORMULA 1

McLaren boss assures Piastri he can still be champ

‘Oscar, from a points point of view, is definitely in condition to win title’

Reuters
Doha

Oscar Piastri was robbed of victory in Qatar but the Australian can take hope from history in his bid to become Formula One champion next weekend, according to McLaren boss Andrea Stella.

The 24-year-old did everything right at the Lusail circuit, winning the Saturday sprint from pole position and leading Sunday’s race from pole until a team strategy blunder left him having to settle for second to Red Bull’s Max Verstappen.

The Australian said he was speechless with what had happened and McLaren were quick to apologise for a mistake that left him third overall and 16 points behind teammate Lando Norris, who finished fourth. Verstappen is second, 12 off the lead.

“Clearly Oscar was in control of the race and deserved to win it, and we lost the podium as well with Lando,” Stella told reporters.

“Oscar, from a points point of view, is definitely in condition to win the title,” added the Italian. “We have seen before in the history of Formula One that when you have this kind of situation sometimes it’s the third one that actually wins.”

Stella, who joined McLaren after years at Ferrari, spoke from

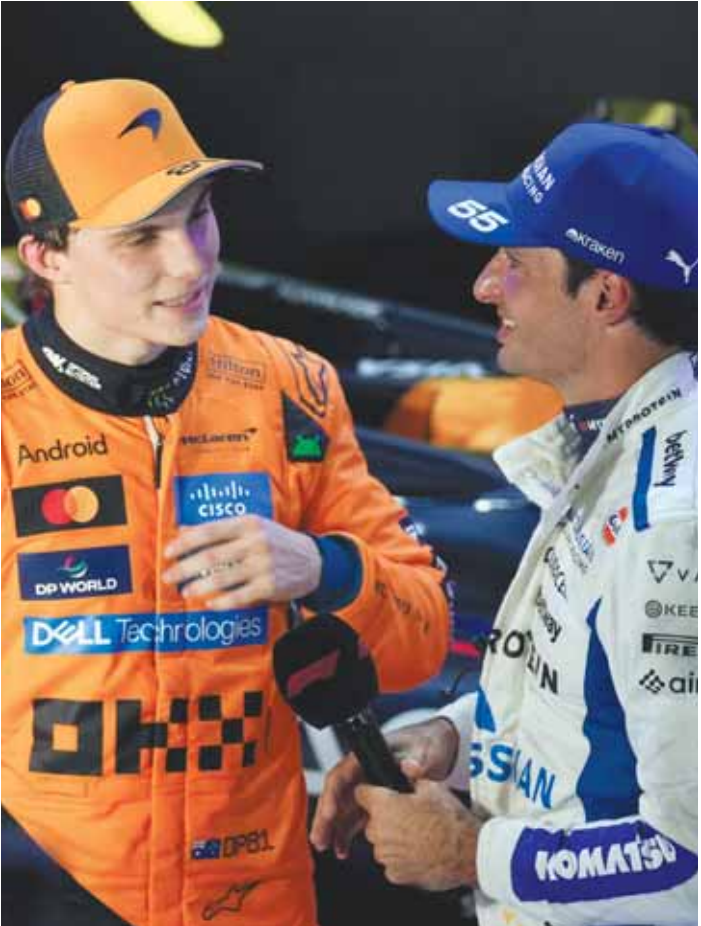
personal experience. In 2007 Ferrari’s Kimi Raikkonen won the championship after going into the final race third overall and behind McLaren’s Fernando Alonso and a rookie Lewis Hamilton, who ended up level on points and missing out by one.

In 2010 Sebastian Vettel took the first of his four championships with Red Bull after going to Abu Dhabi in third place and behind teammate Mark Webber, now Piastri’s manager, and Alonso who was by then at Ferrari.

McLaren have said they are well aware of the precedents but will not abandon the policy of treating their drivers as equals and Stella emphasised that Piastri will be free to race while he still has a chance of the title. “We will let the drivers be in condition to race each other but above all what’s important for us is that we are in condition to beat Verstappen with one of our two drivers,” he added.

“We want to be fair to our drivers, we want to race with integrity and we want to race in a way that doesn’t surprise our drivers.

“So between now and Abu Dhabi there will be further conversations with Lando and Oscar. We will confirm our racing approach but certainly what I can say is that if any of the drivers is in condition to pursue the quest to win the title, then we will respect this.”



Second-placed McLaren's Oscar Piastri and third-placed Williams' Carlos Sainz Jr react after the Qatar Grand Prix in Lusail yesterday. (Reuters)

Red Bull apologise for criticism after Antonelli receives death threats

The Red Bull Formula One team yesterday said it sincerely regretted suggesting Kimi Antonelli had handed McLaren’s Lando Norris fourth place in Qatar after the rookie received death threats. With Red Bull’s defending champion Max Verstappen leading, Norris was stuck behind Antonelli’s Mercedes. When the teenager ran wide on a corner on the penultimate lap, the Briton zoomed past to grab fourth and two extra points. “Not sure what happened to Antonelli Max, looks like he just pulled over and let Norris through,” Gianpiero ‘GP’ Lambiase, Verstappen’s race engineer, immediately told his driver in a radio message which television viewers also heard. Red Bull adviser, Helmut Marko, said later that the 19-year-old “waved” Norris past. On Monday, Antonelli’s profile picture on his Instagram account was blacked out. Mercedes said comments attacking Antonelli on his various social media accounts had shown a “1,100 per cent increase in the abuse we sadly usually see on a Sunday of a race weekend”. Brit-



Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli drives during the Qatar GP in Lusail. (AFP)

ish media reported that the team said several of the comments “were death threats” and that it had flagged 330 more “severe or suspect” comments on team social media. McLaren use engines manufactured by Mercedes. Yesterday, Red Bull issued a statement acknowledging that “replay footage shows Antonelli momentarily losing control of his car, thus allowing Norris to pass him. “We sincerely regret that this has led to

Antonelli receiving online abuse,” it added. Mercedes said Lambiase had apologised to team principal Toto Wolff. “I spoke to GP,” said Wolff. “I saw him and obviously he was emotional in that moment. “He said he didn’t see the situation.” Norris will go into the final race in Abu Dhabi 12 points ahead of the Dutchman. If Verstappen wins, Norris can finish third and still take the title. Without the two points he would have needed to

come second to be sure. “We are fighting for second in the constructors’ championship, which is important for us,” said Wolff. “Kimi is fighting for a potential third in the race. I mean, how brainless can you be to even say something like this? “Why would we do this? Why would we even think about interfering in a driver championship? You really need to check yourself and whether you are seeing ghosts.”

LOSS

Italian tennis icon Pietrangeli dies

AFP
Milan

Nicola Pietrangeli, a two-time winner of the French Open, has died at the age of 92, Italy’s tennis federation announced yesterday.

“Italian tennis is mourning an icon. Nicola Pietrangeli, the only Italian inducted into the World Tennis Hall of Fame, has died,” said the FITP.

Born in Tunis in 1933 to an Italian father and Russian mother, Pietrangeli was widely considered the country’s greatest ever tennis player until the emergence of current world number two Jannik Sinner.

He was also one of the best clay-court players of his generation, with three titles in Monte Carlo and his home Italian Open tournament in Rome, where a court is named in his honour.

In total Pietrangeli won 44 singles titles over his career, including his two triumphs at Roland Garros in 1959 and 1960, and reached the Wimbledon semi-finals in the same year as his second French Open title.

An all-round sportsman, Pietrangeli played for football team Lazio until he was 18 years old, but he switched to tennis after the Rome-based club tried to send him away on loan.

Pietrangeli’s first victory at Roland Garros was the first time any Italian player had won a Grand Slam and came after he defeated South African Ian Vermaak in the final.

He also won that year’s doubles tournament, which back then was hugely popular, alongside his compatriot Orlando Sirola with whom he formed a formidable pairing.

Gifted with an excellent backhand, precise ball control, and impressive stamina, he won his second French Open title in 1960 against Chilean Luis Ayala before being beaten twice in the



1961 and 1964 finals by Spaniard Manuel Santana.

During the majority of his career tennis was divided between amateurs, who played in the traditional top tournaments and the Davis Cup, and professionals who joined a parallel circuit once they established a reputation as a top player.

Unlike his contemporaries Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall, Pietrangeli didn’t turn professional until the beginning of the Open era in 1968, by which time he was in his mid-30s.

After his retirement Pietrangeli, a fan of the high life, became a media personality, presenting popular sports programme *La Domenica Sportiva* and appearing in three films.

“If I’d trained harder I would have won more, but I would have had less fun,” he once said.

Pietrangeli was also a Davis Cup stalwart, playing a record 164 matches for Italy, although he never managed to win it as a player, losing the final in 1960 and 1961.

He racked up those appearances between 1954 and 1972, but he didn’t taste success in the international tournament until 1976 when he captained his country to its first title.

Murray ‘disappointed’ with results coaching former rival Djokovic

British tennis great Andy Murray said yesterday he was “disappointed” with Novak Djokovic’s results while coaching his former rival. Murray joined Djokovic’s coaching team in November 2024 just three months after the 38-year-old Scot had ended his own playing career at the Paris Olympics. But the pair were only together for some six months, their alliance covering the 2025 Australian Open and three other tournaments. “I look back on it and I’m glad that I did it,” Murray told The Tennis Podcast. “It’s an amazing experience that I’ve had. It didn’t last long, but I put everything into it. “I was disappointed. Probably didn’t get the results I would have liked for him. “But it was a good opportunity because I felt I wanted to coach at some stage and if I didn’t take it I might look back and think, ‘It would have been really interesting. I could have learned a lot’, or potentially regretted it,” added Murray, who won three Grand Slam singles titles in an era where Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal dominated men’s tennis. Djokovic defeated Carlos Alcaraz to reach the semi-finals at the Australian Open but the 24-time Grand Slam singles champion was then forced to retire injured in his last-four clash with Alexander Zverev. The 38-year-old Serb then suffered first-round losses in Qatar and at Indian Wells on his return to action before being beaten in the Miami Open final by Czech teenager Jakub Mensik. “It was going well initially and it was unfortunate what happened in Australia with the injury, but I watched him play ridiculous tennis in that tournament,” said Murray. “After the injury, it was certainly a difficult few months for him but also I think for the team and all of us. I learned a lot about what coaching is. I was fully invested, tried my hardest to help, and made some good relationships along the way with his team.”

FOOTBALL

Chelsea captain says 10-man Blues ‘dominated’ Arsenal

‘WE’VE COME A LONG WAY, WE’RE BUILDING ON RESULT AFTER RESULT AND I THINK WE SHOWED THAT’

AFP
London

Chelsea captain Reece James reckons his “dominant” side made a statement in holding Premier League leaders Arsenal to a 1-1 draw despite losing Moises Caicedo to a first-half red card.

The Blues had been the better team at Stamford Bridge on Sunday before the sending-off of Caicedo in the 36th minute for a studs-up tackle on Mikel Merino and then prevented their London rivals from pulling clear.

Defeat would have left Chelsea nine points behind Arsenal and all but out of the title race.

But Enzo Maresca’s men went ahead through Trevor Chalobah’s header early in the second half despite being a man down.

Merino equalised for Arsenal just before the hour but Chelsea dug in and held out in difficult circumstances.

“We dominated the game in every area throughout, with 11 men and 10 men,” said James.

“I think that was a big statement on where we are and what we’re fighting for. We’ve come a long way, we’re building on result after result and I think we showed that.”

Chelsea’s resilience was in

marked contrast to the two previous occasions this season when they had gone a man down in the first half, with the Blues losing to Manchester United and Brighton after Robert Sanchez and Chalobah saw red.

“I’m proud,” said James. “The team is so young but we went toe to toe with the team at the top of the Premier League. We didn’t show fear and we tried to come out to win.

“We knew it was going to be tough but it was a game we felt we probably could have won. It was difficult to only walk away with a point. We played 60 minutes with 10 men, having to cope with the league leaders.”

For Arsenal, now five points clear of second-placed Manchester City, it was a tough end to a week that had seen the Gunners post important wins over both Tottenham and Bayern Munich.

“It’s been a massive week for us,” said Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard, a second-half substitute after returning from a knee injury.

“Some big games, some big results. This was another big test for us. We wanted to come here and finish off the week with a win but it was a tough battle.

“They were fighting really hard for it and we didn’t do enough to win.”



Chelsea’s defender Reece James reacts during the Premier League match against Arsenal at Stamford Bridge in London. (AFP)

Guardiola uncertain over Rodri return

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said yesterday he was uncertain when Spain midfielder Rodri will be fit enough to return to action. Rodri missed much of last season with a knee injury and has appeared just once – and then only for a minute – in City’s last 10 games due to a hamstring problem.

The 29-year-old has been ruled out of today’s Premier League trip to Fulham and is doubtful for the home clash with Sunderland on Saturday.

“No, not yet,” said Guardiola, when asked at a press conference yesterday that lasted just a few minutes, if Rodri was available. Asked if he could feature at the weekend, Guardiola said: “I don’t know.”

Guardiola also spoke about goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, who was booked for a fourth time in his short City career in the last-gasp 3-2 win over Leeds on Saturday.

Leeds manager Daniel Farke also accused Donnarumma of feigning injury to allow Guardiola to deliver a key team talk. The Italian is now just one yellow card away from a suspension.

SERIE A

Yildiz double gives Spalletti first home win with Juventus

AFP
Turin

Kenan Yildiz gave Luciano Spalletti his first home win as Juventus coach with a crucial brace in Saturday’s 2-1 success against Cagliari in Serie A.

Turkiye forward Yildiz saved Juve’s blushes with the winning goal in stoppage time at the end of the first half with a typically stylish finish after bursting towards the Cagliari area.

That was Yildiz’s fifth goal of the season for Juve and came after he levelled the scores with a deflected strike in the 27th minute, seconds after Sebastiano Esposito gave Cagliari a shock lead.

“Yildiz has the qualities of a great player, he gave us the win out of nothing,” said Spalletti.

“I’m trying to give him as much freedom as possible and liberate him from tactical concerns. He’s really great in tight spaces.”

Juve are seventh on 23 points, four behind league leaders Roma who face third-placed Napoli on Sunday, thanks to another top-

drawer display from Yildiz.

The 20-year-old came off the bench to drive Juve to a 3-2 victory at Bodo/Glimt on Tuesday night – the “Old Lady” of Italian football’s first win in the Champions League this season.

Spalletti said that he is “enthusiastic” to head back to Naples on Sunday week for one of the fieriest rivalries in the game.

He will likely have to face Napoli, the team he led to a historic third league title in 2023, without Dusan Vlahovic after the Serbia striker picked up what looked like a thigh injury in the first half.

That is a blow for Spalletti, who has made Vlahovic his first-choice centre forward as he tries to inspire the Turin giants following the sacking of Igor Tudor.

“I don’t have a good feeling about it,” said Spalletti of the injury.

“I tried to rest him at Bodo, we’ve done everything we can to give him rest, but in the end it’s not made a difference.”

AC Milan, second and level on 25 points with Napoli, can take the provisional lead of Italy’s top flight later with a win over Lazio at the San Siro.



Juventus’ Kenan Yildiz celebrates after scoring his team’s second goal during the Serie A match against Cagliari in Turin. (AFP)

LA LIGA

Real Madrid title hopes dented at Girona in third straight draw

AFP
Barcelona

Real Madrid were held to a third consecutive La Liga draw in a 1-1 tie at Girona on Sunday, allowing Barcelona to retain pole position.

Azzedine Ounahi fired the hosts into a surprise lead before half-time, with Kylian Mbappe earning Madrid a point from the penalty spot. After Barcelona beat Alaves on Saturday to move top of the table, Madrid needed a victory at Girona to reclaim top spot but now sit second, a point behind the champions.

Earlier Alberto Moleiro helped Villarreal, third, move back ahead of fourth-place Atletico Madrid with a stoppage time winner in a 3-2 victory at Real Sociedad.

Real Madrid’s draw increases the pressure on Madrid coach Xabi Alonso, after recent rumours suggesting his future is insecure in the Madrid dugout.

“We are up there, it’s all very even, it’s a long season and we have to continue,” Alonso told reporters. “I liked the reac-

tion from the players. It was not enough to turn it around but we were close, and we have to continue with the unity we have, being self-critical enough, and wanting to win away from home.”

Madrid travel to face Athletic Bilbao tomorrow for a fourth consecutive league match on the road, a game moved because of the club’s participation in the Spanish Super Cup in January.

“The table will be hard-fought, there will be lots of movement,” added Alonso.

Mbappe and Arda Guler fired off target for Madrid early on in a hotly-contested but scrappy clash, in front of a raucous home crowd. French superstar Mbappe had a goal ruled out for handball moments before Morocco international Ounahi fired Girona ahead, rifling home from just inside the area to stun their illustrious visitors.

Catalan minnows Girona, 18th, have twice beaten Real Madrid at Montilivi since making their top flight debut in 2017 and for a while it looked like they were going to manage it again.

Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois made a stun-

ning save to tip away Vanat’s drive across goal before Los Blancos fought back.

After having a goal disallowed for offside Vinicius was clumsily felled in the box by Hugo Rincon.

Mbappe smashed the resulting penalty into the bottom left corner past Gazzaniga’s dive for his 14th La Liga goal of the campaign. “Absolutely not the result we wanted tonight, but the league is still on and very long,” wrote Mbappe on social media network Instagram. “We need to change this dynamic and show who we are as a team.”

Villarreal playmaker Moleiro netted twice in the second half of a thrilling game in San Sebastian. Villarreal secured their fifth consecutive league win to stay firmly in the Spanish title fight.

Ayoz Perez sent the visitors ahead midway through the first half and teed up Moleiro for Villarreal’s second soon after the break.

Real Sociedad fought back strongly, with Carlos Soler netting on the hour mark.

The Basque side ramped up the pressure and levelled in the final stages through a spectacular Ander Barrenetxea free-kick.

FOCUS

Four new champions emerge in QDRC second round

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Amid fierce competition witnessed at Qatar Racing Club (QRC) drag strip, the second round of the Qatar Drag Race Championship (QDRC) concluded with great success.

The event is being held under the patronage of QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani. As usual, the round saw wide participation from motorsport champions from Qatar, the Gulf, and the region. By the end of the competition, four racers managed to secure their second consecutive titles after winning the opening round, while the podium welcomed new champions in the other four categories.

In the Index 10.00 category, racer Ahmed Hassan achieved his second title in the championship by defeating Ahmed al-Emadi, who had finished third in the previous round and took second place this time, leaving third place to

Ali al-Johani. Meanwhile, in the Index 8.50 category, Mustafa Atat retained his title after overcoming Adel Ghanem in the final race – Ghanem recorded his first podium finish in the championship, just like Mohammed Zaman, who finished third.

In the Super Street category, Rashid al-Baloushi secured his second consecutive victory in the final races after surpassing Bader al-Sharshani, who settled for second place, while Milos Pavlovic earned his first podium finish by placing third.

The fourth category to have its defending champion retain the title was the bike competitions, where Abdullah al-Ansari claimed the top podium spot after defeating Abdulwahab Bu Qamaz in the final of the Index 8.50 category, while Hassan al-Mezdi repeated his previous round’s result by finishing third.

Four of the championship categories crowned new champions, different from those who won in the opening round a week earlier. The winner of this round was al-

Ansari, being the only competitor to secure two titles. After winning the INDEX 8.50 (motorcycles) category, he went on to claim the Street Bike title – having finished second in that category in the previous round. In the final race, al-Ansari faced Mohammed al-Salem, who finished second, while Abdulwahab Bu Qamaz took third.

Majed al-Sharshani also recorded his first title in the championship by winning the Index 9.00 (cars) category, defeating Mohammed Khawari in the final – Khawari’s second consecutive appearance in a final, finishing second again. Third place went to Mohammed Zaman.

The cars’ index categories contested over the 1/8 mile also saw new champions. After losing the final of the INDEX 4.80 category in the previous round, Saeed al-Baloushi returned strongly, reaching the final once again and this time winning against Mohammed al-Furaih, who finished second, while their colleague Ahmed Afseesi completed the podium in third place.



The final category to crown a new champion this round was Index 4.50, where Ibrahim Abbas Ibrahim and Jaber al-Maghribi

reached the final. Ibrahim claimed the win, while al-Maghribi settled for second place, and third place went to Basil Abbas, who

had also finished third in the previous round. The third round will begin tomorrow with qualifying sessions.