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Starc shines with bat and ball to push Australia to brink of win



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Verstappen outguns McLarens to take key pole in Abu Dhabi

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**FIFA ARAB CUP QATAR 2025**

PREVIEW

# Qatar target victory against Tunisia to keep hopes alive

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui says he still believes in his team as the hosts take on Tunisia in a must-win clash at the Arab Cup at 8pm tonight at Al Bayt Stadium.

Qatar have dropped points in both of their games so far, conceding late goals against Palestine and Syria as they stare at early exit from the tournament. Lopetegui said the team played well in their last match but admitted the result was hard to accept. “We were unhappy with how the game ended, but football can be cruel,” the Spaniard said yesterday. “But at the same time, we played really well against Syria. Football is like this sometimes. It’s not easy to accept that. We’ll now have to use all this frustration to push up in the next match.”

Both Qatar and Tunisia are in precarious positions. Tunisia also failed to win their opening two games, and today’s match is a must-win for both. Their quarter-final hopes will also depend on the Syria-Palestine match being played at the same time today at the Education City Stadium. If Syria and Palestine draw, they will both qualify, regardless of the result at Al Bayt.

Qatar need two things to advance: a win over Tunisia, and a Palestine victory over Syria. Tunisia’s path is the opposite: beat Qatar and hope Syria defeat Palestine.



Qatar have dropped points in both of their games so far, conceding late goals against Palestine and Syria as they stare at an early exit from the Arab Cup.

Lopetegui said his team can only focus on their own performance. “We have to compete well, stay concentrated, and do everything we can,” he said.

Lopetegui described Tunisia as one of the strongest teams in the tournament, saying they have several high-quality players. But he insisted Qatar can still win if they stay sharp and give everything.

Midfielder Ahmed Fathy said the team has struggled mentally after failing to close out games. “The last match was tough on us,” he said. “But we can’t think about the past. We must focus on Tunisia and take the positives from our last performance.”

Fathy also called on Qatari fans to fill the



Palestine’s players train yesterday ahead of their FIFA Arab Cup group stage match against Syria. A draw will ensure both side seal their place in the quarter-finals.

stands. “We always need their support. Tomorrow is a big game, and we want to make them proud,” he said.

Tunisia coach Sami Trabelsi said neither team controls its own destiny, but both must fight until the end. He said Tunisia expect strong backing from their fans in Doha. “We must forget what hap-

pened earlier in the tournament and focus only on winning,” he said. “This is our last chance.”

Tunisian striker Seif Jaziri said the team will approach the match with full seriousness. He praised Qatar’s strengths but added that Tunisia will look to take advantage of any weaknesses.

FOCUS

# Jordan, Iraq into quarters as Algeria win big over Bahrain

EGYPT RESCUED A LATE POINT AGAINST THE UAE IN A THRILLING 1-1 DRAW AT LUSAIL STADIUM

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Jordan and Iraq reached the FIFA Arab Cup quarter-finals yesterday after victories over Kuwait and Sudan respectively. Defending champions Algeria laid down a marker of their title credentials in a 5-1 thrashing of Bahrain, in a match where Redouane Berkane had a hand in four of the five goals.

Egypt rescued a late point against the UAE in a thrilling 1-1 draw at Lusail Stadium, leaving both teams with work to do in their last Group C matches.

**Kuwait 1-3 Jordan**

Jordan booked their place in the quarter-finals with a largely dominant display to defeat Kuwait in their Group C contest at a bouncing Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. World Cup-bound Jordan caught Kuwait napping for the opening goal, tapping a free-kick from some 30 yards out to Mohannad Abu Taha, who unleashed a blistering drive beyond Sulaiman Abdulghafour with his defence still to organise their wall fully.

Abdulghafour was much the busier of the two goalkeepers, and he was beaten again early in the second half as Saed Al Rosan converted following the latest in a series of Jordan corners, with Mahmoud Mardi’s deliveries proving a challenge.

With time running out, substitute Yousef Nasser’s header from Eid al-Rashidi’s delicious cross set up a frantic grandstand finish, before Ali Olwan’s penalty deep into added time finally settled the contest after he had burst clear and been felled by the keeper.

**Egypt 1-1 UAE**

Egypt avoided defeat against the UAE with a dramatic late equaliser as the two sides played out a 1-1



Jordan’s Ali Olwan celebrates with teammates after scoring against Kuwait at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. (Reuters)

draw at Lusail Stadium in Group C match. In front of over 36,000 fans, the UAE took the lead in the 59th minute through substitute Lucas Caio. Egypt responded late, with Marwan Hamdi heading in the equaliser three minutes from time to secure a point for the Pharaohs.

The draw left both teams in a difficult position. Egypt needed a win to recover from their opening-round draw with Kuwait, while the UAE were seeking their first points after losing to Jordan in the first round. This was the first Arab Cup meeting between the two sides.

Group C also features Kuwait

and World Cup 2026 qualifiers Jordan. Jordan currently tops the group with six points, followed by Egypt and Kuwait with two points each, while the UAE remains at the bottom with no points.

**Bahrain 1-5 Algeria**

Qatar’s national team may be struggling at the Arab Cup, but the domestic Stars League has been providing plenty of talent in other teams that is absolutely flourishing. That’s certainly the case with the defending champions Algeria, with Qatar-based players having a hand in all five goals in their romp over Bahrain.

The Fennecs raced to a 3-1 lead at the interval after Al Wakrah’s Redouane Berkane scored the opener and then teed up Al Du-hail’s Adil Boulbina for the second. That came shortly after Bahrain had swept home a leveller in a frenetic period that produced three goals in just six minutes. Berkane was back at it again either side of the break, winning a penalty that Yassine Benzia dispatched in first half stoppage-time before grabbing his second shortly after the resumption.

Substitute Yacine Brahimi, another Qatar-based player, then teed up Boulbina up for his second



Iraq’s Mohanad Ali scores against Sudan at Stadium 974.



Egypt’s Ragab Nabil in action with UAE’s Lucas Pimenta at the Lusail Stadium.

and Algeria’s fifth. The comfortable win maintained an unbeaten start for an Algerian side that face Iraq in the section finale on 9 December.

**Sudan 0-2 Iraq**

Iraq progressed to the last eight of the tournament as they held out against sustained Sudan pressure early in the match before snatching victory with two goals in the closing stages. After being on the back foot for much of the first half, Graham Arnold’s side edged their noses in front when Player of the Match Mohanad Ali seized on a poor defensive header from a free-kick to fire his side ahead. The passionate Iraq fans inside Stadium 974 were on their feet once again moments later as Amjed At-twan made sure of the victory with six minutes left.



CRICKET

# Jaiswal's ton secures ODI series win for India

Reuters  
Visakhapatnam

India registered a 2-1 series victory against South Africa after opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's maiden hundred in one day internationals secured their nine-wicket romp in the third and final match in Visakhapatnam yesterday.

Jaiswal, who played second fiddle in an opening stand of 155 with Rohit Sharma (75), smashed an unbeaten 116 as India chased down a 271-run target with more than 10 overs to spare.

"The most pleasing thing about the series, is how we held our nerve," India captain K L Rahul said at the presentation ceremony.

"South Africa came under with an intent to put us under pressure,

one result didn't go our way but we weren't too upset."

Earlier, Quinton de Kock struck a brisk 106, yet South Africa were dismissed for a below-par 270 in the 48th over.

In a notable prelude, India ended a luckless sequence of 20 consecutive lost tosses in ODIs.

Skipper Rahul punched the air to celebrate that and elected to field to spare his bowlers the predicament of having to operate with a wet ball once the evening dew set in.

South Africa's innings began shakily with the early departure of Ryan Rickelton but De Kock and Temba Bavuma, who made 48, forged a century stand to steady their innings.

Ravindra Jadeja removed Bavuma to break the partnership, and Prasidh Krishna (4-66), who bled

27 in his first two overs, returned to dismiss Matthew Breetzke, Aiden Markram and De Kock in a decisive spell to turn the match on its head.

Left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav (4-41) then cleaned up the tail, consigning South Africa to their first sub-300 total of the series. India, who lost the preceding Test series 2-0, began strongly in their chase with Rohit leading their charge.

The 38-year-old former India captain compiled a polished 75-his fourth fifty-plus score in five innings - anchoring a big opening stand with Jaiswal, who was happy to bide time at the other end.

Rohit departed after fluffing his slog-sweep against spinner Kes-hav Maharaj but Jaiswal went on to become the sixth Indian to hit a hundred in all three international formats of the game. Virat Kohli,

now active exclusively in the ODI format like Rohit, walked out to thunderous applause and made a typically fluent 65 not out, which followed his hundreds in Ranchi and Raipur.

"Playing the way I have in the series is the most satisfying thing for me," player-of-the-series Kohli said.

"I feel really free in my mind. I haven't played like this in two-three years. When I play freely, then I know I can hit sixes," he said.

"So, I just wanted to have some fun because I was batting well. Just push my own boundaries and see where we go, you know."

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**India 271 for 1** (Jaiswal 116\*, Rohit 75, Maharaj 1-44) **beat South Africa 270** (de Kock 106, Kuldeep 4-41, Prasidh 4-66) **by 9 wickets**



India's Virat Kohli (left) and Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrate after winning the third one day international against South Africa at the Y S Rajasekhara Reddy Cricket Stadium in Visakhapatnam yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

# Starc shines with bat and ball as Australia eye win

England have been ineffective with ball and foolhardy with the bat

Reuters  
Brisbane

Mitchell Starc made a late-career bid for all-rounder status when he scored a half-century and grabbed two wickets under the Gabba floodlights to push Australia to the brink of victory at the close of day three of the second Ashes Test yesterday.

Tailender Starc made 77 in a sparkling 141-ball knock to help Australia to a 177-run lead before working his magic with the pink ball as England staggered to 134 for six at stumps, still 43 runs short of making Australia bat again.

Ben Stokes and Will Jacks were both four not out, tasked with restoring a shred of dignity to an England side who were ineffective with the ball and foolhardy with the bat.

England have had many lows on Australian soil since their last test win in Sydney 15 years ago but day three at the Gabba may rival them for infamy.

They started the day with genuine hope of at least containing Australia, who had a 44-run lead with four wickets in hand.

They finished it demoralised, with Australia putting 511 on the board before scything through their batting order like a knife through warm butter.

Stokes's team are now staring at a 2-0 series deficit that should prove impossible to turn around.

Only one team in the history of Test cricket has ever come back from 2-0 down to win a series - Don Bradman's Australia in the 1936/37 Ashes.

Michael Neser and Scott Boland joined Starc with two wickets apiece as England lost



Australia's Mitchell Starc (centre) appeals successfully with team-mates to dismiss England's Joe Root (second right) on day three of the second Ashes Test at the Gabba in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

6-89 in a calamitous night session in front of a crowd of 35,574.

The collapse came after opener Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett had raced out of the gates with an unbroken 45-run partnership in six overs to the dinner break.

"Great fun. We thought the ball was going to come alive in the night session and we just wanted to put as many balls as we could in the right areas. We bowled pretty well," said Boland, who bowled Duckett (15) and had Harry Brook (15) caught behind.

Neser missed a tough caught-and-bowled chance to remove Duckett but got the next two to dismiss Crawley (44) and Ollie Pope (26), both batters falling with loose drives.

Joe Root (15) was also culpable, driving away from the body to send a nick flying to wicketkeeper Alex Carey off the bowling of Starc, who later had Jamie Smith caught behind for four.

Starc now has 18 wickets in two Tests of the series.

Earlier, though, it was all about the big left-arm quick's batting.

He grabbed his 11th Test fifty and fifth against England to go with his six first-innings wickets.

Starc smashed 13 fours and combined with tailender Boland (21 not out) in a record 75-run partnership for the ninth wicket at the Gabba.

When Starc finally holed out with a miscued slog, Brendan Doggett (13) and Boland soaked up

another seven overs before Doggett mercifully nicked the spin of all-rounder Jacks to wrap up the innings. Australia put on 133 for the day after resuming on 378 for six, denying England any chance of batting during safer daylight hours.

Carey ended up scoring 63, one of five half-centuries in Australia's first innings. Seamer Brydon Carse finished with 4-152 for England, but conceded more than five runs an over.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**England 334 & 134 for 6** (Crawley 44, Neser 2-27, Boland 2-33, Starc 2-48) **trail Australia 511** (Starc 77, Weatherald 72, Labuschagne 65, Carse 4-152) **by 43 runs**

CHRISTCHURCH TEST

# West Indies snatch thrilling draw after epic double by Greaves

Reuters  
Christchurch

Justin Greaves produced an epic unbeaten 202 in a remarkable fourth innings display to help West Indies thwart an injury-depleted New Zealand attack and snatch a thrilling draw in the opening Test in Christchurch yesterday.

Chasing an improbable 531, West Indies, who were bundled out for 167 in their first innings, displayed remarkable character to reach 457-6, the second highest fourth-innings total in Test match history, when players shook hands at Hagley Oval.

Player-of-the-match Greaves led their remarkable fightback first with a 196-run stand with Shai Hope (140) and then a 180-run partnership for the unbroken seventh wicket with Kemar Roach, who made 58 not out.

"Obviously, a Herculean effort by Justin Greaves," West Indies captain Roston Chase said. "He's someone that I grew up playing cricket with, so I'm very proud for this moment, for him, and obviously for Kemar Roach ... He's a modern day legend, and I'm happy for these guys, and happy that we could achieve what we did."

Having set West Indies a mammoth victory target, New Zealand would have been justified in believing their victory was just a matter of time but they could not get the job done with their thin bowling resources.

Having lost the services of Nathan Smith (side strain) and Matt Henry (calf) through mid-match injuries, they relied heavily on the part-time spin of Michael Bracewell and Rachin Ravindra but it could not compensate for the absence of two frontline bowlers.

To make things worse, New Zealand ran out of reviews and could not challenge a couple of close calls that went against them on the final day.

After West Indies resumed on 212-4, New Zealand prised out two wickets in the morning session to stay in the hunt for a victory.

Jacob Duffy, who bowled 60 overs in the match, ended Hope's stellar knock when he bounced out the batter, and Zak Foulkes dismissed Tevin Imlach for four.



West Indies batsman Justin Greaves celebrates his double century during day five of the first Test against New Zealand at Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday. (AFP)

Greaves and Roach batted resolutely to deny New Zealand any wicket in the second session, and continued their fightback after the tea break.

Greaves looked rock solid while Roach had an eventful stay at the other end, where the lower-order batter survived two dropped catches, one run out chance and a couple of strong lbw calls.

Greaves hit Duffy for a four to bring up his maiden Test double hundred.

"It was a Test match that had it all," New Zealand captain Tom Latham said.

"It was a great Test match to be involved in, but unfortunately, we weren't able to get the breakthroughs that we wanted to put some pressure on that lower order.

"When you have two of your seamers go down during a test match, it's never ideal."

The second Test is scheduled in Wellington from Tuesday.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**West Indies 167** (Hope 56, Chanderpaul 52, Duffy 5-34) **and 457 for 6** (Greaves 202\*, Hope 140, Roach 58\*, Duffy 3-122) drew with **New Zealand 231** (Williamson 52, Bracewell 47, Seales 2-44, Roach 2-47) **and 466 for 8 dec** (Ravindra 176, Latham 145, Roach 5-78)

MOTORSPORT

# Al-Marri, McInnes bag honours as Qatar Off-Road Championship concludes

Mohammed al-Marri and co-driver Szymon Gospodarczyk topped the cars category, while Alex McInnes dominated the bikes, as Dukhan hosted a thrilling Round 6 (Baja) to conclude the 2025 Qatar Off-Road Championship. The final event featured 22 bikes and 13 cars, with tight battles across all classes.

Al-Marri sealed overall victory in the cars after a commanding drive, finishing ahead of Nouef al-Sowaidi and Aisvydas Paliukenas in second and Ahmad Shaheen al-Muhamnadi and Egor Okhotnikov in third. McInnes led the bikes field, followed by Philip Horlemann and Michael Anderson.

The Car Class 1 was won

by ak-Marri and Gospodarczyk, with Ahmed al-Kuwari and Nuno De Sousa taking second and Camelia Liparoti and Erika Mingozzi third.

The Car Class 2 went to al-Sowaidi and Paliukenas, ahead of al-Muhamnadi and Okhotnikov and Alexander Whyatt and Baptiste Cerrato. The Car Class 3 saw Omar Abdulleh Allahim and Alexey Kuzmich claim top spot, followed by Motab al-Shammari and Badr al-Hamdan and Hassan al-Baloushi and Ali Alajmi.

In the bikes categories, McInnes' victory in Class 1 led the way, while Nasser al-Abdulla topped both the Challenger Class 2 and Quad Class 2 standings. Mohammed al-Kubaisi won Challenger Class 1, and Allan Ramsing took the Veteran Class 1 honours.





MOTORSPORT

# Verstappen on pole for F1 title-decider

‘I am incredible happy to be in first and that’s the only thing we can do’

AFP  
Abu Dhabi

Max Verstappen grabbed pole position and a key advantage for today’s decisive season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix with a scorching late lap to beat title rivals Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri in yesterday’s tense qualifying session.

Red Bull’s four-time world champion clocked a best lap time of one minute and 22.207 seconds to beat series leader Norris by 0.201sec and Piastri by 0.230sec, ensuring that the three protagonists fill the top three places on the grid.

A nervy Norris needs to finish on the podium to land his maiden title while the 28-year-old Dutchman has to win and hope for assistance from others if he is to claim a record-equaling fifth consecutive drivers’ title.

It was Verstappen’s eighth pole this year and the 48th of his career. The two McLaren drivers were disappointed at the outcome, knowing that the last 10 Abu Dhabi races have been won by the driver in pole position.

“Of course, I am incredible happy to be in first and that’s the only thing we can do,” said Verstappen, who has won four times in Abu Dhabi.

“That was great work from everyone and let’s go out and have some fun tomorrow,”

Norris said he was disappointed to miss out on pole, but he would race to win on Sunday even if his 12-point lead over the 28-year-old Dutchman allows him to settle for second or third.

“Max did a good job so congrats to him,” said Norris. “We did everything we could and my lap was pretty good. We weren’t fast



Red Bull Racing’s Dutch driver Max Verstappen reacts after taking the pole position at the end of the qualifying session ahead of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi yesterday. (AFP)

enough today. I still want to win and that’s how I am going into the race.”

Piastri, who is 16 points behind his teammate in the standings, is the outside in the three-way battle for the title and will be more than aware that there hasn’t been a winner off the front row in the last 12 races in Abu Dhabi.

“My last lap in Q3 was pretty good and there wasn’t a lot left in that,” he said.

“Max has looked very quick in the long runs so let’s see how much pace is a factor tomorrow.”

#### HAMILTON FAILURE

George Russell qualified fourth for Mercedes ahead of Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc, two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin, Gabriel Bortoleto of Sauber and Esteban Ocon of Haas.

Racing Bulls’ Red Bull-bound

rookie Isack Hadjar was ninth ahead of the man he will replace Yuki Tsunoda. Ferrari’s seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton failed to proceed from Q1 for the third consecutive race.

Hamilton was one of the first to clock a time at the start, his Ferrari repaired after a final practice crash earlier, but he finished two-tenths slower than Leclerc to become the first Ferrari driver to record three Q1 exits.

He will start 16th on the grid but will perhaps take some solace from the memory of last season when he finished fourth in the race after again starting 16th.

Alex Albon in the Williams, Sauber’s Nico Hulkenberg and the Alpine’s of Pierre Gasly and Gabriel Colapinto also went out in Q1.

They were followed in Q2 by Mercedes’ rookie Kimi Antonelli

who exited in 14th along with Oliver Bearman of Haas, Williams’ Carlos Sainz, Racing Bulls’ Liam Lawson and Lance Stroll of Aston Martin.

Verstappen was the only title contender with two sets of new softs saved for Q3 and, relishing his moment, he clocked 1:22.295 with help from a tow from Tsunoda, to set the pace, beating both McLaren men on his initial run by three-tenths and four-tenths.

It was a slip-streaming tactic that was not available to the McLarens, unless they used team orders – an advantage that Russell requested by asking to rejoin for his final run behind the Dutchman.

Verstappen, however, needed no assistance and delivered a stunning final lap to take pole, affirming his status as one of the greatest exponents of pure speed.

HORSE RACING

## August George lands Al Uqda Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

August George displayed determination and sharp finishing speed to capture the Al Uqda Two-Year-Old Cup by the finest of margins yesterday.

At the Al Uqda Racecourse, August George, in the colours of Sheikh Mohammed Salman al-Thani, secured his second win in four career starts, having finished runner-up in the other two, with a late surge that saw him clinch victory by a head in the over 1300m race for the thoroughbreds.

The bay gelding, breaking smartly from barrier five, settled in a handy fourth and tracked the tempo set by Zabeel Flower, who dictated the pace throughout and remained in control until the home turn. Behind the leader, Dapper Charm, Silca Blue and Zoiros raced in close attendance though Silca Blue briefly lost his position before recovering.

Approaching the turn, Zoiros moved up to take a narrow lead, prompting August George to begin closing steadily behind him. Once in the home straight, Sanna asked his mount to quicken and the response was immediate. August George surged forward to strike the front, but Silca Blue, racing in the colours of Sheikh Abdul Rahman Rashid al-Thani for the same trainer and ridden by last year’s win-

ning jockey Marco Casamento, launched a powerful challenge on his outside.

The pair drew right away from the rest, locked in an intense duel through the final 200m. They hit the line together in a pulsating finish, and for the second time in the evening, the outcome required the verdict of the photo finish. Dapper Charm, representing Saif Jassem A. Al-sulaiti, trained by Hamad al-Jehani with Pierre Charles Boudot aboard, stayed on to finish third, four lengths behind the battling pair.

Ruling Master secured back-to-back victories in the Thoroughbred Handicap (45–65) for three-year-old+ over 2200m, finishing strongly, while Flashy Dark Angel broke her maiden in the Thoroughbred Handicap (0–60) for three-year-old+ over 1200m with a commanding front-running performance.

Mubkhar Al Shahania edged out rivals in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (55–75) for three-year-old+ over 2200m for his second career win, and Blew-burton claimed his first victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap (0–85) for three-year-old over 2100m after 16 attempts. Stylish Performer prevailed in the Thoroughbred Handicap (75–95) for 3YO+ over 1400m in a dramatic photo finish by a nose, while Smartman impressed on debut, powering home from last to win the Al Uqda 2YO Thoroughbreds over 1300m.



Jockey Alberto Sanna guided August George to the Al Uqda Cup win yesterday. **PICTURE:** Juhaïm

FOOTBALL

## Inter thump Como to top Serie A

AFP  
Milan

Inter Milan moved top of Serie A yesterday after hammering high-flying Como 4-0 at the San Siro, ahead of the visit of struggling Liverpool in the Champions League.

Strike partnership Lautaro Martinez and Marcus Thuram scored in each half before Hakan Calhanoglu and Carlos Augusto netted late as Inter eased to a victory which pushed them two points ahead of AC Milan and Napoli who are both yet to play.

Champions Napoli host fierce rivals Juventus today night while Milan will be favourites to leapfrog back over their local rivals at Torino tomorrow.

Yesterday’s win was the perfect warm-up for Tuesday’s clash with Liverpool, which could be key to whether Cristian Chivu’s team secure direct qualification for the last 16 of the Champions League.

A good sign for Chivu was the strong display by Luis Henrique at right wing-back, which has been a trouble position for Inter since Denzel Dumfries’ picked up an ankle injury last month.

It was Henrique who was key to Martinez’s opener in the 11th minute, the Brazilian surging into the area from his own half, cutting



Inter Milan’s Lautaro Martinez celebrates after scoring during the Serie A match against Como in Milan yesterday. (AFP)

back inside and perfectly feeding his captain who netted a league-leading seventh goal of the Serie A campaign.

And in the 59th minute Thuram added to his brace in Inter’s mid-week cup thumping of Venezia with his first league goal since returning from a hamstring injury suffered in September.

France forward Thuram poked home from close range after Federico Dimarco’s corner caused chaos for Como, who had started the second half the better team and should have levelled from one of

two great chances for Tasos Douvikas and Alex Valle.

Cesc Fabregas’ Como drop down a place to sixth, six points behind Inter after falling to their first defeat since August, which was made emphatic by Calhanoglu firing home his seventh goal of the season in the 81st minute and Carlos Augusto’s fine volley shortly afterwards.

Fiorentina plunged deeper into crisis with a 3-1 defeat at promoted Sassuolo which left them bottom of the division without a single win this season.

LA LIGA

Reuters  
Sevilla, Spain

Barcelona’s Ferran Torres scored a first-half hat-trick as his side won 5-3 at Real Betis in La Liga yesterday, bouncing back after conceding an early goal to cruise to victory and extend their lead over Real Madrid at the summit to four points.

Barcelona went behind to an Antony goal in the sixth minute, but Torres struck twice to put them in the lead by the 13th minute, and Rooney Bardghji made it 3-1 just after the half-hour mark with his first La Liga goal for the club before Torres completed his hat-trick.

A Lamine Yamal penalty increased Barca’s lead but Betis never gave up, with Diego Llorente reducing the deficit from a corner in the 85th minute and Cucho Hernandez adding a penalty five minutes later, but it proved too little, too late as Barca held on to win.

Earlier in the afternoon, third-placed Villarreal beat Getafe 2-0, while a penalty in first-half stoppage time gave Deportivo Alaves a 1-0 win over Real Sociedad in their mid-table clash.

Barcelona top the standings on 40 points after 16 games, with Madrid four points behind them with a game in hand. Betis are fifth on 24 points.



Barcelona’s Ferran Torres celebrates after scoring a hat-trick against Real Betis at Benito Villamarin Stadium in Seville yesterday. (AFP)

## Al-Ajmi and al-Eid share Diamond Tour honours at Hathab

Faleh Suwaid al-Ajmi and Khaled al-Eid shared the Diamond Tour title in the eighth round of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour in Al Shaqab yesterday. Al-Ajmi and al-Eid clocked an identical time of 35.63 seconds on their horses Karmalensky and Raker. Fares Saad al-Qahtani finished third in 38.49 seconds aboard Com du Rouet.

In the Bronze Tour, Khalid al-Hadi topped the standings with a time of 25.33 seconds on Carlton de Sauvageonn. Ibrahim Khalid al-Kuwari (Flexi) secured second in 25.81 seconds, while Hassan al-Hadi (Capon) placed third in 25.96. In the team event, Ajwad clinched first place with a combined 54.31 seconds, ahead of The Dome (56.4) and Shahalil Al Shaqab (62.03). The Future Riders Round saw Al Qaqa’a bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani take victory in 20.2 seconds on Bon Suela. Khalifa bin Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani finished second on Zion II Vdk (20.56), followed by Hamad bin Nasser al-Marri on Sandro Girl (21.27).





## MATCH SCHEDULE

# Qatar to kick off World Cup in Santa Clara on June 13

Qatar open their campaign against Switzerland, while they face co-hosts Canada in Vancouver

[illegible]

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

**Q**atar's match schedule for the FIFA World Cup 2026 has been officially confirmed by FIFA, 24 hours after the 12 groups were revealed at the draw ceremony in Washington.

Placed in Group B, Qatar will open their campaign on June 13 at 3pm (June 14 at lam in Qatar) against Switzerland at the 68,500-seater Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. The Maroons then face co-hosts Canada in Vancouver on June 18 at 6pm (June 19 at 5am in Qatar). Julien Lopetegui's side will conclude their group stage at Lumen Field in Seattle on June 24 at 3pm (June 25 at 2am in Qatar), taking on the winner of European Play-Off A, which features Italy, Northern Ireland, Wales or Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The biggest-ever edition of the global showpiece will feature 104 matches in-

**GROUP B**

 CANADA	 ITA / NIR / WAL / BIH	<b>FIFA+</b>
 QATAR	 SWITZERLAND	

**MATCHDAY 1**

 CANADA	<b>v</b>	 ITA / NIR / WAL / BIH	TORONTO
 QATAR	<b>v</b>	 SWITZERLAND	SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

**MATCHDAY 2**

 SWITZERLAND	<b>v</b>	 ITA / NIR / WAL / BIH	LOS ANGELES
 CANADA	<b>v</b>	 QATAR	VANCOUVER

**MATCHDAY 3**

 SWITZERLAND	<b>v</b>	 CANADA	VANCOUVER
 ITA / NIR / WAL / BIH	<b>v</b>	 QATAR	SEATTLE

The schedule of Group B, which consists of Qatar, Canada and Switzerland.

volving 48 teams across 16 host cities in Canada, Mexico and the United States. The complex nature of the first-ever 48-team World Cup being played all across

North America meant that world football's governing body needed an extra day to set venues and kick-off times following Friday's draw.

England will open their World Cup bid against Croatia in Dallas on June 17, while the latest meeting of Brazil and Scotland at the tournament will take place in Miami. Fourth-ranked England will play Croatia at 3pm local time at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, just outside Dallas. They will therefore be grateful for the stadium's retractable roof which should help keep out the baking afternoon temperatures.

England will then go to the northeastern United States for their remaining Group L fixtures, taking on Ghana in Boston on June 23 at 4pm local time, and then facing Panama at the MetLife Stadium just outside New York City on June 27 at 5pm.

European champions Spain will play their first two Group H fixtures, against debutants Cape Verde and Saudi Arabia, in the covered and air-conditioned Atlanta stadium. They will then head to Mexico to take on Uruguay in Guadalajara.

Holders Argentina, meanwhile, will meet Algeria in Kansas City in their opening match in Group J on June 16 before facing

Austria and Jordan in Dallas. France, winners in 2018 and runners-up in 2022, will play all three Group I matches in the northeastern US, facing Senegal at the MetLife Stadium and Norway in Boston, either side of a fixture in Philadelphia against an inter-continental play-off winner.

Brazil, who won the last World Cup staged in the United States in 1994, will meet Morocco at the MetLife Stadium in their first Group C encounter on June 13. Carlo Ancelotti's team then meet Haiti in Philadelphia on June 19 before a clash with Scotland in Miami on June 24 – it will be the fifth time the countries have faced off at a World Cup. Other games to look out for include the meeting of Germany and Caribbean minnows Curacao in Houston in Group E on June 14. Co-hosts Mexico will play South Africa in the opening match – a repeat of the opening game at the 2010 World Cup – at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City on June 11.

The final at the MetLife Stadium on July 19 will kick off at 3pm (9pm Qatar time).

## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arsenal rocked by Aston Villa, City cut gap to two points

**AFP**  
London

**A**ston Villa ended Arsenal's 18-match unbeaten run to blow the Premier League title race wide open with a 2-1 victory as Manchester City beat Sunderland 3-0 to close within two points of the leaders.

While Arsenal and City joust for the title, troubled champions Liverpool suffered an another blow as lowly Leeds snatched a last-gasp 3-3 draw in one of the most dramatic games of the season. Emiliano Buendia's stoppage-time strike at Villa Park stunned Arsenal and gave Ian Emery's third-placed side their ninth win in 10 league games.

Arsenal were without the injured Gabriel Magalhaes, William Saliba and Cristhian Mosquera in defence and the normally rock solid visitors struggled to cope with Villa's variety of attacking weapons.

Eberechi Eze was caught on his heels as Matty Cash blasted Emery's men into a half-time lead. Gunners boss Mikel Arteta responded by introducing Viktor Gyokeres and Leandro Trossard at the break and got the impact he demanded.

Trossard equalised with his 50th Premier



Aston Villa's Emiliano Buendia (left) celebrates after scoring against Arsenal. (Reuters)

League goal, from Bukayo Saka's deflected cross. But Arsenal's quest to end a 22-year wait to win the title hit a rare bump in the road this season when Buendia fired into the top corner with virtually the last kick of the game after a goalmouth scramble.

City took full advantage of Arsenal's defeat to close the gap at the top with a routine 3-0 win over Sunderland. On a rare shot-shy day for Erling Haaland, City's centre-backs lead the way as Ruben Dias blasted

into the top corner from distance before Josko Gvardiol headed in a second before

half-time. Phil Foden scored for the fifth time in three games to round off the scoring in the second half.

At Elland Road, Liverpool suffered another embarrassing capitulation to ramp up the pressure on manager Arne Slot. The Reds led 2-0 and 3-2 thanks to Hugo Ekitike's quickfire double and Dominik Szoboszlai's strike but still failed to see the game out as they failed to win for the eighth time in their last 10 league games.

Slot's faith in Ibrahima Konate will again be questioned after the French centre-back

conceded a penalty that Dominic Calvert-Lewin converted to spark the fightback. Anton Stach levelled before Szoboszlai quickly restored Liverpool's lead. But deep into stoppage-time, Liverpool failed to deal with a corner and Ao Tanaka was unmarked to blast home. Liverpool are languishing in eighth place, showing no signs of arresting an alarming slide since they clinched a record-equaling 20th title last season.

Chelsea's title challenge is fading fast after three games without a win. Cole Palmer's return to the starting line-up for the first time since September could not inspire the Blues as they were held 0-0 at Bournemouth to sit eight points off the lead in fourth.

Tottenham eased the pressure on Thomas Frank with their first home league win since the opening day of the season, against his former club Brentford.

Spurs were winless in five games in all competitions, but moved back into the top half with a 2-0 win courtesy of first-half goals from Richarlison and Xavi Simons.

Newcastle continued their upward trajectory with a 2-1 win over 10-man Burnley at St James' Park. Sean Dyche's return to Everton as Nottingham Forest boss ended in a 3-0 defeat.

## Kane scores hat-trick as Bayern's rout Stuttgart

**Berlin:** Harry Kane came off the bench to score a hat-trick as Bayern Munich thrashed Stuttgart 5-0 on a day of late drama in the Bundesliga. Kane struck three times in the second half to crush spirited resistance from Stuttgart. Playing their fifth game in two weeks, Bayern rested several big names in Stuttgart, with Manuel Neuer, Harry Kane and Jonathan Tah all starting on the bench. Vincent Kompany's side still started strongly. Konrad Laimer opened the scoring with a delicate backheel on 11 minutes. Bayern rallied after Kane came off the bench in the second half. The England striker doubled the lead from the edge of the area and Josip Stanisic whipped in a third 12 minutes from time. Kane then added a fifth from the penalty spot after a goal-line handball from Lorenz Assignon, before completing his hat-trick with a late tap-in. Bayern remain eight points clear at the top