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**FIFA ARAB CUP
QATAR 2025**

FOOTBALL



Qatar exit FIFA Arab Cup as Palestine, Syria reach last 8

A goalless draw gives Palestine, Syria passage to quarter-finals; Tunisia beat Qatar 3-0 at Al Bayt Stadium



Palestine players celebrate after qualifying for the knockout stage at the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 following their Group A match against Syria at the Education City Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

By Sports Reporter
Doha

It was curtains for two-time Asian champions Qatar at the FIFA Arab Cup 2025 yesterday after coach Julien Lopetegui's young side lost 3-0 against Tunisia at Al Bayt Stadium.

Qatar, who desperately needed a win to stay in contention of qualifying for the quarter-finals stage but powerful Tunisia - the runners-up at the last edition of Arab Cup in 2021 - brought their A-game to stun Al Annabi at the 16-team tournament.

An early goal in the 16th minute by quick-thinking Mohamed Ali Ben Romdhane gave Tunisia the start they wanted in the key clash. Yassine Meriah doubled the lead in the 62nd minute.

Ben Ali fired one into the Qatar net after a solo run in injury time (90 +4) to complete a dominating win by Tunisia coached by Sami Trabelsi.

Lopetegui, missing his key players for the tournament, saw his team lose to Palestine following an own goal last week. That shock 1-0 defeat was followed by a 1-1 draw against Syria three days ago. Akram Afif's direct freekick in the 89th

minute yesterday sailed past the Tunisian goalpost to sum up the dismal performance of the home side.

In the other match yesterday at the Education City Stadium, Palestine and Syria produced a goalless draw that allowed them to reach the quarter-finals of the hugely popular tournament. Fan favourite Palestine and Syria finished the group stage with 5 points each. Tunisia ended with 4 points while Qatar could garner only 1 from three matches.

Chances were at a premium in a keenly-fought opening half between two sides on four points from their respective opening two matches. Palestine's Hamed Hamdan flashed a shot well wide from distance before Tamer Seyam's volley forced a good save out of Syria custodian Elias Hadaya.

Syria's big chance came right at the end of the first half after Elmar Abraham's dribble caused confusion in the Palestine defence but Omar Khribin dragged his effort wide of the target.

There was a moment of concern for Palestine in the 61st minute after the referee pointed to the spot when Wajdi Mohammed made contact with Mohammad Alsalkhadi but the decision was reversed after a VAR review.

Both sought a winner but none was

forthcoming as the 39,571 fans at Education City Stadium witnessed a share of the spoils.

At Al Bayt Stadium, Tunisia tested the waters as early as the second minute when Ben Romdhane set up Marouane Sahraoui, who lobbed his effort over the bar before the Central African side's relentless passing left Qatar stunned in the 16th minute.

Ben Romdhane sparked the move on the left, feeding Ali Maaloul to cut the ball back to Seifeddine Jaziri, who had his effort blocked by Meshaal Barsham, only for Ben Romdhane to pounce on the rebound and place his shot well beyond the sprawling Qatar keeper.

Despite the home crowd advantage, Qatar barely troubled Tunisia, with Sultan al-Brake's attempt from the edge of the box in the 27th minute comfortably collected by Tunisian goalkeeper Aymen Dahmen.

Tunisia continued to dictate proceedings with another attacking sequence carving open the Qatari defence at the half-hour mark, with Ben Romdhane once again at the heart of the move in setting up Firas Chaouat, who pulled his shot narrowly wide.

Tunisia went in search of their second with Ben Romdhane and Seifeddine Jaziri



Syria's Omar Maher Khribin celebrates with teammates after qualifying for the quarter-finals of the FIFA Arab Cup following their match against Palestine yesterday. (Reuters)



Tunisia's Mohamed Ben Ali scores their third goal during the FIFA Arab Cup match against Qatar at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor yesterday. Tunisia won 3-0. (Reuters)

both seeing their efforts blocked from inside the box, while Dahmen stayed firm at the other end to keep out Qatar's advances. The two-time AFC Asian Cup champions fell further behind in the 62nd minute with Meriah turning in Ferjani Sassi's flick

off a corner with a close-range header. Tunisia were reduced to 10 men following Jaziri's dismissal for a foul on Afif three minutes later but still scored a third through Ben Ali in stoppage time to leave Qatar frustrated.

PALESTINIAN COACH EHAB ABU JAZAR GETS HOPE, ADVICE FROM MUM IN GAZA TENT



DOHA: Coach **Ehab Abu Jazar** is guiding a national team that carries on its shoulders all the hopes and sorrows of Palestinian football, but it is his mother, forced by war to live in a Gaza tent, who is his main inspiration and motivation. The war that broke out following Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 put an end to Palestinian league matches, and left athletes in exile fearing for their loved ones in Gaza. But Abu Jazar's mother refuses to let the conflict overshadow the sporting dreams of her son, to whom she feeds tactical advice from the rubble of the Palestinian territory by phone. "She talks to me about nothing but

the team. She wants the focus to remain solely on the tournament," the 45-year-old manager told AFP. "My mother asks me about the players, who will play as starters and who will be absent, about the tactics, the morale of the players and the circumstances surrounding them." The coach's mother Huda Mahmoud Abu Jazar, 62, is now displaced in Gaza's Al-Mawasi camp, near Khan Yunis, living in a tent with her other son, his wife and their children. "My feelings are indescribable from the amount of happiness I feel for my son and his amazing team," she told AFP. She beamed with pride about him

and the Palestinian squad, saying her entire camp cheered when the team beat Qatar in an Arab Cup match last week. "You could hear ululations everywhere. They brought back a joy we had forgotten in Gaza," she said. "He made us all proud. It is a great honour for us." The manager, himself a former left-back, says he wants his players to convey the spirit of his mother and Gazans like her. "We always say that we are a small Palestinian family representing the larger family," he said. "Undoubtedly, it puts pressure on us, but it's positive pressure." The Palestinian team are 96th in the FIFA rankings, and their hope

of playing in their first World Cup vanished this summer. But the squad, most of whom have never set foot in Gaza, is within reach of the Arab Cup quarter-finals, keeping their message of resilience alive. Palestine play Syria in their final Arab Cup group match Sunday, where a draw would be enough to achieve an unprecedented feat for the team. He said progress would show the world that the Palestinians, if given the right conditions, can "excel in all fields". Abu Jazar finished his playing career in 2017 before managing the Palestinian U-23 team and eventually taking the top job last year.

After the war broke out, his family home was destroyed, displacing his mother in Gaza, like most of the territory's population during the height of the conflict. He now feels pressure to deliver for them after witnessing from exile the horrors of the war, which came to a halt in October thanks to a fragile US-backed ceasefire. "At one point, it was a burden, especially at the beginning of the war," he said. "We couldn't comprehend what was happening. "But we possess the genes of resilience. "If we surrender and give in to these matters, we as a people will vanish."

ASHES

Australia crush England by eight wickets for 2-0 lead

Neser takes five-wicket haul for the hosts, Smith and Archer have heated exchange at the Gabba

Reuters
Brisbane

Australia stormed to an eight-wicket victory in the second Ashes test in Brisbane to go 2-0 up in the series yesterday as England's resistance was broken on day four by a pace blitz from unlikely hero Michael Neser.

Helped by the catching magic of home captain Steve Smith, 35-year-old Neser finished with 5-42 at his home ground in his first test in three years, leaving the hosts needing 65 runs to win the day-night match.

While England quick Gus Atkinson grabbed two wickets, opener Jake Weatherald (17 not out) and number four batter Smith (23 not out) mowed down the target after dinner, condemning England to a 15th loss in their last 17 tests in Australia.

England seamer Jofra Archer had a heated exchange with Smith in the final overs but ended up getting smashed for two fours and a six by the fired-up skipper.

Australia finished on 69 for two and Smith sealed the win in style, thumping Atkinson for another six over deep square to the delight of the home fans in the crowd of 27,888.

"What I said to Archer stays on the field. It was good banter," said Smith, who charged to his 23 in nine balls.

"I thought the boys played exceptionally well.

"The adrenaline was pumping at the end there ... It was a huge win, obviously great to go 2-0 up."

With Adelaide to come among three matches left in the series, England captain Ben Stokes re-

fused to concede the urn was lost after battling hard in a 152-ball 50. "I absolutely believe in that dressing room," he said.

"We know we have to win these next three games.

"We won't shy away from the battle but we need to sort things out pretty quick if we want to bring the Ashes back to England."

It would nonetheless take something extraordinary for England to win it from here.

Only one team has ever come back from 2-0 down to win a series in nearly 150 years of test cricket – Don Bradman's Australia in the home Ashes of 1936/37.

THIRD-STRING ATTACK

In Brisbane, Stokes's England showed their fans little to suggest a Bradman-esque effort is within them. Australia, meanwhile, may only get stronger. Their Brisbane attack was third-string at best, with the dogged but unexceptional trio of Scott Boland, Neser and Brendan Doggett supporting the outstanding Starc.

Left-arm quick Starc was named player-of-the-match for his eight-wicket haul and first innings 77 with the bat. "We bowled well across both innings," said 35-year-old Starc, who now has 18 wickets for the series.

"I'm pleased for Neser on his home ground."

Champion quick Pat Cummins and elite spinner Nathan Lyon will likely return at the Adelaide Oval from injury and non-selection, respectively. As it was, the duo were hardly needed.

Australia's pacers did their best work late on day three, leaving England needing another 44 runs to make the hosts bat again when they resumed on 134 for six.



Australia's Michael Neser (right) celebrates with teammates after taking five wickets in the innings on day four of the second Ashes Test at The Gabba in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

Stokes and all-rounder Will Jacks deserved credit for batting through the entire first session and pushing England past 200.

But as the overs wore on, the Gabba wicket showed more uneven bounce, and Stokes was doubled over in agony when a Neser delivery caught an edge and can-

oned into his groin. He got up to cut a single off Doggett and raise his fifty, bringing cheering England fans to their feet.

It took Smith to swing the match back in Australia's favour with a stunning slips catch to dismiss Jacks for 41 and trigger another England batting collapse.

Smith leapt to his left to take a one-handed screamer above the grass when the England number eight nicked Neser behind, ending a 96-run stand with Stokes.

After Neser had Stokes caught behind, Smith chipped in another two catches to help the seamers wrap up the tail, as England lost

4-17 to be all out for 241.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 511 (Starc 77, Weatherald 72, Labuschagne 65, Carse 4-152) **and 69 for 2 beat England 334** (Root 138*, Crawley 76, Starc 6-75) **and 241** (Stokes 50, Neser 5-42) **by eight wickets.**

COMMENT

Stokes refuses to give up hope as Ashes ambitions hang by thread

AFP
Brisbane

Ben Stokes refuses to give up hope of winning the Ashes despite going 2-0 down in the five-match series after another heavy loss to Australia at the Gabba yesterday.

England went into the series with many at home believing they had a real chance of regaining the Ashes. But after a two-day loss in Perth and yesterday's eight-wicket defeat in Brisbane, those aims already look doomed.

"The worst thing to do now is to not have hope and not realise that we've still got the opportunity to do what we came out here to do," Stokes said. "I haven't lost hope, the dressing room hasn't lost hope and I'll be doing everything I can as a captain to make sure that everyone is as positive as they possibly can be."

Stokes and all-rounder Will Jacks gave England some joy yesterday as they batted for three hours, defying the Australian attack with "old fashioned" Test cricket. They avoided extravagant stroke-making in favour of leaving good balls and scoring runs through singles rather than boundaries.

Their approach was the polar opposite to how England had batted previously, when their "Bazball" attacking method resulted in soft dismissals on the bouncy Australian pitches. Stokes made 50 and Jacks 41, the pair ensuring that Australia at least had to bat again. "All I wanted to focus on was just fight, just show some fight," he said about the partnership with Jacks.

"And then we'll see where we are – you know nothing's guaranteed in life, or nothing is guaranteed in sport. But as long as you walk out there and you just think in your head: I'm going to fight all the way to the end here, that's all I wanted to focus on. What you saw from me and Will Jacks out there was just on the back of me saying that everyone's got a responsibility to just show some fight."

Stokes conceded that his England team had buckled under the pressure at times during the first two Tests. "We've all been guilty of it so far in this tour at mo-



England's Ben Stokes throws his bat in the air after losing his wicket in Brisbane Test yesterday. (Reuters)

ments where we maybe have let the pressure of the occasion, and the circumstances, get to us in our decision-making," he said. "We've been that team, we've done that to other oppositions before, put them under serious amounts of pressure and they've not been able to stand up to what we've done.

"At the moment we've not been able to stand up to what Australia has thrown up, and that's as a collective group, not as individuals.

"We are a much better team at applying it than we are absorbing it at the moment."

England trained too much prior to Ashes collapse: McCullum
England cricket coach Brendon McCullum responded to criticism his side were under-prepared for the Ashes by claiming they "trained too much" prior to a dismal eight-wicket defeat to fall 2-0 down to Australia.

"If anything, we trained too much. We had five intense training sessions leading into this game," McCullum told the BBC.

"Sometimes there is a tendency to overdo things to make up for it. As we all know in this game it is played in the top two inches. "We all have to find a way to ensure that we feel prepared physically, technically and we are ready for the battle, but also to make sure we are fresh and make sure we can

make those decisions in the heat of the games."

McCullum added to Australia's Channel 7: "I actually feel like we over-prepared to be honest...I think the boys just need a few days off and we probably need to change up a few of the training methods."

England's players are now set to be handed four days off in the holiday resort of Noosa before the third Test in Adelaide begins on December 16. After travelling Down Under with high hopes of reclaiming the urn with a first Ashes series win since 2010/11, England are staring down the barrel of another embarrassment after just six days in the field.

England have never come from 2-0 down to beat Australia, who have not lost three consecutive home Tests to anyone in 38 years.

However, they did come from 2-0 down to tie the last series between the sides 2-2 on home soil two years ago. "We've been here before and we'll have to make sure we stay tight as a group and iron out a couple of the chinks we've shown over the last two Test matches," said McCullum.

"It's very hard to beat Australia at home if you're going to be deficient in all three areas. We've got some work to do. There's no point feeling sorry for yourself, you pick yourself up and you go again."

SA coach Conrad says meant no malice with 'grovel' remark

South Africa cricket coach Shukri Conrad said he intended no malice with his "grovel" remark during the second Test in India after drawing criticism.

Speaking to the media for the first time since he made the comment last month, Conrad said he regretted his choice of word. "On reflection it was never my intention to cause any malice or not be humble about anything," the 58-year-old said after his team went down to India in the third one-day international on Saturday in Visakhapatnam. "I could have chosen a better word because it left it open for people to put their own context

to it." The word "grovel" has a controversial history behind it in cricket. Before a series in 1976 then England captain Tony Greig, a white South African by birth, infamously said he intended to make the West Indies "grovel", evoking the spectre of slavery. Greig insisted it was meant as a reference to the West Indies' supposed mental fragility rather than a racist insult. Conrad used the word after day four of the second Test in Guwahati after South Africa handed India a mammoth target of 549 following a late declaration.

Speaking after the day's play, he said: "We wanted the Indians to spend as much time on their feet out in the field. "We wanted them to really grovel, to steal a phrase..." That sparked criticism, including from former South Africa speedster and visiting commentator Dale Steyn. Speaking on Saturday, Conrad said: "The only context I ever intended it to be was that we wanted India to spend a lot of time in the field and make it really tough for them. "I've got to be careful what word I use here now because context could be attached to that as well."

FOCUS

Atherton, Vaughan unleash scathing verdict as Ashes dream crumbles

Reuters
Brisbane

England's Ashes hopes have shifted from improbable to near-impossible after another eight-wicket hammering by Australia yesterday, prompting criticism from former captains who believe Ben Stokes's side have squandered their best chance Down Under.

The tourists' capitulation at the Gabba – their 15th defeat in 17 tests in Australia – has left them reeling at 2-0 down in the series after just six days of play, with history stacked heavily against them.

Only Don Bradman's legendary 1936-37 Australia side has ever recovered from such a deficit to win a five-match series.

Former skipper Michael Atherton delivered a brutal assessment of England's predicament, saying that optimism was now futile with Australia set to welcome back their key players.

"Although England gave it a good go two years ago, it is difficult to grasp at optimistic straws this time. There are too few players in form, and Australia will be strengthened in Adelaide by the return of Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon," he wrote in *The Times*.

"To win Test matches in Australia, you have to play tough, hard, disciplined cricket for long



England's middle order batsman Ollie Pope is under pressure.

periods of time. England haven't been able to do that. What will haunt them is the sense that they have not given themselves the best chance to do so."

The spotlight has fallen particularly harshly on middle-order batter Ollie Pope, whose struggles against Australia have reached crisis point.

With just 105 runs in four innings and no fifty in 14 attempts against the old enemy, his place is under severe scrutiny ahead of the third Test from December 17-21.

"England will have to make changes going into Adelaide," Michael told BBC Radio 5.

"They have to seriously consider Ollie Pope's position. He has

played plenty of games against Australia. There is a mental scar against Australia for Pope."

BOYCOTT TAKES AIM AT BAZBALL

Geoffrey Boycott described the Brisbane test as a "horror show" as he delivered a savage takedown of England's high-risk 'Bazball' philosophy that has been championed by Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum.

"They are up their own backsides convinced that test cricket has changed so much that only they know anything about the modern game," Boycott wrote in *The Telegraph*.

"One of the problems with this squad is it appears nobody tells them off or sits them down and discusses what they could or should have done differently," Boycott continued.

"All we ever hear from the captain is attack and from the coach keep the faith.

"After some of those dismissals my Yorkshire captain Brian Close would have stood at the top of the pavilion steps with steam coming out of his ears waiting to give you a 'knuckle sandwich'."

The Yorkshire great's criticism cut deeper, targeting the team's apparent immunity from consequences: "This lot aren't even afraid of getting dropped which is why we see the same old failings, particularly in the batting."

GOLF

Neergaard-Petersen edges out Smith for Australian Open title

‘On the outside you can look calm but it was a storm inside all day today’

AFP
Melbourne

Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen sank a 10-foot pressure putt at the last to edge major winner Cameron Smith and win a maiden DP World Tour title at the Australian Open yesterday, also sealing a place at the Masters.

It capped a breakthrough year for the 26-year-old Dane, who booked promotion to the PGA Tour next year by finishing third at the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai last month.

He mixed four birdies with three bogeys in his 70 to be 15-under for the tournament, one clear of Australian LIV Golf star Smith (69) and two ahead of South Korea's Kim Si-woo (70).

South Africa's Michael Hollick was fourth, three behind, with Australia's Adam Scott fifth, a shot further back.

Rory McIlroy finished eight off the pace.

“It's hard, I'm really at a loss for words,” said Neergaard-Petersen, whose previous European Tour best was second at the Qatar Masters this year.

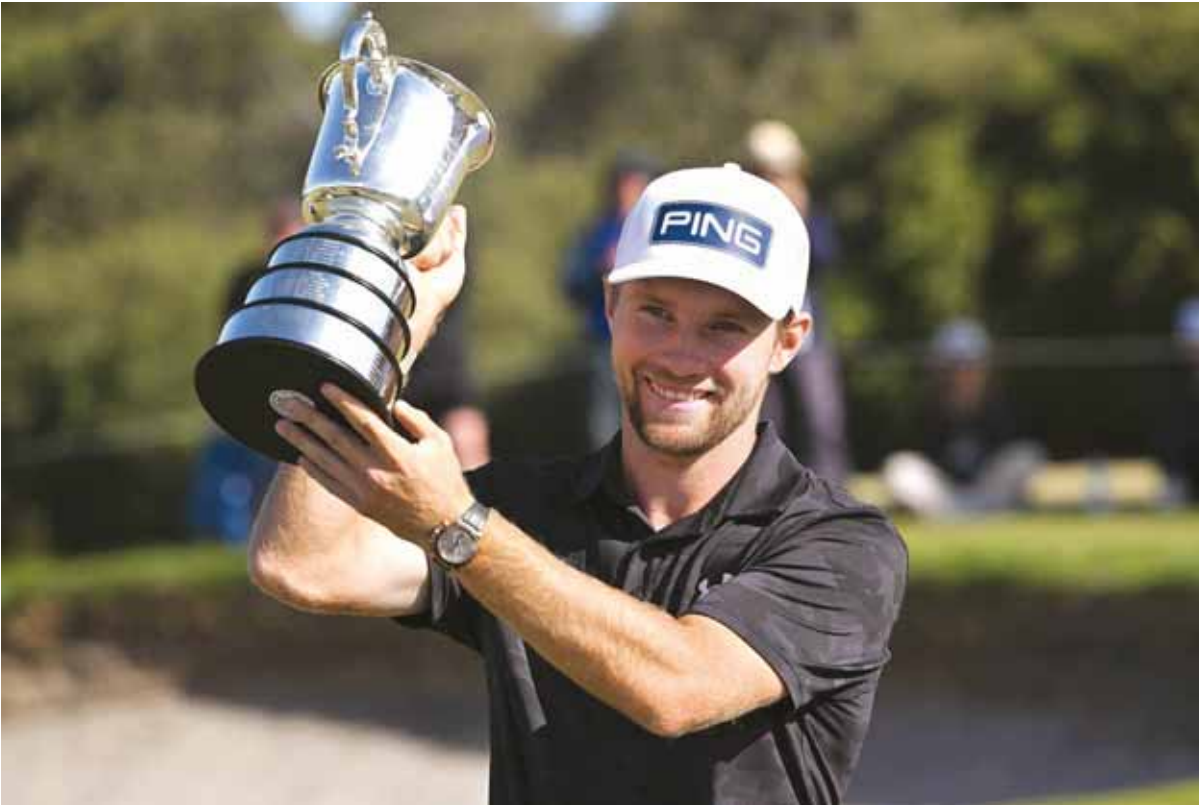
He repeated the feat on his PGA Tour debut at the Puerto Rico Open while playing on an invite to reinforce his burgeoning credentials.

“On the outside you can look calm but it was a storm inside all day today,” he said.

“But I managed to just keep battling and then to get it up and down from there to make that putt on the last, I don't know what to say to be honest.”

Neergaard-Petersen took a two-shot lead into the final day at Royal Melbourne but that was wiped out within the first four holes.

Smith and Kim both nailed early



Denmark's Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen celebrates with the trophy after winning the Australian Open at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

birdies, then a bogey at the fourth by the Dane set up a three-way tie.

A superb approach shot next to the pin at the sixth earned him a tap-in birdie to restore a one-shot lead.

But the Dane lost his nerve with back-to-back bogeys at nine and 10 as Smith kept his cool, draining a three-metre putt on the tricky 10th for the outright lead.

In a see-sawing day, Smith then bogeyed 12th while Neergaard-Petersen

slid in a birdie and they headed to the 18th all square. Neergaard-Petersen sent his approach into long grass at the side of the bunker but recovered to set up a difficult putt for par, which he nailed.

Smith fluffed a five-footer which would have sent it to a play-off.

Drawcard McIlroy started nine adrift and got the huge crowd fired up with birdies at two and three.

But an anticipated charge unravelled

with bogeys at seven, nine and ten before a grandstand finish saw birdies on the 17th and 18th that sent the fans into a frenzy once more.

“I wish I could have been in contention and been coming down the stretch and battling with the boys,” said McIlroy.

“But it's been an amazing week and can't thank everyone in Australia enough for the hospitality and the reception.”

FOOTBALL

PSG thump Rennes but Lens remain on top

AFP
Nantes, France

Surprise package Lens will emerge from the weekend as French Ligue 1 leaders after a 2-1 win at Nantes on Saturday but Paris Saint-Germain thumped Rennes in the late game to loom just one point behind them.

French and European Champions PSG travel to Athletic Bilbao in the Champions League mid-week and on Saturday fielded a weakened side that routed Rennes 5-0, having slipped up 1-0 at Monaco last weekend. Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored twice with youngster Senny Mayulu, Ibrahim Mbaye and Gonçalo Ramos completing the romp in injury time.

The modest northern club Lens with a large regional support base climbed top for the first time in 21 years last weekend, and were to remain top regardless of Paris Saint-Germain's result.

Lens sit top with 34 points, PSG have 33, and Marseille and Lille both have 29 after Lille edged OM 1-0 on Friday.

Former Marseille and Newcastle attacking-midfielder Florian Thauvin set Lens on their way to this fifth straight league win on 34 minutes and Wesley Saïd scored the winner on 81 after Nantes had levelled on 38 through Youssef El-Arabi.

The 32-year-old Thauvin won the World Cup with France in 2018 but has been largely in the international wilderness since, playing two years at Tigres in Mexico and signing for Lens this season after two solid seasons at Udinese.

He has five League goals this season and also scored on his first France appearance in six years after replacing Kylian Mbappe against Azerbaijan.

After four consecutive defeats Nice play Angers at home on Sunday, looking to end a dire run on the pitch and tensions between the team and supporters off it.



PSG's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the Ligue 1 match against Rennais in Paris. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

What next for Salah and Liverpool after explosive outburst?

AFP
Liverpool

Mohamed Salah plunged his future at Liverpool into serious doubt after claiming he had been made the fall guy for the Premier League champions' disastrous form this season.

In an explosive outburst, Salah spoke to reporters after being left on the bench for Saturday's 3-3 draw at Leeds, dropping a bomb-shell accusation that his relationship with Reds manager Arne Slot is broken.

It was the third consecutive game the Egyptian had been axed by Slot, who is struggling for solutions to a run of four wins in 15 games in all competitions for troubled Liverpool.

AFP Sport looks at how the breakdown between the Egypt star and his manager developed and what comes next for both Salah and Liverpool:

Why was Salah dropped?

An undoubted Liverpool legend, only two players have scored more than Salah's 250 goals for the 20-time English champions.

Salah, who arrived at Anfield from Roma in 2017, was fundamental to two Premier League title triumphs, ending a 30-year wait to become champions in 2020, and winning the Champions League in 2019.

In April, as he played a starring role and led Liverpool to the title in Slot's debut year last season, Salah was rewarded with a lucrative new two-year contract.

Salah has struggled to match those heights this season, scoring just five times in 19 appearances.

The 33-year-old, who was dropped for Champions League fixtures against Galatasaray and Eintracht Frankfurt, started all of Liverpool's first 12 league games, but Slot's patience ran out after a 3-0 home defeat to Nottingham Forest.

Liverpool spent £300mn (\$400mn) on forwards Florian Wirtz, Hugo Ekitike and Alexan-



der Isak in the summer transfer window. Despite slow starts for Wirtz and Isak, they appear the future for the Reds and Slot has prioritised trying to get them up to speed over the past week.

“I'm sitting on the bench and I don't know why. It seems like the club has thrown me under the bus. That's how I am feeling. I think it is very clear that someone wanted me to get all of the blame,” Salah said.

“I said many times before that I had a good relationship with the manager and all of a sudden, we don't have any relationship. I don't know why, but it seems to me, how I see it, that someone doesn't want me in the club.”

What happens next?

Liverpool were already planning for life without Salah in the short-term as he departs for the Africa Cup of Nations after this week's matches away to Inter Milan in the Champions League and at home to Brighton. Salah hinted the Brighton game could be his last at Anfield, if selected, and that he had instructed his family to fly in to witness it.

“I will be in Anfield to say goodbye to the fans and go to Africa Cup of Nations,” he added. “I don't know what is going to happen when I am there.”

Where could he go?

A move to the Saudi Pro League has long been rumoured as Salah's next destination.

An icon in the Arab world, his signing would represent another coup for the Gulf state.

The riches of clubs backed by the Saudi sovereign wealth fund means they are one of the few options that can match or even improve Salah's current salary as one of the Premier League's highest-paid players. Liverpool would also welcome the chance to bank a significant transfer fee after their huge summer outlay.

What does it mean for Slot?

Slot's credit among the Liverpool support for an amazing first season in charge was already diminishing after a run of just two wins in 10 league games.

His job is not in immediate danger, but the Liverpool hierarchy may be forced to act later in the season if their place in next season's Champions League is at risk.

Despite a dreadful start, Liverpool, who sit eighth in the table, are only two points outside the top four. Salah has now ramped up even more pressure on Slot as many fans will take the side of the player hailed on the Kop as the “Egyptian King.”

CELIK SEES RED AS ROMA LOSE AT CAGLIARI

AS Roma suffered a 1-0 defeat away to Cagliari in Serie A yesterday, with a second-half red card for Mehmet Celik leaving them unable to prevent Gianluca Gaetano's late winner. The loss denied Roma the chance to narrow the gap to leaders Inter Milan, leaving them fourth on 27 points. Leaders Inter are on 30 points after their 4-0 win over Como on Saturday. During a largely uneventful first half, Roma became visibly frustrated by their shortage of clear opportunities. Their search for a breakthrough grew

even more difficult early in the second half, as Celik was dismissed minutes after the restart for bringing down Michael Folorunsho just outside the box. Shortly after, Cagliari came close to scoring as Roma goalkeeper Mile Svilar blocked Adam Obert's close-range effort. Roma's priority in the latter stages appeared to be securing a point, while Cagliari continued to carve out big chances and tempers flared between the sides, resulting in a brief scuffle in the 78th minute.

MOTORSPORT

Third round of Qatar Drag Racing Championship concludes



QRC Director General Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani poses with the winners of the third round of the QDRC.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

After intense contests and nail-biting final races, the curtain fell on the third round of the Qatar Drag Racing Championship (QDRC), held at the Qatar Racing Club's (QRC) drag strip.

The round witnessed record numbers of participants from Qatar, the Gulf, and the region with six new champions being crowned, reshuffling the standings with two rounds remaining in the season. In the Index 10.00 class, after winning the opening two rounds, competitor Ahmed Hassan missed the podium this time, as Ali Youssef Rabia clinched the round's title. Ahmed al-Emadi secured second place, marking his third podium of the championship, while Khalaf al-Saad finished third.

In Index 9.00, after taking second place in the previous two

rounds, Mohammed Khawari succeeded in winning this round by defeating Mohammed al-Thuwaini in the final, while Mohammed Idris took third place.

The Index 8.50 (Cars) category also saw a new champion, with Hamdan al-Kaabi taking first place, followed by Adel Ghanem in second for the second consecutive round, while Rakan Ali al-Ajmi finished third. In the three car classes competing over the eighth-mile distance, two of them produced new champions. Batti al-Ali claimed his first title in Index 4.80, defeating Mohammed al-Farahi, who finished runner-up for the second consecutive round. Nasser Ghanem secured third place – his first podium this season.

The Super Street category also crowned a new champion: Mohammed Ali Haji, who, in his debut appearance, reached the final and defeated the winner of the past two rounds, Rashid al-Bloushi, who settled for second.

Khalid al-Kandari finished third, earning his first podium this season. Only the Index 4.50 class saw a repeat winner, as Ibrahim Abbas Ibrahim claimed his second title following his victory in the previous round. Ibrahim won the final against Rashid al-Bloushi, who placed second, while Jaber al-Maghribi, last round's runner-up, finished third.

The largest single-category turnout of the round came in the Index 8.50 (Motorcycles) class, which registered 36 competitors. Hussain Ashkanani claimed the win, while Khalifa al-Shrooqi finished second and Youssef al-Durraish finished third. In Street Bike, Ahmed Karam secured his second title, following his victory in the opening round. He met Mohammed al-Salem – runner-up of the previous round – in the final, with al-Salem repeating his second-place finish. Dawood al-Sharshani managed to claim third place in his first appearance in this class after missing the opening two rounds.

MOTORSPORT

Tearful Norris takes F1 title despite Verstappen GP win

Norris ends Verstappen’s four-year reign with third place, McLaren celebrate first title double since 1998



World champion and race third-placed McLaren’s British driver Lando Norris celebrates with his team at the end of the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Abu Dhabi

McLaren’s Lando Norris sobbed tears of joy and relief as he won the Formula One championship for the first time and ended Max Verstappen’s four-year reign with a nervy third place at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix yesterday.

Red Bull’s Verstappen, whose eighth triumph of the campaign was one more than the new champion managed, won the season-ender with McLaren’s Oscar Piastri runner-up and 12.5 seconds behind at the chequered flag.

Norris, Britain’s 11th Formula One world champion at the age of 26 and McLaren’s eighth since 1974, took his points tally to 423 with Verstappen on 421 and Piastri third with 410. “Thank you guys,” he gasped over the team radio. “You have made my dreams come true.”

McLaren, who secured the constructors’ championship in October for the second year in a row, won both titles in the same season for the first time since 1998.

“I’ve not cried in a while. I didn’t think I would cry but I did,” an emotional Norris said in the post-race interview, after also

RESULTS OF ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX	
1. Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull) 1hr 26min 07.469sec, 2. Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren) at 12.594, 3. Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren) 16.572, 4. Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari) 23.279, 5. George Russell (GBR/Mercedes) 48.563, 6. Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin) 1:07.562, 7. Esteban Ocon (FRA/Haas) 1:09.876, 8. Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Ferrari) 1:12.670, 9. Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Sauber) 1:19.014, 10. Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin) 1:19.523, 11. Gabriel Bortoletto (BRA/Sauber) 1:21.043, 12. Oliver Bearman (GBR/Haas) 1:21.166, 13. Carlos Sainz (ESP/Williams) 1:22.158, 14. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/Red Bull) 1:23.794, 15. Kimi Antonelli (ITA/Mercedes) 1:24.399, 16. Alex Albon (THA/Williams) 1:30.327, 17. Isack Hadjar (FRA/Racing Bulls) 1 lap, 18. Liam Lawson (NZL/Racing Bulls) 1 lap, 19. Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine) 1 lap, 20. Franco Colapinto (ARG/Alpine) 1 lap	WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS DRIVERS: 1. Lando Norris (GBR) 423 pts - champion, 2. Max Verstappen (NED) 421, 3. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 410, 4. George Russell (GBR) 319, 5. Charles Leclerc (MON) 242, 6. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 156, 7. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 150, 8. Alex Albon (THA) 73, 9. Carlos Sainz (ESP) 64, 10. Fernando Alonso (ESP) 56, 11. Isack Hadjar (FRA) 51, 12. Nico Hulkenberg (GER) 49, 13. Oliver Bearman (GBR) 42, 14. Liam Lawson (NZL) 38, 15. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 38, 16. Lance Stroll (CAN) 34, 17. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN) 33, 18. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 22, 19. Gabriel Bortoletto (BRA) 19, 20. Franco Colapinto (ARG) 0, 21. Jack Doohan (AUS) 0 CONSTRUCTORS: 1. McLaren 833 pts - champions, 2. Mercedes 469, 3. Red Bull 451, 4. Ferrari 398, 5. Williams 137, 6. Racing Bulls 92, 7. Aston Martin 90, 8. Haas 80, 9. Sauber 68, 10. Alpine 22.

shedding tears inside his helmet on the slowing down lap around the floodlit Yas Marina circuit.

“It feels amazing. I now know what Max feels like a little bit.

“I want to congratulate Max and Oscar, my two biggest competitors the whole season. It’s been a pleasure to race against both of them. It’s been an honour, I’ve learned a lot from both,” he added.

NO FIVE TITLES IN A ROW FOR VERSTAPPEN
Norris’s mother Cisca gave Pi-

astri a consoling hug while both Verstappen and the Australian congratulated McLaren’s first champion since Lewis Hamilton in 2008 in a show of sportsmanship.

The victory denied Verstappen five titles in a row, a feat only Ferrari great Michael Schumacher has managed to date.

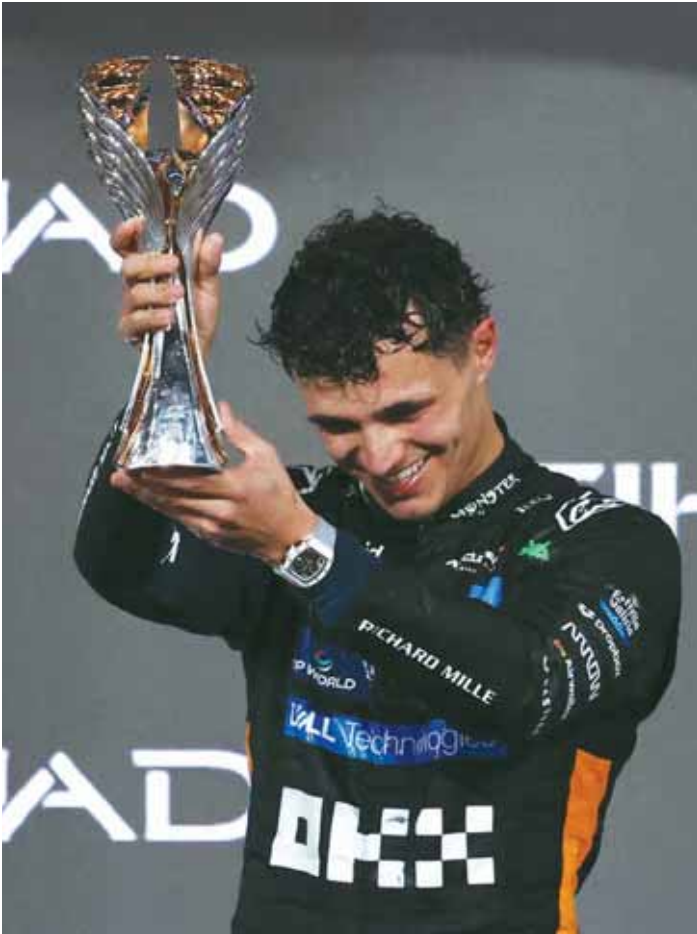
“The way we fought back in the second half of the season, we can be really, really proud of that,” said the Dutch driver, who was 104 points behind then-leader Piastri at the end of August, over the ra-

dio to his team.

“So, don’t be too disappointed. I’m definitely not disappointed. I’m really proud of everyone for not giving up.”

Charles Leclerc finished fourth in yesterday’s race for Ferrari with George Russell fifth for Mercedes and Fernando Alonso sixth for Aston Martin.

Esteban Ocon was seventh for Haas, ahead of Ferrari’s seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton – who failed to stand on the podium all year in a career low



McLaren’s Lando Norris celebrates on the podium with the trophy after becoming the 2025 Formula One World Champion yesterday. (Reuters)

for the 40-year-old who joined the Italian team this year from Mercedes.

Sauber’s Nico Hulkenberg was ninth in the German’s 250th race, and after starting 18th, with Lance Stroll 10th for Aston Martin. Mercedes ended the season second overall, with Red Bull third and Ferrari fourth.

Verstappen, who needed to win with Norris off the podium, led away from pole with his main rival fending off Piastri in second while Russell dropped from fourth to sixth.

Piastri, the only driver apart from Red Bull’s Yuki Tsunoda in the top 10 to start on the hard tyres with the rest on mediums, overtook Norris on lap one to drop the Briton into danger with Leclerc close behind.

Norris pulled out of DRS range, after managing the tyres, before pitting on lap 16 at the same time as the Ferrari driver.

The championship leader re-joined in ninth with Tsunoda, who started 10th, leading a train of traffic with Leclerc again closing in behind.

The McLaren driver dealt with that by overtaking four cars on older tyres in quick succession – Stroll and Red Bull’s Liam Lawson

in the same move – and had the Japanese in his sights after Esteban Ocon’s Haas peeled into the pits.

“(Do) all you can when he catches,” Red Bull told Tsunoda, who replied he knew what to do.

Norris scythed past, running onto the dirt as Tsunoda moved twice in defence – a move that earned the Japanese a five second penalty with the Briton cleared of gaining an advantage by leaving the track.

Verstappen pitted on lap 24, immediately after Norris passed his teammate, to hand the lead to Piastri. Leclerc pitted for a second time on lap 39, followed a lap later by Norris for a second set of hards, with Piastri ending his mighty opening stint to switch for mediums on lap 42.

The Australian rejoined in second, 24.5 seconds behind Verstappen who had passed him just before the stop, with Norris third.

“It’s not just this year or the last seven or eight years I’ve been with McLaren, but the last 16 or 17 years of my life trying to chase this dream,” said Norris, the 35th different world champion since 1950.

“Today we all did it, so I’m pretty happy.”

PREMIER LEAGUE

Palace sink Fulham to reach fourth place

AFP
London

Crystal Palace moved into fourth place in the Premier League as their remarkable rise hit a new high with a 2-1 win against Fulham, while Brighton stopped West Ham climbing out of the relegation zone with a last-gasp 1-1 draw yesterday.

Marc Guehi headed the decisive goal for Palace in the closing minutes at Craven Cottage as Oliver Glasner’s side made it four victories from their last six league games. The England defender’s late winner lifted the Eagles above Chelsea and Everton into the Champions League qualification places.

For so long one of English football’s also-rans, Palace are enjoying a golden period including last season’s shock FA Cup final victory over Manchester City and a Community Shield win against Liverpool at the start of this term.

The south Londoners are also on track to advance from the UEFA Conference League group phase, but they might have far more illustrious European opponents next season if they can keep their unexpected top four challenge on course.

Palace took the lead in the 20th minute when Adam Wharton’s



Crystal Palace’s Marc Guehi celebrates scoring their second goal against Fulham in London yesterday. (Reuters)

pass picked out Eddie Nketiah and the forward drilled a predatory strike past Bernd Leno.

Harry Wilson equalised for Fulham in eye-catching style with a sublime strike using the outside of his foot to bend the ball past Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson in the 38th minute.

Emile Smith Rowe thought he had put Fulham ahead but his close-range finish was disallowed for a tight offside against Samuel Chukwueze after a VAR check.

Palace took advantage of that escape to snatch an 87th-minute winner as Guehi met a corner with a thumping header past Leno.

NUNO FURY

At the Amex Stadium, West Ham were moments away from escaping the bottom three thanks to Jarrod Bowen’s second-half strike.

But Georginio Rutter grabbed Brighton’s leveller in stoppage-time to leave West Ham stuck in 18th place. The third-bottom Hammers are two points behind fourth-bottom Nottingham Forest in the fight for survival.

Conceding so late was a painful blow for West Ham but after holding Manchester United to a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford on Thursday, West Ham’s battling display was further evidence of their improve-

ment since Nuno Espirito Santo replaced the sacked Graham Potter in September. West Ham have lost just one of their last six league matches to revive their survival hopes.

Brighton blew a two-goal lead in a 4-3 defeat against Aston Villa in midweek, surrendering their 10-match unbeaten run at home in the process.

Avoiding another loss in front of their own fans kept seventh-placed Brighton in the hunt for European qualification.

West Ham took the lead in the 73rd minute when Jan Paul van Hecke’s careless back header was intercepted by Callum Wilson.

Wilson slipped a pass towards Bowen, who stretched for a low shot that crept past Bart Verbruggen from an acute angle.

Brighton snatched their equaliser in stoppage-time.

West Ham ‘keeper Alphonse Areola made two saves in a penalty area scramble, but Rutter pounced on the loose ball and squeezed his low shot into the net from close range. Nuno claimed VAR were wrong to rule that Rutter did not handle in the build-up.

“It’s not ‘appears’, it’s clear,” said Nuno. “I saw it, everybody saw it. We cannot understand how they gave the goal.

“It’s hard to take, man, it’s really hard to take especially after the hard work of the boys.”

BUNDESLIGA

Dortmund beat Hoffenheim to cement third spot

AFP
Dortmund

Borussia Dortmund bounced back from Tuesday’s German Cup elimination by Bayer Leverkusen with a comfortable 2-0 home Bundesliga win over Hoffenheim yesterday.

Dortmund won thanks to goals either side of half-time from Julian Brandt and Nico Schlotterbeck. The victory helped third-placed Dortmund open up a five-point gap over Leverkusen in fourth.

Dortmund sit a point behind second-placed RB Leipzig but are already nine points behind runaway league leaders Bayern Munich with 13 games played.

Caught in the relegation mire last season, Hoffenheim have impressed this campaign and came into the weekend in fourth.

Dortmund should have taken the lead after 20 minutes when Karim Adeyemi fed Serhou Guirassy, one-on-one with the Hoffenheim goalie Oliver Baumann but the Guinean got his feet in a knot and failed to get

a shot away. The hosts broke through just before the break when Yan Couto burst down the right and cut the ball back superbly for Brandt to tap home.

Dortmund doubled up with a half-hour remaining, Schlotterbeck guiding a shot through a crowded penalty area and past a diving Baumann.

Guirassy had a chance to put icing on the cake when put through on goal late but chipped his shot onto the crossbar.

The 29-year-old striker has only scored once in the league dating back to mid-September.

Earlier, Yussuf Poulsen came off the bench to score an 84th-minute winner as Hamburg came from a goal down to beat Werder Bremen at home in a fiery clash. In Germany’s first top-flight ‘Northern Derby’ since 2018, Jens Stage gave Bremen the lead before the break but Albert Lokonga levelled things up midway through the second half.

Tottenham loanee Luka Vuskovic put Hamburg in front with an incredible no-look backheel with 15 minutes remaining but Bremen’s Justin Njinmah hit back three minutes later.