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FIFA ARAB CUP
QATAR 2025

FOOTBALL

Plucky Syria test for Morocco, Saudi face inspired Palestine

With hosts Qatar making an early exit, Morocco enter the knockout stage as frontrunners for the title

By Sports Reporter
Doha

As the dust settles on an unpredictable group stage of the FIFA Arab Cup, the tournament now moves into the knockout phase, with eight teams vying for regional supremacy.

The quarter-finals kick off today with tournament favourites Morocco facing Syria at Khalifa International Stadium at 5:30pm, followed by Saudi Arabia taking on a momentum-fuelled Palestine at 8:30pm at Lusail Stadium. Tomorrow, Jordan will take on Iraq, while Algeria meet the United Arab Emirates in the remaining quarter-final fixtures.

Morocco enter the knockout stage believing they are among the frontrunners for the title, especially following the early exit of two-time Asian champions Qatar, who were eliminated on home soil after a disappointing show.

Morocco reached the last eight by topping Group B with seven points, securing a 3-1 win over Comoros, a goalless draw with Oman, and a 1-0 victory against Saudi Arabia. The 2012 champions are aiming to return to the semi-finals after exiting the previous edition at this stage on penalties to eventual winners Algeria.

Coach Tariq Sektioui said his team is 'ready and fully aware of the responsibility' ahead of the tricky tie. "We aspire to reach the semi-finals. We respect our opponents, and our goal is to represent Moroccan football and make our fans proud," he added.

Despite several absences, Morocco will rely on key performers from the group stage, including Karim El Berkaoui, Redouane Berkane, Tariq Tissoudali, and Soufiane Bouftini. Goalkeeper Salah Eddine Chehab echoed his coach's confidence, noting that the team's camp atmosphere is 'very positive' and that the squad is prepared to face a 'strong opponent,' despite the short turnaround between matches.

Syria enter the quarter-finals as one of the tournament's surprise packages, finishing second in Group A with five points. Jose Lana's side opened with a 1-0 win over Tunisia, followed by draws against Qatar (1-1) and Palestine (0-0), securing qualification at the expense of the hosts.

"We are facing a strong team with great experience," Lana said. "We must focus on every detail and play in a style that suits this opponent." The Spanish coach praised his team's resilience in a demanding group and highlighted the technical progress of Arab teams across the tournament.

Syria will look to standout forward Omar Khribin, who scored twice in the group stage, along with threats from Mahmoud al-Mawas and Mohammad al-Hallaq. Defender Ahmed Faqa expressed the



Palestine players at a training session yesterday, ahead of their FIFA Arab Cup quarter-final against Saudi Arabia.

team's determination: "The Syrian team is capable of anything. We must maintain this mentality to reach the level we want."

Tomorrow's clash marks the first-ever Arab Cup meeting between Morocco and Syria.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia progress to the knockout stage after finishing second in Group B with six points, beating Oman 2-1 and Comoros 3-1 before losing 1-0 to Morocco. The two-time Arab Cup champions (1998 and 2002) are seen as strong contenders in this edition, buoyed by a squad rich in experience and their qualification for the 2026 World Cup.

Coach Herve Renard said the 'real competition begins now,' insisting that victory is the only acceptable outcome. "The task is not easy against Palestine, but we will do our best to qualify without going to penalties," he added. Renard also emphasised the importance of consistent playing time in the domestic league to strengthen the national team's long-term competitiveness.

Saudi Arabia are expected to field a full-strength side, including Salem al-Dawsari, Saleh al-Shehri, Mohammed Kanno, Nawaf al-Aqidi, Nawaf Boushal, Saleh Abu al-Shamat, Ali Majrashi, and Abdul-Ilah al-Amri.

Palestine arrive with momentum after



Saudi midfielder Mohamed Kanno trains in Doha yesterday.

topping Group A with five points, marking their first-ever progression to the Arab Cup quarter-finals. They stunned hosts Qatar 1-0 in the opener before drawing with Tunisia (2-2) and Syria (0-0).

Coach Ihab Abu Jazar praised his players' commitment, saying they have shown 'honour, belonging, and loyalty' through-



Syria enter the quarter-finals as one of the tournament's surprise packages.



Morocco players train yesterday, on the eve of the Arab Cup quarter-final against Syria.

out a demanding group stage. "We will play a strong match to make our fans proud. We know Saudi Arabia's strength and history, but we believe in our ability to overcome challenges," he said.

Midfielder Hamed Hamdan added that the team will play 'to win, because our people deserve moments of joy,' while

standout performers Zaid Qanbar, Oday Dabbagh, Musab al-Batat, and Mohammad Saleh are expected to play central roles once again.

Saudi Arabia and Palestine have met three times previously in the Arab Cup, with Saudi winning once and two matches ending in draws.

SIX STARS WHO IMPRESSED THE MOST IN THE FIFA ARAB CUP GROUP STAGE

Doha: After the conclusion of the FIFA Arab Cup group stage, just eight nations remain in contention for the title.

Through an exhilarating week-and-a-half of action there have already been 61 goals, close to 1mn fans in attendance and a host of standout individual and collective performances.

Reflecting on an exceptional start to the regional showpiece, here is a spotlight on six players who have shone during the first phase of the competition.

ACHREF ABADA (ALGERIA)

With the likes of Redouane Berkane, the ageless Yacine Brahimi and Adil Boulbina all impressing going forward Algeria have dazzled in attack. They been quietly just as good at the other end of the pitch, conceding just once, and much of that is down to central defender Abada. The 26-year-old has never played outside of his homeland but has starred at the Arab Cup with some spectacular clearances, perfectly-timed tackles and crisp distribution.

SALEM AL-DAWSARI (SAUDI ARABIA)

The Saudi sensation has starred again during the regional showpiece with his trademark dribbling, passing and explosive burst of pace all on full display in Qatar.

Whenever the Green Falcons have needed a player to raise the tempo or create chances they have, as they always do, looked to the veteran winger.

Even though he was rested from the final fixture, with the team already qualified for the knockouts, his return of two assists in his nation's opening encounter and then a further two assists plus a goal in their second means he's impossible to leave off this list.

KARIM EL BERKAOUI (MOROCCO)

One of the players handed a chance to impress in the absence of a string of regulars, 30-year-old El Berkaoui has certainly done that. Powerful, explosive and deadly in front of goal, the versatile attacker is often deployed centrally at club level but has found a home on the right wing in Mo-

rocco's 4-2-3-1 set-up at the Arab Cup. With goals in both his nation's first and third outings, he's also provided valuable returns for an Atlas Lions outfit that are through to the quarter-finals for the second straight edition.

HAMED HAMDAN (PALESTINE)

Palestine have been one of the surprise stories of the tournament so far, having secured a quarter-final ticket for the first time. Tactically sound, technically solid and with a fantastic belief and camaraderie within the squad, the Lions of Canaan have been efficient both defensively and going forward.

Knitting things in the centre of the pitch has been the versatile Hamed Hamdan, who has alternated between a central role and a more advanced one in Palestine's 4-2-3-1. The left-footer has a commanding defensive presence and also the quality to push forward and contribute in the final third, with a delightful long-range goal against Tunisia starting his nation's come-

back in their second group outing.

OMAR KHRIBIN (SYRIA)

Experienced but still as deadly as he has always been, Omar Khribin continues to provide a lethal goal threat for a Syrian side that is in an extraordinary vein of form, having lost just once this calendar year. The 31-year-old's curling free-kick to win their opener against Tunisia was an outstanding strike. Somehow, he found an even better finish to rescue a point against Qatar three days later with a rising rocket from 25 yards that flew into the top corner of the goal.

ALI OLWAN (JORDAN)

If you had said that the top scorer through the group stage was a Jordanian, many would have expected that to be Yazan al-Naimat. It's Ali Olwan, though, who has stolen the limelight so far, scoring from the penalty spot in each of his nation's first three encounters and generally posing a threat whenever the Nashama have gone forward.

CRICKET

New Zealand lose Tickner as Windies all out for 205

‘We need to put a better first innings score to set up the game for us’

AFP
Wellington

New Zealand fought back to claim first-day honours in the second Test against the West Indies in Wellington, but the home side suffered a blow when seam bowler Blair Tickner was taken to hospital with a nasty shoulder injury.

New Zealand were 24-0 at the close of play after bowling the West Indies out for 205 in 75 overs.

Tickner was the pick of the New Zealand bowlers, taking 4-32 from 16 overs, but his day ended prematurely when he tumbled onto his shoulder while fielding and left on a stretcher.

Medical staff from the West Indies and Black Caps camps rushed to Tickner's aid and after some worrying moments eventually he sat up before being taken away to an ambulance.

New Zealand Cricket said he had suffered a left shoulder injury.

“It was pretty awful to see,” said wicketkeeper Mitch Hay, playing in his first Test having replaced Tom Blundell who was injured in the first Test.

“We wish him all the best because it's never nice seeing that. Everyone is feeling for Blair.”

Captain Tom Latham was seven not out and Devon Conway on 16 after the opening pair made it safely through to stumps against nine overs from the new ball.

“I'm hoping tomorrow is a good day for batting,” said Hay who said his side would aim to post a big lead.

“I think it will be the sort of pitch where there is something on offer, but we'll see how it plays out.”



New Zealand's Blair Tickner celebrates the wicket of West Indies' Brandon King with teammates during day one of the second Test at the Basin reserve in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

Latham won the toss and chose to bowl – the 18th successive time in Wellington where a captain inserted the opposition – only for the West Indies to reach 66-0 after little more than an hour.

Tickner then took two wickets in two overs to get New Zealand under way, causing headaches with his accurate line and length.

The West Indies lost opener John Campbell three balls after lunch for 44, including six fours, but consolidated to be 175-4 at tea before losing six wickets for just 30 runs in the final session.

Tickner had support from debutant Michael Rae, who snared

3-67 from 18 overs in his maiden Test. Shai Hope was the best of the visiting batsmen, scoring 48 from 80 deliveries with eight fours, supported by Campbell and 33 from Brandon King.

“Our openers laid a very good foundation for us, a great start, but we let ourselves down with the bat in the back end,” said Hope.

“We need to put a better first innings score to set up the game for us.”

Injury-depleted New Zealand named two debutants in their side, with wicketkeeper Hay and seamer Rae replacing regular gloveman Tom Blundell and Matt Henry.

The West Indies were also forced into changes after Tagnarine Chandernaul was injured in training the day before the match, replaced by King at the top of the order. Kaveem Hodge came in for Alick Athanaze and fast-bowler Anderson Phillip replaced Johann Layne. The first Test in Christchurch was drawn and the third and final Test begins on December 18 in Mount Maunganui.

BRIEF SCORES: New Zealand 24 for no loss (Conway 16*, Latham 7*) **trail West Indies 205** (Hope 48, Campbell 44, Tickner 4-32, Rae 3-67) **by 181 runs.**

TENNIS

Kyrgios match will not harm women's tennis reputation: Sabalenka

Reuters
London

World number one **Aryna Sabalenka** says she is not concerned that losing to Nick Kyrgios in this month's 'Battle of the Sexes' exhibition could damage the reputation of women's tennis.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka will play the Australian, ranked 672 in the world, on December 28.

“I am not putting myself at any risk,” the 27-year-old Belarusian told the BBC. “We're there to have fun and bring great tennis. Whoever wins, wins.”

“It's so obvious that the man is biologically stronger than the woman, but it's not about that. This event is only going to help bring women's tennis to a higher level.”

Some have criticised the event which has echoes of the original 1973 Battle of the Sexes match in which women's trailblazer Billie Jean King was challenged by 55-year-old former Grand Slam winner Bobby Riggs who claimed women's tennis

was far inferior to men's. King won the match in Houston with the contest attracting a reported 90 million television viewers.

Unlike Riggs, Kyrgios is still an active Tour player although he played only five professional matches in 2025 because of the injuries that have dogged his career.

“It's not going to be an easy match for Nick,” Sabalenka said. “I'm going to be there competing and showing women are strong, powerful and good entertainment.”

“He's in a lose-lose situation. I'm in a win-win situation.”

Kyrgios, the former world number 13, said in September that women can't return men's serves and that he would beat Sabalenka without having to try 100%.

However, he said the match would increase respect between the men's and women's Tours.

“So I can't do anything other than hope me and Aryna play our best tennis and, at the end of the day, whoever wins, that our handshake afterwards solidifies the union between males and females in the tennis world,” he said.



FOCUS

England fast bowler Wood out of Ashes tour with injury

AFP
Sydney

Fast bowler Mark Wood will play no further part in the Ashes tour and is to fly home from Australia at the weekend, England announced.

Wood, 35, returned to action in the first Test in Perth after surgery kept him out for eight months, only to miss the second match in Brisbane after his left knee flared up again.

It could signal the end of a 10-year Test career for Wood, one of the quickest bowlers ever to play for England

“Wood will return home later this week and will work closely with the ECB medical team on his rehabilitation and recovery,” said an England statement.

Wood said he was “gutted” in a lengthy post on social media.

“After extensive surgery and months of work and rehab to get back into the Test arena, my knee just hasn't held up,” he said.

Wood will be replaced in the

squad by Matthew Fisher, 28, who won his only Test cap on a tour of the West Indies in 2022.

Fisher has been with the second-string England Lions squad in Australia.

“None of us expected this,” said Wood, whose absence will be a big blow to England who are already 2-0 down in the five-match series. “I came here with high expectations about making a big impact. “I'm desperately disappointed that despite yet more injections and intensive medical treatment it has become clear that the flare up in my knee is worse than feared.”

It could signal the end of a 10-year Test career for Wood, one of the quickest bowlers ever to play for England. But Wood said he would try to come back. “It has been a tough road these past few months but I remain determined to give it another proper go,” said Wood, who was an Ashes winner with England at home in 2015.

His career has been blighted by injuries and the Perth Test ended a 15-month absence from Test cricket, first because of an elbow injury, then the knee.

Wood bowled only 11 overs in Perth without taking a wicket.

ASHES

Captain Cummins back in Australia squad for third Test

AFP
Sydney

Australia captain **Pat Cummins** is in line to return for the third Ashes Test against England in Adelaide after being named in a 15-man squad yesterday.

Cummins is the only addition to an otherwise unchanged squad from Brisbane, where Australia won by eight wickets to take a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

The 32-year-old Cummins has been sidelined since the tour to the West Indies in July with a lower back injury.

“We feel as though he'll be as best prepared as can be,” Australia coach Andrew McDonald said.

Under-pressure veteran opener Usman Khawaja, who did not play in the second Test because of a back injury, kept his place in the squad for the match, which begins at the Adelaide Oval on December 17. Josh Inglis replaced the injured left-hander in the team for the second Test, but batted in



the middle order with Travis Head moving up to open alongside Jake Weatherald. McDonald did not rule out a fit-again Khawaja moving down the order if the dynamic Head opens again on his home Adelaide Oval wicket.

Khawaja batted at five in the fourth Test of the 2021-22 Ashes, making a century in each innings – 137 and 101 not out – in a drawn match at Sydney.

“Uzzie should be fit and available, and then we will work out our batting order based on the surface,” McDonald said.

“The assumption is that (Khawaja) can only open as well. He does have flexibility. We like to think that all our batters have the flexibility to be able to perform anywhere in that order.”

Veteran off-spinner Nathan Lyon, who has 562 Test wickets, is

likely to return after being dropped at the Gabba for the first time in 12 years at home when Australia opted for an all-seam attack.

If Cummins also plays it means that only one of Scott Boland, Michael Neser and Brendan Doggett will keep their place alongside Mitchell Starc in the pace attack.

Starc, who is the leading wicket-taker in the series with 18, was reported fit by McDonald after suffering what the coach termed a “left side niggles” while making 77 with the bat in Australia's first innings in Brisbane.

After Adelaide, the series moves on to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test with the fifth and final match in Sydney starting on January 4.

Australia squad for third Test: Pat Cummins (capt), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Brendan Doggett, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Michael Neser, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Jake Weatherald, Beau Webster.

SPOTLIGHT

Son of ex-athletics chief Diack to face 2026 retrial

AFP
Paris

The appeals court in Paris on Monday postponed the corruption retrial of Papa Massata Diack, the son of disgraced former athletics supremo Lamine Diack who died in 2021, until September 2026.

Diack, whose father led the IAAF – now called World Athletics – from 1999 to 2015, was one of six men convicted in France in 2020

for hushing up 23 Russian doping offences in exchange for Russian sponsorship contracts.

He was originally sentenced to five years in prison and fined one million euros (\$1.1mn) but in 2024 France's highest court said that the trial could be reheard at the Paris appeals court.

Earlier this year the retrial was delayed until December, but at a hearing on Monday it was decided to delay it until September 8 next year for reasons of the organisation of the court timetable.

The trial in 2020 heard the prosecution allege that Papa Massata Diack, known as PMD, and his father had overseen a corrupt network that set out to hide drug offences and delay or erase sanctions for doped Russian athletes. As a result of hiding the doping cases, Russian athletes were able to compete at the 2012 London Olympics and 2013 world championships in Moscow.

In return, Russian sponsors renewed their contracts with the IAAF.

PMD had a high-profile role as a marketing consultant for the IAAF. He was not present in court for Monday's hearing and remains in his native Senegal which refuses to extradite the 60-year-old.

PMD was found guilty of being an accomplice in a bribery scheme and of having embezzled funds to the tune of 15mn euros at the expense of the IAAF.

World Athletics, headed since 2015 by British double Olympic gold medallist Sebastian Coe, was seeking 41.2mn euros in damages.

Shields to defend heavyweight crown against Crews-Dezurn

Boxing's undisputed heavyweight champion Claressa Shields will defend her belts against Franchon Crews-Dezurn in Detroit in February next year in her first fight after signing a landmark deal, organisers said. Shields, 30, is undefeated in her 17 professional bouts and became the first undisputed women's heavyweight champion with a win over Danielle Perkins in February.

She signed an \$8 million multi-year deal with Salita Promotions and Wynn Records in November, which the promotion company called the richest contract in women's boxing.

Shields, a two-time Olympic champion, has crossed paths with Crews-Dezurn before, beating the 38-year-old by unanimous decision in 2016 in what was both fighters' professional debut.

FOCUS

Qatar Olympic Committee confirms 2nd edition of Half Marathon on Feb 10, 2026

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The second edition of the Half Marathon will be staged on February 10, 2026 at Lusail Boulevard, the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) announced yesterday.

The event's organising committee unveiled a series of accompanying sports events to be held at Team Qatar Village at Al-Saad square in co-operation with national sports federations.

Presided over by Abdulaziz Ghanim, Director General of the QOC Half Marathon 2026, the conference brought together Ahmed al-Jaber, Head of the event's Technical Committee, members of the Organising Committee, 2025 race winner Rabea al-Musleh and Jamal al-Khanji, and media representatives.

The event opened with a compelling video review of the first edition, showcasing its success in attracting more than 6,000 runners and highlighting its contribution to strengthening community engagement under the principle of "Sport for All". In his address, Ghanim expressed pride in launching the 2026 edition, noting the Organising committee's aim to expand participation to 10,000 runners, while commending the support of Qatari Diar and ASICS, the leading Japanese company in sportswear and athletic gear. He emphasised the media's essential role in promoting public awareness and community involvement.

Ahmed al-Jaber, Head of the Technical Committee of the QOC Half Marathon 2026's Organising Committee, explained in his presentation that the second edition will feature a range of main categories designed to suit all ages and fitness levels.

These include: Children's Category (6-14 years): 1km, Juniors Category (Boys & Girls, 15-17 years): 5km; Open Category (Men & Women, 19-39 years): 5km, 10km, and 21km; Open Category (Men & Women, 40+ years): 5km, 10km, and 21km; Team Qatar Category - Al Adaam (Men & Women, 19-39 years): 5km, 10km, and 21km; Team Qatar Category - Al Adaam (Men & Women, 40+ years): 5km, 10km, and 21km.

Al-Jaber also highlighted the comprehensive logistical, technical, administrative and medical services provided by the organising committee along the race routes, including fully equipped water stations and first-aid points, ensuring the safety of all participants and the comfort of everyone involved.

The QOC-Half Marathon 2026's Organising committee reaffirmed



its commitment to delivering an exceptional sporting event that promotes a healthy and active so-

ciety in line with Qatar National Vision 2030 and the QOC's vision "to become a leading nation

in bringing the world together through sustainable sport development".

FOOTBALL

Spectre of Salah saga still hangs over Liverpool

Slot says he has 'no clue' if Salah had played his last game for club

Reuters
London

The shadow of Mohamed Salah's bust-up with Liverpool hung over the team as they got ready to face Inter Milan in the Champions League on Tuesday and the Egyptian forward's situation looks a long way from being resolved after they eked out a narrow 1-0 win.

Salah was left out of Tuesday's squad by coach Arne Slot after his withering comments on Saturday, when he accused the club of throwing him under the bus having been left on the bench during a 3-3 Premier League draw with Leeds United.

When asked ahead of Tuesday's game if Salah had played his last game for the club, Slot said he had "no clue".

With the travelling fans singing the coach's name after the final whistle against Inter, Slot took a slightly more conciliatory line towards Salah, suggesting that the player may have spoken in the heat of the moment after the disappointing draw with Leeds.

Yet he also suggested the responsibility may rest with Salah to repair the damage.

"You concede, and then a lot of things are being said. Normally, that affects players as well, because he's been so influential for the club and the players, so it's never nice when something happens to their team-mates," Slot said.

"Everyone makes mistakes in life, but does the player know he's



Liverpools Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah posts a picture of himself during a solo gym session in Liverpool yesterday. Salah is rumoured to be on his way out at Liverpool following a public spat against club manager Arne Slot. (@MoSalah)

made a mistake? Should the initiative (to make things right) come from him or me? That's another question," he added.

Liverpool have one more Premier League game against Brighton & Hove Albion before Salah departs to play with Egypt in the African Cup of Nations on

December 15. Salah is the third-highest scorer in Liverpool's history behind Ian Rush and Roger Hunt with 250 goals in all competitions and defender Andy Robertson said he hoped the Egyptian's time at the club was not over. "That'll be up to other people. It's not up to me, but I love

Mohamed Salah is the third-highest scorer in Liverpool's history behind Ian Rush and Roger Hunt with 250 goals in all competitions.

Last season Salah contributed 34 goals and 18 assists in 52 games for Liverpool.

But he has scored just 4 goals in 13 Premier League games this season, with Liverpool 10th in the table.

playing with Mo Salah, and I hope to continue to play with him," the 31-year-old said.

Crowned Premier League champions under Slot last season with Salah contributing 34 goals and 18 assists in 52 games across all competitions, Liverpool have struggled to find their best form so far this term, but Tuesday's win might give them some breathing-room.

"We know we're in not the best moment, we know the results haven't been good enough, we know the performances haven't been good enough. So it's important that this club is in the Champions League, and then when you are you have to compete in it," Robertson said.

"The supporters expect us to go far in it (the Champions League), so we need to up our performances to get through and then to hopefully build momentum, so it was a huge result for all of us."

COMMENT

Gerrard urges Salah to stay at Liverpool and stay 'away' from outburst

AFP
London

Liverpool great Steven Gerrard believes the club still need Mohamed Salah as he urged the star forward to "reverse away" from an extraordinary outburst where he accused the faltering Premier League champions of "throwing him under the bus".

The Egypt international was omitted from the squad that travelled to Italy for Tuesday's 1-0 Champions League win at Inter Milan following a blistering attack on manager Arne Slot and the club hierarchy after being left on the bench for last weekend's 3-3 draw at Leeds. Former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher labelled Salah a "disgrace" for his comments but Gerrard urged the player and management to reunite for the good of everyone at Anfield.

"He's obviously really upset he's not playing, which I respect," former Liverpool captain Gerrard told TNT Sports. "A couple of lines about throwing people under the bus, wrong. Need to reverse a little bit away from that, to deal with that with the manager."

Gerrard added bust-ups between players and management were nothing new.

"I've seen this and I've lived it with (Luis) Suarez when he fell out with Brendan (Rodgers) face to face. I've been there and done it myself. I did the Salah statements in 30 seconds against (Manchester) United and got sent off," he explained.

"So no one's perfect and we've all had head loss as players, where we've done emotional things," said Gerrard, who hoped Salah would eventually realise he had been a "bit emotional and a bit hasty".

Salah's remarks sparked reports that Liverpool's third-highest goalscorer in history could leave Anfield in January despite signing a lucrative new contract in April.

The 33-year-old posted a picture of himself training alone in Liverpool's weights room on Tuesday.

Salah's outburst has piqued in-



terest in Saudi Arabia with a source at the kingdom's Public Investment Fund (PIF) telling AFP it will do "whatever it can" to buy him.

'BEST PLAYER'

Gerrard, however, said: "At the end of the day, Liverpool need Mo Salah back playing well, scoring goals because he is the best player, the best scorer, and he will help them get out of this. If this goes on, this is bigger than what we all know and what we see."

Dutch boss Slot tried to put the focus back on his side after Dominik Szoboszlai's controversial late penalty gave the six-time European champions all three points at the San Siro by saying "the ones that are here, they deserve all the credits".

Salah is set to depart for the Africa Cup of Nations after next weekend's home Premier League match against Brighton.

An unused substitute at Leeds, Salah told reporters at Elland Road: "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."

Salah made his explosive comments in the midst of a dismal season for both him and Liverpool.

He has played a key role in Liverpool's two Premier League titles and one Champions League triumph during his iconic spell on Merseyside.

But he has scored just four goals in 13 Premier League appearances this season, with Liverpool 10th in the table.

HORSE RACING

Slick One Nation claims Brooq Cup with third successive win in four starts

By Sports Reporter
Doha

One Nation extended his strong seasonal form with a third straight win in four starts, landing the Brooq Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Racing prominently throughout, the five-year-old gelding bided his time before striking in the concluding stages, quickening smartly under Arnaud De Lepine to secure an impressive two-length victory in the race for the Thoroughbred Handicap (85-105) for four-year+ over 1,900m.

The success marked a second win on the day for trainer Ahmed al-Jehani on behalf of owner Hamed Ali al-Mulla. Saeed Adiba, Head of QREC Racing Operations Section, presented the trophies to the winners. In the penultimate race of

the day, al-Jehani-trained Maysara, won the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-80) race for the three-year-old+.

Trainer Jassim al-Ghazali and jockey Marco Casamento completed a hat-trick of title wins yesterday.

Al-Ghazali rode Al Kazim, in the colours of Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed bin Faleh al-Thani, to victory in the Purebred Arabian Handicap (60-80) for three-year-old+. Earlier in the day, Al Ghazali-trained Maximus Alexios won the 1,200m race for the thoroughbred Handicap (60-80) for three-year-old+.

Casamento was in the winners' enclosure earlier also, when he guided HE Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud-owned Maximus Alexios to win the Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80) for three-year-old+. In the card opener Casamento and al-Ghazali combined to guide Lord Deputy to win the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate race for three- to seven-year-olds.



Jockey De Lepine guided One Nation to the Brooq Cup win yesterday.



Connections of One Nation celebrate after the gelding won the Brooq Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **Pictures:** Juhaim

ARAB CUP

It's all about happiness for Algeria: Brahimi

Off the pitch Yacine Brahimi has the same warmth and engaging character that he has always had. On it, the explosive pace may be waning with age but the movement, vision and intelligence are absolutely still there.

At 35, Algeria's playmaking prince may be in the twilight of his career but there's been plenty of raging against that light on display at the FIFA Arab Cup.

He's also been managed cautiously by head coach Madjid Bougherra. Spared from the Fennecs opening draw with Sudan, he dazzled in a second half cameo in a 5-1 thrashing of Bahrain and then produced a Player of the Match showing in a 2-0 win over Iraq that secured a quarter-final spot.

Speaking to FIFA post-match, the Paris-born forward was relieved that the defending champions had ticked the first item off their Arab Cup list.

"I'm very happy because it was our target to win that game and to finish first in the group, which we did. Games like this, when we play well and get positive results can give us real confidence going forward. It was an intense match, with a lot of duels but we played a great game. At this competition the next game comes very quickly so now we have to focus, recover and prepare for that."

That match will be in the last eight of the regional showpiece where Algeria will meet the Group C runners-up United Arab Emirates. Having recovered from an opening defeat at the hands of section kings Jordan, the Emirates drew with Egypt and then eased past Kuwait. Brahimi is cognisant of the quality they possess.

"We know that they are a strong team and we saw that today in their win against Kuwait. I am fully aware of the team, the players and the quality they have and this will be another tough test for us.

"Of course we will respect them and ap-



Algeria's Yacine Brahimi (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Iraq in the Arab Cup Group D match at Khalifa International Stadium in Doha on Tuesday.

proach things with humility but we are playing to win and to make sure we get to the semi-finals."

Having been based in the Arab Cup host nation for more than a half a decade, Brahimi has gathered support from both Fennec fans and neutral Qataris alike. Given that he always plays with a smile on his face and loves to entertain, it's almost impossible to dislike someone that still has such a joy and passion for the game.

As he notes, the end is certainly nearer than

the start but as long as he can, he's going to keep playing with that same spirit of exuberance and expression.

"I still feel really good and I'm enjoying playing. Naturally, when you wear this shirt and play for your country, you must be happy and give absolutely everything.

"So my motivation is to bring happiness to my family, to our fans and to our country"

The next opportunity to do that comes on December 12 when Algeria face the UAE at Al Bayt Stadium, in the northeast of the country.

Sheikh Joaan meets President of Association of Summer Olympic International Federations



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, Senior Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), met with Ingmar De Vos, President of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) and President of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), during a visit to the FEI headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, on the sidelines of the 14th Olympic Summit held at the Olympic House. The meeting discussed areas of co-operation between QOC and ASOIF, particularly in the fields of developing Olympic sports, enhancing joint programmes that support athletes, and reviewing recent developments within the Olympic movement. The two sides also exchanged views on ways to strengthen co-ordination and integration among international sports institutions. The discussions also touched on the key topics featured on the agenda of the Olympic Summit, and the perspectives they offer regarding the future of the Olympic movement. Both parties emphasised the importance of ongoing collaboration between international sports bodies to ensure the continuous development of sport worldwide and to promote the values of Olympism within communities. This meeting comes as part of the QOC's commitment to exchanging expertise with leading international sports organisations, in a way that contributes to advancing the development of sport in Qatar and strengthening its active presence within the global Olympic movement.

INTERCONTINENTAL CUP

De Arrascaeta inspires Flamengo to Derby of the Americas glory

Midfielder scores brace as Flamengo edge Cruz Azul to set up a date with Pyramids

By Sports Reporter

Doha

When the moment needed him, as it often is, Flamengo's Uruguayan star Giorgian De Arrascaeta delivered. The mercurial midfielder struck either side of a fine Jorge Sanchez equaliser to seal a 2-1 victory for the Rio de Janeiro giants in the FIFA Derby of the Americas at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday.

That also secured Filipe Luis's side a date with Egypt's Pyramids in the FIFA Challenger Cup to be played on December 13, which will also be played at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. The winner of that tie will face European champions Paris Saint Germain in the FIFA Intercontinental Cup final at the same venue on December 17.

The match opened at a frantic pace, with Cruz Azul looking to impose themselves early. Flamengo, however, struck first. An under-hit pass from defender Gonzalo Piovi went straight to De Arrascaeta who dutifully slotted it past Andres Gudino with a quarter of an hour elapsed.

Cruz Azul steadied after that early set-back with Carlos Rotondi fizzing an effort just wide before Jorge Sanchez produced a strike of the highest order to restore parity. The right-back collected the ball at the top of the box and lashed a volley past Agustin Rossi to send the teams to the break locked at 1-1.

A tight half saw Flamengo eventually start to get on top and after a testing effort from substitute Gonzalo Plata flew narrowly wide, it was the playmaking prince De Arrascaeta who won things for the Brazilian side. The Uruguayan brushing aside the challenge of Willer Ditta, collecting a ricocheted effort off Piovi and slotting past Gudino from a tight angle in the 71st minute.

Cruz Azul pushed desperately for an equaliser, generating a series of late corners and half-chances. Angel Sepulveda and Gabriel Fernandez both came close in stoppage time. Fernandez headed just wide in the stoppage time but the finishing touch eluded them.

The match grew increasingly heated in the final minutes. Flamengo collected several yellow cards with Everton, de la Cruz and Alex Sandro going into the referee book. Cruz Azul also saw bookings, notably for Piovi and Ditta.

After the match, Flamengo forward Bruno Henrique praised his team's resilience. "The difficulties imposed by Cruz Azul were clear — they're a strong, organised side. But in the second half, we managed to work our quality and impose our game, which made the difference," he said.



Flamengo players celebrate with the trophy after winning the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Derby of the Americas match against Cruz Azul at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan. (Reuters)



Flamengo's Giorgian de Arrascaeta (centre) is challenged for the ball by Cruz Azul's Gonzalo Piovi (left) and Carlos Rodriguez. (AFP)



Cruz Azul's Luka Romero (left) clashes with Flamengo's Nicolas de la Cruz at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan. (Reuters)

Olwan: This is Jordan's best ever generation

Doha: Jordan entered their encounter with Egypt at the FIFA Arab Cup in Qatar with nothing on the line, having already done the hard work to secure six points and put themselves at the top of their group after their second-round match against Kuwait - guaranteeing them a spot in the quarter-finals.

So it was only natural that coach Jamal Sellami sent out an entirely different line-up to start against Egypt in the last round of the group stage, with none of the previous starters included.

Despite the sweeping changes, Jordan looked outstanding against Egypt. They served up one of the best displays of the tournament, scoring three goals and taking their tally to nine points - the culmination of a terrific effort that made them the only side to complete the group stage with a perfect record, during which they netted eight goals while conceding only two.

Ali Olwan, one of Jordan's standout names in recent years, is the tournament's top scorer with three goals. He spoke to FIFA after the match to explain how the Nashama are managing to perform so brilliantly without their regular starters and even without major stars like Mousa al-Tamari of Stade Rennais.

"None of our squad are here to make up the numbers," Olwan said. "Any player the coach chooses will give 100% for the Jordan badge. Today was a massive opportunity for every player to prove themselves. We topped the group, thank God, and what's to come will be even better."

Issam Smeeri, for his part, shed light on the secret to Jordan's strength. The players, he said, fight like soldiers on the pitch and are ready to sacrifice for their flag and for coach Jamal Sellami without hesitation, regardless of which starting XI he names. "In the Jordan shirt, we don't play with the mentality of a side made up of just 11 starters. We have the mentality that we're a team of 23," Smeeri said. "We're lucky to have coach Jamal Sellami with us, and he's happy to have this squad. All he has to do is choose the team he wants, and we're soldiers who will carry out our duties as required."

Saed al-Rosan, another Nashama star at the regional showpiece, underlined the squad's ambition in Qatar. "We've played three excellent matches, both in terms of performance and results, and we took the maximum points," he said. "We declared from day one of the tournament that we aim to win the title. Coach Jamal is doing a great job. He's instilled confidence in all the players, and everyone's fully ready, whether starting or coming off the bench."

Still, Olwan does not view the Nashama's mission as straight-forward. The pressure mounts with every new achievement, so that the expectations of success are now constant.