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SPORT



**FIFA ARAB CUP
QATAR 2025**



FOCUS

Team Lusail triumphs in Polo AlMarsa Qatar

HE SHEIKHA AL MAYASSA BINT HAMAD BIN KHALIFA AL-THANI PRESENTED THE TROPHIES



Winners pose on the podium after the conclusion of the Polo AlMarsa Qatar 2025 at Old Doha Port yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Polo AlMarsa Qatar 2025 concluded in spectacular fashion, marking a memorable finale to a landmark second day that drew more than 3,000 spectators at the Old Doha Port.

The awards ceremony which followed also delivered a major announcement for the sport's growing community in Qatar: Polo AlMarsa will officially return for its second edition in 2026.

Hosted by Qatar Polo Club, supported by The Social and Sport Contribution Fund (Daam), and presented by Qatar Calendar, Polo AlMarsa Qatar brought together sport, heritage, lifestyle and culture in a unique waterfront setting

that reflects both the elegance of polo and the modern vibrancy of Doha.

Driven by the Qatar-Argentina and Chile 2025 Year of Culture partnership, the event delivered a seamless blend of global equestrian excellence and cultural authenticity.

HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani presented the Championship Cup to the victorious Team Lusail, which featured Bader al-Marri, Beltran Lauhe, and Gaston Lauhe, who secured a 6-3 win.

HE Saad Ali al-Kharji, Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Chair of the Board of Directors of Visit Qatar awarded the runners-up trophy to Team Doha, which was represented by Abdulaziz al-Qahtani, Beltran Di Paola and Marcos Di Paola.

Before presenting the Championship Cup, HE Sheikha Al Mayassa took to the stage to honour the juniors, beginning with the Mini Mallet Cup awards.

Team Doha Juniors, which had Patrick Clarkin, Elizabeth Clarkin and Milo Mac Donough in their line-up claimed the Mini Mallet Cup with a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Team Lusail Juniors, which featured Rafa Mac Donough, Vicente Di Paola and Adino Donosa.

The day also celebrated outstanding equine performances. The Best Playing Pony from yesterday's Years of Culture Championship Cup 2025 was Attraccion Fatal, ridden by Pablo MacDonough of Team Buenos Aires.

For the Polo AlMarsa Championship Cup, the Best Playing Pony

honour went to Tumba, played by Beltran Lauhe. After the success of the event, Ashraf Abu Issa said: "The energy across Old Doha Port reflects everything we envisioned when we were planning for Polo AlMarsa. What began as an idea has now become a world-class platform that celebrates Qatar's culture, creativity, and sporting excellence. The event will return every year, and we hope it will continue to grow bigger and better, helping to develop the sport of polo and encourage the next generation of players."

Commenting on the spirit of cross-cultural collaboration that brought teams from three countries together, Mohammed al-Kuwari, Years of Culture Adviser on Latin America, said: "As we celebrate our 2025 partnerships with Argentina and Chile, this polo



Team Lusail scored a 6-3 win over Team Doha to claim the Championship Cup.



showcase holds special meaning. Polo's roots in Argentina and Chile and Qatar's equestrian heritage reflect shared traditions of horsemanship and craftsmanship. Sport has always been a powerful connector within Years of Culture. It brings people together naturally, creating instant common ground, honouring heritage, and sparking new friendships beyond borders."

FIFA INTERCONTINENTAL CUP

De Arrascaeta masterclass sends Flamengo to final



Flamengo's Bruno Henrique lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning the Challenger Cup defeating Pyramids at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday. (Reuters)

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Three days after they eased past Cruz Azul to win the FIFA Derby of the Americas, Flamengo have collected more silverware as they defeated Pyramids 2-0 to win the

FIFA Challenger Cup at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan. Victory has also secured the Rio giants a ticket to the final of the FIFA Intercontinental Cup against Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday.

Those who were wondering what Georgian de Arrascaeta would have for an encore after he

scored both goals in Flamengo's win over Cruz Azul three days ago didn't have to wait long. Midway through the opening term, the playmaking prince delivered a perfectly-weighted free-kick that was met by the head of Leo Pereira to power the Rio giants into the lead.

With the rare sight of rain tumbling down in Qatar, Pyramids had a huge chance to restore parity in stoppage time as Fiston Mayele found himself one-on-one with Agustin Rossi, only for the Argentinian shot-stopper to thwart him from close range. Seven minutes after the restart it was De Arras-



Flamengo's Leo Pereira scores their first goal against Pyramids yesterday. (Reuters)

caeta who also laid on the second with another delightful free-kick. This time, as he did to win the Copa Libertadores last month, it was Danilo on the end of it with a decisive header in a big moment in another late chance as Felipe Luis' side hung on to the 2-0 win that secures a heavyweight showdown against Paris Saint-Germain in next Wednesday's FIFA Intercontinental Cup final at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan.

Flamengo coach Felipe Luis praised his team's performance and looked ahead to the final against PSG. "The start of the game

was good, then we knew how to suffer when needed and achieved a deserved result. All opponents are different. But of course, PSG is the best team in the world. They showed that by winning the Champions League. They're in the tournament because they're the best, and with all humility in the world, we're going to try to win to make history," Luis said.

Flamengo defender Guillermo Varela added: "We didn't have much information about Pyramids, but they are a physically strong team. We controlled the game very well and decided it on set pieces."

CYCLING

Pogacar has his eyes on Tour de France, Paris-Roubaix and Milan-San Remo

AFP
Benidorm, Spain

Cycling superstar Tadej Pogacar of the Team UAE Emirates will try for a fifth Tour de France title in 2026 but is more excited by the two one-day Monuments that have so far eluded him; Paris-Roubaix and Milan San Remo.

The 27-year-old Slovenian was speaking yesterday at a pre-season training camp at Benidorm in Spain.

"I'm going to do Strade Bianche, Milan-San Remo, the Tour of Flanders, Paris-Roubaix, Liege-Bastogne-Liege, the Tour de Romandie, and the Tour de France. And then we'll see, that's already quite a lot," Pogacar said.

"If I could choose between a win at Roubaix or the Tour, I would choose Roubaix because I have al-

ready won the Tour four times," said Pogacar, who complained of feeling drained during the 2025 Tour.

"There is a bigger difference between zero and one than between four and five," he added.

Tour de France champion in 2020, 2021, 2024 and 2025, he can join an elite clique of five-time winners alongside Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault, Miguel Indurain and Jacques Anquetil next July.

"The Tour de France of course is the biggest race, everybody always arrives ready, teams always send their best team and you have to be super ready," he said.

"But if I won Roubaix and San Remo, I would feel sort of complete, but there's always something else, like The Vuelta, I haven't won that either," he said, while refusing to be drawn on his participation in the Spanish Tour for 2026.

Team UAE also confirmed that

last year's break-out rider Isaac del Toro would also race the Tour de France.

The Mexican burst on to the cycling scene last May when he came close to winning the Giro, finishing second to Simon Yates.

"The team's idea is for me to learn as much as possible alongside Tadej, whose level I want to reach one day," said Del Toro.

Pogacar spoke glowingly of Del Toro.

"Maybe he's going to be better than me one day. He has his own way, his own style, and I admire him as a rider and a person and hope he keeps going that way," said Pogacar

UAE Team Emirate - XRG team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar answers questions at a press conference after a training session in Spain yesterday. (AFP)



CRICKET

England 'must change mindset to salvage Ashes'

Retired fast bowler Mitchell Johnson questions England's tactics

Reuters
Perth

England need to alter their approach if they hope to claw their way back after their disastrous start to the Ashes series and avoid another drubbing, former Australia paceman **Mitchell Johnson** said.

England were beaten by eight wickets in both Perth and Brisbane, with Australia taking a 2-0 lead heading into the third test at the Adelaide Oval beginning on Wednesday.

The outlook appears grim for England, who last won the Ashes in 2015 and have suffered 5-0, 4-0 and 4-0 defeats in their last three series Down Under.

But Johnson said there was still hope for the beleaguered visitors.

"Conditions may well be different in Adelaide next week, where you don't generally see the same bounce and carry, which might suit England. We'll see spin come into it more..." Johnson wrote in a column in *The Times*.

"Australia are obviously in a very strong position but they won't be complacent... This series doesn't have the same feel as 2013-14, when Australia last won 5-0, but with (Pat) Cummins and (Nathan) Lyon coming back, their momentum is strong.

"But if England get it right, it's not like they can't come back. Perhaps too much psychological damage has already been done. I don't think it will be 5-0, but clearly the potential is there."

Johnson, who took 313 Test wickets in his career and was the bane of England's batting lineup in their 2013-14 Ashes whitewash, said there were positives that captain Ben Stokes and coach



Brandon McCullum could take from their losses.

Batter Joe Root scored an unbeaten 138 in the second Test to mark his first century in Australia in the longest format, while fast bowler Jofra Archer produced a fiery spell towards the end of the match, when victory was all but out of reach for England.

"It was by being adaptable that they (Root and Archer) were able to do what they did, and if they

take away anything from the last Test, they have to take that," the 44-year-old said.

"Whether they can genuinely adjust their plans now I'm not sure.

"Some of England's batting left you scratching your head. They have got the skills, no doubt.

"I don't know what conversations they will have behind closed doors, but they need to adjust tactics and mindset fast."

Khawaja fit for third Ashes Test, unfazed by future talk

Australia's Usman Khawaja has declared himself fit for the third Ashes Test against England next week, brushing aside speculation about his future and saying he will keep playing as long as he is valued by the team.

The left-handed batter, who will turn 39 during the Adelaide Test which starts on Wednesday, missed the pink-ball encounter against England due to a back problem, and was also unable to open in either of the innings in Perth last month.

"I could have retired two years ago, or at any time," Khawaja told reporters in Adelaide yesterday.

"I am always mindful of the future, I always have been. I am not here to hang on, I am just here to enjoy my cricket.

"As long as I am valued I am here, I am doing my job."

In Khawaja's absence, Travis Head and Jake Weatherald have been in fine form at the top of the order.

Head scored a match-winning 123 in Perth, while Weatherald contributed with a solid 72-run knock in the second Test.

"I've got to be totally honest, it doesn't really faze me," Khawaja said on the chances of his return to the playing XI.

"The older I have got, the more comfortable I have got with things that I can control and things that I cannot.

"And I feel really good. I am ready to go.

"The rest of it is not in my control.

"So we will see what happens," Khawaja said.

Australia lead the five-match series 2-0 and a win in Adelaide would secure the urn.

COMMENT

Hazlewood not done with Test cricket despite Ashes disappointment

Reuters
Sydney

Australia quick Josh Hazlewood intends to continue playing international cricket in all formats despite missing the entire Ashes series because of injury.

At 34, Hazlewood was one of a half dozen Australia players who were considered to be approaching the twilight, and maybe the end, of their test careers during the Ashes series.

Hazlewood's involvement ended up being stymied by a hamstring injury on the eve of the series, compounded by an Achilles problem as he returned to bowling with the squad.

Despite missing out on the series, Hazlewood said he was determined to continue to represent his country with both red ball and white.

"Yeah absolutely," he told Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*.

"My body still feels as strong as ever. It's just little things here and there that creep in. I'm still deter-

mined to play three formats as best I can.

"You're still going to miss the odd game here and there, no one can do it all, unless you're a batter, but I still enjoy all the different demands of the three formats.

"It keeps it fresh getting ready and preparing for each different format."

Having been ruled out of the last three Ashes Tests, Hazlewood will now turn his focus to getting fully match fit for Australia's Twenty20 World Cup campaign in India and Sri Lanka early next year.

"Once you're injured mid-series or just before a series starts, you're chasing your tail a lot of the time anyway," he added.

"I probably could have got back for one or two tests with the hamstring, but then you leave yourself quite vulnerable going into a test match on the back of not much.

"Every day you're not bowling is another day you've got to bowl to get back to where you were.

"Obviously things are easier when you're up and going and you've got some good work under you."

LEE STARS AS HURRICANES WIN FIRST WBBL TITLE

Hobart, Australia: Lizelle Lee smashed an unbeaten 77 off 44 balls to steer the Hobart Hurricanes to their first-ever WBBL cricket title over the Perth Scorchers in Hobart yesterday.

The former South African international hammered four sixes and 10 fours to power the Hurricanes to a dominant eight-wicket victory with five overs to spare.

Lee, who obtained Australian residency earlier this year, took the game away from the Scorchers with a 77-run partnership with Nat Sciver-Brunt as the Hurricanes cruised to victory before their home fans.

Sciver-Brunt made 35 off 27 balls before falling with the finish line in sight.

Player of the final Lee said: "The bowling has been incredible this whole season, I was just glad to back it up. I'm trying to have fun."

It was another overwhelming

victory for the Hurricanes over the Scorchers this season after they pulled off the biggest run chase in WBBL history, reeling in their target of 186 with five deliveries to spare.

The Hurricanes women's triumph comes after their men's team won last season's BBL title in Hobart. The Hurricanes crowned a magnificent season in the WBBL, finishing on top of the table to qualify for the final for the first time.

The Hurricanes, despite dropping seven catches, set up the win with the key wickets of Beth Mooney for 33 and Sophie Devine, who scored 34, to restrict the Scorchers to 137 for five off their 20 overs.

The dangerous Mooney, who slammed a 55-ball 75 when the sides met earlier this season, and 76 in Thursday's Challenger, was bowled by Heather Graham in a big scalp for the Hurricanes.

GOLF

Thompson, Hull help their teams shoot 55s at Grant Thornton

Reuters
Naples, Florida

A pair of teams with high-profile LPGA stars took down the scoring record at the Grant Thornton Invitational, as Lexi Thompson and Wyndham Clark, as well as Englishwoman Charley Hull and Michael Brennan, posted a 17-under-par 55 on Friday in Naples, Florida.

The three-day team event at Tiburon Golf Club begins with a scramble format, and the two leading duos weren't the only ones to take full advantage.

Lauren Coughlin and Andrew Novak are just two strokes back after a 15-under 57. Three more pairs shot 14-under 58: Nelly Korda and Denny McCarthy, Jennifer Kupcho and Chris Gotterup and Rose Zhang and Michael Kim.

Hull and Brennan combined for eagles on the par-5 sixth and 14th holes. Thompson and Clark also eagled No. 6 and carded their second at the par-4 10th when Clark smashed his tee shot to just off the green and Thompson holed the putt.

"I feel like we kind of have similar games to be honest," Clark said. "She hits it really far off the tee, and if one of us is in play, we're significantly past kind of the compet-

itors, and we have our advantage there. She's a great putter. Yeah, I mean, really I felt like our games complement each other perfectly, and I didn't think there was any flaws in her game."

"Grant Thornton does great things for this event," Thompson added. "To bring the PGA Tour and LPGA together, it's kind of what we want to end our year on, a nice, more relaxed tournament."

Hull was tinkering with her swing just before coming to the tournament to play with PGA Tour newcomer Brennan.

"It's quite funny because, actually, I was changing my swing last week, and I come on Tuesday and I

could not even keep the ball on the planet," Hull said. "So I was actually pretty nervous today. Actually, it worked out pretty well."

Coughlin and Novak made nine birdies in a row at Nos. 6-14 - not bad for a tandem that just met for the first time this week.

"I do like team golf," said Novak, who paired with Ben Griffin to win the Zurich Classic of New Orleans in April. "I think it's just a little bit different aspect to it. I've been lucky to have two good partners this year, and the vibes have been good during the tournament. We're just out there having a lot of fun, making birdies and not taking it too seriously, just doing our job."

Kupcho and Gotterup birdied the first 10 holes of their round, while Korda and McCarthy posted eagles at the par-5 first and 17th holes.

The format won't be this straightforward the rest of the way. The teams will play foursomes (alternate shot) on the third day and a modified fourball (best ball) on the final day.

This is the third year of the event. Defending champions Jake Knapp and Thailand's Patty Tavatanakit are in seventh at 13-under 59. Inaugural champs Jason Day of Australia and Lydia Ko of New Zealand are one behind them in a tie for eighth.



Lexi Thompson of the US looks over an upcoming chip shot on the 13th hole during the first round of the Grant Thornton Invitational 2025 at Tiburon Golf Club in Naples, Florida. (AFP)

FOCUS

Doha Equestrian Tour unveils official identity and logo

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Doha Equestrian Tour Organising Committee has unveiled the tour's official identity and logo, symbolising the 10 rounds that make up this year's edition and reflecting the event's deep connection to equestrian heritage and Doha's growing sporting excellence on the international stage.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalifa al-Attiyah, Executive Director of the Doha Equestrian Tour, said the new identity is rooted in a

strategic vision aimed at strengthening Qatar's presence on the global equestrian map.

"The Doha Equestrian Tour has consistently enriched the international equestrian calendar with high-quality competitions, reinforcing Qatar's position as a global sporting capital and a preferred destination for hosting major international championships," al-Attiyah said.

He added that Qatar's advanced infrastructure, including world-class venues such as Al Shaqab, plays a central role in the continued success of the tour.

The Doha Equestrian Tour



2026 will feature 10 international championships ranging from one to five star events, running from January 2 to April 4, with a total prize purse exceeding €10mn.

The series will open with the HH The Father Amir's Cup,

scheduled from January 2 to 31, comprising four rounds across 1 to 5-star categories.

This will be followed by the HH The Amir's Sword International Equestrian Festival, which runs from February 11 for four days and includes 1, 3 and 5-star competitions, along with dressage events.

The sixth stop on the calendar is the Al Shaqab International Show Jumping Championship (CHI), sponsored by Longines, to be held from February 18 to 21.

The event will feature show jumping, dressage and para-dressage competitions across 1, 4 and

5-star levels. Next is the Longines Global Champions Tour, scheduled from March 4 to 7, with 1, 3 and 5-star categories.

The organising committee also announced the introduction of three new championships for the 2026 edition: the Qatar Olympic Committee Cup, the Al Shaqab Cup and the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup.

The Qatar Olympic Committee Cup will serve as the eighth championship, running from March 11 for four days and featuring 1, 2 and 3-star competitions.

The Al Shaqab Cup, the ninth event on the tour, will take place

from March 26 over three days and will include 1 to 5-star competitions, as well as team events across various categories.

The Doha Equestrian Tour 2026 will conclude with the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup, scheduled from April 2 to 4, featuring one- to five-star competitions.

All competitions of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026 will be staged at Al Shaqab Equestrian Centre, one of the region's leading equestrian venues, renowned for its state-of-the-art infrastructure and facilities built to the highest international standards.

LA LIGA

Raphinha double stretches Barca's lead in Osasuna win

'A clean sheet gives stability to team and then the goals, they always come'

AFP
Barcelona

Raphinha hit a brace to give Barcelona a narrow 2-0 win over Osasuna yesterday and take them seven points clear at the top of La Liga.

The Brazilian winger broke the deadlock after 70 minutes with a fizzing strike from the edge of the box to earn Barca their seventh-straight top flight win.

Second place Real Madrid visit Alaves on Sunday, aiming to cut the gap on the champions back down to four points.

Barca lacked their usual sparkle but ground out their victory, keeping a first clean sheet in six matches across all competitions.

They also recorded a fifth victory in five games at their partially reopened Camp Nou home.

"(The win) has a lot of merit, they were well organised, it was hard to find a way through. With patience and a lot of possession, we finally did it," Barca defender Gerard Martin told Movistar.

"A clean sheet gives stability to the team and then the goals, they always come."

Ferran Torres, chosen to start over Robert Lewandowski after his hat-trick last weekend against Real Betis, might have sent Barca ahead early on but hooked high over the bar from Lamine Yamal's dangerous cross.

At the other end, Ante Budimir's low effort was fielded comfortably by Joan Garcia, with Osasuna looking to hit Barca on the counter. Yamal had a couple of drives beaten away in a mostly frustrating first-half for both the teenager and for Barca.



Barcelona's forward Raphinha celebrates with teammate Lamine Yamal after scoring his team's second goal during the La Liga match against Osasuna at Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

Torres headed home from Marcus Rashford's cross but the goal was disallowed for an offside in the build-up. The Spain international sent an acrobatic overhead effort inches wide, and Garcia denied Budimir with another fine save before the break.

Eventual breakthrough

Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera tipped a Rashford free-kick to safety early in the second half as Barca sought to extend their winning run.

They were having trouble breaking Osasuna down but found a way through when the excellent Pedri roamed forward and found Raphinha on the edge of the box to slam a shot into the bottom right corner.

Osasuna's Jorge Herrando, who was sent off on his debut for the club at the old Camp Nou in 2023, had a strike ruled out after Alejandro Catena collided with Barca goalkeeper Garcia.

Moments later, Raphinha tapped home at the back post after

Alejandro Catena deflected Jules Kounde's cross into the Brazilian's path with four minutes remaining.

Raphinha, who started the match out of position in a central attacking midfield role, was one of the club's key players last season as they won a domestic treble and, after a spell out injured, has made an impact on his return.

"We've got a lot of good players and Rapha, or whoever else plays inside, in the end they give us a lot of solutions in that position," added Martin.

SPOTLIGHT

Players must deliver after Agnelli's reject buyout bid: Juve coach

Reuters
Milan

Juventus manager Luciano Spalletti welcomed John Elkann and the Agnelli family's decision not to sell their majority stake in the Serie A club, and said it was now up to those on the football side to build a better future.

Yesterday, the Agnelli family's holding company Exor rejected an all-cash offer from crypto firm Tether to buy its entire stake in Italy's most successful club. "Juve has been part of my family for 102 years," Exor CEO Elkann said in a video on Juventus' website.

"Juve is part of a much, much larger family, the Bianconeri family, made up of millions of fans in Italy and around the world who love Juve the way you love the people closest to you.

"It is with this passion in mind, with this love story that has united us for more than a century, that as a family we continue to support our team and look to the future to build a winning Juve."

Juventus won the last of their 36 top-flight titles in 2020 - their ninth consecutive Scudetto triumph - and have since failed to really challenge for the Scudetto, overtaken by the likes of Inter and AC Milan, along with Napoli.

Spalletti joined the club at the end of October and is the fifth manager appointed since that last success, but there is little

sign of an upturn in fortunes with Juve currently seventh in the standings and eight points off leaders Milan.

"Even though I've only been here a short time, I think I can include the whole squad in this conversation," Spalletti told a press conference ahead of today's game at Bologna.

"It's gratifying once again to hear the strength and passion that John Elkann and the family have for this club.

"It's clear that it's up to us to give substance and solidity to that passion, by honouring the past and building a future at the same level, or even better."

Spalletti has signed a contract until the end of the season, and if the title appears to be slipping out of reach, securing a place in next season's Champions League would likely be the minimum required to earn a renewal.

Since Spalletti's arrival, Juventus have won two of five league matches to slide further away from the summit, but the manager refused to believe he did not have a strong enough squad to turn things around.

"No one will convince me that these players aren't good. On the contrary, I'm convinced we will overcome these limitations," Spalletti said.

"I accepted this role because I believe in it. I've been doing this job for years and I know it isn't easy. I'm obsessed with the idea of being able to change and improve this group."

Bologna are in fifth place, two points ahead of Juve.

France set up warm-ups with Brazil, Colombia

France will play Brazil and Colombia in the United States in March as part of their build-up for the 2026 World Cup finals, coach Didier Deschamps said yesterday. "It's always good to go the place where the event takes place, and it'll be very good to play Brazil and Colombia," Deschamps said. France will take on five-time world champions Brazil in Boston, where Les Bleus are likely to be based for next year's tournament, and play Colombia in Washington. France were finalists in the last World Cup in Qatar and champions in 2018 in Russia. They have been drawn in Group I along with Senegal, Norway and the winner of a play-off involving Iraq, Bolivia and Suriname. Deschamps will announce his World Cup squad in mid-May. He will step down after the tournament, with Zinedine Zidane the favourite to take over as France coach.

Algeria include son of Zinedine Zidane in AFCON squad

Johannesburg: Goalkeeper Luca Zidane, a son of France football icon Zinedine Zidane, was named yesterday in the Algeria squad for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), which kicks off on December 21 in Morocco. The 27-year-old plays for Spanish second-tier club Granada and represented France at youth level before switching his international allegiance to Algeria. He debuted for Algeria in a World Cup qualifier against Uganda two months ago and is one of three goalkeepers chosen. The others are Oussama Benbot from USM Alger and Anthony Mandrea of Caen. Speaking after his debut, Zidane said: "It is an honour for me, and I will give 100% to make the Algerian people proud." "I'm sure the players will arrive highly motivated and ready to play in this AFCON," said Algeria coach and former Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic after announcing the squad. "The main objective is to get past the first round... with the ambition to go as far as possible in the tournament." Algeria start their Group E campaign against Sudan on December 24, then face Burkina Faso and Equatorial Guinea.

BUNDESLIGA

Terrier returns Leverkusen to fourth

AFP
Berlin

A backheel goal from Martin Terrier set Bayer Leverkusen on the way to a 2-0 win over derby rivals Cologne yesterday, returning the hosts to fourth in the Bundesliga.

Terrier's no-look backheel put Leverkusen in front after 66 minutes, with home captain Robert Andrich heading in from a corner shortly after.

The 2023-24 champions had fallen to sixth after Hoffenheim and Eintracht Frankfurt won earlier yesterday but will finish the weekend in the top four.

The derby between the Rhine neighbours had an uneasy atmosphere. Hundreds of ultras from both sides boycotted the match, with a Cologne fan group complaining of "inappropriate" and "very intense" police checks, according to German sports magazine Kicker.

Just after halftime, Malik Tillman had a golden chance to put Leverkusen in front when one-on-one with Cologne goalie Marvin Schwabe but blasted over the bar.

The hosts broke through in spectacular fashion when Terrier somehow connected with a misplaced pass, looping it over the 'keeper.

Andrich's header gave the hosts breathing space, putting Leverkusen on track for victory.

Earlier yesterday, a brilliant solo goal from Ritsu Doan took Eintracht Frankfurt to a hard-fought 1-0 home win over Augsburg. The victory sent Frankfurt, who have struggled to manage domestic and European commitments this season in just their second Champions League campaign, into sixth.

"You can see we lack a bit of freshness," Frankfurt coach Dino Toppmoller told reporters, adding: "The last six months have been very stressful.

"Today's performance was one driven by great willpower."

Augsburg had two strikes chalked off by VAR early against a shaky Frankfurt defence who had conceded 15 goals in their past five games. Midway through the second-half, Japan international Doan weaved through four Augsburg defenders before hitting a deflected shot past Finn Dahmen.

Augsburg's American defender Noahkai Banks looked to have levelled things up in the 87th minute

but his goal was struck off for a narrow offside.

Elsewhere, Hoffenheim stayed fifth thanks to a commanding 4-1 home win over Hamburg, their sixth victory in their past eight league games.

Goals from Grischka Proemel, Ozan Kabak, Tim Lemberle and Fisnik Asllani took Hoffenheim to victory, while Hamburg's Rayan Philippe scored a late consolation goal before missing a stoppage time penalty. Christian Eriksen sparked Wolfsburg to a 3-1 win away at Borussia Moenchengladbach to continue the Wolves' recent resurgence.

The former Manchester United and Tottenham midfielder guided in an expert cross which led to a Mohammed Amoura goal and created Patrick Wimmer's second with a no-look pass inside four minutes midway through the first half.

Dangling near the relegation spots for much of the season, Wolfsburg have claimed seven points in their last three matches to climb to 13th.

St Pauli won for the first time since September with a 2-1 home victory over Heidenheim, despite going down to 10 men just before halftime.



Bayer Leverkusen's forward Martin Terrier celebrates scoring the opening goal during the Bundesliga match against Cologne in Leverkusen yesterday. (AFP)

HORSE RACING

Arman wins Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Bin Thani Trophy

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Wathnan Racing's Arman wrapped up an exciting evening at Al Rayyan Race-course yesterday, clinching the mile contest for three-year-old+ Local Purebred Arabians by a short head to claim the Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Bin Thani Trophy.

Trained by Alban de Mieulle and ridden by James Doyle, the victory highlighted the horse's determination in a tightly contested feature race. HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani in the presence of Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Vice-Chairman Rashid bin Nasser Sraiya al-Kaabi, presented the trophy to Ali bin Yousef al-Kubaisi, who received it on behalf of Wathnan Racing.

Earlier, in the Grade 2 Qatar National Day Trophy RB Mary Lylah produced a devastating turn of foot in the home straight. The five-year-old mare surged clear under Doyle to win by six lengths in the four-year-old+ Purebred Arabians contest. HE Sheikh Hamad presented the trophy to al-Kubaisi, representing Wathnan Racing. The victory marked a commanding performance for trainer Alban de Mieulle and secured a consecutive retention of the title, following last year's success with Jabalah.

During the nine-race meet, Simca Mille made a stylish return to Qatar by winning the QA Gr 3 Al Safliya Cup, a 2,350m contest for four-year-old+ Thoroughbreds. Drawn barrier 1, the six-year-old chestnut displayed composure and strength to win by 1½ lengths under Doyle, capping a quick-fire double for the connections.

Doha Bu Thaila claimed the Local Thoroughbred Open Race for three-year-old+ over 2,000m, holding off rivals with a decisive 1½-length victory under Soufiane Saadi. Abdulrahman bin Mansour al-Mansour, QREC Board Member, presented the Al Halul Island Cup to Ali bin Yousef al-Kubaisi on behalf of Wathnan Racing.

The four-year-old bay filly preserved the winning combination that had triumphed in the same race last year with Equinoxe.



HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani presented the trophies to the connections of Wathnan Racing's RB Mary Lylah, which won the Qatar National Day Trophy.



Wathnan Racing's Arman is ridden to victory by James Doyle. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm

Thor's Hammer returned to winning form in the Al Busayyir Cup, a 1,600m Thoroughbred Conditions contest for three-year-old+. Drawn widest, the four-year-old bay gelding tracked the leaders before producing a late surge to win by a short head, with jockey Alberto Sann completing a double for the evening. Ahmed

Amanalla al-Sheebani, QREC Deputy CEO, presented the trophy to Ali bin Hamad al-Attiah on behalf of Al Rufaa Racing.

In the Falcon Cup, veteran Taxiwalla retained his title in the 3YO+ Thoroughbred Conditions sprint over 1,200m. The eight-year-old kicked clear in the final 200m under Lukas Delozier to win by 1½



HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani in the presence of Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club Vice-Chairman Rashid bin Nasser Sraiya al-Kaabi, presented the trophy to Ali bin Yousef al-Kubaisi, who received it on behalf of Wathnan Racing after Arman won the Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Bin Thani Trophy.



James Doyle rides RB Mary Lylah to Qatar National Day Trophy.

lengths, taking his season tally to two victories from three starts and his career total to 21 wins. Sheikh Mohammed bin Faleh al-Thani presented the trophy to Engineer Osama Omer al-Dafea, owner and trainer of Taxiwalla.

Other results from the day included Taftan winning the Purebred Arabian

Maiden Plate (1,600m) by 4¼ lengths with Pierre Charles Boudot aboard; Labwa De Carrere (FR) taking the Purebred Arabian Handicap (75-95, 1,600m) by a head under Fayos Martin Borja; and Taymoor Al Shahania claiming the Purebred Arabian Conditions (1,200m) by a neck with Alberto Sanna in the saddle.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Slot says 'no issue to resolve' with Salah

Salah, brought off as a substitute in the first half, set up the Ekitike's second goal

AFP
Liverpool

Arne Slot said there was "no issue to resolve" after Mohamed Salah returned for Liverpool's 2-0 win against Brighton yesterday - a week after he took aim at the club in a fiery interview.

Hugo Ekitike scored at Anfield after 46 seconds and Salah, brought off the substitutes' bench in the first half, set up the Frenchman's second goal after the break. Salah, 33, last week accused the faltering Premier League champions of throwing him "under the bus" after he was left on the bench for the 3-3 draw at Leeds - the third match in a row that he had not started.

The Egyptian also said that he had no relationship with Liverpool manager Slot when he spoke to reporters after the match at Elland Road. He was omitted from the midweek Champions League trip to Inter Milan, which Liverpool won 1-0, and was the subject of intense scrutiny in the build-up to Saturday's home game. Slot said at Friday's pre-match press conference that he would speak to the forward later in the day, adding: "I have no reasons (for) not wanting him to stay."

Speaking to reporters after the win against Brighton, the Dutchman said there was "no issue to resolve" with Salah, whose corner was headed home by Ekitike in the 60th minute. "For me he's now the same as any other player," he said. "You talk to your players if you're happy or unhappy with things, but there's nothing for me to talk about after what happened against Leeds, after the game."



Liverpool's manager Arne Slot gives instructions to Mohamed Salah during a break in play in the Premier League match against Brighton in Liverpool. (Reuters)

Slot confirmed that the winger was left out of the squad for the fixture in Italy due to his interview but defended his approach. "The question is always, and everybody has a different opinion about that, should he be (left out) once, twice, three times, four times, four months, 12 years? Every manager makes different decisions in that, but he wasn't involved in the game against Milan

and I spoke to him yesterday.

"And I think, as I usually never say anything about (what) we talk about, I'm not going to make an exception now, but I think actions speak louder than what has been said. He was in the squad again and when I had to make my first substitutions, I brought him in. And he performed as I think every fan, including me, would like him to

perform today."

Salah now has 277 goal involvements for Liverpool in the Premier League - 188 goals and 89 assists - a new record by a player for a single club in the competition, overtaking Wayne Rooney's mark for Manchester United. Salah, who signed a new two-year contract in April, now departs for the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). The length of his absence depends on how far Egypt go in the competition in Morocco, with the final on January 18.

The forward, who has been linked with a move to the wealthy Saudi Pro League, had invited his family to the Brighton game as speculation swirled over his future. Slot laughed off a question about whether the match could have been Salah's last for the club.

"He wasn't the only player who walked around the pitch thanking the fans, because the fans deserved a thank you from us," he said. He added: "Mo is going to go to the AFCON now, I hope he's going to do very well, and in the meantime we have to play here without him, with not that many players available at the moment."

Salah, third in Liverpool's all-time scoring charts with 250 goals, has won two Premier League titles and one Champions League crown during his spell on Merseyside.

He scored 29 Premier League goals to win the Premier League Golden Boot last season as Liverpool romped to a 20th English league title, but has managed just four league goals during the current campaign. Yesterday's victory for Liverpool was their first at Anfield since November 4 and lifts Slot's men to sixth in the table, easing the pressure on the beleaguered coach.

Maresca hails Palmer as Chelsea return to winning ways

London: Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca insisted his side were a better team for having Cole Palmer back after the forward scored on his first Stamford Bridge start in almost four months as the Blues beat Everton 2-0 to move back into the Premier League's top four. "We said many times with Cole (Palmer) we are a better team," Maresca said. "Unfortunately he was out for many games for us, but now he's back and for sure he will help us."

The injury-plagued attacking midfielder missed Chelsea's loss away to Atalanta in the Champions League on Tuesday as part of his recovery from a two-month spell on the sidelines. Palmer was initially troubled by a groin problem and then fractured his toe after stubbing it on a door at home.

The 23-year-old made his first start for the Blues since September in last weekend's goalless draw at Bournemouth. The England international broke the deadlock against Everton in the 21st minute at Stamford Bridge.

Malo Gusto played in Palmer with a fine pass and he beat fellow England international Jordan Pickford at the goalkeeper's near post.

Everton dominated possession, with Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez saving well from Jack Grealish.

All of Everton's pressure failed to yield an equaliser and Chelsea, against the run of play, doubled their lead in first half stoppage-time when a counter-attack ended with Gusto turning in a cut-back from Pedro Neto.

Everton, eighth in the table despite this loss, had a chance to make it 2-1 when Carlos Alcaraz curled in a cross to the back post only for the unmarked Grealish to divert the ball well wide.

LIGUE 1

Teenage pair Ndjantou and Mbaye star as PSG beat Metz to go top

AFP
Paris

Teenagers Quentin Ndjantou and Ibrahim Mbaye starred as Paris Saint-Germain returned to the top of Ligue 1 with a hard-fought 3-2 win at lowly Metz.

Ndjantou scored his first goal for the club while Mbaye managed two assists, with Portuguese forward Goncalo Ramos

and substitute Desire Doue adding the other goals for PSG.

Four days before PSG play the Intercontinental Cup final against Brazil's Flamengo in Qatar, coach Luis Enrique rested a host of players for the trip to northeast France. Even though Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele was not deemed well enough to play after an illness, Luis Enrique left Doue, Bradley Barcola, Joao Neves, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier on the bench.

Instead, 17-year-old Mbaye and 18-year-old Ndjantou were picked either side of Ramos in attack, and they did not disappoint. After a quiet opening, the game burst into life in the final 15 minutes of the first half.

Ramos gave PSG the lead when he headed home a cross from Lee Kang-in on 31 minutes. On 39 minutes Ndjantou slid home Mbaye's devilish cross into the six-yard box. Just three minutes later, Jessy Deminguet lashed home for Metz from

outside the area after a ricochet fell into his path. Danish goalkeeper Jonathan Fischer denied Ramos with a smart save to keep Metz in the game after the break. Habib Diallo had a chance to equalise just before the hour mark but shinned his volley from the edge of the box wide of the upright.

Doue seemed to have sealed the victory for PSG when he raced clear from his own half, released by Mbaye, as Metz were caught pushing up at a corner. Doue ran 70 yards before calmly slotting past Fischer.

A week after scoring his first goal of the season against Rennes, Mbaye hit the woodwork on 71 minutes. Georgiy Tsitaishvili gave Metz hope nine minutes from time with a curling effort from outside the box, but PSG held on.

Lens can return to the Ligue 1 summit if they beat Nice - who have lost eight straight games in all competitions - today. Earlier in the day, Rennes moved up to fifth with a 3-1 come-from-behind victory over Brest.