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SPORT

CRICKET

‘Awesome’ Australia dominate to win Ashes against ‘hurting’ England

Page 2

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Gharafa aim to ‘revive’ chances against Wahda

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Al Gharafa will have to be at their best if they are to stop Al Wahda in their AFC Champions League Elite group tie at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium today.

Al Gharafa sit ninth in the standings with just three points while UAE's Al Wahda have already confirmed their pre-quarter-finals spot.

Al Gharafa head coach Pedro Martinez is wary of the challenge. "We are facing a very important match. We are targeting victory to revive our chances of qualifying for the pre-quarter-finals," says Martinez.

"Our preparations went smoothly. The players are in good technical condition and their level is better than before the Arab Cup break," he said.

Al Gharafa last savoured victory in round two match and will have no margin for error against Al Wahda.

They are three points behind eighth-placed Al Ittihad Club and a fourth defeat in a row could result in their final two matches being reduced to meaningless affairs.

Only Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal have performed better than Al Wahda this season and the UAE

side will be determined to secure a fourth consecutive victory.

It will mean equalling their best ever winning run in the AFC Champions League and Al Wahda will fancy their chances against an Al Gharafa side who have been unable to translate their domestic form onto the continental stage.

"The match against Al Gharafa will be tough. They are a strong team, top the Qatari league, and have outstanding players.

They will push hard to keep their qualification hopes alive," head coach of Al Wahda Demis Teixeira said.

Al Duhail vs Tractor

Tractor will confirm their round of 16 spot with victory against Al Duhail when the sides meet in the AFC Champions League Elite group match at the At Yadegar-e-Emam Stadium in Tabriz today.

Iran's Tractor is third in the West Zone standings with 11 points, four ahead of sixth-placed Al Duhail of Qatar.

Having opened their campaign with two draws, a three-match winning run means Tractor are within touching distance of the round of 16 and they will aim to maximise home ground advantage against Al Duhail.

Defensive resilience has been the back bone of their campaign,



Al Gharafa's Yacine Brahimi warms up during a training session in Doha yesterday, on the eve of the AFC Champions League Elite match against UAE's Al Wahda.

with Tractor having kept four clean sheets but they are winless in their last two meetings with Al Duhail. Al Duhail kept their

hopes alive with a stunning 4-2 win against Saudi Arabia's Al Ittihad Club on Matchday Five but will face a stiff test against a con-



Al Gharafa head coach Pedro Martinez (right) during a training session.

fident Tractor. Their away form on the continent has been poor, with three defeats in their last four matches and walking away empty handed will leave them in a perilous position.

Djamal Belmadi, head coach of Al Duhail, underlined the importance of victory against Tractor.

"It will be a difficult match against a strong opponent, as is always the case in the AFC Champions League," Belmadi said.

"They are still unbeaten in the competition and have conceded very few goals. We have a clear objective and we must stay focused to achieve it."

PREMIER LEAGUE

Villa beat Man Utd 2-1 to boost title bid

ROGERS' GOALS PROPEL ASTON VILLA TO SEVENTH WIN IN ROW

AFP
Birmingham

Aston Villa stepped up their unexpected Premier League title challenge as Morgan Rogers' brilliant brace sealed a 2-1 win against Manchester United yesterday.

Unai Emery's side took the lead through Rogers' stunning strike late in the first half at Villa Park.

Matheus Cunha levelled for United moments later but Rogers bagged his sixth goal in his last six league appearances after the interval to clinch Villa's 10th successive victory in all competitions.

Unai Emery's third-placed side are just three points adrift of leaders Arsenal and one behind second-placed Manchester City as they chase a first English title since 1981.

Villa are on their best winning run in all competitions since 1914, when they secured 11 successive victories. They have won seven consecutive top-flight matches for the first time since 1989-90, when they finished second under Graham Taylor.

Villa's ascent into the title race is even more remarkable as it comes after their worst start to a league campaign for 28 years, featuring just two points and one goal scored in their opening five matches.

Emery has turned Villa Park into a fortress, with just one Premier League home defeat in 2025, fewer than any other team.

Arsenal have already lost there this season and even United, beaten just once in their previous 26 trips to Villa, were unable to derail Emery's title charge.

Seventh-placed United's sec-



Aston Villa's Morgan Rogers celebrates scoring against Manchester United at Villa Park in Birmingham yesterday. (AFP)

ond defeat in their last 11 league matches left them winless in their last two games after the 4-4 draw with Bournemouth on Monday.

Adding to Ruben Amorim's problems, United captain Bruno Fernandes was forced off at half-time with an apparent hamstring issue. Fernandes' injury couldn't have come at a worse time for Amorim, who was without seven players against Villa.

Harry Maguire, Matthijs de Ligt and Kobbie Mainoo were injured, Casemiro was suspended, while Amad Diallo, Bryan Mbeumo and Noussair Mazraoui are at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Fernandes recently claimed United "wanted me to go" when Al Hilal made a bid for him in the summer.

The Portugal midfielder rejected the switch to Saudi Arabia, but

United will experience what life without their influential skipper is like if Fernandes is sidelined for a prolonged spell.

Benjamin Sesko should have put United in front after racing into the Villa area, but he hesitated, allowing Emiliano Martinez time to dash off his line and block the Slovenian's shot.

Villa took the lead with a perfectly crafted counter-attack in the 45th minute.

John McGinn's pin-point pass sent Rogers surging away down the left flank and the England midfielder glided past Leny Yoro to curl a brilliant finish into the far corner from just inside the area.

Matty Cash gifted United their equaliser on the stroke of half-time, the defender dawdling in possession as Patrick Dorgu pounced to tee up Cunha for a clinical finish from an acute angle.

Losing Fernandes for the second half was a hammer blow and the irrepressible Rogers restored Villa's advantage in the 57th minute.

Showing more desire than Yoro, Rogers pounced on a loose ball in the United area and guided a predatory finish past Senne Lammens from 12 yards. Emery revelled in the moment, roaring in delight as he threw his jacket in the air in celebration.

The Spaniard's joy was nearly curtailed immediately, but Martinez saved from Diogo Dalot and Dorgu to preserve Villa's lead.

Cunha squandered an even better chance, heading wide from Dorgu's cross.

Amorim sent on Jack Fletcher, the son of former United midfielder Darren Fletcher, for his debut, but the teenager's first game was destined to end in defeat. Yesterday's win was Villa's seventh straight Premier League victory.

Qatar grab four medals in Arab Shooting and Airgun Championships



Qatar's shooters secured four medals - two silver and two bronze - to start their campaign in the Arab Shooting and Airgun Championships at the National Olympic Complex in Muscat, Oman. The championship features 141 marksmen representing 14 countries. Qatar's Abdulrahman al-Sulaiti won silver in the 10m airgun individual youth category, while Ritaj al-Yafai claimed silver in the 10m airgun individual junior women's category. Khalid al-Sharshani won bronze in the 10m airgun individual men's category and the women's team comprised of Maha al-Ali, Dalal al-Qubaisi and Fatima al-Abdulrahman also claimed the 10m airgun bronze medal. The Qatari shooting team is participating in the championship with a delegation of 17 shooters competing in the rifle and pistol events. The delegation is headed by Executive Director of the Qatar Shooting and Archery Federation Abdulaziz Mohammed al-Aji.

SPOTLIGHT

Australia crush England to retain Ashes in Adelaide

In just a matter of 11 days, global cricketing powerhouse Australia take unassailable 3-0 lead

Reuters
Adelaide

Australia swept to an 82-run win in the third Ashes Test at Adelaide Oval yesterday to retain the urn with two matches to spare and leave England facing recriminations over another failed campaign.

Chasing a world record 435 runs to win, England battled doggedly on day five but folded for 352, with left-arm quick Mitchell Starc taking three wickets and Scott Boland the last dismissal of Josh Tongue before tea.

“Three-nil is hugely satisfying for many reasons but particularly with how the chat before the series was how equally poised it was going to be,” Australia captain Pat Cummins, who took six wickets on his return from a back injury, told reporters

“This group’s amazing at just cracking on.”

Much of the talk in the build-up to the Ashes had been the age profile of the Australia squad but Starc said the veterans had proved their worth.

“We do laugh at some of the comments that get back to us about how old we are,” the 35-year-old added.

“I’m sure experience plays a part going through your highs and lows.... That plays a big part in all of this.”

After eight-wicket defeats in Perth and Brisbane, England have now lost the Ashes in three matches for the fourth consecutive tour, while losing 16 of their last 18 Tests in the country.

Though two Tests remain, the latest surrender may top the previous tours for sheer disappointment.

There were expectations of a genuine contest, fighting words from England captain Ben Stokes, and hope that “Bazball” might win the urn in Australia for the first time since 2010/11.

All that was swept aside in Adelaide where England ditched their trademark aggression, reverted to



Australia's Pat Cummins (right) shakes hands with England captain Ben Stokes on the final day of the third Ashes Test at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide yesterday. (AFP)

more traditional Test batting and were still beaten convincingly.

“We obviously came here with a goal in mind and we haven’t been able to achieve it. It hurts and it sucks,” said England skipper Stokes.

“They’ve been able to outdo us on a much higher level... I thought we did incredibly well to take us where we did in this fourth innings.

“We couldn’t do what we came here to do but there was some good stuff to come out of this game.”

On day five, still needing 228 runs to win, England’s hopes were pinned on all-rounder Will Jacks and wicketkeeper Jamie Smith after they resumed on 207 for six.

Jacks turned his ankle when pushing off his crease for a run but battled on for 40 minutes until rain halted play.

England fans cheered but it was just a passing squall, the ground soon bathed in sunshine.

The Surrey duo brought up a fifty-run partnership with the old ball and were soon spared spinner Nathan Lyon, who came off with a

hamstring injury after cutting off a four in the field.

When the second new ball came, Smith attacked with gusto, smashing both Pat Cummins and Starc for back-to-back fours.

But with the deficit trimmed to 150 runs, he threw the bat at a Starc delivery for a third time in succession and was caught for 60 by a back-peddalling Cummins at mid-on.

Jacks played a steadier hand with tailender Carse, who finished 39 not out and hung tough with the all-rounder for 52 runs.

Home fans shifted uncomfortably in their seats as the pair reduced the deficit to under 100 runs but Starc returned and Labuschagne flew in the slips to snuff out the danger.

Jacks, on 47, drove at a Starc ball that moved away off the seam and Labuschagne dived to his left for another terrific one-handed catch, having removed Ollie Pope with a screamer in the slips on day four.

Jofra Archer then tried to slog Starc but sent the ball down the

throat of Jake Weatherald at deep point to leave England one wicket from defeat, before Boland had Tongue sending another slips catch to Labuschagne.

Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey was named Man of the Match for a first-innings 106 and 72 in the second, while Head set up the victory with 170 in the third innings, his fourth consecutive test ton at Adelaide Oval.

“If he wasn’t before, he’s the king of Adelaide,” Starc said of Head, who also scored a match-winning 123 in Perth.

“He’s not going to have to pay for another drink (here). I don’t know he does it but jeez, it’s bloody good to watch.”

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 371 and 349 (Head 170, Carey 72, Tongue 4-70) **beat England 286 and 352** (Crawley 85, Smith 60, Jacks 47, Starc 3-42, Cummins 3-48, Lyon 3-77) **by 82 runs**

Man of the Match: Alex Carey
Next Test: Melbourne, Dec 26

ASHES DEFEAT HERALDS END OF ENGLAND’S BAZBALL ERA



England head coach Brendon McCullum talks to the press following the third Ashes Test at Adelaide Oval yesterday. (Reuters)

Adelaide: It was a wild ride while it lasted but the ‘Bazball’ revolution that enlivened English cricket for three years collapsed in 11 days on Australian soil in an Ashes defeat as harrowing as any in the modern era. Bazball’s champions, coach Brendon ‘Baz’ McCullum and captain Ben Stokes, may argue otherwise and claim England’s death-or-glory style can be retooled and rise again.

In reality, it is unlikely to survive the bitter post-mortem that looms at the end of a series that had promised so much and has, to date, yielded so little.

Losing the urn in three Tests is hardly rare for touring England squads, with the previous three series in Australia all going the same way.

But this failure will feel particularly grievous for fans on both sides who held expectations of a genuine contest.

Pre-series, England supporters were buoyed by the undeniable talent in the squad and lapped up players’ pledges that, this time, things would be different.

They were asked to believe that England had it all in hand, that a solitary warm-up hit against the England Lions in the lead-up to the series-opener in Perth was all that was needed to be battle-ready for their bid to wrest back the urn from the world’s top-ranked test nation.

Former England players who questioned the light preparations were labelled ‘has-beens’ by Stokes, who later apologised for using the term while dismissing their concerns.

Now 3-0 down in the Ashes after yesterday’s 82-run loss at Adelaide Oval, England’s casual build-up, lack of match practice between the Tests and long break in the beach resort of Noosa Heads will seem like hubris to some supporters.

‘RUN TOWARD THE DANGER’ McCullum often described England’s philosophy as “run toward the danger” but refused to countenance any criticism after each setback in Perth and Brisbane. For McCullum, England’s planning was beyond reproach - that is until the moment the urn was gone yesterday when he finally conceded that mistakes had been made.

McCullum said, correctly, that England had been beaten with bat, ball and in the field.

What was left unsaid was that they had squandered possibly their best chance to take down Australia, an ageing side robbed of their captain and pace ace Pat Cummins for two Tests, Josh Hazlewood for the series and Steve Smith in Adelaide.

Having once held ambitions of becoming the first touring team to win the Ashes in Australia since 2010-11, England are now reduced to the much humbler aim of winning a first Test match in the country in 15 years.

The last two days at Adelaide Oval showed Australia were vulnerable and that England could be competitive against a world-class attack if enough players executed their skills and were flexible to deal with changing match situations.

Opener Zak Crawley played his finest innings in Australia when he patiently saw off the new ball to score 85 in the fourth innings. Will Jacks soaked up 137 balls for his 47 runs before falling to a good ball from left-arm maestro Mitchell Starc.

However, other players, like Ollie Pope and Harry Brook, who was bowled by spinner Nathan Lyon trying to reverse-sweep, have appeared incapable of adapting to Australian conditions and learning on the run. Clearly Bazball has been laid to rest in Adelaide.

WHAT THEY SAID AS AUSTRALIA RETAIN ASHES WITH WIN IN ADELAIDE TEST

“It feels pretty awesome. It wasn’t easy today, but we got it done. It’s an excited changing room.”

- Australia captain Pat Cummins. “They made us work for it. A bit of a flat wicket and they played pretty well but another Ashes win and it’s been a great atmosphere all week, all series.”

- Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc “A little bit of nerves there with some really good batting by Jamie Smith and Will Jacks. We held firm as we have been all series.”

- Australia batsman Marnus Labuschagne

“The Australian team have been able to execute things on a much more consistent basis than us, with the ball, with the bat and in the field. They’ve been able to outdo us on a much higher level.”

- Stokes on how Australia dismantled England in just 11 days of cricket

“We know England are such a good cricket team and we’re going to be challenged right to the end today it was a real grind.”

- Australia’s player of the match Alex Carey “Having the immediate family here to look up at the heavens and score a hundred was

something special.”

- Carey, whose father died in September “A moment Scott Boland will never forget. He goes down in history as the man who took the wicket to win the Ashes. That is a special moment for any player and any team.”

- Former England captain Alastair Cook commenting on TV as the final wicket fell

“It has been a thoroughly professional performance. Australia have out-thought England in many situations. You have got to take your hat off.”

- Former England spinner Phil Tufnell

FOCUS

Latham and Conway hit hundreds again as New Zealand sense victory

Reuters
Mount Maunganui

New Zealand openers Tom Latham and Devon Conway entered the record books yesterday by smashing their second hundreds of the match to help set West Indies an unlikely victory target of 462 on day four of the third and final Test in Mount Maunganui.

It was the first time in a Test match that a team’s opening batters had each hit centuries in both innings. Latham had chalked up 137 and Conway 227 in the first innings. West Indies, who trail 1-0 in the three-Test series, finished the day on 43 for no loss - still 419 behind their improbable target. Brandon King was batting on 37, while John Campbell was on two.

West Indies resumed on 381-6 and were all out for 420 in reply to New Zealand’s first-innings tally of 575-8 declared. Latham and Conway, who forged a mammoth stand of 323 in the first innings, once again punished a West Indies attack depleted by a mid-match injury to fast bowler Kemar Roach.

Kavem Hodge finally ended the opening partnership at 192 when he had Conway caught by Jayden Seales for 100, a fluent knock that



New Zealand’s Devon Conway (left) and Tom Latham touch gloves during day four of the third Test against West Indies at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday. (AFP)

included eight fours and three sixes. Hodge and Seales combined again to remove New Zealand captain Latham, whose 101 included nine fours and two sixes.

Kane Williamson made 40 not out and Rachin Ravindra smashed four sixes in his unbeaten 46 before New Zealand declared their second innings on 306-2.

“It’s just making sure we got enough time to bowl them out and then make sure we got some runs on the board that we feel comfortable enough...” New Zealand batting coach Luke Ronchi said on the timing of their declaration.

“We just need to make sure that we bowl the way we know we can bowl and trust ourselves to go out there and we’ve got 90 overs tomorrow to take 10 wickets.” The West Indies openers demonstrated contrasting approaches in the final 16 overs of the day’s play.

BRIEF SCORES

West Indies 420 (Hodge 123*, King 63, Duffy 4-86) **and 43 for 0** (King 37*, Campbell 2*) **need another 419 runs to beat New Zealand 575 for 8 dec and 306 for 2 dec** (Latham 101, Conway 100, Hodge 2-80)

QATAR FREESTYLE CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Qahtani emerges champion

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Abdullah al-Qahtani won the second round of Qatar Freestyle Championship that concluded last week at the Qatar Racing Club (QRC).

The round was held under the generous patronage of HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, Chairman of the Club, and witnessed a large crowd that filled the grandstands.

Registration and technical inspection procedures were conducted last Wednesday, as Thursday coincided with the celebrations of the National Day of the State of Qatar. Registration was exceptionally reopened on Friday for approximately three hours to allow the largest possible number of participants to compete in this round.

The inspection procedures adopted by the championship’s organising committee emphasise the readiness of the cars to compete according to a few standards and conditions that all competitors must meet. These include vehicle-related requirements such as equipping the car with a roll cage, securely fixing the battery, and having a functional seat belt, among other points.

There are also requirements



Action from the second round competitions of Qatar Freestyle Championship.

related to the competitors themselves, focusing on safety elements such as wearing racing gear, a helmet, and having a functional seat belt, and similar measures. According to the competition format, each competitor is given one opportunity to enter the track and perform a freestyle run, aiming to execute specific manoeuvres: drifting, reverse driving, the knot manoeuvre, and the “Riyous” manoeuvre, within a total time not exceeding four minutes.

There is also a dedicated score for the overall style of the performance. These details were explained to the competitors during the briefing held on Friday prior to the start of the competitions,

which lasted for approximately three hours. Abdullah al-Qahtani managed to secure his second consecutive title after winning the opening round. Saud al-Marri repeated his result from the previous round by finishing in second place, while Ahmed al-Musnad claimed third place, outperforming Mohammed al-Farhan and Ahmed al-Banna, who finished fourth and fifth respectively.

As customary, the event concluded with the top three finishers being honoured on the podium amid a large crowd, marking the end of the second round of the championship and the beginning of preparations for the third and penultimate round, scheduled to take place in two weeks.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Al-Mana re-elected as president of AWF

QNA
Doha

The Executive Office of the Arab Weightlifting Federation (AWF) held a meeting on the margins of the Combined Weightlifting Championships, hosted by Doha, featuring the Qatar Cup, the Arab Weightlifting Championship, and the West Asia Weightlifting Championship, amid wide Arab and Asian participation and high-level attendance from the sport's leadership.

During the meeting, AWF renewed its confidence in Mohammed bin Yousef al-Mana by electing him as president of AWF for a new term extending from 2025-2029, after he was elected unopposed in a move that demonstrates the massive confidence in the current leadership, along with the apparent gains earned both on the coaching and administrative levels throughout the previous cycle, in terms of promoting the Arab presence in international fora, elevating the game system, as well as the refereeing and coaching talents.

Al-Mana retained his position as President of the AWF, in addition to his international and regional posts, as he serves as first vice-president of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), vice-president



Mohammed bin Yousef al-Mana

of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), president of the Qatar Weightlifting Federation (QWF), president of the Asian Weightlifting Federation, and president of the Afro-Asian Weightlifting Council of Weightlifting, underscoring his sports influence and prominent standing in the global weightlifting landscape.

The new term witnessed the creation of the post of first vice-president of the AWF, in an organisational step aimed at strengthening governance and expanding the scope of executive work, with Mohammed Ahmed al-Harbi, President of the Saudi Weightlifting Federation, elected unopposed to assume this post, in recognition of



The Executive Office of the Arab Weightlifting Federation after a meeting held in Doha yesterday.

his outstanding role in advancing the sport on the national and Gulf regional stages.

The new formation of vice-presidents was also approved, including Talal Rasheed al-Jassar (Kuwait) and Dr Abdullah al-Jarmal (Yemen) as vice-presidents representing the Asian region, alongside Mohamed Abdelmaksoud (Egypt) and Kamel Saidi (Algeria) as vice-presidents representing the African region.

The executive office elected unopposed also includes Mohammed Kadhem Mza'al (Iraq), Dr Basil al-Ibrahim (Syria), Ishaq Ibrahim Ishaq (Bahrain), Abdel Ilah Laarash (Morocco), Abdulrahman al-Jatlawi (Libya), and Dr Khaled

al-Wadaia (Palestine), reflecting geographical diversity, extensive technical expertise, and broad administrative experience.

Attending the meeting were representatives from 19 countries among the executive members, alongside a record number of officials from Arab federations and heads of delegations participating in the Combined Championships, led by Mohammed Hasan Jalood al-Shammari, President of IWF; Abdel Aziz bin Mohammed al-Enazi, Secretary-General of the Union of Arab National Olympic Committees; and Dr Astrit Hasani, President of the European Weightlifting Federation (EWF).

This attendance re-emphasised

the advanced status achieved by the Arab championships and the growing role of AWF within the international weightlifting framework.

Al-Mana asserted that renewing confidence in him is a colossal responsibility prior to being an honour, stressing that the upcoming period will be marked by extensive work to meet the aspirations of the Arab federations. This election by acclamation reflects the spirit of Arab consensus and the confidence of the member federations in the pathway of the AWF, as a robust momentum to continue the work and advance this game at all coaching and administrative levels, he underlined.

Al-Mana added that the next phase will focus on expanding the participation base, qualifying coaching and refereeing cadres, and strengthening developmental programs for juniors and youth, contributing to the preparation of Arab champions capable of competing on continental and global stages.

Finally, he emphasised that Doha's hosting of the Combined Championships represents a successful model of organisational and coaching integration.

He also noted that Qatar will continue to support Arab sport and provide optimal conditions to ensure the success of the championships.

FOOTBALL

Four-star Bayern beat Heidenheim to extend lead

TWO GOALS IN EACH HALF POWER GERMAN GIANTS TO 4-0 WIN

Reuters
Heidenheim, Germany

Undefeated Bayern Munich cruised past hosts Heidenheim 4-0 yesterday to go into the winter break with a nine-point advantage at the top of the Bundesliga standings. The Bavarians, who have gone through 2025 without an away league loss, are on 41 points, with Borussia Dortmund second on 32 following Friday's 2-0 win at Borussia Moenchengladbach. Struggling Heidenheim are in 17th place on 11.

It was one-way traffic from the start for Vincent Kompany's team, despite missing injured Joshua Kimmich, Manuel Neuer and suspended Konrad Laimer among others, and they took a 15th-minute lead through a close-range Josip Stanisic header at the far post after Heidenheim keeper Diant Ramaj failed to clear a Jonathan Tah header.

The visitors doubled their advantage in the 35th with an almost identical move after again catching the Heidenheim defence napping, Michael Olise tapping in at the far post.

The Bundesliga's leading scorer Harry Kane rattled the post with a fine solo effort and low shot before Heidenheim substitute Stefan Schimmer responded by hitting the crossbar with the hosts' best chance.



Bayern Munich's Luis Diaz (left) celebrates scoring their third goal with English football star Harry Kane against FC Heidenheim at Voith-Arena, Heidenheim, Germany, yesterday. (Reuters)

Schimmer should have done better in the 78th with only Bayern's Jonas Urbig to beat but he volleyed straight at the keeper.

Bayern scored again with Luis Diaz's diving header in the 86th minute and Kane still had time to get on the scoresheet with a fine move in the box deep in stoppage time for his 19th league goal of the season.

Earlier on Saturday, goals from Martin Terrier, Patrik Schick and

Montrell Culbreath took Bayer Leverkusen to a 3-1 win at RB Leipzig, moving them past their hosts into third in the German Bundesliga table.

Xaver Schlager gave Leipzig the lead but Leverkusen struck back with Terrier and Schick both scoring inside four minutes just before half-time. Teenage winger Culbreath scored on his top-flight debut deep into stoppage time to round out the victory.

Leipzig fall back to fourth after a second-straight defeat, three points behind second-placed Borussia Dortmund. Also on Saturday, Stuttgart were held to a goalless draw at home by Hoffenheim, falling three points outside the Champions League placings. Eintracht Frankfurt's struggles continued with a 1-1 draw away against Hamburg.

The league resumes on January 9.

HANDBALL

Qatar's al-Shaabi elected AHF's representative to IHF



President of the Qatar Handball Association Ahmed al-Shaabi during the 25th Ordinary General Assembly of the Asian Handball Federation in Cairo, Egypt, on Saturday.

QNA
Doha

President of the Qatar Handball Association Ahmed al-Shaabi was elected by acclamation as the Asian Handball Federation (AHF)'s representative to the International Handball Federation (IHF) during the 25th Ordinary General Assembly of the Asian Handball Federation in Cairo, Egypt, on Saturday.

Al-Shaabi's election to this important position underscores the high level of trust placed in him and his extensive experience within the handball system. It also

reflects the prominent presence of Qatari talent and its active role in international sports decision-making.

The General Assembly meeting also elected by acclamation Kuwait's Badr al-Thayab as president of the AHF for the 2025-2029 term. The new board includes Iran's Alireza as first vice-president; Jordan's Sari Hamdan, Bahrain's Ali Ishaqi, and China's Wang Tao as vice-presidents, and Pakistani Muhammad Shafiq as secretary-general. It also included Thai Sombat Kuruphan, Emirati Mohammed Julfar, Iraqi Ahmed Riyadh, Omani Ameen al-Barwani, South Korean Jung Choi, and Kazakh Gulnara Turlykhanova.

SCHAPER TOPS FIELD AT MAURITIUS OPEN

Bel Ombre, Mauritius: Jayden Schaper continued his soaring start to the 2026 European tour season when he chipped in for an eagle on the second playoff hole Sunday to win the Mauritius Open. "That's just such an insane way to finish a tournament," said the South African after he won on extra holes for the second straight week. The South African joined the

five-event opening swing of the season when it hit his native South Africa and finished second in the Nedbank Golf Challenge in Sun City. He followed that with his maiden tour title last week in Johannesburg, also in a playoff. "The last three weeks have been incredible," said Schaper. Schaper started the final round two behind American Ryan Gerard but shot a 64 to take a lead into the club house.

BADMINTON

South Korea's An and Frenchman Popov corner World Tour Finals glory



Gold medalist South Korea's An Se-young (right) and silver medalist China's Wang Zhiyi pose with the trophies at the award ceremony for women's singles final at the BWF Badminton World Tour Finals in Hangzhou yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Hangzhou, China

South Korea's An Se-young claimed a record-equalling 11th title of the year with victory at the badminton World Tour Finals in Hangzhou yesterday.

The 2024 Olympic champion beat world number two Wang Zhiyi of China 21-13, 18-21, 21-10 to tie Japanese men's singles player Kento Momota's 2019 record for the most titles won in a calendar year.

An, the world number one, ended the gruelling 96-minute match limping between points with what appeared to be a left-knee problem, but managed to grind to victory over defending champion Wang.

"Winning my 11th title, I feel really happy

and that it's really something for me to be proud of," the 23-year-old said after her victory.

"I'll enjoy this win today."

According to the Badminton World Federation, An also became the first badminton player to win more than \$1mn in prize money in a year after banking the \$240,000 winner's cheque, adding to the \$763,000 she had already pocketed this season.

Christo Popov became only the third European, and the first Frenchman, to win the season-ending event by overcoming China's world champion Shi Yuqi 21-19, 21-9. Shi appeared to struggle with a foot injury throughout and quickly succumbed after a tight first game.

Popov, who hadn't won a tour title all year and was an underdog coming into the tournament, defeated Olympic silver-medallist

Kunlavut Vitidsarn and world number three Anders Antonsen on his way to glory in the season-ending event.

"It was an amazing week," Popov said.

"Very happy to win the first title for France and I'm hoping for many more to come."

South Korea enjoyed more success in the doubles as women's pair Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee defeated Japan's Mayu Matsumoto and Yuki Fukushima 21-17, 21-11.

And world champions Kim Won-ho and Seo Seung-jae defeated China's Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang 21-18, 21-14, in the men's.

The home crowd did have something to cheer earlier in the day, when mixed doubles pair Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping overcoming compatriots Jiang Zhenbang and Wei Yaxin 21-12, 21-17.

HORSE RACING

Bint Mohaather claims Qatar Oaks glory



The connections of Bint Mohaather celebrate with trophies after the bay filly won the QA Listed Qatar Oaks for three-year-old thoroughbreds at the QREC's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.



The connections of Shama'ah Bu Thaila celebrate after the grey filly won the Local Purebred Arabian Oaks.

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Al Jeryan Stud's Bint Mohaather produced a decisive finish to win the QA Listed Qatar Oaks for three-year-old thoroughbreds at the QREC's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The day's feature saw the bay filly double her tally, rewarding a string of recent placed efforts with a decisive success. Settled off the pace for much of the 2,000m contest, she produced a sweeping move in the home stretch, hitting the front inside the final 300m and holding on to score by a length for

trainer MHK al-Attiyah under Lukas Delozier. Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, QREC Acting CEO, crowned the winners of the race, with Ali bin Hamad al-Attiyah receiving the trophy on behalf of Al Jeryan Stud.

Wathnan Racing's War Lady broke her maiden on just her second career start by winning the Local thoroughbred Oaks for three-year-olds over 1,850m.

The bay filly delivered an emphatic display to win by 3½ lengths. Tracking the leaders throughout, she was set alight in the closing stages to surge clear, completing a straight treble on the evening for the in-form owner and trainer Alban de Mieulle, while

also retaining the Oaks title for the same connections for the second consecutive year under Soufiane Saadi. Wathnan Racing's Chdia once again underlined her exceptional quality as the bay filly scoring decisively by three lengths to record her sixth win from seven career starts to win the Purebred Arabian Oaks for four-year-olds.

Trained by Alban de Mieulle and ridden by James Doyle, she completed a quick-fire double for owner and trainer and led home a one-two in the 2,000m race for the same connections with Intisar De Monlau finishing second while also retaining the title for the owner-trainer-jockey trio for the second consecutive year;



Lukas Delozier celebrates after guiding Bint Mohaather to Qatar Oaks win yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm



Wathnan Racing's War Lady won the Local Thoroughbred Oaks for three-year-olds yesterday.

a performance that firmly stamps her as a true champion.

Wathnan Racing's Shama'ah Bu Thaila opened her campaign in style by winning the Local Purebred Arabian Oaks for four-year-olds run over 2,000m.

The grey filly settled towards the rear in the 2,000m contest before bidding her time and unleashing a sharp late run in the home straight. She reeled in the leaders to score by 1¼ lengths for trainer Alban de Mieulle, with jockey Faleh Bughwenaïm completing a

quick-fire double in the evening. In doing so, she retained the Oaks title for her owner and trainer for the second consecutive year.

Al Shaqab Racing's Dhariya retained the Purebred Arabian Oaks title for three-year-olds.

Jean de Mieulle-trained grey filly extended her winning run with a third success from four career starts, remaining unbeaten in Qatar with a polished pillar-to-post display over 1,600m under jockey Faleh Bughwenaïm.

She travelled smoothly in front,

set her own rhythm throughout and lifted the tempo in the home straight, never allowing a rival to mount a serious challenge as she scored decisively by 1¾ lengths.

Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, presented the trophy to Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Mansour, Chief Operating Officer of Al Shaqab Racing, after Dhariya retained the Oaks title for her owner and trainer for the second consecutive year.

Grace Secret in the colours of Umm Al Shukhut Farm, bounced back to winning ways as she claimed the Local Purebred Arabian Oaks for three-year-olds despite the widest draw, securing her third career victory and maintaining a flawless record of finishing in the first four in all her six starts.

The bay filly raced in first and second throughout the mile race before digging deep in the home stretch to edge clear by a neck from her half-sister Kendah Al Shahania.

Trained by Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed, she was guided home by Pierre Charles Boudot, who completed his third win of the evening.

LA LIGA

Barca's Raphinha, Yamal sparkle in win over Villarreal

'We're happy because we finish year as leaders, which was our objective'

AFP

Vila-real, Spain

Barcelona wingers Raphinha and Lamine Yamal guided the Catalan giants four points clear at the top of La Liga with a 2-0 win at 10-man Villarreal yesterday.

Brazil international Raphinha won and converted an early penalty before Villarreal's Renato Veiga was sent off before half-time for a late lunge on teenager Yamal.

The 18-year-old slotted home Barca's second midway through the second half, as Hansi Flick's side restored their advantage on Real Madrid, second, and won an eighth consecutive league game.

Villarreal are fourth after Atletico Madrid moved ahead of them with a 3-0 win at Girona earlier on.

"We're happy because we finish the year as leaders, which was our objective, and now we can rest," Barca midfielder Frenkie de Jong told DAZN.

"Villarreal have fast players who break rapidly, and we have to manage that a bit better... But in the end I think we were superior, and I wouldn't say comfortable, but I think it was a deserved win."

Flick launched into an impassioned defence of Raphinha on Saturday after he was not included in FIFA's 'The Best' team of the year earlier in the week, and the winger quickly repaid his coach.

Raphinha produced an all-action display at Villarreal's Estadio de la Ceramica, where the match was played instead of in Miami, after La Liga's plans to take this game to the United States were scrapped in October.

Barca were poor defensively and struggled in their build-up play,



Barcelona's forward Lamine Yamal whistles as he celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the La Liga match against Villarreal at La Ceramica Stadium in Vila-real yesterday. (AFP)

but the quality of wingers Raphinha and Yamal and their goalkeeper Joan Garcia's outstanding performance decided an entertaining encounter.

Jules Kounde blocked Villarreal striker Ayoze Perez's shot before Raphinha drew a foul from Santi

Comesana to win a penalty at the other end.

The winger dispatched it confidently in the 12th minute and nearly added the second with a superb effort from distance which crashed back off the bar.

Kounde deflected a cross into

his own net as Villarreal fought back, but the goal was disallowed for offside in the build-up.

Barca stopper Garcia saved from Tajon Buchanan after an Alejandro Balde mistake as Villarreal almost levelled.

The visitors' job was made easier by Veiga's needless red card for an ugly, late lunge on Yamal before the interval.

The champions got their second goal after a scramble in the box, with De Jong teeing up Yamal to fire home after 63 minutes.

Joan Garcia made stunning saves to deny Rafa Marin and Georges Mikautadze to help Barca end 2026 with three points and a third clean sheet in their last three games across all competitions.

Kounde went off hurt before the end, potentially adding to Flick's problems at the back following Andreas Christensen being diagnosed with a partially torn knee ligament.

Barca finish the year in better shape than rivals Real Madrid, who beat Sevilla 2-0 on Saturday, but still with plenty of their own concerns to worry about.

"Now's not the time they're giving out the trophies, but we're doing well, on a good path, we're leaders, we're alive in (the other competitions), so we're happy," added De Jong.

Villarreal lost their first league match at home all season and trail Barca by 11 points, albeit having played two fewer matches as the winter break begins.

"We're hurt by the result, our first home defeat, right before we go on holiday," said Villarreal midfielder Dani Parejo.

"But we are proud and happy with the team's work, for how we set up to play this game... We had so many chances to go in at half-time winning."

FOOTBALL

Salah unaffected by Liverpool turmoil, says Egypt coach

AFP

Agadir, Morocco

Mohamed Salah has shown no signs of being distracted by the uncertainty surrounding his future at Liverpool as he prepares to lead Egypt into the Africa Cup of Nations, Pharaohs coach Hossam Hassan said yesterday.

"Salah's morale in training is very high, as if he were just starting out with the national team, and I believe he will have a great tournament with his country," Hassan told reporters ahead of Egypt's opening AFCON game against Zimbabwe in Agadir today.

"I feel his motivation is very, very strong. Salah is an icon and will remain so. He is one of the best players in the world, and I support him in everything he does," Hassan added.

Salah did not start any of Liverpool's last five games before departing for the Cup of Nations in Morocco and things came to a head following the recent Premier League draw at Leeds United when he claimed he had been "thrown under the bus" by his coach at Anfield, Arne Slot.

That suggested a move away from the troubled Premier League champions during the January transfer window was a real possibility.

"I don't consider what happened to him to be a crisis. These things often happen between players and coaches," Hassan added.

"We've been in contact with



Egypt's coach Hossam Hassan attends a press conference at the Agadir Grand Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

him by phone from the beginning, and I met with him when he joined the national team camp. His focus is entirely on the tournament."

Salah, 33, is aiming to lead Egypt to a record-extending eighth AFCON title in Morocco. He has never won the continental title, but ended up on the losing side in final defeats by Cameroon in 2017 and Senegal in 2022.

His goals this year have already helped Egypt qualify for the World Cup.

"Whenever Salah's performances dip with his club, he regains his strength with the national team and becomes even better, whether by contributing to goals or scoring himself. Then he returns to his club even stronger," Hassan added. "He needs to win the cup by helping us and by helping himself."

Egypt will also face South Africa and Angola in Group B at the Cup of Nations, with all three of their games in the first round being played in Agadir.

Marseille cruise as Monaco advance to last 32

Paris: Mason Greenwood scored as Marseille strolled to a 6-0 win over third-tier Bourg-Peronnas in the French Cup last 64 yesterday, while Monaco edged an all-Ligue 1 tie with Auxerre. Captain Leonardo Balerdi put Marseille ahead before Greenwood struck on the hour as Roberto De Zerbi's side turned the screw in the final 30 minutes. Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, Igor Paixao, Bilal Nadir and teenager Tadjidine Mmadi were also on target for 10-time winners Marseille, who last lifted the French Cup in 1989. "It wasn't perfect but it was a good match," said De Zerbi. "It was only 1-0 at half-time and the cup can throw up some nasty surprises. I was fearing this match but we had the right approach." Danish forward Mika Biereth netted both goals as Monaco saw off Auxerre 2-1, with Strasbourg beating second-division Dunkerque by the same scoreline.