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PREMIER LEAGUE

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SHOWJUMPING

Charles claims CSI4* GP at HH The Father Amir's Prix

British riders also dominate the CSI2* Grand Prix, with Fletcher claiming top honours in the 1.45m class

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Britain's Harry Charles clinched the feature CSI4* Grand Prix in style at the opening tour of the inaugural HH The Father Amir's Prix, following a thrilling jump-off at Al Shaqab yesterday.

Riding Casquo Blue, the 26-year-old produced a double-clear round and set the winning time of 38.20 seconds in the 1.55m contest.

Charles finished nearly three-tenths of a second ahead of compatriot Scott Brash, who partnered his European Championship mare Hello Folie to second place in 38.48 seconds. Thailand's Janakabhorn Karunayadhaj completed the podium aboard the Irish-bred Maxwin Kinmar Bespoke with a clear round in 40.14 seconds. Anastasia Nielsen narrowly missed out on a top-three finish, taking fourth with ESI Rocky, while Ines Joly rounded off the top five on the 11-year-old stallion Crack d'Aiguilly Z.

A member of Great Britain's gold medal-winning team at the Paris 2024 Olympics, Charles was delighted with the result. "It's a fantastic way to start the year. Winning the first Grand Prix of the season and achieving our first Grand Prix victory together makes it very special," he said. "The course was well designed and challenging, with the time allowed encouraging riders to take risks in the jump-off. It came down to very fine margins, and I'm extremely pleased to come out on top in such a competitive field."

Earlier in the day, Britain also dominated the CSI2* Grand Prix, with Oliver Fletcher claiming top honours in the 1.45m jump-off class.

Fletcher guided Cajus 42 to victory in 33.59 seconds after 14 combinations progressed to the jump-off, edging out Millie Allen and Quick Diamant HR (34.02). Germany's Philipp Weishaupt finished third aboard Callao L in 34.74 seconds.

Italian rider Emanuele Gaudiano enjoyed a productive day at Al Shaqab, securing victory in the CSI4* Special Two-Phase (1.45m) with Vasco 118 in a time of 31.12 seconds. Fellow Italian Roberto Previtali followed in second with Chaquano PS, while Millie Allen placed third on Quickly D vh Ijzerenlindehof. Gaudiano also topped the CSI2* Table C (1.35m) aboard Chabrello PS, ahead of Jordan's Ibrahim Hani Bisharat and Italy's Previtali.

Qatari riders featured prominently in the lower categories, with Faris Saad A H al-Qahtani winning the CSI2* Faults and Time (1.30m) on Cavallina 13, and Hussain Said Haidan claiming the CSI1* Grand Prix after a jump-off aboard D Saucedo. Saad Ahmed al-Saad and Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi completed the all-Qatari podium in that class.

The HH The Father Amir's Prix continues with Tour 2 from January 8-10 at Al Shaqab as part of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026. Looking ahead, the season builds towards HH The Amir's Sword (February 11-14), Qatar's most prestigious equestrian festival, which will feature elite competition across multiple international classes and a total prize fund of €2,079,000.

The event is organised by the Qatar Equestrian Federation, Al Shaqab and the Qatar Olympic Committee.



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Organising Committee of the Doha Equestrian Tour, presents the trophy to Britain's Harry Charles, who won the CSI4* Grand Prix at HH The Father Amir's Prix at Al Shaqab.



Riding Casquo Blue, Harry Charles produced a double-clear round and set the winning time of 38.20 seconds in the 1.55m contest.



Oliver Fletcher claimed top honours in the CIS2* 1.45m jump-off class onboard Cajus 42.



Qatar's Hussain Said Haidan won the CSI1* Grand Prix after a jump-off aboard D Saucedo.

MOTORSPORT

De Mevius takes Dakar lead as al-Attiyah in second place

Agencies
Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

X-Raid Mini driver Guillaume de Mevius took the Dakar Rally lead after yesterday's first full stage, while Qatar's five-time winner Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah was in second place for the Dacia Sandriders team, 40 seconds behind the Belgian.

Al-Attiyah had mixed feelings saying he "could have lost it all" on the challenging route and lamented that he had been ahead of the day's winner for most of the stage. "We had a good pace and could have pushed harder, but when we saw (Dacia teammate) Sebastien Loeb with two flat tyres, we decided to be cautious and avoid puncturing ourselves," said al-Attiyah.

For De Mevius co-driver Mathieu Baumel it was "enormous triumph" as just a year after having his leg amputated he won the opening stage with his Belgian driver. Navigator Baumel was back at the race just 11 months after his right lower leg was amputated after being run over while helping someone who had broken down on the road in France.

Last January it had looked as if life behind the wheel was in the past for the successful co-driver and navigator. "Just being here is an enormous triumph," said the 49-year-old, who got into his car yesterday carrying his prosthetic limb.



Belgium's Guillaume de Mevius and his French co-driver Mathieu Baumel celebrate after winning the Stage 1 of Dakar Rally in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia.

Driving a mini the pair won the perilous 305km first stage at Yanbu, Saudi Arabia. Baumel had previously won the Dakar Rally four times as co-pilot to al-Attiyah, most recently back-to-back titles in 2022 and 2023. De Mevius, sitting top of the heap at the finish line, admitted he was surprised. "It wasn't particularly the objective to win today, but we said to ourselves with Mathieu (Baumel) that we wanted to at least win one on the Dakar stages," he said after a stoney and dusty ride.

Czech driver Martin Prokop was in third place for the Orlen Jipocar team, with Sweden's Mattias Ekstrom fourth in a Ford Raptor. French driver Sebastien Loeb came 10th in his Dacia losing three minutes with a puncture after also leading the field.



Dacia Sandriders' Nasser al-Attiyah and his co-pilot Fabian Lurquin in action.

Reigning Dakar champion Yazeed al-Rajhi was the big loser of the day as the Saudi was slapped with a 16-minute penalty due to a missed crossing point and ended up nearly 29 minutes off de Mevius with 12 more stages of the endurance event to come over the next two weeks in Saudi Arabia. In the motorcycle category, Spain's Edgar Canet, already winner of the prologue, benefited after Botswana's Ross Branch received a six-minute penalty for speeding in a restricted zone. Canet leads Australia's Daniel Sanders by just over a minute.

Today, the competitors will tackle a first big day of racing, heading towards Al-Ula after more than 500km, 400 of which are individually timed.

SPORT

CRICKET

Bangladesh 'no' to T20 WC matches in India

Reuters
Dhaka

Bangladesh will not play their Twenty20 World Cup matches in India after Mustafizur Rahman was released by his Indian Premier League team amid growing tensions between the countries, Bangladesh's cricket board (BCB) said yesterday.

Kolkata Knight Riders said on Saturday they had released the Bangladesh bowler after being told to do so by India's cricket board (BCCI).

Bangladesh are scheduled to play three Twenty20 World Cup matches in Kolkata next month, with the February 7-March 8 tournament being co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, but the BCB said they are worried about their players' safety.

"Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh government, the Board of Directors resolved that the Bangladesh national team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions," the BCB said.

"In light of this decision, the BCB has formally requested the International Cricket Council (ICC), as the event authority, to consider relocating all of Bangladesh's matches to a venue outside India."

Earlier yesterday Ministry of Sports said Bangladesh would not travel to India.

"We welcome this decision taken in the context of the extreme communal policy of India's cricket board," said Nazrul, who added that he had instructed the board to request Bangladesh's World Cup games be held in Sri Lanka.

Last month, hundreds protested near Bangladesh's High Commission in New Delhi after Hindu factory worker Dipu Chandra Das was beaten and set on fire in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district by a crowd that accused him of making derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A total of 12 people were arrested in connection with his death.

WORSENED RELATIONS

The incident worsened relations between India and its neighbour, with ties already strained after Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to New Delhi following protests against her.

After Mustafizur's release on Saturday, the BCB had held an emergency meeting before writing to the ICC to relocate their matches.

"The board said that where a Bangladesh cricketer can't play in India despite being contracted, the entire Bangladesh cricket team can't feel safe to go to the World Cup," Nazrul had said.

Last year, the ICC allowed India to play Champions Trophy matches in the United Arab Emirates due to soured relations with hosts Pakistan.

Yesterday, cricket news site *Cricbuzz* reported that the BCB would ask the BCCI for a formal explanation regarding Mustafizur's release. The ICC did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Bangladesh are due to play West Indies, England and Italy in Kolkata before ending the group stage against Nepal in Mumbai.



ASHES TEST

Root, Brook dig in as England exhibit courage

A 154-run stand between Root and Brook lifts England at SCG

Reuters
Sydney

England enjoyed one of their better days of the Ashes series yesterday when a 154-run stand between Joe Root and Harry Brook drove them to 211 for three before the opening day of the fifth Test was brought to a premature end at Sydney Cricket Ground.

Play was stopped for bad light 20 minutes before tea with storm clouds threatening, and abandoned to boos from the remnants of the 49,574 crowd some 90 minutes before the scheduled close of play.

At 3-1 down in what has been a mostly miserable series for the tourists, nothing England can do will prevent Australia from lifting the urn in triumph at the end of the series.

The sight of their two best batsmen finally combining for a meaningful contribution, however, would have brought a smile to the face of skipper Ben Stokes as well as the loyal battalion of travelling supporters.

After slumping to 57-3 early on, fears of another green pitch reprising the chaos of England's consolation win inside two days in Melbourne last week were assuaged when Root and Brook came together in the middle.

Root brought up the 100 partnership and his 67th Test half century with the same stroke to deep backward point before Brook joined him on the 50-mark with a four through the covers a few balls later.

Brook, who had given fans a few reminders of his sometimes rash shot-choices, was 78 not out and Root unbeaten on 72 when they were called off for light.



England's Harry Brook celebrates with Joe Root after reaching fifty runs during day one of the fifth and final Ashes Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday. *(Reuters)*

"We're in very good position, obviously, three down at the end of play and hopefully we can make the most of that going into tomorrow," Brook told reporters after accumulating his highest score of the series.

"It was a good pitch. When I first went in, it felt like the bounce was fairly steep, but then it started to get a little bit lower and slower and it just generally feels like a good wicket out there."

DIMINISHING RESULTS

Stokes earlier won the toss and elected to bat first with both teams deciding, after a week of debate, against bringing in a specialist spinner at a ground once considered Australia's most spin-friendly Ashes venue.

"It's history, it's a long time ago," said Australia assistant coach Daniel Vettori.

"I think you've seen over the last three years has been diminishing results for spin bowlers here, which is obviously not something that we'd like, but it's the nature of the surface."

At first, the day followed the script of much of the rest of the series with Ben Duckett making a decent start with 27 off 24 balls before edging a Mitchell Starc outswinger behind to give the left-arm quick his 27th wicket of the series.

England's other opener, Zak Crawley, survived an early scare with an edge through the slips only to be trapped in front by Michael Neser after eking out 16.

Jacob Bethell followed shortly afterwards, edging a Scott Boland delivery behind for 10, to bring Root and Brook together.

The match was preceded by a ceremony honouring first responders and "community members who acted bravely" during the attack by gunmen which killed 15 people at a Jewish event at nearby Bondi Beach on December 14.

The unusually high level of security for the match was evident outside the ground with riot police observing the crowd as they entered the venue.

BRIEF SCORES

Stumps England 211 for 3 (Brook 78*, Root 72*, Neser 1-36) **vs Australia** (yet to bat)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Litton Das named to lead Bangladesh in World Cup

AFP
Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday named their squad for the T20 World Cup beginning in February, leaving out middle-order batters Jaker Ali Anik and Mahidul Islam, and selecting five fast bowlers.

Wicketkeeper and batter Litton Das will also lead Bangladesh in the tournament in India and Sri Lanka, the Bangladesh Cricket Board said.

But the announcement also came as Dhaka requested that its four group matches in India be moved to Sri Lanka, after anger because India forced a Bangladeshi player to quit the Indian Premier League.

Bangladesh are due to play the West Indies in Kolkata on February 7, the opening day of the World Cup.

They are then due to face Italy on February 9, and England on February 14, both also in Kolkata, followed by Nepal on February 17 in Mumbai. Top-order options Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Parvez Hossain Emon made the squad, while Towhid Hridoy is the only specialist middle-order batter.

Shamim Hossain and Nurul Hasan have been picked as finishers, while a varied bowling attack will be led by left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman and fast bowler Taskin Ahmed.

The spin department includes off-spinner Mahedi Hasan, left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain, while seam support will come from Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Shoriful Islam and Mohammad Shaifuddin, it was confirmed.

BANGLADESH WORLD CUP T20 SQUAD

Litton Das (captain), Mohammad Saif Hasan, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Parvez Hossain Emon, Towhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed, Mohammad Shaifuddin, Shoriful Islam.

FOCUS

Australian great Martyn out of coma in 'miracle'

AFP
Sydney

Australian Test great Damien Martyn has woken from an induced coma following meningitis, with ex-teammate Adam Gilchrist yesterday calling it "a miracle".

The 54-year-old Martyn, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 one-day internationals, fell seriously ill late last month and was rushed to hospital.

The former batsman was diagnosed with meningitis, an inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain and spinal cord.

"It's been an unbelievable turn of events in the last 48 hours," Gilchrist said.

"He is now able to talk and respond to treatment.

"He has responded extraordinarily well since coming out of the coma to the point where his family feels it's like some sort of miracle," Gilchrist said.

Martyn is set to be moved out of intensive care at Gold Coast University Hospital.

A who's who of cricket greats have over the past week posted messages of support, including former England skipper Michael Vaughan and Indian legends Ravichandran Ashwin and V V S Laxman.

Known as one of the game's great strokemakers, Martyn became a key figure in Steve Waugh's all-powerful Australian side, hitting 13 centuries and averaging 46.37.

He was also part of the Australia team that won the 2003 ODI World Cup, cracking 88 not out in the final against India in a match-winning partnership with Ricky Ponting.

Martyn retired in 2006 during the Ashes series and had kept a low profile since.

Joshua makes first public comments since fatal crash



LONDON: Former world heavyweight champion **Anthony Joshua** has posted on social media for the first time since a fatal car crash in Nigeria that killed two of his close friends.
The 36-year-old British fighter was a passenger in a Lexus SUV that collided with a stationary truck on a busy highway linking Lagos and Ibadan in southwest Nigeria last Monday.
Joshua's backroom team members Latif Ayodele and Sina Ghami died in the crash, while the boxer sustained minor injuries.
Joshua was taken to hospital before being discharged on Wednesday, later flying back to the UK ahead of the funerals of Ghami, his strength and conditioning coach, and Ayodele, his personal trainer.
The former two-time unified world heavyweight champion posted two images on Instagram on Sunday, sitting alongside his mother and three other women, one of whom clutched a photograph of Ghami.
He captioned the post 'My Brothers Keeper'.
Joshua's social media activity comes after Nigerian police charged the driver of the vehicle, Adeniyi Mobolaji Kayode, 46, with "dangerous driving causing death". He is due to appear in court on January 20.
Joshua, the 2012 Olympic champion, has family roots in Nigeria and was on holiday in the country following his win over Jake Paul in Miami on December 19.

FOCUS

Fury, 37, announces comeback from retirement

Reuters
London

Former lineal heavyweight champion **Tyson Fury** said yesterday that he will come out of retirement this year for his first fight since losing to Oleksandr Usyk in December 2024.

Fury announced his retirement after losing a rematch with Ukraine's Usyk, who had won by split decision in their first bout to become the undisputed champion.

Usyk is the only boxer to beat Fury in the Briton's professional career, which includes 34 wins, two losses, and one draw.

"2026 is that year. Return of the Mac. Been away for a while but I'm back now, 37 years old and still punching. Nothing better to do than punch men in the face & get paid for it," Fury posted on *Instagram*.



Fury, nicknamed 'The Gypsy King', had previously spent over two-and-a-half years away from the ring as he went through mental health struggles after his win over Wladimir Klitschko in 2015 to take the WBA, IBF, WBO and IBO heavyweight titles.

He returned to action in 2018, and knocked out Deontay Wilder to win the WBC heavyweight belt in February 2020.

Fury again announced retirement in 2022, only to come back six months later.

In the past, fellow Briton and former champion Anthony Joshua had called out Fury for a fight multiple times, including after last month's knockout win over Jake Paul.

"If Tyson Fury is as serious as he thinks he is... step in the ring with me next, if you're a real bad boy. Don't do all that talking, AJ this, AJ that. Let's see you in the ring and talk with your fists," Joshua had said last month.

Joshua recently spent a few days in hospital after suffering minor injuries in a car crash in Nigeria that killed two of his friends.

He was discharged from hospital on Thursday, a day before police charged his driver with dangerous driving over the fatal collision.

AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS

Diaz delight as Morocco advance to quarter-finals

Diaz becomes first Moroccan to find net in 4 consecutive AFCON matches



Morocco's Brahim Diaz (right) celebrates scoring against Tanzania in the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16 match at Prince Moulay Abdallah Stadium in Rabat yesterday. *(AFP)*

AFP
Rabat

Real Madrid forward Brahim Diaz maintained his goal-a-game record at the Africa Cup of Nations by scoring to take Morocco into the quarter-finals with a 1-0 victory over Tanzania in Rabat yesterday.

Diaz scored once in each of three group matches and his 64th-minute strike against the Tanzanians created history as he became the first Moroccan to find the net in four consecutive AFCON matches.

The goal came after Morocco squandered numerous scoring chances while stretching an unbeaten run in competitive and friendly matches to 23. Their last loss was to South Africa at the 2024 AFCON.

Morocco will face South Africa or Cameroon, who meet later on Sunday at a different Rabat venue, in the quarter-finals on Friday.

Paris Saint-Germain defender Achraf Hakimi, set up the last-16 winner for Diaz, while making his first start in the tournament after coming off the bench in a victory over Zambia last Monday.

The 2025 African player of the year suffered a serious ankle injury playing for PSG against Bayern Munich in the Champions League two months ago. But Morocco lacked Azzedine Ounahi, who arrived at the stadium using crutches and wearing a medical boot on his left foot. Bilal El Khannouss took his place in midfield.

Morocco were favourites for several reasons, including home advantage, the backing of close to 70,000 supporters, and lying 101 places above Tanzania in the world rankings. However, it was Tanzania who had the first chance in the third minute, but Saimon Msuva misconnected with a Selemani Mwalimu cross.

Morocco had the ball in the net after 15 minutes as Ismael Saibari nodded a Abdessamad Ezzalzouli free-kick past goalkeeper Hussein Masaranga. The assistant referee immediately raised his flag for offside and a VAR review confirmed that the PSV striker had strayed too far forward. Ayoub El Kaabi was the next Moroccan to come close, heading over before being injured in a collision with Masaranga. Both players resumed after treatment.

A Diaz shot was too high from the edge of the box and El Kaabi headed wide as the host nation continued their pursuit of the opening goal, but the first half ended goalless. In a lively start to the second period, Ezzalzouli and El Kaabi headed wide then, in a rare Tanzanian raid, Feisal 'Fei Toto' Salum fired over with only goalkeeper Yassine Bounou to beat. As Moroccan pressure mounted, Hakimi rifled a free-kick against the crossbar from just outside the box on the hour mark.

A goal seemed inevitable given the relentless pressure from the host nation, and it came thanks to Hakimi and Diaz.

The full-back passed to the forward, who beat Masaranga at his near post with an angled shot from close range.

TENNIS

Kyrgios, Kokkinakis victorious in emotional 'Special Ks' comeback

Reuters
Brisbane

Thanasi Kokkinakis and Nick Kyrgios reprised their triumphant Australian Open partnership by winning their opening match at the Brisbane International yesterday, as the 'Special Ks' also marked their return from long-term injuries.

It was the first match on the ATP tour in 167 days for Kyrgios, while Kokkinakis played for the first time since suffering a pectoral injury in January 2025, as the pair beat Matthew Ebden and Rajeev Ram 5-7 6-4 10-8.

"I'm about to tear up," an emotional Kokkinakis said in the post-match interview.

"It's crazy. I haven't played a match in 12 months... I underwent surgery a year ago with no guarantee I would be back playing. So it's been a long year, a challenging one a lot of times, where I thought the game was done for me. So I chipped away at it."

Kyrgios and Kokkinakis won the men's doubles title in the Australian Open 2022. The pair reunited ahead of last year's Australian Open, but their campaign ended in the first round due to Kokkinakis's injury.

"It's doubles but it means everything. This is a good stepping stone," Kokkinakis added.

The Australian duo will face French sixth seeds Sadio Doumbia and Fabien Reboul in the second round.

Kenin opens 2026 with Brisbane win

Former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin opened her 2026 season with a hard-fought 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 win over Romanian qualifier Elena-Gabriele Ruse in the Brisbane International yesterday.

Kenin, who won the Australian Open as a 21-year-old in 2020, recovered from a second-set lapse to outlast Ruse and set up a second-round clash against seventh seed Ekaterina Alexandrova.

"My last match was in October so it was definitely weird. But I trusted the pre-season I had and I felt like I was playing good tennis," said the 27-year-old American.

"She is a really tough player and I had to stay with it, definitely wasn't easy."

Australian wildcard Ajla Tomljanovic eased into the second round with a 6-1, 6-3 win over France's Elsa Jacquemot and will now play 11th seed Karolina Muchova.

"I had such a great preparation but you never know when that first match comes, anything can happen on the day," Tomljanovic said.

"I was hoping to do at least 80 percent of what I've been practising and I think I did even more. This feels amazing."



Nick Kyrgios (left) and Thanasi Kokkinakis of Australia discuss tactics during their doubles match against Matthew Ebden of Australia and Rajeev Ram of the US at the Brisbane International in Brisbane yesterday. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

Venus still 'feeling the fire' ahead of Australian Open record

AFP
Auckland

Seven-time major singles champion **Venus Williams** said yesterday she's still driven to play good tennis - and "it gives you great legs" - as she prepares for an Australian Open tilt at age 45.

Williams will become the oldest woman to play in the main draw at the season-opening Grand Slam after accepting a wildcard, five years after she last competed in Melbourne.

The American said she was unaware of the record she was poised to break, adding she didn't have the same intense approach to achieving milestones as in her prime.

However, her drive to succeed on court remained. "I think one of my goals is to be joyful and just embrace being uncomfortable because that's the things champions can do," she said.

"I definitely don't wake up and come halfway across the world - or more than halfway - to not be feeling the fire.

"And, well, tennis burns a lot of calories. It gives you great legs. I figure if I want to stay fit, I've got to keep playing."



A five-time Wimbledon champion, Williams was an Australian Open singles finalist in 2003 and 2017 and won the doubles title four times alongside sister Serena. Williams' last tournament was the US Open in August, not long after returning from a 16-month break.

She will play warmup events in Auckland next week and Hobart ahead of the January 18-February 1 Australian Open and hoped she can shake rust out of her system.

"It's interesting because I have so much experience, but I've probably played the least amount as any other player in this draw," Williams told reporters in Auckland.

"So I have a lot to pull out but I also have to come out of the gates playing quickly. The good news is that, you know, tennis matches are long and you have a chance to figure things out."

Her first opponent in Auckland today will be Polish fifth seed and world No 54 Magda Linette.

Van Aert undergoes successful surgery after fracture in crash

Two-time Olympic medallist Wout van Aert has undergone successful surgery on Saturday, a day after spraining his ankle and sustaining a fracture in a crash, his team Visma-Lease a Bike said.
The Belgian, who won silver at the Tokyo Olympics in the road race and took bronze in the time trial at the Paris Games, had crashed on a paved curve during a cyclo-cross race in Mol after it snowed heavily.
The 31-year-old, who took the green jersey in the 2022 Tour de France, said he was disappointed after the fall in a statement shared by his team.
"Of course I am very disappointed to have to end my cyclo-cross season like this... my focus will now be on recovery and, later on, the preparation of the road season," said Van Aert, a three-time world champion in cyclo-cross.

UNITED CUP

Osaka wins after Raducanu pullout, Swiss enter quarters

AFP
Perth

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka got her 2026 season off to a winning start for Japan in the United Cup, after Great Britain's Emma Raducanu pulled out of their singles clash with a foot injury.

But despite Osaka's win, GB took the match 2-1 with a deciding mixed doubles victory in the yesterday's clash.

Switzerland came through the deciding mixed doubles against Italy, with a 7-5, 4-6, 10-7 win by Belinda Bencic and Jakub Paul over Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori, enough to see the team through.2-1 into the quarter-finals.

"There was great emotion from the team. We were into it with our hearts and it showed," Bencic said.

Against Britain, Osaka was too strong for 276th-ranked reserve Katie Swan, winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 as Raducanu watched from the sidelines.

"I'm proud of how I fought," Osaka said. "I'd never played here, it was tough."

GB captain Tim Henman said Raducanu, the 2021 US Open champion, could appear later in the event.

"She struggled with her foot at the end of last year. She's been practising in London and is very close. Tomorrow (against Greece) is a bit up in the air."

Billy Harris, standing in for the injured Jack Draper, began with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 defeat of Shintaro Mochizuki. Great Britain sealed the match when Neal Skupski and Olivia Nicholls defeated Yasutaka Uchiyama and Nao Hibino 7-5, 4-6, 10-7.



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates her victory against Britain's Katie Swan in their United Cup match in Perth yesterday. *(AFP)*

Swiss veteran Stan Wawrinka, 40 and playing his final season, matched it with 23-year-old Italian Flavio Cobolli until a double-fault on match point proved to be the downfall of the three-time Grand Slam winner.

Wawrinka, playing his his second three-hour match in as many days, lost 6-4, 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4).

Bencic spoiled the 30th birthday of Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 6-3. "I had to convince my mind after losing to her at the end of 2025," the winner said.

"It was about mentality out there but I knew I could do it."

In Sydney, Alexander Zverev clinched victory for Germany against the Netherlands as the world number three demolished Tallon Griekspoor 7-5, 6-0.

Eva Lys beat Suzan Lamens 6-2, 6-2 and Germany also took the doubles for a 3-0 sweep.

Playing his first match of 2026, Zverev dropped just seven points in a commanding second set.

"The first set, it was tough to get rhythm,"said Zverev.

"Once I got the chances, I did well and I'm very happy with the win."

Canada beat China, with Victoria Mboko defeating Zhu Lin 2-6, 6-2, 6-0 and Felix Auger-Aliassime overcoming Zhang Zhizhen 6-4, 6-4. The 18-nation mixed-team event in Perth and Sydney is a warm-up for the Australian Open which begins on January 18.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Managerless Chelsea dent City title hopes

Injury-time Fernandez goal gives Chelsea 1-1 draw with Man City

AFP
London

Manchester City's Premier League title challenge suffered a huge setback as managerless Chelsea salvaged a dramatic 1-1 draw, while Harrison Reed's stunning last-gasp strike gave Fulham a 2-2 draw against Liverpool yesterday.

Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim sparked fresh talk about his future with a fiery press conference after his side rescued a 1-1 draw against bitter rivals Leeds.

But it was City's spluttering attempt to stop Arsenal running away with the title that took the spotlight as they fell six points behind the Gunners.

After Arsenal's 3-2 win at Bournemouth on Saturday, Pep Guardiola's second-placed side had no margin for error against troubled opponents at the Etihad Stadium.

Yet they stumbled in painful fashion as Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez equalised deep into stoppage-time to cancel out Tijjani Reijnders' 42nd-minute opener.

Just days after Chelsea parted company with boss Enzo Maresca, the Blues were managed by Under-21 coach Calum McFarlane.

McFarlane will never forget his first senior match as a manager after frustrating the decorated Guardiola.

But despite the damage McFarlane inflicted on Guardiola's title dreams, Strasbourg boss Liam Rosenior remains the leading candidate to replace Maresca on a permanent basis.

City, who host Brighton on Wednesday, have gone two games without a win following their 0-0 draw at Sunderland on January 1.

They will hope for a favour from Liverpool on Thursday when Arne Slot's men face Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium. At Craven Cottage, Liverpool looked set to consolidate their place in the top four when they came from behind to lead. Harry Wilson opened the scoring against his former club to give Fulham a deserved half-time lead. Florian Wirtz levelled before Cody Gakpo steered home Jeremie Frimpong's cross in the 94th minute.

However, the visitors' celebrations were cut short when Reed took aim from outside the box and blasted into the top corner for his first goal in three years.

A point keeps Liverpool, unbeaten in nine games in all competitions, three points ahead of fifth-placed Chelsea in the battle for a place in the Champions League.


Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez (right) celebrates after scoring a goal during the Premier League match against Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester yesterday. *(AFP)*

Amorim makes his point

The Red Devils were headed for a rare defeat at Elland Road as the sides rekindled their historic rivalry after Leeds' two-year absence from the Premier League.

Brenden Aaronson's strike early in the second half sparked wild scenes of jubilation among the home fans, but Matheus Cunha quickly levelled to ensure United did not fall to a first defeat against Leeds in 16 years.

United have consistently wasted opportunities to move into the top four in recent weeks and Amorim hinted he will not remain at Old Trafford beyond the end of his contract in 18 months' time.

"I came here to be the manager, not to be the coach," said Amorim.

"In every department - the scouting department, the sporting director -- (they) need to do their job. I will do mine for 18 months and then we move on."

Tottenham did little to ease the pressure on Thomas Frank in a 1-1 draw at home to Sunderland.

Ben Davies put Spurs in front, but they were unable to hold out for just a second home league win since the opening weekend of the season.

Brian Brobbey equalised 10 minutes from time for Sunderland to extend their unbeaten run to five games despite being depleted by the absence of six players at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Spurs slip to 13th, three points behind eighth-placed Sunderland.

Igor Thiago's hat-trick fired Brentford up to seventh with a 4-2 win at Everton.

Nathan Collins was also on target for the Bees.

Newcastle beat Crystal Palace 2-0 at St James' Park thanks to second-half goals from Bruno Guimaraes and Malick Thiaw.

SERIE A

Napoli keep pace in title race after defeating Lazio

Reuters
Rome

First-half goals from Leonardo Spinazzola and Amir Rrahmani helped Napoli claim a 2-0 victory at Lazio yesterday in a heated contest that featured three red cards.

The result left Napoli one point adrift of leaders AC Milan, who are on 38 points, while Inter sit third on 36 ahead of their match against Bologna later on Sunday.

Despite being hampered by the absence of a number of injured players, including Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Billy Gilmour, Napoli appeared largely in control as they patiently built their attacks.

Napoli seized control in the 14th minute when a teasing cross drifted to the back post, where an unmarked Spinazzola fired a volley home to give the visitors the lead.

Antonio Conte's side underlined their dominance in the 32nd minute when a free kick was floated into the box and Rrahmani headed into the bottom corner to double the visitors' lead.

Napoli came close to stretching their advantage just minutes later when Eljif Elmas rose to meet a delivery but his header crashed against the crossbar.

Napoli's injury concerns deepened in the second half when David Neres was seen limping off. The stoppage sparked a brief flashpoint between the two sides, ending with yellow cards for Rrahmani and Lazio's Tijjani Noslin.

Lazio's afternoon unravelled further in the 81st minute when Noslin was sent off for a clumsy challenge on Alessandro Buongiorno. Tempers flared again minutes before full time as Lazio's Adam Marusic and Napoli's Pasquale Mazzocchi became embroiled in a heated confrontation, prompting Napoli coach Antonio Conte to intervene in an attempt to separate the pair. Both players were subsequently shown red cards.


Napoli's Leonardo Spinazzola (right) celebrates with team-mate Scott McTominay after scoring a goal during the Serie A match against Lazio at The Olympic Stadium in Rome yesterday. *(AFP)*

LA LIGA

Garcia hits treble as Real Madrid thrash Betis without Mbappe

AFP
Madrid

Gonzalo Garcia bagged a hat-trick for Real Madrid as they beat Real Betis 5-1 yesterday to stay on La Liga leaders Barcelona's tail.

Spanish striker Garcia, filling in for the injured Kylian Mbappe, opened the scoring after 20 minutes and then volleyed home a superb second early in the second half to give Madrid a commanding lead. Raul Asencio further extended Xabi Alonso's side's advantage before Cucho Hernandez pulled one back for Manuel Pellegrini's visitors, sixth.

Madrid youth academy product Garcia completed his hat-trick after 82 minutes with a clever flicked finish to delight fans at the Santiago Bernabeu, with Fran Garcia notching a late fifth.

Madrid, second, cut Barca's lead back down to four points after the champions edged Espanyol 2-0 in a Catalan derby on Saturday.

It eased the pressure on Alonso, who scraped through to 2026 at the helm despite reports he was on the verge of being sacked after a run of inconsistent form.

With top goalscorer Mbappe sidelined with a knee sprain, Alonso turned to 21-year-old forward Garcia to replace him, as he did during the Club World Cup last summer. Garcia's opportunities have been limited this season despite acquitting himself well in the United States and he proved himself again.

"These were three very special goals, my first hat-trick here at the Bernabeu, my first goals this season as well," he told reporters, before admitting he still faces a fight for minutes. "In front of me I obviously have the best players in the world, like Mbappe, Rodrygo (Goes), (Jude) Bellingham, Vinicius," he continued.

"I just focus on myself, which means working day by day and taking the opportunities the coach gives me, like today, and I hope I can deliver and help my teammates every minute I get."

Madrid started strongly and took a deserved lead through Garcia's looping header from Rodrygo's free-kick.

Betis battled back into the game and were the more dangerous team in the remainder of the first half, although they could not test Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid extended their lead early in the second half after an excellent finish from Garcia, who controlled Fede Valverde's long ball on his chest and volleyed home from the edge of the box.

Asencio, who also came from Madrid's youth academy, nodded home Rodrygo's corner for Madrid's third before the hour mark in one of the more convincing performances under Alonso.

With the points secured Madrid relaxed and Betis created some danger, with Giovani Lo Celso and Rodrigo Riquelme hitting the woodwork and Hernandez rounding Courtois before drilling home.

Garcia restored Madrid's three-goal advantage with a lovely flick from Arda Guler's cross, drawing applause from the watching Mbappe.

With virtually the final kick of the game defender Fran Garcia, who played with Madrid at youth level before moving to Rayo Vallecano, fired home Valverde's cross to round off an emphatic victory.

"It was a tough game for us, one to forget and we have to turn the page as quickly as possible," said Betis midfielder Marc Roca.


Real Madrid's Gonzalo Garcia celebrates his hat-trick of goals during the La Liga match against Real Betis at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid yesterday. *(AFP)*

Inter Miami sign goalkeeper Dayne St Clair

Inter Miami yesterday signed 2025 MLS Goalkeeper of the Year Dayne St Clair to a contract through the 2026 season.
Financial terms were not disclosed by the club on the deal, which includes an option through June 2027.
He spent the past seven seasons with Minnesota United before becoming a free agent.
"I'm super excited to be joining the club and look forward to representing you guys on and off the field," St. Clair said in a video posted by the team.
"Can't wait to get down there to meet everyone and start our preparation to win trophies."
St. Clair, 28, led the league with a 77.93 save percentage and set career highs in saves (113) and clean sheets (10) in 30 matches with Minnesota United.
He was the only MLS goalkeeper to finish with a goals-against average of 1.00 or lower and a save percentage above 75%.
A two-time MLS All-Star (2022, 2025) and All-Star MVP (2022), St. Clair has totaled 37 clean sheets in 135 career matches (all starts).
The Canadian international was selected by the Loons with the seventh overall pick of the 2019 MLS SuperDraft out of Maryland. *(Reuters)*

LIGUE 1

Marseille crash to defeat vs Nantes

AFP
Marseille

Marseille kickstarted the year by crashing to a 2-0 home defeat to lowly Nantes in Ligue 1 as Roberto De Zerbi's team finished with just nine men on the pitch.

Red cards either side of half-time for Arthur Vermeeren and Bilal Nadir, coupled with a Fabien Centonze strike and a late Remy Cabella penalty, condemned Marseille to a fifth defeat of the campaign as they remain eight points behind surprise league leaders Lens.

Crucially, the loss was also a missed opportunity for third-placed Marseille to open up a gap with the chasing pack for the final automatic Champions League qualification spot as they failed to capitalise on fourth-placed Lille's 2-0 defeat to Rennes yesterday.

Just a third victory of the season for Nantes, Ahmed Kantari's team have provisionally climbed out of the relegation zone at the expense of Auxerre, who play later. "It gives us a boost," Nantes coach Kantari said. "There's the satisfaction of taking three points. We're in a race for points, so it feels good. When we win, we feel lighter and more confident."

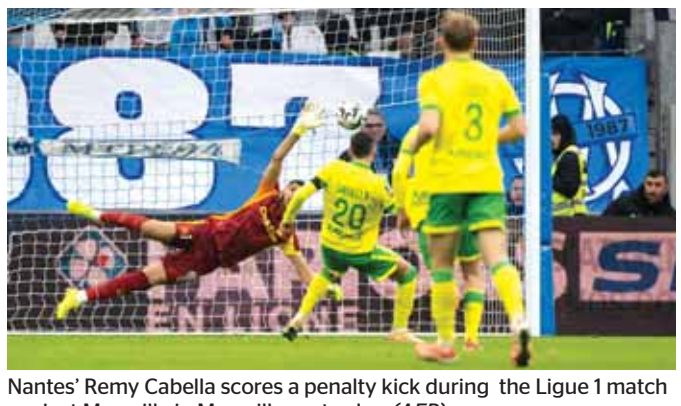
Marseille handed Nantes the numerical advantage on 26 minutes as midfielder Vermeeren was dismissed for an overexuberant challenge on Anthony Lopes as he tried to charge down the goalkeeper's clearance.

The visitors then took the lead five minutes later as Centonze pounced on weak parry by Geronimo Rulli to open the scoring from close range.

De Zerbi responded immediately by sending centre-midfielder Nadir on in the place of forward Igor Paixao.

The decision did not pay off as the 22-year-old was himself dismissed after collecting a pair of yellow cards in the space of two minutes early in the second half.

Despite being down to nine, Marseille pushed in search of a leveller at the Velodrome as Nantes continued to make chances at the other end.


Nantes' Remy Cabella scores a penalty kick during the Ligue 1 match against Marseille in Marseille yesterday. *(AFP)*