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MOTORSPORT

Desert King is back: Al-Attiyah claims sixth Dakar Rally crown

The 55-year-old moves two ahead of Vatanen and Sainz, eyes Peterhansel's record of eight titles



Dacia Sandriders' Qatari driver Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and Belgian co-driver Fabian Lurquin celebrate with the trophy after winning the 48th edition of the Dakar Rally in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. The winner of the bike category Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Luciano Benavides is also seen in the picture. (Reuters)

AFP
Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah secured his sixth Dakar Rally car title in Saudi Arabia yesterday with Luciano Benavides scraping home by two seconds to claim the bike title.

Al-Attiyah, at the wheel of a Dacia, only had to avoid a final day slip-up to top the podium after bringing his career tally of stage wins to 50 on Friday. The 55-year-old, who took skeet shooting bronze at the 2012 London Olympic Games, was adding to his previous Dakar wins in 2011, 2015, 2019, 2022 and 2023.

"We've worked very hard since last year. I might not be showing much emotion yet, but it's there, deep down. We are so happy to win," said al-Attiyah at the finish. "I think we made the difference on the second day of the first marathon stage by building up a twelve-minute lead. Yesterday was also important. That's when we knew we'd won the race."

With Belgian co-driver Fabian Lurquin, al-Attiyah took control of the overall

standings early on in the motorsport marathon. After placing ninth on the 13th and final stage in Yanbu on the Red Sea he had almost 10 minutes in hand over second-placed Nani Roma (Ford).

The 2014 champion Roma said: "Yesterday I broke a wheel 50 metres before the end of the special, but we kept believing in our chances and here we are today, in second place. I only have words of gratitude for my team."

"This victory doesn't belong to me, but to the team. Without them, nothing is possible. You have to congratulate Nasser for pulling it off, but also Mattias Ekstrom, because with two Fords on the podium, we're coming back for more next year."

Roma's Swedish teammate Mattias Ekstrom won the final stage to complete the car podium in third overall. For Romanian car manufacturer Dacia this was their first Dakar victory at only their second attempt.

Al-Attiyah already had the second-most overall victories in the car section of the rally. He moved two ahead of Finn Ari Vatanen and Spaniard Carlos Sainz, who are tied for third with four each.

Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel won

a record eight times in cars between 2004 and 2021 to go with his car six victories in the bike category. "This is my sixth victory. I still need to break Peterhansel's record," said al-Attiyah.

Last year's champion, Saudi Yazeed al-Rajhi, was forced to pull out with mechanical problems last week.

Earlier, Argentina's Luciano Benavides took the bike honour by a mere two seconds. Second in the 13th and closing stage was enough for the 30-year-old KTM rider to deny Honda's American two-time champion Ricky Brabec and secure a debut Dakar crown. "I've dreamed of this moment my whole life," said the winner.

Brabec, winner in 2020 and 2024, was on target for a third title but lost time when he went the wrong way close to the finish of the 105km ride around Yanbu.

"Even yesterday, it seemed impossible, but I still felt it could happen, and today Ricky took the wrong line and I took the right one," Benavides said.

"It was a glimmer of hope. I saw it was him and that he had to pull a U-turn to get back on the right line because crossing between the two was impossible. I saw the



Nasser al-Attiyah gestures with his hands to indicate his sixth Dakar win.



Nasser al-Attiyah posing with his sketch made by Gulf Times cartoonist Reynold Phillips. It was presented to the six-time Dakar Rally champion by Event Manager Dakar Rally, Anoop Reynold, in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia.

opening and I went for it."

Edgar Canet won the bike stage, with Spain's Toshha Schareina (Honda) finishing third and also taking the number-three spot in the overall standings. Benavides' older brother Kevin won the marathon race in 2021 and 2023. Benavides said he had given his all "from start to finish today".

"I'd told everyone before the start that this Dakar was mine," he added. "Nine

years in the Dakar and my first win. My brother and I are making history. He won by 43 seconds and I've won by two. I think I have him beaten on that front! It's a dream come true."

Lithuania's Vaidotas Zala took his first title in the trucks category, dethroning Martin Macik of the Czech Republic who ended up fourth. American Brock Heger won the SSV race.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Collado strikes as Shamal beat Rayyan to move to third spot



Al Shamal's midfielder Alex Collado celebrates after scoring against Al Rayyan in the Qatar Stars League at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shamal climbed to third in the Qatar Stars League following a 1-0 win over Al Rayyan, while Al Sailiya moved off the bottom with a 2-1 victory over Qatar SC yesterday.

A second-half strike from Alex Collado proved enough for Al Shamal to take their tally to 24 points – seven behind leaders Al Gharafa and two adrift of defending champions Al Sadd, who are second in the table.

At Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, Collado struck in the 54th minute after Al Rayyan goalkeeper Mahmud Abunada had punched away a Baghdad Bounedjah attempt. Al Shamal also had two goals ruled out for offside deep in the match. Al Rayyan – on 23 points – slipped to fourth place, three ahead of fifth-placed Al Arabi.

"We deserved the victory after we had a top performance," Bounedjah said after the win. "Today's match was exciting and featured physical clashes from both sides, and we knew that whoever scored the goal would win."

Meanwhile, Abdulrahman Mohamed and Di-



Al Sailiya scored a thrilling and vital 2-1 win over Qatar SC at the Grand Hamad Stadium.

ogo Amaro struck in the second half to give Al Sailiya a much-needed victory over Qatar SC at Grand Hamad Stadium.

Soon after, Eisa Ahmad Khalidi aimed for goal, but Al Sailiya goalkeeper Fahad Younis Baker made a diving save and pushed the ball towards a lurking Amaro, who struck his team's winning goal in the 84th minute.

The result gave Al Sailiya valuable three points, moving them away from the dreaded 12th spot to 10th with 11 points, while Qatar SC remained seventh on 17 points.



TABLE TENNIS

Ovtcharov stuns top-seed Shidong, Woojin

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The title race at WTT Star Contender Doha 2026 has been turned upside down. In a vintage display of power and grit, German veteran Dimitrij Ovtcharov pulled off the upset of the tournament, knocking out world number one and top seed Lin Shidong in a high-octane Round of 16 clash.

Rolling back the years at the Lusail Sports Arena, the 37-year-old Ovtcharov dismantled the Chinese phenom with a devastating 3-1 victory (11-9, 11-9, 3-11, 11-9).

The 37-year-old looked every bit the player who rose to World No.1 in the pinnacle of his career back in 2018, dictating the pace of play right from the off as he looked to put Lin firmly on the backfoot.

Fighting his way back up the standings following a series of injury setbacks over the past couple of seasons, Ovtcharov has been building momentum in recent months, with impressive outings on the WTT Champions stage. But yesterday he'd take home his biggest statement win in a while, restricting top seed Lin to just a single game.

Lin Shidong's exit is a significant



Dimitrij Ovtcharov of Germany celebrates a point against world number one Lin Shidong of China at Lusail Sports Arena yesterday.

shake up to the title race, but he wasn't the only high-profile player to hit a roadblock, with No.3 seed Tomokazu Harimoto also ruining his luck. Despite eight Match Point saves yesterday, Harimoto would ultimately fall short, losing out to qualifier Xue Fei by the smallest of margins (11-3, 5-11, 11-6, 12-14, 11-9).

Later in the day, Ovtcharov added another prominent name to his

list of victories. Overturning an early deficit, Dima outlasted WTT Champions Doha 2026 runner-up Jang Woojin, leaving no stone unturned to get the job done in five (9-11, 12-10, 11-6, 9-11, 11-7).

Meanwhile, the Women's Singles draw also lost its top-seeded entry as Kuai Man left the table in defeat.

Facing off against the defensive brick wall that is Hitomi Sato, the

match opened in jaw-dropping fashion as Sato locked up the opening nine points, leaving Kuai with nothing to show for. The World No.4 would produce a staggering response, winning the following 10 points to set up Game Point at 9-10, but she'd fail to capitalise.

With that rollercoaster of a first game eventually going Sato's way, the Japanese defender's confidence received a welcome boost, and she



The women's doubles final at the WTT Star Contender Doha 2026 in Qatar - an all-Japanese clash - was won by Satsuki Odo and Sakura Yokoi yesterday. They defeated Saki Shibata and Hitomi Sato 3-0 (12-10, 11-4, 11-9).

only got better as the match progressed.

After three games the debate was settled, Sato had staged the upset (13-11, 11-9, 11-7), a result that will be felt up and down the draw.

The Japanese superstar held aloft the WTT Finals Hong Kong 2025 winner's trophy just last month, reaffirming his status as one of the sport's all-time elite players.

This high-stakes tournament began last Tuesday at the Lusail Sports Arena and featured 170 players competing for a \$300,000 prize purse.

It followed immediately after the WTT Champions Doha, keeping the momentum of elite competition alive in Qatar. As the Star Contender event wraps up, the focus shifts to the next generation of talents.

TENNIS

Djokovic likes his chances at Australian Open

The Serb needs one more Grand Slam title to take outright record

Reuters
Melbourne

A defiant Novak Djokovic is adamant he can still beat any player on his day but at 38 the Serb is no longer focusing on the Grand Slam record, saying he does not need the pressure it brings.

With 24 Grand Slam titles, the 10-times Australian Open champion needs one more to move clear of Margaret Court and take sole ownership of the all-time record.

"There has been a lot of talk about the 25th, but, you know, I try to focus myself on what I have achieved, not what I'm possibly achieving," he told reporters at Melbourne Park yesterday.

"I mean, I hope it comes to that, but 24 is also not a bad number. I have to appreciate that and remind myself of the amazing career I had. And also release some of that unnecessary pressure."

"Obviously there is always pressure and expectations, but I don't think it's needed for me to really go far in terms of make-it-or-break-it type of thing... I don't feel it's necessary."

"Neither does that allow me to excel and perform my best."

Djokovic made the semi-finals of all the Grand Slams last year but Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have proved a brick wall in his bid for more major silverware.

He will likely need to beat one or both of them to clinch an 11th title at Melbourne Park in his 21st



Serbia's Novak Djokovic speaks at a press conference ahead of the 2026 Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

appearance in the men's singles.

Battle-hardened after 20 years at the top of the game, Djokovic conceded it would be hard to beat the duo in five-set Grand Slam matches after losing to Alcaraz in last year's US Open semis.

Yesterday, though, the fourth-seeded Serb was ruling nothing out.

"I know that when I'm healthy, when I'm able to put all the pieces of the puzzle together on a given day, I feel like I can beat anybody," he said.

"If I don't have that self-belief and confidence in myself, I wouldn't be here definitely sitting

here and talking to you guys or competing."

"I still have the drive, and of course I understand that Sinner and Alcaraz are playing on a different level right now from everybody else. That's a fact, but that doesn't mean that nobody else has a chance."

"So I like my chances always in any tournament, particularly here."

Famously cagey about his injuries, Djokovic pulled out of the Adelaide International in the leadup to Melbourne Park, saying he was not physically ready.

He declined to elaborate on

what he called a little setback but said he felt generally good ahead of a first-round match against unseeded Spaniard Pedro Martínez tomorrow.

He also shot down any talk of retirement, saying he was some way off planning a farewell season and that walking out onto a court to compete was still an adrenaline rush.

"It's almost like a drug, to be honest," he added.

"But right now I'm still number four in the world, still competing at the highest level, and I feel like there is no need to draw the attention to that (retirement) discussion."

ANNOUNCEMENT

Organising Committee for Qatar-UAE Super Cup unveils latest preparations

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Organising Committee for Qatar-UAE Super Cup unveiled details of the tournament's third edition, which brings together clubs from Qatar and the UAE, at a Press Conference held yesterday, at the Torch Hotel. Present were representatives of Organising Committee - Ahmed al-Adsani, Director of Competitions, Abdullah al-Minhali, Facility Manager, and Ali Hassan al-Salat, Media Manager.

The conference reviewed prepa-

rations for the two matches to be held in Doha - Al Gharafa vs Sharjah (UAE) in Super Cup and Al Sadd vs Shabab Al Ahli in Super Shield.

Al-Minhali confirmed that the Al Gharafa vs Sharjah match would be played on January 22 (kick-off 7pm) at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, with gates opening to fans at 4pm.

He emphasised the readiness of facilities and the full co-ordination with security authorities. He added that the Al Sadd vs Shabab Al Ahli match (kick-off 7pm) would be played on January 24 at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, confirming that designated fan zones have been set up at both stadiums.

and fan activities and prize draws would be organised in co-ordination with competing clubs.

On his part, al-Adsani explained that the tournament features four teams from each country. He noted that the matches are played in a knockout format, with penalty kicks immediately following a draw at the end of regular time. The tournament winners will receive a cash prize of QR4mn and runners-up QR2mn. He emphasised that there are incentives specifically designed to encourage attendance and enhance the tournament's competitive atmosphere.

The Organising Committee re-

views the regulations after each edition and works to improve the tournament's technical and organisational aspects to ensure the best possible outcome.

Al-Salat yesterday said the tickets had been on sale since January 11 through online platforms of UAE Pro League and Qatar Stars League.

He explained that 75 per cent of the tickets for Al Sadd vs Shabab Al Ahli match and 50 per cent of the tickets for Al Gharafa vs Sharjah match had already been sold out, with sales expected to increase on conclusion of Week 13 of Doha Bank Stars League.

Al-Salat thanked the tournament's official sponsors, most notably Visit Qatar, official sponsor for three seasons, Air Arabia as official airline sponsor, Ooredoo as telecommunications partner, and Jetour Motors in addition to fan zones set up by companies such as Hardee's, Red Bull and Jetour on the sidelines of competitions.



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FOOTBALL

Mbappe, Asencio on target as Real Madrid post win

Real steady ship with 2-0 home victory over struggling Levante

Reuters
Madrid

Real Madrid ended a turbulent week with a 2-0 La Liga win over lowly Levante yesterday courtesy of second-half goals from Kylian Mbappe and Raul Asencio, after being met with boos from a restless Bernabeu crowd before the breakthrough arrived.

Real stayed second in La Liga on 48 points from 20 matches, one behind leaders Barcelona, who have a game in hand and visit Real Sociedad today. Levante are 19th with 14 points.

The win also snapped Real's two-match losing run and offered brief respite after a bruising week.

They looked flat in the first half, still carrying the scars of Sunday's 3-2 Spanish Super Cup final defeat by Barcelona, followed by the departure of manager Xabi Alonso and a shock 3-2 Copa del Rey exit to second-division Al-bacete.

Boos greeted the players at kickoff, with sections of the crowd also directing chants at club president Florentino Perez. Real finally eased the tension when defender Dela tripped Mbappe in the box, and the French forward converted the penalty in the 58th minute to extend his league-leading tally to 19 goals.

Seven minutes later, Real doubled their advantage through centre-back Asencio, who rose to meet Arda Guler's corner with a powerful header to make it 2-0, giving new coach Alvaro Arbeloa a crucial cushion and settling the mood inside the stadium.



Real Madrid's French forward Kylian Mbappe shoots during the Spanish league match against Levante UD at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

ARBELOA REACTS
Tensions at the Bernabeu spared no one, with the crowd particularly aggressive towards Vinicius Jr and Jude Bellingham, whistling both players whenever they touched the ball during a cagey first half.

Vinicius, who scored 22 goals last season, has managed only

six across all competitions this campaign, while Bellingham has found the net five times, compared with 15 last season.

Asked about Vinicius, Arbeloa - a former Real right back - said he is determined to help the 25-year-old Brazilian winger rediscover his best form.

"I've been booted a lot myself, and one of the things that makes this club great is the high standards demanded," the Spaniard said.

"We know what kind of week we've had, and the demands placed on us, and we have to take it in our stride because they know

we can give more. I have no complaints about them - it's on us to give much more at the Bernabeu," he said.

"I'm going to work on improving Vinicius. I'm going to ask his teammates to give him as many balls as possible. He's the most unpredictable player in the world."

When asked about chants aimed at Perez, Arbeloa defended the club president: "I believe the shouts are not from people who dislike Florentino, but from people who dislike Real Madrid. All Madrid fans know how fortunate we are to have him."

GOLF

Taylor retains share of lead in title defence at Sony Open



Davis Riley hits out of the sand on the 16th fairway during the second round of the Sony Open in Hawaii. (Reuters)

Reuters
Honolulu

Canada's Nick Taylor endured an inconsistent second round on Friday at the Sony Open in Hawaii, but the defending champion retained a share of the lead at the PGA Tour's season-opening event in Honolulu.

Taylor shot a 1-under-par 69, leaving him at 9-under 131.

Also at 9 under are first-round co-leader Kevin Roy, who carded a 69 on Friday, Davis Riley (64), Belgium's Adrien Dumont de Chassart (67) and South Korea's SH Kim (68).

Maverick McNealy (66), Chris Gotterup (69), England's John Parry (68) and Japan's Takumi Kanaya (66) are tied for sixth at 8 under.

Taylor offset four birdies with three bogeys on Friday as he seeks to win on the PGA Tour for the

fourth year in a row. He acknowledged he has a lot of players to hold off if he is to earn his seventh career tour victory.

"I feel like at least here the first two days it's very bunched," Taylor said. "I don't know how many guys are within a couple shots of the lead, but probably almost double digits."

After following up a 62 on Thursday with a 69, Taylor said: "Today was difficult because conditions were much harder today, slightly different (wind) directions. It was really different golf course today compared to yesterday."

"So there is still some opportunities, but like a lot of par-3s you're happy with pars. I played them even today, which is pretty solid."

Roy endured a round similar to Taylor's: three bogeys, four birdies. He birdied the par-4 ninth hole to close his round and keep his spot among the co-leaders.

Faldo, 68, returns home following open-heart surgery

Cleveland: Six-time major champion Nick Faldo announced that he is headed home following open-heart surgery.

Faldo, 68, underwent a preventative procedure at The Cleveland Clinic.

"After two weeks in Cleveland, Nick Faldo, and his wife, Lindsay, are on their way home following a successful, scheduled preventative open-heart surgery to repair his enlarged aorta, performed by world-renowned cardiac surgeon Dr. Lars Svensson at The

Cleveland Clinic," read a post from Faldo's official X account on Friday.

"...Home never felt so good," the post added.

Faldo won three times at both the Masters (1989, 1990 and 1996) and The Open Championship (1987, 1990 and 1992) and finished with 43 professional victories.

The Englishman was named the PGA Player of the Year in 1990 and was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 1997.

FOCUS

Martinez guides Inter past Udinese and 6 points clear

AFP
Udine, Italy

Lautaro Martinez made sure that Inter Milan put pressure on their Serie A title rivals with the only goal in yesterday's 1-0 win at Udinese, which extended his team's league lead to six points.

Martinez expertly poked home the winner in the 20th minute in Udine to continue Inter's nine-match unbeaten run in Italy's top flight.

Inter were the better team from start to finish, putting pressure on Udinese high up the pitch as Cristian Chivu wants his team to do.

"What we're displaying on the pitch is a testament to the desire of these players, because it's not easy to change habits," Chivu told DAZN.

"We defend high up the pitch and we start with pressure from the forwards and it comes from their work, the desire for our midfielders to win duels and from the courage of our defenders in



Inter Milan's Argentinian forward Lautaro Martinez kicks the ball during the Italian Serie A match against Udinese at the Friuli stadium in Udine yesterday. (AFP)

maintaining a high line." Inter have collected 25 points from a possible 27 since losing the Milan derby at the end of November and again showed a ruthlessness in dealing with the smaller sides that both AC Milan and Napoli

have lacked. Napoli take on Sasuolo in yesterday's next fixture after three straight draws have left the champions in third, nine points off the Scudetto pace.

Second-placed Milan host Lecce today with a six-point gap

separating them from local rivals Inter even though the seven-time European champions haven't lost since the opening day of the season.

Massimiliano Allegri's side have dropped a host of points to teams they should beat, starting back in August against Jamie Vardy's Cremonese who remain the only team to get three points from Milan.

Inter meanwhile have the opposite problem, with a poor track record in matches against high-profile opposition, a weakness which will be tested by Premier League leaders Arsenal on Tuesday in the Champions League.

Four straight wins at the start of the league phase of the competition were followed up by two defeats which have left direct qualification for the last 16 in doubt.

Juventus, in fourth spot, trail Inter by 10 points but have been improving under Luciano Spalletti and are heavy favourites to win at Cagliari in Saturday's late match.

NIGERIA EDGE EGYPT ON PENALTIES FOR THIRD PLACE AT CUP OF NATIONS

Casablanca: Nigeria secured third place at the Africa Cup of Nations, edging Egypt 4-2 on penalties after a goalless draw in yesterday's bronze medal match. Goalkeeper Stanley Nwabali made two saves from Egypt's Mohamed Salah and Omar Marmoush to set up Nigeria's success in the shootout at Casablanca's Stade Mohamed V.

Nigeria had the ball in Egypt's net twice but the efforts from Paul

Onauchu in the first half and Ademola Lookman after the break were ruled out.

Onauchu's was disallowed because he had elbowed Egypt defender Hamdi Fathy in the face, which was confirmed after a VAR check.

Lookman, who came on as a halftime substitute, had his effort chalked off for offside.

Nigeria have now finished third at nine Cup of Nations tournaments.



Nigeria's defender Chidzoe Awaziem celebrates after the penalty shoot out in the Africa Cup of Nations third-place match against Egypt at the Mohammed V Stadium in Casablanca yesterday. (AFP)

BUNDESLIGA

Dortmund waste two-goal lead but score stoppage-time win over St Pauli



St Pauli's Ricky-Jade Jones fouls Borussia Dortmund's Maximilian Beier resulting in a penalty during their Bundesliga match at Signal Iduna Park, Dortmund, Germany, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Berlin

An Emre Can penalty in the fifth minute of stoppage time saved Borussia Dortmund's blushes in a 3-2 home win against lowly St Pauli in the Bundesliga yesterday.

Dortmund were cruising when Julian Brandt and Karim Adeyemi scored either side of half-time but St Pauli hit back with goals by James Sands and Ricky-Jade Jones inside the space of 10 minutes. In the dying moments, VAR found a foul on Germany forward Maximilian Beier, bringing Dortmund captain Can to the spot.

"What a rollercoaster ride," Can told Sky Germany, but added: "We need to do much better to

settle things down and to convert our chances."

The win helped Dortmund cut the gap to Bayern Munich to eight points, but the league leaders can restore their 11-point buffer with a win at RB Leipzig later on Saturday.

With German chancellor and Dortmund fan Friedrich Merz watching from the home VIP box, the hosts overcame a poor first half when Brandt tapped in from close range just before the break. Adeyemi created the opener and gave Dortmund a two-goal buffer in the 54th minute, converting a Fabio Silva assist.

Sitting bottom of the table, St Pauli had won just once since September but fought back into the game when Sands and Jones scored midway through the second half to stun the hosts.

Deep into stoppage time, Jones caught Beier on the edge of the penalty area, allowing Can

to convert nervelessly from the spot. Elsewhere, Hoffenheim's Wouter Burger scored the only goal in a 1-0 home win over flailing Bayer Leverkusen to climb to third in the table.

Burger swung in an excellent free-kick after nine minutes to give the hosts the three points.

Relegation candidates last season, Hoffenheim are on track to qualify for Europe's top competition for just the second time in their history, having last done so under now-Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann in 2017/18.

Leverkusen have now lost four of their past six, falling three points behind the Champions League placings.

Cologne beat Mainz 2-1 at home, Wolfsburg played out a 1-1 draw with Heidenheim and hosts Hamburg were held to a scoreless draw by Borussia Moenchengladbach.

HORSE RACING

Al Jeryan Stud's Aafoor retains Sheikh Joaan Rifle

Wathnan Racing dominated the meet securing seven victories out of 10 races at Al Rayyan Racecourse



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, presented the Rifle to M H K al-Attiyah, who received it on behalf of the winning owner Al Jeryan Stud after Aafoor's victory at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Wathnan Racing and trainer Alban de Mieulle dominated the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle Day by securing seven victories out of 10 races on the turf track of the QREC's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. Al Jeryan Stud's Aafoor retained the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle, by winning the 2,200m race for the four-year-old+ Thoroughbreds. The victory came under the guidance of jockey Szczepan Mazur.

In the day's feature and final race, Aafoor ensured the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle remained with Al Jeryan Stud for a second consecutive year, successfully defending his title in the Class 1 Thoroughbred feature for four-year-old+ over 2,200m.

The seasoned campaigner delivered a determined and resolute performance, showing admirable courage in the closing stages as he surged to the front and held firm under sustained, collective pressure to prevail by a neck.

Prepared once again by M H K al-Attiyah and partnered by Szczepan Mazur, the victory also secured Aafoor's second victory in just three starts this season, finishing runner-up on one of them as well, and qualification for the Shafra race at the HH The Amir Sword Festival in February.

President of the Qatar Olympic Committee HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani presented the Rifle to M H K al-Attiyah, who received it on behalf of the winning owner Al Jeryan Stud, in the presence of Rashid bin Nasser Sraiya al-Kaabi, QREC Vice-Chairman, and Ahmed Amanullah al-Shaibani, QREC Deputy CEO.

In the penultimate race on the card, Lippo De Carrere extended Wathnan Racing and Alban de Mieulle combination's remarkable hold on the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy by landing the Group 3 Purebred Arabian feature for four-year-old+ over 2,200m, ensuring the prestigious prize remained in the famous



Szczepan Mazur rides Al Jeryan Stud's Aafoor to HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle victory.



Wathnan Racing's Lippo De Carrere won the Group 3 Purebred Arabian feature.

colours and with the master trainer for a fourth consecutive year, following three successive renewals won by the champion Abbes.

A winner of the four-year-old edition of this trophy last season, the five-year-old returned this year to add the senior Gr3 PA title, underlining the dominance of Wathnan Racing and trainer De Mieulle by securing a seventh success on the 10-race card, with the victory coming under the guidance of Saadi, who rode his second winner of the day.

Khaddah opened his winning account in memorable fashion by landing the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy for four-year-old Purebred Arabians over 1,750m, Class 2, prevailing by a quarter of a length.

The grey colt, drawn in barrier one, built on a sequence of three runner-up finishes earlier in his career and delivered at the fifth attempt, showing both patience and a sharp turn of foot when it mattered most. Carrying the colours of Wathnan Racing, he was trained by De Mieulle and partnered by James Doyle, with the success bringing up a sixth winner on the day

for the owner-trainer combination and a fifth for the jockey. He, further, retained the trophy for the same trio for the second year in a row after they landed the same title through Lippo De Carrere last year.

Meshal bin Ali al-Attiyah, ambassador of the State of Qatar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, presented the HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy to Sheikh Abdulla-

lah bin Tamim al-Thani receiving the prize on behalf of Wathnan Racing, owners of Khaddah, winner of the eighth race on the card. English jockey James Doyle also left a mark as he rode five winners on the day.

Sheikh Joaan also honoured the Al Sabiq Championship winning riders, in the presence of Rashid bin Nasser Sraiya al-Kaabi,

QREC Vice-Chairman, and Ahmed Amanullah al-Shaibani, QREC Deputy CEO. The traditional contest was staged as part of His Excellency's Rifle meeting. The first four places were secured, in order, by Mohammed Kamaan Saeed al-Hajri aboard Malzoom, Ali Mohammed Ali al-Otibi partnering Shere Khan, Mohammed Faisal Abdulhadi al-Marri guiding Mahjooba and Saud Rashid Mohammed Meteb al-Saq riding Kahilan Al Sakab.

RESULTS

HE SHEIKH JOAAN BIN HAMAD AL THANI RIFLE DAY

- 1 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle, Thoroughbreds
Aafoor, M H K al-Attiyah, Szczepan Mazur
- 2 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Purebred Arabians, Gr3
Lippo De Carrere, Alban de Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi
- 3 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Purebred Arabians
Khaddah, Alban de Mieulle, James Doyle
- 4 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Purebred Arabians
Mac'zoom Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
- 5 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Thoroughbred Open Race
Dark Trooper, Alban de Mieulle, James Doyle
- 6 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Local Thoroughbreds
Equinoxe, Alban de Mieulle, James Doyle
- 7 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, 3YO Thoroughbreds, 3YOs, 1400m
August George, Jassim al-Ghazali, Alberto Sanna
- 8 - HE Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Trophy, Thoroughbred Open Sprint
Soldier's Gold, Alban de Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi
- 9 - Desert Rose Cup, Local Thoroughbred Fillies & Mares
Doha Bu Thaila, Alban de Mieulle, James Doyle
- 10 - Al Na'amra Cup, Local Purebred Arabian Fillies & Mares
Razika, Alban de Mieulle, James Doyle

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man United dent Man City's title bid as Arsenal held

AFP
London

Michael Carrick made a flying start to life as Manchester United boss against Manchester City but Premier League leaders Arsenal missed a chance to pull nine points clear.

Sorry Tottenham slipped to defeat against relegation-threatened West Ham, further increasing the pressure on beleaguered boss Thomas Frank, while Liverpool were held to a 1-1 draw by lowly Burnley. Carrick's first game of his second temporary spell in charge of the Red Devils could barely have gone better in a dominant 2-0 win at Old Trafford.

The former United midfielder was appointed as head coach until the end of the campaign following the sacking of Ruben Amorim earlier this month. The 44-year-old, who was also briefly United's caretaker boss in 2021, said ahead of his first game that there was still "magic" at United, and his team put on a memorable show.

Second-half goals from Bryan Mbeumo and Patrick Dorgu capped an energetic and incisive display by United, who could have won by a far more comfortable margin. "Great start. No getting away from that," said Carrick. "The boys were fantastic. Consistency is the key to any success," he



Manchester United's Bryan Mbeumo (second left) scores past Manchester City's Gianluigi Donnarumma at Old Trafford. (AFP)

added. "If you could find that, then you're onto a winner."

Guardiola admitted that his team - winless in four league games this year - were outplayed by Carrick's inspired United. "The better team won," said the City boss. "We weren't at the level required to win this game."

Arsenal are seven points clear at the top despite being held to a 0-0 draw for the second league game in a row at Nottingham Forest. A frustrated Arteta, chasing a

first Premier League title for the Gunners since 2004, felt that his side should have been awarded a penalty, believing Ola Aina had handled the ball. "We created four big, big, big chances and a clear penalty, but we weren't able to win the game," said the Spaniard. "I've just seen the replays. I think it's a clear intention to clear the ball inside and it's a clear penalty so I don't understand why it's not been given."

Third-placed Aston Villa can close to within four points of Arsenal if they beat

Everton today.

The mood at Tottenham darkened further after Spurs slipped to a 2-1 defeat against West Ham, who had not won a Premier League match since early November. Spurs fans turned on Frank and chanted "you're getting sacked in the morning" after Callum Wilson struck a stoppage-time winner.

Spurs, 14th in the table, have won just two home league games this season, leaving Frank, in his first campaign in charge,

under enormous pressure. "It's tough to take, it hurts a lot," the Spurs boss told Sky Sports. "The boys put everything in, and that's a sign of a squad that is fighting, doing everything they can to try and win."

Nuno Espirito Santo's West Ham finished the day five points behind Forest, who are just above the relegation zone. Defending champions Liverpool are now unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions but dropped two valuable points against struggling Burnley at Anfield.

Germany midfielder Florian Wirtz scored his third league goal since his arrival while the visitors drew level in the 65th minute when Marcus Edwards placed his shot beyond the reach of Alisson Becker. "It feels like a defeat," said Wirtz.

"When we had so many shots and so many on target, I think we had to score more goals. "But some days are like this -- you try everything but in the end it doesn't go in the goal."

Chelsea boss Liam Rosenior, who replaced the departed Enzo Maresca earlier this month, watched as his side saw off high-flying London rivals Brentford 2-0. Joao Pedro gave the Blues the lead in the first half and Cole Palmer doubled the advantage from the spot in the 76th minute.

Sunderland beat Crystal Palace 2-1 while Leeds scored late on to beat Fulham 1-0, remaining eight points clear of the relegation zone.