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SPORT



OPINION

Sheikh Joaan election as
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SPOTLIGHT

Gulf, Asian sports leaders place confidence in Sheikh Joaan's bold leadership

THE NEWLY-ELECTED OCA PRESIDENT SEEN AS AN ASTUTE SPORTS ADMINISTRATOR

QNA
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The election of HE the President of the Qatar Olympic Committee Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani as President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has earned wider traction and commendations from sports leaders across Asia, particularly from the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states.

A variety of officials at OCA and national Olympic committees spoke to Qatar News Agency (QNA), expressing their confidence in Sheikh Joaan's leadership capabilities and immense expertise in administering sports activities and advancing the sports movement in Asia.

Vice-President of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee (SOPC) Prince Fahd bin Jalawi al-Saud affirmed that electing Sheikh Joaan represents a triumph for sports in the entire Asia, and the Gulf region in particular.

Taking on the mantle of this high-profile tenure is a pride for all, as Sheikh Joaan represents the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as he does Qatar, amid the historic and long-standing relationship between the two countries, he underlined.

Prince Fahd said he is fully confident in the massive expertise Sheikh Joaan possesses to crucially help advance Asian sports and elevate them to the highest global heights.

He asserted his full support and absolute trust in Sheikh Joaan's capability to spearhead OCA toward a new era of achievements.

For his part, President of the Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah stressed that floating Sheikh Joaan to lead OCA is a gain for entire Asia.

He commended the clear footprints of Sheikh Joaan in the advancement of Qatari and Asian



President of the Olympic Council of Asia HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev, HE the Minister of Sports and Youth Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani and OCA officials at the end of the OCA General Assembly in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, yesterday.

sports, declaring Kuwait's unequivocal backing of his upcoming career.

Successful election cherished
This successful election is highly cherished and greeted by the entire Gulf and Asia, as Sheikh Joaan's compelling and successful career has been monitored in sports fields domestically and beyond, leaving explicit and influential footprints that made him the most deserving one for this high-profile position, Sheikh Fahad pointed out.

Sheikh Fahad elaborated that having Sheikh Joaan in the upper echelon of this council underscores the tremendous confidence in his leadership capabilities and effective role in developing the sports movement on the Asian stage to lead them toward new heights of excellence.

Secretary-General of the United Arab Emirates National Olympic Committee Faris al-Mutawa asserted that this election is a pride for the GCC nations and all Arabs. Today's congratulations go to the

Gulf region and Asia in general for this successful selection, since having Sheikh Joaan take on the mantle of this leadership is an extraordinary milestone and a true nurturing of the Asian Olympic movement, by dint of his in-depth vision and field expertise that have materialised in years-long accumulation marked by contributions in sports fields, al-Mutawa noted.

The UAE looks forward to reinforcing combined efforts and effective collaboration with OCA, led by Sheikh Joaan, to help achieve fur-

ther successes that appropriately suit the ambitions of the Asian peoples, he added. Al Mutawa asserted that this milestone is a natural extension of Sheikh Joaan's illustrious career in serving sports, adding that he is confident OCA will move ahead toward achieving epic ambitions, as well as strengthening the Asian sports movement and elevating it to new heights of excellence.

For his part, President of the Palestine Olympic Committee Jibril Rajoub asserted that this election underscores Qatar's standing in

Qatari officials appointed to key leadership roles in OCA

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) announced the appointment of several Qatari professionals to senior leadership positions within its organizational structure, in a move that reflects the professional competence and administrative expertise of national cadres and supports the advancement of Olympic work across Asia. The new appointments include Sheikh Faisal bin Ahmed al-Thani as Head of the President's Office and Director of International Relations, Mubarak Mohammed al-Buainain as Director of Media, Saeed Ali al-Awami as Director of Protocol for the President's Office, and Khalid Hamdan al-Zamat as Secretary of the President's Office. These appointments, bringing diverse expertise, are expected to contribute to the implementation of the Council's strategic objectives and enhance institutional efficiency, serving the development of the Olympic sports movement across the continent.

buttressing Asian sports awareness.

He suggested that undoubtedly success and development would be concrete in the coming period while Sheikh Joaan spearheads the Asian sports movement, relying on the tremendous successes he has achieved throughout the past era.

Rajoub further stressed that this election would deepen a systematic approach that would achieve the interests of all members of Olympic committees, as well as accomplish the sublime mission of the council.

Sheikh Joaan set to usher in 'golden era'

Prominent Qatari journalists and writers have hailed the election of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), as president of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), describing it as a pivotal moment and the start of a "golden era" for Asian sports. Speaking to the Qatar News Agency (QNA), commentators noted that Sheikh Joaan's decade-long leadership of QOC has been marked by unprecedented achievements, equipping him to guide Asian sport toward a stronger global presence. They said his tenure at the OCA is expected to carry a clear Qatari imprint, with the overarching goal of positioning Asian sport at the forefront of the international stage. Observers highlighted that Sheikh Joaan's leadership agenda will focus on key initiatives, including sustainable development and comprehensive digital



transformation within the OCA, while leveraging Qatar's global standing to support the growth of sport across the continent. They also pointed to his ambitious plans to enhance athlete performance, nurture talent, elevate competition standards and broaden fan engagement. Abdullah Talib al-Marri, editor-in-chief of the Qatari newspaper *Arrayah*, said the achievements under Sheikh Joaan's leadership of QOC demonstrate his ability to succeed at the continental level. He added that Sheikh Joaan's vision and dedication have raised Qatar's profile in international Olympic forums, providing valuable experience that will benefit the OCA. Al-Marri emphasised that Qatar's unprecedented Olympic achievements were the result of a strategic vision implemented successfully over the past decade, and that Sheikh Joaan's leadership has transformed

ambitions into tangible results, citing Olympic gold medals as evidence of this success. Similarly, Faleh al-Hajri, editor-in-chief of *Al Arab* newspaper, said Sheikh Joaan's election marks a qualitative leap for Asian sport, which he believes will drive further progress and prosperity across the continent. Al-Hajri praised Sheikh Joaan's leadership capabilities and extensive experience, noting that Qatar's success in developing smart sports infrastructure and applying digital and sustainable practices will form the foundation of his strategy at the OCA. He added that adopting these concepts will enhance operational efficiency, governance and transparency within the council, and predicted that Sheikh Joaan will extend Qatar's modern, technology-driven approach to sports management to benefit Asian sport as a whole. For his part, Mohammed Hajji, editor-in-chief of *Al Watan* newspaper and vice-president of the International Sports Press Association (AIPS), highlighted the political and sporting influence that the State of Qatar now enjoys globally, considering it a major asset in supporting the candidacy of Sheikh Joaan for the presidency of the OCA. In statements to QNA, al-Hajji said that Sheikh Joaan's leadership of the OCA would allow maximum benefit from Qatar's strong international relations built over recent years, noting that these distinguished ties would be leveraged in favour of Asian sport to ensure the continent secures its rightful position on the global Olympic stage.

For his part, Fahad al-Emadi, an *Al Watan* editor, affirmed that a key pillar of Sheikh Joaan's success as President of QOC has been his focus on investing in human capital, an approach he expects to be implemented across Asia to enhance athlete development during his tenure at the OCA. Meanwhile, Abdulaziz al-Maarefi, editor-in-chief of *Al Sharq* newspaper said that Sheikh Joaan's achievements during his years as QOC's President demonstrate his capacity and vision to restructure and diversify Asian competitions, making them more attractive and competitive while raising the overall profile of Asian sport globally. Al-Maarefi indicated that Sheikh Joaan's leadership of the OCA would usher in a qualitative transformation in the structure and content of Asian competitions, including comprehensive reforms to the Asian Games and other continental championships, enhancing their organisation as well as their commercial and media appeal to attract sponsors and audiences. He added that Sheikh Joaan's presidency would mark a shift toward more professional and transparent sports governance in Asia, leading to increased Asian medal counts at future Olympic Games through comprehensive support programs. This, he said, would position the OCA as an influential partner in global sports decision-making rather than a passive participant. Al Maarefi stressed that developing Asian sporting competitions represents one of the most significant upcoming challenges facing the President of QOC during his tenure as OCA President. (QNA)

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan delay final call on T20 World Cup participation

AFP
Islamabad

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) president Mohsin Naqvi said yesterday a final decision on the team's participation in next month's Twenty20 World Cup will be delayed by up to a week, keeping open a possible boycott over Bangladesh's withdrawal. Naqvi met Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif yesterday to take his advice on the situation, after which a call was expected to be made, but the cricket board boss posted on X that "the final decision will be taken either

on Friday or next Monday". Describing a "productive meeting" with the premier, he said Sharif "directed that we resolve it while keeping all options on the table". Naqvi threw the national cricket team's participation into doubt on Saturday, saying Pakistan could pull out after the International Cricket Council (ICC) replaced Bangladesh in the tournament. Local media also reported that Pakistan could also boycott a February 15 match against arch-rivals India over political tension. Pakistan's reaction comes after the ICC rejected Bangladesh's demands to relocate their World Cup matches from India to Sri Lanka over security fears.

On Saturday, the ICC replaced Bangladesh with Scotland as per the Twenty20 international rankings. Pakistan backed Bangladesh's stance in Wednesday's ICC Board virtual meeting, saying there was a precedence of relocating India's matches on security fears from Pakistan in last year's Champions Trophy. Then India, who have not toured Pakistan since 2008, played all their matches in Dubai. The same option was given to Pakistan who will not tour India and play their Twenty20 World Cup matches in Sri Lanka under an agreement signed last year saying the two countries will play on neutral venues whenever one of

them hosts an ICC event. Pakistan and Bangladesh revived their sour relations after the ousting of prime minister Sheikh Hasina in a student-inspired uprising in Bangladesh. In contrast, Dhaka and New Delhi fell out over demands India hand over the fugitive former premier. Earlier this month, the Board of Control for Cricket in India told Indian Premier League franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to drop Bangladesh cricketer Mustafizur Rahman due to political tensions. Bangladesh then refused to play in India and demanded their matches be relocated to co-hosts Sri Lanka, but the ICC rejected the appeal.



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif with PCB president Mohsin Naqvi during a meeting in Islamabad yesterday.

CRICKET

England and Root test Sri Lanka's home ODI success

'ROOT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A THORN IN OUR FLESH'

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka's five-year unbeaten home series ODI run faces its stiffest test today, with England levelling the series 1-1 and Joe Root again the key obstacle. Root has been England's sheet anchor, posting half-centuries in both matches, with his back-to-the-wall 75 in Saturday's second ODI laying the foundation for a five-wicket victory. "Joe's unbelievable, the way he batted the other night showed his class in these conditions when the pitch is turning," England spinner Liam Dawson told reporters in Colombo yesterday. "To be that successful and dominate world cricket for the number of years he's played is phenomenal. He's obviously going to go down as one of the greats of the game." Root has taken the old-school route, at a time when most modern batters try to bludgeon spin into submission by sweeping, reverse-sweeping and going aerial. He does use the sweep, but he is far from a one-trick pony. Playing late, using soft hands and milking the bowling for singles, he rotates strike effortlessly, shifting pressure back onto the bowlers. Sri Lanka know the equation only too well. "Root has always been a thorn in our flesh and we have seen how, when we dismiss him early, Eng-



land struggle," captain Charith Asalanka said. "He holds one end up, builds partnerships and he is England's key, we know that. His experience, with over 22,000 international runs, makes him a huge challenge for us, but we are ready for him in the series decider." England's growing comfort with spin was underlined in the second ODI. They rolled out six slow bowling

options and sent down 40.3 overs of spin, the most by an England side in ODI history. Dawson believes that depth could be a trump card with the T20 World Cup looming, which Sri Lanka will co-host with India. "With the World Cup being in this part of the world, having so many spin options is a good thing for the captain," Dawson said. "On flatter surfaces, you have to vary your pace and things like

that, but in these conditions, you just have to land it in a good spot - and let the pitch do the rest." The Sri Lanka tour is a dress rehearsal for the World Cup for England. "This experience of playing here before the World Cup is important for us," Dawson said. "Hopefully we can win the last game, build some confidence, compete well in the T20 series coming up and head into the World Cup on a high."

England's Dawson wants to be fifth time lucky with World Cup debut at age 35

Liam Dawson, who has been with the England squad at four different World Cups but never played a match, is hoping to make his debut at the global tournament in next month's Twenty20 World Cup at the age of 35. Dawson was in the squad at the T20 World Cup in 2016 and the 50-over one in 2019. He was a travelling reserve in the T20 World Cups of 2021 and 2022 and last month was named in

England's 15-man party for this year's tournament co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. He has scored one fifty and taken 33 wickets for England in 33 matches across all formats and has been the team's most economical bowler in the ongoing one-day international (ODI) series against Sri Lanka in Colombo. Left-arm spinner Dawson conceded 31 and 40 runs from his 10 overs in both matches, with the series level at

1-1 going into today's decider. "Obviously, the older you get. Sometimes you don't expect to be involved. I'm 35 now but it's amazing to be back involved. And obviously, the World Cup is going to be a really cool occasion if I'm selected to play," Dawson told reporters yesterday. England will play three T20 matches against Sri Lanka before kicking off their World Cup campaign against Nepal in Mumbai on February 8.

Bradman's 'Baggy Green' cap worn against India sells for \$460,000 at auction

A "Baggy Green" cap worn by Don Bradman during a series against India in 1947-48 was sold for \$460,000 at a Gold Coast auction yesterday, fetching the highest price for a cap sported by the great Australian batsman. Bradman had gifted it to Indian cricketer Sriranga Wasudev Sohoni, whose family preserved it for the last 75 years. "That's over three generations under lock and key. If you were a family member you were only allowed to look at it when you were 16 years old for five minutes," said Lee Hames, the chief operating officer of Lloyds Auctioneers and Valuers. The cap was sold to an anonymous bidder and will be kept on display at an Australian museum, local media reported. The cap, which has the names "D.G. Bradman" and "S.W. Sohoni" inscribed on the inside, is in good condition. Another cap worn by Bradman was sun-faded and insect-damaged when it fetched \$310,000 at auction in 2024. Widely regarded as the greatest batsman in history, Bradman played 52 tests with a batting average of 99.94, nearly 40 runs higher than any other player.



FOOTBALL

Bayern confirm talks to extend Kane's contract

AFP
Munich

Bayern Munich sporting director Max Eberl yesterday confirmed the club are in talks to extend Harry Kane's deal at the club. The 32-year-old England forward, who joined Bayern in 2023, has a deal until 2027. "We're talking to Harry, we're talking," Eberl said at a Bundesliga event in Frankfurt. "Everyone knows at some point a decision has to be made," he added. Club CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen said yesterday: "Harry has great confidence in us and he feels comfortable in Munich. "He and his family are settled in. Therefore we've got absolutely no reason to rush." Long without a team trophy, Kane broke his drought in 2025 when Bayern won the Bundes-

liga. This campaign, Bayern are eight points clear in the league and sit second in the 36-team Champions League table. Speaking in October, Kane said he could "definitely imagine" extending his stay in Germany. Kane has scored 119 goals in 126 games for Bayern, while adding 30 assists. This campaign, Kane has 34 goals in 30 games. With 21 goals in 19 Bundesliga matches, Kane is on track to break the single season league record of 41 goals set by Robert Lewandowski in 2020-21.



BOTTOMLINE

Can Arsenal handle Premier League weight of expectation?

AFP
London

Top of both the Premier League and Champions League and still in both domestic cup competitions, Arsenal fans should be relishing what could yet turn out to be the greatest season in the Gunners' history. But a 3-2 defeat to Manchester United has reopened the debate over whether Mikel Arteta's side can shrug off their tag of nearly men to deliver a first league title in 22 years. Arsenal still hold a four-point lead over an inconsistent Manchester City and surprise-packages Aston Villa at the top of the table with 15 games to go. Already assured of progression

to the Champions League last 16, Arteta's men are also well placed to reach the League Cup final and have a favourable home draw against third-tier Wigan in the FA Cup fourth round. But legendary former captain Patrick Vieira questioned the mental strength of the current Arsenal crop after a tentative display against United to lose at home for the first time this season. They have finished second for the past three Premier League seasons and have not won any major trophy since Arteta's debut season six years ago. "There are still questions about the mental strength of the team," Vieira said. "They need to understand when they are on the pitch they have to play with more energy and more risks. They have the quality." As City and Villa have stum-

bled in recent weeks, Arsenal have wasted the chance to turn the title race into a something of a procession. After back-to-back goalless draws against Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, Arsenal conceded three goals for the first time in nearly three years as a rejuvenated United won at the Emirates for the first time since 2019. "We have to show the mental strength that we have on the pitch when it comes to matchday," said Arteta when questioned about his side's doubters. "We lost a game... It's how we react to that and I am very convinced because I know those players in that dressing room and how much we want it that we're going to react immediately." Despite their lofty position, a lack of invention in the final third is not a new problem for Arteta



Arsenal's David Raya reacts with teammates after Manchester United's Patrick Dorgu scores their second goal in their Premier league match on Sunday. (Reuters)

to solve. No Arsenal player has scored more than five league goals this season, a quarter of the tally of Manchester City's Erling Haaland. A Lisandro Martinez own goal and Mikel Merino's finish from a corner means more than half of Arsenal's Premier League goals have come either from op-

position players or set-pieces. The signing of Viktor Gyokeres has failed to end Arteta's quest for a prolific number nine, while star winger Bukayo Saka has gone off the boil with no goals in his last 13 games. However, Arsenal remain very much in the box seat for a first title since Vieira's side went

a full league season unbeaten in 2003/04, thanks in part to the unreliability of their rivals. City won for the first time in five league games in 2026 against bottom-of-the-table Wolves on Saturday. But Pep Guardiola's men travel to Tottenham and Liverpool in their next two league games - two stadiums where they have rarely succeeded even during a glorious era. Villa's first title since 1980/81 would be an even bigger shock as they continue to punch above their weight under Unai Emery. "The journey's not always going to be smooth, there's going to be ups and downs," said Saka. "It's up to us to show our character next week." If Arsenal can restore order, the title remains theirs for the taking.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Sinner races on, Pegula knocks out champ Keys

Musetti battles stifling conditions to set up a last-eight showdown with Djokovic

AFP
Melbourne

Jannik Sinner sent an Australian Open statement in rolling into the quarter-finals but fellow champion Madison Keys was dethroned as Melbourne braced for forecast 45C heat.

Fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti battled stifling conditions to set up a last-eight showdown with Novak Djokovic and six-time major champion Iga Swiatek progressed in rampant fashion. Two-time defending champion Sinner raced to a 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) victory over fellow Italian and close friend Luciano Darderi.

The second seed plays the United States' all-action eighth seed Ben Shelton after he beat Norway's 12th-seeded Casper Ruud in four sets. Djokovic and Sinner are on course for a blockbuster last-four showdown. Sinner told Margaret Court Arena, where temperatures hovered around 30C in the early evening: "It was difficult to put the match away, happy I closed it in three sets."

Sinner sent down a bumper 19 aces in the match, and said his hard work had paid off. "Still room to improve but happy how I have come back in the new season," he added.

In another clash between compatriots and friends, Jessica Pegula defeated title-holder Keys, 6-3, 6-4. The Americans host a tennis podcast together, "The Player's Box", and had even been planning to record an episode on the eve of their match.

All that was put aside as a clinical Pegula dominated to set up a last-eight encounter with another American in fourth seed Amanda Anisimova.

Anisimova, beaten finalist at last year's US Open and Wimbledon, cooled herself off with bags of ice before taming China's Wang Xinyu 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Pegula, the sixth seed, is chasing an elusive Grand Slam title aged 31, her best performance to date reaching the US Open final in 2024. An erratic Keys made 27 unforced errors to Pegula's 17 and fired down six double faults as her title defence folded.

The forfeit, as a part of a jokey bet with Pegula, will be a slice of apple pie with melted cheddar cheese on top. "A bet is a bet, so I'll do it. I hope it's less gross than I think it's going to be, but we will find out," said Keys, who described herself as proud despite defeat.

Fifth seed Elena Rybakina dismantled



Two-time defending champion Jannik Sinner raced to a 6-1, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) victory over fellow Italian and close friend Luciano Darderi. (Reuters)

21st seed Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-1, 6-3 and will play second seed Swiatek. The Pole demolished home qualifier Maddison Inglis 6-0, 6-3 as she closes on a first Australian crown, having won all three of the other majors.

Inglis, ranked 168, was in the biggest match of her life after two-time Melbourne champion Naomi Osaka pulled out injured from their third-round meeting.

Just being in the fourth round earned Inglis a life-changing Aus\$480,000 (US\$330,000) - she plans to buy a toaster and a kettle with the windfall.

After brutal weather caused the suspension of matches on Saturday, temperatures rose sharply again. Longer matches yesterday had 10-minute breaks in certain circumstances as part of measures to protect

player health. Temperatures are forecast to hit a blistering 45C today, meaning matches are likely to be played under roofs on the three courts that have them.

In the last match of the day on Rod Laver Arena, Shelton defeated father-to-be Ruud 3-6, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4, letting out an almighty roar in victory. Melbourne Park king Djokovic was supposed to face the 20-year-old Jakub Mensik in the night match.

But the Czech player pulled out injured on Sunday, sending 10-time champion Djokovic into the last eight without hitting a ball. The 38-year-old Serb will play Musetti after the Italian defeated American ninth seed Taylor Fritz 6-2, 7-5, 6-4. Djokovic has won nine of their 10 previous meetings, but Musetti said: "I feel ready to try to push him to his maximum."



USA's Jessica Pegula celebrates her victory over compatriot Madison Keys. (AFP)

Qatar Olympic Academy signs co-operation agreement with Saudi counterpart

Tashkent: The Qatar Olympic Academy today signed a co-operation agreement with its Saudi counterpart on the sidelines of the 46th General Assembly of the Olympic Council of Asia in Tashkent.

The agreement aims to strengthen regional and Gulf sports co-operation and comes as part of ongoing efforts to promote the Olympic movement and support sport as a tool for community and regional development.

Under the agreement, the two academies will enhance co-operation in the development of sports training personnel, while supporting the exchange of knowledge and practical expertise. The partnership reflects the strong historical and sporting ties between the State of Qatar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Key areas of co-operation include the exchange of invitations to attend courses and conferences organised by both academies, as well as the organisation of joint training programmes for sports academy staff, with a focus on advanced training skills.

The agreement also provides for the organisation of joint workshops to discuss key sports-related issues, including the development of educational programmes and the handling of administrative challenges. In addition, both sides will implement joint programmes aimed at preparing specialised sports training personnel, including coach education across various sports.

The signing of the agreement represents a strategic step towards developing a new generation of sports leaders in Asia and the Gulf, particularly in light of global challenges such as the shortage of qualified personnel and the impact of pandemics on the sports sector. It also contributes to enhancing sustainability in sport.

The agreement is aligned with Qatar National Vision 2030, which positions sport as a driver of human development, and Saudi Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify the economy through sports and entertainment.

Qualifier Inglis to splash out on toaster, kettle after last 16 run

Melbourne: Plucky home qualifier Maddison Inglis plans to do a bit of shopping with her unexpected Australian Open windfall - and a toaster and kettle top her wish list. The 168th-ranked Australian was one of the feel-good stories of the Melbourne Grand Slam, coming through qualifying to reach the main draw. She won her first two matches and then had a big stroke of luck when third-round opponent and two-time former champion Naomi Osaka pulled out injured. That propelled the unheralded 28-year-old into the last 16 and what she called a "life-changing" paycheck of Aus\$480,000 (US\$330,000). Inglis was well beaten yesterday on centre court by six-time Grand Slam

champion Iga Swiatek, 6-0, 6-3. But she was all smiles, walking away with memories of a lifetime and the money to buy a few things long on her wish list. "I'll definitely use a lot of it to invest back into my tennis," she said. "I love shopping, so I'm sure I'll buy something nice. I've wanted a Smeg toaster for so long, so long. (But) I just was, like, no you can't do that. So I think that's going to be my treat, and maybe the kettle, too."

Inglis beamed and celebrated when she finally won a game in the second set against Swiatek. Asked about the celebration, she said: "It's not every day you get to play on Rod Laver (Arena), so I was like, let's get the crowd involved and just kind of enjoy it."

FOCUS

Rampant Swiatek to meets old foe Rybakina

AFP
Melbourne

Iga Swiatek said she will draw on her experience and knowledge of playing Elena Rybakina 11 times when they clash once more in the Australian Open quarter-finals.

The six-time major champion set up a showdown with the Kazakh fifth seed by ending the fairytale run of Australian qualifier Maddison Inglis with a rampant display. The Polish second seed, who is chasing a maiden Melbourne title, was in a different class to the Australian with a 6-0, 6-3 demolition job on Rod Laver Arena.

Rybakina, who crushed Elise Mertens 6-1, 6-3, will be a much harder proposition when they meet for a place in the last four. The pair have faced each other many times over the years, with Swiatek holding a 6-5 advantage.

"I wouldn't say head-to-head matters, because even when one of us was winning, it was always a tight match, or she beat me easy," said the Pole. "Doesn't matter, doesn't make sense to



overanalyse who won the last ones or how it has been looking. Every match is a different story. Every match she's been a tough opponent, and her tennis for sure is great. I need to be 100 per cent ready and go for it and use my experience and also the knowledge from previous matches."

Swiatek's victory over Inglis brought to a close the Australian's "life-changing" run. Inglis was thrust into the primetime contest when Naomi Osaka withdrew from their third-round

match with injury, earning her Aus\$480,000 (US\$330,000) and crucial ranking points. But, as expected, her tournament went no further with Swiatek on a mission. "I felt pretty confident from the beginning," said Swiatek, who has won four French Opens, the US Open and Wimbledon, but is yet to lift the trophy in Melbourne.

Last year, she surged into the last four but failed to get past eventual winner Madison Keys. Swiatek made a fast start, holding to love and breaking Inglis straight away.

When the Australian won her first point of the match the home crowd let out a massive roar, but they had little more to cheer about as a red-hot Swiatek got to work. She was totally dominant in racing 5-0 clear and wrapped up the set in 32 minutes, with Inglis winning just 13 points. Against the odds, three consecutive unforced errors handed Inglis a break in the first game of set two, with the 28-year-old throwing her arms in the air and celebrating as if she had won the match. Her joy was short-lived with Swiatek immediately breaking back and romping home with minimum fuss.

AL ARABI, AL WAAB AND MUAITHER REACH QSL CUP QUARTER-FINALS

Doha: Al Arabi, Al Waab and Muaither booked their places in the quarter-finals of the QSL Cup following dramatic and decisive Play-Off victories.

At the Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium in Al Wakrah, Al Arabi edged Qatar SC 12-11 on penalties after a thrilling 2-2 draw in regulation time. Qatar SC were moments away from victory, leading 2-1 deep into added time, before Al Arabi produced a sensational equaliser to force the shootout.

Yan Matheus (14th minute) and Joao Pedro (58th minute) had put Qatar SC ahead, while Al Arabi responded through Karl Toko Ekambi from the penalty spot in the 57th minute and Joao Pedro Darros in the second minute of stoppage time. Ibrahim Abdelhalim Masoud's missed kick proved decisive as Al Arabi advanced. The winners had finished fourth in the league with 19 points, while Qatar SC placed 13th with 13 points.

At Al Shamal Stadium, Al Waab

claimed a convincing 3-1 victory over Mesaimeer to secure their quarter-final berth. Al Waab struck early to establish a 2-0 lead by half-time, with Mekki Mohsen scoring in the third minute and Ameer Fowadah adding the second in the 32nd. Baha Faisal sealed the win in the 69th minute, while Mohammed Djenidi netted a late consolation for Mesaimeer in the 74th. Al Waab had finished fifth in the league standings with 18 points, while Mesaimeer were 11th on 13 points.

Meanwhile, Muaither registered a comfortable 2-0 win over Al Kharaitiyat at Al Khor Stadium. Both goals came after the break, with Siriky Diabate opening the scoring in the 56th minute before Etyan Morales doubled the advantage in the 76th. Muaither, who finished third in the league phase with 20 points, moved confidently into the last eight, while Al Kharaitiyat had scraped into the Play-Offs in 14th place, the final qualifying position, with 13 points.



SPOTLIGHT

Sheikh Joaan at OCA helm reflects Qatar’s long-standing sports stature: QMMF President



By Sports Reporter
Doha

President of the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) Abdulrahman bin Abdul Latif al-Mannai has congratulated HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), on his election as President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA).

Several Qatari sports bodies congratulated Sheikh Joaan on his election, saying the achievement reflects Qatar's advanced standing in sports at both the continental and international levels.

Al-Mannai said the election of Sheikh Joaan to this prestigious position is a well-deserved culmination of a career filled with successes and accomplishments. It also recognises his pioneering role over more than a decade in leading the Qatari Olympic movement, establishing Doha as a global capital of sport, and setting a benchmark for modern sports management, he added.

The QMMF President noted that the unprecedented organisational successes and outstanding Olympic results achieved under Sheikh Joaan's leadership, most notably Qatar's best-ever Olympic performance at the Tokyo 2020 Games, along with hosting major international and continental championships, are clear evidence of his leadership competence and comprehensive strategic vision, capable of guiding Asian sports to new heights.

Al-Mannai added that the extensive experience of Sheikh Joaan, both through his

Sheikh Joaan election as OCA President qualitative addition to sports movement: AFC chief

Kuala Lumpur: Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifa, Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President and First Vice President of FIFA, affirmed that the election of HE President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, as President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) reflects the confidence of the Asian sports community in His Excellency and his ability to lead the Council towards broader horizons of excellence and development.

In a statement, Sheikh Salman said that Sheikh Joaan's presidency of the OCA will have a direct and positive impact on the future of the sports movement in Asia by strengthening cooperation among continental sports institutions, supporting development and sustainability initiatives, and consolidating Olympic values across various federations and national committees.

AFC President congratulated Sheikh

Joaan on his election as OCA President. He emphasised that the next phase requires leadership with experience, vision, and the ability to work institutionally, noting that Sheikh Joaan possesses high



administrative capabilities and a proven track record that qualifies him to lead the OCA towards a bright future that meets the aspirations of the Asian sports family.

The AFC President concluded his statement by wishing Sheikh Joaan success in his duties and affirming the Asian football family's support for all initiatives that contribute to the advancement of Asian sports and serve the continent's athletes.

Sheikh Joaan was elected unopposed as the new OCA President during the 46th General Assembly meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, with the participation of more than 350 sports officials from 45 Asian National Olympic Committees. (QNA)

presidency of the QOC and his position as First Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC), in

addition to his contributions to developing sports talent through the Qatar Olympic Academy, enhances the prospects for a

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani Speaking at a Press Conference:



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani



- Expressed his pride in having him elected as president of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)
- Pledged to serve all 45 national Olympic committees with a spirit of transparency, resolve, and partnership
- Highly prioritizes governance and focuses on perfectly managing resources through tremendously organizing upcoming tournaments
- Supporting youth would be a priority for OCA, not only athletes but administrators as well, through mobilizing new talents in administering sports enterprises
- Recalled that Asian media outlets are incredibly fundamental partners in the Olympic movement
- The council is here to serve Asia, as well as national Olympic committees and their sports, with the best available capabilities
- Indicated that the massive diversity in Asia cannot be seen as a challenge, but rather as an offered opportunity to evolve

qualitative leap forward for the OCA in the coming period.

Al-Mannai affirmed his great confidence in Sheikh Joaan's ability to represent the Asian continent in the best possible way and to continue promoting the values of the Olympic Movement. He wished him success in his new role and praised the unlimited support provided by the wise leadership to sports and athletes, in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

Meanwhile, Qatar Football Association President and QOC Secretary-General Jasim bin Rashid al-Buenain congratulated Sheikh Joaan on his election. "Heartfelt congratulations to His Excellency Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani on the occasion of his election as President of the Olympic Council of Asia. A leadership stemming from extensive experience and an ambitious vision that will contribute to the development of the Olympic movement on the continent and the enhancement of the Asian sports journey," he wrote on X.

Also, Executive Director of the Qatar Olympic Academy (QOA), Khalil al-Jaber, expressed his best wishes for success to HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani during his tenure as President of the Olympic Council of

Asia, which is considered the second-largest sporting organisation in the world.

Al-Jaber explained that Sheikh Joaan left a clear and lasting mark during his presidency of the QOC, whether through the major sporting events hosted by the State of Qatar or through the notable achievements realised by Qatari sport.

He added that the OCA is set to witness a significant qualitative leap during His Excellency's presidency, given his strong vision and great ambition to develop the sports system and host major international sporting events.

Mohammed Ahmed al-Mudahka, President of the Qatar Chess Association welcomed the appointment of Sheikh Joaan as President of the OCA. He said it is a significant gain not only for the State of Qatar but for Asian sports as a whole. He noted that the Asian continent is poised for an ambitious vision and substantial development in the future under the leadership of Sheikh Joaan. Al-Mudahka expressed his pride in the election of HE Sheikh Joaan to head the world's largest regional organisation, a decision stemming from confidence in his ambitious vision to lead Asian sports to greater heights.

FOCUS

Carrick says Man United must ride wave of confidence



Reuters
London

Manchester United's stand-in manager **Michael Carrick** continued his dream start to his second stint in the position with victory at Arsenal on Sunday and said his team must ride the wave of confidence that has swept away the Old Trafford gloom.

Former midfielder Carrick answered United's call in the wake of Ruben Amorim's sacking this month and his two games in charge have seen a 2-0 win against Manchester City and a thrilling 3-2 victory at Premier League leaders Arsenal.

"We've got to ride it and use the emotion, you have got to use the energy and use the confidence," Carrick, whose team moved up to fourth in the table, said. "You've got to be humble enough to understand how we could just achieve these two big results. It doesn't just come easy, so we need to continue that and bottle it and use it again."

United had to dig deep on Sunday as Arsenal bossed the opening half-hour and led through a Lisandro Martinez own goal. But Bryan Mbeumo was gifted an equaliser and stunning goals by

Patrick Dorgu and Matheus Cunha in the second half sealed a first United league win at Arsenal since 2017. "The goals were fantastic and some of the football was good, and we looked dangerous at certain times," Carrick, who won multiple league titles in United's midfield, said. "Other times we had to defend, but it was just a performance with a bit of everything, really."

Carrick was also unbeaten in his three-game stint as caretaker manager in 2021, including a 3-2 win against Arsenal before handing over the reins to Ralf Rangnick. With Carrick placed in charge until the end of the season this time, he has the chance to stake his claim for the role on a permanent basis and his stock has risen rapidly.

"What happens next I'm not going to be answering it every week. I'm enjoying it and I'll continue to do what I can," the 44-year-old said when asked about his ambition. "I know from our perspective it's just about moving forward to the next game. It's been less than two weeks that we've been together, so it's just keep getting good habits and good routines. The boys have been fantastic with that. But I don't think we can look too far ahead. We'll finish where we finish by getting the results."

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Europe's elite jostle for last 16 places

AFP
Paris, France

Holders Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid and Liverpool are among the clubs battling for direct passage to the last 16 of the Champions League going into the final round of the league phase this week.

Fifteen teams have already sealed their progress to the knockout rounds but a further 17 sides will be competing for the remaining places with all 18 games kicking off at the same time tomorrow. The top eight receive a bye into the last 16 while the next 16 teams enter Friday's draw for the play-offs, although PSG demonstrated last season that is no obstacle to lifting the trophy. Here is a look at what's at stake on matchday eight:

QUALIFIED FOR LAST 16

Arsenal, with seven wins from seven, and Bayern Munich are the only two clubs already assured of a place in the last 16. The Gunners could become the first team to win all eight games since the league phase was introduced last season. They host Kairat Almaty, who are bottom of the table with just a single point.

Bayern's lone defeat in Europe came at Arsenal in November. Vincent Kompany's side go to PSV Eindhoven in their final fixture.

KNOCKOUT PLACE GUARANTEED

Real Madrid, record 15-time winners of the competition, will wrap up a last-16 berth with victory away to Jose Mourinho's Benfica. Liverpool will join them if they beat Qarabag at Anfield, while Tottenham know victory at Eintracht Frankfurt will allow them to also bypass the play-offs despite their domestic struggles.

Eight teams – those placed sixth to 13th – are locked on 13 points, with reigning cham-



Reigning champions PSG will host Newcastle at the Parc des Princes. (Reuters)

pions PSG hosting Newcastle at the Parc des Princes. Chelsea currently occupy the final top-eight spot but face a tricky assignment at Napoli, coached by former Blues boss Antonio Conte. Barcelona and Manchester City are ninth and 11th respectively. They are poised to sneak into the top eight if any of the teams above them slip up. At least PSG or Newcastle, if not both, will drop points. Sporting Lisbon, Atletico Madrid and Atalanta are also in the mix, while Inter – who have lost three matches in a row – and Juventus sit on 12 points. All of those clubs will progress from the league phase regardless of Wednesday's results.

ON COURSE FOR KNOCKOUTS

Borussia Dortmund are all but certain to advance alongside Galatasaray. Azerbaijan's Qarabag are on track to reach the knockouts for the first time after a last-gasp win over Eintracht last week. Marseille, Bayer Leverkusen, Monaco, PSV, Athletic Bilbao and Olympia-

cos round out the top 24 as it stands, but there are seven clubs beneath them who could force their way back into contention.

TEAMS IN DANGER

Italian champions Napoli are the most notable team at risk of missing out on the knockout phase. They are 25th – behind Olympiacos by virtue of fewer goals scored. FC Copenhagen also have eight points but head to Barcelona for their final match. Benfica and Ajax, both former European champions, must win to stand a chance of qualifying. The same is true for Club Brugge, Bodo/Glimt, Pafos and Union Saint-Gilloise.

ELIMINATED

Debutants Kairat and Villarreal have lost six of seven matches. Slavia Prague are also yet to win, while Eintracht sacked coach Dino Toppmoeller earlier this month after a poor run of results both in Germany and Europe.

Barca chief Laporta upset by impending Dro switch to PSG

Barcelona: Barcelona president Joan Laporta said that teenage talent Dro Fernandez's decision to leave the club for a planned move to Paris Saint-Germain, despite having previously agreed a new deal with the Catalan giants, was "unpleasant".

Central midfielder Dro, 18, is poised to join French giants PSG, with Spanish media reporting that they will pay Barca slightly more

than his 6mn euro (\$7mn) release clause as a goodwill gesture.

"We will speak when it's all done, it has been an unpleasant situation," Laporta said. "It came as a surprise because we had agreed on a different solution for when he turned 18," continued the Barca chief. "Surprisingly, his representative told us he couldn't follow through on what we'd agreed to."

Laporta indicated that Barca would be able to "change the situation as it was presented" to them, seemingly referring to receiving up to 8.5mn euros for Dro from PSG, rather than the figure stipulated in his release clause.

Dro, who is from Galicia in Spain's northwest, joined Barcelona's La Masia youth academy, considered the best in the world, in 2022 and has since made eight appearances for the club.