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Djokovic gets out of jail and into semis as injured Musetti forced to retire

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**QATAR STARS LEAGUE**

# Umm Salal face Al Arabi, eye revival under new coach

Umm Salal, who sit bottom of the table with nine points, have appointed Roper in place of Carteron

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Umm Salal will look to spark a turnaround under new coach Danilo Roper when they face Al Arabi today at Al Khor Stadium in the opening match of Round 14 of the Qatar Stars League. Umm Salal sit bottom of the table with nine points, while Al Arabi are fifth on 20 points.

The Brazilian coach, appointed to replace Patrice Carteron, said the fixture carries special significance as his first in charge, stressing that his side will approach the contest with a single objective – victory. “This match is very important for the team and for me personally,” Roper said during the pre-match press conference yesterday. “We enter with a clear goal, which is to win and take the three points. Every upcoming match will be treated like a cup final.”

Roper expressed confidence in his players’ commitment, revealing that the technical staff has worked intensively in recent days to correct mistakes from previous outings. He added that Al Arabi have been carefully analysed ahead of the clash.

Al Arabi coach Cosmin Contra, meanwhile, underlined the need for a positive response following his team’s recent defeat to league leaders Al Gharafa. The Romanian said his players are fully focused on strengthening their position in the standings. “The Umm Salal match is crucial for us,” Contra said. “We expect a tough opponent fighting for survival, so we must show maximum concentration and quality in every detail.”

**WAKRAH AIM TO BUILD MOMENTUM AGAINST SHAHANIA**

At the Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium, Al Wakrah coach Vicente Moreno confirmed his side’s readiness to face Al Shahania, stressing that preparations have focused on improving performance and consistency. “The work has gone well and we concentrated on correcting mistakes,” the Spaniard said. “I have great confidence



Umm Salal's new coach Danilo Roper (left) and Al Arabi manager Cosmin Contra at a practice session yesterday.



in the players. They are among the best in the league, but we know this will be a difficult match.”

Moreno confirmed the return of Egyptian midfielder Hamdi Fathi following international duty at the Africa Cup of Nations, while Angolan forward Gelson Dala will miss out through injury.

Al Shahania assistant coach Bezman Montazeri said his side are determined to continue their positive run, highlighting belief and fighting spirit as key factors behind recent performances. “We asked the players to focus on our strengths and maintain a high level of concentration,”

Montazeri said. “Everyone is working hard to climb further up the table.” Al Wakrah are eighth with 16 points, while Al Shahaniya sit eleventh on 11 points.

**TITLE RACE AND TOP-FOUR BATTLE INTENSIFY**

Elsewhere, third-placed Al Shamal host Al Saliya tomorrow, with the home side looking to maintain pressure on the teams above them. Al Shamal have 24 points, two behind second-placed Al Sadd and seven adrift of leaders Al Gharafa. Al Saliya, tenth with 11 points, come into the match buoyed by a 2-1 victory over Qatar SC in

the previous round.

The marquee clash of the round will take place on Saturday, when defending champions Al Sadd meet table-toppers Al Gharafa at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium. Al Gharafa lead the standings with 31 points, while Al Sadd are second on 26 and chasing to close the gap. The Wolves claimed a 2-0 win in the first-leg meeting.

Al Gharafa will rely on the attacking threat of Yacine Brahimi, Alvaro Djalo and Ferjani Sassi, though they will be without Joselu due to suspension. Al Sadd, meanwhile, will look to Akram Afif, Roberto Firmino and Giovanni Henrique, but will

miss Paulo Otavio through suspension and Youcef Atal because of injury.

**FIXTURES - ROUND 14**

**Today:** Umm Salal vs Al Arabi – Al Khor Stadium (5:45pm); Al Wakrah vs Al Shahaniya – Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium (7:45pm)

**Tomorrow:** Al Shamal vs Al Saliya – Al Shamal SC (5:45pm); Al Duhail vs Al Rayyan – Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:45pm)

**Saturday:** Al Ahli vs Qatar SC – Al Thumama Stadium (5:45pm); Al Gharafa vs Al Sadd – Thani Bin Jassim Stadium (7:45pm)

**SHOWJUMPING**

# Final tour set to decide HH The Father Amir’s Prix titles

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Tour 4 of HH The Father Amir’s Prix begins today at Al Shaqab, bringing the four-leg international series to a decisive close with final series points and overall honours to be settled by Saturday.

All eyes will be on the CSI4\*-5\* standings, where Britain’s Scott Brash holds a commanding lead on 144 points, ahead of Eve Jobs of the United States on 95 and fellow Briton Harry Charles on 84. In the CSI1\* category, Qatar’s Saad Ahmed al-Saad tops the table on 49 points, with compatriot Hussain Said Haidan close behind on 43.

The series has gathered momentum over the first three tours at the Longines Arena. Tour 1 set the tone with three Grand Prix jump-offs across categories, while Tour 2 raised the standard with the introduction of CSI5\* competition, highlighted by Brash’s victories in both the CSI5\* 1.60m and CSI3\* 1.50m Grand Prix classes. Tour 3 followed a similar script as Brash again claimed a double win, with Qatari riders continuing to post strong home performances across the programme.

The final tour features CSICH-B, CSI1\*, CSI2\*, CSI3\* and CSI5\* competitions from morning through evening. Tomorrow’s schedule includes major CSI5\* action, notably the 1.55m Jump-Off class and the popular Six Bars event. Saturday will deliver the decisive Grand Prix programme, with the CSI1\* 1.30m, CSI3\* 1.50m and the showpiece CSI5\* 1.60m Grand Prix all decided by jump-offs.

Deputy Director of the championship Mohammed Jaber al-Khayarin said: “Tour 4 is the final step of the four-tour series, and we’re



The final tour of HH the Amir Grand Prix features CSICH-B, CSI1\*, CSI3\* and CSI5\* competitions.

looking forward to three days of top competition.”

Abdullah al-Qashouti, Director of Marketing and Communications for HH The Father Amir’s Prix:

“Tour 4 is the moment when everything comes together: the final points, the Grand Prix, and the outcome of the series. Alongside the headline CSI5\*, Friday’s programme includes the Six Bars class, always a favourite with spectators. We encourage fans to plan their visit and experience the atmosphere across the weekend at Al Shaqab.”

In the CSI4\*-5\* rankings, Brash leads on 144 points, followed by Jobs on 95 and Charles on

84. Anastasia Nielsen of Monaco is fourth on 67, with Megane Moissonnier of France and Thailand’s Janakabhorn Karunayadhaj tied on 66. Austria’s Gerfried Puck sits seventh on 61.

The CSI2\* standings remain tightly contested, led by al-Saad on 49 points, with Haidan second on 43. Egypt’s Fatima Mohanad Alkishawi is third on 24, followed by France’s Jean Francois Rondoux on 23 and Suzette Tittle of the United States on 20.

Inaugurated in 2025, the Doha Equestrian Tour is staged at Al Shaqab and brings together elite riders and horses in a premium international series aimed at strengthening Doha’s status as a global equestrian hub.

جائزة سمو الأمير الوليد  
H.H. THE FATHER AMIR'S

الجدول  
Schedule

THURSDAY 29 <sup>th</sup> January   Day 1			
9:30 AM	CSI 3* - 135 cm	Special Two-Phase	Outdoor Arena
12:00 PM	CSI 3* - 125 cm	Faults & Time	2 <sup>nd</sup> Outdoor Arena
12:45 PM	CSI 3* - 140 cm	Two Phases	Outdoor Arena
3:00 PM	CSI 1* - 120 cm	Faults & Time	Indoor Arena
3:30 PM	CSI 1* - 110 cm	Special Two-Phase	2 <sup>nd</sup> Outdoor Arena
4:30 PM	CSI 3* - 140 cm	Two Phases	Outdoor Arena
6:30 PM	NATIONAL COMPETITION 80 cm	Optimum Time	Indoor Arena
7:30 PM	CSI 5* - 150 cm	Faults & Time	Outdoor Arena
FRIDAY 30 <sup>th</sup> January   Day 2			
8:30 AM	CSI 3* - 130 cm	Special Two-Phase	Outdoor Arena
8:45 AM	CSI 1* - 125 cm	Faults & Time	Indoor Arena
1:00 PM	CSI 3* - 145 cm	Faults & Time	Outdoor Arena
1:15 PM	CSICH - B - 105 cm	Special Two-Phase	Indoor Arena
1:30 PM	CSI 3* - 140 cm	Jump-Off	2 <sup>nd</sup> Outdoor Arena
2:30 PM	CSI 1* - 115 cm	Faults & Time	Indoor Arena
4:00 PM	CSI 5* - 145 cm	Faults & Time	Indoor Arena
5:15 PM	NATIONAL COMPETITION 80 cm	Optimum Time	Indoor Arena
6:00 PM	CSI 5* - 155 cm	Jump-Off	Outdoor Arena
8:30 PM	CSI 5*	Six Bars	Outdoor Arena
SATURDAY 31 <sup>st</sup> January   Day 3			
10:00 AM	CSI 3* - 140 cm	Faults & Time	Outdoor Arena
10:45 AM	CSI 3* - 130 cm	Immediate Jump-Off	2 <sup>nd</sup> Outdoor Arena
1:15 PM	CSI 3* - 130 cm	Special Two-Phase	Outdoor Arena
2:30 PM	CSICH - B - 110 cm	Jump-Off	Indoor Arena
2:45 PM	NATIONAL COMPETITION 100 cm	Optimum Time	2 <sup>nd</sup> Outdoor Arena
3:15 PM	CSI 3* - 150 cm	GP Jump-Off	Outdoor Arena
4:30 PM	CSI 1* - 150 cm	GP Jump-Off	Indoor Arena
6:30 PM	CSI 5* - 160 cm	GP Jump-Off	Outdoor Arena



SPOTLIGHT

# Nelly Korda laments women not in TGL

Reuters  
New York

While women's golf will have its own version of an indoor virtual league starting next winter, one of the top LPGA stars is lamenting the fact that women aren't included in the men's version. The TGL, featuring top men's stars, is early in its second season. Asked about the upcoming WTGL, the women's edition that will share the TGL's virtual platform in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla, **Nelly Korda** told *Golfweek* yesterday: "I have mixed feelings on it if I'm being very honest, and I'm surprised no other girls have, or no one's really spoken out about it. I think it's a huge and unbelievable miss that we're not playing alongside the men. "There's no greater way to grow the game, and it would have been revolutionary. It would have been the first time, I think, that men and women are on the same playing field, playing for the same exact amount of money. But I also think it's great that we are getting this opportunity, so that's my mixed feelings"

Korda, a 27-year-old Florida

native, spoke to *Golfweek* in Orlando, where she is preparing for the LPGA's season-debut Tournament of Champions. The two-time major winner has not yet committed to competing in the WTGL, which has an entry list that features world No. 1 Jeeno Thitikul, Lexi Thompson, Brooke Henderson, Charley Hull, Lydia Ko, Lottie Woad and Rose Zhang. "I'm just still weighing out the time commitment," Korda told *Golfweek*. "I just haven't really thought about it too much, because I've been really focused on trying to get ready for this season. "I think logistically, they're still trying to figure some stuff out, so I will just weigh out my options in the near future." Mike McCarley, a former television executive who founded TGL with Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy under their TMRW Sports banner, previously discussed the possibility of TGL becoming coed. "I think that is something that's interesting to us and is interesting to the LPGA and is interesting to a lot of the players we're talking to, but right now, we're really focused on building (the TGL) out and providing, frankly, a nice stage and really nice platform to showcase the players and their personali-

ties," McCarley said, according to *Golfweek*. **Report: OWGR could make LIV Golf decision this week** A long-awaited decision reportedly could come soon about whether LIV Golf members will begin receiving Official World Golf Ranking points. The OWGR board is meeting and a vote on the LIV Golf situation could be added to the agenda, with a potential decision by the end of the week, according to *Golfweek*. Under the current system, LIV Golf members struggle to get into the fields for major championships without OWGR points. For example, two of the circuit's top players, Bryson DeChambeau and Jon Rahm, currently rank No. 31 and No. 93, respectively. The Saudi-backed LIV Golf league begins its fifth season next week in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. LIV Golf is expanding from 54-hole to 72-hole tournaments this year, part of the league's efforts to make itself more viable for world ranking points. Those efforts also include expanding its fields and creating more pathways into the league. The major strike against LIV



Golf's OWGR inclusion has been the way that its rosters are formed, as hardly any of the golfers played their way into the league (as they

do on the PGA Tour) but rather signed contracts and joined hand-picked teams. "That's one of the beauties of our sport is earning

your way onto a tour, fighting to keep your job on that tour," OWGR chairman Trevor Immelman said last month.

CRICKET

# Bold New Zealand thrash India to end losing streak

The tourists easily defend 215 for 5 to win the 4th T20I by 50 runs

Reuters  
Visakhapatnam

New Zealand thumped India by 50 runs in the fourth Twenty20 International to earn their first win of the five-match series in Visakhapatnam yesterday. Put in to bat, New Zealand struggled to build on the century opening stand between Tim Seifert (62) and Devon Conway (44) but still posted a commanding 215-7. The tourists then returned to bowl out India for 165 in 18.4 overs despite Shivam Dube's belligerent 65 off 23 balls that included seven sixes. India lead the series 3-1 ahead of Saturday's final match in Thiruvananthapuram. Earlier, New Zealand got off to a blazing start with Seifert and Conway combining in an opening stand of 100 to lay the foundation for a big total. Spinner Kuldeep Yadav dismissed Conway in the ninth over to break the century stand as India clawed their way back into the contest with a flurry of wickets. Jasprit Bumrah took a return catch to send back Rachin Ravindra in the next over and Arshdeep Singh ended Seifert's 36-ball blitz, which contained three sixes. Kuldeep also claimed the wicket of Glenn Phillips (24) but Daryl Mitchell smashed 39 not out from 18 balls as New Zealand managed to make hay in the death overs to power past the 200-mark. Having taken an unassailable 3-0 lead, India rested top-order batter Ishan Kishan, who sustained a niggle in his victory in Guwahati, and their rejigged bat-



New Zealand's Tim Seifert plays a shot during the fourth Twenty20 international against India in Visakhapatnam yesterday. (AFP)

ting order was immediately under pressure. Their in-form opener Abhishek Sharma, currently the top-ranked T20 batter, fell for a first-ball duck to Matt Henry while skipper Suryakumar Yadav (eight) did not last long either. A promoted Rinku Singh made

39, but wickets kept tumbling with New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner claiming 3-26. Dube kept India in the hunt but his run-out, when Harshit Rana's drive was deflected onto the stumps at the non-striker's end by bowler Henry in his follow-through, ef-

fectively sealed India's fate.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**New Zealand 215 for 7** (Seifert 62, Conway 44, Arshdeep 2-33, Kuldeep 2-39) **beat India 165** (Dube 65, Rinku 39, Santner 3-26, Duffy 2-33) by 50 runs

PREVIEW

## Pakistan face Australia with T20 World Cup participation uncertain

AFP  
Lahore, Pakistan

Pakistan take on Australia in a three-match Twenty20 international series starting in Lahore from today, despite doubts over their participation in next month's World Cup in cricket's shortest format. The country's cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi will announce a final decision on taking part in the mega event either tomorrow or Monday. Pakistan are protesting over last week's decision by the International Cricket Council (ICC), which rejected Bangladesh's demand to relocate their matches out of India over security fears. Bangladesh are replaced by Scotland in the 20-team event, which runs from February 7 to March 8 with Sri Lanka as co-hosts. However, despite the doubts, the Pakistan team was preparing for the World Cup with skipper Salman Agha stressing the importance of the Australia series. "These three games will give us an idea how prepared we are for the World Cup," Agha told a news conference yesterday. "Australia is a top team and will give us the best final preparations"

Pakistan are placed in Group A alongside defending world champions India, the United States, Namibia and the Netherlands. Pakistan's spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi returns to full fitness after injuring his knee in the Big Bash League in Australia this month. "We need to see how many boxes we tick in the series which are important for the World Cup as we aim to do well and win the Cup," Agha said. A 17-member Australian squad led by Mitchell Marsh arrived in Lahore early yesterday, with the last two matches set for January 31 and February 1. The Australians are without the injured quartet of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Tim David and Nathan Ellis, while allrounder Glenn Maxwell was rested to manage workload. Marsh still believes Australia



Pakistan's Babar Azam bats in the nets ahead of a three-match T20I series against Australia that starts today in Lahore.

were ready for the World Cup tune-up series. "These are very important times in both teams' preparations for the World Cup," said Marsh, whose team will be in Group B with Sri Lanka, Oman, Ireland and Zimbabwe. "This is a very important series as the conditions are similar and that is against a quality side, so we will assess the situation and be clear about our plans ahead."

**SQUADS**  
**Pakistan:** Salman Ali Agha (capt), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Salman Mirza, Mohammad Wasim, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq  
**Australia:** Mitch Marsh (c), Sean Abbott, Xavier Bartlett, Mahli Beardman, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Jack Edwards, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Mitch Owen, Josh Philippe, Matthew Renshaw, Matt Short, Marcus Stonis, Adam Zampa

FOCUS

## QCA President al-Mudahka set to oversee chess Olympiad in Samarkand

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

FIDE has announced that Mohammed al-Mudahka, President of Qatar Chess Association (QCA) will oversee the next edition of the World Chess Olympiad to be held in September in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Al-Mudahka's appointment to oversee the World Olympiad comes in recognition of his efforts in supporting and developing chess in-

ternationally and the remarkable success of the World Championship hosted by Qatar in December. Samarkand will host the 46th Chess Olympiad from September 10 to 24, 2026. The city is currently undergoing intensive preparations to host the major event. Al-Mudahka expressed his pleasure at his appointment for one of the most important chess events in the world, expressing his gratitude for the great trust placed in him by the global chess community. The QCA president, who also

serves as the Director of International Relations at FIDE, commended the significant work being done by FIDE, under the leadership of Arkady Dvorkovich, to elevate the game at all levels, develop FIDE competitions, and expand the game's reach in developing countries. Al-Mudahka explained that the upcoming strategy aims to continue advancing chess in Asia, and that Uzbekistan's hosting of the World Chess Olympiad is part of its efforts to support the global chess movement.

He also announced the Qatari national team's participation in the upcoming Olympiad, noting that Qatar's presence in such major tournaments is crucial in every respect. He emphasised the association's commitment to participating in the World Chess Olympiad to raise the level of its players. Al-Mudahka stressed that chess is a global game that encourages integrity, inclusion, and mutual respect, and contributes to fostering an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding among peoples and nations.



Arkady Dvorkovich, (right) FIDE President, Mohammed al-Mudahka, President of Qatar Chess Association, during the opening ceremony of the FIDE World Rapid & Blitz Championships 2025 in Doha.



TENNIS

# Djokovic in semis as injured Musetti forced to retire

Jannik Sinner books blockbuster last-4 clash with Serb by beating Ben Shelton; Swiatek loses to Rybakina  
Pegula beats Anisimova, finally makes Melbourne semi; players call for more privacy after Gauff meltdown



Italy's Lorenzo Musetti applauds the fans and walks off the court after retiring from his quarter-final match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic (in green) at the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Melbourne

Novak Djokovic continued his quest for a record-extending 11th Australian Open title and standalone 25th Grand Slam crown, but only after a cruel twist of fate for Lorenzo Musetti, who quit their quarter-final due to injury yesterday holding a comfortable lead.

While the stars may seem to be aligning for Djokovic in his bid for more major glory, the road will only be more rocky after Jannik Sinner beat Ben Shelton to book a blockbuster semi-final against him, and Carlos Alcaraz potentially in the final.

Like Alcaraz, Iga Swiatek arrived in Melbourne chasing a career Grand Slam – the feat of winning all four of the sport's biggest trophies – but her bid went up in smoke after a defeat by Elena Rybakina earlier in the day.

Jessica Pegula had little trouble as she reached the Melbourne Park semi-finals for the first time after dashing fellow American Amanda Anisimova's hopes of reaching three straight major finals.

The drama in the day session was reserved for the afternoon match and Djokovic arrived fresh for the battle with fifth seed Musetti after getting a walkover on Sunday from injured Czech Jakub Mensik.

The Serb made a fast start but it was then one-way traffic as the artistic Musetti showed his full range of strokes and bagged the opening two sets, before the Italian pulled



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates victory against Poland's Iga Swiatek during their quarter-final match at the Australian Open. (AFP)

up holding the upper part of his right leg at the start of the third.

Musetti looked to soldier on after receiving treatment, but lasted only one more game and he threw in the towel leading 6-4 6-3 1-3 as stunned fans at the Rod Laver Arena let out a gasp and Djokovic quietly heaved a sigh of relief.

"I don't know what to say, except that I feel really sorry for him and he was a far better player," Djokovic said.

"I was on my way home. These things happen in sport and it's happened to me a few times, but being in the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam, two sets to love up and being in full control, I mean it's so unfortunate."

**'SOMETHING STRANGE'**

A heartbroken Musetti said he was pained by having to retire after taking a big lead against the experienced Djokovic, adding the trouble in his leg first began in the

second set. "I felt there was something strange," he said.

"I continued to play, because I was playing really well, but I was feeling that the pain was increasing, and the problem was not going away.

"In the end, when I took the medical timeout ... and started to play again, I felt it even more and it was getting higher and higher, the level of the pain."

Although he eclipsed Roger Federer with his 103rd match win at Melbourne Park, the task will get only tougher for Djokovic when he meets Sinner, who won a 22nd consecutive set against Shelton in a 6-3 6-4 6-4 victory in the evening session.

Djokovic admitted that Sinner was the "absolute favourite".

"You never know," he said. "Hopefully, I can deliver my A-game for that match, because that's what's going to be needed at least to have a chance.

"I wasn't playing close to my best today, so I'm going to have to change that around," Djokovic said after the match.

**DOMINANT DISPLAY**

As one fifth seed crashed, another advanced as Elena Rybakina booked her place in the semi-finals with a dominant 7-5 6-1 win over six-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek. The Pole was left to rue the defeat and the lack of privacy in difficult moments off the court where players cannot escape cameras, a day after Coco Gauff's racket-smashing meltdown in response to her defeat by Elina Svitolina.

"The question is, are we tennis players or are we animals in the zoo, where they are observed even when they poop?" she said.

"That was exaggerating obviously, but it would be nice to have privacy. It would be nice also to have your own process and not always be observed."

All eyes were on sixth seed Pegula as she stayed on course for her maiden Grand Slam trophy by beating Anisimova 6-2 7-6(1), sparkling despite testing moments towards the end of the clash.

"I'm really happy with my performance," Pegula said.

"From start to finish there was a lot of momentum swings, but I thought I came out playing really well, and was able to just hold on there in the second and get that break back and take it in two. I showed good mental resilience there at the end not to get frustrated."

### Sinner hails 'inspiration' Djokovic ahead of AO semi-final

**Melbourne:** Reigning champion Jannik Sinner called Novak Djokovic "an inspiration" after setting up an Australian Open semi-final blockbuster against the 24-time Grand Slam winner.

Italian second seed Sinner swatted aside big-serving American Ben Shelton 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 and has dropped only one set in moving ominously into the last four.

The other semi-final at Melbourne Park is between world number one Carlos Alcaraz and third-ranked Alexander Zverev. "We all know what a challenge I am up to," the relentless Sinner, who is chasing a third Australian title in a row, said of facing Djokovic, 38.

"These are the moments you practise for and wake up for in the morning.

"It improves you as a player and a person, we are lucky to have Novak still here playing incredible tennis for his age."

Sinner has a 6-4 win-loss record over the Serb, but has won their last five encounters.

Djokovic, a record 10-time winner in Melbourne, took his place in the semi-finals when Italian opponent Lorenzo Musetti retired hurt when he was leading the Serb 6-4, 6-3, 1-3.

Sinner, who has now reached a sixth consecutive Grand Slam semi-final, said that Djokovic still set the standard for professionalism.

"Me, as a 24-year-old, I'm lucky to have someone like him in front of my eyes, and I can hopefully learn something," said Sinner,

who together with Alcaraz has dominated the last eight majors. "He's an inspiration for all of us and especially the young players," he added.

Sinner and Shelton came into the quarter-final with the Italian having won eight of their nine previous meetings in straight sets.

Eighth-seeded Shelton has got the better of Sinner just once, in their first encounter, in 2023.

Sinner's dominance includes winning their Melbourne semi-final 12 months ago, and it was to be more of the same on a cool evening on Rod Laver Arena.

Sinner raced into a 4-1 lead in the first set as he sent Shelton, who is a year younger at 23, scurrying to all corners of the court.

A Sinner ace sealed the first set in 49 minutes and, despite having the crowd willing him on, Shelton was broken again in falling two sets down.

Four-time major champion Sinner was imperious and looked unflustered on the few occasions that the aggressive Shelton put him under the cosh.

They went with serve in the third set and Shelton did his best to feed off what he has approvingly called a "rowdy" Melbourne crowd. But he struck his 33rd unforced error to give Sinner three break points, and after saving one of them, the American double-faulted to gift his opponent a 5-4 lead and signal the end was close.

"We go day by day, today I felt I was moving again a little bit better, I feel physically stronger again," Sinner said.



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning his quarter-final match against Ben Shelton of the US. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

## Williams say new F1 car now ready for testing

Reuters  
London

Williams will be ready to test in Bahrain next month after taking the "incredibly painful" decision to miss this week's Formula One shakedown in Barcelona, team boss James Vowles said yesterday. The former champions are the only absentees from the five days of running at the Circuit de Catalunya that started on Monday.

Media reports had speculated about there being a problem with the car passing the FIA crash tests required to participate, but Vowles told reporters there were no longer any hurdles.

"I'm pleased to say that we've passed all necessary tests and we're ready to run in Bahrain, and we'll carry out a promotional filming day ahead of it," he said in a video call.

"We're also carrying out a VTT (virtual test track) as a physical car testing rig...we've been running that pretty much in tandem to Barcelona."

Vowles said the decision to miss the Barcelona week stemmed from the team's "determination to push the limits of performance under the new regulations."

He said Williams could have taken part but only by compromising on spare parts, updates and preparations for the Bahrain tests and the start of the season in Australia.

"The car this year that we've built...is about three times more complicated than anything we have put through our business beforehand," he said.



Williams' Carlos Sainz Jr in the garage during practice at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in Yas Marina Circuit on December 5, 2025. (Reuters)

"It means the amount of load going through our system is about three times what it used to be and we started falling a little bit behind and late on parts."

Vowles referred to certain unspecified tests as "a blip in the grand scheme of things" that pushed the team beyond the limit of what could be achieved in the time available, particularly in the supply of components.

"We're in this halfway house where we're using systems and where they're not quite for purpose we're falling back to old techniques and human glue, and that's what's causing the problem with that," he said yesterday.

Vowles brushed aside as "murmurings in the media" suggestions that the car was significantly overweight and said drivers Carlos Sainz and Alex Albon stood "shoulder to shoulder" with him.

Williams finished fifth in the team standings last season, their best since the 2017 season.

The 2026 campaign begins with the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 8.

## FURY CONFIRMS APRIL COMEBACK FIGHT AGAINST MAKHMUDOV

**London:** Former heavyweight world champion **Tyson Fury** will face Arslanbek Makhmudov in his comeback fight in April, weeks after saying he would come out of retirement.

The bout between the Briton and Canada-based Russian Makhmudov will take place in the UK on April 11, with no venue yet announced, and will be broadcast on Netflix.

Fury quit boxing in January last year after suffering a second straight defeat to Oleksandr Usyk – the latest in a string of retirements.

The 37-year-old "Gypsy King" said earlier this month he would return to the sport in 2026 and has been training in Thailand.

"Well it's official, I'm back doing what I love to do," Fury posted on Instagram.

"I've brought the biggest network along with me @netflix @netflixuk this is going to be astronomical. Blessed by God."

Fury has a record of 34 wins, two defeats and one draw.

"I am thrilled about the opportunity," said 36-year-old Makhmudov, who has won 21 of his 23 fights. "I'm coming to deliver a war."

"Tyson Fury has been a big champion. I will be more ready than ever to leave with a massive W."

Fury had been expected to build towards a long-awaited fight against fellow British former heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua, but Joshua's future is uncertain after a



car crash in December, in Nigeria, in which two of his close friends were killed.

**Mbilli elevated to WBC super middleweight champion**

French boxer Christian Mbilli was elevated to WBC super middleweight world champion (-76.2 kg) on Tuesday, his promoter announced in a statement.

Mbilli had held the WBC interim super middleweight title since June 2025.

The 30-year-old reclaims the official title which was stripped from American boxer Terence Crawford in December following a financial dispute with the WBC.

The WBC is one of the four major boxing federations.



HORSE RACING

# Late burst propels Caid Du Soleil to Al Judhay Cup win

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Caid Du Soleil delivered a late burst of speed to capture the feature Al Judhay Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday, concluding Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's 42nd race meeting with a dramatic finish.

The five-year-old grey horse, owned by Al Shahania Stud and trained by Rudy Nerbonne, finally broke his maiden on his seventh start, taking the Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate over 2200m.

Ridden by Lukas Delozier, Caid Du Soleil was positioned mid-pack as Al Natibis Up led the early stages.

The pace increased approaching the home turn when Munahis moved up to challenge, forcing the leaders into a battle. Delozier timed his run perfectly, producing Caid Du Soleil with a powerful late surge that carried him past Munahis in the final strides. Munahis, trained by Hadi al-Ramzani and ridden by Jefferson Smith, held on well for second, while Lattam closed strongly to take third. The victory marked Delozier's treble on the day.

Earlier on the card, Megalithic opened proceedings by breaking his maiden in the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate over 1400m, scoring for jockey Pierre Charles Boudot and trainer Hamad al-Jehani.

Fatack Al Shahania dominated the Local Purebred Arabian Novice Plate over 1400m under Delozier for trainer Nerbonne.

Hornsea Bay struck over 2200m in the Thoroughbred Novice Plate, ridden by Jef-



Jockey Lukas Delozier rode Caid Du Soleil to the Al Judhay Cup win at the Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm

erson Smith and trained by al-Jehani.

In another race, Marzog produced a strong late finish to win the Purebred Arabian Handicap (50-70) over 1400m for Smith and al-Jehani.

Overrule extended his winning run in the Thoroughbred Handicap over 2200m, with Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi aboard for trainer Mohammed Hassan al-Matwi.

AJS Najma returned to winning form in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap over

1400m, ridden by Szczepan Mazur and trained by MHK al-Attiyah.

Alzabyr made all to land the Purebred Arabian Handicap over 2100m for Delozier and trainer Mohammed al-Ghazali.

**RESULTS 42ND AL UQDA RACE MEETING - AL JUDHAY CUP**  
**WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**  
**1 - Al Judhay Cup, Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate**



Connections of Caid Du Soleil celebrate after the five-year-old won the Al Judhay Cup.

Caid Du Soleil, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

**2 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate**  
Megalithic, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot

**3 - Local Purebred Arabian Novice Plate**  
Fatack Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

**4 - Thoroughbred Novice Plate**  
Hornsea Bay, Hamad al-Jehani, Jefferson Smith

**5 - Purebred Arabian Handicap**

Marzog, Hamad al-Jehani, Jefferson Smith

**6 - Thoroughbred Handicap (0-70)**  
Overrule, Mohammed Hassan al-Matwi, Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi

**7 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (60-80)**  
AJS Najma, MHK al-Attiyah, Szczepan Mazur

**8 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (0-95)**  
Alzabyr, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Lukas Delozier

FOCUS

# Sterling agrees Chelsea exit after troubled spell

Winger had 18 months remaining on a contract worth a reported £325,000 per week

AFP  
London

Raheem Sterling left Chelsea by mutual consent as the former England forward finally ended his nightmare spell at Stamford Bridge. Sterling had been training away from the rest of his Chelsea team-mates after failing to secure a move in the summer transfer window. "Raheem Sterling has today departed Chelsea Football Club by mutual agreement, bringing to an end three-and-a-half seasons as our player," a Chelsea statement said. "We thank Raheem for the contribution he made while a Chelsea player and wish him well for the next stage in his career."

The 31-year-old was regarded as one of England's leading wingers when he joined Chelsea from Manchester City in a £47mn (\$64mn) deal in 2022. But the four-time Premier League winner's move to west London quickly turned sour as he failed to replicate his City form.

Even the departure of Enzo Maresca, who had consigned Sterling to the so-called "bomb squad" of unwanted Chelsea players, was unable to resuscitate the former Liverpool star's career at Stamford Bridge. A season-long loan spell at Arsenal last season was a disappointment, with Sterling struggling to break into Mikel Arteta's side.

Sterling had reportedly been kept apart from the rest of the Chelsea players this season, arriving and leaving at a different time to the squad and using a different building. Liam Rosenior, hired as Maresca's successor on January 6, did not pick him in any of his five matches in charge to date.

Sterling, who was signed by Thomas Tuchel's reign as Chelsea manager, last played for the club in a competitive game in May 2024, making a total of 81 appearances. He had 18 months remaining on a contract



Chelsea's Raheem Sterling, who was signed in Thomas Tuchel's reign as Chelsea manager, last played for the club in a competitive game in May 2024.

worth a reported £325,000 per week.

The man capped 82 times by England, had been linked with Juventus, Bayer Leverkusen and Fulham before the start of this season, but a move never materialised. He is now able to join any club as a free agent even after Monday's transfer deadline.

**PAQUETA SIGNS FOR FLAMENGO IN RECORD SOUTH AMERICAN DEAL**  
Brazil's Flamengo have signed West Ham midfielder Lucas Paqueta, the English club

confirmed, in a record transfer in South American football which local media said was worth 42mn euros. The Brazilian Paqueta, 28, was cleared in July of spot-fixing allegations that have hung over him and were seen as costing him a likely move to Manchester City two years ago.

West Ham said they had tried their best to convince him to stay, but "reluctantly" agreed to the transfer. "Lucas has made it clear that, for personal and family reasons, he wishes to return home to Brazil

and make a fresh start," said the statement. The club confirmed that Paqueta "has been given permission to undergo a medical and discuss personal terms with Brazilian club Flamengo, after a fee was agreed for his permanent transfer."

The record sale brings Paqueta back to Flamengo where he began his career before taking the leap to Europe in 2019. Previously with AC Milan and Lyon, Paqueta played 18 matches for West Ham in the Premier League this season, scoring four goals.

Flamengo president Luiz Eduardo Baptista told journalists on Sunday he was focused on closing "the biggest transaction ever made by a football club" in South America. Flamengo are one of Brazil's most successful and richest clubs, and last year won the Copa Libertadores and the Brazilian title.

Brazilian media reported Paqueta had been signed for 42mn euros, before tax. Last year, Flamengo paid 31.6mn euros for winger Samuel Lino from Atletico Madrid, according to their financial statements.

Brazilian clubs have a combined revenue approaching \$2bn, according to the latest annual report from the investment firm Galapagos Capital, thanks to a massive domestic market of more than 200 million people. This financial power gives Brazil a significant advantage in the region.

Paqueta - who was part of the 2022 World Cup team - hopes to represent Brazil again this year at the tournament held in the United States, Mexico, and Canada between June 11 and July 19.

The midfielder is emerging from a two-year cloud of suspicion as England's Football Association (FA) investigated whether he was deliberately getting yellow cards after a series of suspicious betting patterns were noted. The player maintained his innocence and after his acquittal, said he could "play football again with a smile on my face."

## Men's football transfer fees hit record \$13bn: FIFA

**Paris:** International transfer fees in men's football hit a record \$13.08bn in 2025, world football's governing body said. FIFA said in its annual Global Transfer Market report there was an all-time record of 86,158 international transfers completed in 2025.

Women's football accounted for 2,440 transfers (+6.3%) and total spending of \$28.6mn, a year-on-year increase of more than 80%. The joint transfer total from men and women's football, professional and amateur, of \$13.11bn represents more than 50% above the spending in 2024 and 35.6% higher than the previous record, set in 2023.

In men's professional football, clubs from England were once again both the number-one spender and the number-one recipient of transfer fees, with \$3.82bn spent on incoming transfers and \$1.77bn received for outgoing transfers in 2025. Brazilian clubs led the way in terms of the total number of transfers, with 1,190 incoming and 1,005 outgoing transfers. French players were those for whom clubs shelled out the most (\$1.67bn), followed by Brazilians (\$1.21bn). The three biggest spending clubs were Premier League outfits Manchester City, Liverpool and Chelsea. City take top spot from current Champions League winners Paris Saint-Germain, who now do not figure in a top 20 dominated by 11 English clubs.

## LEIPZIG CONCEDE STOPPAGE-TIME GOAL IN 1-1 DRAW AT ST PAULI

St Pauli scored with a stoppage-time penalty from Martijn Kaars to rescue a 1-1 draw against visitors RB Leipzig in a rearranged Bundesliga match on Tuesday. Dutchman Kaars kept his cool to beat keeper Peter Gulacsi deep in second-half stoppage time, cancelling out Yan Diomande's 66th-minute goal for the visitors.

The match had been postponed earlier this month due to heavy snow and ice. Leipzig remain fourth on 36 points, three behind Hoffenheim, who were 2-0 winners at Werder Bremen in their own postponed match. Borussia Dortmund are in second place on 42, with leaders Bayern Munich on 50. Relegation-threatened St Pauli are 17th on 14 points.

## LA LIGA TO PAY FANS FOR TIP-OFFS ON BARS SHOWING GAMES ILLEGALLY

Spanish football fans can earn 50 euros (\$60) for giving La Liga tip-offs about venues showing football illegally, the Spanish league said.

La Liga provided instructions for fans to be able to identify whether a broadcast or stream is legal and asked for photos to be uploaded to a website to prove it, which they will then analyse before paying out the reward.

La Liga have taken a strong stance against piracy over the last few seasons, with Tebas warning it costs the football industry hundreds of millions of euros a year.

SPOTLIGHT

# Villa's Tielemans ruled out for up to 10 weeks

AFP  
London

Aston Villa's Premier League title bid has suffered a major blow after Belgian midfielder **Youri Tielemans** was ruled out for up to 10 weeks with an ankle injury.

Tielemans sustained the problem in Villa's 2-0 win over Newcastle United at St James' Park on Sunday. The 28-year-old was replaced in the 74th minute following a clash with Newcastle's Lewis Miley.

Tielemans' extended absence adds to Villa's mounting list of injured midfielders, with Boubacar Kamara and John McGinn already sidelined. McGinn will be out for two months with a knee injury, while Kamara is not expected back this season due

to a knee problem. "We know about Kamara, McGinn and Tielemans. Kamara is a long time, I think he's not going to play this season. McGinn, more or less, is 6-8 weeks out, and Tielemans is 8-10 weeks out," Villa boss Unai Emery told reporters. "We need to see how we can manage central midfielders in the matches we are going to play."

Emery moved quickly to bolster his midfield options by re-signing Douglas Luiz on loan from Juventus. The 27-year-old Brazilian midfielder previously made over 200 appearances before Villa sold Luiz to Juventus in 2024 for £42.35m but he made just three Serie A starts last season before joining Forest in the summer.

The move to Forest would have become permanent if he made a certain number of appearances, but he did not hit the threshold, having started

just once in the Premier League under Sean Dyche.

"Welcome home, Dougie. Aston Villa is delighted to announce that Douglas Luiz has joined the club on loan from Juventus," Villa said in a statement. Bidding to win the English title for the first time since 1981, third-placed Villa sit just four points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal.

Asked about his other midfield options, Emery added: "Amadou Onana will be coming back and Barkley will be back in a few days. He has been training individually but he's so close to joining us."

Emery's injury-hit side are in Europa League action at home to RB Salzburg today. Villa have secured their place in the last 16 and are looking to claim top spot in the league phase with victory.

