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Sunday, February 1, 2026
Sha'ban 13, 1447 AH

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Rybakina keeps her cool to beat Sabalenka in tense Melbourne final

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SHOWJUMPING

Brash reigns again as HH The Father Amir's Prix concludes

'Jefferson is an incredible horse. Even at 17, he feels young and full of energy. He loves to jump in Doha'

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Scott Brash capped a dominant run at Al Shaqab by claiming the CSI5* Grand Prix on the final day of the inaugural HH The Father Amir's Prix series for the second time this month, guiding his long-time partner bay gelding Hello Jefferson to victory in the concluding 160cm class.

The British rider delivered a faultless performance in a 12-horse jump-off, stopping the clock at 52.97 seconds aboard the 17-year-old BWP gelding to secure top honours.

"Jefferson is an incredible horse. Even at 17, he feels young and full of energy," Brash, who took home a whopping €195,000 in prize money, said after the win. "He loves to jump, and Doha is one of his favourite arenas because of the space. I'm very grateful to my team. This result is the outcome of years of hard work."

Brash finished almost two seconds clear of France's Megane Moissonnier, who produced a clear round in 54.90 seconds with the SF stallion Crooner Tame. Switzerland's Nadja Peter Steiner completed the podium with another fault-free effort aboard Mila.

Germany's Philipp Weishaupt settled for fourth after collecting four faults in the jump-off with Oreo DR, while American rider Kristen Vanderveen rounded out the top five on Bull Run's Jireh.

The inaugural HH The Father Amir's Prix series featured four Tours and delivered high-level competition throughout, attracting more than 400 riders from over 40 nations and more than 700 horses across three arenas at Al Shaqab.

Assistant Deputy Director of the Doha Equestrian Tour Sheikh Talal bin Khalid al-Thani praised the standard of competition. "We wanted to create something truly special. The level of competition was outstanding, and I thank the riders for their exceptional performances," he said. "Qatar has always been a hub for major sporting events, and this series is a continuation of that tradition."

Earlier, Harry Charles and 11-year-old Stallion Bandit signalled return to top form in the 150cm two-phase class, producing a sharp double-clear round in a tightly contested finish. The powerhouse duo clocked 32.02 seconds, just ahead of Portugal's Duarte Seabra and the KWPN gelding Fernhill Leonardo. Germany's Philipp Weishaupt finished third with Karaldo.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Alsharbatty of Saudi Arabia claimed top honours in the CSI3* Grand Prix 150cm after producing



HE Sheikh Thani bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of the Qatar Fund for Development, crowned the winners of the top three places in the CSI5* Grand Prix of the fourth and final round of the HH The Father Amir's Prix at Al Shaqab.



Scott Brash clears a rail with 17-year-old bay gelding Hello Jefferson in the 1.60m class.

a flawless jump-off round aboard Quisandro in 34.73 seconds. Germany's Janne Friederike Meyer-Zimmermann finished second with Iron Dames High Level, stopping the clock at 34.90 seconds, while Weishaupt came third again on Callao L in 35.17 seconds.

In the CSI3* Faults and Time class over 140cm, Italy's Emanuele Gaudiano emerged victorious with a clear round in 54.45 seconds on Chabrello PS. American rider Kristen Vanderveen followed closely in second aboard Bull Run's Lioness, while

Brazil's Marlon Modolo Zanotelli secured third place with Merciminka.

Qatari rider Ali Omar al-Ansari delivered a strong performance to win the CSI5* Grand Prix, guiding Nikita Eindeken Z to a clear jump-off in 35.71 seconds. Egypt's Fares Mohamed Fared finished second on Orestes van het Tolhuis, with Mohammed Yousef al-Jaber of Qatar placing third on Christa 27.

South Africa's Oliver Lazarus topped the CSI3* Immediate Jump-Off over 130cm after stopping the clock at 31.73 seconds



HE Sheikh Thani bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of the Qatar Fund for Development, presents the trophy to CSI5* Grand Prix winner Scott Brash of Britain.



Assistant Deputy Director of the Doha Equestrian Tour Sheikh Talal bin Khalid al-Thani presents the trophy to Qatari rider Ali Omar al-Ansari, who won the CSI5* Grand Prix at Al Shaqab's Indoor Arena. Egypt's Fares Mohamed Fared finished second, while Mohammed Yousef al-Jaber of Qatar was third.

with Butterfly Ennemmel. He was followed by Egypt's Abdallah Haitham on Consagros, while Qatar's Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi finished third with Mukaynis.

The CSI5* Immediate Jump-Off class over 120cm saw Estonia's Meriel Isok take victory aboard Hbr Zorro d'Ac's, ahead of American rider Liza Tittle on Jerez-S. Qatar's Nasser al-Ghazali completed the podium with Nikita.

In the CSICh-B CSICh Group VII series qualifier over 110cm, Saudi rider Halah

Alrasheed claimed first place with Cruising On The Ridge. Qatar's Ali Khalid al-Obaidi finished second on Roxette van de Achterhoek, while Mohammed Mansoor al-Sulaiti secured third place aboard Georgia de Maugre.

At national level, Alqaqa Tamim al-Thani won the Special Two-Phase 100cm class with Bon Suela. Hayfa Hamad al-Thani finished second on Take Me Home Z, while Aseel Ali Ibrahim placed third with Cephyr de la Fontaine.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Defending champions Al Sadd scored a comfortable 3-1 win over table toppers Al Gharafa in the Qatar Stars League to cut down the gap to two points. Goals from Roberto Firmino (47th minute), Giovani Henrique (55th minute) and Akram Afif (90th +5 minute) helped propel The Wolves to 29 points in the standings, just behind Al Gharafa on 31 points.

After a goalless first half, Al Sadd, who were recently crowned winners of the Qatar-UAE Super Cup's Super Shield following their thrilling 3-2 defeat of UAE's Shabab Al Ahli, set the ball rolling for what ended up as an exciting win for Italian coach Roberto Mancini's team.

Firmino latched on to a cross from Giovani that somehow managed to elude all of Al Gharafa's defenders to tap into an empty end. Al Sadd's second and third goals were both beautiful displays of fine teamwork

that were perfectly finished to make the race for title more interesting. Al Gharafa's consolation goal came from Ayoub al-Oui, who pulled one back for The Cheetahs in the 65th minute with a powerful header from a cross by Amro Abdelfatah Surag.

PEDRO BRACE IN QATAR SC WIN

Earlier, Brazilian Joao Pedro scored a brace while Mohamed Emad Aiash scored one goal as Qatar SC prevailed over Al Ahli 3-1 at the Al Thumama Stadium. Aiash opened the scoring for the Kings in the 16th minute before Joao Pedro struck in the 48th and 72nd minutes.

Aiash made a successful header after Al Ahli goalkeeper had blocked a first-half Mason attempt following corner kick. Pedro broke into the striking zone first from the right, and later from the left to register his two goals.

Al Ahli's consolation goal came from Driss Fettouhi, who drilled home a long ranger in the 87th minute. The win saw Qatar SC move up seventh with 20 points whereas Al Ahli remained ninth on 15 points.



Al Sadd's Firmino attempts to dribble past Al Gharafa players at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium.



FOCUS

Kishan, Arshdeep star as India down NZ

AFP
Thiruvananthapuram

Ishan Kishan hit his maiden T20 international century and Arshdeep Singh took five wickets as India thrashed New Zealand by 46 runs to seal the series 4-1 yesterday.

Kishan struck 103 off 43 balls as India posted 271-5 in Thiruvananthapuram after they elected to bat first in their final game ahead of the T20 World Cup starting next weekend.

India, who are number one in the T20 rankings, bowled out New Zealand for 225 despite a 38-ball 80 by opener Finn Allen. India will begin their T20 World Cup title defence next Saturday when they play the United States in Mumbai.

"I've done well and I'm getting these awards, but my focus is firmly on the World Cup," player of the match Kishan said.

"That's where the extra effort is needed. What's important is carrying this form forward and continuing to contribute there."

Left-arm quick Arshdeep picked up his first five-wicket haul

in T20 matches for India, taking 5-51. Left-arm spinner Axar Patel took three wickets.

Arshdeep went for 40 runs and took one wicket in his first two overs but later gained his revenge.

Allen and Rachin Ravindra put on 100 runs for the second wicket before the wheels soon came off for New Zealand as Allen departed. Arshdeep made further inroads with two wickets in an over including Ravindra, for 30, and skipper Mitchell Santner, for a duck. Ish Sodhi hit a valiant 33 off 15 balls before he fell as the last wicket with New Zealand bowled out in 19.4 overs.

Earlier, India lost local boy Sanju Samson for six before Kishan took matters into his own hands in a 137-run third-wicket partnership with skipper Suryakumar Yadav, who hit 63.

Kishan took on leg-spinner Sodhi as he blasted four fours and two sixes in a 29-run 12th over. Suryakumar then reached his third fifty of the series with two successive sixes. Suryakumar was named player of the series for his 242 runs in the five matches.

"As a bowling unit, we've got to

find ways against very good batters - guys who deal in boundaries and sixes," Santner said about the improvements for the World Cup.

"Maybe it's about turning those big overs into 15 or 16, especially on flat pitches, knowing that even 230 can be chaseable."

Spinner Santner took down his opposite number when he had Suryakumar stumped, but Kishan raised his hundred off 42 balls with a six, jumping for joy as he soaked up the applause from the fans and dressing room.

Kishan had been dropped by Glenn Phillips in the deep on 84, and eventually fell to Jacob Duffy - ending a knock featuring six fours and 10 sixes. Hardik Pandya kept up the charge though with a 17-ball 42 as India hammered 169 runs off the last 10 overs. India will begin their T20 World Cup title defence next Saturday when they play the United States in Mumbai.

"That's where the extra effort is needed. What's important is carrying this form forward and continuing to contribute there."

Left-arm quick Arshdeep picked up his first five-wicket haul

BRIEF SCORES: India 271 for 5 (Kishan 103, Suryakumar 63, Hardik 42, Ferguson 2-41) beat New Zealand 225 (Allen 80, Arshdeep 5-51, Axar 3-33) by 46 runs.



India's Rinku Singh (centre) lifts the trophy alongside Abhishek Sharma (left), Ishan Kishan (second from left), Harshit Rana (second right) and Axar Patel after their victory against New Zealand in the fifth and final T20 match in Thiruvananthapuram yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Pakistan spin out Australia in 2nd T20 to take series

'Pakistan outplayed us. Hopefully, we can improve and come back'

AFP
Lahore

skipper Salman Agha hit his highest score in the shortest format before Pakistan's spinners routed Australia by 90 runs in the second Twenty20 international in Lahore yesterday.

Agha hit a 40-ball 76 and Usman Khan smashed a 36-ball 53 as Pakistan made 198-5, their highest-ever T20I total against Australia.

This was enough for Pakistan's spin quintet who shared all ten wickets between them with Abrar Ahmed returning the best figures of 3-14 and Shadab Khan finishing with 3-26.

Australia were routed for 108 in 15.4 overs, giving Pakistan their biggest T20I victory over Australia eclipsing the 66-run win in Abu Dhabi in 2018.

"It has to be a perfect game," said Agha. "We batted well and then were outstanding with the ball. Fielding was outstanding."

The victory gives Pakistan an unbeatable 2-0 lead after they won the first match by 22 runs, also in Lahore, on Friday.

"We want to play in the same way, forget the 2-0 scoreline and come again with the same intensity and go to the World Cup with the same energy," said Agha of the event starting in India and Sri Lanka from February 7.

This is Pakistan's first T20I series win over Australia since 2018. The final match is today, also in Lahore. Despite skipper Mitchell Marsh coming back after resting on Friday, the visiting batters had little answer to Pakistan's spin assault. Ahmed dismissed Marsh for 18, Josh Inglis for five and Matthew



Pakistan's players celebrate after winning the second Twenty20 against Australia at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

Short for 27. Cameroon Green top scored with a 20-ball 35 before spinner Usman Tariq dismissed him on his way to figures of 2-16.

Marsh admitted Pakistan were better. "Pakistan outplayed us," said Marsh. "Hopefully, we can improve and come back tomorrow. They put us under great pressure in batting; it was probably a 160-170 wicket so they scored a big total."

Earlier, Agha and Usman led Pakistan to a fighting total after they won the toss and batted. Agha built the innings with Saim Ayub

(11-ball 23) during a second wicket stand of 55 as Pakistan scored 72 runs in the power-paly.

Agha's previous highest in all T20 cricket was 68 not out.

After Babar Azam failed with a five-ball two, Usman helped Agha add another quickfire 49 for the fourth wicket before Sean Abbott broke the stand. Agha smashed four sixes and eight fours in his sixth Twenty20 half century.

Pakistan added a good 61 runs in the last five overs with Usman knocking two sixes and four fours in his second T20I half century

while Shadab's knock had two sixes and a four.

The Usman-Shadab fifth-wicket stand yielded 63 runs off just 39 balls. Shadab finished with an unbeaten 20-ball 28. Pacer Xavier Bartlett and spinner Matthew Kuhnemann were expensive, conceding 92 runs between them in their eight overs.

BRIEF SCORES: Pakistan 198 for 5 (Salman 76, Usman 53, Connolly 1-30) beat Australia 108 (Green 35, Abrar 3-14, Shadab 3-26, Tariq 2-16) by 90 runs.

Injured Cummins out of Australia's T20 World Cup squad

Star paceman Pat Cummins was ruled out of Australia's Twenty20 World Cup campaign yesterday, while batsman Matthew Renshaw has come into the squad at the expense of Matt Short.

Test skipper Cummins only played one of the five Ashes Tests against England over the Australian summer as he slowly recovers from a lower back injury.

He was hoping to be fit for the tournament in India and Sri Lanka beginning on February 7, but has run out of time and been replaced by Ben Dwarshuis.

"With Pat needing more time to recover from his back injury, Ben is a ready replacement who offers a left-arm pace option as well as

dynamic fielding and late-order hitting," selector Tony Dohmen said. "We believe his ability to swing the ball at good pace, along with clever variations, will be well-suited to the conditions we expect and overall structure of the squad."

The only other change to the provisional squad named this month sees Renshaw come in for Short, who has paid the price for his ordinary performances in the Big Bash League.

"Matt (Renshaw) has impressed in all formats of late, including in multiple roles in white ball formats for Australia, the Queensland Heat, and the Brisbane Heat," Dohmen said.

"With the top order settled and spin-heavy conditions expected in the pool stages in Sri Lanka, we also feel Matt provides extra middle-order support, with Tim David completing his return to play programme in the early phase of the tournament."

Big-hitter David is on the comeback trail from a hamstring injury. The squad is spin-heavy in preparation for the sub-continent conditions, with left-arm Matt Kuhnemann and Cooper Connolly complementing chief tweaker Adam Zampa and part-timer Glenn Maxwell.

Australia's group-stage matches are all being played in Sri Lanka. They open their account against

Ireland in Colombo on February 11.

SQUAD: Mitchell Marsh (capt), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Tim David, Ben Dwarshuis, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Renshaw, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.



SPOTLIGHT

Coventry set to give clues to her Olympic vision in Milan

AFP
Milan

At the helm of the IOC for seven months, Kirsty Coventry is finally expected to set the course of her mandate in Milan, sketching out her vision for the future of the Olympics.

The Zimbabwean former swimmer, the first woman and the first African to lead the International Olympic Committee, is likely to give clues to the movement's future direction in meetings on the eve of the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics.

Coventry, who at 42 is also the youngest IOC leader since Pierre de Coubertin, has embodied a promise of renewal since her election.

But the outlines of that change have been slow to emerge.

As she promised during her election campaign, Coventry began her eight-year term by launching several working groups in June.

However, on the highly-charged issue of the access to women's events for transgender and intersex athletes, she is awaiting further clarity before making decisions.

One of the working groups, called "protection of the women's category", will address the issue of transgender and intersex athletes. Another centres on the Olympic programme, seeking to strike a balance between the size of the Games, the relevance of sports, and that of individual disciplines.

The progress of the committees will be revealed for the first time during the IOC Executive Board meeting from Saturday to Monday, then discussed Tuesday and Wednesday in Milan by around 100 members of the Olympic body for an IOC Session, ahead of the opening of the Games on Friday.

One aim is to redesign the Olympic sports programme - even if that means blurring the boundary between summer and winter events, should cyclo-cross or cross-country or trail running be included as early as the 2030 Games in the French Alps.

Other aims are to rethink the way the Games are allocated, adapt their economic model, and give a fresh impetus to the Youth Olympics.

The scientifically complex and politically explosive issue of protecting the women's category has been thrust back into the spotlight by the adoption of genetic testing in athletics, swimming, boxing and skiing.

The bodies concerned want to reserve women's events for athletes carrying XX chromosomes, banning both transgender and 'intersex' athletes, defined as those considered female from birth and often unaware of their genetic or hormonal particularities.

A decision on this issue will definitely not be on the Session agenda, Coventry said last



IOC President Kirsty Coventry.

week. Having initially promised in December to make a ruling "in the first quarter" of 2026, she is now speaking of "the coming months."

Her timetable is constrained: with Los Angeles hosting the 2028 Summer Olympics, US President Donald Trump has banned transgender women from all women's competitions by executive order, encroaching on the IOC's prerogatives in his first months in office.

Coventry "will probably wait until after the World Cup this summer for a first meeting with Trump. But at that point, there will have to be a policy", said Jean-Loup Challepelet, a specialist on Olympic issues at the University of Lausanne.

Since 2021, the IOC has recommended that international federations adapt eligibility rules to each discipline, backed by scientific data, without assuming that intersex traits or transgender identity systematically confer an unfair advantage.

Can Coventry maintain this nuanced line, at the risk of a confrontation with Trump?

It is hard to anticipate, since the working group dedicated to gender is the only one whose composition the IOC has kept secret, in order to "protect" its members from harassment.

That secrecy worries the Sport and Rights Alliance, a collection of leading human rights organisations, which said last week it feared the "politicisation and weaponisation" of the issue was having "undue influence on the IOC's decision".

Coventry's own convictions remain a mystery for now: she readily recounts her personal attachment to Olympism but deflects political questions about the ongoing consultations.

As for Trump, she joked after her election about her experience with "difficult men in high positions".

Coventry, a former Zimbabwean sports minister, has since adopted a more diplomatic tone and will make initial contact in Milan with US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio when they attend the opening ceremony of the Games.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Rybalkina keeps her cool to beat Sabalenka in final

'WELL, THE HEART DEFINITELY WAS BEATING TOO FAST, EVEN IF MAYBE MY FACE DID NOT SHOW IT'

AFP
Melbourne

Elena Rybalkina stifled her emotions to take revenge over world number one Aryna Sabalenka and win the Australian Open yesterday for her second Grand Slam title.

The big-serving Kazakh fifth seed fought back from 0-3 in the deciding set to triumph 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 at Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne in 2hrs 18mins.

It was payback after the Belarusian Sabalenka won the 2023 final between two of the hardest hitters in women's tennis.

Rybalkina, 26, who was born in Moscow, adds the Melbourne crown to her Wimbledon win in 2022.

Rybalkina has a reputation for being unflappable but she said she was nervous in losing the second set, even though she did not show it, and again as she served for the match.

She sealed the championship with her sixth ace of the final.

"Well, the heart definitely was beating too fast, even if maybe my face did not show it," she told local broadcasters.

"Inside was a lot of emotions."

It was more disappointment in a major final for Sabalenka, who won the US Open last year for the second time but lost the French Open and Melbourne title deciders.

She was into her fourth Australian Open final in a row and had been imperious until now.

The 27-year-old top seed had tears in her eyes at the end and draped a towel over her head to hide her feelings.

"Let's hope maybe next year will be a better year for me," Sabalenka said ruefully.

"She played an incredible match and I tried my very best. I was fighting until the very last point."

RYBAKINA BATTLES BACK

With the roof on because of drizzle in Melbourne, Rybalkina immediately broke serve and then comfortably held for 2-0.

Rybalkina faced two break points at 4-3, but found her range with her serve to send down an ace and dig herself out of trouble, leaving Sabalenka visibly frustrated.

Rybalkina looked in the zone and wrapped up the set in 37 minutes on her



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka looks on with the runner-up shield in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

rattled. She reset to hold, then wrestled back the break, allowing herself the merest of smiles.

At 3-3 the title threatened to swing either way.

But a surging Rybalkina won a fourth game in a row to break for 4-3, then held to put a thrilling victory within sight.

Sabalenka came into the final as favourite but Rybalkina has been one of the form players on the women's tour in recent months. She also defeated Sabalenka in the decider at the season-ending WTA Finals.

CONFIDENCE BOOST
Rybalkina said her overriding emotions were relief, but also hope that she can carry her scintillating form into the rest of the season.

"It gives a lot confidence for sure," she said. "Last year I didn't start that well... now it's different." "So I just hope that I can carry all this momentum and hopefully do a good job with the team and continue this way throughout the year."

Rybalkina beat second seed Iga Swiatek in the quarter-finals and sixth seed Jessica Pegula in the last four in Melbourne.

Rybalkina switched to play under the Kazakh flag in 2018 when she was a little-known 19-year-old, citing financial reasons.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybalkina kisses the trophy after winning the Australian Open final against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in Melbourne yesterday. (Reuters)

WOMEN'S CHAMPS THIS CENTURY

2026 - Elena Rybalkina (KAZ)	2017 - Serena Williams (USA)	2008 - Maria Sharapova (RUS)
2025 - Madison Keys (USA)	2016 - Angelique Kerber (GER)	2007 - Serena Williams (USA)
2024 - Aryna Sabalenka (BLR)	2015 - Serena Williams (USA)	2006 - Amelie Mauresmo (FRA)
2023 - Aryna Sabalenka (BLR)	2014 - Li Na (CHN)	2005 - Serena Williams (USA)
2022 - Ashleigh Barty (AUS)	2013 - Victoria Azarenka (BLR)	2004 - Justine Henin (BEL)
2021 - Naomi Osaka (JPN)	2012 - Victoria Azarenka (BLR)	2003 - Serena Williams (USA)
2020 - Sofia Kenin (USA)	2011 - Kim Clijsters (BEL)	2002 - Jennifer Capriati (USA)
2019 - Naomi Osaka (JPN)	2010 - Serena Williams (USA)	2001 - Jennifer Capriati (USA)
2018 - Caroline Wozniacki (DEN)	2009 - Serena Williams (USA)	2000 - Lindsay Davenport (USA)

HORSE RACING

Maysara claims Marmi Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Mohammed Abdul-hadi al-Hajri-owned Maysara returned to winning ways as she clinched the Marmi Cup at the Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

Settled at the rear for much of the contest, the six-year-old chestnut mare produced an electrifying turn of foot in the home straight to sweep past the leaders and score impressively by two lengths, providing trainer Hamad al-Jehani with double on the card, with Pierre Charles Boudot in the saddle.

The mare's victory in the Local Thoroughbred Open Race for four-year-old and up over 1,200m (class 2), contested by six runners, came after consecutive runner-up finishes to register her third success from five starts this season.

Al Nasr Al Washeek pressed forward to set the pace in the early stages, tracked closely by Mutamarid, with Maysara racing just behind them. As the race developed, Maysara was eased back toward the rear while Barq Al Atam moved up into third, allowing the leader to establish a modest advantage through the middle stages.

Approaching the home turn, the tempo began to lift and Maysara was brought back into contention, improving smoothly to enter the straight in third.

Once asked to quicken, she produced a decisive and electrifying turn of foot. Inside the final 300m, she swept past the leaders with ease, opening up rapidly and putting the outcome beyond doubt.

Al Nasr Al Washeek, representing Injaaz Stud and trained by Jihad El Ahmad, stayed on under Ivan Rossi to take second, holding off his stablemate Mutamarid, who carried the same colours, ridden by Lukas Delozier, by just a



Jockey Pierre Charles Boudot celebrates after riding Maysara to the Marmi Cup victory at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. PICTURE: Juhaim

neck. Mutamarid completed the frame in third, as Maysara's powerful late burst proved the defining moment of the feature contest.

Traine al-Jehani was in the winners' enclosure earlier in the day when Washington Street continued his upward trajectory with a convincing victory in the sixth race, a Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90) for four-year-olds and up over 1,200m (class 3).

The four-year-old chestnut gelding, owned by Al Ghaf Stud added a second win to a season that has already produced two placed efforts from four starts, drawing clear by 2½ lengths with Pierre Charles Boudot in the saddle.

Neebrook, Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki and partnered by Tomas Lukasek, opened the card with a polished success in the first race,

a Thoroughbred Maiden Plate for three-year-olds over 1,400m (class 6) contested by nine lightly raced runners.

The chestnut gelding, having just his second career start and his first appearance in Qatar, built on a debut fifth at Navan, Ireland, to get off the mark by a length for owner Abdulrahman Mohammed al-Attiyah.

RESULTS
44th Al Uqda Race Meeting - Marmi Cup

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

1 - Marmi Cup, Local Thoroughbred Open Race

Maysara, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot

2 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate

Neebrook, Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki, Tomas Lukasek

3 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate

Anika, Alban de Mieulle, Megane Peslier

4 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (O-45)

Mabsam, Jihad El Ahmad, Salman Fahad al-Hajri

5 - Purebred Arabian Novice Plate

Waseelh, Julian Smart, Marco Casamento

6 - Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85)

Loaded Gun, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento

7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90)

Washington Street, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot

8 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (80-100)

Samsa Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier

'Full respect' for Djokovic but Nadal tips Alcaraz for Melbourne title

Rafael Nadal says he has "full respect" for old rival Novak Djokovic but tipped Spanish compatriot Carlos Alcaraz to win today's Australian Open final. The 22-time Grand Slam winner, who retired from tennis in 2024, is set to attend the blockbuster title match in Melbourne. A two-time Australian Open champion himself, Nadal believes world number one Alcaraz is the clear favourite, but would not be surprised if 38-year-old Djokovic caused an upset.

"I think the favourite is Carlos," Nadal told host broadcaster Channel Nine yesterday. "He's young, he has the energy and he's in his prime. But I mean, Novak is Novak. He's a very special player. I don't know if Novak has lost a final here. It's always a challenge and he likes the challenges. (But) favourite is Carlos from my point of view."

Speaking separately to the Melbourne Age newspaper, Nadal said it was a "positive thing" to have somebody at Djokovic's age fighting with Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner. Djokovic stunned 24-year-old Sinner in the semi-finals over five tough sets to surge into his 11th Australian Open final. He has won all previous 10. "I really believe that he is here for one simple reason - because if I don't get injured, probably I will be here playing too," said Nadal, who is one year older than Djokovic. "When you like to do this thing, if you are not injured and if you are not super tired mentally, why wouldn't you be here?"

"I think it's a positive example of commitment, of resilience."

"I mean, Novak, for obvious reasons, he's not at his prime, but he is still very, very competitive at an age that is difficult to be very competitive. So full respect."

Djokovic is bidding to become the oldest man to win the Australian Open. The 37-year-old Ken Rosewall won it in 1972. He is also striving to finally win a record 25th Grand Slam and surpass Margaret Court, who is also expected to be watching in Rod Laver Arena yesterday.

Rose breaks out to 4-shot Farmers lead

Justin Rose will carry a four-stroke lead into the weekend at the Farmers Insurance Open after posting a stellar 7-under-par 65 on Friday in San Diego. After opening with a 62 on Torrey Pines' North Course, Rose recorded the round of the day at the more challenging South Course with an eagle, six birdies and just one bogey. That pumped the Englishman up to 17-under 127 for the week. Irishman Seamus Power is alone in second at 13 under; after shooting the only 65 at the South Course on Thursday, he settled for a 66 at the North Course in the second round. Joel Dahmen (63, North Course) and Max McGreevy (67, North Course) are tied for third at 11 under, and Si Woo Kim of South Korea (66, North Course) rounds out the top five at 10 under. Everyone in the field played one round at each course, and those who made Friday's 36-hole cut will spend the weekend on the South Course. Brooks Koepka made the cut on the number at 3 under par in his first tournament back on the PGA Tour following nearly four years with LIV Golf. Koepka, like many, struggled on the South Course on Thursday but hit his stride with a 4-under 68 on the North Course, which featured an eagle putt at the par-5 17th. Not everyone was as fortunate. Xander Schauffele's consecutive cuts streak of 72 - the longest active on tour - came to an end as he finished 2 under for the week. He only managed a 69 at the North Course and missed a birdie putt to qualify on the number on his final hole, the par-5 ninth.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal thrash Leeds United to stretch advantage

CHELSEA STAGE IMPRESSIVE FIGHTBACK TO BEAT WEST HAM

AFP

London

Arsenal settled any fears of a collapse in their pursuit of a first Premier League title in 22 years by thrashing Leeds 4-0 yesterday as Chelsea came from two goals down to beat West Ham 3-2.

The Gunners' advantage over Manchester City and Aston Villa, who are both in action today, stretches to seven points as Mikel Arteta's men took another step towards the title at Elland Road.

A first home defeat of the season last weekend to Manchester United capped a run of just two points from a possible nine in Arsenal's previous three league games.

After finishing runners-up for the past three seasons, questions were raised over the mentality of Arteta's men and their ability to get over the line in a title race.

The visitors were dealt another blow before kick-off as Bukayo Saka was injured in the warm-up.

But his replacement Noni Madueke played a major part in inflicting just a second defeat in 12 games on Leeds.

"A very impressive performance, a very impressive result, especially in the context that we've done it," said Arteta.

Madueke's cross was headed in by Martin Zubimendi to open the scoring.

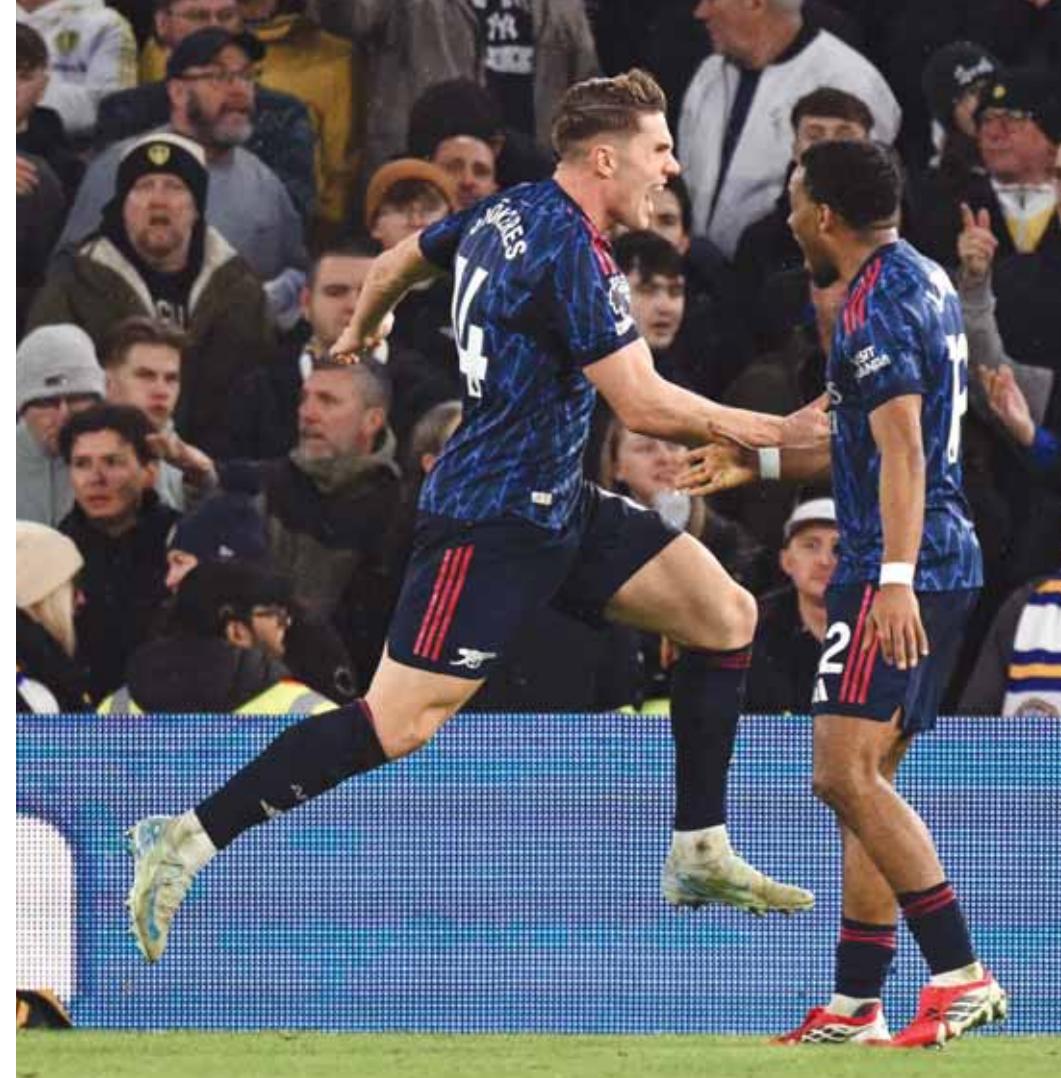
Leeds goalkeeper Karl Darlow could then only parry another dangerous delivery from the England winger into his own goal before half-time.

Despite a fine run of form, Leeds remain only six points above the relegation zone.

Their first defeat at home since November was confirmed when the much-criticised Viktor Gyokeres latched onto Gabriel Martinelli's cross to blast in his 11th goal since joining Arsenal from Sporting Lisbon.

Gabriel Jesus came off the bench to round off the scoring with a blistering strike four minutes from time.

Arsenal will be hoping local rivals Tottenham can do them a favour when City visit north London, while Villa host Brentford today.



Arsenal's Viktor Gyokeres celebrates after scoring their third goal during the Premier League match against Leeds United at Elland Road in Leeds yesterday. (AFP)

Rosenior inspires Chelsea comeback

Chelsea's fine start under Liam Rosenior continued but they climbed into the top four the hard way after being outplayed by relegation-threatened West Ham for 45 minutes at Stamford Bridge.

The Blues were booed off at half-time by their own fans after goals from Jarrod Bowen and Crysencio Summerville gave the visitors a deserved lead.

A third consecutive league win would have taken Nuno Espirito Santo's side to within two points of safety. But they wilted under

the weight of Chelsea pressure after Rosenior's triple half-time substitution inspired a transformed second-half performance.

Two of those introduced at the break, Joao Pedro and Marc Cucurella, brought Chelsea level before Enzo Fernandez fired in the winner in stoppage time.

Chelsea moved above Manchester United into fourth and open up a four-point lead over Liverpool, who host Newcastle later, in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League.

Everton snatched a 1-1 draw at Brighton thanks to Beto's 97th-

minute equaliser in a result that does little for either side's aspirations of European football next season.

Pascal Gross' first goal since returning to the Seagulls from Borussia Dortmund put Brighton in front.

Bournemouth ended any remaining worries of being dragged into a relegation fight as goals from Eli Kroupi and Alex Scott earned a 2-0 win at bottom-of-the-table Wolves.

The Cherries climb up to 12th and 13 points clear of the relegation zone.

SERIE A

Napoli edge Fiorentina as injury crisis deepens

AFP

Rome

Champions Napoli edged slowly Fiorentina 2-1 in Serie A yesterday to keep pace in the title race, three days after being dumped out of the Champions League.

Napoli lost 3-2 to Chelsea on Wednesday and 3-0 to Juventus in the league last weekend but bounced back thanks to impressive goals from Antonio Vergara in the 11th minute and Miguel Gutiérrez early in the second half.

Staggering under the weight of an injury crisis that includes star midfielder Kevin De Bruyne and striker Romelu Lukaku, Napoli lost captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo to a twisted knee in the first half.

"It's a serious injury, the cruciate ligament," coach Antonio Conte said after the game.

"We're killing these guys, we're killing football... with 60-70 matches per season, it's suicide."

Fiorentina forced Conte's charges to dig in when Manor Solomon pulled a goal back on 57 minutes, but the home team held on for a narrow win with a lively pressing game. "We'll keep fighting," vowed Conte. "We want to make sure we at least get back into the Champions League."

Inter Milan travel to Cremonese today and lead the title charge on 52 points, with AC Milan second on 47 ahead of Tuesday's game at

Bologna.

Napoli climbed provisionally to third on 46. Roma have 43 ahead of tomorrow's game at Udinese.

Napoli went into yesterday's game with just one win from their last seven matches in all competitions. Earlier Pisa lost 3-1 at home to Sassuolo to remain rock-bottom having won just one match from 23.

Meanwhile Mike Maignan signed a new deal with AC Milan that will keep the France goalkeeper at the San Siro until 2031, the Serie A giants confirmed yesterday. Italian media reported that Milan have almost doubled Maignan's annual salary to five millions euros, ensuring their captain will stay.

"AC Milan is pleased to announce the extension of Mike Maignan's contract until June 30, 2031," said Milan, currently second in Serie A. Maignan says he enjoys working with coach Massimiliano Allegri, who joined Milan in May 2025.

"He's experienced and level-headed, he knows how to manage his group of goalkeepers. Working like that is much easier. I don't want to make comparisons, but we get along well and he knows how to handle me," Maignan said in December. The deal comes after the 30-year-old rediscovered the form which earned him the nickname "Magic Mike" when he replaced Gianluigi Donnarumma between the sticks in 2021.

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BUNDESLIGA

Leaders Bayern Munich held 2-2 at Hamburg

AFP

Berlin

Bayern Munich dropped points for the second straight week in the Bundesliga as they were held to a 2-2 draw at Hamburg yesterday. Borussia Dortmund have a chance to revive a dormant title race with a win at home to bottom club Heidenheim today, which would draw them to within six points.

Hamburg had lost 17 and drawn three of their past 20 games with Bayern but put up a fight against the defending champions, taking the lead with a Fabio Vieira penalty after 32 minutes.

Bayern hit back when Harry Kane and Luis Diaz scored either side of half-time, but the hosts swiftly equalised through Luka Vuskovic. Hamburg had chance to win it late with Manuel Neuer well outside his box, but Alphonso Davies denied Vieira and saved Bayern with a desperation clearance.

It was the first time Hamburg avoided defeat against Bayern since 2014, a run of nine straight defeats with 39 goals conceded.

Arsenal loanee Vieira tucked a penalty under Neuer's outstretched hand to give Hamburg the lead, their first goal against Bayern in seven matches dating back to 2016.

Kane brought the visitors level just before the break, scoring on the spin from a rebound with a classic poacher's finish.

Half-time substitute Diaz gave Bayern the lead 90 seconds into the second period, guiding a Michael Olise pass in from close range.

The visitors levelled minutes later though as Vuskovic headed a cross past Neuer and just inside the post, before holding on to nab a valuable point. Andrej Kramaric scored twice as Hoffenheim extended their strong run with a 3-1 home win over Union Berlin.

Hoffenheim narrowly escaped relegation last season but have picked up 19 of a possi-



Bayern Munich's Luis Diaz (right) celebrates scoring his team's second goal with Harry Kane (centre) and Serge Gnabry during the Bundesliga match against Hamburg yesterday. (AFP)

ble 21 points in their past seven games to move level with second-placed Dortmund.

Bayern host Hoffenheim next Sunday and Kramaric told Sky Germany: "We're up for it – it'll be a great test. If we keep up the performances we've had in the past few weeks, we won't leave empty-handed."

Union's rise to mid-table this season has been driven by stately defence but the Berlin club's resistance was broken when defender Leopold Querfeld clipped Hoffenheim's Fisnik Asllani in the box.

Kramaric converted from the spot with a cool chipped finish. The Croatia forward headed in a second from a Bazoumana Toure cross just before half-time.

Another Toure cross enabled the hosts to seal victory just after the break, as Union's Diogo Leite scuffed the ball into his own net with Kramaric lurking.

Bayer Leverkusen moved a point behind fourth-placed Leipzig with a 3-1 win at free-

falling Eintracht Frankfurt, without a coach until Albert Riera takes over next week. The hosts finished with 10 men. Arthur gave Leverkusen the lead, his first Bundesliga goal, after a clever Alejandro Grimaldo backheel.

Malik Tillman made the most of some poor positioning from Frankfurt goalkeeper Kaua Santos moments later to double the lead.

A Robin Koch goal just after half-time gave Frankfurt a glimmer of hope, but Ellyes Skhiri picked up two yellow cards in three second-half minutes. Frankfurt have won just one of their past 13 games in all competitions. On Friday, Riera was named coach in a surprise appointment, but the former Spain international, currently with Slovenian side Celje, will not arrive until Monday.

"We'll be starting from zero," Frankfurt's Mario Goetze said, "step by step."

Elsewhere, RB Leipzig became the latest victim of resurgent Mainz, going down 2-1 at home after taking the lead.

MOTORSPORT

Al-Attiyah clinches Baja Hail Rally in Saudi Arabia

Agencies

Riyadh

Qatar's rally legend Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah delivered another commanding performance in international rally-raid competition by winning the Baja Hail Toyota International Rally, round one of the FIA Baja World Cup, in Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

Representing Qatar Racing and partnered by French co-driver Max Delfino in the Optimus MD Rallye, al-Attiyah topped the overall classification with a total time of 4 hours 06 minutes 23 seconds across the three-day event.

The victory comes just two weeks after the Qatari star se-



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah celebrates after winning the Baja Hail Toyota International Rally, round one of the FIA Baja World Cup, in Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

MARSEILLE BUCKLE AS PARIS FC BATTLE BACK FOR DRAW

Marseille suffered a late collapse and blew a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 at Paris FC in Ligue 1 yesterday with the pain still fresh from their excruciating Champions League exit. Mason Greenwood converted a first-half penalty for his league-best 13th goal of the season and set up Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to double Marseille's lead early in the second half. However, three days after crashing out of Europe in improbable fashion, Marseille came unstuck again as Jonathan Ikone's header brought Paris FC back into the game and Ilan Kebbel levelled with an injury-time spot-kick. Marseille lost 3-0 at Club Brugge on Wednesday but it took a last-gasp header from Benfica's goalkeeper in a win over Real Madrid to knock Roberto De Zerbi's side out of the competition. De Zerbi dismissed reports that he was stepping down in the wake of the defeat in Belgium after he missed a training session the next day. The Italian said he had held talks with club officials to find the best way to move on from the Champions League disappointment, but the nature of Marseille's latest setback will only add to the unease at the Velodrome.