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Lollobrigida wins Italy's first gold medal at the Winter Olympics

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MOTORSPORT

Abdulaziz and brother Nasser end a 10-year wait for a third MERC win

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GOLF

Bogey-free day gives Reed 2-shot Qatar Masters lead

THE IN-FORM AMERICAN SITS AT 14-UNDER-PAR AFTER CARDING A TWO-UNDER 70 AT DGC

By Sports Reporter
Doha

A bogey-free third round at the Qatar Masters yesterday saw American Patrick Reed open up a two-shot lead heading into the final round, keeping himself firmly in contention for a second victory in three weeks.

Reed sits at 14-under-par after carding a two-under 70 at Doha Golf Club.

Denmark's Jacob Olesen is his closest challenger on 12 under, having produced the standout round of the day among the pursuers. Olesen fired a four-under 68, highlighted by a blistering back nine that featured five birdies.

"I felt like I hit the ball better today than I did the last two days - well, really compared to yesterday, and shot two shots worse, so it's an interesting game," Reed said after the third round yesterday.

"The golf game feels good, it feels solid, it feels steady and really just got to go out there and keep the foot on the gas tomorrow, get off to hopefully a faster start than today, and see where it goes," Reed added.

Reed's birdies at the second and the par-five tenth were backed up by 16 pars in a solid round despite a three-putt from just under 100 feet at the last hole after finding the green in two.

"It's one of those days you've got to take advantage of the par-fives, I didn't really do that very well today," Reed said. "A three-putt on the last obviously stings but to go round this place bogey-free, especially with how the wind was, it's obviously successful," the 2018 Masters champion said.

Reed won the Dubai Desert Classic trophy last month and then lost in play-off at Bahrain Championship last week as Germany's Freddy Schott claimed a maiden victory.

The American, now playing regularly on the European-based circuit after leaving LIV Golf with a return to the PGA Tour not pos-



Patrick Reed in action during the third round of the Qatar Masters at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.
PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

sible until August. "Hopefully we can continue to do that tomorrow, continue hitting the ball solid and giving ourselves a lot of birdie looks, and hopefully make a couple more than just two tomorrow," the 35-year-old said.

LAGERGREN SLIPPS OFF THE PACE

Reed's playing partner Joakim Lagergren slipped off the pace slightly with a one-over par 73 seeing him fall back to 10-under.

Bogeys for Lagergren at the 11th, 14th and 16th left him four off the pace going, meaning Olesen will play with Reed in today's final group. The left-hander Olesen was one over for his front nine but five birdies coming home, including three in the last four holes, put him in contention for his maiden DP World Tour win.

"It was a grind on the front nine, couldn't really get anything going, didn't hit any good shots at all either," said Olesen.

"I hit a good wedge in on ten af-



ter a poor drive. It's not really the pin position where you want to be

stuck with a wedge out the first cut, but hit a good one in there

Spain's Angel Ayora is joint third on 11 under after the third day.



Denmark's Jacob Olesen tees off on the 10th hole during round three of Qatar Masters yesterday.

wasn't playing that easy so I knew I wasn't in a terrible spot, just needed to get something going," the Dane said.

Australia's Daniel Hillier and Spain's Angel Ayora are joint third on 11 under, while Scotland's Calum Hill - the third member of last week's play-off in Bahrain with Reed and Schott - and England's Daniel Bradbury are in a six-way tie for ninth on nine under.

Sebastian Soderberg from Sweden, posted the best round of the day - a seven-under 65 that included an eagle two at the 10th to reach nine under. Alongside them on that total were Dan Bradbury, Kazuma Kobori and Johannes Veerman.

Padraig Harrington carded a one-under par 71 to sit on four-under overall in tied-34th.

The Dubliner, who is making his 500th start on the Tour, recorded birdies on the first, sixth, 10th and 14th holes with dropped strokes on the eighth, 13th, and the par-5 18th.

TENNIS

Qatar TotalEnergies Open begins today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The season's first WTA 1000-level event - \$4.1mn Qatar TotalEnergies Open 2026 will swing into big action at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex today with seven of the Top 10 players in action.

The draw for the tournament has thrown up some interesting prospects where defending champion Amanda Anisimova could face Elina Svitolina in the quarter-finals, while Mirra Andreeva sits on a collision course with Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina at the bottom.

With World No. 1 and former champion Aryna Sabalenka not in the field, three-time champion Iga Swiatek is the top seed, followed by Rybakina, Anisimova, Coco Gauff and Andreeva.

Swiatek could run into Italian Jasmine Paolini, seeded sixth, in the last eight. Swiatek has won their first six matches, including the Cincinnati final last year, but Paolini turned the tables at the WTA Finals last year with a commanding 6-1, 6-2 win that took everyone by surprise.

Today's order of play at Centre Court (3pm start)
Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova vs 16-Elise Mertens (BEL)
Followed by:
Ann Li (USA) vs Leylah Fernandez (CAN)
Not Before 6Pm:
Marie Bouzkova (CZE) vs 10-Victoria Mboko (CAN)
Followed by:
Jaqueline Cristian (ROU) vs 14-Karolina Muchova (CZE)

Rybakina, fresh off her second Grand Slam title and winner of 20 of her last 21 matches, tops her part of the draw. Her biggest threat is Andreeva, who won the title in Adelaide last month. This section also includes Victoria Mboko, Diana Shnaider and the returning Zheng Qinwen.

Anisimova, who won the biggest title of her career here last year (till then), is the top seed in a section that also includes Australian Open semi-finalist Elina Svitolina, fresh into the Top 10. American Emma Navarro and Karolina Muchova are also in this quarter, as are Filipina sensa-

tion Alexandra Eala (who will attract a large number of fans in Doha) and 2017 champion Karolina Pliskova.

Among the opening day matches will be the meeting between 2019 winner Elise Mertens of Belgium and Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, scheduled for 3pm on centre court.

The first round also features a clash between Czech Linda Noskova, seeded nine, and Australian teen Maya Joint. Noskova, now up to No. 12 in the world will take on Joint in their first meeting in a match between potential future superstars.

There will also be American Emma Navarro against German Tatjana Maria.

It's been a slow start to the year for Navarro, who went just 2-3 during the Australian swing and lost her opener in Abu Dhabi. She's fallen to No. 17 in the rankings, and is very much in need of a deep run in Doha to get some momentum back. And her opponent, 38-year-old Maria, is always a joy to watch. They've only played once, a 6-3, 6-2 win for Maria in Rome, Italy way back in 2022.

Meanwhile, Emma Raducanu, who missed the chance to win her first title since her US Open triumph in 2021 after



losing in straight sets to home favourite Sorana Cirstea in the Transylvania Open final yesterday, will also feature in Doha hoping to swing her fortunes. Unfortunately, Czech Barbora Krejcikova and Spaniard Paola Badosa had to withdraw from the tournament yesterday due to injuries. Krejcikova suffered a left knee injury while Badosa was pulled down by a troubled right hip.

Seedings at the \$4.1mn Qatar TotalEnergies Open
1. Iga Swiatek 2. Elena Rybakina 3. Amanda Anisimova 4. Coco Gauff 5. Mirra Andreeva 6. Jasmine Paolini 7. Elina Svitolina 8. Ekaterina Alexandrova 9. Linda Noskova 10. Victoria Mboko 11. Clara Tauson 12. Emma Navarro 13. Liudmila Samsonova 14. Karolina Muchova 15. Diana Shnaider 16. Elise Mertens.

MATCH REPORT

SPOTLIGHT

Suryakumar stars as India survive scare against USA

India were in trouble at 77-6 before captain's 83 took them to 161

AFP
Mumbai

A sparkling unbeaten 84 from India captain Suryakumar Yadav and three wickets from late call-up Mohammed Siraj in Mumbai yesterday helped India avoid a shock defeat to the United States as they opened their defence of the T20 World Cup.

India were in trouble at 77-6 before Suryakumar took them to a competitive 161-9 at a packed Wankhede stadium and won by 29 runs as the USA could only muster 132-8 in reply.

"Only I can tell how much pressure I was feeling," said Suryakumar after his brilliantly paced knock, which contained 10 fours and four sixes as India plundered 75 off the last six overs. "But I had the belief. I knew if I bat till the end, I can make a difference."

Chasing 162 for a massive upset, the Americans were quickly reduced to 13-3 as Siraj, only added to the squad 24 hours earlier as a replacement for the injured Harshit Rana, struck twice in his first two overs.

A 58-run fourth-wicket partnership between Milind Kumar (34) and Sanjay Krishnamurthi (37) gave the US a chance of pulling off a stunning win. They were still in the hunt at 98-4 in the 16th over when spinner Axar Patel took two wickets in two balls to end their hopes.

"I thought our bowlers did a good job," said US captain Monank Patel. "We dropped catches and that cost us. At one stage, I felt we could restrict them to 130. We made a few mistakes but we will try to come back stronger."

Siraj, who had not played a T20 international since July 2024 and would have been left out had Jasprit Bumrah not been sick with a fever, celebrated his recall by taking a wicket with his fourth ball. US opener Andries Gous had just hit Siraj for six but the next ball could only find Tilak Varma, who took a low catch.

Arshdeep Singh got in on the act at the other end when Monank was caught by Shivam Dube off a leading edge. That left the US at 11-2, which became 13-3 when Siraj struck again to remove Saiteja Mulkamall for two.

Siraj finished with 3-29 after trapping Shubham Ranjane lbw with the final ball of the match. Monank's decision to field was rewarded with the prize wicket of the dangerous Abhishek Sharma off the first ball he faced. Number three Varma announced his arrival with a six and two fours off Saurabh Netravalkar.

India had reached a steady 45-1 when Ishan Kishan (20) slapped Shadley van Schalkwyk to Kumar at mid-off to spark a mini-collapse. Tilak succumbed to Van Schalkwyk, splicing an attempted pull to Monank at midwicket and on the next ball, Shivam Dube also fell to leave Van Schalkwyk on a hat-trick, which was successfully staved off by Suryakumar.

India crept to 63-4 at the halfway stage, which soon became 72-5 and 77-6 when Rinku Singh was caught in the deep and Hardik Pandya perished in similar fashion. Suryakumar bided his time before unleashing an assault in



India's captain Suryakumar Yadav plays a shot during the ICC T20 World Cup group stage match against USA at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. (AFP)

the 16th over, hitting three fours and a six off seamer Netravalkar. He reached his fifty off 36 balls with a trademark wristy sweep for four.

The final over saw more carnage as Suryakumar smashed 21 runs, including two sixes, off the hapless Netravalkar, who finished with the sorry figures 0-65 off his four overs.

Van Schalkwyk was the pick of the American

attack as he took four wickets for 25.

BRIEF SCORES

India 161/9 in 20 overs (Suryakumar 84; Shadley van Schalkwyk 4-25, Harmeet Singh 2-26) **beat USA 132/8 in 20 overs** (Sanjay Krishnamurthi 37; Mohammed Siraj 3-29, Arshdeep Singh 2-18, Axar Patel 2-24) by 29 runs

Faheem blitz sees Pakistan avoid Netherlands shock



Faheem Ashraf's breezy cameo secured a nervy three-wicket win for Pakistan against the Netherlands at the T20 World Cup in Colombo. (AFP)

AFP
Colombo

Faheem Ashraf smashed an unbeaten 29 off 11 balls as Pakistan scrambled past the Netherlands by three wickets to avoid a massive shock in the curtain-raiser of the T20 World Cup in Colombo yesterday.

Pakistan were made to sweat as the Netherlands took a flurry of late wickets to leave them needing 29 off the last two overs with only three wickets in hand at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground. Faheem then hit 24, including three sixes, off a 19th over that also saw him dropped in the deep by Max O'Dowd and then completed the chase with three balls to spare.

"We had to do it the hard way," admitted Pakistan captain Salman Agha. "We did well with the bat. We batted well earlier on but then in T20 cricket a few bad overs can change the complexion. All credit to Faheem," he added. "Happy with our bowling. We did a good job. A target of 148 we would take that any day on this kind of surface. It was a good bowling performance."

Pakistan had begun well, racing to 61 for two after the six-over power play. Sahibzada Farhan looked in prime touch, cracking 47 off 31, but his exit swung the pendulum the Dutch way. Right-arm quick Paul van Meekeren produced a double-wicket maiden to turn the screws. When the unconvincing Babar Azam perished in the next over for a scratchy 15, Pakistan were in trouble having lost three wickets for two runs in the space of 10 deliveries.

With the chase wobbling, Faheem stitched a priceless unbroken 34-run stand for the eighth wicket with Shaheen Shah Afridi to see Pakistan home. "We have been playing this brand of cricket for this past year," said Faheem, who

was awarded player of the match. "Heart rates go up and down, it's happened so many times before, we're used to it."

Earlier, the Netherlands showed plenty of flair after being put in. Roared on by around 200 travelling fans, they were in a good position at 127-4 with four overs to go, but Pakistan applied the brakes with the slow men sharing six wickets between them. "We weren't at our best in all three departments today," said Netherlands captain Scott Edwards. "Credit to the boys to give us a chance at the back end. Obviously small moments can be crucial," he added.

Edwards anchored the innings with a polished 37 off 29 balls, but perished when he tried to take the aerial route against leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed. Part-time spinner Saim Ayub then struck twice in the 17th over before left-arm quick Salman Mirza's three-wicket burst dismissed the Dutch with one ball to spare.

Pakistan conceded just 20 runs in the final four overs backed up by a razor-sharp performance in the field with several outstanding catches in the deep. "We just kept losing wickets at important times rather than building partnerships. We were thinking 160 would be a good total," said Edwards.

Pakistan can ill-afford any slip-ups in the group stage after saying they will not play against India on February 15 on government instructions and forfeiting the points in Group A. Pakistan will play all their matches in Sri Lanka in the 20-team tournament co-hosted by Sri Lanka and defending champions India.

BRIEF SCORES

Netherlands 147 in 19.5 overs (Scott Edwards 37; Salman Mirza 3-24) **lost to Pakistan 148/7 in 19.3 overs** (Sahibzada Farhan 47, Faheem Ashraf 29 not out; Paul van Meekeren 2-20) by 3 wickets

ICC in talks to revive India vs Pakistan World Cup clash

New Delhi: The International Cricket Council is in talks with the Pakistan Cricket Board to resolve the boycott of its T20 World Cup match against India on February 15, *AFP* reported.

Any clash between arch-rivals India and Pakistan is one of the most lucrative in cricket, worth millions of dollars in broadcast, sponsor and advertising revenue. But the fixture was thrown into doubt after Pakistan's government ordered the team not to play the match in Colombo.

The Pakistan Cricket Board reached out to the ICC after a formal communication from the cricket's world body, a source close to the developments told *AFP*. The ICC was seeking a resolution through dialogue and not confrontation, the source added. The 20-team tournament has been overshadowed by an acrimonious political build-up after Bangladesh, who refused to play in India citing security concerns, were replaced by Scotland. As a protest, Pakistan refused to face co-hosts India in their Group A fixture.

Pakistan, who edged out Netherlands in the tournament opener yesterday, will lose two points if they forfeit the match and also suffer a significant blow to their net run rate.

India skipper Suryakumar Yadav said this week that his team would travel to Colombo for the clash. Pakistan and India have not played bilateral cricket for more than a decade, and meet only in global or regional tournaments.

ENGLAND'S SALT PASSED FIT FOR OPENER

Hard-hitting batsman Phil Salt was passed fit as England named their team for their first match in the T20 World Cup. He will open the batting alongside wicket-keeper Jos Buttler against Nepal at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium today in Group C.

Salt missed Tuesday's third T20 against Sri Lanka with a back spasm but trained successfully on Friday and will take his place at the top of the order. Tom Banton, fresh from a sparkling 54 off 33 balls against Sri Lanka five days ago, is preferred to Ben Duckett and will bat at number four.

Left-arm fast bowler Luke Wood gets the nod ahead of Jamie Overton and joins express man Jofra Archer and Sam Curran in the seam attack.

England have opted to have four spinners at their disposal with spearheads Adil Rashid and Liam Dawson backed up by all-rounders Jacob Bethell and Will Jacks.

FOCUS

Shepherd takes hat-trick as Windies beat Scotland

AFP
Kolkata

Pace bowler Romario Shepherd took the first hat-trick of the 2026 T20 World Cup yesterday to help the West Indies blow away Scotland's tail and win by 35 runs in their Group C opener in Kolkata.

Shepherd grabbed a sensational four wickets in five balls in the 17th over to put an end to Scotland's hopes of chasing their target of 183. Shimron Hetmyer's 36-ball 64 at Eden Gardens earlier propelled the West Indies to 182-5 in their 20 overs.

The Scots, who only received a call-up two weeks ago to replace Bangladesh, were threatening a famous victory at 114-3 at the end of the 13th over, with big-hitting captain Richie Berrington and Tom Bruce at the crease. A 78-run fourth-wicket partnership between Berrington, who made 42, and Tom Bruce (35) had put them back in the hunt.

But strikes by Jason Holder and then Shepherd's burst saw Scotland bowled out for 147. "Sheppie, he is one of those guys who is willing to learn and improve," West Indies captain Shai Hope said. "He is always willing to put his hand up whatever the team requires of him whether with bat or ball. He is kind of versatile for us in the middle overs and it's good to see him starting the tournament with a bang and hopefully he will continue doing the same."

Shepherd removed Matthew Cross, for 11, Michael Leask and Oliver Davidson and celebrated wildly before ending with an impressive 5-20 from his three overs. Holder finished with figures of 3-30 in 3.5 overs as he wrapped up the Scotland innings in 18.5 overs.



West Indies' Romario Shepherd celebrates after taking the hat-trick against Scotland. (AFP)

The Scots won the toss and elected to field and initially had the West Indies on the back foot with some disciplined bowling. Opener Brandon King made 35 as he cut loose in the seventh over to hit pace bowler Safyaan Sharif for a six and two fours off successive balls.

Scotland rotated their bowlers and Leask struck the first blow with his off-spin as he bowled Hope for 19. King was out next, falling to debutant left-arm spinner Davidson caught at backward point for his maiden T20 wicket.

The left-handed Hetmyer took on the opposition attack, hitting six sixes in all, and put on a stand of 81 off 37 balls with Rovman Powell, who made 24. Hetmyer, who was named player

of the match, reached his fifty off 22 balls with a six. Powell was dismissed, but he kept up the attack with fellow left-hander Sherfane Rutherford, who scored a 13-ball 26. Hetmyer fell to Sharif with Brandon McMullen taking a stunning catch and Rutherford followed him on the first ball of the next over. Left-arm pace bowler Brad Currie returned figures of 2-23.

BRIEF SCORES

West Indies 182/5 in 20 overs (Shimron Hetmyer 64, Brandon King 35, Brad Currie 2-23) **beat Scotland 147 all out in 18.5 overs** (Richie Berrington 42, Tom Bruce 35, Romario Shepherd 5-20, Jason Holder 3-30) by 35 runs

HORSE RACING

Hadi De Carrere captures Ain Sinan Cup

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hadi De Carrere, carrying the silks of Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed bin Faleh al-Thani, captured the Ain Sinan Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

The nine-year-old bay settled into a handy position throughout the 2000m Purebred Arabian Open Race before producing a strong late challenge.

He reeled in the long-time leader in the closing stages and swept clear to land the day's feature by an emphatic 2¼ lengths.

This was his second win from three starts this season and in the process the veteran completed a treble on the card for the Jassim al-Ghazali-Marco Casamento trainer-jockey combination.

M'tawa El Saa'yeb broke sharply from barrier one and was allowed to stride on, quickly opening up a wide advantage as he set a strong gallop through the early stages. The remainder of the field adopted more conservative tactics, with



Marco Casamento, astride Hadi De Carrere, wins the Ain Sinan Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. **Right:** The connections of Hadi De Carrere celebrate the win.

Hadi De Carrere settling at the head of the chasing group ahead of Nasser Al Shahania, content to track the leader while keeping his powder dry through the middle stages.

The order remained unchanged passing halfway, though the early leader's margin began to contract after the 1000m mark as the tempo took its toll. Approaching the home turn, Hadi De Carrere was brought

into the race smoothly from his handy position and began to close decisively on the long-time leader. Once inside the final 200m, he asserted with authority, quickly reeling in M'tawa El Saa'yeb and drawing clear to settle the outcome in convincing fashion.

M'tawa El Saa'yeb, owned by Saif Rashid Saif al-Khayarin and trained by Hamad al-Jehani, stayed on under Pierre-Charles

Boudot to take second, finishing just a neck ahead of Nasser Al Shahania. The latter, representing Al Shahania Stud and trained by Rudy Nerbonne, ran on under Lukas Delozier to secure third after racing prominently throughout.

The meeting's seven-race card produced a full spectrum of winners, beginning with Lahab, who opened the day with a victory in the local Thoroughbred maiden.

Shamshon ANR prevailed in a tight Purebred Arabian contest, while Thunder Valley was awarded the handicap after a stewards' inquiry.

Politico produced a late surge to win decisively, and Al Ryan Park dominated once again with a wide-margin success. Maarek continued his consistent form with a commanding staying performance, before Hadi De Carrere reasserted his class to close the day in style.

RESULTS 47th Al Uqda Race Meeting - Ain Sinan Cup

- WINNERS:** (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1 - Ain Sinan Cup, Purebred Arabian Open Race
Hadi De Carrere, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
2 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate, 4-7yo, 2000m
Lahab, Jassim al-Ghazali, Saleh Salem al-Marri
3 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate
Shamshon ANR, Dr Fahad Salman al-Hajri, Marco Casamento
4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (45-65)
Thunder Valley, Hadi al-Ramzani, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri
5 - Thoroughbred Handicap (0-70)
Politico, Fahad Rashid al-Khayarin al-Hajri, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri
6 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (55-75)
Al Ryan Park, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
7 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (55-75)
Maarek, Jihad El Ahmad, Damien Morin

WINTER OLYMPICS

Lollobrigida wins Italy's first gold of Games

Defending champion Alex Hall advances to slopestyle final

Reuters
Milan

Francesca Lollobrigida powered to victory in the women's 3,000 metres speed skating yesterday, bringing Italy its first gold medal of the Milano Cortina Winter Games and ending the Netherlands' run of three consecutive Olympic titles in the discipline. Norway's Ragne Wiklund and Canada's Valerie Maltais joined her on the podium as the speed skating programme got underway at the Milano Speed Skating Stadium.

Lollobrigida clocked three minutes and 54.28 seconds to finish 2.26 seconds ahead of Wiklund.

Skating in her fourth Olympics, Lollobrigida produced an inspired performance to secure her first gold medal, adding to the 3,000m silver and mass start bronze she won at Beijing in 2022.

Celebrating her 35th birthday, she carried the weight of home expectations and lived up to them.

Her victory ended a formidable Dutch legacy in the 3,000m. The Netherlands famously swept the podium at PyeongChang 2018, and Irene Schouten won gold at Beijing 2022 before retiring.

In Milan, Marijke Groenewoud and Joy Beune were again seen as leading Dutch contenders to extend that dominance, as was Wiklund – but Lollobrigida had other ideas. The Netherlands remains the sport's powerhouse, with a record 48 Olympic gold medals – well clear of the US (30) and Norway (28). Lollobrigida's victory was Italy's third Olympic gold in speed skating.

Meanwhile Olympic medallists Alex Hall of the United States and



Gold medallist Francesca Lollobrigida of Italy celebrates with her son following the speed skating Women's 3000m victory ceremony at Milano Cortina 2026 Olympics in Milano Speed Skating Stadium situated in Milan, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)



Alex Hall of United States in action during his run in the freestyle skiing freeski slopestyle qualification. (Reuters)

Jesper Tjader of Sweden made it through the freeskiing slopestyle qualifying round at the Milano Cortina Winter Games to set up a

showdown in next week's final in the Italian Alps. Hall, the defending champion, was one of three Americans to make the field of 12 who will compete for medals in the mountain town of Livigno, near the Swiss border. His teammates Mac Forehand and Konnor Ralph also advanced.

The 27-year-old Hall sounded relieved after securing his spot in Tuesday's final after two smooth runs under sunny skies.

"It's always nerve-wracking during the qualifiers," Hall said. "There is a little bit of strategy involved."

"You don't want to show all your cards. You don't want to try something too hard that you might not land. In the finals, you just go all out," he added.

The slopestyle event features

skiers who slide across rails and perform aerial tricks to impress the judges with difficulty and originality. The best score from each of the two runs determines the rankings. Tjader, the bronze medallist at the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing, tumbled off a rail in his initial run, putting him in danger of elimination.

A strong second run vaulted the 31-year-old to third place.

"Everybody did amazing runs so I really had to step up to make the final," Tjader said.

"I'm really proud of my run. I did a few new tricks that I haven't done on a slopestyle run before," Tjader added.

Norway's Birk Ruud, the first men's rider of the day, executed a flawless performance and finished at the top of the pack.

MOTORSPORT

Martin eyes Thailand return as Aprilia future remains uncertain



Red Bull KTM Tech3's Enea Bastianini, Aprilia Racing's Jorge Martin and Trackhouse MotoGP Team's Raul Fernandez during the launch of the 2026 MotoGP season at Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
Kuala Lumpur

Former MotoGP champion Jorge Martin is targeting a return to action at the Thailand Grand Prix as the Aprilia rider looks to put a nightmare 2025 season behind him – but his future with the team beyond this year remains clouded in uncertainty. The Spanish rider, in the final year of his contract with Aprilia, missed pre-season testing at Sepang for the second consecutive year due to injury, this time due to surgeries in the off-season rather than crash-related injuries last year.

The 28-year-old has not yet received the all-clear ahead of the 2026 season opener at the Thailand Grand Prix weekend that starts on February 27.

MARTIN 'STILL NOT FEELING 100%

"I think the target is to be in the Thailand Grand Prix. For sure, I'm still not feeling 100% but I started to see the light," Martin told reporters at the MotoGP season launch on Saturday.

"Last year was really, really tough for me. It's like it was a nightmare. I was always with some pain in some part of the body."

Now I started to feel that is getting out." After missing the first three races last year, he returned at the Qatar Grand Prix where another crash ruled him out for several months. Martin eventually managed just seven races in the 22-race season.

The 2026 season will be more about rebuilding than title hunting

for Martin, who acknowledged the competitive disadvantage of missing crucial development time on the bike.

However, he also praised his teammate Marco Bezecchi's work during the Sepang sessions.

'BUILDING MY CONFIDENCE AGAIN'

"I think it's more about building my confidence again, to be back to winning, to feel my full potential. This is the target," Martin said.

"For sure, it's a handicap (missing out on testing), because you lose time on development of the bike, of understanding the bike. But I think Marco did a fantastic job during the test and the bike is ready to go." The relationship between Martin and Aprilia remains strained after contract disagreements last year, with the Spaniard even announcing his intention to leave Aprilia ahead of the 2026 season before his U-turn two months later.

When asked about trust levels with the Italian manufacturer, Martin was diplomatic but non-committal.

"It's difficult to say at the moment."

"For sure, it's nice that they renew Marco that fast. But now, I have different options," Martin said.

Martin confirmed his management team is exploring alternatives for 2027, including potential talks with Yamaha, although he remained coy about specifics.

"My team is working on that. I'm not really in talks with anyone," he added.

"So my team will do it and let's see what happens."

TENNIS

Cirstea beats Raducanu, wins title

AFP
Paris, France

Emma Raducanu was swept aside 6-0, 6-2 by Romanian Sorana Cirstea in the final of the Transylvania Open, the Briton's first title match since her shock victory at the US Open in 2021.

Four-and-a-half years after becoming the first player in the Open era to win a Grand Slam from the qualifying rounds in New York, the tournament's top

seed got off to a disastrous start in the Romanian city of Cluj, conceding the first eight games to her opponent.

Trailing 6-0, 2-0, Raducanu won her first game on her opponent's serve, before asking to have her blood pressure taken at the changeover.

Clearly not at her best, the 23-year-old nevertheless managed to level the set at two games all before conceding the last four and losing in just over an hour.

Cirstea, who at 35 has already said this will be her last season

on tour, won the fourth title of her career, and first in her home country.

"Someone please pinch me, because this is a dream come true," Cirstea said after compatriot and former world number one Simona Halep presented her with the trophy.

"I still can't believe that I'm holding the trophy as champion here in Cluj. I am so, so happy."

The world number 36 previously picked up titles in Tashkent in 2008, Istanbul in 2021 and Cleveland in 2025.

Japan's Hisatsune, Matsuyama 1-2 at Phoenix Open

Arizona: Ryo Hisatsune chipped in for birdie in surprising fashion to cap a back-nine hot streak and overtake Japanese countryman Hideki Matsuyama for the second-round lead at the WM Phoenix Open on Friday in Arizona. Hisatsune is 11 under for the week after his stellar 8-under-par 63. The 23-year-old is searching for his first win on the PGA Tour. Hisatsune went birdie-birdie-eagle-birdie-birdie at TPC Scottsdale's 13th through 17th holes, including an 8-footer for eagle at the par-5 15th and a 7 1/2-foot birdie putt at the "Stadium Hole," the par-3 16th. The latter tied him with Matsuyama, who was in the clubhouse at 10 under after a 64. On the short par-4 17th, Hisatsune attempted to drive the green but ended up in the adjacent water hazard. After a penalty drop, he faced about 29 feet to the pin, and his chip tracked straight to the cup for the

go-ahead birdie. "It was very lucky, especially like little bit pulled. Really nice tee shot but I kind of a little bit into the water," Hisatsune said. "Yeah, some more reset and then I going to make some chip-in." Now the youngster will play in the third round's final group with Matsuyama, who was the first male golfer from Japan to win a major when he claimed the 2021 Masters. "Yeah, yeah. Absolutely dream to play (with Matsuyama)," Hisatsune said. "Especially in the Phoenix, yeah." Matsuyama started his second round on the back nine and made his move early with six consecutive birdies at Nos. 13-18. At the Stadium Hole, he drained a putt from nearly 30 feet. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler was in danger of missing the cut after a surprising round of 73 on Thursday. He responded with a bogey-free, 6-under 65 in his second round to climb to 4 under par.

MOTORSPORT

Al-Kuwari brothers roll back the years to win Qatar Rally

Al-Attiyah suffers broken wheel and resultant suspension damage while leading the event

By Sports Reporter
Lusail

Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and his brother Nasser ended a 10-year wait for a third FIA Middle East Rally Championship victory when they secured a second win at the Qatar International Rally yesterday.

The Qatari duo trailed runaway leader Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah for three-quarters of the event but hit the front when the defending champion suffered a broken wheel and resultant suspension damage after nine of the event's 12 gravel stages to the north of Doha.

From then on, the Sarrazin Skoda Fabia RS duo stayed clear of trouble over the remaining three special stages to follow up their 2012 victory in Qatar at the wheel of a Mini S2000. Al-Kuwari had also notched up success on a candidate event in Oman back in 2014 and picked up maximum MERC points in Cyprus the same year. His brother only came back as a stand-in co-driver for this event after announcing his retirement from the sport last year.

The delighted Qatari had a flattering winning margin of 5min 08.8sec. He said: "Fourteen years I didn't win the event and, 14 years, my brother was never next to me on this event. I brought him back. I said he had to retire at home. It was good to come back and win the rally. I never pushed 100%. I never had a penalty or a puncture, maybe one of the only ones. There is a limit you have to stay below. The team did a great job. Thanks to the QMMF and Sarrazin Motorsport. Now, for sure, I will ask the QMMF if I can continue the Middle East championship. I think I deserve it. I am always there."

Nasser al-Kuwari added: "When my brother tried to push me to come back, I had a feeling that we were going to win it.



Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and his brother Nasser (centre) celebrate after winning the Qatar International Rally in Lusail yesterday. Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhshab and his Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore finished second ahead of Qatar's Nasser Khalifa al-Atya and Lebanon's Ziad Chehab. QMMF President Abdulrahman al-Mannai and the Executive Director Amro al-Hamad presented the trophies.

This will be my last race and we have won it. I am so happy for my brother, my father, my family, the QMMF. I am proud of my brother. This is the end of my career."

Al-Attiyah's goal of a 19th Qatar victory fizzled out on the road section after stage nine. The Qatari and co-driver Candido Carrera had completed the stage with a broken rear-left wheel and damaged suspension on their Autotek Skoda Fabia RS.

They were forced to change the wheel and make emergency repairs on the side of the road after the stage but the wheel was

hanging at an angle and there was a small fire when they began the return to Lusail. The Qatari tried a couple of times to make further repairs and made it back to Lusail within his maximum lateness, albeit on three rotating wheels, before throwing in the towel. He admitted that he thought he had a puncture and drove to the end of the stage, not realising that the wheel had broken and damaged the suspension.

Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhshab and his Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore applied the pressure on local youngster Mohammed

al-Marri and Frenchman Pierre Delorme as the leg progressed and took full advantage of a large time loss for the young Qatari on stage 10 to secure second overall in a Jameel Motorsport Toyota GR Yaris Rally2. It was the Saudi's third ever special stage rally after the WRC event in Saudi Arabia last November and Oman last month.

Al-Marri delivered a memorable performance on his first outing in a Citroën C3 Rally2 but was forced to retire after the 10th stage with a broken suspension rod.

Nasser Khalifa al-Atya and Ziad Chehab

finished on the final step of the podium in their Motortune Ford Fiesta and al-Atya claimed maximum points in the FIA Master Driver category for the second event in succession.

Shaker Jweihan completely dominated the FIA MERC2 category with Mustafa Juma in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X for a second time in three weeks. Despite a bent suspension arm for the opening loop of stages, the Jordanian finished fourth and romped to class victory by 13min 20.8sec.

Rashid al-Muhannadi and Gary McElhinney moved into a useful lead in the FIA MERC4 category on the first stage of the morning when Khalifa Saleh al-Attiyah was sidelined with technical problems. The defending champions increased their advantage as the day progressed in a QM-MF-backed Peugeot 208 but a penultimate stage retirement with transmission issues enabled rivals Ahmad Shaheen al-Muhannadi and Taha al-Zadjali to take the lead.

They then rolled in the last stage and gifted victory and fifth place to Nouef al-Sowaidi and Aisvydas Paliukenas. Ahmed al-Kuwari and Baptiste Cerrato finished sixth in the second of the Peugeots.

The Italian duo of Christiano Gabbarini and Alessandro Forni were seventh in a Yamaha Quaddy YXZ 1000R and the Omani duo of Zakariya al-Aamri and Mohammed al-Mazrui finished eighth in a Subaru Impreza N14 and picked up points for second in MERC2.

Charbel Chebly drove well on his Qatar debut with Carlos Hanna, finished third in MERC2 and ninth overall. Mohammed Mansoor Parol (Mitsubishi), Shadi El-Fakih (Renault) and Jassim al-Muqahwi (Mitsubishi) rounded off the 12 finishers.

Abdullah al-Rawahi retired before the restart. The Omani had suffered several time-consuming punctures during leg one and had back pain as a result of his injury in Lebanon last year.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Gyokeres lifts Arsenal nine clear as Man United pile pressure on Frank

AFP
London

Arsenal moved nine points clear at the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 victory against Sunderland, while Tottenham boss Thomas Frank faced renewed calls for his sacking after a 2-0 defeat at Manchester United.

Mikel Arteta's side went ahead in the 42nd minute at the Emirates Stadium as Martin Zubimendi fired past Sunderland goalkeeper Rob-in Roefs at his near post. Viktor Gyokeres sealed Arsenal's second successive league win with a 66th-minute strike before the Swede netted again in stoppage time.

The Gunners, who haven't won a trophy since the 2020 FA Cup, are chasing their first English title in 22 years. After three successive runners-up finishes in the Premier League, including blowing significant leads at the top in 2023 and 2024, the north Londoners finally look set to end their title drought.

Arsenal also beat Chelsea in midweek to book a League Cup final date with Manchester City at Wembley on March 22. Second-placed City will be under pressure to close the gap by beating Liverpool at Anfield today.

Third-placed Aston Villa are also nine points adrift of the Gunners after a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth. Villa took the lead as Morgan Rogers lashed into the top corner in the 22nd minute. But Brazilian teenager Rayan equalised for Bournemouth with his first top-flight goal in the 55th minute.

Manchester United profited from Tottenham captain Cristian Romero's red card to stretch their perfect start under Michael Carrick to four games, leaving the beleaguered Frank under mounting scrutiny. With the game still scoreless in the 29th minute, Romero – who has been vocal in his criticism of Tottenham's owners lately – was dismissed after lunging in to catch Casemiro on the ankle.

Bryan Mbeumo swept United ahead from a clever corner routine in the 38th minute. Bruno Fernandes' close-range finish in the 81st minute



Arsenal's Viktor Gyokeres scores against Sunderland at the Emirates Stadium in London. (AFP)

ended an eight-game winless run against Tottenham for United, who cemented their hold on fourth place in the race to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Another damaging defeat for Frank left Tottenham in 14th place – just six points above the relegation zone – as their winless league run in 2026 extended to seven matches. "It is what it is. We need to deal with it," Frank said. "Cristian clearly goes for the ball. Unfortunately, the way the rules are, it becomes a red. He apologised to his team-mates."

Interim boss Carrick is making his case for the permanent job after masterminding an impressive turnaround since Ruben Amorim was sacked in January. Cole Palmer scored a first half hat-trick as fifth-placed Chelsea won 3-1 at bottom of the table Wolves. Matt Doherty fouled Joao Pedro and Palmer stepped up to send Jose Sa the wrong way with his 13th-minute penalty.

Palmer converted another spot-kick in the 35th minute after Yerson Mosquera's needless shove on Joao Pedro. The England forward completed his hat-trick three minutes later,

drilling home from Marc Cucurella's pass after more woeful Wolves defending. Toluwalase Arokodare got one back for Wolves in the 54th minute, but Blues boss Liam Rosenior is just the second English manager to win his first four Premier League games after Craig Shakespeare at Leicester.

West Ham improved their hopes of avoiding relegation and pushed Burnley closer to the drop with a 2-0 win at Turf Moor. The Hammers struck first through Crysencio Summerville in the 13th minute and Valentin Castellanos bagged their second in the 26th minute. Nuno Espirito Santo's third-bottom side are three points behind fourth-bottom Nottingham Forest, while second-bottom Burnley are 11 points from safety after 16 games without a win.

Everton won 2-1 at Fulham thanks to farcical own goal from Cottagers keeper Bernd Leno. Everton defender Vitaliy Mykolenko's 18th-minute own goal was cancelled out by Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall's 75th-minute equaliser. In the 83rd minute, Leno punched an Everton corner into his own net under pressure from Everton's Jake O'Brien.

the coveted top-four places. St Pauli, whose last win was before the winter break, hosted fourth-placed Stuttgart, who hadn't lost in the league since a 5-0 home drubbing by Bayern on December 6. Daniel Sinani's clever dummy wrong-footed the Stuttgart defence and the loose ball was lashed in from the edge of the box by Manolis Saliakis for the opener on 35 minutes. Things got even better for St Pauli 10 minutes after the break when Sinani slotted home from the penalty spot to make it 2-0 after a VAR review confirmed a handball.

chance to dream of a first title since 2012 with 13 games to go. It was not a vintage display by Dortmund, who suffered a blow pre-match with the news that captain Emre Can will be sidelined for another month.

But they ground out victory against a Wolfsburg team who have only won once since the turn of the year thanks to goals by Julian Brandt and Guirassy, each side of a Konstantinos Koulierakis leveller for the hosts.

This also proved a pivotal day in the battle for Bundesliga survival as well as the fight for

Late Guirassy winner for Dortmund trims Bayern's lead

Wolfsburg, Germany: A late Serhou Guirassy winner settled a tense contest in Wolfsburg as Borussia Dortmund prevailed 2-1 to provisionally cut Bayern Munich's lead at the top of the Bundesliga to three points.

A fifth consecutive league victory moved Niko Kovac's side to 48 points, within a victory of erstwhile runaway leaders Bayern, who can restore their six-point cushion with victory at inform Hoffenheim today. After a record-breaking start to the season, the champions are winless in their last two games, giving Dortmund the

Hemeida wins gold at Asian Indoor Athletics Championships



Qatar's Bassem Hemeida claimed 400m gold medal at the 12th Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Tianjin, China, yesterday. He clocked 47.27 seconds to top the field, with China's Chiyu Zheng finishing runner-up in 47.34 seconds. Iran's Arash Sayyari secured third place in 47.59 seconds.

LA LIGA

Barca beat Mallorca to extend lead

AFP
Barcelona

Robert Lewandowski and Lamine Yamal scored as Barcelona eased to a comfortable 3-0 win over Mallorca to move four points clear at the top of La Liga.

The champions extended the gap to Real Madrid in second before Alvaro Arbeloa's side visit Valencia today, with Marc Bernal also on target late on at the partially reopened Camp Nou stadium. Barcelona's first half display was sluggish, even though Lewandowski's goal had them ahead at the break.

"I was not happy... we were not on our level, the playing and passing was too slow," admitted Flick, who demanded more from his side going forward. "The first half was not how Barca want to play, (but) the second half was much better."

Mallorca target man Vedat Muriqi came close early on as he slid in at the back post but hit the side netting, while Jan Virgili's shot was saved by Joan Garcia. Marcus Rashford added some urgency into Barca's game after a

listless start, curling inches wide of the far post after cutting in from the left.

A blocked shot from the England international led to the opener, with Dani Olmo knocking the rebound to Lewandowski to finish from close range.

Rashford's dangerous free-kick was tipped onto the bar by Mallorca stopper Leo Roman, and Yamal missed from point blank range as Jules Kounde sent the rebound into his path.

The 18-year-old made amends in the second half with a superb shot from outside the area which left Roman with no chance.

It was his fourth goal in four games, with Yamal in his best form of the season.

Midfielder Marc Casado struck the crossbar with a deflected effort as Barca could have opened up a wider lead. At the other end, Garcia earned his clean sheet with a good save to thwart Antonio Sanchez, before Bernal rounded off Barca's victory.

Flick handed 19-year-old midfielder Tommy Marques his debut late on, as another youngster from the club's feted La Masia academy made the jump to the first team.