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HORSE RACING

Amir Sword Festival to feature 32-race programme

Al Shaqab Racing's Al Ghadeer will be seeking to secure HH The Amir Sword for a third consecutive time

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club (QREC) yesterday announced its full readiness for the launch of the HH The Amir Sword Festival at Al Rayyan Racecourse, which will run over four days from tomorrow until Saturday. The programme will comprise two days of racing on the sand track, followed by two days on the turf.

To mark this readiness, a press conference was held yesterday at QREC, attended by Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, Acting Chief Executive Officer of QREC, Ahmed al-Sheebani, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, and Abdulla al-Kubaisi, Racing Manager.

Representatives of the Festival's sponsors were also present, including Nasr Jai-roudi, General Manager of Alfardan Premier Motors, Hassan Youssef al-Obaidly, Director of Programs at the Social and Sports Activities Support Fund (DAAM), Ahmed Abdullah al-Attiyah, Director of Public Relations at the Qatar Media Corporation, and Faisal bin Khalid al-Otaibi, Chairman of Loom, the festival's marketing partner.

Speaking during the press conference, al-Darwish, said: "I would like to confirm that all organisational and logistical arrangements for this year's HH The Amir Sword Festival have been completed, including the full readiness of the Al Rayyan

Racecourse and the entire infrastructure of the QREC."

He added: "The Festival features a total of 32 races across the four days. It begins with two days of sand-track racing, bringing together the leading sand specialists among Purebred Arabians and Thoroughbreds. Attention then switches to the turf on the third day, which includes one of the Festival's most important races, dedicated to local breeders. The Festival concludes with a series of major feature races, highlighted by the HH The Amir Sword and the HH The Amir Trophy, each carrying total prize money of \$2.5mn.

"The HH The Amir Trophy will be staged this year as an International Group 2 contest for the first time, having previously held Group 3 status."

He confirmed that the HH The Amir Trophy for Thoroughbreds and the HH The Amir Sword for Purebred Arabians will both be run on the closing day, as Races 3 and 4 on the card.

Al-Darwish noted that this year's edition holds particular significance for Al Ghadeer, owned by Al Shaqab Racing, who will be seeking not only to defend his title, but also to secure the HH The Amir Sword for a third consecutive time. Achieving that feat would see the horse complete the Doha Triple Crown for the third time, an unprecedented achievement.

Addressing the new elements of this year's renewal of the Festival, al-Darwish said: "Among the additions to the programme are several new races, includ-



Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, Acting Chief Executive Officer of QREC, Ahmed al-Sheebani, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, and Abdulla al-Kubaisi, Racing Manager and other officials pose after the press conference yesterday.

ing the Middle-Distance Cup – a Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (85-105) over 1700m, the Sand Sprint Cup – a Thoroughbred Handicap (85-105) over 1200m, and the Qatar International Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (90-110) over 2400m. We are confident that competition among owners, trainers and jockeys will exceed expectations, given the high level of challenge across the programme. We wish all participants the very best as they compete for the season's most prestigious honours."

SPOTLIGHT

€1.5mn Grand Prix headlines Amir's Sword showjumping spectacle

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Preparations have been completed for the HH The Amir's Sword showjumping competition, set to take place at Al Shaqab from tomorrow until February 14, with 283 riders and 599 horses confirmed and a total prize purse exceeding €2mn for the prestigious championship.

The highlight of the event will be the Grand Prix, offering €1.5mn in prize money and regarded as one of the most prestigious and lucrative competitions in international showjumping. The championship forms the fifth leg of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026 and is expected to attract many of the world's leading riders. Details were announced during a press conference attended by Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF) president and organising committee member Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, Sports Director Salmeen al-Suwaidi and Marketing and Communications Director Abdullah al-Qashouti.

The competition opens tomorrow with two five-star classes at heights of 140cm and 150cm in the outdoor arena. Thursday's programme will feature nine classes across one-star and five-star levels, three three-star World Cup qualifying rounds, a local 60cm class and an international dressage event. The outdoor arena will also host the Hermes Seller class, a 155cm Grand Prix qualifier with a jump-off.

Friday will see 10 rounds, including star and three-star competitions, World Cup qualifiers, junior and youth events, a local 80cm round, an international dressage class and the five-star Grand Prix at 160cm with a jump-off.

On the final day, Saturday, action will include the three-star Grand Prix at 150cm qualifying for the World Cup, the star Grand Prix at 130cm, additional five-star and star rounds, FEI Group VII qualifying classes for youth and juniors, further three-star World Cup qualifiers and a local 100cm class.

The rider line-up features several world-ranked competitors led by world number one Scott Brash of Great Britain, who currently tops the Doha Equestrian Tour standings in the four-star and five-star categories. Brash



Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF) president and organising committee member Bader bin Mohammed al-Darwish, Sports Director Salmeen al-Suwaidi and Marketing and Communications Director Abdullah al-Qashouti address a press conference yesterday.

also claimed the five-star Grand Prix title in the final leg of the HH The Father Amir's Prix. Other notable names include Austria's Max Kuhner, Britain's Harry Charles, USA rider Eve Jobs, Germany's Nadja Peter-Steiner and Belgium's Abdelkader Said.

Doha Equestrian Tour Executive Director Khalifa al-Attiyah said Qatar's equestrian sport was experiencing a strong period of growth following the success of the HH The Father Amir's Prix. He noted that the Amir's Sword represents the largest equestrian championship staged in Qatar and the region in terms of prize money, highlighting the country's world-class facilities at Al Shaqab and increasing international participation.

Al-Darwish described the event as a strategic step in developing Qatari riders by giving them the opportunity to compete against leading international athletes, while also strengthening sports tourism and reinforcing Doha's reputation as a global sports destination.

Al-Suwaidi confirmed that more than 280 riders, including 93 Qataris representing over 30 countries, will compete across show jump-

ing and dressage disciplines, with World Cup qualifying rounds, FEI Group VII qualifiers and local youth competitions included in the programme.

A festive closing ceremony will be held on Friday featuring light shows and equestrian-themed entertainment, alongside a dedicated fan zone offering cafes, retail outlets and family activities. Cultural events and exhibitions around the Al Shaqab arena will showcase Qatari heritage and hospitality throughout the championship.

The HH The Amir's Sword is the fifth stop of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026, which began with the HH The Father Amir's Prix series. Scott Brash leads the overall four-star and five-star standings with 199 points ahead of Harry Charles with 114, while French rider Meghann Moussonnier sits third with 113. In the star category, Qatar's Saad Ahmed al-Saad leads with 49 points, followed by Hussein Saeed Haidan with 43.

The championship is organised by the Qatar Equestrian Federation, the Qatar Olympic Committee and Al Shaqab.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Duhail fight back to hold Sharjah

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Al Duhail and Sharjah settled for a 1-1 draw which kept their AFC Champions League Elite last 16 hopes just about alive. The stalemate took both sides to eight points, with their fates to be decided in next week's final round of league stage matches.

Both teams came into the tie needing victory. Hosts Duhail threatened in the sixth minute with Jean-Charles Castelletto sending his glancing header off Benjamin Bourigeaud's cross just wide of the right post, while Sharjah responded three minutes later with Mathheus Saldanha forcing Al Duhail keeper Salah Zakaria into a save.

Al Duhail exposed Sharjah again a minute later when Sharjah goalkeeper Adel al-Hosani spilled Edmilson Junior's close-range shot into the path of Adil Boulbina who, however, was flagged offside.

Another chance went begging for the Qatari side in the 12th minute when Edmilson Junior

slipped through into the box and floated the ball for an unmarked Boubakary Soumare at the far post who, however, crashed his shot against the left post. The missed opportunities came back to haunt Al Duhail when Zakaria brought down Luanzinho inside the box, allowing Igor Coronado to convert from the spot in the 41st minute.

Boulbina and Krzysztof Piatek caused problems for Sharjah early in the second half, while Maro Katinic couldn't find the target from Coronado's cross in the 50th minute with Luanzinho flashing his headed attempt agonisingly wide 10 minutes later from a fast break.

Al Duhail were left frustrated again in the 62nd minute when Luanzinho fed an unmarked Boulbina, whose effort was ruled offside.

There was, however, joy for the Algerian midfielder as he equalised from the spot in the 81st minute after being brought down by Rafael Pereira. Al-Hosani had initially saved the effort, but the penalty had to be retaken as the keeper had come off his line, with Boulbina making no mistake with his second attempt as the points were shared.



Duhail's Bassam al-Rawi (right) and Sharjah's Luanzinho vie for the ball.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Pakistan agrees to play India in Colombo

Reuters
Islamabad

Pakistan has agreed to play India in the Twenty20 cricket World Cup match scheduled to take place in Sri Lanka on Sunday, Pakistan's government said yesterday, reversing its decision to boycott the game citing geopolitical tensions.

The Pakistani government last week directed its team to boycott the Group A contest to show solidarity with Bangladesh, who were replaced in the tournament by Scotland after their refusal to tour India over safety concerns.

"In view of the outcomes achieved in multilateral discussions, as well as the request of friendly countries, the Government of Pakistan hereby directs the Pakistan National Cricket Team to take the field on February 15, 2026, for its scheduled fixture in

the ICC Men's T20 World Cup," the government said in a post on X.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday urged Pakistan to reverse their decision to boycott the match. Pakistan also received communications from Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates, and other member nations urging it to help in securing a resolution to the impasse, the government said in the statement.

Pakistan, who are scheduled to play all their matches in Sri Lanka, would have forfeited two points if they had withdrawn from the match and also dealt a serious blow to the tournament since an India-Pakistan clash remains cricket's greatest blockbuster. Indian captain Suryakumar Yadav said last week that his team would travel to Colombo as planned, regardless of Pakistan's decision on the fixture. New Delhi's ties with both Islamabad and Dhaka have deteriorated in recent months, with political



Pakistan captain Salman Agha and Indian counterpart Suryakumar Yadav pose with the Asia Cup trophy on September 28, 2025, in Dubai.

strains increasingly spilling into cricket. India engaged in its worst conflict with Pakistan in decades in May. Ties with Bangladesh soured after then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to Delhi in 2024 after violent protests against her government. Bilateral cricket between India and Pakistan has long

been suspended but an arrangement is in place enabling them to play at a neutral venue when either hosts a global tournament. India, the world's top-ranked T20 team, are aiming to become the first side to successfully defend the title and the first hosts to win the tournament.

'All the pressure' on Pakistan against USA in second WC clash
USA leg-spinner Mohammad Mohsin said yesterday that "the pressure will be on Pakistan" when the teams lock horns in the T20 World Cup again, two years after the Americans inflicted a shock defeat on the former champions.

But Pakistan quick bowler Salman Mirza insisted the stunning super over defeat in Dallas in the 2024 T20 World Cup would be firmly "in the past" when the two clash in Colombo today.

The USA team gave tournament favourites India a big scare in their opening match in Mumbai, reducing them to 77-6 at one point, with Mohsin taking a wicket on his T20 World Cup debut, before losing by 29 runs. They are confident they can repeat their stunning upset of two years ago in the Group A encounter.

"The pressure of losing the last game will be on Pakistan," said

Mohsin. Born and brought up playing cricket in Pakistan, Mohsin migrated to the US five years ago and warned the USA were a better team now than two years ago.

"I have played with most of the players in this Pakistan team, so I have given my input to the team and we are a more skilled and confident team."

Mirza was confident the last defeat will not prey on the Pakistan players' minds.

"Winning and losing are part of the game, it happens in cricket," Mirza said. "The defeat against the USA is now past and behind us."

Mirza admitted the smaller teams were dangerous opponents.

"Until now all the matches are close and no team is small or big in this format," said Mirza, who took 3-24 against the Netherlands. Pakistan may bring back experienced batsman Fakhar Zaman to replace Babar Azam who has been criticised for slow scoring.

MATCH REPORT

Scotland spoil Italy's WC debut with big win

Scotland piled up 207-4 with George Munsey top-scoring with 84

AFP
Kolkata

T20 World Cup debutants Italy had a bruising introduction to cricket's biggest stage as they suffered a crushing 73-run loss to Scotland yesterday in Kolkata.

Scotland piled up 207-4 with opener George Munsey top-scoring with 84 and in reply Italy were bowled out for 134 in 16.4 overs.

Off-spinner Michael Leask took 4-17 for Scotland, adding to his batting cameo of an unbeaten 22 off five balls.

A nation better known for its football, Italy are the lowest-ranked side in the 20-team tournament and were making a slice of history here.

Chasing a mammoth 208 for victory, they suffered early blows before a valiant fourth-wicket partnership of 73 between Australia-born brothers Ben and Harry Manenti kept them afloat at Eden Gardens. But Harry departed for 37 and Ben got out after his 31-ball 52 as the Italian batting collapsed from 113-3.

"Hopefully we'll sit down at some stage and reflect on that little partnership that we had and it would have been nice to contribute to a win there," said vice-captain Harry. He called playing with his brother "special".

"Obviously growing up and playing backyard cricket with him, batting together, and as young kids then dreaming of being at a World Cup batting together and we've got to live that out today."

South Africa-born captain Wayne Madsen could not bat after he dislocated his shoulder while fielding and might miss the rest of the tournament.

Scotland skipper Richie Ber-



Scotland's George Munsey watches the ball after playing a shot during the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup group stage match against Italy at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

rington said it was vital for them to bounce back after losing their opening match of the tournament. "Really pleased to get our first win. In the end it was a comprehensive win, but we had to work hard for it," he said.

Scotland originally failed to qualify for the World Cup but with only two weeks to go they replaced Bangladesh, who were kicked out after they refused to play in India.

Italy won the toss and bowled in the Group C encounter, where there were a few Italian fans decked out in the country's blue.

Scotland rode on a 126-run opening stand between Munsey and Michael Jones, who hit 37, to post the highest total in the tournament so far. Brandon McMullen

with an unbeaten 18-ball 41 and Leask, who hit two fours and two sixes in the last five balls, took Scotland to their best T20 World Cup total.

The left-handed Munsey started briskly with a flurry of fours to unsettle the Italy attack in the first six overs of the powerplay.

Italy suffered a blow when Madsen fell awkwardly while trying to stop a boundary in the fourth over and went off the field wincing in pain.

His shoulder has been put back in place by the physio but he will undergo scans and is "doubtful" for the rest of the tournament, Italy coach John Davison said.

The captain still completed an unusual World Cup double on Monday - playing in two different

sports for two separate countries.

He played at the field hockey World Cup for his native South Africa, but holds an Italian passport now through his ancestry.

Munsey, who was dropped on 40 by Anthony Mosca, reached his fifty in 30 balls with a six.

Munsey missed out on a hundred after he holed out to long-on off pace bowler Grant Stewart.

He hit 13 fours and two sixes in his 54-ball knock to lead Scotland to their first group win, after they lost their first match to the West Indies.

BRIEF SCORES
Scotland 207 for 4 (Munsey 84, McMullen 41) **beat Italy** (B Manenti 52, Leask 4-17) **by 73 runs.**

SPOTLIGHT

QCC holds General Assembly Meeting

QNA
Doha

The Qatar Cricket Committee held its Ordinary General Assembly meeting, followed by an Extraordinary General Assembly meeting.

The meetings were attended by HE Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Saud al-Thani, Chairman of the Committee; Khalid Saleh al-Rumaihi, Secretary-General; Abdullah Hussein Al Marri, Board Member, representing the Assistant Secretary-General; several other committee members; and a representative of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) for Sports Affairs.

The meeting was chaired by the Chairman of the Qatar Cricket Committee.

The Ordinary General Assembly commenced after confirming a quorum and approving the minutes of the previous meeting.

The meeting included the presentation and discussion of the 2025 sports activity reports, a review of future plans and proposed requirements for 2026, and the approval of the 2026 fiscal year budget.



Nepal's grit wins applause after loss

Mumbai: Nepal's heroic performance against two-time champions England in their opening game at the Twenty20 World Cup on Sunday received widespread praise from cricketing corners, with former South Africa pacer Dale Steyn offering his services to the tier-two member of the International Cricket Council. Nepal missed out on a famous group stage win by four runs despite a spirited run-chase against England's 184, prompting Steyn to tweet praising the performance and offer his guidance.

"That's a big thing for us. A legend who ruled cricket for 10 years is tweeting about us," Nepal pacer Nandan Yadav said. Nepal's strong performance was also praised by England batter and the player of the match Will Jacks, who admitted the opposition pushed them to the edge. "I think full credit to Nepal. They were absolutely brilliant," Jacks, who scored an unbeaten 39 off 18 and provided the late surge to England's innings, told reporters.

Kohli, Rohit dropped from top tier of contracts

New Delhi: Batting stars Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, who have retired from Test and T20 international cricket, had their India central contracts downgraded yesterday. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced it had scrapped the elite A+ contract category, making A the top tier. Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill, pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja were awarded A category contracts. The BCCI did not stipulate pay for each category, but the top contracts carried an annual salary of \$772,000 last year. A total of 30 senior men's cricketers, none of them new faces, were awarded central contracts spread

across three tiers. While the BCCI is suspending Grade A+ (7 crore), it was surprising to see Bumrah being demoted since he still remains a key all-format cricketer for India. **Grade A:** Shubman Gill, Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja. **Grade B:** Washington Sundar, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Mohammed Siraj, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant, Kuldeep Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer. **Grade C:** Axar Patel, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Shivam Dube, Sanju Samson, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, Akash Deep, Dhruv Jurel, Harshit Rana, Varun Chakravarthy, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Abhishek Sharma, Sai Sudharsan, Ravi Bishnoi, Ruturaj Gaikwad.

FOCUS

South Africa open WC campaign with easy win

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

South Africa inflicted a 57-run thrashing on Canada in Ahmedabad yesterday, as the 2024 runners-up opened their latest T20 World Cup campaign with a dominant performance with bat and ball.

After Canada won the toss and elected to field, South Africa smashed 47 off the last three overs to pile up 213-4, the highest total so far in this year's T20 World Cup.

David Miller hit an unbeaten 39 off 23 balls and Tristan Stubbs was not out 34 off 19 as they put on an unbroken stand of 75 in 6.1 overs at the end.

Canada's Navneet Dhaliwal was the only top-order batsman to offer any resistance,

falling for 64 in the final over as Canada were restricted to 156-8 in reply. Lungi Ngidi did the bulk of the damage for South Africa, taking 4-31 from his four overs as their pace attack had Canada reeling at 45-4 during the powerplay. Ngidi was named player of the match and said the evening dew had helped his variation.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 213 for 4 (Markram 59, Miller 39*, Ansh 3-31) **beat Canada 156 for 8** (Dhaliwal 64, Ngidi 4-31) **by 57 runs**

Zimbabwe dominate Oman on return to World Cup

Zimbabwe returned to the T20 World Cup in emphatic fashion yesterday, strolling to an eight-wicket win over Oman at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club. In their first T20 World

Cup since 2022, Zimbabwe skittled Oman for 103 before knocking off the runs with 39 balls to spare. Brian Bennett was unbeaten on 48 and Brendan Taylor, 40, who played in the first T20 World Cup in 2007, made 31 before retiring hurt.

Zimbabwe's quick bowling twin towers Richard Ngarava and Blessing Muzarabani did the early damage, reducing Oman to 27-5 with none of their top order managing to get into double figures. "We have to take it game by game and we are very happy with the win," said Muzarabani, who won the player-of-the-match award.

BRIEF SCORES
Zimbabwe 106 for 2 (Bennett 48*, Mehmood 2-12) **beat Oman 103** (Shukla 28, Muzarabani 3-16, Evans, 3-18, Ngarava 3-17) **by eight wickets**

QATAR OPEN

Anisimova's title defence derailed due to illness

Britain's Raducanu also retires as Philippines' Eala makes early exit

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Amanda Anisimova's Qatar TotalEnergies Open title defence ended in a harsh way after the American felt unwell and was forced to retire against Karolina Pliskova in her opening match at the Khalifa Tennis Complex in Doha yesterday.

Britain's Emma Raducanu also retired during the third set of her first-round match with the qualifier Camila Osorio, having tried to play on after taking a medical timeout.

Anisimova's, who was seeded at No. 3, blew an early first-set break but broke the Czech former world No. 1 again to take the first set with a 7-5 scoreline. The result goes down as a 5-7, 7-6 (3), 4-1, ret., victory in 2:22m for Pliskova, her sixth win over Anisimova in seven meetings and her first since 2022. She becomes the first player through to the third round in Doha.

"I was really happy to be back and excited to play," Anisimova said in a statement afterwards.

"I got sick here, so I wasn't feeling my best, but I thought it was a good match regardless. I feel we both played really well. Congrats to her, it's good to see her back playing."

Playing just her third tournament back at the Tour level after an ankle injury sidelined her for more than a year, Pliskova has already reached the third round of the Australian Open.

"It feels great to be back," Pliskova said in her on-court interview.

"I missed you guys as well, last year. As you know, I won here, so I have great memories. Two years ago, I played the semi-finals. So I just enjoy this place so much. And



Amanda Anisimova grimaces in pain during Qatar Open match against Karolina Pliskova in Doha yesterday.
PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

you know, I have a new ankle so I can move now for two and a half hours pretty good. Hopefully it can stay like that."

Pliskova dropped the opening set before rallying from 0-3 down in the second to force a tiebreak, which she won to send the match to a decider. At that point, Anisimova appeared clearly hampered physically. The defending champion tried to continue after a medical timeout, but her condition worsened and she retired trailing 4-1 in the final set.

Meanwhile, Osorio, ranked No. 80, also dropped the opening set against Raducanu in their first-round match. The Brit reached

the final in Ostrava on Saturday, her first final since winning the 2021 US Open, but later admitted she ran out of gas against Sorana Cirstea, winning only two games in a lopsided loss to the Romanian. Osorio fought back to take the second set 6-4. In the third set, Raducanu received a medical timeout and had her blood pressure checked before retiring while trailing 2-0.

The victory was Osorio's eighth in a row on the pro tour, including two in the qualifying draw in Doha. She won the WTA 125 Philippines Women's Open last month after opening 2026 with three straight losses during the Austral-

ian swing. One of those defeats was a 6-3, 7-6 loss to Raducanu in Hobart.

Earlier in the day, the Philippines' Alex Eala came up short against Tereza Valentova of the Czech Republic, 7-6(6), 6-1 to bow out in the Round of 64. Eala and Valentova went back and forth in a competitive opening set, exchanging games before going into a tiebreak. It was Valentova, though, who came up with the big points to take the set, 7-6.

Valentova then took control of the match in the second set, winning the first five games, before the Filipina ace finally got on the board 5-1.

MOTORSPORT

Cadillac would be disappointed to finish last, says Perez

Reuters
London

Formula One newcomers Cadillac may finish last this season but Sergio Perez will be disappointed if they do.

The Mexican and equally-experienced Finnish teammate Valtteri Bottas are multiple race winners who know their way around the world's circuits and both feel they have something to achieve.

The General Motors-backed team make their race debut in Australia on March 8 with Ferrari engines and have recruited heavily from rivals since securing an entry as the 11th outfit on the starting grid.

"We are definitely not having that mindset (of being last)," Perez, 36, told Reuters ahead of Cadillac launching their 2026 livery with an advert during Sunday's Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and Seattle Seahawks in Santa Clara, California.

"Not with the level of investment that has been put in place.

"We will definitely be very disappointed to finish last. We know we will not win the championship for sure, but we definitely want to make a lot of progress and beat a couple of teams."

Perez had a year out last year after parting from Red Bull at the end of 2024 but he said Cadillac felt like getting the band back together.

His race engineer at Cadillac will be Italian Carlo Pasetti, who worked with the Mexican

at Racing Point (now Aston Martin).

"This is a team that has recruited people from basically all the teams that I've been with," said Perez, who started with Sauber and has also raced for Force India, McLaren, Racing Point and Red Bull.

"I think this team, this structure, has the capacity to go a very long way in the sport. I think it's going to become a very important team in the future of Formula One."

Bottas agreed it was a huge project and saw the Super Bowl advert as a clear statement of intent with an expected US television and streaming platform audience in excess of 120 million people.

"It was pretty much what I expected," he said of the launch plan. "From the beginning I knew the team is going all in. And of course we're trying to reach new fans. They always said from the top that they were going large on everything."

"But it's pretty cool... that's going to reach quite a few eyeballs, which is good."

Bottas said it would take time for the on-track performance to match the ambition and he was trying to take "all the best bits" from his years with Williams, Mercedes and Sauber.

"I'm prepared that it could be a tough start," said the Finn. "And I don't mind if we don't start in a great way. Of course I want to. But if we don't, then that's here we are."

"It's not really where we start from, it's where we end up together. And that's the motivation."



Fifty One East marks 29 consecutive years as 'official retailer' of Qatar Masters



Fifty One East, Qatar's leading department store, continued its long-standing association as the "official retailer" of the Qatar Masters, marking its support of the championship across 29 consecutive tournaments. The Qatar Masters took place from February 5 to 8 at the Doha Golf Club, welcoming the world's elite golfers as part of the DP World Tour. Renowned for its challenging desert-style course and international field, the championship remains a cornerstone of Qatar's impressive sporting calendar.

On the significance of the championship, Bader al-Darwish, Chairman and Managing Director of Fifty One East, commented: "As we continue our journey alongside the Qatar Masters, Fifty One East is proud to have been part of this distinguished championship for almost three decades. This long-standing association, in partnership with Rolex, Fnac Qatar, and Pierre Hermé Paris, reflects our consistent pursuit of excellence and our belief in supporting platforms that position Qatar at the forefront of the global sporting landscape."

Beyond the competition, the tournament has become a destination in its own right, welcoming regional and international tourists and contributing to the vibrant experience that surrounds Qatar's sporting calendar. It stands as a celebration of ambition, passion, and a shared vision for a lasting international legacy."

He added, "We commend the Qatar Golf Association for their instrumental role in the continued evolution of this championship. The standards, continuity, and long-term thinking that define the Qatar Masters are what sustain its relevance and momentum, and we are proud to align with partners who consistently raise the benchmark."

Fifty One East's uninterrupted involvement in the Qatar Masters since its inception in 1998 reflects the brand's long-term commitment to supporting initiatives that embody excellence, consistency, and international sporting standards. Over 29 years, this partnership has evolved into an integral part of the tournament's identity, contributing to both its stature and spectator experience.

ARABIAN DRAG RACING LEAGUE

Stavrinou emerges Pro Mod season champ

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Racing Club's (QRC) drag racing strip hosted the conclusion of the fifth and penultimate round of the 2026 Arabian Drag Racing League (ADRL), featuring intense competition that went down to the final moments.

Held under the patronage of QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, the podium winners were honoured by QRC Director General Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani.

The round marked the final appearance of the Pro Mod category, while the remaining ten categories continue into round six next week.

In the quarter-mile index categories, the INDEX 9.0 class produced a completely new podium, with Badr al-Foudary and Mohammed Zaman advancing to the final, where al-Foudary claimed victory.

The INDEX 8.50 final featured opening-round runner-up Rakan Ali al-Ajmi against third-round winner Youssef al-Faraj, with al-Ajmi securing victory and al-Faraj finishing second.

The index categories contested over the eighth-mile distance also witnessed strong competition and produced a new champion in the INDEX 4.0 class. Driver Fawaz Ibrahim Ahmed Ali claimed victory after defeating opening-round champion Rashid al-Balushi in the final.

The final race of the INDEX 4.50 category featured Shawn Langdon and Hussein al-Maqseed, both seeking their first title in this class. Langdon ultimately claimed the win, with al-Maqseed finishing second.

As for the final index category, INDEX 4.80, Khaled al-Kandari and Saad al-Abkal reached the decisive showdown, which al-Kandari won, recording his first title and second podium appearance after having finished third in



the opening round. Heading into the fifth and final round of the Pro Modified category, Mike Stavrinou led the overall standings. He dominated qualifying with the fastest time and carried that momentum to the final against third-round winner J.R. Gray.

Although reaching the final was enough to secure the season championship, Stavrinou went on to claim victory, earning his third title of the season.

After missing the top step of the podium in the previous race, Mustafa Atat returned to winning form, recording his fourth victory of the season after defeating last

round's winner Turki al-Dhafeeri in the final of the Super Street Outlaw category.

Mirroring Atat's four titles, Youssef al-Ali secured his fourth victory of the season in the Super Street Pro category at the expense of his rival Jaber al-Maghribi, who recorded his fifth consecutive podium finish of the season by placing second.

The final of the most powerful Bike category repeated the second-round showdown between Mishaal al-Sabr and Mohammed al-Awad. Making his fourth consecutive final appearance, al-Sabr claimed his first title of the season,

with al-Awad finishing second. Mohammed Bourashed returned to winning ways, recording his second victory of the season in the Super Street Bike category after defeating third-round winner Badr bin Eidan in the final race. In his first participation, Fadi Abu Jammous delivered an impressive performance by finishing third.

The final bike category witnessed a fourth consecutive title for Mustafa al-Mahmoudi, while Mohammed al-Salem and Abdullah al-Ansari finished second and third respectively.

The sixth and final round begins on Wednesday.

FOCUS

OCA, Asian Games delegations visit Lusail Boulevard ahead of Fun Run

The delegations of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Organising Committee paid a field visit yesterday to Lusail Boulevard, as part of preparations for the Fun Run. The event which will be held under the umbrella of OCA at Lusail Boulevard, in conjunction with Qatar National Sports Day today.

The delegation included Mubarak al-Buainain, OCA Media Director, Mr. Jian Zhou, Director of Media and Broadcasting at the OCA, and Digant Tiwari, Sports Department Officer at the OCA, Ramireddy Kona, Video & Photography Supervisor in the Technology & Information Department at the OCA.

The Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games's Organizing Committee delegation comprised. Yasuhiro Nakamori, Acting Director General the Organizing Committee, and, Manami Okumura, member of Public Relations Department.

Ahmed Al-Jaber, Head of the Technical Committee for the Qatar Olympic Committee Half Marathon, provided a concise briefing to the visiting delegations while inspecting the one-kilometer Fun Run course for children. He explained the start and finish areas, as well as the organiza-



tion, safety measures, and services provided for the participating children,

The visit of the Organising Committee for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games comes as part of the "Asian Games for All"

campaign, organised by the OCA, aiming to introduce the Games and highlight its promotional activities.

This visit is part of a series of promotional tours carried out by the Organising

Committee across several Asian countries, seeking to broaden participation and ensure wider engagement in the event, which is scheduled to take place in Japan from September 19 to October 4, 2026.

On the occasion of the visit, al-Buainain said: "We are delighted to welcome the delegation of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games Organising Committee and members of the Olympic Council of Asia to the Qatar Olympic Committee Half Marathon 2026, Team Qatar Village activities, and the Fun Run held under the Council's auspices on the occasion of the Country's Sports Day."

Al-Buainain added that National Sport Day represents an important occasion to promote physical activity and encourage a healthy and active lifestyle across the community, noting that such initiatives align with the vision of the Olympic Council of Asia to expand community participation in sport and reinforce the role of sport as a way of life, contributing to broader health, social, and humanitarian objectives across the Asian continent.

Meanwhile Nakamori stated: "The concept of "One Asia" reflects how, through the Asian Games, all 45 Asian countries and regions come together to promote

peace across Asia and contribute to world peace, while also advancing the development of sport.

"We hope that these Games will continue to strengthen peace throughout Asia. I remember being here during the Doha 2006 Asian Games, which were the first Asian Games held in an Arab country. I was greatly impressed, especially by the opening ceremony, as well as the many new facilities and venues constructed for the event, which helped make the Doha 2006 Games highly successful."

"I am convinced that the Doha 2030 Asian Games will further contribute to peace among Asian countries, and that Doha will continue to promote initiatives that encourage health and well-being for all Asians" said Nakamori.

He also stated: "The Qatar Olympic Committee plays a significant role in promoting the success of the Games. Therefore, the Nagoya 2026 Asian Games Organizing Committee is eager to cooperate with the Doha 2030 Asian Games Organizing Committee, including the intention to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen collaboration and mutual support, ensuring the success of both countries' Asian Games"

FOOTBALL

'I need to improve', says Haaland after barren spell

Striker has netted 28 times in 36 games for City this season

AFP
Manchester

Erling Haaland said tiredness was no excuse for his poor goalscoring run in 2026 as he demands more of himself to keep Manchester City in the hunt for four trophies.

Haaland scored a dramatic stoppage-time winner from the penalty spot as City beat Liverpool 2-1 on Sunday to remain six points behind Arsenal in the Premier League title race. The 25-year-old has netted 28 times in 36 games for City this season. But he has not scored from open play in the Premier League since December 20 and has just three goals in his last 13 appearances.

"Of course, I haven't scored enough goals since the start of this year and I know that I need to improve," said the Norwegian. "I know I need to be more sharp, better at all of this, and this is something that I have to work on. I have to keep going because this is what everyone deserves and expects."

Pep Guardiola said last month that Haaland was "exhausted" by a gruelling schedule with City still involved in four competitions. Guardiola's men will face Arsenal in the League Cup final next month, are into the last 16 of the Champions League, and face fourth-tier Salford in the fourth round of the FA Cup.

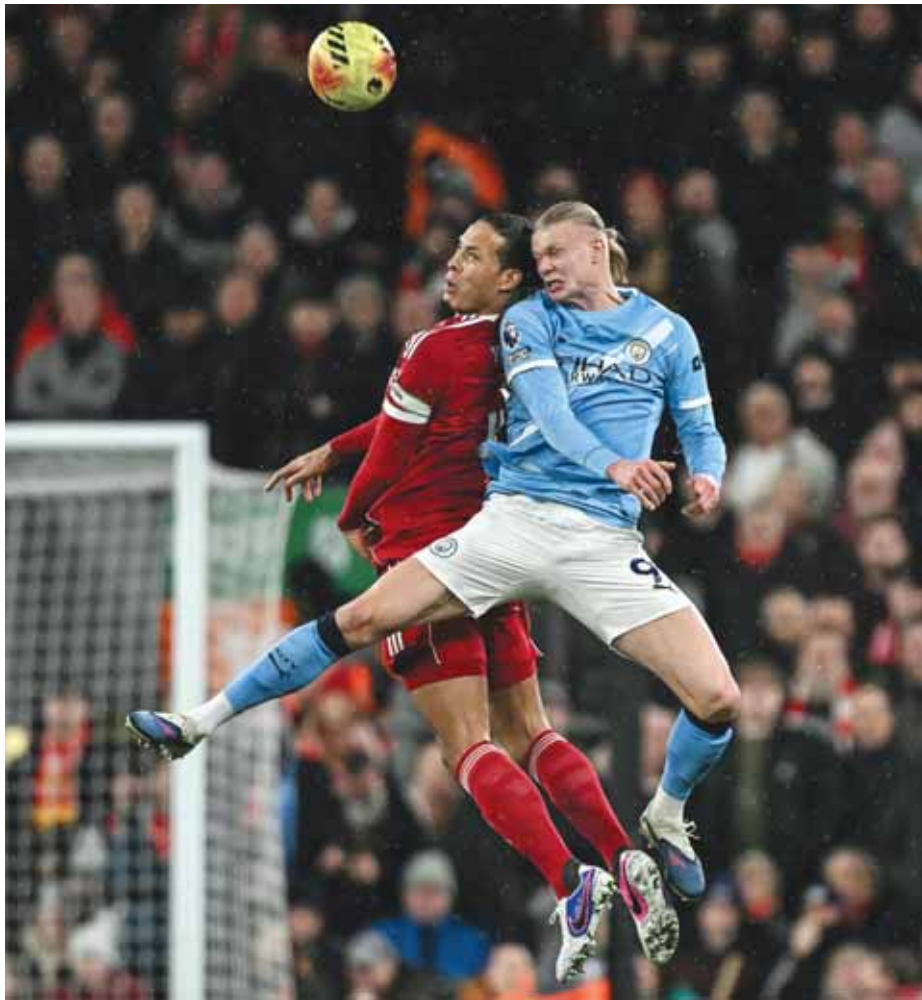
"I don't want to speak about why I haven't performed. I don't think there's any excuse. Fatigue is a lot in the head," added Haaland. "It's a lot of games. Look at the schedule, it's not easy and for me, it's about staying fit, that's the most important thing, and trying to be ready to help the team."

City looked set to fall nine points behind Arsenal at the top of the table until a chaotic finale at Anfield. The visitors trailed to Dominik Szoboszlai's brilliant free-kick with just six minutes of normal time remaining until Haaland teed up Bernardo Silva to level.

Haaland then kept his cool in a frenzied atmosphere from the spot to rekindle City's hopes in the title race. They can ramp up the pressure even more on Arsenal with victory over Fulham on Wednesday to halve the deficit at the top before the Gunners face Brentford 24 hours later. "We've seen before that the title race is not over until it's over," said Haaland. "Right now I need to focus on Fulham because there's still many games (to go)."

SLOT BEMOANS OFFICIATING AFTER LIVERPOOL'S LOSS TOMAN CITY

Meanwhile, Liverpool manager Arne Slot believes Liverpool are an improved side from a few months ago despite their 2-1 loss to Manchester City at Anfield on Sunday, a chaotic defeat that leaves them with one win in their last seven Premier League fixtures. The Reds are four points behind fifth-placed Chelsea



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (right) and Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk go for a header during the Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool on Sunday. (AFP)

in the table and outside of the Champions League qualification places.

"A lot has happened, which is normal in this fixture. For us we are disappointed to come away without a result," Slot said. "In the first half, Manchester City were the better team without creating many big chances but they had the ball more in our half. The second half, we were on top and had good moments. We are getting almost used to conceding a goal in (added) time and it happened again today."

Slot says his side are in a better place than at the end of 2025, despite their poor run of results in the league.

"You cannot compare this game with three or four months ago, we have improved so much, but we need to improve the results. So many times this year we haven't got what I think we deserve and this is another time."

Slot also bemoaned the decision by the officials not to send off Marc Guehi when he

appeared to catch Mohamed Salah as the Liverpool forward attempted to race onto a pass. "If there is any incident we should talk about, it's when Mo Salah is one on one with the goalkeeper," he said.

"Anyone who has been to this stadium in the last seven or eight years, that is a goal for Salah. Once again, the referee decides not in our favour. They have to do their job."

City manager Pep Guardiola praised the resilience of his side, who moved to within six points of Arsenal at the top of the table. "I am really proud we won. The first half was incredible," Guardiola said. "Liverpool had the momentum after Szoboszlai's free kick, a copy paste of the one against Arsenal, what a strike. What a player. At the end, belief from our captain (Silva), his character, personality, not giving up, we came back. We are six points behind (Arsenal), okay it is a big gap, but many things can still happen."

SPOTLIGHT

Aspire Academy launches the 'Qatar Player App for Referees'

Aspire Academy, in cooperation with the Referees Department of the Qatar Football Association (QFA), has launched the "Qatar Player App for Referees" at the Academy's headquarters.

The launch was attended by Hani Taleb Ballan, Chairman of the QFA Referees Committee; Ivan Bravo, Director General of Aspire Academy; and Professor Valter Di Salvo, Director of Football Performance and Science at the Academy. They were joined by several elite referees, coaches, assessors, experts, and Aspire Academy officials. This new step aims to support and enhance the physical and technical performance of elite referees through advanced technology.

Ballan confirmed that this initiative represents an important milestone in the development of refereeing in Qatar. He noted that the application delivers real added value for referees and reflects a strong belief in leveraging technology to serve the game. He expressed his gratitude for the ongoing cooperation with Aspire Academy and praised its significant efforts in developing all aspects of football.

He added that he is confident the application will make a significant difference, both technically and in performance, particularly because it provides all the necessary tools to support referees throughout their careers. He emphasised that believing in this technology and investing in it properly is a key factor in ensuring the success of the application.

Bravo praised the efforts of the QFA Referees Committee and Ballan in developing referees' performance. He expressed his appreciation to the Referees Department for its partnership with the Academy, affirming that refe-

rees are among the most important partners within the football ecosystem. Bravo explained that the nature of referees' work and the significant pressures they face on the field require continuous support, noting that the application will be highly beneficial to them. He added that Aspire Academy is building a comprehensive archive of data, knowledge, and scientific expertise to transfer this experience to future generations and ensure sustainable development.

Di Salvo explained how the application's features work. The "Qatar Player App for Referees" was developed by the Football Performance and Science Department and the Information Technology Department at Aspire Academy to meet the individual needs of each referee. The application provides referees with immediate access to their personal performance data, along with analytical video clips of matches and training sessions, enhancing technical evaluation and decision-making.

The application includes several features, most notably the ability to view video clips of referee-specific incidents from past games, as well as monitoring physical performance data during matches.

These indicators help assess a referee's ability to meet match demands and maintain game flow. The app also allows access to daily training data and enables referees to provide feedback on their physical condition, helping fitness coaches design training sessions tailored to each referee's individual needs. In addition, it integrates results from specialised performance tests and body composition assessments conducted at Aspire Academy, enabling referees to track their individual, continuous development over the long term using precise scientific principles.



Hani Taleb Ballan, Chairman of the QFA Referees Committee and Ivan Bravo, Director General of Aspire Academy at the launch of the app.

Laporta steps down as Barcelona president to seek re-election

Barcelona: Joan Laporta has resigned as president of Barcelona in order to seek re-election, launching a 35-day countdown to elections set for March 15, the club said.

Laporta, who took office in March, 2021 after winning 54% of the vote, steps down after nearly five years in charge in line with club statutes. Vice President Rafa Yuste will act as president for the next three and a half months. Lawyer Laporta is aiming to reclaim the role at the ballot box and return

to office on July 1. He is widely viewed as the favourite against long-time rival Victor Font. Former club executive Xavier Vilajoana and economist Marc Ciria, making his first run in a Barcelona election, have also confirmed their intention to stand as candidates. Around 100,000 Barcelona members of legal age with at least one year of membership are eligible to vote.

Barcelona confirmed the election will again be held across multiple venues, a

decision designed to increase the turnout. Polling stations will be located at the club's facilities, in the three other Catalan provincial capitals of Girona, Tarragona and Lleida, and in Andorra la Vella.

The club said postal voting will not be permitted, despite requests from opposition candidates. "This was implemented on an exceptional basis in the 2021 elections due to the Covid-19 pandemic," Barcelona said in a statement.

More than 20,000 of the 55,000 members who voted in the 2021 election did so by post. Laporta's latest spell at the helm has spanned a turbulent and transformative period. It began with Lionel Messi's departure to Paris St Germain and has moved on to a team defending their LaLiga and Copa del Rey titles, while seeking to reassert themselves in Europe after reaching the Champions League semi-finals last year. The squad now features 18-year-old

Lamine Yamal, a product of La Masia whose rise Laporta has watched from the stands. Off the pitch, Barcelona returned to the Camp Nou in November after two and a half years away for renovations. Capacity remains limited as work continues and is behind schedule, but the move back has fed a renewed sense of optimism around the team led by German coach Hansi Flick, whose attacking style has won over supporters.