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# GULF TIMES SPORT



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HORSE RACING

# Al-Ghazali, Casamento secure treble at Amir Sword Festival

Pair won the opening day's feature class Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup with Hadi De Carrere

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**T**rainer-jockey combination of Jassim al-Ghazali and Marco Casamento celebrated a treble on the first day of the HH The Amir Sword Festival at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Al-Ghazali-Casamento pair won the Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup with Hadi De Carrere, in the colours of Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed bin Faleh al-Thani, yesterday to complete the hat-trick of wins. Hadi De Carrere underlined his class in emphatic fashion in the 1900m race, with a second straight winner from three starts this season. The nine-year-old bay horse travelled comfortably in a handy position throughout, poised to strike. Once set alight in the home straight, he surged clear and was never threatened, powering away inside the final 250m to register a resounding 13-length victory.

Last Saturday, Hadi De Carrere claimed the Ain Sinan Cup with an impressive victory in the Purebred Arabian Open Race under the supervision of Casamento at the Al Uqda Racecourse. In the penultimate race of the day, the pair guided Khalid Nasser al-Attiya's Loaded Gun to victory in the Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (85-105) race for the four-year-old+.

In the 2500m race, where stamina came to the fore, Loaded Gun added further substance to his season. The five-year-old bay gelding recorded his fourth victory of the campaign, anchored towards the rear before circling the field approaching the home turn. Once asked to lengthen in the straight, he responded immediately, kicking clear and then holding on gamely from his only serious challenger to prevail by ¾ of a length.

In the card opener, al-Ghazali and Casamento were in the winners' enclosure when Mansoor bin Ebrahim al-Mahmoud-owned Jungle Monarch made a striking Qatar debut by winning the Thoroughbred Maiden Cup for three-year-old.

In the 1200m contest, Jungle Monarch, bounded straight to the lead in a race dominated by speed and never seeing a rival, stretching clear in the closing stages to score comfortably by 2½ lengths and give the trainer-jockey a flying start in the festival curtain raiser.

Sweet Fantastic also produced a performance of authority yesterday by clinching the Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (70-90) contest for three-year-old+. The four-year-old raced prominently within



Marco Casamento rides Hadi De Carrere to Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup win on the opening day of the HH The Amir Sword Festival at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES: Juhaim**

striking distance throughout in the 1200m contest. Set alight on straightening, he lengthened powerfully inside the final 200m, stretching further clear with every stride to settle matters by 5¾ lengths. The gelding was trained by Hamad al-Jehani and was ridden by Szczepan Mazur, who completed a double on the day.

RESULTS

**48th HH The Amir Sword Festival - Day 1 WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**

**1 - Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup**

Hadi De Carrere, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento

**2 - Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (85-105)**

Loaded Gun, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento

**3 - Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (70-90)**

Sweet Fantastic, Hamad al-Jehani, Szczepan Mazur

**4 - Purebred Arabian Handicap Cup (0-70)**

Dukhan Alseej, Jassim Hamad al-Atteya, Hamza Laglaoui

**5 - Thoroughbred Novice Cup, 4yo+**

Waajidd, Zuhair Mohsen, Szczepan Mazur

**6 - Purebred Arabian Novice Cup**

Al Natibis Up, Eng. Osama Omer al-Dafea, Pierre Charles Boudot

**7 - Thoroughbred Maiden Cup**

Jungle Monarch, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento



Connections of Hadi De Carrere celebrate after the nine-year-old bay won the Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse.



SPOTLIGHT

# Steiner shines as Amir's Sword Showjumping kicks off at Al Shaqab



Swiss rider Nadja Peter Steiner aboard Nice Van'T Zorgvliet celebrates after winning the CSI5\* 150cm class at Al Shaqab yesterday.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**N**adja Peter Steiner delivered a standout performance to claim top honours in the feature CSI5\* 150cm class as the HH The Amir's Sword Showjumping Championship got underway at Al Shaqab yesterday.

The Swiss rider, aboard Nice Van'T Zorgvliet, produced a flawless round to finish clear in 66.42 seconds and secure victory ahead of a strong field that featured 36 starters, with 13 combinations making the placings. American rider Kristen Vanderveen took second place with Bull Run's Jireh after stopping the clock at 66.92 seconds, while Brazil's Marlon Modolo Zanotelli completed the podium in third riding Dorette Old in 67.67 seconds. Zanotelli has earlier topped the standings in the CSI5\* Two Phases 140cm class, guiding Merciminka to victory with a double-clear effort in 22.25 seconds from a competitive field of 70 participants. Vanderveen again featured prominently, finishing second aboard Starbucks 27 in 23.02 seconds, while Italy's Emanuele Gaudiano secured third place with Vasco 118 in 23.32 seconds.

Dressage action at the Longines Indoor Arena



Morocco's Youssef Essamlali topped the CDN Preliminary Freestyle, ahead of USA's Haajerah Khan and Qatar's Sheikha Shaikha al-Thani.

also drew attention, with Morocco's Youssef Essamlali and Jazz Parra topping the CDN Preliminary Freestyle. USA's Haajerah Khan riding Chantal M finished second, while Qatar's Sheikha Shaikha al-Thani claimed third place on Fenouil-F.M. In the juniors category, Qatar's Hamad Nasser al-Marri aboard Sandro Girl secured victory in the CDN Preliminary Freestyle, followed by compatriots Hadi Nasser al-Hajri

on Cordian Z and Moza Hamza al-Kuwari riding Lippo in second and third places respectively.

The championship continues today with nine classes on the programme, including one-star and five-star competitions, three three-star World Cup qualifiers, a local 80cm class, an international dressage event for the St. George classification, and the Hermes Seller class, a 155cm Grand Prix qualifier featuring a jump-off.

## MATCH REPORT

# Motie guides WI to 30-run victory over England

BOLD BATTING AND ATTACKING BOWLING LIFT WEST INDIES

AFF  
Mumbai, India

Left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie tore the heart out of England's much-vaunted middle order Wednesday as the West Indies won by 30 runs in their T20 World Cup clash in Mumbai.

The West Indies scored 196-6 largely thanks to Sherfane Rutherford's brutal unbeaten 76 and some late hitting from Jason Holder.

In reply England were all out for 166 in 19 overs.

They made a brisk start to the chase before Motie, who varies between left-arm orthodox and wrist spin, bamboozled Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell and captain Harry Brook in a brilliant spell of 3-33.

It pegged back England from a comfortable 85-2 in the eighth over to 131-5 in the 14th when Brook departed for 17.

Sam Curran kept them in the hunt with a brave unbeaten 43 off 30 balls before he ran out of partners.

It was the second win from two for the West Indies and puts them in pole position to qualify for the Super Eights from Group C.

England got off to the perfect start in their chase when opener Phil Salt carted Jason Holder's first over for 24 with two sixes and three fours as they raced to 31-0 off 12 balls.

Salt fell for 30 in the fourth over, looping a catch to Rutherford when attempting another big hit, this time off Romario Shepherd.

England sped to 67-1 at the end of the six-over power play, with Jos Buttler on 15 and Bethell 20.

Buttler hit a six off Roston Chase but perished trying to repeat the damage, caught in the deep by Rovman Powell for 21.

Banton (2) was out cheaply for the second successive match and when Bethell (33) followed soon after, both to Motie, England were in bother at 90-4.

Motie then captured the prize wicket of Brook, caught and bowled for 17, in his final over to leave England 131-5 off 14 and the



West Indies' Sherfane Rutherford plays a shot during the ICC T20 World Cup group stage match against England at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)



West Indies' Gudakesh Motie celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Tom Banton in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

damage had been done. For the West Indies, sixth-wicket pair Rutherford, who hit seven sixes and two fours, and Jason Holder (33, four sixes, one four) hammered 61 in 32 balls in the dying overs.

Jofra Archer had struck in the first over of the match when captain Shai Hope slapped him

straight to Banton at cover. It was soon 8-2 when Brandon King tried to smash Curran's first ball but could only find Salt at deep cover.

Chase hit spinner Will Jacks for three fours and Shimron Hetmyer joined in with a colossal six as the fifth over was despatched for 19 runs. Hetmyer, on 23, top-edged

Overton to Curran at fine leg to leave the West Indies 55-3.

When Adil Rashid trapped Chase, on 34, for his 400th wicket in T20 internationals, the Caribbean side had slipped to 77-4 in the 10th over.

Powell and Rutherford put on an impressive 50 in just 26 balls as the West Indies raced to 127-4 after 14 overs.

Rashid's reintroduction immediately bore fruit as Powell holed out to Overton at long-off.

Rutherford sailed on and brought up his fifty in 29 balls with a four and a six off Overton.

Curran, the last-gasp hero against Nepal, was pummeled for 20 off his third over, including three sixes by Holder.

Rashid was the pick of England's bowlers, taking a superb 2-16 off his four overs.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**West Indies 196 for 6** (Rutherford 76\*, Chase 34, Rashid 2-16) **beat England 166** (Curran 43\*, Motie 3-33, Chase 2-29) **by 30 runs**

## FOCUS

## Australia cruise past Ireland after skipper Marsh suffers groin pain

AFF  
Colombo

Depleted Australia shrugged off the loss of their captain Mitchell Marsh to injury to cruise to a dominant 67-run opening T20 World Cup win over Ireland in Colombo yesterday.

Australia made 182-6 after stand-in captain Travis Head won the toss and elected to bat and then bowled Ireland out for 115 at the R. Premadasa stadium.

Josh Inglis was promoted to open in place of Marsh and made 37 off 17 balls, while Marcus Stoinis top scored with 45. Matt Renshaw made 37.

Nathan Ellis, who had been nursing a hamstring injury in the run-up to the tournament, bowled brilliantly to take 4-12 while spinner Adam Zampa took 4-23 as Ireland were dismissed in 16.5 overs.

Ellis's unusual action and clever change of pace made up for the absence of pace spearheads Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood who have both missed the tournament through injury.

"Obviously not having guys like Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood is a big blow for us," player of the match Ellis told reporters.

"I don't like to be called the leader of the attack.

"I am just happy being out here playing a World Cup and representing Australia.

"Glad we started off the competition well and looking forward to a good tournament."

Ellis ripped through Ireland's top order with two wickets in his first over and they were soon 27-4. A 46-run sixth wicket stand be-

tween Lorcan Tucker and George Dockrell offered some resistance but they were never in the hunt in the face of some disciplined bowling.

Dockerell scored 41 off 29 balls before being stumped off Zampa. Marsh was ruled out before the match after being struck in the groin during training on Tuesday.

Australia were quick to call up Steve Smith, who will fly to Sri Lanka on standby in case opener Marsh is unable to take any part in the tournament.

"Mitchell Marsh will miss the opening match of the ICC men's T20 World Cup after sustaining a direct blow to the groin during training earlier this week," said Cricket Australia in a statement.

"He is experiencing ongoing pain and discomfort which is restricting his movement.

"Scans have confirmed internal testicular bleeding and he will require a period of rest and rehabilitation.

"His return to play will be guided by symptom resolution and medical advice."

It is the latest injury blow to hit the Australia squad after leading pace bowlers Cummins and Hazlewood were forced out after failing to recover from injury in time for the month-long tournament.

The in-form Smith, Australia's best player against spin, was controversially omitted from the original squad despite his blistering Big Bash League form this year as an opening batsman.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Australia 182 for 6** (Stoinis 45, Inglis 37, Renshaw 37) **beat Ireland 115** (Dockrell 41, Ellis 4-12, Zampa 4-23) **by 67 runs.**



Australia's Adam Zampa delivers a ball during the 2026 ICC T20 World Cup group stage match against Ireland in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

## India's Abhishek out of hospital, doubtful for Namibia game



**NEW DELHI:** Prolific India opener **Abhishek Sharma** was discharged from hospital yesterday after being treated for an upset stomach, teammate Tilak Varma told reporters. The explosive left-hander is an integral part of India's T20 World Cup title defence and is doubtful for the Group A fixture against Namibia today in New Delhi. "He has been discharged today and he is doing well," Varma, an attacking batter, told reporters on the eve of the match at Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium. "We have got one more day for the game.

"Hopefully we decide by tomorrow on how he feels and we go with it."

The 25-year-old was admitted to a Delhi hospital on Tuesday with a stomach issue he had carried since their opening win on

Saturday, an official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Abhishek was out for a duck in India's win over the United States. India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is expected to return for the second group match after he missed the opener due to having a fever, Varma said.

India will move on after the Namibia match to Colombo where they face a blockbuster clash against Pakistan on Sunday. The Pakistan government late Monday ended a week-long stand-off by reversing its order for the cricket team to boycott the big game due to political reasons. "We are actually excited to play (against Pakistan)," said the 23-year-old Varma. "We were already prepared for the game even before we got to know about it a couple of days back. We are in match zone now."

## SPOTLIGHT

## SA edge past Afghanistan in double Super Over

AFF  
Ahmedabad, India

South Africa prevailed in a double super over thriller as Afghanistan came up agonisingly short of a famous victory after their T20 World Cup clash ended in a tie yesterday.

Afghanistan were 187 all out after South Africa scored 187-6 in the Group D encounter in Ahmedabad.

The teams were tied again after a breathless first super over saw them both score 18, before South Africa won off the final ball of a heart-thumping second sudden-death showdown.

After South Africa bludgeoned 23 from their second super over and Afghanistan lost a wicket off the second ball of theirs, Rahmanullah Gurbaz was left needing four sixes off four balls for an unlikely victory.

Gurbaz sensationally launched Keshav Maharaj into the crowd three times with some huge blows.

A wide off the fifth delivery meant Afghanistan still needed six to win but now a four would send it, incredibly, to a third super over.

With nerves jangling and pulses racing, the left-arm spin-



South Africa's captain Aiden Markram (second left) celebrates with teammates after their sensational win in the T20 World Cup group match against Afghanistan in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

ner held his nerve to bowl a wide yorker that Gurbaz smacked into the grateful hands of David Miller at point as he looked to hit a boundary.

Afghanistan - semi-finalists in 2024 - also lost to the group's other heavyweights, New Zealand, leaving their chances of advancing as one of the top two teams all but over.

"The boys did an amazing job,

especially with the way they started with the bat," said Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan.

"To restrict them under 190 was amazing.

"So, so unlucky to be part of a losing team," he added.

It was South Africa's second win. New Zealand have also won both their matches and are top of the group on net run rate.

"There's areas we can im-

prove," said South Africa captain Aiden Markram.

"Small little phases, and it adds up to a lot in this format. You need to win games like this."

A few minutes earlier, after Gurbaz scored a brilliant 42-ball 84 in the chase, Afghanistan had needed 13 off the last over of the match to win with one wicket in hand.

After Kagiso Rabada bowled two no balls and a wide and Noor Ahmad hit a six, Afghanistan needed two to win off three balls.

But after Noor turned for the second run that would have won the match, Fazalhaq Farooqi was run out at the non-striker's end and the scores were tied.

South Africa pace bowler Lungi Ngidi was named player of the match after his 3-26 in four overs.

"I've lost so much weight today," said a smiling Ngidi.

"Never been that stressed in my life in a cricket game. Happy to come out on the winning side."

Quinton de Kock (59) and Ryan Rickelton (61) were the mainstays of South Africa's innings as they put on 114 for the second wicket.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**South Africa 187 for 6** (Rickelton 61, de Kock 59, Omarzai 3-41, Rashid 2-28) **beat Afghanistan 187** (Gurbaz 84, Ngidi 3-26) **in the Super Over**

SPOTLIGHT

# PISQ, LSQ enter Mini Basketball World Cup final

Philippine International School (PISQ) Qatar and the Lebanese School Qatar (LSQ) have qualified for the final of the 2025-2026 Mini Basketball World Cup after securing impressive semi-final victories over GEMS American Academy and Universal Academy, respectively at the Qatar Basketball Federation courts.

The first semi-final began evenly in the opening quarter before PISQ gradually took control, overturning the balance of play and sealing a 69-53 victory to confirm its place in the final.

In the second semi-final, the LSQ dominated from the outset, showcasing strong performances and excellent technical skills to claim a deserved 66-31 win and secure the other spot in the championship match.

The third-place playoff between Universal Academy and GEMS American Academy is scheduled to take place at the Qatar Basketball Federation courts.



The final will take place on April 30 at Aspire Academy Arena, coinciding with the closing ceremony of the School Olympic Program season.

Based on the final standings of the 2025-2026 season, each participating school in the second edition of the mini tournament will have the opportunity to select the jersey of one of the

national teams qualified for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027. Arsenio Lacson, head coach of the PISQ team, stated that his players delivered "an outstanding performance characterised by high skill and hard work," noting that the team maintained determination and focus despite facing difficulties at certain stages of the game.



He added, "Winning the final on April 30 is a dream for everyone, and we will do our utmost to achieve it. From a technical perspective, every player was a hero today, as their united efforts secured qualification for the final."

Gaspard Ishak, head coach of the LSQ team, said that his team's technical performance had been "consistent and strong from one

match to another, reflecting the players' discipline and commitment."

He added, "We have now reached the final, where we will face the Philippine School, and the better-performing team will claim the top spot on the podium. We also commend the excellent organization and professional management of the championship."

A total of 32 secondary schools from across Qatar took part in the championship. The Mini Basketball World Cup represents a pioneering initiative that combines both sporting and educational dimensions.

It is being staged for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa under the supervision of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA), in cooperation with the Qatar Basketball Federation and the Qatar School Sports Federation, using a modern competitive format inspired by the atmosphere of the upcoming FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

The championship forms part of the Schools Olympic Program for the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 seasons, reflecting an integrated vision that blends competitive excellence with educational values, contributes to building a sports-educated generation, and strengthens the role of sport as a bridge for human connection and friendship among nations.

WINTER OLYMPICS

# Von Allmen claims super-G to complete golden hat-trick

'We really, really want him to have his moment. That's very, very important'

AFP  
Milan

Swiss skier Franjo von Allmen joined the Olympic greats yesterday by winning his third gold medal of the Milan-Cortina Games, while Chloe Kim stayed on track to make her own history in snowboarding.

On the slopes in Bormio, Von Allmen was victorious in the super-G event, adding that gold to his titles in the downhill and the team combined.

Von Allmen entered the pantheon of Olympic male alpine skiing greats to have three events at one Games, alongside Austrian Toni Sailer, at the 1956 Winter Games, and France's Jean-Claude Killy in 1968.

Croatia's Janica Kostelic is the only woman to have achieved the feat, at the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics.

Von Allmen hit speeds of 120km/h (75mph) in the super-G, an event that combines the speed of downhill with the precise turns of giant slalom.

American Ryan Cochran-Siegle won silver in the event for a second successive Games while Switzerland's defending world champion Marco Odermatt rounded out the podium, picking up a medal after his bitter disappointment at missing out in the downhill.

US superstar Chloe Kim began her quest for her own piece of history as she tries to become the first snowboarder - man or woman - to win three gold medals at consecutive Olympics.

Two athletes have missed the chance to do so earlier in the Games in Italy, but in her first appearance at the Milan-Cortina Olympics Kim produced a sparkling run to top qualifying for the half-pipe event.

Kim, who is still only 25 despite



Switzerland's gold medallist Franjo von Allmen (also inset) competes in the men's super-G alpine skiing event during the Milano Cortina Winter Olympic Games at the Stelvio Ski Centre in Bormio, Valtellina, yesterday. (AFP)

winning golds at the two previous Winter Olympics, said "muscle memory" had kicked in as she began her quest.

"I've been doing this for 22 years, OK? Muscle memory is a thing. I might be better at snowboarding than I am at walking," she said.

Kim was almost ruled out of the Olympics last month by a dislocated shoulder but said it had not bothered her during her qualifying performance.

The International Olympic Committee said on Wednesday it will try to convince Ukrainian skeleton racer Vladyslav Heraskevych to not wear a banned helmet that depicts victims of the war with Russia at the Milan-Cortina Games.

However, Heraskevych has already said he has no intention of backing down and he was wearing the helmet again in training at the Cortina Sliding Centre

on Wednesday ahead of Thursday's heats. The gesture has been defended by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky but Heraskevych risks being disqualified as gestures of a political nature during competition are forbidden under the Olympic charter.

"We will contact him today, and we will reiterate the many, many opportunities that he has to express his grief," IOC spokesperson Mark Adams said.

Athletes are permitted to express their views in press conferences and on social media, and on Tuesday the IOC said it would "make an exception" for Heraskevych, allowing him to wear a plain black armband during competition.

"We want him to compete. We really, really want him to have his moment. That's very, very important."

Meanwhile, in a story that has tongues wagging, the ex-girl-

friend of a Norwegian biathlete who won a bronze medal and then confessed on live television to an affair, says it is "hard to forgive".

Asked by Norway's NRK on Tuesday to share his feelings after his bronze in the 20km individual, a teary Sturla Holm Laegreid broke down and admitted he had cheated on his girlfriend.

"Six months ago, I met the love of my life, the most beautiful and best person in the world," said the 28-year-old.

"And three months ago, I made the biggest mistake of my life and I was unfaithful," he continued.

On Wednesday, the woman in question, whose name has not been disclosed, said in a message to the Verdens Gang (VG) newspaper: "It's hard to forgive. Even after a declaration of love in front of the whole world.

"I didn't choose to be put in this position and it's painful," she added.

GOLF

# McIlroy back at Pebble Beach, where memorable '25 began



Reuters  
Los Angeles

A visit to Pebble Beach last year helped set up **Rory McIlroy** for one of the biggest moments of his golf career.

McIlroy earned a two-shot victory at the 2025 AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, kickstarting a stellar run that saw him win the Players Championship before completing the career Grand Slam by capturing the Green Jacket at the Masters. The 36-year-old Northern Ireland native is back on the Monterey Peninsula this week to defend his Pebble Beach championship.

"Obviously last year was a great way to start the 2025 season," McIlroy said. "Historically I haven't played Pebble Beach that well. I've played OK, but nothing spectacular."

"I think winning on a golf course that I hadn't won on before, hadn't really contended on before, I feel like it gave me a lot of confidence going into the rest of the season."

He added of his triumphant performance at Pebble Beach performed at Pebble Beach Golf Links that he was pleased with "how in control I was with my ball flight, especially in tough conditions last year on the Saturday. There was a lot of things that I worked on in the offseason that I brought with me into here. Yeah, it was a massive confidence boost and obviously then went on to play well in that early part of the season, won at The Players and then obviously into the Masters."

"Yeah, it was a perfect way to start the year here last year."

Hoping for something similar this."

An aggressive approach and clutch work on the greens were key to prevailing at Pebble Beach, McIlroy believes.

"I hit driver a lot, giving myself short irons in," he said of his 2025 strategy. "I think last year as well, it was probably the best putting performance I've ever had on poa greens. I usually come to the West Coast and I struggle a little bit on the poa, and last year I didn't. I holed a lot of putts and that was a big difference."

McIlroy finished last season and started this season well, too. After the PGA Tour playoffs concluded, he captured the Irish Open, tied for third in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and finished second at the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

After tying for 14th at the Australian Open to end 2025, he tied for third and tied for 33rd in two Middle Eastern events to kick off 2026. "Game feels in good shape," McIlroy said. "I had two weeks in Dubai to sort of shake the rust off. Played OK, wasn't anything spectacular. But I've had two nice weeks at home and done some practice. ... I feel pretty good coming in here."

Meanwhile Cleeks Golf Club captain and two-time major winner Martin Kaymer withdrew from LIV Golf Adelaide yesterday due to an elbow injury.

The 41-year-old German is the latest LIV Golf captain to bow out of the event, joining six-time major champion Phil Mickelson (family matter) and Englishman Lee Westwood (wrist).

TENNIS

# Cilic says 600th tour-level win shows his dedication to the sport

Reuters  
Dallas

Former US Open champion Marin Cilic said that joining an elite club of players with at least 600 match wins on the ATP Tour was proof of his dedication to the sport after battling through several injury-ravaged seasons.

The 37-year-old, who has had two knee surgeries since 2023, downed American Learner Tien 7-5 7-6(4) at the Dallas Open on Tuesday to reach the milestone, putting him second behind Novak Djokovic (1,168 wins) among active players.

"It's been so difficult these last couple of years, I was battling through many things," said Cilic, who also went past Croatian compatriot Goran Ivanisevic's career tally of 599 tour-level victories.

Just to get to this level, playing this well against guys like Learner, who's an incredible player and can have a fantastic career, is just a joy.

"To get this milestone speaks volumes about my dedication to tennis, living in this sport for so many years. It's given me so much joy and I love it. It's fun to be out here still competing and I can't be happier."

Cilic, who claimed his only Grand Slam trophy at Flushing Meadows in

2014, tore the lateral meniscus on his right knee in 2023 and underwent surgery. That was followed by another in 2024 following difficulties in his recovery.

The former world number three bounced back on the biggest stage by reaching the fourth round of Wimbledon last year and the third round of the Australian Open last month. Cilic will face another American in Dallas with either Trevor Svajda or Ethan Quinn up next.

Meanwhile Serena Williams has been listed as eligible to return to tennis from February 22 by the sport's drug-testing body (ITIA), though it remains unclear whether the 23-times Grand Slam champion will make a

stunning comeback to the women's tour. The 44-year-old raised eyebrows late last year after rejoining the tennis anti-doping testing pool, though she denied at the time the move signalled she was preparing to return to the sport she dominated for nearly two decades.

She reignited speculation last month when she deflected questions about a possible return during an appearance on NBC's 'Today' show. The Women's Tennis Association did not immediately respond to a request for comment outside normal business hours. Williams, who won her last Grand Slam singles title in 2017, has not competed since the 2022 US Open.

## Djokovic withdraws from Qatar Open with fatigue

Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from next week's Qatar ExxonMobil Open in Doha due to fatigue, the tournament organisers said yesterday. The 38-year-old had been scheduled to make his first appearance since the Australian Open but will instead rest ahead of the North American swing. Djokovic reached his 11th Australian Open final last month, where he lost to world No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz in four sets.

Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner will headline the ATP 500 hard-court event in Doha, which begins on Monday, as the top two seeds.

(Reuters)

## TENNIS

# Swiatek, Rybakina fight back to reach Qatar Open quarters

Mboko won the battle of the teenagers as the Canadian knocked out fifth seed Andreeva



Iga Swiatek beat Daria Kasatkina 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 and set up a clash with Greece's Maria Sakkari. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

Agencies  
Doha

Iga Swiatek came from a set down to defeat Daria Kasatkina and keep her bid for a fourth Qatar Open title alive, as Elena Rybakina also reached the quarter-finals. The world number two recovered to beat Russian-born Australian Kasatkina 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 and set up a tie with Greece's Maria Sakkari. Swiatek, who won the WTA 1000 tournament in 2022, 2023 and 2024, had breezed through her last six meetings with Kasatkina without dropping a set but blew a 5-3 lead to lose the opener.

The six-time Grand Slam champion quickly regrouped, though, racing through the next two sets with six breaks of serve.

"It wasn't an easy match," said Swiatek. "She used the slower surface here and she was going for it more compared to (our) last matches. But you never know if it was her just doing that from the beginning, or me giving her more chances. But for sure I felt like I could do some things more in the first set."

Swiatek remains on course for a possible rematch with Australian Open champion Rybakina in the final after the Kazakh's win in their quarter-final clash at Melbourne Park last month.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina reacts during her round of 16 match against China's Qinwen Zheng at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

Rybakina also had to battle back to defeat China's Zheng Qinwen 4-6, 6-2, 7-5 and end the former world number four's first tournament of the year. Zheng, the 2024 Australian Open runner-up, was playing only her second event since undergoing elbow surgery last July but proved her fitness with three-set wins over Sofia Kenin and Alycia Parks in the previous two rounds.

She produced an excellent first

set, losing just four points on serve and taking it with a single break in the fifth game. But Rybakina was much improved in the second, breaking serve twice to force a decider. The world number three continued her momentum into the third set, racing into a 5-2 lead.

Rybakina, without a WTA 1000 title since the 2023 Italian Open, missed a match point in the next game and was then broken while

serving for the match. But Zheng faltered from 40-0 up when serving to push the set into a tie-break, allowing Rybakina to secure a Thursday quarter-final against Victoria Mboko with a rasping backhand.

Canada's Mboko won the battle of the teenagers by saving a match point to knock out fifth seed Mirra Andreeva in a deciding-set tie-break. The 19-year-old Mboko saved the match point on the Andreeva serve late in the third set before sealing a 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5) success.

"I feel like I came out with some very clutch shots at the end," said Mboko. "I think we both were pretty tired when it came to the tie-break. I think I felt like I was lucky enough to have some good shots in the great moments."

Jelena Ostapenko, last year's runner-up, saw off Colombian Camila Osorio 6-3, 6-1 to set up a last-eight tie with Elisabetta Cocciaretto. Italian lucky loser Cocciaretto backed up her second-round win over Coco Gauff by beating Ann Li 7-6 (7/5), 5-7, 6-4.

Czech Karolina Muchova also reached the quarters when compatriot and former world number one Karolina Pliskova retired injured from their last-16 match when trailing 5-2 in the first set. Sakkari defeated France's Varvara Gracheva 7-6 (7/3), 6-0 in the opening tie of the day.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Spurs sack Frank after miserable reign

AFP  
London

Tottenham Hotspur have sacked head coach Thomas Frank after fewer than eight months in charge following a 2-1 defeat at home to Newcastle on Tuesday, which left them a mere five points above the Premier League relegation zone.

The north London side are 16th in the table and without a win in their past eight Premier League games – their worst such run since October 2008. Spurs have won just two of their past 17 league matches and collected only 12 points in that time.

Frank, 52, replaced Ange Postecoglou, who was dismissed in June just over two weeks after leading Spurs to victory in the Europa League final. The club hailed the former Brentford boss as "one of the most progressive and innovative head coaches within the game" when they announced the Dane's appointment on a three-year deal.

But a Tottenham statement issued said: "The club has taken the decision to make a change in the men's head coach position and Thomas Frank will leave today. Thomas was appointed in June 2025, and we have been determined to give him the time and support needed to build for the future together. However, results and performances have led the board to conclude that a change at this point in the season is necessary."

The statement also thanked Frank for his "unwavering commitment" and wished him "every success" in the future. Frank led Spurs to automatic qualification for the last 16 of the Champions League by finishing fourth in the group stage. But that was offset by a Premier League record of seven wins, eight draws and 11 defeats this season, with Spurs also knocked out of both domestic cup competitions.

Despite the Newcastle defeat, which saw frustrated home fans call for him to be "sacked in the morning", Frank was confident of remaining in charge after speaking to the Spurs hierar-



Under Thomas Frank, Tottenham Hotspur dropped to 16th in the standings with just 29 points from 26 games, unable to stamp an identity on a squad that had won the Europa League. (Reuters)

chy on Monday. "We understand we are not in a top position and we need to do everything we can to get out," said Frank after Tuesday's loss, with a 12-day gap until Tottenham are next in action, at home to Premier League leaders Arsenal in a north London derby on February 22. "I understand the frustration and the easiest thing is to point at me. That's part of the job unfortunately."

He added: "I will work day and night to turn this around but it is not just one person. There is no doubt we need to improve and I need to be part of that."

Frank spent seven years in charge of Brentford, guiding the club from the Championship to the Premier League in 2021 and keeping the west London side in the top division despite relatively meagre resources.

Spurs finished 17th last season but qualified for the Champions League after beating Man-

chester United in the Europa League final in Bilbao – their first major trophy for 17 years.

Despite their struggles in the league under Postecoglou, the Australian's attacking style at least provided entertainment for long-suffering fans, in contrast to Frank's dour defensive game plan.

Frank said earlier this month he shared the frustrations of supporters but he has also been hampered by a long list of injuries to creative players including James Maddison, Dejan Kulusevski and Mohammed Kudus.

Although considered a member of the Premier League's "Big Six", Tottenham have not been crowned champions of England since winning the old First Division title in the 1960/61 season – when they also did 'The Double' by lifting the FA Cup. Frank is the seventh manager to part ways with a Premier League club this season.

## FOOTBALL

## Duhail face Waab in Amir Cup last 16 tie

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Duhail begin their Amir Cup knockout campaign today with a Round of 16 clash against Al Waab at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium, aiming to book a berth in the quarter-finals.

Elsewhere, Al Wakrah will square off against Al Saliya at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium, as the knockout fixtures run through Sunday.

Speaking ahead of the tie, Al Duhail assistant coach Fares Bouzid underlined the need for complete concentration and discipline against their opponents. "This is a crucial match in a tournament that means a great deal to Al Duhail, and we must give everything to win the title. We've prepared thoroughly and expect a tough match," he said at yesterday.

"We've studied Al Waab closely, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and will fight with full focus and determination to secure qualification."

Second Division side Al Waab advanced to the Round of 16 after defeating Lusail in the preliminary stage. Al Waab coach Ahmed Abdelsalam Mohamed said his team is ready to rise to the challenge. "We're looking forward to delivering our best performance against Al Duhail. The team is fully prepared, and we aim to show a level worthy of this highly competitive tournament," he said.

Meanwhile, Al Wakrah, currently sixth in the Qatar Stars

League, are aiming for a strong showing in the prestigious competition. "We're excited to perform well in a competition that means a lot to us and everyone involved, and we are striving to win the title, even though we know it will be very difficult with so many strong teams," said Al Wakrah coach Vicente Moreno.

"Al Saliya are a distinguished side with good players and a good coach, but we are ambitious and determined to compete strongly and fight for the trophy."

Al Saliya coach Mirghani Al Zain said his side is eager to make the most of their opportunity in the tournament. "We are preparing to compete in a tournament that is dear to everyone's hearts. The players are striving to give their best, and despite the difficulty of our situation, we are determined to seize the opportunity to qualify for the next round."

## ROUND OF 16 FIXTURES

**Today:** Al Duhail vs Al Waab at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium (4:30pm); Al Wakrah vs Al Saliya at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:15pm)  
**Tomorrow:** Al Shamal vs Qatar SC at Grand Hamad Stadium (4:30pm); Al Shahania vs Al Arabi at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:15pm)  
**On Saturday:** Al Gharafa vs Al Kharaitiyat at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium (4:30pm); Al Rayyan vs Al Khor at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium (7:15pm); Al Sadd vs Al Markhiya at Grand Hamad Stadium (7:15pm)  
**On Sunday:** Al Ahli vs Umm Salal at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:15pm)

## Real Madrid, UEFA reach 'agreement' over Super League dispute

**Madrid:** The European Super League saga drew towards an end as Real Madrid, the last club still involved in the failed breakaway project, and UEFA announced an agreement to help resolve their legal dispute.

Spanish giants Madrid, whose president Florentino Perez has relentlessly championed the idea of a Super League, and promoters A22 Sports Management, were seeking \$4bn in damages from European football governing body UEFA after the project collapsed.

"UEFA, the European Football Clubs (EFC, the sole, independent body representing football clubs within Europe) and Real Madrid CF reach an agreement for the good of European club football," read a statement published by Real Madrid and UEFA. "This agreement of principles will also serve to resolve their legal disputes related to the European Super League, once such principles are executed and implemented."

Last week, Spanish champions Barcelona confirmed their withdrawal from the Super League, which was launched by 12 clubs in 2021 but quickly folded under the weight of immense fan and institutional pressure. Shortly after the semi-closed Super League project was announced, the six English clubs involved – Manchester City, Arsenal, Liverpool, Manchester United, Tottenham and Chelsea – all withdrew.

Four other clubs, Atletico Madrid, Inter Milan, AC Milan and Juventus, followed suit by 2024, leaving only Barca and Real Madrid still involved. After a Spanish court ruled that opposition to the Super League from world and European football governing bodies FIFA and UEFA "prevented free competition", Madrid and A22 plotted legal action against UEFA.

A source close to the matter said that announcement was "a historic agreement" and the beginning "of a period of peace" which would

benefit all parties. In 2022, UEFA decided to expand the Champions League to 36 teams and introduce the league phase, grouping all sides in the same table and increasing the number of matches from six to eight, for the 2024/25 season onwards.

### 'UNPOPULAR' DECISIONS STARTING TO PAY OFF AT MAN UNITED: SAYS RATCLIFFE

Jim Ratcliffe insists the difficult decisions that have made him "unpopular" at Manchester United are starting to pay off. The United co-owner has made a string of controversial cuts to staff at Old Trafford since acquiring a stake in the Premier League club two years ago. Ratcliffe has also sacked underachieving managers Erik ten Hag and Ruben Amorim during his turbulent reign heading United's football operations.

The British billionaire and fellow owners the Glazer family have been the target of protests from

frustrated United fans this term.

But interim boss Michael Carrick has bought Ratcliffe some breathing space by overseeing a mini-revival with four wins and a draw to climb back into the race to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Ratcliffe, the founder of the INEOS chemicals group, was speaking to Sky News about politicians having to make unpopular calls to "get the big issues sorted out".

And referring to United, he said: "I've seen quite a bit of this at the football club. If you do difficult things, which we felt that we had to do at Manchester United. We felt like they were the right things to do. But you do become very unpopular for a while."

"Well, I've been very unpopular at Manchester United because we've made lots of changes. But for the better, in my view. And I think we're beginning to see some evidence in the football club that that's beginning to pay off."



Al Waab players at a practice session on the eve of their Amir Cup last 16 match against Al Duhail.