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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Shamal close gap on Sadd after leaders held by Rayyan

After their win over Umm Salal, Shamal are just two points behind Sadd and have a game in hand



Al Sadd and Al Rayyan players battle for the ball at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday. **PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil**

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shamal boosted their chances of winning the Qatar Stars League title for the first time in their history with a thrilling 3-2 victory over Umm Salal at Al Bayt Stadium yesterday, while leaders Al Sadd were held to a 1-1 draw by Al Rayyan in the 'Qatar Clasico'.

Al Shamal raised their points tally to 37, strengthening their hold on second place and narrowing the gap with Sadd to just two points after the leaders dropped points earlier in the evening. Shamal also have a postponed match from Round 17 against

Qatar SC scheduled at Al Khor Stadium on April 13. Victory in that fixture would see them move to the top of the standings before crucial clashes against Al Shahaniya in Round 21 and Al Sadd in the final round of the season.

In contrast, Umm Salal remained stuck in the relegation zone, with their tally unchanged at 20 points in 10th place in the provisional standings, just three points ahead of bottom side Al Shahaniya.

Al Shamal made a flying start as Omid Ebrahimi converted a penalty in the sixth minute after Omar Mohamed was fouled inside the area. Baghdad Bounedjah doubled the lead deep into first-half added time, giving Al Shamal a comfortable cushion heading into the break.

Alex Collado extended the advantage in the 59th minute, his deflected effort beating goalkeeper Rami Hamada following a precise pass from Bounedjah.

Umm Salal mounted a late comeback when Antonio Mance struck from long range in the 75th minute before Yamaan Jarrar added another eight minutes later, but Al Shamal held firm to secure a vital victory in the title race.

Earlier, Al Rayyan denied Al Sadd a crucial win after a dramatic stoppage-time equaliser secured a 1-1 draw at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

Roberto Firmino had given Al Sadd the lead in the 27th minute after a fine move involving Akram Afif, with Paulo Otavio providing the assist. Al Sadd thought they



Al Shamal's Baghdad Bounedjah (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Umm Salal at Al Bayt Stadium.



Almoez Ali scored winner as Al Duhail secured a dramatic 3-2 win over Al Gharafa.

had doubled their advantage in the 57th minute when Pedro Miguel lobbed the ball into the net from an Afif pass, but the effort was ruled out for offside.

The Wolves continued to press, forcing Al Rayyan goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada into a series of fine saves, including two at the hour mark and another late in regulation time.

However, Al Rayyan snatched a point deep into stoppage time when Aleksandar

Mitrovic capitalised on a Roger Guedes assist, firing between two defenders to beat the goalkeeper and spark celebrations among The Lions.

In a late match, Al Duhail secured a dramatic 3-2 victory over Al Gharafa in a highly-entertaining clash at Khalifa International Stadium.

Almoez Ali scored the decisive goal in the first minute of added time to hand The Red Knights all three points and move them sixth place with 30 points, while Al Gharafa are third with 34 points.

Four goals were scored in an action-packed first half. Mubarak Shanani opened the scoring for Al Duhail in the 7th minute with a close-range rebound header. Al Gharafa equalised in the 26th minute through Aladin Hasan's header from a Yacine Brahimi free-kick.

Edmilson Junior restored Al Duhail's lead in the 37th minute with a powerful low drive, but Ferjani Sassi levelled for Al Gharafa just before half-time. The second half remained tightly contested until Ali's late strike sealed the win for Al Duhail in a keenly fought battle.

SPOTLIGHT

Fitzgerald claims Qatar Open Golf Championship

By Sports Reporter
Doha

English golfer Calum Fitzgerald claimed the Qatar Open Golf Championship title after a commanding final round, finishing the tournament with a total of 225 strokes, nine over par at Doha Golf Club yesterday.

The victory also secures him a coveted place in the next edition of prestigious Qatar Masters.

Fitzgerald, who also won the 2024 edition of the tournament, expressed his delight at returning to the top. "I thank my father, who acted as my coach and was a great help throughout the tournament. The atmosphere was fantastic, and the course is one of the best in the world. I'm delighted to be back and to win the title two years after my 2024 victory," he said.

"I'm looking forward to returning again, this time at the Qatar Masters, where I will strive to reach the later stages of the tournament," he said.

Qatar Golf Association (QGA) President Hamad Abdullah al-Mana crowned the winners while QGA General Secretary Fahad Nasser al-Nuaimi, and Board Member Mohammed Faisal al-Naimi were also present. QGA Technical Expert Mike Shouairy and Member of QGA's Organising Committee Walid Saad hosted the presentation ceremony.

Qatari golfer Saleh al-Kaabi, the defending champion, finished second with a total of 12 over par after a strong per-



England's Calum Fitzgerald received the trophy from QGA President Hamad Abdullah al-Mana after winning the Qatar Open Golf Championship at Doha Golf Club yesterday.

formance throughout the competition. His compatriot, rising star Daniel Sokolov, claimed third place, just one stroke behind.

Other notable finishers included Dean Morris of the United Kingdom in fourth with the same score, England's Andrew Saunders in fifth at 14 over par, and Australia's Cam Craner in sixth with 24 over

par. Scotland's Gary Bowman was seventh, Sweden's Claes Beberg ninth, and Bolivian Pablo Hevia completed the top ten in tenth place at 30 over par.

Secretary General of the Qatar Golf Association Fahad al-Nuaimi praised the success of the 40th edition of the tournament. "I would like to thank the Qatar Olympic Committee for allowing us to



Winner Calum Fitzgerald shakes hands with runner-up Saleh al-Kaabi at the end of the Qatar Open Golf Championship yesterday.

host this prestigious tournament, which is very dear to the Qatar Golf Association. This is especially significant as this is the 40th edition of the championship, which has been running for over 40 years since its inception in 1983 on the sand courses in Mesaieed," he said.

Al-Nuaimi highlighted the participation of international players and noted Fitzgerald's repeat victory.

"The English player succeeded in win-

ning the title, repeating his achievement from two years ago in the 2024 edition, when he also won the title at the Doha Golf Club," he added while praising the Qatari contingent.

"The second-place finish of Qatari national team players Saleh al-Kaabi and Daniel Sokolov demonstrates the excellent level they displayed in this year's edition alongside their fellow Qatari participants," al-Nuaimi said.

CRICKET

Rajasthan hold nerve to edge past Gujarat for IPL win

JUREL, BISHNOI AND DESHPANDE SPARKLE FOR BOYS IN PINK

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Tushar Deshpande bowled an excellent last over as Rajasthan Royals edged out Gujarat Titans by six runs to win their second successive match of the IPL season yesterday.

Spinner Ravi Bishnoi took four wickets but it was Deshpande who held his nerve to deny Gujarat 11 runs in the final over while chasing 211 for victory at their home in Ahmedabad.

Deshpande started with a wide to Kagiso Rabada, who hit an unbeaten 23, but soon nailed his yorkers and dismissed Gujarat's stand-in-skipper Rashid Khan, who made 24, on the fifth ball.

He gave away just four runs as Rajasthan celebrated their second win to take the top spot from Delhi Capitals, who beat Mumbai Indians in the first match of the day in Delhi.

"The discussion was clear, like, you know, we just need to hit one boundary," said Rashid. "And I think Tushar bowled really well. He bowled some exceptional yorkers."

Delhi and Punjab Kings have two wins in two matches but Rajasthan, led by Riyan Parag, are number one in the 10-team table with a better net run-rate.

England pace bowler Jofra Archer was equally effective as he bowled the 19th over for just four runs when Gujarat need 15 to win from the last 12 balls.

"I took a challenge thinking that let's go full and fast," said Parag on going with two quicks in overs 19 and 20.



Rajasthan Royals' Dhruv Jurel in action against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad yesterday. (Reuters)

"It's insane that they (Archer and Tushar) executed as we wanted."

Gujarat opener Sai Sudharsan top-scored with 73 and Jos Buttler hit 26 but the batting collapsed after they looked good on 127-2 in 12 overs.

Rashid and Rabada then threatened to pull off the chase with late cameos and a 43-run eighth-wicket partnership but it was not to be.

Impact substitute Bishnoi, a leg-spinner, took down Sudharsan and struck regular blows to rattle the batting as he went past

200 T20 wickets. Earlier Rajasthan posted a competitive 210-6 after they elected to bat first with wicketkeeper-batter Dhruv Jurel hitting 75 and opener Yashasvi Jaiswal 55.

Left-handers Jaiswal and 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, who hit an 18-ball 31, got the team off to a flier with an opening stand of 70 in 6.2 overs.

Sooryavanshi, a T20 batting sensation who blasted a 17-ball 52 in his team's opening win, unleashed his power with five fours and one six before leg-spinner Rashid cut short his innings.

Test opener Jaiswal kept up pace and put on 56 runs with Jurel to strengthen the foundations of the tall total.

Rajasthan wobbled with a few wickets including Shimron Hetmyer out for 18 but Jurel took the attack to the opposition with five fours and five sixes in his 42-ball knock, but it was not enough.

BRIEF SCORES
Rajasthan Royals 210 for 6 (Jurel 75, Jaiswal 55, Rabada 2-42)
beat Gujarat Titans 204 for 8 (Sai Sudharsan 73, Bishnoi 4-41) **by six runs**

FOCUS

Capitals gain after Rizvi impact sinks Mumbai



Delhi Capitals' Sameer Rizvi plays a shot during the 2026 IPL against Mumbai Indians in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
New Delhi

Sameer Rizvi dazzled in the impact player's role again as he hammered 90 off 51 balls to secure Delhi Capitals a six-wicket victory over the Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League (IPL) yesterday.

Electing to field, Delhi restricted Mumbai to 162-6 on a slow track at the Arun Jaitley Stadium where timing was tricky and stroke-making risky.

Standing in for the ailing skipper Hardik Pandya, Suryakumar Yadav top-scored with 51 and Rohit Sharma made 35, but only four sixes in an entire Mumbai innings underscored how hard it was to clear the ropes.

Rizvi mastered those conditions to smash his second successive half-century as Delhi romped home with 11 balls to spare. Rizvi smacked seven sixes and as many fours in his 51-ball blitz which consigned Mumbai to their first defeat of the season.

Delhi top the standings level on four points with Punjab Kings but ahead on net run-rate.

Mukesh struck twice in the third over, removing Ryan Rickelton and

Tilak Varma to reduce Mumbai to 18-2.

Mumbai crawled to 41-2 after the first six powerplay overs in a testimony to Delhi's tight fielding and discipline with lengths.

Relief came in the seventh over when Rohit smacked the first six of the match to also raise Mumbai's fifty.

Axar Patel, however, removed Rohit just when the opener was threatening to break the shackles.

Kuldeep Yadav conceded 17 runs in the 15th over but the surge was checked almost immediately, when Suryakumar was trapped lbw by Lungi Ngidi.

Delhi's 42-2 in the powerplay mirrored Mumbai's sluggish start before opener Pathum Nissanka (44) counter-attacked.

Mitchell Santner removed Nissanka, but Rizvi went after the change bowlers, milking 20 off a Corbin Bosch over and cracking Mayank Markande for back-to-back sixes to put Delhi firmly in control.

BRIEF SCORES
Delhi Capitals 164 for 4 (Rizvi 90, Nissanka 44, Chahar 1-20)
beat Mumbai Indians 162 for 6 (Suryakumar 51, Mukesh 2-26, Axar 1-22) **by six wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

Captain Iyer says Punjab players want to impress each other, not outsiders



Reuters
New Delhi

Punjab Kings captain **Shreyas Iyer** said an internal competitive edge has driven his side's early-season success rather than any desire to impress those outside the dressing room, after scoring a second successive Indian Premier League (IPL) win on Friday.

The team stormed to the top of the IPL standings by chasing down 210 with eight balls to spare against Chennai Su-

per Kings, completing another statement victory to open their campaign with back-to-back wins.

Their top order came out swinging and never really relented, with Iyer leading by example with a commanding 50 off 29 balls as Punjab completed the chase at Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium.

"We've just decided in the dressing room that whatever happens, we are going to play a brand of cricket which is to impress each other, not others outside," Iyer said after the match.

"That gives us a certain sort of clarity

as well, when we approach the game. It is basically challenging each other inside the dressing room, not outside."

The chase was Punjab's ninth successful pursuit of a 200-plus target, the highest among the IPL's 10 franchises.

Opener Priyansh Arya provided the early spark with a blistering 39 off 11 balls, and Punjab's top-order batsmen sustained the charge to leave Chennai chasing the game for most of the night.

"I'm glad that everyone's getting to bat in the first two games itself," Iyer said.

"That gives immense confidence for

the team as well. Whenever we're stuck in a pressure situation, people are aware of how to handle them."

There was, however, one blemish, with Iyer and his teammates fined for a slow over-rate for the second match running, an issue the captain acknowledged needs to be fixed quickly.

"The over-rate is something we should look into right now, because five fielders coming in in the last two overs, you sort of know that there's one line to bowl.

"That's the only part we need to focus on," he said.

United beat Pindiz in PSL



Islamabad United secured a 7-wicket victory over the Rawalpindi Pindiz in their PSL match in Lahore yesterday. After winning the toss and electing to bowl, Islamabad's attack, led by disciplined spells from Richard Gleeson (2/21) and Faheem Ashraf (2/22), restricted the Pindiz to a modest 156/7. Kamran Ghulam anchored the innings with a steady 50. Despite the early loss of Devon Conway, 19-year-old sensation Sameer Minhas (above) played a match-winning knock. Minhas smashed 70 off 36 deliveries, with 7 boundaries and 4 sixes. United reached the target of 157/3 in just 14.2 overs, finishing the game with 34 balls to spare. Mark Chapman (24)* and Haider Ali (26)* also batted well.

WOODS NEEDS SOME HELP' AFTER DUI ARREST, SAYS NICKLAUS

Jack Nicklaus isn't worried about Tiger Woods, the golfer. He's worried about Tiger Woods, the man - and he wants his friend to get the help that he needs.

Woods was arrested last Friday in Florida and is facing charges of DUI with property damage and refusal to submit to a lawful test. He passed a breath test but refused to submit to a urinalysis. Police found two pills in his pocket that later were revealed to be hydrocodone, a strong opioid painkiller.

"Sometimes you get, you know, too far down the line and you just need somebody to help you," Nicklaus told the Palm Beach Post of Woods. "I think he probably needs some help. And we all want to help him. We're all on his side. Obviously I feel bad for Tiger. I like Tiger. I don't just like him, I like him a lot.

"He's been taking painkillers for a long time and I don't know how much pain he's in because I just don't know.

"But I don't think he'd be taking them if he didn't need them."

Nicklaus, 86, is an 18-time major champion and owner of 73 PGA Tour victories.

Woods, 50, has won 15 majors and owns 82 wins on Tour, tied for the all-time lead with Sam Snead. The World Golf Hall of Fame member's most recent victory was at the 2019 Zozo Championship.

Woods has not played in an official event since the 2024 Open Championship. He ruptured his left Achilles tendon last spring and underwent lumbar disk replacement surgery in October.

Woods wanted to play Masters after rollover accident: Report

Tiger Woods told first responders to his March 27 rollover crash that he hoped to play in the Masters, per multiple reports citing body camera footage released by the Martin County, Florida, Sheriff's Office on Thursday. As responders retrieved his golf clubs from



Tiger Woods' Land Rover rolled over on a two-lane road near his Jupiter Island home, in this handout image released by the Martin County Sheriff's Office on March 28, 2026, as Woods was arrested on suspicion of DUI, in Jupiter Island, Florida. (AFP)

the back of his Land Rover while it was lying on its side after the accident, an investigator asked Woods, "Are you golfing in the Masters this year?"

Woods responded, "Hoping to. It depends on you all."

His answer drew laughter from multiple people, with one voice heard saying, "It don't depend on me."

Just three days before the crash, Woods said he would "keep trying" to get himself ready for the Masters, which starts April 9. Speaking after playing his first TGL match of the season, Woods said of the season's first major, "I want to play. I love the tournament."

Woods contends that he was looking at his phone and changing the radio station when his Land Rover clipped the back of a truck and rolled onto its side on Jupiter Island, Florida. The release of the bodycam footage came one day after Woods was granted a request by a Florida judge to leave the United States

to enter a comprehensive inpatient treatment facility as he faces misdemeanor driving under the influence charges.

Martin County Judge Darren Steele granted the motion to travel submitted by Woods' attorney, Douglas Duncan, who cited the 50-year-old golf superstar's need for an "intensive, highly individualized and medically integrated program" away from media and public scrutiny. Woods released a public statement on Tuesday and entered a plea of not guilty in a Florida court to charges of misdemeanor driving under the influence with property damage. The arrest affidavit stated a breathalyzer test showed no signs of alcohol, but that Woods refused a urinalysis test for other drugs. The affidavit stated Woods was "sweating profusely," his movements were "lethargic and slow," his eyes were "bloodshot and glassy," his pupils were "extremely dilated" and that during the field sobriety exercises, Woods was "limping and stumbling to the right."

HORSE RACING

Rayyan Bu Thaila lands Al Uqda Local Thoroughbred Trophy



Jockey Pierre Charles Boudot guided Rayyan Bu Thaila to the Al Uqda Local Thoroughbred Trophy Open Race win at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES: Juhaim**

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Injaaz Stud's Rayyan Bu Thaila secured an impressive victory in the Al Uqda Local Thoroughbred Trophy Open Race as jockey Pierre-Charles Boudot completed his treble at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The five-year-old chestnut gelding, trained by Jihad El Ahmad, was settled off the early pace before launching a strong run to reel in the long-time leader and strike the front inside the final

furlong, drawing clear to score by 1½ lengths. Al Nasr Al Washeek set the pace from the outset and dictated throughout the early and middle stages, tracked by Barq Al Atam, War Boy, Saida and Al Faisal, with the field well strung out behind the long-time leader.

Settling off the tempo, Rayyan Bu Thaila travelled comfortably in behind, conserving energy as the race developed.

Approaching the final furlong, he was produced with a strong run, closing rapidly on the leader and the chasing pack. Once in front, he asserted and pulled clear

in the closing stages.

Al Faisal, representing Al Emadi Racing and prepared by Khalifa Hamed Nasser al-Sawai, finished second with Alberto Sanna doing the steering, just a head ahead of Saida, who stayed on for Time Form Syndicate, from the Hamad al-Jehani yard and with Saleh Faraj al-Otaibi aboard to take third.

Earlier in the day, Boudot had claimed wins aboard Toyota (Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-70) and Reverberate (Thoroughbred Handicap 0-95). The 57th Al Uqda Race Meeting at Al Rayyan featured a total of eight races on



Connections of Rayyan Bu Thaila celebrate after the five-year-old chestnut gelding won the Al Uqda Local Thoroughbred Trophy Open Race yesterday.

the card. The Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate saw Salman Fahad al-Hajri steer Sharifa KA to victory, while Extension Of Kings won the Thoroughbred Rated Maiden Plate under Faleh Bughenaim.

Other winners included Waajidd (Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85), Mai Dubai (Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85), and Naseeb Zakhir (Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 75-95).

RESULTS
57th Al Uqda Race Meeting
In Al Rayyan - Al Uqda Local Thoroughbred Trophy

WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1 - Al Uqda Local Thoroughbred Trophy, Open Race
Rayyan Bu Thaila, Jihad El Ahmad, Pierre Charles Boudot
2 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate
Sharifa KA, Maayouf bin Hashim al-Shamari, Salman Fahad al-Hajri
3 - Thoroughbred Rated Maiden Plate
Extension Of Kings, Bader al-Balushi, Faleh Bughenaim
4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85)
Waajidd, Zuhair Mohsen, Soufiane

Saadi
5 - Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85)
Mai Dubai, Nayef Batal al-Otibi, Alberto Sanna
6 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-70)
Toyota, Saeed al-Shafi, Pierre Charles Boudot
7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (0-95)
Reverberate, Hamad al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
8 - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (75-95)
Naseeb Zakhir, Eng. Osama Omer al-Dafea, Faleh Bughenaim

FOOTBALL

Bayern Munich storm back late to win at Freiburg

Dortmund score twice in stoppage time to beat Stuttgart 2-0

AFP
Berlin

Bayern Munich came from two goals down in the last 10 minutes to win 3-2 at Freiburg in the Bundesliga yesterday, ahead of their Champions League quarter-final first leg at Real Madrid.

Trailing 2-0 and without injured talisman Harry Kane, Tom Bischof scored twice from distance before Lennart Karl grabbed the winner in the ninth minute of stoppage time. Bischof said the comeback win was the ideal preparation for Tuesday's European tie in the Spanish capital.

"A game like this is the perfect match for us right now before Real Madrid, because we realise what type of team we are - we stick together," said the 20-year-old Bischof, who scored his first Bayern goals since arriving from Hoffenheim last summer. Real lost 2-1 to Mallorca in La Liga on Saturday but Bischof said the 15-time European champions always perform on the biggest stage.

"It will be a different game, that much is clear, because Real are simply on a different level," he said. "They can always be dangerous, even if things aren't going so well in the league."

With Kane sidelined by an ankle complaint, Vincent Kompany opted to leave Michael Olise and Dayot Upamecano on the bench ahead of the trip to Madrid, whom Bayern have not beaten since 2012.

Veteran Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer returned from injury and rescued the visitors with two superb saves in the first half.

Freiburg took the lead just after the break when Johan Manzambi blasted a long-range effort into the corner with Neuer flat-footed.



Bayern Munich's Lennart Karl celebrates scoring against Freiburg yesterday. (Reuters)

Lucas Hoeler doubled Freiburg's lead on 71 minutes to seemingly put his side on track for a first league win over Bayern since 2015.

The defending champions sparked into life late however, with Bischof scoring in the 81st minute and again in stoppage time. Substitute Alphonso Davies set up Karl for the winner with an excellent low pass across the face of goal.

Karim Adeyemi and Julian Brandt scored in stoppage time to snatch Borussia Dortmund a fiery 2-0 win at Stuttgart.

Both sides had few chances and the match looked headed for a goalless draw until Dortmund broke through on the counter, Adeyemi blasting in from near the penalty spot in the fourth minute of added time. Two minutes later, Dortmund again went on the counter and Brandt ripped the top of the net with a superb vol-

ley. As Dortmund celebrated in front of the Stuttgart fans, several supporters breached the fence and came close to the field, with a folding chair thrown onto the pitch.

The win keeps Dortmund nine points behind Bayern, while Stuttgart drop from third to fourth behind RB Leipzig, who beat Werder Bremen 2-1, on goal difference.

Leipzig's win came thanks to two pieces of individual brilliance. Antonio Nusa put Leipzig in front with an excellent shot from outside the box and Romulo drove a low shot into the corner to pad the visitors' advantage. Bremen sit four points ahead of St Pauli, who occupy the relegation play-off spot.

Elsewhere, Bayer Leverkusen came from behind twice to win 6-3 in a wild clash at home to Wolfsburg to stay in Champions League contention. Wolfsburg's Danish contingent

Jonas Wind, Joakim Maehle and Christian Eriksen all scored before half-time to put the Wolves 3-1 up against a Leverkusen side coached by former Denmark boss Kasper Hjulmand. Leverkusen pulled one back before the break and then responded with four second-half goals to grab control of the match.

Alejandro Grimaldo bagged a brace, while Patrik Schick, Ibrahim Maza, Edmond Tapsoba and Malik Tillman also scored as Leverkusen moved four points behind fourth-placed Leipzig.

Leverkusen's win took them a point behind Hoffenheim, whose 2-1 home defeat to Mainz continued their slide. Cruising in third in February, Hoffenheim are now fifth and have won just one of their past six matches. Borussia Moenchengladbach drew 2-2 with last-placed Heidenheim, while 10-man Hamburg drew 1-1 at home with Augsburg.

CYCLING

Surprise Evenepoel entry spices up Tour of Flanders battle

AFP
Ghent, Belgium

Double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel's surprise decision to race in today's Tour of Flanders has spiced up the expected titanic battle against three of the peloton's fastest riders.

Belgian Evenepoel and his Red Bull-BORA Hansgrohe team provided a twist on the April Fools theme on Wednesday when he made the shock announcement that he would be making his "De Ronde" debut.

With world champion Tadej Pogacar coming back to defend his title, Mathieu van der Poel aiming for a record fourth success, and a resurgent Wout van Aert on the start line, fans are dreaming of a shoot-out between four of cycling's top stars.

Evenepoel's biggest rivals are delighted that he will take part.

Despite never previously having raced any of the major cobbled classics, Evenepoel knows these roads well having grown up in the Flanders region. And it is his attacking style of racing that has his rivals salivating.

"We definitely shouldn't underestimate Remco. And yes, I'm glad he's at the start," said Van der Poel, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest cobbled classics specialists of all time. "The more strong riders there are, the faster the race opens up. That's not a disadvantage for me."

Van Aert also feels that Evenepoel's inclusion could work in his favour. "What I like about him, is that he's always attacking and he makes the race," said Van Aert. "That's how I see myself, and that can work well."

Evenepoel, whose form this season has been patchy, knows he has his work cut out to try to add his name to the list of Flanders laureates. "Mathieu and Tadej are the big favourites: they've won five of the last six editions," said Evenepoel, who was a promising footballer and long-distance runner in his youth. "But if I'm there, it's because I feel that I can win."

Should Van der Poel take the honours on Sunday, he would become the first rider to win De Ronde four times, and would match Belgian great Tom Boonen's record of seven cobbled Monument victories.

"Of course I'm aware of that, and it would be something very special," he said. "But I approach the race with the same mindset as always: to try and win. If that eventually leads to a record, I will cherish it."

Like his rivals, he has had a great start to the year, winning two cobbled classics in Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and E3 Saxo Classic, while coming close to another at In Flanders Fields.

For Van Aert, Pogacar has the edge on Van der Poel, and both of them are head and shoulders above the competition at Flanders. "We forget very quickly because Pogacar was ridiculously superior to everyone at Strade Bianche and Milan-San Remo," said the 31-year-old Belgian, whose only Monument victory came in San Remo in 2020.

"Tadej is super strong and Mathieu's record at Flanders speaks for itself."

Van Aert has won a host of one-day classics in the past - if only one Monument - and came 100 metres from winning Dwars door Vlaanderen on Wednesday after a 40km breakaway.

Pogacar is himself chasing history. Two weeks ago he won Milan-San Remo for the first time, meaning the only one of the five Monuments missing from his trophy cabinet is next week's Paris-Roubaix.

Given that he will start as the favourite in three of the four remaining Monuments this season - and maybe too at Paris-Roubaix - he could yet become not just the fourth man to achieve the Grand Slam, but the first to do it in a single calendar year.

And finally winning San Remo at the sixth attempt lifted a weight off his shoulders.

"Maybe I didn't realise before the race that it was a little bit bothering me," he said.

"I realised a few days after San Remo that it was a kind of relief... it was some sort of satisfaction to finally win it."



Red Bull-BORA-hansgrohe's riders Remco Evenepoel (left), Jan Tratnik and Jarrad Drizners (right) take part in a track reconnaissance ahead of the Tour of Flanders, one-day cycling race. (AFP)

'HE'D PLAY IN A WHEELCHAIR': BAYERN BACK KANE FOR REAL RETURN

Bayern Munich are confident striker Harry Kane will return from an ankle injury in time for Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg against Real Madrid. Kane missed yesterday's come-from-behind 3-2 Bundesliga win at Freiburg, the fifth match the England captain has missed in his past seven for club and country. The 32-year-old missed both of England's March friendlies, with coach Thomas Tuchel saying it was only a "minor" complaint. Six-time Champions League winners Bayern are among the favourites for the competition but have

not beaten Real Madrid since 2012. Kane has a history of ankle injuries but German media speculated the forward was rested against Freiburg with Real in mind. Speaking of Kane's comeback, Bayern midfielder Joshua Kimmich told reporters: "He'd play in a wheelchair. I expect him to be fit on Tuesday." "The physios are working on it. He's been at the training ground constantly, receiving treatment. We believe that it'll work," Bayern sporting director Max Eberl told reporters after Saturday's match.

"I'm generally a positive person," Eberl added. Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said after the match: "I have a feeling he'll make it." With Bayern on track for another Bundesliga title and through to the final four in the German Cup, Kane is crucial to their Champions League hopes. He has 48 goals in 40 matches in all competitions this season. After the match, Kane posted a video to social media congratulating his teammates on the victory, saying: "Wow, what a comeback. Credit to the boys, that wasn't easy - what mentality, what a win (and) a great away three points."

QATAR EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION CUP

Bassem tops CSI5* 145cm class in a thriller at Al Shaqab

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Bassem Mohammed delivered a composed performance to claim top honours in the CSI5* 145cm class at the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup, part of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026, held at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab yesterday.

Riding Wathnan Zodiak, Bassem produced a flawless round to finish clear in a time of 69.45 seconds, narrowly edging Syria's Mohamad Mogheeth Alshahab on Saphir Z, who clocked 69.69 seconds, while Jordan's Nasouh Kayali aboard Kamacho P.S. completed the podium after stopping the clock at 69.70 seconds in a tightly contested competition featuring 17 participants.

In the CSI3* 145cm faults and time class, Austria's Gerfried Puck secured victory on Idiaal Special H.J. with a clear round in 70.61 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Bader Alfard finished second riding Kimberly in 72.63 seconds, followed by compatriot Abdullah Alsharbaty on Quisandro in 77.17 seconds.

Italy's Juan Carlos Garcia triumphed in the CSI3* 140cm immediate jump-off class with Django du Marais, producing double clear rounds in 33.09 seconds. Kuwait's Yara al-Hunaidi on Caprice 563 finished second in 34.40 seconds, while Egypt's Mustafa Saed guided Rambling Loon to third place in 34.47 seconds.

The CSI1* 135cm Grand Prix with jump-off saw Qatar's Khalid Jassim al-Suwaidi take the win aboard E.T.'s Queeny Z after posting a faultless jump-off in 31.20 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khalid al-Hadi finished close behind on Carlton de Sauvageonn in 31.64 seconds, while Qatar's Yaqub Nasser al-Mass claimed third place riding Ozenne in 32.40 seconds.



Qatar's Bassem Mohammed, on board Wathnan Zodiak, clears a rail during the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup at Al Shaqab yesterday.

In the CSI3* 130cm special two-phase class, Kuwait's Ali al-Khorafi emerged victorious with L-Ballerin LB in 37.05 seconds, ahead of Iraq's Zayed Ali on Bali Ppz in 38.46 seconds. Qatar's Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi secured third place riding Mukaynis in 39.21 seconds.

Qatar riders dominated the CSI2* 120cm faults and time class, with Ahmad Jassim al-Suwaidi claiming first place on Power Girl Jmg in 49.98 seconds. Suhaim Hamad al-Yafei finished second aboard Flash du Puits in 52.73 seconds, while Saudi Arabia's Halah al-Rasheed took third place riding Cruising On The Ridge in 55.20 seconds.

In the junior Group VII qualifier over 1.20m with a jump-off, Qatar's Hadi Nasser al-Hajri secured victory riding Monopoly with a double clear round in 37.19 seconds. Fellow Qatari Ali Omar al-Ansari

finished second on Nikita Eindeken Z, while Mohammed Eisa al-Bukhari placed third riding Lisa Perina F.

The children's Group VII qualifier over 1.10m saw Abdulla Tamim al-Thani take top honours aboard Cassandra 352 after completing a double clear round in 25.06 seconds. Layan Sultan al-Thani finished second on Dino Bb Z in 25.62 seconds, while Saudi Arabia's Alanoud al-Rasheed claimed third place riding Love You Smh in 27.71 seconds.

More than 170 riders representing 21 countries competed across one- to five-star categories over four days, vying for a total prize purse of €784,000. The championship concludes today with the feature Grand Prix classes in the three- and five-star categories, alongside additional competitions at heights ranging from 135cm to 150cm.



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LA LIGA

Muriqi strikes late as Mallorca stun Real

Defeat leaves second-place Real Madrid four points behind leaders Barcelona

AFP

Palma de Mallorca, Spain

Vedat Muriqi snatched Mallorca a surprise 2-1 La Liga win over Real Madrid yesterday to deal Los Blancos a significant blow in the Spanish title race.

Alvaro Arbeloa's side thought they had rescued a point after Eder Militao nodded home with two minutes remaining before Muriqi pounced in stoppage time to help the hosts climb to 17th. The defeat leaves second-place Real Madrid four points behind leaders Barcelona, who were visiting Atletico Madrid late last night.

"For me it is easy to see but the hard thing is for the players to know that without giving 200 percent today, we were not going to win," Arbeloa told reporters. "We were on top in the first half but because of one mistake, they scored. Here if you slip up for a moment... you end up paying the price. This is the elite, the top flight... not having a better second half than we did is what hurts me the most."

Arbeloa started the game with Vinicius Junior on the bench, with Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final against Bayern Munich in mind. Madrid lacked spark in the first half, creating few openings of note. The best was for top scorer Kylian Mbappe, fit after a knee sprain that has troubled him for months.

Arda Guler rolled a ball in behind Mallorca's defence for the French superstar to



Mallorca's Vedat Muriqi celebrates after scoring against Real Madrid. (Reuters)

dart on to but Leo Roman saved with his leg. The goalkeeper denied Mbappe again after Eduardo Camavinga fed him and Antonio Rudiger also nodded over from a corner. Manu Morlanes threatened for Mallorca,

heading just over, but Madrid did not heed the warning. The midfielder opened the scoring a few minutes later, losing Camavinga and arriving into the box to fire Pablo Maffeo's cross into the bottom corner past Andriy Lunin.

Leo Roman saved from Mbappe early in the second half as Madrid searched for an equaliser. Arbeloa sent on Vinicius, Jude Bellingham and Militao for his first appearance since December after injury. Madrid huffed and puffed but to little avail as Martin Demichelis's Mallorca stayed solid at the back until the final stages.

They were eventually undone by Trent Alexander-Arnold's corner, whipped towards Militao, who powered a header into the top corner. However there was a sting in the tail for Madrid. Muriqi, second top scorer in the division behind Mbappe with 19 goals, lashed past Lunin in the 91st minute to claim three points for his side.

The striker was visibly emotional after scoring, having missed a penalty in the team's previous game, a defeat by relegation-battling rivals Elche. "It's been two difficult weeks... emotions and nerves get the better of me, I'm human," said Muriqi, who also missed out on World Cup qualification with Kosovo in a play-off against Turkey. "Many thanks to the fans for the enormous support and everything you've given me. I hope we can stay in the top flight."

Mallorca climbed two points clear of the drop zone after recording a famous victory, which the players celebrated gleefully with the fans at the end. "I've really wanted the boys to feel joy like this," said Demichelis. "It doesn't mean we are safe, but they needed it, we kept taking blows. The boys were beaten down but training very well."

Thousands welcome Iraq team home after World Cup qualifier

Baghdad: Thousands gathered in Baghdad to welcome home the triumphant Iraqi football team, fresh off their qualification for the World Cup.

Iraq, whose preparations were disrupted by the war in the Middle East, sealed their first appearance at the finals in 40 years and will play in Group I against France, Senegal and Norway.

Goals from Ali al-Hamadi and Ayman Hussein secured a famous win for Iraq, whose last appearance at the World Cup came at Mexico in 1986. Known as the "Lions of Mesopotamia", the players were greeted by Prime Minister Shia al-Sudani on their return on Friday and yesterday morning were driven in an open-topped bus through the capital - cheered by thousands of men, women and children.

Hassan Khalifa, who attended the celebrations, said it was "a memory that will remain etched in our minds".

In a statement, the Iraqi cabinet said in light of the "historic achievement" the team would be given residential properties, granted diplomatic passports - and a song about their achievements would be commissioned.

The statement also suggested that commemorative stamps be issued, a mural be painted in the capital, and a street in each governorate should be named after the "Lions of Mesopotamia".

The statement said measures would be approved in a cabinet meeting. Iraq has been drawn unwillingly into the war launched by the US and Israel on February 28, with strikes targeting US interests on its soil as well as attacks against Iraqi pro-Iran groups.

FA CUP

Haaland treble destroys Liverpool as Man City reach semis

AFP

London

Eriling Haaland hit a hat-trick as Manchester City thrashed Liverpool 4-0 to reach the FA Cup semi-finals and increase the pressure on Reds boss Arne Slot.

Haaland netted twice late in the first half of the quarter-final at the Etihad Stadium and completed his treble after the interval following an Antoine Semenyo strike. With Liverpool trailing by four, Mohamed Salah had a penalty saved by City goalkeeper James Trafford to compound a miserable afternoon for the under-fire Slot.

Liverpool head to Paris Saint-Germain for the Champions League quarter-final first leg on Wednesday with Slot desperately needing a victory over the holders to keep the critics at bay.

Liverpool, who have just two wins in their last seven matches in all competitions, are fifth in the Premier League and far from certain to qualify for next season's Champions League. It is a remarkable de-

cline for Slot, who just 12 months ago was on the brink of leading Liverpool to their record-equalling 20th English title.

City's ruthless performance took them into the FA Cup semi-finals for an eighth successive season. After beating Liverpool twice in the Premier League this term, City have enjoyed three successive victories over the Reds for the first time since 1937.

City have also won 18 consecutive home FA Cup matches, setting a new record in the competition.

Trailing Premier League leaders Arsenal by nine points and knocked out of the Champions League by Real Madrid, City bounced back to beat the Gunners 2-0 in the League Cup final just before the international break. Now they can set their sights on winning the FA Cup for the first time since 2023 while retaining an outside chance of catching Arsenal in the title race.

Fresh from scoring twice in the League Cup final, Nico O'Reilly was key to City's 39th-minute opener. Mathews Nunes picked out O'Reilly in the Liverpool area and as he twisted away from Virgil van Dijk, the defender's clumsy trip conceded



Manchester City's Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring against Liverpool. (Reuters)

a penalty that Haaland converted in clinical fashion. Haaland doubled City's advantage on the stroke of half-time. Rayan Cherki found Semenyo's run and he lofted a pin-point cross towards Haaland, who

made a perfectly-timed run in front of Ibrahim Konate to glance a superb header past Giorgi Mamardashvili.

Liverpool were in disarray and Semenyo landed the knockout blow five

minutes after the interval. Cherki's pass sent Semenyo sprinting in behind the flat-footed Van Dijk to clip a deft finish over Mamardashvili.

Haaland completed the 28th treble of his career in the 57th minute, drilling home via the underside of the bar after O'Reilly teed him up 12 yards from goal. On a prolonged farewell tour after announcing he will leave Liverpool at the end of the season, the out-of-form Salah missed his penalty after Nunes fouled Ekitike.

Chelsea crushed Port Vale 7-0 at Stamford Bridge to provide a welcome boost for Blues boss Liam Rosenior. Rocked by four successive defeats and Rosenior's controversial decision to suspend Enzo Fernandez for two games after the midfielder hinted he might leave in the summer, Chelsea could not afford an embarrassing loss to a team bottom of the third tier.

Jorrel Hato and Joao Pedro put Chelsea in command in the first-half before Jordan Lawrence-Gabriel's own goal was followed by second-half goals from Tosin Adarabioyo, Andrey Santos, Estevao Wilian and Alejandro Garnacho.