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# GULF TIMES SPORT



AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

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tougher test as  
Sadd face Kobe in  
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FOOTBALL

## Rayyan lift QSL Cup to claim first title since 2018

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Favourites Al Rayyan prevailed over Second Division rivals Muaither 2-0 in the final to lift the QSL Cup at Stadium 974 yesterday. The triumph also meant The Lions claimed their first trophy since winning the Sheikh Jassim Cup in 2018, delivering immediate success under new coach Vicente Moreno.

Roger Guedes struck in first-half stoppage time (45+1 minute) before Aleksandar Mitrovic added a second in the 53rd minute to seal victory for the champions.

Muaither, who enjoyed an impressive tournament run, made strong early efforts to find a breakthrough but were held back by a resolute Al Rayyan defence. Their inexperience showed at a crucial moment when they squandered a promising chance inside the box.

Al Rayyan were also tested by Muaither's disciplined backline despite creating several opportunities. The deadlock was eventually broken when Brazilian forward Guedes capitalised on a clever assist from Khaled Ali Binsabaa,

breaking into the box before beating both defender and goalkeeper to slot the ball into the right corner of the net.

Al Rayyan doubled their lead early in the second half when Mitrovic headed home a long free kick that bounced into the net. The assistant referee initially raised the flag, but the goal was awarded following a VAR review.

Moreno has been in charge for just two weeks after replacing Artur Jorge, and the victory provides a timely boost as The Lions continue their pursuit of further silverware. Al Rayyan remain in contention in both the Amir Cup and the Gulf Club Champions League.

Al Rayyan centre-back Jassim Jaber expressed his delight at securing the title. "We performed well in the final against Muaither and crowned our efforts by winning this championship, which we hope will be an important motivation for us in the future," he said.

"Winning this title will give us confidence ahead of the semi-finals of the Gulf Champions League next Sunday. We thank Al Rayyan fans for their support, as they always have a great impact on raising the morale of the players," Jaber added.



Al Rayyan players celebrate after winning the QSL Cup at Stadium 974 yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## Bayern late show sinks Real Madrid

German giants to face holders Paris Saint-Germain in the semis

AFP  
Munich

Late goals from Luis Diaz and Michael Olise earned Bayern Munich a 4-3 win over Real Madrid last night, securing a 6-4 aggregate victory and sending them through to face holders Paris Saint-Germain in the semi-finals.

The tie was level at the break after a scintillating opening half, with Real going ahead three times on the night. Arda Guler pounced on a loose Manuel Neuer pass to put the visitors ahead after just 34 seconds and scored again from a free-kick after Aleksandar Pavlovic equalised.

Harry Kane put Bayern ahead in the tie only for Kylian Mbappe to restore parity overall when he put Madrid 3-2 up before half-time. Eduardo Camavinga was sent off for a second yellow with four minutes left and Bayern pushed forward, Diaz blasting into the corner from outside the box after a crucial deflection.

With Real pressing for an equaliser, Bayern broke and Olise curled in a magnificent shot to rubberstamp their tickets to the last four, where Luis Enrique's reigning European champions await. Tempers boiled over after the final whistle with Guler picking up a straight red for confronting the referee.

For the first time in Real's long Champions League history, their starting XI did not contain a single Spanish player. Jude Bellingham, who impressed off the bench in the first leg, was one of four changes to Alvaro Arbeloa's line-up for the visitors.

Neuer, widely lauded after a vintage performance in Madrid, gifted Real an opener. The Bayern goalkeeper miscued a pass directly to Guler, who floated a first-touch shot into the unguarded goal in the first minute. Bayern looked stunned but struck back almost immediately when Pavlovic headed in a Joshua Kimmich corner after Real goalkeeper Andriy Lunin failed to read the flight of the ball.

The match had barely time to settle before Real were ahead once more thanks to a Guler goal, with Neuer again not at his best. The Turkey international whipped a free-kick into the top corner which Neuer got a hand to but was unable to keep out.

The match continued to seesaw before half-time, with both Kane and Mbappe getting on the scoresheet. Kane slotted clinically into the bottom corner in the 38th minute to again haul Bayern level on the night - and ahead in



Bayern Munich's Luis Diaz (left) celebrates with Dayot Upamecano after scoring against Real Madrid in Champions League quarter-final second leg in Munich. (Reuters)

the tie - before Mbappe ran onto a Vinicius Junior pass and slotted home just before the break to level the tie 4-4 on aggregate.

With Real regularly cutting into Bayern's high line, Kompany responded by introducing the pace of Alphonso Davies at the interval. Both sides traded chances in the second half, with Olise particularly dangerous, forcing a fingertip save from Lunin with 20 minutes left. Camavinga came on midway through the

second half but picked up two yellow cards in quick succession to leave his team a man down in the closing stages. It proved a turning point as Bayern struck three minutes later when Diaz's effort from outside the box took a touch off Eder Militao and flashed beyond Lunin. Olise made certain of Bayern's progress deep into stoppage time as the German giants took down Real in a knockout clash for the first time since 2012.

SPOTLIGHT

## Arsenal survive tense Sporting stalemate to reach semi-finals

AFP  
London

Arsenal reached the Champions League semi-finals after riding their luck in a nervous goalless draw against Sporting Lisbon that clinched a 1-0 aggregate victory last night.

Mikel Arteta's team were well below their best in the quarter-final second leg at the Emirates Stadium. But they held onto their slender first-leg advantage as Sporting failed to make them pay for the latest in a growing list of angst-ridden performances.

The Gunners will face Atletico Madrid for a place in the final after the Spanish club went through 3-2 on aggregate against Barcelona on Tuesday. Arsenal crushed Atletico 4-0 in the group stage at the Emirates in October, but they will have to improve significantly to reach the final for the first time since 2006.

Arsenal have reached the Champions semi-finals in two consecutive seasons for the first time in their history. Yet after losing three of their last five games in all competitions and winning just once, they remain a puzzling side in the midst of an untimely stumble.

Arteta had challenged Arsenal to play with "pure fire" and "zero fear" in an unusually passionate press conference on Tuesday. The response was hardly emphatic as Arsenal quickly retreated into their shell in another display lacking cohesion and quality in the final third.

Arsenal haven't lifted the Premier League since 2004 and have never won the Champions League. The Premier League leaders are on

course to achieve both targets, but the flaws in Arteta's side have become increasingly clear in recent weeks.

Losing the League Cup final against Manchester City and the FA Cup quarter-final against second-tier Southampton was bad enough. But a shock 2-1 home defeat against Bournemouth in the Premier League on Saturday left Arteta facing pointed questions about Arsenal's character that remain unanswered.

Arsenal are just six points ahead of second-placed City, who have a game in hand and host the Gunners in a seismic showdown on Sunday.

The north Londoners have finished Premier League runners-up for the past three seasons - twice blowing substantial leads to City in 2023 and 2024 - and the nerves are mounting.

Responding to Arteta's call for a fiery performance, Arsenal pressed furiously in the opening 10 minutes but couldn't make the breakthrough. Once that initial assault petered out, Arsenal wobbled at the back and William Saliba's wayward pass led to Francisco Trincao curling wide from the edge of the area. Without the injured Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard, Arsenal were too often slow and unambitious in attack. They grew increasingly edgy in a first half played out to a soundtrack of anxious groans from their frustrated fans.

Arteta responded by sending on Kai Havertz for Gyokeres, while Max Dowman replaced the injured Madueke. Sporting appealed in vain for a penalty after Christian Mosquera's slight push on Maxi Araujo. Arsenal were creaking but they held firm as Arteta breathed a sigh of relief.



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard (right) hits the post at the Emirates. (Reuters)

SPOTLIGHT

# Bengaluru move top of IPL after win over Lucknow

Kohli plays as 'impact sub' and hits 49 in 5-wicket win

AFP  
Bengaluru, India

**V**irat Kohli was introduced as an impact substitute for the first time in the IPL and his 49 led defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a comprehensive five-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants yesterday.

The 37-year-old Kohli was only able to play as a batter due to an injury suffered in Bengaluru's previous win over Mumbai Indians.

After sitting out of the first innings, he got his team off to a strong start in a modest chase of 147 after opening partner Phil Salt departed for seven in the second over.

Bengaluru raced to their fourth win in five matches with 29 balls to spare to move level on points with Rajasthan Royals but top of the 10-team table on net run-rate.

Kohli, who made 50 in the previous match, hit six fours off new-ball bowlers Mohammed Shami and Prince Yadav before he crunched his only six off spinner Digvesh Rathi.

Kohli looked in control but missed out on his fifty after being caught in the deep off Avesh Khan.

Kohli is the leading run-scorer



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Rasikh Salam (left) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants' Aiden Markram during the IPL match in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

this season with 228, including two half-centuries in five matches. The former India captain remains one of the biggest draws in the IPL, although he now only plays the ODI format in international cricket.

Bengaluru lost two more wickets, including skipper Rajat Patidar for 27, before Tim David and Romario Shepherd - who both scored 14 not out - steered the team home.

Earlier, Rasikh Salam returned figures of 4-24 to help bowl out Lucknow for 146 in exactly 20 overs. Salam, who dismissed Lucknow opener Aiden Markram for 12, was ably supported by senior seam bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar (3-27).

Lucknow skipper Rishabh Pant was hit on the elbow by a short delivery from Josh Hazlewood and retired hurt, grimacing in pain, after just three balls.

Pant later returned but quickly fell to a stunning outfield catch by Salt off Kumar. Mitchell Marsh top-scored with 40, but the Lucknow batters largely struggled in a below-par performance.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Royal Challengers Bengaluru 149 for 5** (Kohli 49, Prince 3-32) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 146** (Marsh 40, Rasikh 4-24, Bhuvneshwar 3-27) **by 5 wickets**

REVIEW

## Green still off-colour for winless Kolkata



Reuters  
Kolkata

**K**olkata Knight Riders are confident that marquee signing **Cameron Green** will eventually come good but the Indian Premier League's only winless team need the Australia all-rounder to show why they made him the league's most expensive overseas recruit.

The two-time champions sit bottom of the 10-team table with a solitary point thanks to a wash-out against Punjab Kings. Their 32-run defeat by Chennai Super Kings on Tuesday was their fourth loss and nudged them further off the playoff pace.

Green, who cost Kolkata a record \$2.77mn, was recruited to drive their push for a third title but he has yet to catch fire.

The 26-year-old played his first three matches of the season solely as a batter as he completed his recovery from a lower back injury but they would have hoped for a higher return than 56 runs from five innings.

In Chennai, he struggled with both bat and ball, conceding 30 runs in two wicketless overs and

falling for a first-ball duck. "He has not had the start he would've liked but he's obviously a quality player," bowling coach Tim Southee said after the loss.

"He has not had a lot of cricket leading to the IPL. Of all people, he'll be the most disappointed himself the way he's started. But he's a great cricketer and I'm sure he'll bounce back at some stage in this tournament."

Kartik Tyagi claimed 2-35 in his four overs but Chennai still surged to 192-5 against Kolkata's depleted pace attack.

Kolkata have lost Harshit Rana and Akash Deep to injuries and were forced to omit overseas seamer Mustafizur Rahman amid diplomatic tensions between India and Bangladesh.

They are also awaiting the arrival of Sri Lankan Matheesha Pathirana after the seamer's recovery from a calf injury.

"The results are not going our way," Southee said.

"In the last few games we've seen glimpses, just not enough to put on a performance worthy of a win.

"The number of injuries hasn't helped, but we're impressed with the way Kartik Tyagi bowled."

## Peshawar Zalmi beat Quetta Gladiators



Peshawar Zalmi's Babar Azam in action against Quetta Gladiators during a Pakistan Super League match in Karachi yesterday. After winning the toss and opting to bowl, Babar's side restricted the Gladiators to a modest 154/10 in their 20 overs. Babar scored unbeaten 71 as Zalmi won by eight wickets.

FOCUS

## England captain Stokes 'quite lucky' to be alive after facial injury

AFP  
London

**E**ngland Test captain Ben Stokes has said he feels "quite lucky" to be alive after being hit in the face by a cricket ball.

All-rounder Stokes suffered a broken cheekbone after being hit by the ball during a net session while he was coaching academy players at his county side Durham in February.

Stokes underwent surgery and is set to play in two first-class County Championship games next month, but he revealed the incident could have been so much

worse. "I copped one straight in the face," the 34-year-old told the England and Wales Cricket Board.

"Pretty nasty but, funnily, probably the best result of a bad situation, to be honest. Just a couple of inches one way or the other, I might not be here doing this interview, if I didn't turn my head round.

"All things considered, although I had pretty major facial surgery to sort it out, it was a bit of a mess under here (cheekbone), I've got out quite lucky. So pretty thankful for that."

He added: "Obviously it set everything back about a month, five weeks, with getting back to

where I wanted to be to play at the start of the season for Durham, but just had to sort of quickly go back to the drawing board and put a plan together to get me ready to play a couple of games for Durham before the Test summer starts.

"At the back end of all that now but it was a pretty scary situation.

"Thankfully still here and everything's all right."

Stokes is expected to be fit to lead England in the first Test of their home season against New Zealand at Lord's starting on June 4 as they look to recover from their woeful 4-1 Ashes humiliation in Australia.

BOTTOMLINE

## New South Wales nixes Big Bash League's privatisation plan while Queensland defers

Reuters  
Melbourne

**C**ricket Australia's (CA) hopes of opening the Big Bash League (BBL) to private investment have hit a major roadblock after New South Wales rejected a plan to sell stakes in the nation's T20 franchises and Queensland deferred its decision.

CA set Wednesday as a deadline for the nation's six member states to indicate their support to sell 49% stakes in most BBL teams and 100% of one team each in Victoria and New South Wales. But Cricket New South Wales Chief Executive Lee Germon said the state governing body had sent a counter-proposal to CA and other member states which involved self-funding mechanisms.

"Our position is unchanged from ... a few weeks ago," the former New Zealand Test captain told reporters in Sydney yesterday.

"We still do not believe that the sale of the BBL clubs is the right approach here.

"We are in fierce agreement with Cricket Australia that we need to invest in the BBL, we need to grow the BBL, we need our best players playing in the BBL and in a window that allows that."

New South Wales hosts two BBL teams, Sydney Sixers and Sydney Thunder.

Queensland Cricket, which hosts Brisbane Heat, said yesterday it had made no final decision following a board meeting and would seek further information from CA.

The other four member states - Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia - are seen as broadly supportive of pri-



ate investment but the lack of consensus is a major blow for CA.

"We ... remain open to discussing any questions or concerns about this model," CA boss Todd Greenberg said in a statement.

"This process remains respectful and collaborative and with the best interests of Australian cricket the key consideration of all involved."

The privatisation push has been driven by CA Chairman Mike Baird and CEO Greenberg following a review by Boston Consulting Group last year.

CA hopes to raise up to A\$600mn (\$427mn) from the sale to future-proof the sport, boost its finances and improve Australia's competitiveness in T20 cricket.

CA reported a net deficit of A\$11.3mn for

the 2024-25 financial year despite a jump in revenue from hosting the lucrative Border-Gavaskar series against powerhouse India. Australia crashed out of the group stage at the recent T20 World Cup won by India, triggering acrimony on the home front.

Despite the potential for a major capital boost, influential cricket figures in Australia remain wary of private money.

Former Test captain and talent development boss Greg Chappell said the BBL was a success and selling it off could mean a damaging loss of control for the game's local custodians. "Australian cricket has long benefited from maintaining its autonomy," he wrote in a column published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "Surrendering even part of that independence could have far-reaching consequences."

ANNOUNCEMENT

## India's T20 World Cup hero Samson is named ICC Player of the Month

Agencies  
Dubai

**A** prolific run at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 sees India's **Sanju Samson** being named as the ICC Men's Player of the Month for March.

Speaking on the honour, Samson reflected on the importance of the award at this juncture of his cricketing journey.

"Winning the ICC Player of the Month award is an incredible feeling, especially as it comes during what has been the most unforgettable phase of my cricketing journey. Playing a part in India's triumph at the Men's T20 World Cup was truly a dream realised, and it took some time for the magnitude of that moment to fully sink in.

"This is an exciting era for Indian cricket, with immense talent across the board. I feel grateful for the opportunities I've received, and for the trust and support from my team-mates and coaching staff that have allowed me to perform at my best."

Samson winning the monthly honour sees a player from a different country claim the award over the past five months. The streak



includes Simon Harmer (South Africa), Mitchell Starc (Australia), Daryl Mitchell (New Zealand), and Sahibzada Farhan (Pakistan).

Samson missed out on a century against the West Indies by just three runs on 1 March at the World Cup, but his attacking 97\* set up India's spot in the semi-final.

A blistering 89 against England at the Wankhede helped India to 253/7, and the target proved elusive for the English who missed out by seven runs on 5 March. An equally amazing 89 was churned out during India's successful title defence in Ahmedabad, securing a 96-run win. This is the first time that Samson has secured an ICC Men's Player of the Month honour.

HORSE RACING

# Al Eida Racing's Ghanem claims Rodat Al Maida Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Ghanem, ridden by Marco Casamento, produced a commanding late surge to capture the Rodat Al Maida Cup, winning the Purebred Arabian Handicap 85-105 (Class 2) at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The six-year-old bay, trained by Jassim al-Ghazali, was held off the early pace over the 1700m feature before making smooth progress entering the final 300m. He then quickened decisively to draw clear and secure a comfortable two-length victory, delivering a notable success for Al Eida Racing.

The win marked a standout performance for Casamento, who completed a treble on the day. The jockey had earlier guided Al Yateema to victory in the Local

Thoroughbred Handicap 0-45 and followed up with Jungle Monarch in the Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85 during the eight-race card.

At the conclusion of the feature race, Head of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Racing Operations Section Rashid Saed Adiba presented the Rodat Al Maida Cup to the winning connections of the feature.

**RESULTS**  
**67th Al Rayyan Race Meeting - Rodat Al Maida Cup**  
**WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**  
**1 - Rodat Al Maida Cup - Purebred Arabian Handicap 85-105 (Class 2)**  
Rodat Al Maida Cup, Purebred Arabian Handicap (85-105)  
Ghanem, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**2 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-45)**

Al Yateema, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**3 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate**  
Ghazah, Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed, Alberto Sanna  
**4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (45-65)**  
Delirious Dream, Owaida Salem al-Hajri, Faleh Bughenaim  
**5 - Race 4: Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (55-75)**  
Al Maqam, Hamad al-Jehani, Faleh Bughenaim  
**6 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (55-75)**  
Navarzato, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Soufiane Saadi  
**7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85)**  
Jungle Monarch, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**8 - Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85), 3yo+, 1200m, Div. 2**  
Midnight City, Hamad al-Jehani, Szczepan Mazur



Jockey Marco Casamento rides Ghanem to the Rodat Al Maida Cup win yesterday. PICTURE: Juhaim

MOTORSPORT

# Verstappen has to respect impact of his comments: F1 chief

'He is a multiple world champion and of course his voice has to be listened to'

AFP  
Paris

Formula 1 boss Stefano Domenicali yesterday called on drivers, including the outspoken Max Verstappen, to "be respectful" of the sport but said changes to this year's new power unit regulations needed to be made.

The Dutch four-time world champion has been the most vocal of the drivers criticising the new regulations concerning the hybrid engines, whose electric power management has posed problems for the drivers in the opening three races of the season.

Verstappen called the new style of racing "a joke" after the Chinese Grand Prix and has hinted he will take a break from F1 in 2027 if it remains the same.

"We have spoken many, many times since the beginning," Domenicali told Autosport.

"I understand his (Verstappen's) comments and he understands the bigger picture. I don't want to fall in to the trap of trying to create antagonism because that's not me.

"We're going to be together. He is the best driver, he is a multiple world champion and of course his voice has to be listened to.

"But he knows that his voice has a weight. And he needs to respect that weight (as) sometimes some people can take it the wrong way and this is something we shouldn't allow to happen."

He also urged all the drivers to "protect the jewel" of motorsport.

"What I said to them is: 'Listen, guys, don't forget that what we are doing is because we did the right things together. So be respectful of a sport that gave to all of us an incredible opportunity to grow, to make a lot of money, to develop a



(From L-R) Formula One CEO Stefano Domenicali, Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen, McLaren's Australian driver Oscar Piastri and McLaren's British driver Lando Norris pose for a picture on October 7, 2023 after the sprint race of the Qatari Formula One Grand Prix at the Lusail International Circuit. (AFP)

personality in the world that other sports cannot give!

"I think that has been acknowledged.

"We musn't forget this is the jewel of our sport and we need to protect that jewel."

Domenicali also said talks between the FIA, the teams and the drivers to find a solution to the current problems were "moving in the right direction".

"There are meetings this week and next week before the Miami Grand Prix to see what can be done to improve or adjust the situation."

The FIA is expected to announce

changes next week which Domenicali hopes will "allow drivers to be as much as possible at full power or full braking" and during races, where there have been safety concerns. The new hybrid engines, 50 percent internal combustion and 50 percent electric, were brought in to encourage overtaking and make races more exciting for the hundreds of millions of viewers around the world.

"The outcome is magnificent... There's a lot of action, and that's what people want to see," said Domenicali. But an accident at Suzuka last month, involving

Haas driver Oliver Bearman, who crashed at 300 km/h into the Alpine of Franco Colapinto, running 50 km/h slower, has revived paddock criticism over the large speed differences between cars and the complex management of electric energy. "The regulations obviously need to be improved," said Domenicali.

The season was interrupted after three races because of the war in Iran and Lebanon which led to the double cancellation this month of the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix. The season resumes in Miami on May 3.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

# Qatar's Younousse, Tijan claim Samila Open gold

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan powered their way to gold with a commanding run at the AVC Beach Tour 25th Samila Open, sealing victory in the men's final in Songkhla yesterday.

The Qatari duo capped an impressive campaign with a hard-fought win over Australia's Ben Hood-Thomas Hodges 2-1 (18-21, 21-14, 15-11) in the final, underlining their status as one of the region's elite pairings. The Australians settled for silver, while compatriots Potts-Pearse ensured a strong showing for their country by claiming bronze after edging Thailand's K. Dunwinit-N. Banlue.

In the women's competition, New Zealand's Polley/MacDonald showcased outstanding form to clinch the title, overcoming Japan's Shiba/Reika in a tightly contested final. Australia's Rayner/Fejes completed the

podium, defeating Thailand's S. Patcharaporn/M. Salinda to secure bronze. The four-day tournament, held from April 12 to 15, brought together top beach volleyball teams from across Asia and Oceania, producing high-quality action from the qualification rounds through to the finals. Fans witnessed a series of intense encounters, with several matches - including the semifinals and medal deciders - going the distance in dramatic three-set battles.

Staged on the sands of Songkhla, the event once again highlighted the growing strength and depth of beach volleyball across the continent, offering a platform for both established partnerships and emerging talents to test themselves at a high level.

With another successful stop completed on the tour, focus now shifts to upcoming legs of the AVC Beach Tour, where teams will continue their push for valuable ranking points, podium finishes and continental honours.



## Diamond League to raise prize money in select events in 2026

The Diamond League yesterday announced it will increase top-level individual prize money in select events in 2026, expanding the number of disciplines offering enhanced payouts while maintaining the overall prize pool at \$9.24 mn. Under the new structure, each meeting will feature eight 'Diamond+' disciplines - selected events that offer enhanced prize money - increasing the number of events in which athletes can compete for the highest payouts.

The number of Diamond+ disciplines will double from four to eight at all meetings. The eight disciplines at each meeting will include two sprint or hurdles events, two long- or middle-distance races, two field events, and two other disciplines, all equally distributed between male and female athletes. "This new structure allows athletes from a wider range of disciplines to increase their earnings in 2026, while also guaranteeing gender equality," organisers said in a statement. Athletes will be able to earn up to \$20,000 at Diamond League meetings and up to \$60,000 in the Final, the highest individual rewards in the series' 17-year history. The basic level of individual prize money will remain unchanged, with competitors able to earn up to \$10,000 at series meetings and up to \$30,000 at the Final.

TENNIS

# Alcaraz pulls out of Barcelona Open with wrist injury

Reuters  
Barcelona

World number two Carlos Alcaraz withdrew yesterday from the Barcelona Open because of a wrist injury that troubled him in his first-round match, potentially casting doubt over his Roland Garros defence.

"I won't be able to continue in the tournament," Alcaraz told reporters a day after his win over Finnish qualifier Otto Virtanen.

"I felt my wrist give out on a return during the match. After the tests, we saw that it's a more serious injury than any of us expected, and I have to listen to my body so it doesn't affect me in the future."

It is the second time in three years injury has forced Alcaraz

to withdraw from the Barcelona tournament. He won it 2022 and 2023, and finished runner-up to Holger Rune 12 months ago.

Alcaraz had been scheduled to face Tomas Machac today for a place in the quarter-finals.

"I have to go home to start my recovery as soon as possible with my team, the doctors, and the physical therapist, and get - or try to get - as healthy as possible as soon as possible for the tournaments I have coming up," the Spaniard said. "I hope you'll be able to see me on the court again as soon as possible."

Alcaraz received a medical timeout at the end of the first set during his 6-4, 6-3 win over Virtanen on Tuesday but did not show any signs of physical discomfort.

He said he hoped it was "nothing" after the match and that

without time to rest between tournaments that it was normal to have "little niggles".

Alcaraz lost his world number one ranking this week following his defeat by Jannik Sinner in the Monte Carlo Masters final on Sunday. He would have had a chance to regain it by winning the title in Barcelona, with Sinner not playing this week. The 22-year-old Alcaraz became the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam in January with his triumph at the Australian Open.

He holds a 22-3 record this season and also won a title in Doha.

Alcaraz said earlier this month he was hoping to play a full season on clay before starting his French Open title defence in late May.

Last year he won in Monte Carlo but skipped the Madrid Open, returning in Rome to lift the trophy there for the first time. titles.

**Shelton sinks Blockx to reach Munich quarters**  
American second seed Ben Shelton is through to the quarter-finals of the ATP event in Munich after beating Belgian Alexander Blockx 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) on Wednesday.

The 21-year-old Belgian wildcard, ranked 72nd in the world, pushed the world number six deep into a second-set tie-break but Shelton dug in to hold him at bay and secure victory in just over one hour and 45 minutes.

Shelton, who blasted four aces and saved three of three break points across the match, will face Brazilian rising star Joao Fonseca in the last eight. The American is still chasing a first clay court title, having lost the final in Munich last year to Alexander Zverev.

Three-time champion Zverev, who is again the top seed on home soil, faces Canadian Gabriel Diallo

in their last-16 clash. Earlier yesterday, French world number 26 and seventh seed Arthur Rinderknech was eliminated by Fonseca 6-3, 6-2. The 19-year-old Brazilian, who also beat Rinderknech in Monte Carlo earlier in April, prevailed in one hour and 21 minutes.

### Former doubles world No. 1 Jamie Murray retires

Former doubles world number one Jamie Murray called time on his tennis career yesterday, hanging up his racket at 40 after a trophy-laden journey that included seven Grand Slam titles and a Davis Cup triumph with his brother Andy.

The older sibling of former top-ranked singles player Andy, Jamie announced his retirement after 36 years in the sport, capping a career that saw him reach the doubles world number one ranking in 2016. Jamie retires with 34 titles to

his name, with a Grand Slam haul that includes doubles crowns at the Australian Open and U.S. Open in 2016. He also won five mixed doubles titles split between Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. "My tennis journey comes to an end after 36 years. I feel very fortunate and privileged for all the amazing experiences this great sport has given me," Jamie said in a statement thanking his family. "For everybody else that's helped/supported me - I appreciate all of you! Excited to enter the real world!"

Having won his maiden title in 2007, his final flourish came at the Belgrade Open in Serbia in November 2024. Perhaps his most memorable moment came in 2015 when he partnered brother Andy in the Davis Cup final doubles rubber, eventually helping Britain beat Belgium to claim their first title since 1936.

## Police SC beat Al Arabi to emerge Amir Cup volleyball champs



Mohammed Yusuf al-Mana, First Vice-President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, presents the winner's trophy to Police SC captain after the Amir Cup volleyball final at Aspire Sports Hall yesterday. The Police team beat Al Arabi 3-0 (25-21, 25-23, 25-23) in the final. **Right:** Players of Police and Al Arabi in action in the final.



### AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

# Mancini expects tougher test as Sadd face Kobe in quarters

'WE WILL GIVE OUR BEST TO REACH THE SEMI-FINALS'

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**A**l Sadd head coach Roberto Mancini has cautioned that his side must be prepared for an even sterner test against Japan's Visel Kobe when the teams meet in their AFC Champions League Elite quarter-final at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah today, as the Qatari champions aim to carry momentum from their dramatic Round of 16 victory.

"We have a tough match ahead of us, and it will be more difficult than facing Al Hilal," Mancini said, underlining the scale of the task awaiting Sadd. His side are coming off an exhausting encounter that stretched to 120 minutes before sealing a 4-2 penalty shoot-out victory, leaving recovery a key concern ahead of today's clash.

"We need to recover after the great effort the players made, but we are capable of performing better and achieving victory," Mancini added.

The Italian also explained his decision not to rotate during the previous match, citing the team's balance and cohesion as crucial in navigating the high-pressure contest.

Defender Romain Saiss echoed his coach's warning, describing the quarter-final as a difficult assignment for both sides.

"We played a strong match against Al Hilal and we are capable of continuing and achieving victory," he said.

"The Asian Championship is very important for the club and the fans, and we will give our best to reach the semi-finals."

Standing in their way is a Visel



Al Sadd head coach Roberto Mancini speaks at a press conference in Jeddah yesterday.



Al Sadd players train in Jeddah yesterday.

Kobe side arriving in Saudi Arabia in excellent form and close to full strength. Head coach Michael Skibbe confirmed the return of

several experienced players, providing a timely boost for the Japanese outfit.

"I'm very happy that nearly all

the players are ready, especially experienced players who have played in Europe," Skibbe said.

"They are leaders of our group and this is very important for us. Hopefully we will show that we are competitive against Al Sadd."

Skibbe is in his first season as Kobe coach having moved from Sanfrecce Hiroshima during the winter to replace Takayuki Yoshida and the German is relishing the challenge presented by playing in the AFC Champions League Elite Finals in Jeddah.

Kobe fell short of a place in the Finals last season, losing out to Gwangju FC from South Korea in the last 16, and the task facing his team is one that excites the 60-year-old former Borussia Dortmund coach.

"Over the last days we could see how incredible the football in the western region of Asia is right now with the match we have seen between Al Hilal and Al Sadd," said Skibbe.

"Two very good teams which have a lot of power, a lot of fast players and physically very strong so it will be a very strong opponent for us to play against Al Sadd tomorrow evening. It's a team with a lot of very experienced players who have played really everywhere in the world and with a coach who is experienced and who has done so many good things during his career. It's very nice to be here in Jeddah and, on the other hand, we would like to show how good is the team of Visel Kobe playing and we are looking forward to playing tomorrow."

Visel Kobe are runaway leaders of the western conference of the J.League 100 Year Vision tournament and will be facing Al Sadd for the first time in the AFC Champions League Elite.

### CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## The star is the team, says al-Khelaifi after PSG reach semis



**N**asser al-Khelaifi, President of Paris Saint-Germain, praised his side's collective approach after they secured a place in the UEFA Champions League semi-finals with a 2-0 win over Liverpool FC at Anfield on Tuesday evening, sealing a 4-0 aggregate victory.

PSG are the defending champions and have strong hopes of winning the title again this year.

"We tried everything in the past 13-15 years. Three years ago, with Luis Enrique and the new project, we are trying to build something with a very young team. That is what we tried," al-Khelaifi said in a post-match interview.

"We tried everything in the past 13-15 years. Three years ago, with Luis Enrique and the new project, we are trying to build something with a very young team. That is what we tried," he added, reflecting on the club's long-term direction under head coach Luis Enrique.

"Of course, results are really important, but the most important for us was how we played football, to have a team, not players only. The star is the team, there are no stars in our team. Even today, we have the Ballon d'Or [winner], our players are huge, but the biggest star is the team.

"They work for each other, the team, the club, the logo. We

can probably have the best players in the world last year and this year but they work together as a team. Your fault is my fault, they run together, that is the mentality we want to have. We have the best coach in the world, he is an amazing coach, person and motivator."

PSG president's first reaction after the win also included a tribute to the 97 Liverpool fans who lost their lives in the Hillsborough disaster.

"We really think about the 97 people who lost their lives for football, and that's something much bigger than any football, any sport. So, our thoughts are with them and their family," he said.

He also showed support for Hugo Ekitike, who picked up an injury during the match, saying he hopes the injury is not too serious.

Al-Khelaifi said the team would stay grounded despite the result.

"We are here, of course, very proud, very happy with both the result and qualifying for the semi-final. To come here and show respect for the amazing fans, and to beat them 2-0 again, that's an amazing achievement."

"But we need to be humble, we need to stay grounded and think about the next step, the next match. We shouldn't go over the moon, but we're very, very happy."

### SHOWJUMPING

## Al-Saad shines on opening day of FEI Group VII Finals at Al Shaqab

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar's Saad Ahmed al-Saad delivered a stand-out performance to win the CSI U-25 Special Two Phase class on the opening day of the FEI Group VII Finals at the Longines Arena at Al Shaqab yesterday.

Riding Craquante de Mazin, al-Saad produced two flawless rounds to clock 33.01 seconds and secure first place in the 135cm class, which featured 19 participants with 13 advancing to the placings.

Saudi Arabia's Abdulaziz Fahad Aleid finished a close second aboard Q Layen in 33.24 seconds, while the United Arab Emirates' Saif Owaida Mohammed Alkirbi took third place riding Hui Buh 21 in 33.72 seconds.



Riding Craquante de Mazin, Saad Ahmed al-Saad secured first place in the CSI U-25 Special Two Phase 135cm class.

The top six finishers were crowned by Sultan Mohammed al-Yahyai, President of Regional Group VII of the International Federation for Equestrian Sports.

Earlier in the day, the four-day championship began with the

junior class featuring fences set at 110cm. A total of 21 riders qualified for the next individual round, while teams from Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia progressed to the next stage of the team competition.



A total of 21 riders qualified for the next round in junior class featuring fences set at 110cm.

The qualifiers were honoured by Engineer Lahdan al-Buainain, the venue manager for the championship.

In the Junior 120cm class, 23 riders delivered clear rounds in the individual competition to advance to the next round.

Teams representing the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait took part in the team event for the same class.

The qualifiers were honoured by Abdullah al-Qashouti, Marketing and Communications Manager for the championship.

More than 100 riders from across the region are competing in The FEI Group VII Finals for junior, youth and senior riders, who qualified through the 2025-2026 equestrian season.

The total prize purse for the event is €318,000.