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SHOWJUMPING

Young riders impress as Group VII Finals wrap up

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The FEI Regional Group VII Finals for Juniors, Cadets, and Young Riders, featuring qualifiers from the 2025-2026 equestrian season, concluded at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab after four days of competition. The event brought together more than 100 riders representing countries across the region, competing for a total prize purse of €318,000 and showcasing the next generation of equestrian talent.

In the Junior Final of the Regional Group VII Individual category, the United Arab Emirates dominated the podium. Hasan Majed al-Nuaimi riding Grazie secured first place with a flawless performance, followed by compatriot Khaled Ahmad al-Mheiri aboard Feline Peguignon in second. Qatar's Mohammed Hamza al-Kuwari riding Galatee de La Trigale finished third.

In another Junior Final Individual class, Saleh Mufrej al-Karbi of the UAE riding Espresso claimed first place ahead of Mohammad Saeed al-Ghurair on Hazel de Luxe, also representing the UAE, while Abdulhadi al-Kahtani of Saudi Arabia riding We'll See completed the podium in third.

In the Junior Individual Final, Kuwait's Hussain al-Kharafi riding Gk C'Est Un Reve secured victory, while Qatar's Ibrahim Yousuf al-Mahmoud on Perle Van Dorperheide finished second. Abdulla Khalid al-Julandani of Qatar riding Cavallina 13 placed third.

In the Local Junior class at a height of 120cm, Qatar's Khalid Nasser al-Khater riding Dancing Queen d'Ick took first place, followed by compatriots Mohammed Faisal al-Marri on Duke G in second and Ahmad Ali al-Jaber riding Riane TB in third.



Sultan Mohammed al-Yahyai, President of Regional Group VII of the International Equestrian Federation, and Sheikh Talal bin Khalid al-Thani, the tournament director pose with the podium winners at Al Shaqab.

Commenting on the conclusion of the Group VII competitions, Sultan Mohammed al-Yahyai, President of FEI Regional Group VII, praised the high standard displayed throughout the event.

"Over the course of four days at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab, we witnessed outstanding levels of competition from riders in the junior, youth, and young adult categories. They demonstrated exceptional readiness and a clear ability to compete with confidence and skill. Several

riders reached the podium multiple times, reflecting their improved performance and consistent level of performance," he said.

He added that the gathering extended beyond competition, providing an interactive environment that enabled riders from different countries to exchange experiences and enhance their technical skills.

Sheikh Talal bin Khalid al-Thani, the tournament director, described the conclusion of the FEI Regional Group VII competitions as an important milestone in



In the Junior Final of the Regional Group VII Individual category, Emirati rider Hassan Majid al-Nuaimi won the title, ahead of compatriot Khalid Ahmed al-Muhairi and Qatar's Mohammed Hamza al-Kuwari.

the continued development of equestrian sport in the region.

He noted that Doha's hosting of the tournament for the second consecutive year reflects the high level of confidence in Qatar's organisational capabilities and infrastructure, as well as the country's accumulated experience in staging major sporting events.

Sheikh Talal added that this edition witnessed a qualitative step forward with the introduction of a dedicated class for rid-

ers under the age of 25, aimed at providing them with opportunities to compete in technically demanding competitions and supporting the long-term development of riders across all age groups.

He emphasised that the team and individual competitions served not only as contests for medals, but also as a platform for identifying emerging talent in the region, strengthening the pathway for riders to progress to international championships.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Brighton's Rutter denies Tottenham crucial victory

Spurs stay in relegation zone at 18th place after winless run extends to 15 league games

AFP
London

Tottenham remain in the Premier League relegation zone after Georginio Rutter's stoppage-time equaliser salvaged a 2-2 draw for Brighton, while Leeds beat Wolves 3-0 to pull clear of the bottom three.

Spurs were headed for their first win in 15 league games as they twice led in Roberto De Zerbi's first home match in charge. Pedro Porro's header was quickly cancelled out by Kaoru Mitoma's spectacular volley in first-half stoppage time.

Xavi Simons' stunning strike 13 minutes from time sparked an outpouring of joy around the state-of-the-art Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Yet, the home fans were stunned five minutes into time added on when Jan Paul van Hecke outmuscled Kevin Danso and squared for Rutter to blast high into the net.

Spurs, who have not played outside the top flight in nearly 50 years, edge to within one point of West Ham in the battle for survival. But the Hammers have a game in hand and could stretch that advantage when they travel to Crystal Palace on Monday. Tottenham have 31 points from 33 games, with West Ham United on 32 and Nottingham Forest 33.

The result might not have been what De Zerbi craved against his former club, but the Italian could not have asked much more of his players.

Dutch playmaker Simons produced a dazzling display and looked close to tears at the end after Rutter denied him being a deserved match-winner.

"Today I saw signs, I saw blood, character, qualities, organisation with and without the ball," De Zerbi said. "Everything to reach our target."

"The crucial part is to keep this mentality and I told the players to come on Monday afternoon with the same behaviour



Brighton Georginio Rutter scores a last-gap equaliser against Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League in London. (Reuters)

they showed today?"

Brighton's equaliser also saved Wolves from being officially relegated. But their eight-year stay in the top flight is coming to an end as Leeds opened up an eight-point cushion on the bottom three.

Fresh from a first league win away at fierce rivals Manchester United since 1981, Leeds all but secured their top-flight status. Two goals in two first-half minutes from James Justin and Noah Okafor put the home side in control before Dominic Calvert-Lewin's penalty in stoppage time

rounded off the scoring.

Tottenham's woeful campaign has been compounded by an impressive return to the top flight by Sunderland and Leeds, to buck the trend of recent seasons. For the past two years all three promoted sides have gone straight back down.

However, Daniel Farke's men not only look set for survival, but could reach a first FA Cup final since 1973 should they beat Chelsea in next weekend's semi-finals.

Bournemouth piled more pressure on Newcastle manager Eddie Howe with a

2-1 win at St James' Park. The Cherries showed no ill effects from the news that Andoni Iraola will depart as boss at the end of the season. Marcus Tavernier and Adrien Truffert struck for the visitors to extend their unbeaten Premier League run to 13 matches.

Bournemouth climb to eighth and within four points of the Champions League places. Newcastle, by contrast, remain in 14th with their hopes of European football next season all but over. Despite delivering Newcastle's first domestic trophy for 70

years last season, Howe is another high-profile Premier League manager who could move on at the end of the campaign.

Brentford missed the chance to leapfrog Chelsea into the top six after being held to a 0-0 draw by west London rivals Fulham.

Leaders Arsenal travel to Manchester City in a clash that could decide the destiny of the title race today.

The Gunners hold a six-point lead, but City have a game in hand and home advantage when the top two clash at the Etihad Stadium.

SPOTLIGHT

Rahul and Stubbs steer Delhi past Bengaluru in IPL

DELHI ARE FOURTH, BENGALURU SECOND IN IPL STANDINGS



Delhi Capitals' Tristan Stubbs (right) bumps his fists with teammate KL Rahul during the IPL match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Bengaluru

KL Rahul and Tristan Stubbs led Delhi Capitals to a six-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League on a sweltering Saturday, as the visitors outplayed the hosts in a cracking contest at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Chasing 176, Delhi rode a composed innings from Rahul, who marked his birthday with a fluent 57 off 34 before Stubbs applied the finishing touches, ensuring the target was overhauled with a ball to spare.

Put in to bat, Bengaluru opener Phil Salt marked his presence with a half-century to set the tone, but regular wickets in the innings prevented the hosts from accelerating and they finished on 175-8 in oppressive heat.

Bengaluru struck back early in Delhi's chase, with pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar delivering a telling power-play spell that accounted for three quick wickets, leaving Delhi under pressure at 50-3 inside six overs.

Local favourite Rahul, however, steadied the innings by striking six fours and two sixes in his knock and allowed others to play without pressure despite challenging batting conditions.

"We didn't want to take it too deep, we just wanted to stay positive... and try to put pressure on the bowlers," Rahul said at the post-match presentation.



Former Australian Test great and captain Allan Border watches the IPL match with his son in Hyderabad yesterday. Border, who played 156 Tests, captained Australia to World Cup glory in 1987.

"There was faith in Stubbs and (David) Miller.

"They do this on a daily basis for South Africa and franchise cricket," he added.

Stubbs shifted the momentum decisively, seizing control with an unbeaten 60-run knock to tilt the contest firmly in Delhi's favour, with steady support from captain Axar Patel before he was forced to retire hurt on 26.

Miller (22 off 10) sealed the victory by striking the winning runs, ensuring there were no late alarms.

"I didn't want to take it into the last over. I knew we were going to do it, I didn't know how. But thankfully Miller was at the other end. It's his bread and butter," said Stubbs, who was named player of the match.

The win lifted Delhi to fourth in the standings with six points, while Bengaluru's defeat dented their push at the top of the table, keeping them second on eight points.

The match marked a milestone for the hosts, who became the first team to play 100 IPL matches at a single venue - the Chinnaswamy Stadium. Former Australia captain Allan Border was among the spectators, watching his first-ever IPL match.

Earlier, Bengaluru opens Salt and Virat Kohli began briskly, but the tempo dipped when Lungi Ngidi struck in his opening over to dismiss Kohli for 19 off 13 balls.

Salt, the hosts' top scorer, then took control with a fluent 63 off 38 deliveries, before Tim David added a lively 26 off 17.

"We were 15-20 runs short. The way we started, especially VK bhai (Virat Kohli) and Salt, they gave us a good start. Then we started losing wickets and it put us on the back foot," said Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar.

Delhi bowlers including Ngidi, Kuldeep Yadav and Patel also did a reasonable job in checking the run flow, with all three picking off two wickets apiece.

Delhi next face Sunrisers Hyderabad on Tuesday, while Bengaluru host Gujarat Titans on Friday.

BRIEF SCORES
Delhi Capitals 179 for 4 (Stubbs 60*, Rahul 57, Bhuvneshwar 3-26) **beat Royal Challengers Bengaluru 175 for 8** (Salt 63, Axar 2-18, Kuldeep 2-32) **by six wickets**

Fakhar shines as Qalandars win in PSL



Fakhar Zaman of Lahore Qalandars celebrates with his teammate Mohammad Farooq during their Pakistan Super League match against Rawalpindiz in Karachi on Saturday. Qalandars beat Rawalpindiz on the back of a superb 84 by Zaman. Farooq scored 63. Qalandars won by 32 runs after scoring 210/4 in their 20 overs. Rawalpindiz were restricted to 178/9 in 20 overs.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Pakistan include four uncapped players as Sarfaraz named coach

AFP
Karachi

Pakistan included four uncapped players in their squad announced Saturday for next month's two Test matches against Bangladesh, and also appointed Sarfaraz Ahmed as head coach.

The matches, part of the World Test Championship (WTC) will be played in Dhaka (May 8-12) and Sylhet (12-16).

Top-order batter Shan Masood will lead the Test side, which has promising new players in Azan Awaiz, Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt and Muhammad Ghazi Ghorri, selected on their good performances in domestic cricket.

Spinners Noman Ali and Sajid Khan remain Pakistan's main strength with the pace attack including Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali. The players will undergo a camp in Karachi and are scheduled to fly to Bangladesh on May 2.

Pakistan Cricket Board also appointed Sarfaraz as head coach to the post that was vacant after Azhar Mahmood resigned last year. "PCB also confirms the appointment of red-ball coaches for the Bangladesh tour, with former Test captain Ahmed appointed as head coach with Asad Shafiq and Umar Gul working as batting and bowling coaches, respectively, on the



tour," the PCB said in a statement naming the 16-member squad.

Sarfaraz, who won two ICC titles as captain of Pakistan - ICC U19 World Cup 2006 and ICC Champions Trophy 2017 also guided Pakistan U19 to the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup title as mentor/manager five months ago.

Shafiq and Gul are both former Pakistan players. Asad featured in 147 international matches (77 Tests, 60 ODIs, 10 T20Is), scoring 6,188 runs, including 12 centuries and 36 half-centuries. Right-arm fast bowler Umar featured in 237 international matches (47 Tests, 130 ODIs, 60 T20Is), taking 427 wickets.

Squad: Shan Masood (captain), Abdullah Fazal, Amad Butt, Azan Awaiz, Babar Azam, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Rizwan, Muhammad Ghazi Ghorri, Noman Ali, Sajid Khan, Salman Ali Agha, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi.

Gujarat sink Kolkata with adaptable bowling, says Rabada

Ahmedabad: Gujarat Titans adapted to conditions to secure a five-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday, fast bowler Kagiso Rabada said, focusing on tight bowling instead of the explosive batting that has been the hallmark of the Indian Premier League.

Gujarat's victory was shaped by a disciplined bowling display led by Rabada and India pacer Mohammed Siraj, before captain Shubman Gill anchored the chase with a commanding 86 off 50, consigning ailing Kolkata to another defeat. Rabada couldn't create a defining impact early in the season, with the South African striking at key moments but conceding runs too freely to allow opposing teams back into contests. Against Kolkata, however, he found the right balance, sharing the new ball and bowling the entire powerplay alongside Siraj. "Extra bounce has probably been my ally throughout my entire career," Rabada told reporters. "You look at someone like Siraj - he's more skiddy, and on wickets that stay low he becomes a lot more of a threat than I do. Whereas on pitches that perhaps have a bit more bounce, you're looking at that favouring my strength a bit more."



The decision to persist with Rabada and Siraj during the powerplay paid dividends, as the pair struck early to leave Kolkata reeling at 37-3 inside six overs. "On any given day, you could have them five down in that powerplay, but we'll take three down any day," the 30-year-old said. "And then moving on to the middle overs and the death overs, it's just about executing a game plan that we feel is going to work based on what we've adapted or pre-planned the ones to." Kolkata found resistance later through Cameron Green, whose resilient 79 briefly threatened to wrest momentum back, but the visitors were eventually restricted to 180 which Gujarat chased down with two balls to spare. After the win, Gujarat climbed to fourth in the standings.

FOCUS

Abhishek, Malinga sparkle in SRH's victory

AFP
Hyderabad, India

Sri Lankan pacer Eshan Malinga's tight spell of 3-29 and a trademark blistering half-century by Abhishek Sharma helped Sunrisers Hyderabad down Chennai Super Kings by 10 runs yesterday in the Indian Premier League.

After being put in to bat, Hyderabad posted a formidable 194-9 on the back of Abhishek's 59 off 22 and veteran South Africa international Heinrich Klaasen's 59 off 39.

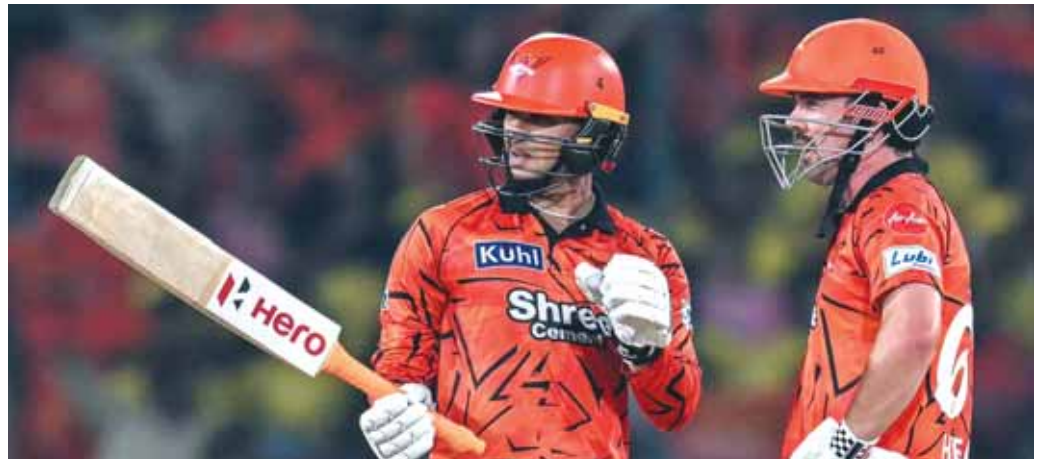
In reply, five-time winners Chennai lost opener and India's T20 World Cup hero Sanju Samson cheaply for 7 off 3.

Impact substitute Ayush Mhatre hit a quickfire 30 off 13, giving the chase momentum but a sharp catch by Klaasen cut short the teenager's heroics.

A flurry of quick wickets followed, stymying the run flow in the middle overs.

Despite handy contributions by Australian T20 specialist Matthew Short and Indian batter Sarfaraz Khan, Chennai's innings never recovered from the early blows.

Chennai skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad blamed the defeat on the lack of partnerships in the middle over.



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Travis Head (right) and his Indian teammate Abhishek Sharma speak during the IPL match against Chennai Super Kings in Hyderabad yesterday. (AFP)

"It was just about 80 runs needed in (the last) 10 overs in the chase," he said. "From there it was just about building a couple of partnerships."

Malinga was ably assisted by Indian all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy, who returned figures of 2-31 in his four overs.

Sunrisers captain Ishan Kishan was all praise for his bowlers who he said helped his team cross the

line despite being "20-30 (runs) short?" "Lovely when you have a bunch of young bowlers coming up with their plans," said Kishan. Earlier, Sunrisers Hyderabad got off to a flying start with openers Abhishek and Travis Head notching up 75 runs in the powerplay. Head was the first to go, immediately followed by captain Ishan Kishan who was out for a first ball duck.

Abhishek followed soon after. Klaasen held steady at one end before being bowled by pacer An-

shul Kamboj. For Chennai, Kamboj returned the most productive figures, taking three wickets for 22 runs. Chennai are still waiting for the return of India legend MS Dhoni, who is recovering from a calf injury.

BRIEF SCORES
Sunrisers Hyderabad 194 for 9 (Abhishek 59, Klaasen 59, Kamboj 3-22, Overton 3-37) **beat Chennai Super Kings 184 for 8** (Mhatre 34, Malinga 3-29, Reddy 2-31) **by 10 runs**

TENNIS

Cobolli downs Zverev to set up final with Shelton

'It was one of my best matches ever against one of my biggest friends'

AFP
Munich

Flavio Cobolli ended top seed Alexander Zverev's Munich Open title defence yesterday as the Italian breezed past the world number three in straight sets to book his place in the final against Ben Shelton.

Fourth seed Cobolli downed the home favourite 6-3, 6-3 in just under 70 minutes in their semi-final meeting.

The 23-year-old's blistering performance put paid to Zverev's hopes for a record fourth title on the red dirt in Munich.

"It was one of my best matches ever against one of my biggest friends on tour," Cobolli said.

"I'm a little bit shy when I play with a big player, but today I played one of my best performances and I'm really happy."

Cobolli edged ahead of Zverev when he broke the German to love in the fourth game of the first set.

Zverev struggled to make inroads on Cobolli's serve over the course of the match, and when the world number 16 pounced on his opponent's first service game of the second set the writing was on the wall for Zverev.

Two punishing crosscourt forehands followed up by a crisp volley to finish off game seven secured Cobolli a double break and gave him the chance to serve for the match.

But Zverev hit back immediately as he secured his first break points of the encounter, converting at the second time of asking to halt



Italy's Flavio Cobolli in action during the Munich Open semi-final against Germany's Alexander Zverev (in set) yesterday. (Reuters)

his opponent. A brilliant forehand on the run handed Cobolli match point in the next game and when Zverev framed a deep return the match was decided.

Cobolli advances to his second final of the season, where he will look to add to the title he picked up in Acapulco in February.

Shelton, who later Saturday beat qualifier Alex Molcan 6-3, 6-4, will be the man standing in Cobolli's way as the American seeks to go one better than last year when he lost the Munich title match to Zverev.

Second seed Shelton broke in the sixth game of the first set to

get his nose in front against the 166th-ranked Slovakian and then secured a crucial second break of the match to go 5-4 up in the final set. The 23-year-old was on form with his serve as Molcan managed to engineer just one break point across the two sets, which Shelton saved.

FOCUS

Rybakina powers past Andreeva to reach Stuttgart Open final

AFP
Stuttgart

Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina surged to a 7-5, 6-1 victory over teenager Mirra Andreeva yesterday and will face Karolina Muchova for the title in Stuttgart.

Rybakina shook off any lingering fatigue from a late finish in Friday's quarter-final win over Leylah Fernandez to reach her third final of the year.

Top seed Rybakina snatched a tight opening set by breaking Andreeva, who was 7-0 on clay this season and won in Linz last week, with the Russian serving to force a tie-break.

She carried over that momentum to sweep into a 5-0 lead in the second set before closing out victory in 77 minutes.

"First set, we were going pretty even," said Rybakina. "I had some opportunities to go up but didn't take them. But I'm happy that in these important moments, my serve worked and I stayed aggressive."

"Then in the second set being up, I was more free to hit, to step in, to play even more aggressive."

"So I'm pretty happy with the performance. It was really sol-

id. And I guess the three-hour match yesterday, it did help me today."

Rybakina, who finished runner-up at Indian Wells last month, will have a chance on Sunday to regain the title she won two years ago and drive off with a second Porsche sports car -- the coveted prize awarded to the champion in Stuttgart.

Muchova edged Elina Svitolina 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 earlier in the day to book her spot in the final.

The world number 12 will play the first 500-level final of her career as she goes in search of a third WTA title.

Muchova, the 2023 Roland Garros runner-up, got the edge over Svitolina to claim the opening set as she converted both break points against the Ukrainian.

The seventh seed's serve deserted her somewhat in the next frame as Svitolina hit back by breaking Muchova three times to claim the second set.

The crucial moment in the decider came in the ninth game as Muchova pounced on Svitolina's service game to get her nose in front at 5-4.

That sole break was enough as Muchova then served out the match to love, sealing the deal with an ace out wide.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina returns the ball to Russia's Mirra Andreeva during the Stuttgart Open semi-final yesterday. (AFP)

FOOTBALL

Coventry clinch promotion to end 25-year Premier League exile

AFP
London

Coventry secured promotion to the Premier League on Friday as the Championship leaders' 1-1 draw against Blackburn ended their 25-year exile from the top-flight.

Frank Lampard's side needed a point from their trip to Ewood Park to be certain of automatic promotion. They did it the hard way, trailing to Ryoia Morishita's deflected 54th-minute strike before Bobby Thomas headed the price-less equaliser in the 84th minute. Having led the Championship table for much of the season, the Sky Blues have wrapped up their return to English football's elite with three games to spare.

"It was an incredible moment. This is what it's about," a tearful Lampard said in an emotional post-match interview. "Coming here and getting a point at this stage isn't easy. We had to see it out and we didn't know whether to attack again. "Doing this after 25 years? Wow! Wow!"

Backed by 7,500 raucous fans crammed into the Darwen End, Coventry were below their best for long periods of a nervous display.

But their performance will quickly be forgotten, replaced by life-long memories of the promotion party that followed Thomas' glancing header from Victor Torp's free-kick.

Supporters wept tears of joy when the final whistle announced their ascent to the Premier League.

"Amazing, amazing. I couldn't believe it when it went in," Thomas said. "It's been a hell of a season. I feel like we deserve it."

Now Lampard's men can set their sights on winning the Championship title, with second-placed Ipswich 11 points behind with five matches to play. "This is a serious, serious football club. I grew up with them as a top flight club but I didn't realise," Lampard said.

"To go and get promotion automatically as a non-parachute team with three games to go. These boys have managed to achieve something special and unique."

Fittingly, Coventry's previous promotion to the top-flight in 1967 was also sealed at Blackburn when Rovers drew with Bolton. That was the start of a 34-year spell in the top tier before relegation in 2001 sparked a steep decline. Coventry plunged into the fourth tier for one season in 2017-18 and were even forced to play their home games in Northampton and Birmingham for three seasons due to a bitter legal battle between the club and their stadium's owners.

The 1987 FA Cup winners' rise back to prominence was initially piloted by Mark Robins, whose second spell in charge brought promotion from League Two and League One.

Losing the 2023 Championship play-off final against Luton stalled Coventry's momentum and even-

tually led to Robins' dismissal in 2024. Hiring former England star Lampard as Robins' replacement proved an inspired move as he revived his career following sackings by Chelsea and Everton.

Lampard led Coventry away from the relegation zone in his first season before losing to Sunderland in the play-off semi-finals.

Fuelled by the pain of that near-miss, Coventry embarked on a relentless march to promotion.

A 7-1 demolition of QPR and a 5-3 win at Lampard's former club Derby in August established Coventry as the Championship's dominant force.

Jack Rudoni's assured presence in midfield, complemented by the goals of Haji Wright, Ellis Simms and Brandon Thomas-Asante, kept Coventry top of the pile as the promotion dream came true.

The Sky Blues' success has also reinvigorated the midlands city, according to Coventry's Lord Mayor Rachel Lancaster.

"It's huge for Coventry football club and the fans, but for Coventry itself as a city, this has been massive," she said.

Coventry owner Doug King added: "The fans have been starved of it for a long time and you can feel it. "Twenty-five years is a huge amount of time. If you don't bounce back you feel like it's never going to happen."

"Getting out of this league is very difficult but we did it. We got the whole city together. I'm super proud of everybody."

Al Ahli and Al Sadd enter Amir Cup Basketball semi-finals



Al Ahli and Al Sadd secured their spots in the Amir Cup basketball semi-finals with strong performances yesterday. At Al Gharafa Hall, Al Ahli powered past Al Wakrah 85-72 in the opening quarter-final, led by a game-high 31 points from Raekwon Rogers. In the second quarter-final, Al Sadd claimed a 107-96 victory over Al Shamal. Steven Green spearheaded Al Sadd's offense with 29 points, while Tyree Quanell Crump delivered an impressive 39-point effort for Al Shamal in a losing cause.

Rublev sets up Barcelona final showdown with Fils

Russian Andrey Rublev fought back to beat Hamad Medjedovic 3-6 6-2 6-2 in the Barcelona Open yesterday to reach his first final of the season where he will play Arthur Fils.

Medjedovic, who came through the qualifiers, had stunned third seed Alex de Minaur in the last 16 and the Serbian came out swinging in the opening set, saving five break points to put one foot in the final. But Rublev recovered in the second set, improving on his second serve to level the match before dominating the third set on the back of a superb first serve as Medjedovic's unforced error count climbed. After three semi-final exits this year, former world number five Rublev will play his first final since he lost in Hamburg 11 months ago. "Of course, I would like to (win the title). If it happens, it happens. If it doesn't happen, we keep working, what can I do? Not much to say," he said in an on-court interview.

Fils was also forced to make a comeback as he beat Spanish teenager Rafael Jodar 3-6 6-3 6-2 to register a landmark 100th victory on the ATP Tour. Jodar, who won the Grand Prix Hassan II title this month, was on an eight-match win streak but he could not stop Fils from reaching his second final of the year. Fils lost to Carlos Alcaraz in the Doha final in February.



Russia's Andrey Rublev reacts after winning his Barcelona Open semi-final against Serbia's Hamad Medjedovic yesterday. (AFP)



Coventry City players celebrate after winning promotion to the Premier League in Blackburn, Britain. (Reuters)

FOOTBALL

Napoli's Serie A title defence nears end with Lazio defeat

AFP
Naples

Napoli could concede the Serie A title to Inter Milan as soon as next week after falling to a 2-0 home defeat at the hands of Lazio. With five matches remaining in their respective league seasons the reigning champions trail Inter by 12 points following a poor display in Naples.

Matteo Cancellieri's early tap-in set the tone at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona, and Toma Basic made sure of a fine win for ninth-placed Lazio with another simple finish in the 57th minute.

Lazio's performance was a good sign for their Italian Cup semi-final against Atalanta, which is delicately poised at 2-2 ahead of Wednesday's second leg in Bergamo. But it leaves Napoli counting the days until they officially concede the Scudetto,

as if they fail to beat Cremonese and Inter win at Torino next weekend, the Scudetto will return north to Milan.

Napoli could have even lost by more as in the 31st minute Vanja Milinkovic-Savic got his hands to an uncharacteristically poor penalty from Mattia Zaccagni, who then smashed over the rebound after slipping to the deck.

That was the first time Zaccagni had failed to score from the penalty spot in Serie A but it made no difference to the final result. Napoli's title defence might effectively be over but Champions League qualification is still on the cards thanks to an eight-point lead on fifth-placed Como.

Roma, in sixth, host Atalanta in the day's late match and can move to within six points of Napoli with a win. However Napoli have the better of the head-to-head record which decides the positions of teams who finish the season level on points.

Roma also have problems of their own, with open conflict between coach Gian Piero Gasperini and Claudio Ranieri, who is a senior advisor to the Frickin family, the capital club's billionaire American owners.

Gasperini abandoned Friday's pre-match press conference on the verge of tears after speaking about Atalanta president Antonio Percassi, with whom Gasperini had a strong working relationship during his hugely successful nine years in Bergamo.

Italian media have widely report one of Gasperini or Ranieri will be out the door come the end of the season, hardly the ideal backdrop as Roma head into a key clash against Gasperini's old club.

Gasperini said his successes at Atalanta, which include winning the Europa League in 2024, were down to a "club which was in sync with the coach", a clear hint he didn't believe he has that at Roma.



Lazio's goalkeeper Edoardo Motta makes a save in front of Napoli's Scott McTominay during the Italian Serie A match at the Diego Armando Maradona stadium in Naples. (AFP)

BUNDESLIGA

Bayern on cusp of title as Dortmund lose

Bayern need just a point against Stuttgart today to claim their 35th German title

AFP
Berlin

Bayern Munich edged closer to the Bundesliga title after Borussia Dortmund lost 2-1 at Hoffenheim, while pioneering Union Berlin coach Marie-Louise Eta was beaten on her debut.

Second-placed Dortmund's defeat leaves Bayern, who host Stuttgart today, 12 points clear with a game in hand. The defending champions need just a point to claim their 35th German title. Club record goalscorer Andrej Kramaric converted two penalties, bringing his career total to 156 for Hoffenheim, to help the hosts move past Bayer Leverkusen into fifth spot.

Unlike Dortmund, who have all but locked up second place, Hoffenheim still have plenty to play for as they chase a Champions League berth, and dominated proceedings in the opening half. Just before the break, Dortmund defender Niklas Suele fell awkwardly in the box and handled the ball.

Kramaric converted the penalty as Suele was helped from the pitch with a knee injury. Substitute Serhou Guirassy pulled one back for the visitors but Hoffenheim were awarded another penalty in stoppage time, which Kramaric once more dispatched to grab victory. Dortmund have now lost their past two matches, having previously suffered just two defeats across the entire campaign.

New Union coach Eta, the first female manager of a men's team in the top five European leagues, suffered a setback on her debut, going down 2-1 at home to relegation battlers Wolfsburg. Appointed on an interim basis until the end of the season, Eta received a rapturous response from the home crowd when her name was announced pre-match.



Hoffenheim's Andrej Kramaric (second right) celebrates after scoring a penalty against Borussia Dortmund. (AFP)

Union were quickly on the back foot when Patrick Wimmer scored after 11 minutes. Dzenan Pejcinovic added another just after the break to help Wolfsburg move two points behind St Pauli in the relegation play-off spot and six from safety.

Union's Oliver Burke scored a late goal but despite the defeat, the Berliners remain six points ahead of the relegation play-off spot with four games left to play this season.

Leverkusen dropped to sixth after losing 2-1 at home against mid-table Augsburg. Patrik Schick headed Leverkusen in front after 12 minutes but Augsburg pegged them back just three minutes later when Fabian Rieder's shot took a deflection off Jarell Quansah and went in. Rieder converted a penalty in the seventh minute of stoppage time to deal a hammer blow to Leverkusen's top-four hopes.

Elsewhere, Werder Bremen picked up

crucial points in the battle to beat the drop, winning 3-1 at home to northern rivals Hamburg, who finished the match with nine men.

Jens Stage bagged a double either side of a Robert Glatzel strike. Cameron Pueras added a late goal to help Bremen move five points clear of the bottom three and level with Hamburg. RB Leipzig moved five points clear of fifth spot with a 3-1 win at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Marseille lose at Lorient, damage Champions League bid

Paris: Marseille sporting director Medhi Benatia blasted the team's performance after a 2-0 loss at Lorient dealt a damaging blow to their hopes of Champions League football next season.

Panos Kateris and Bamba Dieng goals secured victory for Lorient in Brittany and left Marseille in danger of losing further ground in the race for automatic Champions League qualification.

Habib Beye's team are a point behind third-placed Lille, who were hosting Nice late last night, and Marseille could also finish the weekend trailing Lyon and Rennes. Only the top three in France are guaranteed a spot in Europe's top club competition.

Benatia, who is leaving the club at the end of the season, tore into the players as Marseille lost for the third time in four matches.

"I didn't plan on speaking again until the end of the year because I think we've talked far too much over the first six months... but when I see the game we played today, even though I don't want to talk, I have to come before the press, because it's a scandal. It's a scandal," Benatia raged.

"You're playing Lorient, who have nothing left to play for, and you don't win a single duel, you don't make a single run forward, you're not proactive, you don't try anything, and you just watch them. In the stadium, they're doing the 'ole' because they're nutmegging you, dribbling past you... Yep, that's the truth."

"In your opinion, how many went into the dressing room and flipped over the table? Zero, nobody. Everything is spotless, the bottles are right where they belong, all that. So basically, you play for Marseille, you have a game like that, and you just accept it?" Benatia fumed.

ALLEGRI RULES OUT TAKING ITALY JOB, WANTS TO STAY AT AC MILAN

Massimiliano Allegri said that he was not interested in the vacant Italy job, the AC Milan coach saying that he was hoping to stay with the seven-time European champions.

Allegri was quickly suggested, alongside Napoli coach Antonio Conte, as one of the favourites to replace Gennaro Gattuso who stepped down earlier this month after Italy failed to qualify for a third straight World Cup.

"My career speaks for itself: changing jobs often isn't part of my DNA," Allegri told reporters ahead of today's Serie A fixture at Verona. Allegri, 58, first coached Milan between 2010 and 2014 before leaving for five very successful years at Juventus, where he returned after a hiatus from coaching in 2021 and was sacked three years later.

"I like working in a club that's managed as a business and should be managed that way," added Allegri.

"I like working and seeing progress. We can't win the Champions League in two years, but you need to have that ambition because if you don't think about the future you stay stuck in the past. We're in constant contact, I've given my suggestions for summer transfers and the club's management will work on that."

Allegri took charge of Milan last summer and currently has his team in third place in Serie A and on course for qualification for the Champions League. Milan are five points ahead of fifth-placed Como but have lost three of their last four matches.

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TWO

Ahli face defining test against Al Hussein

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Ahli step into their defining match of the season with everything on the line, facing Al Hussein Irbid in a no-margin-for-error AFC Champions League Two quarter-final at Zabeel Stadium in Dubai today. For Al Ahli, this is it. A difficult domestic campaign that will end in the bottom half of the Qatar Stars League leaves continental success as their only route to salvage pride.

Yet their Asian run tells a different story - composed efficient, and resilient. They topped Group B with 10 points, then edged Iran's Sepahan 3-2 on aggregate in the round of 16, showing the grit required for knockout football. Now comes their toughest test.

Al Hussein arrive with momentum and belief. The Jordanian side are firmly in the domestic title race - level on points with Al Faisaly but holding a game in hand and have mirrored that consistency in Asia. Group C winners with nine points, they underlined their credentials by eliminating Esteghlal in the previous round.

Al Ahli coach Younes Ali is under no illusions about the scale of the challenge. He has labelled



Al Ahli coach Younes Ali speaks at a press conference.

Al Hussein a "strong and distinguished opponent" highlighting their results both continentally and domestically.

His message is clear: preparation has been meticulous, and his players must reach peak physical and mental levels to progress. "I have closely followed Al Hussein and they are a strong team. We have prepared well and our aim is to reach the semi-finals," he said.

This is a one-off 90-minute battle - not a two-legged chess match. That reality sharpens the stakes. "Concentration throughout is crucial," Ali stressed, pointing to the fine margins that will decide the tie. Set pieces, in particular, are an area of concern against a technically sharp Al Hussein side.

Lane, al-Suwaidi triumph in opening round of Qatar Off Road Championship



Doha: The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation organised Survival 1, the opening round of the 2026 Qatar Off Road Championship, in the challenging dunes of Sealine. The event featured a strong entry list of 42 competitors representing Qatar and several other nationalities, delivering an exciting and competitive start to the season.

The demanding terrain tested both skill and endurance, producing intense competition across all classes. In Class 1, Ethan Lane secured first place with an outstanding performance and was also the Challenger category winner in his class. Alex McInnes finished in second place, followed by Michael Anderson in third. The Veteran Class victory went to Gregory Kis.

In Class 2, Mansour al-Suwaidi claimed first place after a strong and consistent drive. Khalifa al-Bastaki secured second place and was also the Challenger category winner in his class, while Ali al-Marzouqi completed the podium in third position. The Veteran Class 2 was won by Mohammed al-Shamsi. The trophies were



presented to the winners by Amro al-Hamad, Executive Director of QMMF, alongside Pedro Almeida, Clerk of the Course.

The championship continues next week with Round 2 of the Qatar Off Road Championship, Baja 1 for cars and motorcycles, scheduled to take place on 25 April.