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ASIAN BEACH GAMES

All-Qatari beach volleyball clash seals quarters spot

Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan will face compatriots Mohamed Ehab and Moussa al-Khair today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

After impressive group-stage performances, the country's two men's teams will meet in an all-Qatari round of 16 clash in the beach volleyball competition at the Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026 today.

The first team of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan booked their place at the top of Group B after a hard-fought 2-1 (21-11, 21-23, 15-13) victory over Iran yesterday, underlining their strong title credentials.

Meanwhile, the second team of Mohamed Ehab and Moussa al-Khair finished runners-up in their group following a 0-2 defeat to hosts China, setting up a direct encounter with their compatriots.

The fixture guarantees Qatar a place in the quarter-finals and reflects the teams' impressive group-stage performances. Younousse and Tijan had earlier secured wins over the Maldives and Uzbekistan, while Ehab and al-Khair recorded victories against Saudi Arabia and Macau before their loss to China.

In the women's competition, Haya Abu Issa and Laila Mohammed exited after a 0-2 defeat to China.

Qatar is represented by four teams—two men's and two women's—reflecting growing participation and the sport's expanding continental presence.

Meanwhile, Qatar's beach handball team faces Thailand today, aiming to secure a place in the semi-finals and continue its title defence. The team enters the match in strong form, having recorded five consecutive wins against Pakistan, Oman, Bangladesh, Mongolia and Jordan to top the group with 10 points. Drawn in a com-



Qatar's Ahmed Tijan reacts after a hard-fought win over Iran at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, yesterday.

petitive group that also includes the Maldives and Thailand, Qatar has maintained a high level from the outset.

Today's match is key to confirming top spot and shaping the knockout path, ahead of the final group fixture against the Maldives tomorrow. The semi-finals are set for Tuesday, with the final on Thursday, as Qatar looks to extend its winning run and move closer to another title.

BRIGHT START FOR QATAR'S MEN'S 3X3 BASKETBALL TEAM

Qatar's men's 3x3 basketball team opened their Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026 campaign with two wins, defeating Bah-

rain 21-11 and Kazakhstan 22-15 to boost their qualification chances.

The team delivered strong performances in both matches, imposing a fast pace and making the most of scoring opportunities through effective teamwork to secure a perfect start. In contrast, the women's team lost their opener 5-21 to China.

The men conclude the group stage against India tomorrow, a key match for their progression, while the women face Kazakhstan next. The knockout rounds begin on Tuesday, with the competition concluding on Wednesday with the semi-finals and final.

The men's squad includes Mohammed



Qatar's men's 3x3 basketball team opened their campaign with two wins, defeating Bahrain 21-11 and Kazakhstan 22-15.

Bashir, Dejan Janic, Nadim Muslic and Osman Deng, while the women's team features Sama Jasser, Tania Al-Tawil, Mona Al-Sayed and Alaa Suleiman, reflecting continued efforts to support and expand the sport.

Elsewhere, Qatar's sailing team continue its participation, with Tamim Shams set to compete in the sixth and seventh races of the Optimist class for boys, while Thani Shams will race in the sixth and seventh rounds of the ILCA 4 class.

The competition follows a cumulative format in which all sailors take part in every race, with final standings determined by the total results across ten races running

through Tuesday. This system requires consistent performance, while also allowing competitors to improve their positions with each race amid close competition, as the Qatari sailors aim to achieve strong results and enhance their overall standings.

China extended its lead in the medal standings after yesterday's events, with 19 medals (9 gold, 8 silver, 2 bronze). Thailand moved into second with eight medals (3 gold), followed by the Philippines in third with six (3 gold). The United Arab Emirates ranked fourth with six medals (2 gold), while Vietnam placed fifth with five medals (2 gold), as competition remains tight heading into the final stages.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Eze fires Arsenal back into top spot

AFP
London

Eberechi Eze fired Arsenal back to the top of the Premier League as relegation-threatened Tottenham won for the first time in 2026 to give themselves renewed hope.

The Gunners were nine points clear of Manchester City just two weeks ago before defeats against Bournemouth and City allowed their rivals to edge ahead of them.

The home game against Newcastle was a must-win for Arsenal, with Pep Guardiola's team involved in an FA Cup semi-final against Southampton, which they won to stay on track for a domestic treble.

Before the Gunners kicked off, the two title contenders were locked on 70 points each, with an identical goal difference. City topped the table on goals scored. England midfielder Eze eased the pressure on Arsenal with an early goal, arrowing home from outside the box after being teed up by Kai Havertz and the game finished 1-0. It was a 16th league defeat of a dispiriting season for Newcastle.

"We had the necessity to win the game, the margins are very short, and we got through it," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said. "There were moments in the first half and second. We certainly had discipline, courage and great habits defensively, but with the ball, there are habits we have to do much better if we want to be more dominant in the game."

Arsenal could increase their advantage over City to six points before the Blues play again, when they face Fulham next week. The Gunners are desperate to shed their reputation as perpetual runners-up as they chase a first Premier League title since 2004. But they are up against a City juggernaut relentlessly hunting a seventh league title in nine seasons.

Earlier, the focus was on the other end of the table, where Spurs and West Ham are locked in a dramatic relegation battle, with Wolves and Burnley already down. Spurs looked set to escape the bottom three after Joao Palhinha's late goal at Wolves and Everton's equaliser at



Arsenal's Eberechi Eze (left) celebrates with Piero Hincapie after scoring against Newcastle. (AFP)

the London Stadium.

But West Ham substitute Callum Wilson scored a 92nd-minute winner to seal a 2-1 victory and restore his side's two-point cushion, with just four games to go. Roberto De Zerbi celebrated his first triumph as Tottenham head coach after replacing interim boss Igor Tudor earlier this month. "We have to believe and to stay up and to win the games because we have the quality to win the games," he said after his side's 1-0 victory. "The players are very good players and these three points, I think and I hope they can become important for the head, for the mentality, for the enthusiasm to prepare the next games."

West Ham manager Nuno Espirito Santo said he expected the relegation battle to go to the wire. "It is going to be until the end - keep fighting, keep believing," he said. "Tough one but we are in our path."

Nottingham Forest hammered Sunderland 5-0 on Friday to ease their relegation fears.

Liverpool beat Crystal Palace 3-1, getting the better of their opponents for the first time in four meetings this season to climb into fourth place above Aston Villa, who had earlier lost 1-0 at Fulham.

Alexander Isak, who has recently returned to action after fracturing his fibula, scored the opener, with Liverpool's other goals coming from Andy Robertson and Florian Wirtz. Mohamed Salah limped off in the second half at Anfield holding his hamstring with less than a month of his glittering career with the Reds remaining.

Arne Slot's men are now near-certainties to qualify for next season's Champions League, which would be some consolation after a miserable title defence. They are level on 58 points with Villa and Manchester United - with all three teams eight points clear of Brighton. Fulham's win against Villa, courtesy of a goal from Ryan Sessegnon, kept the London club's hopes of qualification for Europe alive.

LIGUE 1

PSG shrug off Angers to edge closer to title

AFP
Lyon

Paris Saint-Germain took another stride towards the Ligue 1 crown, beating Angers 3-0 to open up a six-point advantage over Lens at the top of the table.

Lee Kang-in and Senny Mayulu struck first-half goals in Angers, with Lucas Beraldo bagging a third shortly after half-time to keep PSG on course for a 12th French title in 14 years. It was a largely ideal afternoon for PSG ahead of Tuesday's Champions League semi-final first leg at home to Bayern Munich, although Achraf Hakimi is an injury concern after he picked up an apparent injury and came off at half-time. PSG also finished

the game with 10 men as Goncalo Ramos saw red on 74 minutes after receiving a second yellow card.

Lyon held off lowly Auxerre 3-2 in Ligue 1 earlier in the day to keep their Champions League ambitions on track. A Roman Yaremchuk brace, either side of a Corentin Tolisso goal, was enough to move the hosts to 57 points and open up a provisional three point gap to fourth-placed Lille. Auxerre, despite a Sinaly Diomande strike and Bryan Okoh's late goal, which set up a nervy finish, were condemned to a 16th defeat of the season and remain in the relegation play-off spot.

With three games left for them this season, Lyon moved to within six points of Lens, who drew 3-3 at Brest on Friday, and an unlikely top-two finish.



Paris St Germain's Joao Neves (left) and Angers' Haris Belkebla battle for the ball during the Ligue 1 match in Angers, France. (Reuters)

CRICKET

Gutsy Punjab pull off record chase despite Rahul's 152

Punjab chase down record 265 target with seven balls left as fielding errors prove costly for Delhi

Reuters
New Delhi

KL Rahul hammered a sensational 152 not out and Delhi Capitals piled up what was briefly the season's highest total, yet Punjab Kings cruised to a six-wicket victory in an Indian Premier League run-fest yesterday.

In all, 529 runs were plundered in 38.5 overs in a remarkable exhibition of T20 batting, with a combined 33 sixes clearing the ropes at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Punjab captain Shreyas Iyer was left searching for words after his team chased down a record 265-run target with seven balls to spare.

"I'm running out of words, honestly speaking," said Iyer, who led by example with an unbeaten 71.

"We discussed that in the previous games, we chased around 220-225 with two overs left. So the mindset was very much similar."

Punjab, chasing their maiden IPL title, cemented their position atop the standings after their sixth win in seven matches, while Delhi are sixth at the halfway stage of their campaign.

It was Delhi, who looked to be in the box seat after Rahul led their charge with a stunning 67-ball knock that included nine sixes and 16 fours.



Punjab Kings' Shreyas Iyer in action against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi, India, yesterday. Iyer scored an unbeaten 71 as Punjab won by six wickets. (Reuters)

Rahul and Nitish Rana (91) milked 220 runs in their extraordinary 96-ball partnership as Delhi racked up 264-2, their highest ever total in the 10-team league.

Chasing a steep target, Punjab openers Priyansh Arya (43) and Prabhsimran (76) responded in kind, taking the attack straight to Delhi's bowlers from the outset.

They pillaged 116 runs from the first six powerplay overs with audacious power-hitting to set the tone for a successful chase.

Iyer clobbered seven sixes in his 36-ball blitz to guide his side

home, aided by two costly re-entries.

The right-hander was dropped twice, on 28 and 35, with Karun Nair spilling both chances.

"Looking at the kind of wicket, if you don't support your bowlers and keep giving away so many chances, then I feel we deserved to lose," Delhi captain Axar Patel said in a blunt assessment of his side's fielding.

Delhi fast bowler Lungi Ngidi left the game in an ambulance after sustaining a head injury while fielding. The South African was stable and set to be discharged

soon from a city hospital, organisers said later.

BRIEF SCORES
Punjab Kings 265 for 4 (Prabhsimran 76, Shreyas 71*, Arya 43, Kuldeep 2-46) **beat Delhi Capitals 264 for 2** (Rahul 152*, Rana, 91, Arshdeep 1-49) **by six wickets**

Punjab Kings' Prabhsimran Singh celebrates after reaching his half century. Prabhsimran smashed 76 in his team's win. (Reuters)



Delhi Capitals' KL Rahul shakes hands with Punjab Kings co-owner and Bollywood actress Preity Zinta after the match. (Reuters)



Warner lifts Karachi in PSL



David Warner of Karachi Kings celebrates his knock of 89 not out off 48 deliveries against Quetta Gladiators yesterday. Gladiators scored 195/6 in 20 overs but in reply, Kings reached 199/1 in 18.3 overs to win by 9 wickets.

Fakhar powers Qalandars



Fakhar Zaman of Lahore Qalandars hits out during his knock of 58 not out off 47 deliveries against Peshawar Zalmi in a PSL match yesterday. Qalandars won by 6 wickets. Zalmi scored 199/4 in 20 overs. In reply, Qalandars finished with 200/4 in 19.3 overs.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Pakistan to allow spectators at PSL final

Reuters
Lahore

Next month's Pakistan Super League final will be open to fans, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi said yesterday, after matches in the tournament were played behind closed doors due to a nationwide fuel shortage.

PSL T20 league games were shifted to empty stadiums in March as Pakistan imposed austerity measures to curb fuel consumption after energy supply disruptions linked to the Iran war.

"I requested (Pakistan) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to allow spectators in the stadiums. While he was also inclined to permit fans, he emphasized that austerity measures are currently in place across Pakistan, with efforts under way to minimize fuel consumption," Naqvi said in a social media post.

"However, on the request of franchise owners, he has graciously approved the presence of fans for the PSL 11 Final. I sincerely thank him for this decision and for facilitating the fans."

The PSL league phase is drawing to a close, with teams playing the last of their 10 matches on Saturday. Peshawar Zalmi lead Multan Sultans in the standings, with Islamabad United also securing a playoff berth, leaving one place still to be decided.

The PSL final is scheduled to take place on May 3 at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium. Pakistan is facing acute fuel pressures and rising costs after Iran war-linked fighting curtailed shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, through which about a fifth of the world's oil normally passes.

The country has emerged as a key intermediary between the United States and Iran, using its ties with both sides to facilitate indirect talks aimed at de-escalating the conflict.

FOOTBALL

Manchester City late show beats Southampton to reach FA Cup final

AFP
London

Nico Gonzalez's stunning strike fired Manchester City into the FA Cup final as Pep Guardiola's men produced a late fightback to beat Southampton 2-1 yesterday.

The Saints appeared heading towards a first FA Cup final since 2003 when Finn Azaz's brilliant finish put the Championship side in front 11 minutes from time.

However, City avoided the same fate that Arsenal suffered in the quarter-finals to remain on course for a domestic treble.

Jeremy Doku's deflected effort quickly levelled before Gonzalez rifled in from long range three minutes from time.

The defeat ends Southampton's 20-game unbeaten run that has propelled them into contention for an immediate return to the Premier League. The Saints also knocked out City's title rivals Arsenal in the previous round and will rue a glorious chance missed to return to Wembley next month.

Guardiola made eight changes from the side that went top of the Premier League with a 1-0 victory over Burnley on Wednesday.

Erling Haaland, Bernardo Silva



Manchester City's Gianluigi Donnarumma and Nico Gonzalez celebrate after the FA Cup semi-final against Southampton at Wembley Stadium, London, yesterday. (Reuters)

and Doku were among those to miss out and City took 45 minutes to find their feet. Leo Scienza found the bottom corner early on, but Southampton's joy was cut short by the outside flag.

City came out for the second half a changed team even before Guardiola turned to his bench to unleash the stars he had kept in reserve. Omar Marmoush missed his chance to shine on a rare start ahead of Haaland.

The Egyptian spooned the best of City's chances over the bar before he was replaced by Haaland.

Guardiola also introduced Doku, Savinho and Nico O'Reilly to break down Southampton's mass ranks

of well-marshalled defence.

Daniel Peretz repelled Gonzalez's powerful effort before Southampton pounced to take a shock lead on a rare second-half foray forward.

Kuryu Matsuki fed Azaz, who spun before unleashing an unstoppable effort into the top corner.

However, Southampton could not hold on as City roared back to become the first club to reach four consecutive FA Cup finals.

Doku's effort from the edge of the box deflected off James Bree to wrong-foot Peretz. The Southampton goalkeeper was then left helpless as Gonzalez's piledriver completed the comeback.

Sooryavanshi fastest to reach 1,000 runs in T20s but Sunrisers complete remarkable win

Jaipur: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi became the youngest player, and the fastest by balls faced, to complete 1,000 runs in Twenty20 cricket as the 15-year-old smashed a 36-ball century in the Indian Premier League yesterday in a game his team lost by five wickets.

Sooryavanshi hit 12 sixes and five boundaries as he completed his second century in the IPL, shortly after reaching 1,000 runs in T20 cricket, having faced just 473 balls in the format.

The previous record was held by Australia's Mitchell Owen, who completed 1,000 runs in 533 balls.

The century was the third fastest in IPL history, after Chris Gayle's 30-ball ton in 2013 and Sooryavanshi's own 35-ball hundred last year.

"There wasn't much thinking... I just played according to the ball. The wicket felt good, so I backed my game," said Sooryavanshi, who had hit four sixes in the first over.

"I think about which bowlers are in the opposition, what shots I can play against them... I try to visualise all of that."

The teenager, who has yet to make his senior debut for India, has been in scorching form this season, having earlier scored two 15-ball fifties against



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi plays a shot against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Jaipur yesterday. (AFP)



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Ishan Kishan plays a shot during the IPL match against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur yesterday. (AFP)

Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Sooryavanshi fell at 103 off 37 balls, helping Rajasthan to post 228-6.

Hyderabad chased down the target with nine balls to spare, driven by half-centuries from Ishan Kishan (74) and Abhishek Sharma (57). Hyderabad and Rajasthan, both on 10 points, are four points above fifth-placed Chennai in the race to finish in the top four

and progress to the playoffs of the world's richest league. Punjab Kings lead the table with 13 points after pulling off a record chase of 265 against Delhi Capitals earlier in the day.

BRIEF SCORES
Sunrisers Hyderabad 229 for 5 (Kishan 74, Abhishek 57, Archer 2-34) **beat Rajasthan Royals 228 for 6** (Sooryavanshi 103, Jurel 51, Malinga 2-38) **by five wickets**

MOTORCYCLING

Marquez claims chaotic rain-hit Spanish GP sprint

ALEX CRASHES OUT OF LEAD, BEZZECCHI FAILS TO FINISH

AFP
Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

Reigning champion Marc Marquez triumphed in a chaotic and rain-lashed Spanish MotoGP flag-to-flag sprint yesterday in Jerez.

The Spanish Ducati rider, bidding for a record-equalling eighth world title, started on pole and recovered from a crash to finish ahead of teammate Francesco Bagnaia and Franco Morbidelli for his 17th sprint victory.

Overall leader Marco Bezzecchi started poorly and later crashed out, failing to score any points, with Jorge Martin and Pedro Acosta, second and third overall, also not adding to their tallies.

"The truth is that we had a lot of luck," admitted Marc Marquez, who was able to take advantage of his crash to switch to a wet bike.

The race started under grey clouds and rain began to fall three laps in, after Martin had already pulled out because of a technical problem with his Aprilia.

Marc's brother Alex, who won the Spanish MotoGP last year, had impressed on the dry on Friday and carried his good form in Jerez into the race by taking the lead on the seventh lap. The rain increased in intensity and riders began to fall, with Toprak Razgatlioglu and Lorenzo Savadori colliding.

Marc Marquez was next to tumble, but had the presence of mind to cut across the grass back to the pit lane and change bikes, while the other race leaders ploughed on. However, they too soon had to change bikes under the downpour.

"We were lucky to crash on the last corner so that the bike didn't stall, that's when I could breathe, I waited for everyone to go past



Ducati Lenovo Team's Marc Marquez celebrates winning the Spanish Grand Prix sprint in Jerez de la Frontera yesterday. (AFP)

because the whole group was coming, and then I was able to go into the pits, change the bike," explained Marc Marquez.

Alex Marquez came to grief shortly after his older brother's mishap and it was two-time world champion Bagnaia who took the lead. However, Marc Marquez overtook him with three laps remaining and went on to triumph.

Victory took him up to fourth overall, 24 points off leader Bezzecchi ahead of Sunday's main event.

THE GRID
Front row

Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati), Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR), Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46)

2nd row
Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia), Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini), Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM)

3rd row
Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3), Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse), Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati)

4th row
Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia), Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse), Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini)

5th row
Brad Binder (RSA/KTM), Joan Mir (ESP/Honda), Luca Marini (ITA/Honda)

6th row
Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha), Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha), Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46)

7th row
Toprak Razgatlioglu (TUR/Yamaha-Pramac), Lorenzo Savadori (ITA-Aprilia), Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha)

8th row
Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac), Diogo Moreira (BRA/Honda-LCR)

Al-Marri, Mcinnes shine in round 1 of Qatar Off-Road Championship Baja



The opening round of the Qatar Off-Road Championship (Baja 1) for both motos and cars took place in the Sealine area, delivering an exciting start to the season with strong competition across all categories. In the motos category, Class 1 saw Alex McInnes claim first place, followed by Ethan Lane in second and Michael Anderson in third. Rafic Eid secured victory in both the Veteran and Challenger sub-categories.

In Class 2, Mansour al-Suwaidi took the win, while Hamdan al-Ali finished second and claimed the Challenger category victory. Khalifa al-Bastaki completed the podium in third place. The Veteran category in Class 2 was won by Mohammed al-Shamsi. In the cars category, competing in Class 1 and overall standings, Mohammed al-Marri and co-driver Pierre Delorme secured first place. Camelia Liparoti and Erika Mingozzi finished second, while Ghanem Khaled al-Attiyah and Dmytro Tsyro came third. In Class 2, Rashid al-Mohannadi and Mirko Brun took top honors, followed by Mohammed al-Attiyah and Tamer Hijazeen in second place. Alexander Whyatt and Baptiste Cerrato finished third. Class 3 was won by Omar al-Lahim and Faisal al-Suwahy, with Motab al-Shammari and Badr Alhamdan in second, and Hassan al-Blooshi and Ali Obaid in third place. Trophies were presented to the winners by Amro al-Hamad, Executive Director of the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation, along with Clerk of the Course Pedro Almeida.



TENNIS

Ailing Swiatek retires in Madrid

AFP
Madrid

Iga Swiatek was forced to retire from her Madrid Open clash with Ann Li yesterday due to a viral illness, sending the American 31st seed in the round of 16 of the WTA 1000 tournament.

A champion in the Spanish capital in 2024, Swiatek rebounded from a one-set deficit to level the contest but put an end to proceedings while down 0-3 in the decider. The Polish six-time Grand Slam champion appeared to be struggling and asked for the doctor after getting broken early in the third set. Following a conversation with the trainers and getting her vitals checked, Swiatek tried to break Li back but when her opponent held for a 3-0 advantage, the fourth seed realised she was unable to continue the match.

She revealed after the match that she has been fighting a virus for the last two days and was hoping she could still find a way to win despite feeling "terrible".

"I heard there is something going on between players, that the virus is somewhere on site. I'm sure I'll be fine in a couple of days, but I had zero energy and zero stability and just felt really bad physically, and yesterday even worse," said Swiatek.

It is Swiatek's earliest ever exit in five appearances in Madrid. "I knew that it's going to be hard, but



Poland's Iga Swiatek looks dejected after retiring from the Madrid Open round of 32 match against Ann Li of the US yesterday. (Reuters)

I still wanted to try," she added.

"On the court before the tournament I felt like I'm playing great, so actually it's sad for me that I can't play, because I was feeling really good with my game, and I was moving forward in the process, so, this was positive. But for me the tournament has just started and I couldn't even compete today, so it's disappointing."

Earlier in the day, 15th-seeded Iva Jovic squandered a lead and fell 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 to Canadian 24th seed Leylah Fernandez, who will be Li's opponent in the last 16.

Wins for Andreeva and Zverev
Ninth-seeded Russian Mirra Andreeva overcame an inspired Dalma Galfi 6-3, 6-2 in a match that was much closer than the scoreline suggests.

The Hungarian qualifier ranked 117 in the world broke early in both

sets but was unable to maintain her advantage as Andreeva recovered to improve her clay-court record this season to 9-1 and set up a last-16 showdown with another Hungarian, Anna Bondar.

In ATP action, defending champion Casper Ruud raced into the third round with a 6-0, 6-1 demolition of home favourite Jaume Munar in just 65 minutes.

The 12th-seeded Norwegian will next take on Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

Second-seeded Alexander Zverev recovered from a terrible second set to begin his campaign with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 performance against recent Bucharest champion Mariano Navone.

Zverev will next square off with Terence Atmane, who overcame excruciating cramps to triumph in an all-French duel 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) over 30th seed Ugo Humbert.

HORSE RACING

Thor's Hammer edges thriller to capture End of Season Cup



Jockey Alberto Sanna rides Thor's Hammer to the End of Season Cup win yesterday. PICTURE: Juhaim

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Rufaa Racing's Thor's Hammer stormed to a dramatic victory in the End of Season Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday, edging out his rivals by the narrowest of margins in a thrilling finish.

The feature race of the card, a 1600m Class 1 Thoroughbred contest for horses aged four and above, saw a competitive field of nine runners go head-to-head. In a gripping finale, the five-year-old bay gelding dug deep to prevail by a head, sealing a memorable win. Trained by Jassim al-Ghazali, who secured a double on the evening, Thor's Hammer was expertly guided by jockey Alberto Sanna. The victory marked a return to winning form for the gelding, who capped off his campaign in style with a third triumph, building on a strong recent runner-up performance.

Lueur De Faust made a winning return to form with a polished performance in the 1600m Purebred Arabian Open, capturing the Al Utouriya Cup for Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. The five-year-old bay mare, already a Purebred Arabian Guineas winner on her Qatar debut last November, secured her second victory from six starts this season. Settled patiently towards the rear, she travelled strongly before sweeping into contention in the straight. Showing a sharp turn of foot inside the final 200m, she pulled clear to score by three-quarters of a length. Trained by Hamad al-Jehani, who notched a treble in the evening, Lueur De Faust was expertly partnered by Arnaud de Lepine in a well-timed ride.

Earlier on the card, Spareo extended his unbeaten record with another authoritative display in the 1400m Purebred Arabian Novice for three-year-olds, landing the Al Karana Cup for owner-trainer Hamad

Ahmed Hassan al-Malki al-Jehani. The progressive grey colt, impressive on debut, confirmed his promise with a second straight victory. Breaking smartly, he quickly assumed control and dictated the pace throughout, stretching clear in the closing stages to win comfortably by two and a half lengths. Pierre-Charles Boudot was again in the saddle, maintaining his perfect partnership with the rising talent.

RESULTS
End of Season Cup Day

- WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**
1 - End Of Season Cup, Thoroughbreds Thor's Hammer, Jassim al-Ghazali, Alberto Sanna
2 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate Qiltan, Alban de Mieulle, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri
3 - Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate Mamoun De Bozouls, Hamad al-Jehani, Lukas Delozier
4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80) Selous, Khalid Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, Anas al-Seyabi
5 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap (45-70) Al Deebil, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Saleem Alajmi
6 - Al Karana Cup, Purebred Arabian Novice Spareo, Hamad Ahmed Hassan al-Malki al-Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
7 - Thoroughbred Handicap (0-90) Brotherhood Of Man, Mohammed al-Ghazali, Soufiane Saadi
8 - Thoroughbred Handicap (70-90) Jungle Monarch, Jassim al-Ghazali, Marco Casamento
9 - Al Utouriya Cup, Purebred Arabian Open Race Lueur De Faust, Hamad al-Jehani, Arnaud de Lepine
10 - Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95) Just Bring It, Alban de Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi

Maeda moves Celtic level with leaders Hearts

Daizen Maeda scored twice and made Celtic's other goal in a 3-1 win over Falkirk that moved the defending champions level with Hearts at the top of the Scottish Premiership.

The top three in a tense title race are now separated by just one point with Hearts and Rangers in action, in their game in hand over Celtic, today.

Celtic took advantage of playing a day before their title rivals with Maeda's return to form a massive boost. The Japan international charged down a clearance from Keelan Adams before slotting past the stranded Nicky Hogarth to give Celtic the lead in the 30th minute. Maeda again won possession to create the second goal before feeding Kieran Tierney to smash

in off the underside of the bar just before half-time. Celtic have suffered a series of second-half slumps in recent weeks and Martin O'Neill would have been fearing the worst when Kyrill Wilson's fine finish brought Falkirk back into the game 20 minutes from time. However, Maeda settled Celtic's nerves when he slotted home in the 83rd minute from Sebastian Tounekti's low cross.

Hearts remain on top thanks to their superior goal difference and will look to pull clear again when they travel to local rivals Hibernian in the Edinburgh derby. Third-placed Rangers host Motherwell knowing a win will take them top, even if for just a few hours, before the game at Easter Road is over.

SPOTLIGHT

France's Cherif tops Diamond Round at Hathab Tour

By Sports Reporter
Doha

France's Cyrine Cherif delivered a composed performance to win the Diamond Round 150cm class during the eleventh round of the Longines Hathab - Qatar Equestrian Tour held at the main arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation yesterday.

Cherif guided Triple T Calamando Blue to a faultless finish in 31.48 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khaled al-Eid secured second place aboard Rakker Dmc in 32.11 seconds, while Qatar's Mohammed Saeed Haidan claimed third place riding Wathnan Stand By Me in 32.36 seconds. Speaking after her victory, Cherif said: "My horse was a bit slow today so I was cautious and stayed steady and it worked. I'm glad to have won but I would have been happy with any podium fin-



Cyrine Cherif guided Triple T Calamando Blue to a faultless finish in 31.48 seconds to win the Diamond Tour class during the 11th round of Hathab.

ish. My horse had too much to do through the season and the Doha Equestrian Tours. But yes, having won a Grand Prix at DET, even 1.50m now appears smaller when

I go into the arena." In the Bronze Tour 120cm, Qatar's Hussain Saeed Haidan claimed first place riding D Saucedo in 28.77 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khaled al-Hadi



Judges Irina Makanami and Mariam al-Jaidah presented the awards to winners of the dressage competitions.

finished second aboard Carlton de Sauvageonn in 29.33 seconds, while Kuwait's Annaz al-Annaz took third place with Be Bop de Lyons in 29.41 seconds. In the

Bronze Tour Teams event, Marwan Al Shaqab secured first place with a clear round in 61.93 seconds, followed by Ajwad in second place with 72.89 seconds, while Gazal Al

Shaqab finished third after incurring four faults in 63.70 seconds.

In the Future Riders 90cm class, Qatar's Salha Khalid al-Obaidli claimed first place riding Violet Van Het Koetshuis in 21.57 seconds. Alqaqaa Tamim al-Thani finished second aboard Bon Suela in 22.34 seconds, while Fahad Talal al-Naimi secured third place with Kroaat Van Orchid's in 23.05 seconds. Meanwhile, in the first dressage competitions, Sharifa Ahmed al-Ansari was crowned Amateur (Introductory Level) champion in Group 7 with a score of 70.119 points.

Georgina Roy Khan won the Introductory Level 2 title in Group 7 with 72.625 points, while Hamad Nasser al-Marri recorded 71.5 points to top the Junior category for the Introductory Level 2 test. Michelle Grimes also claimed first place in the Dressage Level 1 class in Group 7 with 70.425 points.

FOOTBALL

Barcelona on brink of La Liga triumph with Getafe win

'WE WILL CELEBRATE WHEN IT'S TIME, BUT NOT NOW'

AFP
Getafe, Spain

Fermin Lopez and Marcus Rashford's goals took Barcelona to the brink of the La Liga title with a 2-0 win at Getafe yesterday.

The defending champions moved 11 points clear of second place Real Madrid, who drew at Real Betis on Friday to dent their hopes of finishing the season with a trophy.

Hansi Flick's side can win their second consecutive Spanish title if they overcome Osasuna next weekend and Real Madrid fail to beat Espanyol.

"It's not done, we have five more games and we're only focused on the next one," Flick told reporters. "We will celebrate when it's time, but not now."

Barcelona were without vital injured wingers Lamine Yamal and Raphinha but still did enough to see off Jose Bordalas's tricky side, sixth, in the Madrid suburbs.

"We were aware of what was going to happen here, we were going to have few chances and I think we played well, competing well defensively and putting away the chances we had," Lopez told Movistar.

"We know we've got a big advantage (in the title race) but even so, we can't relax, I know it's a cliché but it's the truth."

Getafe set out to disrupt Barcelona's rhythm with small fouls and Barca struggled to create many clear opportunities.

Flick opted for Swedish winger Roony Bardghji in place of Yamal and chose Lopez on the left over Rashford.

Dani Olmo made the first with a neat dribble, speeding into Getafe territory, but pulled his shot wide

of the far post. Eventually the hosts made the breakthrough just before half-time when Pedri played in Lopez.

Wearing a protective mask after hurting his face in a collision with Atletico Madrid goalkeeper Juan Musso during Barcelona's Champions League quarter-final elimination last week, Lopez stayed calm to slot home.

The midfielder imitated Yamal's usual "304" celebration in tribute to the injured teenage star.

"The truth is he's really important for us, it's a shame that he can't play any more, but the important thing is that he recovers well and is ready for the World Cup," added Lopez.

With Getafe needing to come out of their shell to find an equaliser, Barca had more opportunities after the break.

David Soria saved from Olmo after he met Jules Kounde's cross, and then the French defender headed a Joao Cancelo ball narrowly off-target.

Martin Satriano threatened for the hosts before Rashford, on loan from Manchester United, secured Barcelona's triumph.

Robert Lewandowski sent the England international charging through on goal and he slipped a low effort past Soria to help Barca put one hand on the trophy.

"Marcus, in the second half he came on and used the space they gave us," said Flick.

"I'm happy that we scored this goal for the team and also for him."

Getafe goalkeeper Soria acknowledged Barca were clinical enough to clinch victory.

"They were very efficient, you give away two chances and they score them both," he said.

"It's a shame to have gone in behind at half-time because it puts you in a difficult spot."



Barcelona's Marcus Rashford celebrates scoring their second goal with team-mate Fermin Lopez during the La Liga match against Getafe yesterday. (Reuters)

BUNDESLIGA

Bayern storm back to beat Mainz ahead of PSG clash



Bayern Munich's Jamal Musiala celebrates scoring the equaliser during the Bundesliga match against Mainz yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Berlin

Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich stormed back from three goals down to win 4-3 at Mainz yesterday, ahead of their Champions League semi-final first leg at Paris Saint-Germain.

After wrapping up another Bundesliga title last weekend and with an eye on Tuesday's trip to the French capital, Bayern coach Vincent Kompany made sweeping changes to his team. Mainz took advantage and cut through Bayern to lead 3-0 at half-time thanks to goals from Dominik Kohr, Paul Nebel and Sheraldo Becker.

Bayern introduced Harry Kane and Michael Olise for the second half and then also brought on Jamal Musiala, turning the match on its head.

Nicolas Jackson ignited the comeback before Olise and Musiala struck to bring Bayern level. Kane's 33rd league goal of the season with seven minutes to go won it for the visitors.

"What went wrong in the first half? Everything. But in the second half, we accepted the fight," Kompany told reporters. "We're already champions and you could imagine the team being OK with a 3-0, 3-1 defeat, but that wasn't the case. We celebrated like we saved ourselves from relegation."

With most of the team that started Wednesday's 2-0 German Cup semi-final win over Bayer Leverkusen on the bench, Mainz broke the deadlock when

Kohr scored from close range after a scuffed clearance from Bayern goalkeeper Jonas Urbig.

Mainz doubled their lead just before the half-hour mark, Nebel tapping in a rebound. The hosts added a third moments before the break through Becker.

But Kompany's decision to throw on his attacking stars swung the game in Bayern's favour. Jackson turned in a Konrad Laimer cross and Olise scored with a superb curling effort from the edge of the box to cut the deficit to 3-2. Olise set up Musiala to equalise, with the German midfielder then laying one on for Kane to put Bayern ahead and seal a remarkable comeback. Elsewhere, Patrik Schick bagged a brace as Leverkusen downed derby rivals Cologne 2-1 away to keep their top-four hopes alive. The win took Leverkusen a point behind Stuttgart, who play Werder Bremen today.

The Czech striker converted a penalty late in the opening half before adding another after the break, turning in a Nathan Tella pass to finish off a length-of-the-field counter. Schick, who now has six goals in his past five league games and seven in his past eight clashes against Cologne, praised his team's fight.

"This win was really important for us. We need points and we're fighting for the Champions League. It wasn't perfect today, but we're happy with the three points," Schick told DAZN.

Heidenheim kept their slim hopes of evading the drop alive, beating relegation rivals St Pauli 2-0 at home courtesy of goals from Zivivadze and Dinkici.

FOCUS

Al Ahli beat Machida Zelvia to retain Asian Champions League title

AFP
Jeddah

Al Ahli became the first club in more than two decades to win back-to-back Asian Champions League titles when they overcame Japan's Machida Zelvia 1-0 in extra time in Jeddah yesterday.

The defending champions, who 12 months ago defeated Kawasaki Frontale to claim a first continental crown, retained the trophy thanks to substitute Feras al-Buraikan's 96th-minute finish in front of 58,984 people at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium - the Saudi Arabians' home ground.

Al Ahli had been reduced to 10 men midway through the second half when defender Zakaria Hawasawi was shown a straight red for

violent conduct. Al Buraikan's goal ensured Al Ahli are the first team to successfully defend Asia's premier club trophy since city rivals Al Ittihad in 2005. The win sees the Saudi Pro League side qualify for both the Fifa Intercontinental Cup later this year and the 2029 Fifa Club World Cup, the second edition of the expanded competition won last summer by English Premier League side Chelsea.

For the second year running, Jeddah staged the eight-team centralised finals series of the competition, rebranded last year as the Asian Champions League Elite. Al Ahli nearly took the lead against tournament debutants Machida on 13 minutes, when Galeno, the standout player of the knockout stages, raced free of the Japanese defence.

However, the Brazilian's shot



Al Ahli players celebrate after retaining the AFC Champions League Elite title in Jeddah yesterday.

was saved expertly by goalkeeper Kosei Tani. Three minutes before half time, Al Ahli defender Merih Demiral had an attempt blocked on the line before sending his rebound against the Machida cross-

bar. Al Ahli's bid for successive titles suffered a blow on 68 minutes, when Hawasawi thrust his head into Machida forward Tete Yengi and the referee was left with no option but to issue the straight

red. Machida, seeking to become the first club since 2014 to win the Asian Champions League at the first attempt, almost made the numerical advantage count immediately, only for Al Ahli goalkeeper

Edouard Mendy to push away Hiroyuki Mae's shot from distance.

The former Chelsea star, who earlier this year lifted the Africa Cup of Nations trophy before Senegal were stripped of the title, then denied Yuki Soma.

As tempers frayed, Al Ahli had Mohammed Abdulrahman sent off from the substitute's bench.

Yet Al Ahli still found a way through. Six minutes into extra-time, Riyad Mahrez floated a cross to the back post, Franck Kessie inadvertently cushioned the ball, and Al Buraikan poked home from close range. It represented the first goal Machida conceded in four knockout matches.

Galeno had a chance at the death after an Al Ahli break but lashed over. It mattered little, though, as Matthias Jaissle's side held on to secure consecutive Asian titles.