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CRICKET | Page 2

Rinku stars as
Kolkata edge
Lucknow in
Super Over



QSL | Page 4

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Monday, April 27, 2026
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GULF TIMES SPORT



MOTORSPORT

Alex Marquez wins
Spanish MotoGP to
end Bezzecchi streak

Page 3

ASIAN BEACH GAMES

Qatar handball team in semi, Younousse-Tijan advance

Qatar's Younousse-Tijan defeated compatriots Ehab-Abu Mousa in straight sets to enter quarter-finals



Qatar's handball team defeated Thailand 2-0 at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, yesterday.

By Sport Reporter
Doha

Qatar's beach handball team has qualified for the semi-finals of the 2026 Asian Beach Games in Sanya after defeating Thailand 2-0 (26-20, 22-20) yesterday.

The win secured Qatar top spot in Group B with 12 points, following a close contest between the two sides, who entered the match level on 10 points from five wins each.

The victory underlined Qatar's dominance in the group stage, as they beat their closest rivals for top spot to maintain a perfect run and strengthen their position heading into the knockout rounds.

Qatar opened their campaign with wins over Pakistan and Oman, before extending their streak against Bangladesh and Mongolia, and then defeating Jordan in their fifth match.

They conclude their first-round fixtures against the Maldives today, with the semi-finals scheduled for tomorrow. The final will be held on Thursday, as Qatar aim to maintain their momentum and defend their title.

Qatar's top beach volleyball team of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan qualified for the quarter-finals of the Games after defeating compatriots Mohamed Ehab and Abu Mousa al-Khair in straight sets (21-10, 21-16) in an all-Qatari round-of-16 clash.

In today's quarter-finals, the duo will face China, who advanced after beating Thailand 2-1. The Qatari pair will aim to maintain their strong form and progress to the final stages.

The team topped Group B with a perfect record, securing three consecutive wins against the Maldives and Uzbekistan before concluding the first round with a 2-1 victory over Iran (21-11, 21-23, 15-13).

Qatar are competing in the

beach volleyball event with four teams, two men's and two women's, highlighting the sport's growing development at the continental level.

Meanwhile, Qatar's men's 3x3 basketball team concludes its first-round campaign at the Games with a crucial match against India today. The team aims to secure top spot in the group and maintain momentum ahead of the knockout stages.

Qatar entered the match in high spirits after a strong start, recording back-to-back wins over Bahrain and Kazakhstan. Their performances highlighted strong technical and physical readiness, a fast-paced style of play, and efficient finishing in attack.

The women's team will play their second group match against Kazakhstan, looking to bounce back from an opening defeat to China. The players aim to improve performance and gain valuable experience in the continental competition.



President of the Olympic Council of Asia, HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, presented medals to the top three finishers in the women's 4x60m relay at the 6th Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026 in China yesterday. Thailand won gold with a strong performance, the Philippines took silver, and China secured bronze. Sheikh Joaan congratulated the athletes, praising their skill and fair play, and highlighting the Olympic values uniting Asian competitors. He also commended the organising committee for delivering a successful continental event.

Qatar wrestling team
arrive in Sanya

Qatar's men's wrestling team arrived in Sanya yesterday to take part in the Games. The squad immediately began training to acclimatise and sharpen readiness ahead of competition. The team features Saad al-Hammadi (80kg) and Hamad al-Nuaimi (70kg), who continue preparations for their respective events.

The wrestlers are scheduled to compete on Tuesday, aiming to deliver strong performances that reflect the sport's development in Qatar and gain experience against some of the continent's top competitors.

China continue to top the medal table at the Games, reaching 28 medals (13 gold, 11 silver, 4 bronze), underlining their dominance across multiple sports.

Thailand remained second with 12 medals (4 gold, 5 silver, 3 bronze), while the Philippines sit third with 7 medals (3 gold, 2 silver, 2 bronze).



Qatar's Cherif Younousse-Ahmed Tijan and Mohamed Ehab-Abu Mousa al-Khair in action in their round of 16 beach volleyball match yesterday. Younousse-Tijan won 21-10, 21-16.

FOCUS

Qatar steps up preparations for GCC Games Doha 2026

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Preparations for the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 have entered an advanced stage, with organising committees intensifying their efforts as the countdown begins for the highly anticipated regional event, scheduled from May 11 to 22.

These comprehensive preparations underline a strong commitment to delivering an exceptional edition of the Games - one that highlights Qatar's established excellence in sports and event management, while reaffirming its proven capability to host major regional and international competitions to the highest global standards.

All committees are working in close coordination to finalise logistical, technical, and organisational aspects, ensuring a seamless and memorable experience for

athletes and spectators alike. The Games will feature elite athletes from across the Gulf Cooperation Council nations, competing in 19 sports.

These include handball, table tennis, athletics, squash, padel, fencing, boxing, taekwondo, karate, swimming, billiards, snooker, basketball (5x5 and 3x3), shooting, archery, volleyball, equestrian, and bowling - reflecting the diversity of competition and enhancing both the sporting spectacle and fan engagement.

In this regard, Mohammed Issa al-Fadala, Chairman of the Sports Committee, confirmed that technical preparations are progressing according to a carefully structured plan designed to ensure every competition is staged at the highest possible level.

He noted that the committee is committed to creating the ideal environment for athletes by preparing venues to international standards and coordinating



Mohammed Issa al-Fadala

closely with sports federations to provide a world-class competitive atmosphere.

For her part, Eman al-Emadi, Chairwoman of the Services Committee, said the work is continuing around the clock to deliver a seamless experience for all delegations.



Eman al-Emadi

She said: "We are focusing on every detail related to transportation, accommodation, and hospitality, while striving to provide smooth and distinguished services that reflect Qatar's renowned hospitality and ensure the comfort of all participants throughout the Games."

Speaking on the occasion, Salah al-Saadi, Chairman of the Venues Committee, stressed the readiness of the sporting facilities, saying: "All venues have been fully prepared to the highest specifications, with operational testing carried out to ensure complete efficiency and to deliver an integrated organizational experience for this Gulf event."

In turn, Sheikh Abdullah bin Saoud al-Thani, Chairman of the Marketing and Communications Committee, confirmed that promotional activities for the Games have already begun.

He explained that the marketing strategy aims to boost spectator attendance and deepen engagement with the event through innovative campaigns that highlight the importance and history of the Games, while also showcasing the athletes who will compete.

The organising committee is overseeing the competitions in accordance with the high-

est technical and organizational standards across 10 state-of-the-art sporting venues, including Aspire Dome, the Women's Sports Hall, the Hamad Aquatic Centre, Qatar Sports Club, the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, the Qatar Billiards and Snooker Federation Hall, Al Gharafa Sports Club, the Lusail Shooting Range, the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, the Qatar Bowling Federation Hall, and Al Duhail Sports Hall, ensuring a world-class hosting experience worthy of the scale of the event.

Earlier, the organizing committee unveiled the official emblem of the Games, inspired by the palm tree, one of the most deeply rooted symbols of Gulf heritage and identity.

The choice reflects the shared values that unite Gulf societies, including resilience, endurance, generosity, patience, and a profound connection to the land.

PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE

Hyderabad Kingsmen seal playoffs spot

Agencies
Karachi

Hyderabad Kingsmen thumped Rawalpindiz by 108 runs to displace Lahore Qalandars from the fourth spot on the points table based on better net run rate as they defended their mammoth 244-6 total here at the National Bank Stadium, Karachi yesterday afternoon.

Australian all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, Usman Khan and Kusal Perera's blazing half-centuries took Kingsmen to a total well beyond the 200-run mark as they were required to win by at least 86 runs and overtake Qalandars.

In turn, pacer Hunain Shah proved to be the difference as he bagged T20 career best 4-22 after Rawalpindiz were cruising at 56-1 in 5.2 overs.

With 245 needed to win their second game of the tournament, the Rawalpindiz could have still ended Kingsmen's journey in the tournament if they scored 159 or more but fell for 136 all out in 17.1

overs losing seven for 42 in 7.2 overs. Usman Khawaja, who remained 66 not out off 43 balls hitting nine fours, couldn't find any stable partners after walking in to bat in the second over with the fall of Shahzaib Khan to Akif Javed. Khawaja and Rizwan collected 43 runs off 22 balls to scare the Kingsmen but not to be.

Player of the match Hunain created impact straightaway in his first over as he removed Mohammad Rizwan (26, 15b, 4x4s) and castled Kamran Ghulam for a duck in a space of three balls.

At this juncture, Sam Billings (23, 12b, 1x4, 2x6s) and Khawaja again threatened Kingsmen's hopes with a fluent 38-run stand, which included two sixes and as many fours.

Akif induced a false shot off Billings after getting hit for a six and began the rot in Rawalpindiz batting at 94-4 in 10 overs.

Akif then got rid of the dangerous Dian Forrester in the 12th over after which wickets fell at regular intervals with Rawalpindiz losing five for 34. Akif picked up three for 38, while Mohammad Ali and

Glenn Maxwell picked up one wicket each.

Earlier, Kingsmen came out all guns blazing after they were asked to bat first and were faced with the challenge of posting a mammoth total on the board. Following skipper Marnus Labuschagne's (5, 5b, 1x4) early departure, Maaz Sadaqat (28, 11b, 5x4s, 1x6) and Usman Khan brisk 54-runs stand to take 64 runs off the first five overs.

Saim Ayub (12, 5b, 1x4, 1x6) then launched a six and a four in last over of powerplay as Kingsmen found themselves 78-2 in six overs. Usman, who contributed a fiery 54 off 26 balls, hit four fours and as many sixes in his outing.

Saad Masood struck twice at the start of ninth over to remove Usman and Muhammad Irfan Khan to leave Kingsmen 119-5.

With the innings on crossroads, top-scorer Maxwell (70, 37b, 8x4s, 3x6s) and Perera (50 not out, 30b, 5x4s, 1x6) came together to put on a game-changing partnership of 108 off 59 balls.

Before falling on the first ball of last over, Maxwell unleashed fury on Rawalpindiz bowling attack

as he hit Sears for a six and four in 11th over and two fours in 18th over, Amir for three fours in 17th over and Amad Butt for two consecutive maximums in 19th over. It was his 59th T20 half-century.

Perera brought up his third HBL PSL fifty and played a supportive knock. Hassan Khan closed the innings in emphatic manner hitting Forrester for a four and two sixes on the last three balls as he finished with 16 off four.

In the day's inconsequential match yesterday, Islamabad United beat Multan Sultans by four wickets as the PSL phase wrapped up before the playoffs.

BRIEF SCORES
Hyderabad Kingsmen 244 for 6 (Maxwell 70, Usman Khan 54*, Masood 2-34) **beat Rawalpindiz 136 all out** (Khawaja 66*, Hunain 4-22, Javed 3-38) **by 108 runs**

BRIEF SCORES
Islamabad United 193 for 6 (Chapman 69*, Shadab 36, Akram 2-41) **beat Multan Sultans 192 for 7** (Masood 44, Arafat 21, Imad 1-23) **by four wickets**



Hyderabad Kingsmen players celebrate a wicket during their PSL win against Rawalpindiz yesterday.

CRICKET

Rinku and Narine sparkle for KKR in win over LSG

'THE ENTIRE TEAM BACKED ME TO BOWL THE SUPER OVER'

Reuters
Lucknow

Kolkata Knight Riders beat Lucknow Super Giants in the shortest Super Over in Indian Premier League history yesterday, needing just one ball to seal victory after Lucknow tied the game with a last-ball six.

Lucknow, chasing 156 for victory after Rinku Singh's unbeaten 83 in the middle order guided Kolkata to a competitive total, stumbled until they needed seven runs off the last ball of the innings.

With Mohammed Shami on strike, the Indian fast bowler smashed Kartik Tyagi's final delivery over long off to tie the match and send it into a Super Over.

However, the Super Over proved to be a masterclass from Kolkata's spinner Sunil Narine, the 37-year-old dismantling Lucknow's batting in devastating fashion while conceding one run.

The experienced all-rounder dismissed fellow West Indian Nicholas Pooran off the first ball when he was bowled before Aiden Markram was caught in the deep off the third ball as Lucknow posted 1-2 in three balls.

"The entire team backed me to bowl the Super Over, so I think once everyone said the same thing, it was pretty easy," Narine said.

"Obviously bowling first, you



Kolkata Knight Riders' Sunil Narine celebrates after taking the wicket of Lucknow Super Giants' Nicholas Pooran during the super over in Lucknow yesterday. (Reuters)

could relax a little more, even though it's not a much of a relaxing place to be!"

With Lucknow in tatters, Rinku came in to bat again for Kolkata and wasted no time in settling the contest, smashing a boundary off the first ball to give Kolkata the win.

The result moved Kolkata up to eighth in the standings while

Lucknow are bottom with two wins from eight games. I think we definitely need a break. I think we're going to refresh. There is always pressure," Lucknow skipper Rishabh Pant said after they lost their fifth straight game.

"But, at the same time, we have to look (for) answers inside, not outside, and just keep it simple. Just take accountability, each and

every guy ... A lot of people will take accountability for that, for sure."

BRIEF SCORES
Kolkata Knight Riders 155 for 7 (Rinku 83*, Green 34, Mohsin 5-23) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 155 for 8** (Pant 42, Markram 31, Arora 2-24, Varun 2-33) **via Super Over**

SPOTLIGHT

Rabada's brilliant spell of 3-25 helps Gujarat thrash Chennai in IPL

AFP
Chennai, India

South Africa's Kagiso Rabada led a disciplined attack with figures of 3-25 to help Gujarat Titans hammer Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets in the IPL yesterday.

Pace bowler Rabada struck twice in his second over to set the tone for his team's domination as they restricted Chennai to 158-7 at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. Sai Sudharsan hit 87 off 46 balls to spare as they bounced back after two defeats to move to fifth spot in the 10-team table.

The top four teams at the end of the league stage will advance to the playoffs. Sudharsan and Shubman Gill, who made 33, laid the foundation of the chase with a 58-run opening stand.

Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad struck in the seventh over to have Gill stumped thanks to Sanju Samson's quick glovework as he removed the bails with the batters' foot centimetres off the ground.

Sudharsan stood firm and put on a partnership of 97 with Jos Buttler, who made an unbeaten

39. Dewald Brevis took a stunning catch in the deep to dismiss Sudharsan off Akeal Hosein with Gujarat needing four for victory and Buttler then hit the winning six.

Rabada was ably supported by fellow quick Mohammed Siraj (1-23) to dent Chennai with regular strikes despite an unbeaten 74 by skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad.

Rabada stood out with his pace and accuracy that first got the inform Samson caught behind for 11 and three balls later dismissed Urvil Patel for four.

Siraj got Sarfaraz Khan, who came in as impact substitute, for a first-ball duck and the batting slipped further when Brevis departed for two.

Gaikwad played a defiant knock and reached his first fifty of the season with help from Shivam Dube, who made 22, Kartik Sharma (15) and Jamie Overton (18).

But the effort was not enough as Chennai suffered their fifth defeat in eight matches.

BRIEF SCORES
Gujarat Titans 162 for 2 (Sai Sudharsan 87, Buttler 39*, Noor 1-29) **beat Chennai Super Kings 158 for 7** (Gaikwad 74*, Rabada 3-25, Arshad 2-43) **by 8 wickets**



Gujarat Titans' Kagiso Rabada (second left) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Chennai Super Kings' Urvil Patel during the IPL match in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

CYCLING

Pogacar cracks Seixas to win 4th Liege-Bastogne-Liege in spectacular fashion



Decathlon CMA-CGM Team's French rider Paul Seixas (right) and UAE Team Emirates-XRG's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar shake hands as they celebrate on the podium after the men's elite race of the Liege-Bastogne-Liege UCI World Tour one day cycling race, 259.5km from Liege, over Bastogne to Liege, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Liege, Belgium

World champion Tadej Pogacar won a third straight Liege-Bastogne-Liege yesterday after a thrilling battle with teenage French sensation Paul Seixas.

Pogacar romped to his 13th Monument victory and fourth in total at La Doyenne after finally cracking Seixas with 14km to ride of the 260km slog through the Ardennes, halfway up the last of 11 punchy climbs along the route.

Seixas came home 45 seconds later with Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel winning the sprint for third place from a large group 1min 42sec back.

"It means a lot to win again one of the biggest races of the year," Pogacar told Belgian television at the finish line.

In what was only his fifth race this year, Pogacar claimed a fourth victory - and three of those in Monuments - while his only blip was a second place behind Wout van Aert at Paris-

Roubaix two weeks ago. "I don't have a lot of opportunities to win because I don't race a lot," added Pogacar. "So it's a lot of pressure for me to deliver on days like today.

"I'm really, really happy that we succeeded. I couldn't be more proud of the team."

But in 19-year-old Seixas, he now has a rival seemingly capable of pushing him to the limit.

"On the Redoute (climb) I was really going deep and I could see that Seixas was a little bit on the elastic," said Pogacar. "But on the top, he came next to me and I was like, okay, really impressed."

At that point, he expected Seixas to stay with him to the finish.

"Maybe in the back of my head, I was already preparing to do a duel sprint because he was so strong. But I tried on (the) Roche-aux-Faucons (climb), I tried to keep my pace... It suits me super well and luckily he dropped. But I was prepared to go head-to-head in a sprint with him."

It was Seixas's first attempt at Liege and only his second ever Monument race having finished a distant seventh behind Pogacar at last October's Tour of Lombardy.

"There wasn't much in it, that was my first Liege, I wanted to give everything and that's what I did," said Seixas. "In the end, Tadej was stronger. I was already on the limit at the top of La Redoute... I was feeling dizzy. After that I took my turn to pull, I said to myself 'let's see how it pans out at the end of the race'. He attacked again on La Roche-aux-Faucons, I wasn't far off going over the top with him!"

But having won the Fleche Wallonne build-up race on Wednesday, Seixas continues to prove with every outing that he is Pogacar's heir apparent.

VOLLERING WINS WOMEN'S LIGE-BASTOGNE-LIEGE FOR 3RD TIME
European champion Demi Vollering won her third Liege-Bastogne-Liege one-day classic after a solo breakaway 35km from the finish yesterday.

Dutch compatriot Puck Pieterse won the sprint for second place in the year's fourth Monument race, some 1min 29sec back with Pole Katarzyna Niewiadoma-Phinney taking third.

SAWE MAKES HISTORY WITH FIRST SUB-TWO-HOUR MARATHON IN LONDON

LONDON: Sebastian Sawe made history yesterday by becoming the first athlete to run a sub-two-hour marathon as Tigst Assefa smashed her own women's-only world record on the streets of London. Kenya's Sawe came into the race predicting fireworks and delivered in spectacular style, crossing the line in 1hr 59min 30sec in a race for the ages. Astonishingly, the top three men all finished inside the previous men's world record of 2:00:35 set in Chicago in 2023 by the late Kelvin Kiptum. Defending London Marathon champion Sawe was locked in a tight battle with Ethiopia's Yomif Kejelcha in the closing stages but surged clear. Kejelcha, running his first-ever marathon, notched a time of 1:59:41 - the fastest debut ever - with Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo third (2:00:28). A delighted Sawe said he went into the race, run in warm spring weather, believing he could break the two-hour mark. "I've made history today in London, and for the new generation (it shows) to run a record is possible," said the 31-year-old, whose winning time was scribbled on his

shoe. "It depends on the preparation you had and the discipline you had, so for me I think I have shown them that nothing is impossible. Everything is possible with a matter of time." Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge ran 1:59:40 in October 2019, becoming the first person in recorded history to complete a sub-two-hour marathon. But the time was not ratified as a world record because he ran with specialised shoes, standard competition rules for pacing and fluids were not followed, and it was not an open event. Sawe, wearing Adidas's new Pro Evo 3 supershoe, which weighs less than 100 grams, suggested in the lead-up to yesterday's race that a course record or even a world record was in his sights. He led a group of six, which also included Olympic champion Tamirat Tola and half-marathon world-record holder Kiplimo as they passed the halfway point in a time of 1:00:29. The leading sextet later began to string out and Sawe and Kejelcha pulled clear, staying in lockstep until the final stages. Sawe made his move with one mile remaining, finally breaking clear of Kejelcha, who was also

wearing the new Adidas shoes, and pressing on alone, taking 65 seconds off the previous world record. Kipchoge praised his compatriot, posting on social media that it was a "historical day for marathon running". "Seeing two athletes break the magical two-hour barrier at the London Marathon is the proof that we are just at the beginning of what is possible when talent, progress and an unwavering belief in the human potential come together," he said. Kenya's President William Ruto said Sawe had "redrawn the limits of human endurance". "This is more than a win," he tweeted. "It is a defining moment. Your triumph places you firmly among the greats of global athletics and reaffirms Kenya as an enduring force at the pinnacle of distance running."

ASSEFA OUTPACES OBIRI
In the women's race, reigning Olympic and world silver medalist Assefa was locked in a three-way tussle with Kenyan pair Hellen Obiri and Joyciline Jepkosgei, but surged away in the closing stages to cross the line in a time of 2:15:41. That time beat by nine seconds



Winners of the men's and women's elite races, Kenya's Sebastian Sawe (left) and Ethiopia's Tigst Assefa pose with the Chris Brasher Sporting Life Trophy at the presentation ceremony at the 2026 London Marathon in central London yesterday. (AFP)

the Ethiopian's previous best, set on the same course last year. "I'm so happy to win again," said the 29-year-old, who also wore the new footwear. "To repeat my victory from last year means even more. The happiness I feel is just swelling up inside me. "It was one of my plans really

coming into this competition to break my own world record from last year's race. So to do that has brought me a lot of satisfaction." Obiri, a two-time former world 5,000m champion who won marathon bronze at the 2024 Paris Olympics, came in second in a personal best of 2:15:53.

She finished just two-hundredths of a second ahead of compatriot Jepkosgei. The world record set in a mixed race where female athletes benefit from male pacemakers was by Kenya's now-banned Ruth Chepngetich, who clocked 2:09:56 at the Chicago Marathon in October 2024.

MOTOGP

Alex Marquez wins Spanish Grand Prix again

Championship points leader Marco Bezzecchi finishes second

Reuters
Jerez, Spain

Alex Marquez turned his 250th Grand Prix start into a late birthday gift by winning the Spanish Grand Prix for the second straight year yesterday while watching his brother and pole sitter Marc crash out in dramatic fashion.

The Gresini Racing rider, who celebrated his 30th birthday on Thursday, started fifth on the grid but quickly moved up to overtake his elder sibling before stretching clear for victory.

Marc's quest for a milestone 100th Grand Prix win across all classes came to an abrupt end on lap two when he lost control at turn 11, crashing out while chasing down his younger brother and stunning the home crowd.

"Not many words to describe this moment, we struggled a lot at the beginning of the year," Alex said.

"Today, for me, it was clear - go from the first lap, pushing, trying to take the lead. From that moment, I knew that the rhythm was really good until the end."

Championship leader Marco Bezzecchi finished second for Aprilia after failing to reel in the flying Alex over 25 laps, while VR46 Racing's Fabio di Giannantonio completed the podium to move up to third in the championship standings.

Marc's crash now leaves the reigning champion 44 points behind Bezzecchi in the championship hunt, as a first Jerez victory since 2019 remains elusive.



Gresini Racing MotoGP's Alex Marquez celebrates after the Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera, yesterday. (AFP)

ALEX UNBEATABLE IN DRY CONDITIONS

Marc had clinched his first pole of the season before winning a chaotic sprint despite a crash in rainy conditions on Saturday, but bright sunshine welcomed the riders at the Circuito de Jerez yesterday. Alex, who had been unbeatable in dry conditions at Jerez with a 2025 setup on his Ducati, made a perfect getaway from fifth on the grid.

After Marc got the jump from pole and Bezzecchi slotted in behind from the second row, Alex quickly pushed the Italian down to third before taking the lead

from his brother with a dive on the inside. As the elder Marquez brother chased him, his race unravelled spectacularly on lap two when he lost the front end and crashed at turn 11, much to the dismay of the Spanish crowd.

That moved Bezzecchi up to second but the Italian had his work cut out trying to close the gap as Alex continued to stretch his advantage to more than a second. Behind the leading duo, Di Giannantonio split the two Aprilias by pushing Jorge Martin down to fourth.

BOTH DUCATIS FAIL TO FINISH
Ducati had celebrated a one-two

in Saturday's sprint but yesterday's race came to a premature end for the Italian outfit when Francesco Bagnaia retired with a technical problem. The factory Ducati team have now gone nine races without a Grand Prix podium - their longest drought since 2014. But up front, it was all about Alex as he urged the crowd to increase their volume on the final lap - just as he did last year - before crossing the finish line and heading straight to the fans to soak up their adulation.

"We struggled a bit all weekend, so it wasn't easy and we made a good performance. I'm very happy," said Bezzecchi.

TENNIS

Sinner advances, Gauff overcomes stomach bug



Italy's Jannik Sinner returns the ball to Denmark's Elmer Moller during the Madrid Open third round match at the Caja Magica in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Madrid

Jannik Sinner continued his quest to become the first man in history to win five Masters 1000 tournaments in a row with a smooth 6-2, 6-3 victory over Danish qualifier Elmer Moller at the Madrid Open yesterday.

The world number one extended his winning streak to 19 matches, a run that began early March in Indian Wells, and he has also captured 24 consecutive victories at the Masters 1000 level, dating back to the Paris Masters last October.

Searching for a maiden title at this level on clay, Sinner advanced to the round of 16 at the Caja Magica with a 77-minute performance against the 169th-ranked Moller.

The Italian broke Moller four times and dropped serve just once late in the opening set to book a last-16 meeting with Cameron Norrie or Thiago Agustín Tirante.

"I tried to stay calm, trying to serve well in the important moments," Sinner told *Tennis TV* on court after the win.

"I think today that was the key. And not a lot of rhythm, so I tried to stay quite compact and let's see what's coming in the next round."

Another Italian enjoyed a successful yesterday in the form of Lorenzo Musetti, who overcame Dutch 29th seed Tallon Griekspoor 6-4, 7-5.

The sixth-seeded Musetti will face Czech 11th seed Jiri Lehecka for a spot in the quarter-finals.

UNWELL GAUFF SICK ON COURT

Earlier in the day, Coco Gauff became the latest victim of the stomach virus that has been sweeping through the draw in Madrid but the ailing American still found a way to beat Sorana Cirstea 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 and reach the round of 16.

Several players have been struggling with illness in the Spanish capital this week, including Iga Swiatek, who was forced to retire from her match against Ann Li on Saturday, and Marin Cilic, who had to withdraw ahead of his second-round meeting with Joao Fonseca on Friday.

Liudmila Samsonova also pulled out of the tournament yesterday citing illness ahead of her third-



USA's Coco Gauff returns the ball to Romania's Sorana Cirstea. (AFP)

round match with Linda Noskova of Czechia.

Gauff vomited in a bin on the court during her clash with Cirstea, and asked for a medical timeout during the latter stages of the match before she completed the win in two hours and 21 minutes.

"Yeah, I don't know, honestly (how I got through that)," said Gauff, who will face Noskova in the last 16.

"I was just trying to finish the match and one point turned into another. I think I got what everybody else is having here in Madrid, unfortunately."

"So, I'm just going to try to push through for tomorrow."

A runner-up to Aryna Sabalenka in the Spanish capital 12 months ago, Gauff has 3,300 points to defend on clay from Madrid through to her Roland Garros title defence in early June.

"I pulled out in Indian Wells. I'm not someone who likes to pull out, so I didn't want to pull out again today. So, I'm glad that I was able to get through it," added the two-time Grand Slam champion.

"I did start to feel better, not feeling like I had to throw up. They gave me some pills, so that definitely helped. But I was really tired."

Fellow American Jessica Pegula was unable to join Gauff in the next round as the fifth seed suffered a 6-1, 6-4 upset at the hands of Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk.

Both players entered the contest riding six-match winning streaks, with Kostyuk clinching a title on red clay in Rouen last week and Pegula successfully defending her Charleston title on green clay earlier this month.

GOLF

Wiesberger wins first World Tour title in 1,792 days

AFP
Shanghai

Austria's Bernd Wiesberger beat Adrian Otaegui by three shots to win the China Open yesterday for his first DP World Tour title in five years.

Wiesberger scored a final-round four-under-par 67 to finish on 19 under at Shanghai Enhance Anting Golf Club and claim his ninth win on what was formerly the European Tour.

It was the 40-year-old's first victory on the tour since winning in Denmark in 2021 and came after going into the turn three shots behind the UAE's Otaegui.

An emotional Wiesberger said



Austria's Bernd Wiesberger poses with the trophy after winning the China Open in Shanghai yesterday. (AFP)

it had been "a tough couple of years" as he savoured his first victory on the DP World Tour in

1,792 days. "Unbelievable week, I played my heart out today," said the former Ryder Cup player,

tears in his eyes. "It wasn't pretty at times, but I got it done. Super proud of sticking through hard times on the golf course lately. This is for everyone at home. Couldn't be happier," he added.

Wiesberger was unruffled in what became a straight shootout between him and Otaegui. He carded four birdies - three of them on holes 10, 11 and 13 - against no bogeys in his flawless final round.

In contrast, Spain-born Otaegui's title charge faltered with bogeys on the 12th and 16th holes and he finished with a double bogey to sign off with a round of even-par 71.

Third was Sweden's Mikael Lindberg, two shots further back at 14 under, with South Africa's Shaun Norris another shot back.

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Al Sadd, Al Shamal set for title-deciding showdown

Al Shamal must deliver a standout performance against the 17-time champions for historic first-ever title

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sadd and Al Shamal are set for a decisive title showdown at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today, in the final round of the 2025-26 Qatar Stars League (QSL) season.

Separated by just two points - Al Sadd on 42 and Al Shamal on 40 - the clash is effectively a winner-takes-all encounter.

Al Shamal must deliver a standout performance to keep alive their hopes of securing a historic first-ever league title.

Al Sadd, meanwhile, will look to make full use of home advantage as they chase a third consecutive triumph and an 18th Qatar Stars League crown overall.

"We were five points ahead and now the gap has narrowed to two. Our focus is on achieving victory. We know the match will be very difficult because Al Shamal play good football, but our goal is to win this game," Al Sadd coach Roberto Mancini said yesterday.

"When I took over the team, we were eight points behind league leaders Al Gharafa and now we are in first place. I think we have done a very good job, thanks to our players, who possess great talent and high professionalism.

"We hope our fans will come to the stadium in large numbers because this is a very important match. We are playing for the title and we are waiting for them at the stadium," said the Italian coach.

Al Sadd star Roberto Firmino said, "Al Shamal are a very good team and they have shown throughout the season that they play excellent football. We are aware of the magnitude of the challenge.

"We have to focus on our own performance, give our best and strive for victory and, of course, the title. It will be a big match because we need to win and they also need to win to clinch the title. It is expected to be a special game. We hope to perform at our best, secure the three points, and lift the trophy."

While Al Sadd have gone from strength to strength in terms of



Al Sadd coach Roberto Mancini during a practice session on the eve of the QSL match against Al Shamal.

results in the league, Al Shamal floundered after being in a commanding situation as they lost to Umm Salal and Al Shahania.

Their protest against Qatar SC (after the postponed Week 17 game) was upheld by QFA's disciplinary committee and the three points fetched thereof saw them set up the title clash with Al Sadd.

With all to play for, Al Shamal coach David Prats underlined the fact, saying, "There is no doubt that the Al Sadd match is the most important match for us this season, in which we aspire to achieve our dream and make history by winning the league title for the

first time in Al Shamal's history.

"We are now facing a very important moment and we must be ready for it while not putting undue pressure on ourselves. Our task will certainly be difficult against a prestigious club and a great team like Al Sadd.

"I have great confidence in the Al Shamal players and their ability to shoulder the immense responsibility placed upon them. Everyone will exert his utmost effort to achieve the desired goal, bring joy to our fans and fulfil the ambitions of the club management," said Prats.

Al Shamal player Mohammed Waad said, "The Al Sadd match is



Al Shamal's Baghdad Bounedjah (centre) and teammates during a training session yesterday.

difficult and extremely important. We have a tremendous opportunity to make history by winning the league title for the first time in Al Shamal's history.

"We want to make history in the most significant way, especially since our opponent is a very strong team and a club with a history of championships. I have previously won six or seven titles with Al Sadd."

Meanwhile today, as many as four teams - Al Shahania (20pts), Umm Salal (20pts), Al Saliya (22pts) and Al Ahli (23pts) will be playing their respective matches looking to gain maximum points to steer away from the danger of

finishing twelfth. Al Shahania face Al Gharafa at the Al Bayt Stadium, who having lost their chance in the race for the title are now looking to secure a top-four finish amidst competition from other teams. Umm Salal and Al Ahli will clash at Stadium 974.

It is an all-to-play for game for either sides given their battles to rise higher in the standings and escape relegation.

Al Ahli are currently in ninth place in the standings with 23 points, and aiming for a positive result to secure their position and avoid any complicated scenarios.

Meanwhile, Umm Salal, in second last and 11th place with 20

points are in a do-or-die situation needing a win to keep their hopes of staying in the league and avoiding relegation play-off. Their fate also depends on results of the other teams competing in the relegation zone.

TODAY'S FIXTURES

5.15pm: Umm Salal vs Al Ahli (at 974 Stadium); Al Rayyan vs Al Arabi (at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium); Al Gharafa vs Al Shahania (at Al Bayt Stadium); Al Wakrah vs Al Saliya (at Al Thumama Stadium); Qatar SC vs Al Duhail (at Khalifa International Stadium).
7.30pm: Al Sadd vs Al Shamal (at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium)

SERIE A

Inter pegged back by Torino as title charge hits bump in road



Torino's Nikola Vlasic (centre) celebrates after scoring a goal during the Serie A match against Inter Milan at the Olympic Stadium Grande Torino in Turin yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Milan

Inter Milan's charge to the Serie A title was held up yesterday after throwing away a two-goal lead to only draw 2-2 at Torino, as Como kept up their bid for Champions League football. Leading just after the hour mark through two headed goals from Marcus Thuram and Yann Bisseck, Inter looked set to stroll to victory in Turin.

But Giovanni Simeone got Torino back into the match out of nowhere in the 70th minute when he dinked a finish over Yann Sommer, and Nikola Vlasic earned the hosts a point from the penalty spot

nine minutes later. Sunday's draw should only be a bump in the road for Inter who will secure a 21st league crown if they beat Parma at the San Siro next weekend.

With four games left in the season, Inter are 10 points ahead of their nearest challengers Napoli, who won the Scudetto last year. Cristian Chivu's side will be heavy favourites to seal the deal next weekend in front of their home support as Parma are a team with nothing left to play for this season.

Earlier, Como won 2-0 at Genoa and put pressure on Juventus in the race for a top four finish.

Headed goals in each half from Tasos Douvikas and Assane Diao gave Como a deserved victory at the Stadio Luigi Ferraris and

moved the ambitious lakeside outfit back into fifth, two points behind fourth-placed Juve.

Juventus face AC Milan at the San Siro in Sunday's headline fixture, with both teams trying to secure a place in Europe's elite club competition. The pressure will be on Juve as Roma, in sixth, are level on 61 points with Como whose win was a return to form after a difficult few weeks. Cesc Fabregas' team were at one point favourites for the final Champions League spot but a single point from their previous three matches allowed Juve to sneak in. Como, who have never played in European competition, also suffered a painful elimination from the Italian Cup at the hands of Inter Milan on Tuesday.

Sevilla suffer late blow, stay in Liga drop zone

Pamplona, Spain: Sevilla plunged deeper into danger of relegation from La Liga with a 2-1 defeat at Osasuna yesterday, while Elche picked up three vital points with a 2-1 win at Real Oviedo. Luis Garcia Plaza's Sevilla took the lead through Neal Maupay in the 69th minute but Raul Garcia pulled the hosts level and Alejandro Catena struck in stoppage time to deal a blow to the Andalucians' survival hopes. The seven-time Europa League winners are 18th, a point behind Mallorca in 17th, after the islanders lost at Alaves on Saturday.

"I have a knot in my throat," said Sevilla defender Gabriel Suazo. "We have to keep moving forward, we have to keep fighting, there are five finals left, and whoever gets to play - if it's me - I'm going to put my life on the line for this club." Elche moved up to 13th with their victory, three points above the drop zone, but are still looking nervously over their shoulders. Only six points separate Athletic Bilbao, 10th, from Sevilla, with the remaining five rounds of fixtures offering plenty of intrigue as to who will ultimately drop out of the top flight. The only side cut badly adrift are Oviedo, who are seven points from safety with only 15 left to play for.

Lille win to stay in Champions League hunt

Fourth-placed Lille secured a hard-fought 1-0 victory away to Paris FC yesterday to stay firmly in the race for an automatic Champions League place in Ligue 1. Belgian forward Matias Fernandez-Pardo converted a 26th-minute penalty after a foul on Romain Perraud, sending former Paris Saint-Germain goalkeeper Kevin Trapp the wrong way with his spot kick. The win puts Lille level on 57 points with third-placed Lyon, who beat Auxerre 3-2 on Saturday. However Lille will rue their narrow victory as they now have the same goal difference as Lyon, but the run-in favours Lille who will face lower-table clubs Le Havre and Auxerre. Lyon, on the other hand, still have to play Rennes, who are fifth and just a point behind and have their own European aspirations.

The top three teams in France earn Champions League places while the fourth-placed club goes into the qualifying rounds.

Metz staved off relegation for at least another week with an entertaining 4-4 draw away to Le Havre. Gauthier Hein proved to be Metz's saviour, scoring in the 85th minute to bring the scores level having earlier netted from the penalty spot.

FA CUP

Chelsea in final with win over Leeds

Reuters
London

Crisis-hit Chelsea beat Leeds United 1-0 at Wembley yesterday to reach the FA Cup final, a first-half goal from controversial Argentine midfielder Enzo Fernandez earning them a clash with Manchester City in the showpiece match next month.

Fernandez slipped between defenders to nod home a cross from Portugal winger Pedro Neto in the 23rd minute of the semi-final. Fernandez was suspended earlier this month by former coach Liam Rosenior and the club hierarchy for a press interview in which he implied he was unhappy at Chelsea and was looking to move to Spain.

The suspension came in the



Enzo Fernandez celebrates after Chelsea won FA Cup semi-final against Leeds United in London yesterday. (Reuters)

middle of a woeful run of five Premier League defeats for the London side amid reports of discontent among players with the inexperienced coach who had been in charge only since January. Chelsea's American owners BlueCo sacked Rosenior last

Wednesday after a woeful 3-0 defeat by Brighton & Hove Albion and his assistant Calum McFarlane was put in charge until the end of the season.

On Sunday Chelsea, who have won the Cup eight times, came out with renewed intent. They dominated the first half and held firm in the second after Leeds coach Daniel Farke's change of system and substitutions gave the Yorkshire side greater impetus. But Leeds, who have been fighting for survival in the Premier League for much of the season, could not turn their energy into goals. Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez pulled off fine saves in each half from Brenden Aaronson and Anton Stach but Leeds had few other chances.

"It's amazing. The boys reacted in the way they should have," Sanchez told TNT Sports.