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AMIR CUP

Mujica hat-trick fires Sadd past Shamal

Qatar Stars League champions to face fierce rivals Al Duhail in the semi-finals



Al Sadd's Rafa Mujica celebrates after completing his hat-trick against Al Shamal at Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd stormed into the Amir Cup semi-finals after edging Al Shamal 6-4 in a thrilling quarter-final clash at Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan. In one of the most entertaining matches of recent editions, Al Sadd raced to a 4-1 lead by half-time before surviving a spirited Al Shamal fightback in a 10-goal spectacle.

Veteran Hassan al-Haydos opened the scoring from the penalty spot after a retake, before Claudinho doubled the lead just two minutes later. Rafa Mujica then struck twice midway through the half to put Al Sadd firmly in control. Tamer Siam pulled one back for Al Shamal in first-half stoppage time.

Mujica completed his hat-trick early in the second half to make it 5-1, but Al Shamal responded through former Sadd star Baghdad Bounedjah, Jeison Murillo and Mohammed Omar to narrow the deficit to 5-4 heading into stoppage time. However, substitute Gilson sealed the win for Al Sadd with a late sixth goal as Al Shamal pushed for an equaliser. Al Sadd will now face Al Duhail in the semi-finals.

Al Shamal, despite the defeat, impressed



Al Duhail booked their place in the last four with a commanding 4-0 victory over Al Arabi.

with a determined display and capped a historic season in which they finished runners-up in the Qatar Stars League and secured qualification for the AFC Champions League.

Earlier, Al Duhail booked their place in the last four with a commanding 4-0 victory over Al Arabi at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. Krzysztof Piatek struck twice inside the opening 18 minutes to put Al Duhail in control, finishing off chances created by

Sultan Al Buraik and Edmilson Junior. Benjamin Bourigeaud added a third in the 51st minute after a strong run by Almoez Ali, before Tahseen Mohammed wrapped up the scoring late on with an individual effort.

Al Wakrah also advanced to the semi-finals after defeating Al Rayyan 3-0 at Al Thumama Stadium. After withstanding early pressure, Al Wakrah took the lead in the 19th minute through a superb direct free kick from Lucas Mendes. Goalkeeper

Amir Cup final tickets on sale from today

Doha: Football fans across Qatar and the region can purchase tickets for the Amir Cup final at www.qfa.qa starting today at 1pm, with the country's most anticipated sporting event set to take place on May 9 at 5:30pm, at Khalifa International Stadium.

Now in its 54th edition, the Amir Cup brought together 20 clubs from across Qatar's first and second division to compete for the coveted trophy. Tickets will be available at www.qfa.qa in the following categories: CAT 1: QAR 50; CAT 2: QAR 30; CAT 3: QAR 10; Accessibility: QAR 10

Fans can purchase up to six tickets per person. Upon purchase, tickets will be made available on the Road to Qatar mobile app on May 7. Accessibility tickets can be requested at: accessibility.tickets@sc.qa.

The final will be complemented by a fan zone at Khalifa International Stadium, where attendees can enjoy a range of entertainment and cultural activities before and during the match. Fans are encouraged to arrive early to make the most of the fan zone experience and be in their seats ahead of kick-off.

Adding to the excitement, a selection of exclusive prizes will be up for grabs through a live prize draw held during the match. This year, Khalifa International Stadium marks 50 years since its inauguration in 1976. Located in Aspire Zone, the venue has served as the stage for some of the nation's greatest sporting occasions, including matches during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Mohammed al-Bakri played a key role in preserving the advantage with several crucial saves before the break. Amine Zahzouh doubled the lead in the 76th minute, and Gelson Dala added a third five minutes later to seal a comfortable win. Al Wakrah will meet Al Gharafa in the semi-finals.

Al Gharafa completed the semi-final line-up with a 2-1 victory over Umm Salal at Al Bayt Stadium. Umm Salal took an early lead through Michel Badu in the eighth minute, but Ahmed Al Janahi equalised shortly after. Ferjani Sassi then netted the winner, capitalising on a defensive lapse to give Al Gharafa the edge.

Both sides created chances in the second half, with Al Gharafa having a goal ruled out for offside, but the score remained unchanged as they secured their place in the last four.

Infantino to seek fourth term as FIFA president

Vancouver: FIFA President Gianni Infantino said that he planned to seek re-election for a fourth term in a bid to continue to lead the governing body of world football. Infantino confirmed he would run for the 2027-2031 term in the closing moments of the FIFA Congress in Vancouver, which comes less than two months before the start of the World Cup.

The election will be held on March 18 in Morocco, which is set to co-host the 2030 World Cup. Infantino said he was "honoured and humbled" to have the chance to run for a fourth term. The Italian-Swiss took office in 2016, replacing Sepp Blatter, and was re-elected unopposed in 2019 and 2023. Infantino has pushed for the expansion of FIFA competitions during his tenure, with this year's World Cup in North America the first to feature 48 teams, while the women's tournament in 2023 has been expanded to 32 teams.

Infantino's tenure has also drawn some criticism over issues such as high World Cup ticket prices and the decision to award the inaugural FIFA Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump at the World Cup draw in December. Earlier this month, the council of South American football's governing body (CONMEBOL) said in a statement it would unanimously support the 56-year old if he decided to seek another term.

FIFA TO REVIEW TICKET STRATEGY FOR 2030 WORLD CUP

FIFA said it will review its ticketing strategy for the 2030 World Cup following anger over skyrocketing prices for the 2026 finals. FIFA Secretary-general Mattias Grafstrom said high ticket prices for this year's tournament reflected "the reality of the market in North America."

"I will always have understanding for fans and their opinions, but I think there are quite a wide array of ticket prices - some are cheap, some are more expensive," he said. "But of course, you know, we listen, we take into the account the comments, and of course, as for every World Cup, we will review and see how we do it for the next one," Grafstrom added.

FIFA has faced searing criticism over soaring ticket prices for this year's World Cup, with fan organisation Football Supporters Europe (FSE) branding the pricing structure "extortionate" and a "monumental betrayal" of fans. FSE last month filed a lawsuit with the European Commission targeting FIFA over "excessive ticket prices" for the tournament.

FOCUS

Palestinian FA chief hits out at Israeli federation VP at FIFA Congress

Reuters
Vancouver

Palestinian football federation President Jibril Rajoub refused to stand alongside Israel FA Vice-President Basim Sheikh Suliman in a heated moment at the FIFA Congress on Thursday.

Both men were called to the stand by FIFA President Gianni Infantino but Rajoub declined to be brought closer to Arab-Israeli Suliman. Infantino put his hand on Rajoub's arm and invited him with a gesture to come closer to Suliman, but in vain.

Asked what Rajoub said when he refused, Palestinian FA Vice-President Susan Shalabi, who was in the room, said: "I cannot shake the hand of someone the Israelis have brought to whitewash their fascism and genocide. We are suffering."

Israel has denied committing genocide in Gaza. Infantino then took the stand and said: "We will work together, President Rajoub, Vice-President Suliman. Let's

work together to give hope to the children. These are complex matters."

Speaking after the Congress ended, Shalabi said Infantino's attempt to have Suliman and Rajoub shake hands showed little consideration for the Palestinian FA chief's speech, in which he made yet another plea for Israeli clubs not to base teams in the West Bank settlements.

"To be put in a position where to have a handshake after everything that was said, this negates the whole purpose of the speech that the general (Rajoub) was giving," she said. "He spent like 15 minutes trying to explain to everyone how the rules matter, how this could easily become a precedent where the rights of member associations are violated with impudence, and then we'll just wrap this under the carpet. It was absurd."

Rajoub said: "From my side, I still respect and follow the legal procedure but I think it's time to understand that Israel should be sanctioned. The double standard policy should stop. I refused to shake hands. Sport is sport... for me that should



Palestinian football federation President Jibril Rajoub refused to take part in a photo opportunity with Israel football official Basim Sheikh Suliman in a tense incident at the end of FIFA's Congress in Vancouver, Canada, on Thursday. (AFP)

be respected, but if the other side is representing a criminal like Bibi (Benjamin Netanyahu) and speaking on behalf of Bibi as if Bibi is Mother Teresa, how can I shake hands or have a photo with such a man?"

"I think Gianni has the right to try to bridge gaps and bring people together but I think maybe he does not understand or does not know the deep suffering of the Palestinian people."

Last week, the PFA appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport against FIFA's decision not to sanction Israel over clubs based in West Bank settlements. The PFA has long argued that clubs based in settlements in the West Bank - territory Palestinians seek as part of a future state - should not compete in leagues run by the Israel Football Association.

FIFA said last month it would take no action against the IFA or Israeli clubs, citing the unresolved legal status of the West Bank under public international law. As they were leaving the Vancouver Convention Centre, Rajoub and Shalabi were targeted by protesters who were demanding that FIFA should ban Iran from the World Cup on the grounds that the team, they say, represent the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

"Does that convince you that you have to support IRGC... because you're having a problem with Israel," one protester asked Rajoub. "We're not supporting anyone, we just want the support of the international community," Rajoub said.

SPOTLIGHT

Hunain delivers as Kingsmen reach PSL final

After 4 consecutive losses, Hyderabad turn things around in style

Agencies
Lahore

The Hyderabad Kingsmen secured a dramatic 2-run victory over Islamabad United in Eliminator 2 of the 2026 Pakistan Super League yesterday thanks largely to a superb last over bowled by pace Hunain Shah.

The win completes a remarkable turnaround for the Kingsmen, who started the season with four consecutive losses but have now booked their place in the final against Peshawar Zalmi.

After Islamabad United won the toss and elected to bowl, Hyderabad faced early pressure, losing opener Maaz Sadaqat in the first over. However, the Kingsmen recovered through a composed partnership between Saim Ayub (38) and captain Marnus Labuschagne.

While spinner Imad Wasim briefly derailed the momentum by removing Labuschagne and Australian World Cup hero Glenn Maxwell in a single over, wicketkeeper batsman Usman Khan proved to be the savior. His aggressive 61 off 30 balls, laced with ten boundaries, anchored the middle order.

A late cameo from Kusal Perera (37) pushed the Kingsmen to a competitive 186/5 in their allotted 20 overs.

Islamabad United's chase mirrored the see-saw nature of the contest. Despite losing early wickets, Devon Conway (30) and Mark Chapman (43) kept United in the hunt.

Haider Ali provided the explosive spark in the later stages, striking two sixes to bring the equation down to a manageable target.

The 19th over proved particularly expensive for Hyderabad, as they conceded 22 runs, leaving Islamabad needing just 6 runs off the final 6 balls with momentum firmly on their side.

Hunain's ice-cold finish

The match reached a fever pitch in the final over, delivered by Hunain. Having been the bowler targeted in the penultimate over, Hunain displayed incredible mental fortitude to execute a series of pinpoint yorkers. He conceded only three runs and claimed a crucial wicket, leaving Chris Green and the Islamabad



Pacer Hunain Shah (right) celebrates after Hyderabad Kingsmen beat Islamabad United in the Second Eliminator of the Pakistan Super League in Lahore yesterday.

lower order unable to find the boundary. The Kingsmen defended their 186-run total by the narrowest of margins, finishing with Islamabad at 184/7.

Labuschagne, the Kingsmen captain, said yesterday: "I don't have words to describe what we've done today. I mean, this team; we're providing entertainment, that's for sure. It looked like we were going to win relatively comfortably and then we don't and then all of a sudden it looks like it's over; we pack our

bags and we're going home. And then Hunain Shah steps in and goes for, what, three in the last over to win the game, with four fielders out. I can't describe what we've just done. We've become that team and I've got goosebumps just talking about it."

Hunain, the Player of the match, said yesterday: "I wanted to keep belief in my abilities, thought if we got Faheem Ashraf out, the job would be easier for us. Focus was on execution. When I came to bowl the last over, I told

Marnus we don't have margin, I will bowl six yorkers and went with the plan. Feeling really good, thanks to God."

They now head into the final with immense momentum, looking to complete a "worst-to-first" championship run.

BRIEF SCORES
Hyderabad Kingsmen 186 for 5 (Usman 61*, Imad 2-16) **beat Islamabad United 184 for 7** (Chapman 43, Hunain 2-37, M Ali 2-44) **by two runs**

ANNOUNCEMENT

Kent stop social media comments to protect players' mental health

AFP
London

English cricket club Kent have suspended comments on their official social media accounts, with head coach Adam Hoolioake suggesting players' mental health could be damaged by stinging criticism.

Kent have made a bad start to the season and are currently at the foot of the second and bottom division of the County Championship following three matches.

Their form has led to some cutting online comments from frustrated Kent fans.

Hoolioake, in a statement released ahead of Kent's latest game against Derbyshire, which began at Canterbury yesterday, accepted the team's performances had not been "anywhere near the standards we expect of ourselves".

But Hoolioake, a close friend of former Surrey and England teammate Graham Thorpe, who took his own life in 2024, said he had a "duty of care" to protect the Kent squad.

"Throughout my career in cricket as a player and a coach, I have had to deal with a lot, that's no secret," said Hoolioake, whose younger brother Ben, also an England all-rounder, was killed in a car crash back in 2002.

Hoolioake was also close to former England batsman Robin Smith, who struggled with alco-



holism before his death late last year.

"I've seen in recent times, two players and friends that I played alongside for England, go down a bad path in terms of mental health, and I've lost both of them," the 54-year-old added.

"It's part of my job, and my duty of care, to make sure that we don't see that again.

"As a professional cricket department, alongside our media team, we've decided as one that we will be suspending commenting on our official Kent Cricket social media accounts for the time being.

"This has not been a decision that we've taken lightly and we are in no means stopping people voicing their opinions, but to align with our short-term strategy to allow players and staff to think and play with freedom and clarity, we feel it is a necessary one."

New Zealand's injured Santner to miss first England Test



WELLINGTON: New Zealand all-rounder Mitchell Santner will miss at least the one-off Test against Ireland later in May and the first Test with England because of a shoulder injury, New Zealand Cricket said yesterday. The Black Caps' white-ball captain will be out for "at least a month" after hurting his left shoulder while fielding in the Indian Premier League for Mumbai Indians on April 23. The 34-year-old returned to New Zealand and will need rest and rehabilitation, forcing him out of the Ireland Test on May 27-30 in

Belfast and the first England Test at Lord's a week later. His availability for the second and third Tests will be "evaluated at a later date", New Zealand Cricket said. The second Test is at The Oval from June 17 and the third at Trent Bridge starts June 25. The squad for the Ireland and England Test series will be named in the coming days, NZC said. Santner led New Zealand to the final of the T20 World Cup in March, where they lost to hosts India by 96 runs.

Holder brings 'sprinkling of stardust' as Gujarat beat RCB

AHMEDABAD: Jason Holder's display in Gujarat Titans' four-wicket IPL win over champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru was exactly what the team was looking for when they bought the West Indies international, director of cricket Vikram Solanki said.

Holder took two wickets and three catches, before scoring 12 runs as Gujarat chased down 155 in Thursday's match.

"I think when we were pursuing Jason at the auction, it was with the mind to him being able to fulfil both roles - the bat and the ball. So he does offer us exactly that," Solanki told reporters.

"... His numbers at five and six have been quite outstanding. And that has come about because he, of course, has all of the ability that you need.

"Physically, a strong guy, has great reach, leverage as far as the bat is concerned, so all the technicalities are covered. He also is now bringing an added dimension, that sprinkling of stardust, if you like, of being a really experienced campaigner." Holder, 34, has played 96 Twenty20 Internationals for the West Indies and has captained the side in all three formats, with Solanki saying his experience was proving valuable on and off the field.

"You often get individuals that have a good amount of experience that perhaps can't com-



municate it as well," he added. "It doesn't come naturally to them. Jason will always be willing to have conversations, whether it's with the coaching group ... or with all of the young guys around as well. "And that's just it. That's the perfect storm if you think about it - a skilled cricketer that has experience, wants to be a part of a team, is a thorough gentleman. He's very articulate when he speaks." Gujarat, fifth in the standings, next face Punjab Kings tomorrow.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Rahul leads the show as Delhi beat Rajasthan

AFP
Jaipur, India

An opening partnership of 110 from 57 balls by Pathum Nissanka and KL Rahul paved the way for Delhi Capitals to record their highest successful chase in the IPL, beating Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets.

The Delhi openers paved the way for a turnaround win after three consecutive losses, as they chased down Rajasthan's imposing 225-6 which was buoyed by Riyan Parag's 90 from 50 balls.

Delhi's previous highest successful run-chase was 210 against Lucknow Super Giants in 2025.

"It matters to get the win," said player of the match Rahul who top-scored with 75 from 40 balls.

"Results haven't gone our way but we had some honest conversations. We needed to get sharper in certain areas.

"We got this win and are hoping to string together some more."

Sri Lankan Nissanka hit his maiden IPL half-century, scoring 62 off 33 balls. Rahul's 75 was his third half-century of the season, along with 152 not out against Punjab Kings.

Nitish Rana chipped in with 33 but the hosts fumbled the finish, holding back Jofra Archer and Nandre Burger. Impact sub Tushar Deshpande went for 16 runs in the penultimate over as Tristan



Delhi Capitals' KL Rahul in action against Rajasthan Royals during the IPL match in Jaipur yesterday. (Reuters)

Stubbs (18 not out) and Ashutosh Sharma (25 not out) steered Delhi over the line with five balls to spare.

The Capitals moved to sixth in the table with four wins in nine games while Rajasthan missed out on a chance to go top.

They remain fourth with 12 points from 10 games and trail Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Sunrisers Hyderabad who are also on 10, on net run-rate.

"My job is to get two points so my score and innings don't really

matter if we lose the game," said Rajasthan captain Parag.

Earlier, the experienced pair of Kyle Jamieson and Mitchell Starc hit Rajasthan hard as both openers fell cheaply.

Wonderkid Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was bowled by Jamieson for four while Yashasvi Jaiswal was caught and bowled by Starc for six.

Parag, with five sixes in his 90, and Dhruv Jurel (42) turned the innings around before Starc struck twice more to reduce the

score to 168-5. The Australian quick sent down 12 dot balls in his four overs and finished with 3-40. South African slugger Donovan Ferreira then hit six sixes and scored 20 off Kuldeep Yadav's 18th over, closing on 47 not out from just 14 balls.

BRIEF SCORES
Delhi Capitals 226 for 3 (Rahul 75, Nissanka 62, Jadeja 1-33) **beat Rajasthan Royals 225 for 6** (Parag 90, Ferreira 47*, Starc 3-40) **by seven wickets**

WAS LIV GOLF AN EXPENSIVE FAILURE FOR SAUDIS? NOT EVERYONE THINKS SO

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA: Throwing more than \$5bn at a divisive new tour and walking away after five seasons does not look like good business, but LIV Golf wasn't all bad news for Saudi Arabia. Oil-funded LIV, which poached top stars and sent golf's establishment into a tailspin, helped push the conservative kingdom into global view - one of its key aims, experts say. They said the exit, confirmed on Thursday after weeks of speculation, does not signal a flight of Saudi money from sport, even after the Middle East war that sparked Iranian attacks around the Gulf. "Saudi Arabia is not going cold on sport," Simon Chadwick, professor of Afro-Eurasian sport at the Emlyon Business School in Shanghai, told AFP. "It is evaluating the work that has thus far been done, what remains to be delivered, and what has worked (or hasn't worked). The trajectory remains the same." The \$900bn Public Investment Fund (PIF) has spent big on sport to raise Saudi's profile, luring superstar footballers such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Saudi Arabia

later secured hosting rights for the 2034 World Cup. The desert monarchy and world's biggest crude exporter, deploying its oil wealth via the PIF, aims to diversify its economic portfolio by encouraging tourism, business and domestic spending, to shield it from an expected slump in demand for fossil fuels. "Perhaps Saudi plans were rather too grandiose to begin with, but equally the grifters and opportunists of global sport have been seeking to take advantage of the country's sports spending," Chadwick said. PIF-funded LIV ("54" in Roman numerals), promised to reshape golf when it debuted in 2022 with 54 holes, shotgun starts, dance music on the course and stars such as Dustin Johnson and Phil Mickelson on reported nine-figure deals. A dispute with the US PGA Tour was headed for the courts until the two rivals announced surprise merger talks which dragged on for years without resolution. In the meantime, LIV failed to land a major broadcast deal or build a significant fanbase. Saudi sport investments have



Jon Rahm, one of LIV Golf's biggest signings, celebrates a win in Mexico last month.

grown since LIV was announced in October 2021. PIF acquired English football club Newcastle United around the same time, the F1 Saudi Grand Prix began two months later and Ronaldo arrived to huge fanfare in January 2023. "That phase was primarily about

visibility and positioning Saudi Arabia as a major global player," Amro Elserty, a France-based Middle East affairs sports analyst, told AFP. "What has changed is not that this objective disappeared, but that the marginal value of continuing to spend at the same level on

a single project like LIV has declined." The new phase includes cuts beyond LIV. The Saudi Pro League, once a blank cheque for veteran footballers, has pulled back from major signings, and the PIF sold a majority stake in Al Hilal, one of the top Saudi clubs, last month.

PIF "stated from the beginning that financial support for the Saudi league would not be sustainable", said Amir Abdelhalim, an Egyptian football analyst. Meanwhile the WTA Finals women's tennis tournament will complete a three-year run this year and the Saudi Arabia Snooker Masters, one of the sport's richest events, was scrapped last month, two years into a scheduled 10-edition deal. The sports slowdown is consistent with cuts to other projects, such as tourism resorts and NEOM, a futuristic new city priced at \$500bn, as Saudi Arabia winds back its more extravagant ventures. Elserty said leaving LIV, the brainchild of PIF governor and golf fan Yasir Al-Rumayyan, carries "reputational impact... but it is unlikely to be seen internally as a significant setback. "Within the logic of PIF's strategy, this is better understood as a controlled exit from an experimental phase rather than a failure in the conventional sense." According to Chadwick, "observers and critics are the people who have turned the supposed sports divestment into a melodrama".

TENNIS

Sinner beats Fils, to face Zverev in Madrid Open final

SINNER A WIN AWAY FROM 5TH CONSECUTIVE MASTERS TITLE

AFP
Madrid

World number one Jannik Sinner downed Arthur Fils 6-2, 6-4 yesterday to reach the Madrid Open final. The Italian won his 22nd straight match to book a place in the final, where he will aim to win a record fifth consecutive Masters 1000 title.

With his chief rival Carlos Alcaraz out injured, Sinner is firm favourite to triumph at the Caja Magica and add to recent titles at Indian Wells, Miami and Monte Carlo.

In the final, the 24-year-old Italian will face second seed Alexander Zverev who beat promising Belgian Alexander Bublik yesterday.

In the second semi-final, Zverev ended the fairy-tale run of unseeded Bublik with a disciplined 6-2, 7-5 victory yesterday.

Playing under the lights at the Manolo Santana Centre Court, the two-time champion leveraged his experience and massive serve, firing 6 aces and winning 85% of his first-serve points.

While Bublik—the tournament's surprise package who had upset Casper Ruud, showed flashes of brilliance in a competitive second set, Zverev's relentless baseline pressure eventually forced the decisive break.

"I played at a very high level, but I focus on always raising my level a little. Especially when the tournament gets serious... You



Italy's Jannik Sinner takes a selfie with fans after winning his semi-final match against France's Arthur Fils at the Madrid Open in Park Manzanares, Madrid, Spain, yesterday. (Reuters)

have to raise your level if you want to keep going," Sinner told *Movistar*. The Italian admitted he was feeling a little tired after playing so many matches of late.

"Obviously there's a bit of fatigue - mentally I feel good, but there is some physical tiredness, my body isn't completely fresh, but that's normal, and I think it's a very positive thing for me, because it means I'm playing a lot of matches," Sinner said. "Of course on Sunday we'll try to do even better, but whatever happens, I've reached another final in a very important tournament."

Beating Sinner right now seems a near-impossible feat and the four-time Grand Slam winner started superbly against Barcelona Open winner Fils, who has impressed since returning from injury in February.

The Italian broke in third game when Fils went long to lead 2-1. Sinner broke again in the fifth game with Fils, ranked 25th in the world, unable to cope with his sheer power. Sinner wrapped up the first set on his serve after Fils found some fighting spirit to prevent a third break.

The second set was far closer,

with Fils rising in confidence and belief. The 21-year-old saved two break points for a 3-2 lead, and put pressure on Sinner's next serve, although the Italian produced two aces to hold. Sinner broke with a down-the-line backhand winner to end an excellent rally for a 5-4 lead and served it out to triumph.

Earlier on Thursday, Mirra Andreeva booked her spot in the women's final. Andreeva will take on Marta Kostyuk, after the Ukrainian beat lucky loser Anastasia Potapova 6-2, 1-6, 6-1. Andreeva beat Hailey Baptiste 6-4, 7-6 (10/8).

GOLF

Ace lifts rookie Green to share of LPGA lead as No. 1 Korda lurks

AFP
Mexico City

Melanie Green aced the par-three 15th hole on the way to a six-under par 66 and a share of the first-round lead in the LPGA Riviera Maya Open in Playa del Carmen, Mexico, on Thursday.

Green, one of 21 rookies in the field, scored six birdies and two bogeys and was tied with veteran Brianna Do, who had seven birdies and a bogey on the El Camaleon Golf Course.

The leaders, both chasing a first LPGA title, were one stroke in front of Spain's Carlota Ciganda while world number one Nelly Korda headlined a group of six players sharing fourth on 68.

Korda, fresh off her third career major title at the Chevron Championship that catapulted her back to the top of the rankings, teed off on 10 and after a birdie at 13 eagled the par-five 18th.

She answered her lone bogey at the second with birdies at the fifth

and seventh. "It was a solid four-under, definitely took advantage of the par-fives," said Korda, who also won the weather-shortened Tournament of Champions to open the season, then strung together three straight runner-up finishes before winning the Chevron for the second time in three years.

Green also teed off on 10 and picked up six strokes in the space of six holes with birdies at 13 and 14, her eagle hole-in-one at 15 and birdies at 17 and 18.

She didn't know her tee shot at the 15th had gone in the cup until she was at the green.

"I was walking up and before I started walking I was like, 'OK, great shot. Phenomenal. Grab the putter,'" Green said after the first round.

"Then we're walking up, walking up and I'm looking at the green, I'm like, 'there is no ball!'"

When her caddie told her she'd aced it, she said, she told him: "It's not in the hole. That's not nice."

When the truth dawned "I was so excited," she said. "Good bounce."

SPOTLIGHT

World No. 4 Young leads at PGA Cadillac Championship

AFP
Miami

Cameron Young rode a hot putter to an eight-under par 64 on Thursday to take a one-shot first-round lead in the PGA Tour Cadillac Championship.

"I feel like I made a billion feet of putts," said Young, who had eight birdies without a bogey and was rolling them in from on and off the green. "Every time my ball got near the hole it seemed to want to go in today," he said.

Young was one stroke ahead of three-time major champion Jordan Spieth and fellow American Alex Smalley. Young, who won the Players championship in March and contended at the Masters before finishing tied for third behind Rory McIlroy and Scottie Scheffler, got his round going with a birdie at the second, where he landed his approach inches from the pin.

He rolled in a 41-foot birdie at the fourth and after another short birdie at the fifth made a 28-foot birdie putt from off the green at seven.

Birdies at 10 and 11 were followed by another 25-foot birdie putt from off the green at 15 and after he took a one-shot lead with a birdie at 16 he made a testing six-foot par putt at 17 to maintain the advantage.

"I saw a few go in early and it was just one of those days," Young said. "I just had a really nice feel for the greens today."

Young, who won the first of his two PGA Tour titles to date at the Wyndham Championship in August, has three top-five finishes this year and has climbed to number four in the world.

Spieth holed out for eagle at the eighth to highlight his round. He was eight-under through 15 but made his second bogey of the day at 16. "It was a very nice start," said Spieth, who was seven-under through 11 and said he took advantage early when the breeze was minimal and the greens were soft.

"I don't foresee seven-unders every day," Spieth said. "I knocked a couple putts in from the fringe which is a bonus and the rest of the round I just played really the right way."

Smalley, chasing his first PGA Tour title, had eight birdies and one bogey, seizing his share of second with birdies at 16 and 17.

Canadian Nick Taylor was alone in fourth after a six-under 66, but world number one Scottie Scheffler got off to a disappointing start with three birdies and two bogeys in a one-under 71 that left him seven off the pace.

The \$20m signature event marks the PGA Tour's return to the Blue Monster course at Trump National Doral for the first time since 2016. The venue had featured on the PGA Tour calendar for more than half a century, hosting a tournament annually from 1962 to 2016 when it staged the World Golf Championships Cadillac Championship.

The tournament was moved after sponsor Cadillac decided not to renew its sponsorship and a replacement could not be found.

The PGA Tour, which had been sharply critical of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign rhetoric concerning immigrants, relocated the event to Mexico - prompting a furious reaction from Trump at the time. Since then Doral had hosted a stop in the breakaway LIV Golf circuit.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Japanese tennis trailblazer Nishikori set to retire

AFP
Tokyo

Kei Nishikori, Asia's most decorated men's tennis player, yesterday said that he will retire at the end of the season after a career ravaged by injury. The 36-year-old became the first Japanese player to reach a Grand Slam final at the 2014 US Open, eventually losing to Croatia's Marin Cilic. He was the first Japanese man to climb into the top 10 in the ATP world rankings, reaching a career high of number four, and won 12 titles on tour.

Nishikori also won bronze in the men's singles at the 2016 Rio Olympics. He has been dogged by injuries for years and said last month that he was "barely hanging on" in terms of his physical fitness.

Nishikori said yesterday on social media that he was reluctantly calling it quits at the end of the 2026 season. "To be honest, I still wish I could continue my playing career," he said. "Even so, looking back on everything up to this point, I can proudly say that I gave it my all."



Nishikori was born in western Japan and moved to Florida at the age of 14 to train at the IMG Academy.

He began his professional career in 2007 and won his first ATP Tour title a year later at

Delray Beach. He produced the best season of his career in 2014, winning four ATP titles and reaching the final of the US Open, where he upset then-world number one Novak Djokovic in the semi-finals.

"Reaching the ATP Tour, playing at the highest level of competition and maintaining a presence in the top 10 is something I am extremely proud of," he said in his social media post. "Whether in victory or defeat, the special atmosphere I felt in packed arenas is irreplaceable."

Nishikori last won a title at Brisbane in 2019. He is currently ranked No. 464 in the world and has been playing this season on the second-tier Challenger Tour. "There were also times when I was overwhelmed by frustration and anxiety due to repeated injuries that prevented me from playing as I wanted," he said.

"Even so, my love for tennis and my belief that I could become a stronger player always brought me back to the court," he added. "I will cherish every moment of the remaining matches and fight to the very end."

Nishikori is a hugely popular figure in tennis. "Thank you for all the memories," the ATP Tour wrote on social media.

EQUESTRIAN

Al-Qadi tops Gold Tour as Al Shaqab win team honours in Hathab



Riding Happy Tina, Hamad Nasser al-Qadi secured first place in the 140cm class with a flawless round.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hamad Nasser al-Qadi delivered a standout performance to claim top honours in the Gold Tour at the 12th round of the Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab at the main arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation. Riding Happy Tina, al-Qadi secured first place in the Table A, special two phases 140cm class with a flawless round in 30.68 seconds. Faris Saad al-Qahtani finished second aboard Gaya des Cours in 33.19 seconds, while Nasser al-Ghazali took third with Heavens Light H in 33.65 seconds, as all three riders maintained clear rounds.

In the Gold Tour team competition, Al Shaqab claimed victory with a combined time of 67.06 seconds and no penalties. Wathnan followed in second with 70.35 secs, while Al Fardan and Alsalam placed third and fourth respectively.

The Gold Tour winners were crowned by Abdullah al-Qashouti, Head of the Media



The Gold Tour winners were crowned by Abdullah al-Qashouti, Head of the Media and Live Broadcasting Committee of Hathab.

and Live Broadcasting Committee for the championship.

In the Open Tour Table A, two phases 110cm class, Khaled al-Hadi of Saudi Arabia emerged victorious with a clear round in 21.66 seconds on Miss Chili. Hazzaa Mubarak al-Hajri secured second place riding Elio 4, while Mohammed al-Dalaan

finished third on Sarina Del Valle. The Junior category saw Sultan Jassim al-Suwaidi take first place on Cat Ballou, followed by Sharida Nasser al-Kaabi on Extra Pam and Ali Omar al-Ansari on Nikita. The winners were crowned by Saeed al-Rashdi, Deputy Director of the tournament.

In the Future Riders 70cm class, Alya



In the Future Riders, Alya Ahmad al-Khater claimed victory on Vahine de Curaine

Ahmad al-Khater claimed victory on Vahine de Curaine with a clear round in 22.86 seconds. Hissa Ali al-Jaber and Reem Hamza al-Kuwari completed the podium in second and third places respectively. The Future Riders winners were crowned by Mohammed Saleh al-Marri, Head of the Facilities and Logistics Committee.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Fixture pile-up no excuse for Man City, says Guardiola

Guardiola's side are three points behind leaders Arsenal

AFP
London

Pep Guardiola insists Manchester City cannot use their gruelling schedule as an excuse if they fail to win the Premier League title. Guardiola's second-placed side are three points behind leaders Arsenal heading into the final weeks of the season.

But City's title bid could be hampered by a fixture pile-up after their games against Crystal Palace and Bournemouth were given new dates either side of the FA Cup final against Chelsea on May 16.

Those matches needed to be moved because of City's progress in both domestic cups, but the new schedule means they need to play three times in the space of seven days from May 13 to 19.

The League Cup winners' title charge concludes against Aston Villa on May 24.

City were reportedly unhappy when the fixtures were confirmed, particularly because they felt the Palace game originally slated for March could have been rearranged earlier. But Guardiola has accepted the situation as an inevitable consequence of being successful in English football.

"It is what it is. When we won the treble and quadruple we always had this kind of calendar,"

the City manager told reporters. "Of course it could be better but I've never expected help. We'll do that and go game by game. If you don't like it, go and train in France or Portugal. I like being here, and I've said many times, when I was at Barcelona and saw managers here complain about the schedule, it has always been like this."

City are chasing the seventh Premier League crown of the Guardiola era as they seek to take advantage of Arsenal's latest title-race stumble. The Gunners blew substantial leads that allowed City to lift the trophy in 2023 and 2024.

By the time City travel to Everton on Monday, they will be six points behind Arsenal if Mikel Arteta's men beat Fulham at the Emirates Stadium today. But the Everton game will be the first of City's two games in hand in a race so tight it could be decided by goal difference or goals scored.

"It's normal, it's the calendar. Sometimes you play first, sometimes behind," Guardiola said. "It is what it is and nothing changes at this stage -- you know exactly what you have to do."

Guardiola claimed he did not even know when Arsenal were playing when asked if he would be watching their game against Fulham. "What time do they play? It's after a training session, so maybe I will watch it," said the 55-year-old Spaniard.



Arsenal must manage emotions of title race, says Arteta

London: Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to manage their emotions as a gripping Premier League title race builds to a nerve-shredding climax. Arteta's side can move six points clear of second-placed Manchester City if they beat Fulham at the Emirates Stadium today. But the Gunners have been far from convincing in recent weeks, blowing a substantial lead at the top after damaging defeats against City and Bournemouth. A tense 1-0 win against Newcastle last weekend hardly suggested Arsenal have conquered their anxiety.

But Arteta called on his players to embrace the positives of being potentially just four games away from a first league title in 22 years. "Emotions for sure we have to manage in the right way. But I want to put more emphasis on showing that desire, that hunger that we have shown all season," he said. "We have only four games left and everything to play for, so it doesn't get better than that."

After facing Fulham, Arsenal will have played two more games than City, who are next in action at Everton on Monday. City's games in hand could tip the balance in a desperately close race that may be decided on goal

difference or goals scored. Arsenal have the extra complication of balancing their Premier League efforts with a quest to win the Champions League for the first time. Arteta was furious as penalty decisions did not go his side's way in a 1-1 semi-final, first leg draw away to Atletico Madrid on Wednesday, meaning Arsenal still have plenty of work to do in Tuesday's second leg to reach the final.

"I think we have enough fuel in the tank, we are planning to win the Premier League," he added. "We are exactly where we wanted to be, four games to go, now let's go. We need to face each situation in any context to achieve our goal. What happened the other night was extremely disappointing, but we need to make it at home now."

Arteta, though, stressed his players are fully focused on beating Fulham rather than the return leg against Atletico. "Focus on Fulham and hunger. Hunger to compete, hunger to play, hunger to win. Hunger to be closer to achieve our dream," he said.

Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber will again be missing through injury, but Arteta hailed his side's ability to overcome injury problems throughout the campaign.

FOCUS

Winter sports competitions of School Olympic programme conclude with short track finals

The short track ice racing competitions of the Schools Olympic programme ended yesterday. The event was organised by the Qatar Winter Sports Committee in cooperation with Qatar School Sports Federation. It lasted for two days at Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena, in a competitive atmosphere that showed the growing level of young sports talents in Qatar.

The competitions, which marked the final event of the committee's activities this year, saw wide participation from students. A total of 32 boys from five schools qualified for the finals, along with 17 girls from three schools.

The races were full of excitement and strong sportsmanship, as all participants aimed to achieve the best results and reach the podium.

The boys' competitions were held on Wednesday, while the girls' events took place on Thursday at the same venue, which hosted all races. The event was well organized, showing the readiness of the facilities and the efficiency of the technical and administrative teams in charge.

At the end of the event, Hassan Hissam al-Hebabi, Secretary-General of the Qatar Winter Sports Committee, and Ahmed Ali al-Jaber, Board Member, crowned the winners.

These finals come as part of the committee's strategy to promote winter sports in schools and to discover and develop talents at an early age, helping to build a new generation of athletes who can represent Qatar at regional and international levels.

Al-Hebabi said: "We saw many promising Qatari talents during these competitions, which is the main goal of the program. We will continue to support and prepare them to join the national winter sports teams." He also explained that the program started with curling and continued with short track races, which are key pathways for discovering talents.



Enrique says 'unique' PSG-Bayern first leg could have gone either way

Paris: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said on Friday that he was "not frustrated" by the narrow advantage his side hold over Bayern Munich heading into their trip to Germany for the Champions League semi-final second leg.

Last week, the two sides played out what many considered to be one of the best matches in Champions League history as the side from the French capital emerged 5-4 winners at their Parc des Princes home.

"No, I'm not frustrated because it's a unique football match for me," Enrique told reporters, despite the fact his side had led by five goals to two midway through the second period. "We won the match. But we could have drawn, and we could have lost the match, and that wouldn't have been unfair."

Enrique said the first leg was such a spectacle because of the outstanding performances of both team's attackers, rather than any defensive shortcomings. "It was a very spectacular match because the strikers from both teams got the better of the defenders on numerous occasions, but not because they did a poor job defensively," he explained. "No, that's what makes this match magnificent, because the standard was incredible, especially from the strikers."

The 55-year-old praised in particular the contributions of PSG forward Ousmane Dembele and Bayern's English centre-forward Harry Kane. "The two number nines -- look at how they defend. How they attack is what we normally see. But look at how they both defend -- it's incredible," he said. The second leg of the semi-final will take place next Wednesday in Munich.

MOURINHO SAYS NO CONTACT WITH MADRID
Benfica coach Jose Mourinho said there has been no contact

between him and Real Madrid, despite speculation the Spanish giants could turn to him this summer. The veteran Portuguese coach, who led Los Blancos from 2010 to 2013 in a heated rivalry with Pep Guardiola's Barca, is reported to be on Madrid's shortlist for a new coach.

Current Madrid boss Alvaro Arbeloa seems set to be replaced with the team heading for a second consecutive season without a major trophy. "No one from Real Madrid has spoken to me. I can guarantee that," Mourinho, 63, told reporters. "I've been in football for so many years and I'm used to these things... but there's nothing from Real Madrid," added Mourinho, who guided Real to the 2012 La Liga title.

Madrid president Florentino Perez appointed Arbeloa in January to replace Xabi Alonso, who lasted just a few months at the helm. Real Madrid trail La Liga leaders Barcelona by 11 points with five matches remaining and were knocked out of the Champions League by Bayern Munich in the quarter-finals.

"I have a year to go on my Benfica contract, and that's all," added Mourinho, whose side were knocked out of the Champions League by Real Madrid in the play-off round in February.

VENEZIA SEAL PROMOTION BACK TO SERIE A

Venezia will return to the Italian top flight following their 2-2 draw away to La Spezia on Friday in the penultimate round of Serie B. After squandering a two-goal lead in the final moments of their match on the Ligurian coast, the Venetians thought they would have to wait another week to book their ticket to Serie A. That was until Mantova scored a 96th-minute winner to beat third-placed Monza 3-2 and ensure promotion for Venezia ahead of the final matchday.