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AMIR CUP

Holdings Gharafa target final as Sadd face Duhail in titans clash

Defending champs, who finished fourth in the recently concluded QSL, to face impressive Al Wakrah

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Gharafa are determined to retain the Amir Cup, with their immediate focus on securing a place in the final, head coach Pedro Martins said yesterday.

The defending champions, who finished fourth in the recently concluded Qatar Stars League (QSL), will face an ambitious Al Wakrah side that impressed in the quarter-finals with a commanding victory over Al Rayyan.

"We are familiar with this type of cup competition, which demands a very high level of mental focus and concentration, as it is often decided by small details. Therefore, we must remain cautious and deliver our best performance to achieve our goal," Martins said, while addressing the media on the eve of the match.

Speaking about the team's injury concerns at the end of a hectic season, Martins added: "We are dealing with several injuries, including Joselu, Mohammed Muntari and Alaa El-Din Hassan. All three are strikers, which increases the impact, but we remain confident of putting in a strong performance in the semi-final."

Al Gharafa's forward Ahmed al-Janahi also expressed confidence ahead of the semi-final, insisting the team is fully prepared for the challenge. "We are focused on reaching the final and then pushing to retain the title. Despite some injury concerns, we believe in our ability to win, as we have a squad filled with high-calibre players," al-Janahi said.

Al Wakrah's Chilean coach Jose Luis Sierra said his side have prepared thoroughly for the semi-final and remain driven by a strong ambition to reach the final.

"Reaching the semi-finals is a great achievement, but it does not mean we will ease off. We are determined to continue our strong performances and push for a place in the final," Sierra said.

He noted that while his team delivered an excellent display in the quarter-finals, securing a convincing 3-0 win over Al Rayyan, that performance alone will not be enough against the defending champions.

"We will need to put in even greater effort and produce a better



Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins talks to his players ahead of his team's Amir Cup clash against Al Wakrah.

performance to reach the final of the tournament," the 57-year-old coach said.

Al Wakrah goalkeeper Saud al-Khater said the team is relishing the challenge of facing Al Gharafa in the semi-final and is determined to secure a place in the final. "We delivered a very strong performance against Al Rayyan, and we need to replicate that level to overcome Al Gharafa in what will undoubtedly be a tough match against the defending champions," al-Khater said.

"However, we are confident in ourselves and our ability to achieve what is required," he added.

In the other semi-final, heavyweights Al Sadd and Al Duhail are set for a high-stakes showdown. QSL champions Al Sadd's head coach Roberto Mancini has affirmed his team's readiness ahead

of the clash against Al Duhail, despite a tight turnaround following their quarter-final fixture.

Addressing the media, Mancini highlighted the limited recovery time after the win over Al Shamal but commended his players for adapting well.

"The players are maintaining their focus in preparation for a physically demanding encounter," Mancini said.

He emphasised that facing Al Duhail, the 2022 champions, presents a significant challenge, describing them as one of Qatar's top sides despite finishing fifth in the QSL.

"Duhail are a force to reckon with, considering the club's consistent status as a major contender over the past 15 years," the Italian coach said.

Mancini highlighted Al Sadd's



Al Sadd's Italian coach Roberto Mancini (centre) during a team training session in Doha yesterday.



Luiz Junior of Al Duhail trains with teammate Karim Boudiaf.



Al Wakrah players break a sweat during a training session in Doha.

recent attacking form, including their 6-4 quarter-final victory, but acknowledged the need for improvement at the back. He stressed that his primary focus

remains on results, with the team aiming to secure victory, reach the final, and compete for the title, while continuing to address defensive shortcomings.

However, Al Duhail are equally keen to end the season on a high by lifting the Amir Cup - the only title still within their reach this season - coach Djamel Belmadi said yesterday. Belmadi acknowledged the scale of the challenge against a strong and experienced opponent with a proven record of success.

He noted that the clash brings together two sides that have dominated domestic football in Qatar over the past 15 years.

"We must be fully prepared and deliver a perfect performance to reach the final. This is the only title available to us this season after setbacks in the league. I have great confidence in the players' ability to achieve what is required," Belmadi said.

Almoez Ali, the top scorer for Qatar and Al Duhail, said the players are relishing the prospect of facing a strong Al Sadd side in a crucial encounter. "We are all eager to play this important match against the QSL champions, Al Sadd. We will fight to make the most of our chances," he said.

SEMI-FINAL FIXTURES

Al Gharafa vs Al Wakrah at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, 5:15pm

Al Sadd vs Al Duhail at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, 8pm

BASKETBALL

Al Arabi and Al Sadd enter Amir Cup final

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi and Al Sadd secured their places in the final of the HH the Amir Basketball Cup after overcoming Al Ahli and Al Rayyan, respectively in the semi-final held at the Al Gharafa Indoor Hall yesterday.

Al Arabi advanced with a convincing 89-70 victory over Al Ahli, showcasing superior tactical execution.

The first quarter ended 24-18 in Arabi's favor, before they raised the tempo in the second quarter, tightening their defense to limit Al Ahli's offensive options and extending the lead 28-17.

Despite a slight improvement from Al Ahli in the third quarter (18-16), Arabi maintained composure and closed the game with

a balanced fourth quarter that ended 19-19.

Taylor James was the standout for Al Ahli with 18 points, making him the game's top scorer, while Elmedin Kikanovic led Arabi's offense with 17 points, emerging as his team's best scorer.

In the second semi-final, Al Sadd clinched their ticket to the final with a hard-fought 87-72 win over Al Rayyan in a highly competitive encounter.

The teams exchanged control across quarters, but Al Sadd's experience proved decisive in the closing minutes.

Rayyan's Riyon Cortez Brown was the game's top scorer with 23 points, while Mustafa Fouada led Al Sadd with 21 points with seven assists and three rebounds.

The final is scheduled for Wednesday at Al Gharafa Hall at 6:30 PM.



Action from Al Arabi-Al Ahli semi-final.



Mustafa Fouada scored 21 points in Al Sadd's win yesterday.

CRICKET

Rohit, Rickelton keep Mumbai in playoffs hunt

The openers lay the foundation for MI to beat LSG by five wickets



Mumbai Indians' Ryan Rickelton and Rohit Sharma bump fists during their IPL match against Lucknow Super Giants at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP

Mumbai, India

Openers Rohit Sharma and Ryan Rickelton hit attacking knocks as Mumbai Indians beat Lucknow Super Giants by six wickets to keep their slim playoff hopes alive in the IPL yesterday.

Rohit, who hit 84, and the left-handed Rickelton (83) put on 143 runs to lay the foundations for Mumbai's chase of 229 with eight balls to spare at the Wankhede Stadium.

Five-time champions Mumbai, who were without unwell captain Hardik Pandya, stay in the 10-team table with three wins in 10 matches.

Lucknow, led by Rishabh Pant, languish at the bottom and are nearly out of the race for the playoffs.

The top two teams at the end of the league stage will qualify for the playoffs.

The 39-year-old Rohit returned from an injury after missing five matches to hit his second fifty of the season as he struck six fours and seven sixes in his 44-ball knock.

South Africa's Rickelton kept up his blazing form in his 32-ball blitz to pummel the opposition attack before his departure in the 11th over.

Rohit came in as impact substitute

Rohit, who came in as an impact substitute after Lucknow's batting innings of 228-5, kept up the momentum with his trademark pull shot and wristy flicks to entertain the home crowd.

He finally fell to Manimaran Siddharth's left-arm spin and Tilak Varma soon fell for 11 to raise Lucknow's hopes.

Stand-in-skipper Suryakumar Yadav departed for 12 before Naman Dhir, who made 23, and Will Jacks, who hit the winning six in his 10, steered the team home.

Earlier Lucknow's West Indies star Nicholas Pooran struck form with a 21-ball 63 to put Lucknow on course to a big total. Australian opener Mitchell Marsh provided the early impetus with his 44 off 25 balls and put on 94 runs for the second wicket with the left-handed Pooran.

Pace bowler Corbin Bosch dismissed Pooran and Marsh in the ninth over to hit back for Mumbai, but Lucknow kept pace with unbeaten knocks from Aiden Markram and Himmat Singh.

Markram, who hit 31, and Himmat, who top-scored with 40, put on 68 runs for the sixth wicket to boost Lucknow's score, which ultimately proved insufficient.

BRIEF SCORES

Mumbai Indians 229 for 4 (Rohit 84, Rickelton 83, Siddharth 2-47) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 228 for 5** (Pooran 63, Marsh 44, Bosch 2-20) **by six wickets**

ANNOUNCEMENT

LIV Golf hires help to advise on new multi-partner model

Reuters
London

With LIV Golf in search of new funding partners, the league announced that New York-based Ducera Partners LLC will serve as an investment banking advisor as it seeks financial stability moving forward.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund already has announced it will end financial support of LIV Golf at the end of the 2026 season.

Last month, LIV announced a new board to be headed by Eugene Davis, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of PIRINATE Consulting Group LLC and Jon Zinman, the founder and managing member of JZ Advisors LLC. They are tasked primarily with "institutionalizing the league, formalizing its ownership structure, and evaluating the range of strategic opportunities," according to the league.

"This league has proven its value, and our focus now is on building the right financial foundation for the long term," LIV CEO Scott O'Neil said. "... Ducera (brings) deep transaction experience and a track record of delivering in complex, high-stakes situations. They

are the right partner for this process."

Founded in 2021, LIV Golf made its debut in June 2022 and used lavish, guaranteed contracts to lure dozens of stars like Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickelson, Jon Rahm and Bryson DeChambeau away from the PGA. Former LIV participant Brooks Koepka already has returned to the PGA Tour while Patrick Reed will return later this season.

PIF has provided LIV with more than \$5bn, but the league has reportedly lost millions of dollars per year.

Earlier this month, Yasir Al-Rumayyan, PIF's governor and LIV's main financial backer, shared a plan for the kingdom to cut back on international investments and focus on more domestic projects.

LIV notes that Ducera "is a leading investment bank specializing in complex, high-stakes corporate finance." The investment giant is noted to have "\$850 billion in transactions" through media, entertainment and sports ventures.

In touting "significant momentum," LIV said that sponsors and partnerships have increased 40% per year, ticket sales have grown 130% and that tournament broadcasts have reached one million households worldwide.

GOLF

Cink wins Regions Tradition to clinch back-to-back majors



Stewart Cink of the United States poses with the trophy after winning the Regions Tradition 2026 at Greystone Golf and Country Club in Birmingham, Alabama. (AFP)

Reuters

Birmingham, Alabama

Less than a month ago, Stewart Cink had never won a PGA Tour Championships major. Now he has won two.

Cink shot a 3-under-par 69 on Sunday at the Regions Tradition in Birmingham, Alabama, taking home the title by three strokes over nearest competitor Scott Hend of Australia in breezy conditions.

"It wasn't easy," Cink said. "But I was pretty resilient and I trusted what I had and our game plan was good. You know, I wasn't perfect by any stretch, but I played good golf under the circumstances."

The Florence, Alabama, native had his own cheering section at Greystone Golf and Country Club on Sunday, as Cink carded five birdies against two bogeys to earn his second straight major after winning the Senior PGA Championship in Bradenton, Florida, two weeks ago.

"This is where I cut my teeth in golf," Cink said. "The fans out here were awesome, I saw a lot of familiar faces. Everybody's put on the years, but some people from junior golf that I played with and against and their families. A lot of my friends and family have been out here all week anyway that I

knew they were coming. It's just been great."

The eight-time PGA Champions tourney winner cited the importance of keeping his focus on the present for his recent hot streak, which has included four wins overall in 2026. He has yet to finish lower than sixth this calendar year.

"One of the things I'm doing a pretty good job of is just kind of staying in the moment," he said. "It feels good to get back in the winner's circle again, of course. I hope there's a lot more times coming."

Hend surged up the leaderboard to apply some pressure as most other golfers struggled to match Cink's strong day. Hend did Cink four better with a 7-under 65, but he ultimately had too much ground to make up coming into the day. Still, a day with six birdies, a bogey and an eagle on the par-5 No. 13 left much to be proud of.

Scotland's Colin Montgomerie shot a 1-under 71 which left him in third place at 13 under once the dust settled, while Denmark's Soren Kjeldsen took fourth with a 3-under 69 that put him at 12 under.

Three golfers rounded out the top five in a tie for fifth: South Korea's Charlie Wi (68), Germany's Alex Cejka (70) and Doug Barron (71).

FOCUS

Young wins Cadillac Championship in Miami

Reuters

Miami

Cameron Young had it all working during the Cadillac Championship, and the result was another tournament title.

Young shot a 4-under-par 68 in the final round and was never threatened on the way to a six-stroke victory Sunday outside Miami.

Young finished as the wire-to-wire winner at 19-under 269 at Trump National Doral's Blue Monster Course, where President Trump was in attendance.

"I feel like I had different parts of the game working on different days," Young said. "Today I drove it a lot better. First couple days I putt great and I drove it a little bit more all over the place. Thankfully I feel like I've got a lot of tools right now and throughout the week I was able to use different parts of the game to keep myself moving in the right direction."

World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler also posted 68 to finish as the runner-up for his third straight start. Ben Griffin (68) was third at 12 under.

Australia's Adam Scott (64), Austria's Sepp Straka (66) and South Korea's Si Woo Kim (70) all tied for fourth place at 11 under.

Young has won two tournaments this year - this followed his breakthrough at The Players Championship in March - and three overall in his PGA Tour career. He didn't make Sunday's round



Cameron Young poses with the trophy after winning the Cadillac Championship. (Jeff Romance-Imagn Images)

complicated. "I think it was made easier by the weather forecast," Young said. "We didn't know exactly how the day was going to go, whether we would be starting and stopping. Started with a delay. It was just one of those times that I feel like that played into my hands and just being really accepting of what came next."

KORDA ROLLS TO RIVIERA MAYA TITLE FOR THIRD WIN OF '26

Nelly Korda didn't take long to return to the winner's circle, posting a final-round, 3-under-par 69 to win the Riviera Maya Open at Mayakoba by four strokes Sunday in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

Korda continued her victorious ways at El Camaleon Golf Course seven days after capturing the Chevron Championship - the first

major of the season and the third such title of her career - and returning to the No. 1 world ranking.

Korda entered the day with a three-shot advantage and wound up four ahead of Thailand's Arpichaya Yubol (70). In third at 12 under was China's Yu Liu (69), feel-good story Brianna Do (71) finished fourth at 10 under and Colombian amateur Maria Jose Marin (69) placed fifth at 8 under.

"I think it was a perfect week after a major championship, too, where it felt like it was super relaxing but I knew that I needed to grind and I was here to work," Korda said.

"I've had such an amazing time. Yeah, I mean, emphasizing it with a win, at the end of the day that's what I was coming here for."

Korda's only scoring stretch amid two runs of pars came at the fifth through seventh holes. She holed an eagle at the par-5 fifth, then birdied the next two for a 4-under run.

From there, it was 10 straight pars until cleaning up a bogey 6 at the 18th.

"I guess there (were) two parts to my round," Korda said. "Definitely on my front nine I had my A-game, and then on the back nine I wasn't playing bad; just wasn't hitting it close. And then I was kind of cruising and then golf humbled me on the last hole. Made my (second bogey) on the weekend." Korda continued a thoroughly dominant season to this point. In six starts, she now has three victories and three second-place finishes.

ably drawn scrutiny from players, media and fans," the Asian Tour said in a statement.

"The delay in delivering the ruling has highlighted the need for greater communication between sanctioning bodies and efficiency in the decision-making process."

The Asian Tour acknowledged the ruling had put Hur - who was seen angrily remonstrating with officials - in "a difficult situation," along with his fellow competitors. "We are confident the action taken was the right decision in accordance with the Rules of Golf," the tour said.

Asian Tour to tighten review process after golf rules row

HONG KONG: The Asian Tour said yesterday it would tighten its rules review process after a decision at the weekend saw South Korea's Hur In-hoi at the centre of a major row.

Song Min-hyuk beat Cho Min-gyu on the first hole of a sudden-death playoff Sunday to win the Maekyung Open in their native South Korea, but it was the drama behind the scenes that took the spotlight.

Hur was poised to join the playoff, but after signing his scorecard he was penalised two shots for an incident on Saturday.

That day, Hur had been allowed to play a provisional ball without penalty on the seventh hole following a dispute over whether his original ball had gone out of bounds. He signed for a 69.

But on Sunday officials determined that his original tee shot on Saturday had been out of bounds, so his score was adjusted to 71 - more than 24 hours later.

"The decision to correct the initial ruling and apply a stroke and distance penalty, a day after the incident in question, has understand-



Scotland's Colin Montgomerie, aged 62, plays his tee shot on the 17th hole during the final round of the Regions Tradition 2026 at Greystone Golf and Country Club in Birmingham, Alabama. (AFP)

FORMULA 1

Wolff wary of hype around Antonelli

At just 19, the Italian is the youngest leader of the championship



Toto Wolff, Executive Director of Mercedes team, says Kimi Antonelli's win in Miami was the Italian teen's best yet. (AFP)

Reuters
Miami

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said he would need to keep a handbrake on the hype as Kimi Antonelli's sensational start to the Formula One season provides Italy with a feelgood story after their football side's failure to qualify for the World Cup finals.

Hope and expectations are soaring at home as the 19-year-old Italian driver, the sport's youngest ever championship leader, goes from success to success with the Miami Grand Prix weekend producing a third pole position and win in a row. Wolff said keeping feet on the ground was the easier part, thanks to the support of the youngster's family.

"The bigger problem is the Italian public," said the Austrian, whose team have won all four races this season. "Now that they are not qualified for the football, it's all about (tennis world number one Jannik) Sinner and Antonelli. It's the two that are, you know, superstars. And that's something which we need to contain. There are so many requests for his time from the media, from sponsors. Now it's on us to keep the handbrake on. The risk is that he is being carried away too quickly."

The World Cup, co-hosted by the US, Mexico and Canada, gets underway on June 11 and four-times champions Italy are not part of it after

failing to qualify for the third time in a row. Sinner on Sunday became the first man to win five successive Masters 1000 titles after he crushed Alexander Zverev 6-1 6-2 in the Madrid Open final.

Wolff said Sunday's race at the Hard Rock Stadium was Antonelli's best yet.

"It reminds me of his karting days, there were no mistakes," he said.

"The pressure on him he takes it so well, analyses it but doesn't overthink it... we just really need to stay calm here because such success for such a young man at this stage, all of Italy will be on him. This is the long game, he has a killer of a team-mate that is extremely fast. We want to play the long game, he can hopefully win many championships over 10 years, 15 years, we don't want to stumble now with these huge expectations on him."

Teammate George Russell, the pre-season favourite, finished fourth in Miami and is now 20 points behind. The Briton won in Australia but recognised Miami was a track where he had struggled in the past. Antonelli had a mixed rookie season last year, setting age records for fastest laps and a sprint pole but also, as expected, making mistakes.

Wolff said 2026 was continuing as expected, with the youngster learning and improving. "It is astounding these few races. In a way it is what we predicted as a team. There are up and down moments, moments of brilliance, moments where you tear your hair out and this year it is

all coming together," he said. "I don't think any of us would have expected this kind of run." (Reporting by Alan Baldwin Editing by Toby Davis)

RUSSELL CONFIDENT MOMENTUM WILL SWING BACK HIS WAY FROM ANTONELLI

Meanwhile, Russell remained confident the momentum would swing back his way. The Briton is now 20 points adrift to teammate Antonelli. Bookmakers William Hill installed Antonelli, 19, as their 6/5 favourite, with Russell 9/4.

"Clearly Kimi's in a really great place at the moment and momentum is with him," said Russell, who finished fourth at the Hard Rock Stadium. "But I've got enough experience myself in championships I've won on how momentum swings throughout a year and also looking at the championship last year. To be honest, I'm not even considering it. I just want to get back onto the top step of the podium."

The next race is Canada and Russell won from pole with fastest lap in Montreal last year while Antonelli was third. Russell was also on pole there in 2024, before Antonelli was a Formula One driver, and finished third.

Antonelli said he was surprised to be where he was. "It's still a very long season and there's so many things that can change. George for sure is going to be super strong in Canada, he's always been very strong there, so he's for sure going to be back at the top," said the Italian. "But I think I feel much more comfortable in the car, much more in control as well."

Players keep up battle with tennis majors as they decry Roland Garros prize money

Paris: Top players including world number ones Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka kept up the pressure on the Grand Slam tournaments with a letter to Roland Garros on Monday expressing "deep disappointment" over the French major's 2026 prize money.

Last year almost all the leading players signed two letters to the four Grand Slam bosses demanding an increase in prize money, payments into a player welfare fund to improve retirement and maternity benefits, as well as involvement in decisions that affected them.

The letters set a target of a 22-percent share in tournament revenue, which would bring the majors in line with the nine combined 1000-level events run by the ATP men's tour and the women's WTA tour. On Monday, players said in a statement that an announcement by Roland Garros on April 16 of a 9.5 percent prize money rise was not good enough.

It said that last year the French Open generated 395m euros (\$463m), a 14-percent increase. However the total purse went up by just 5.4 percent, reducing player share of revenue to 14.3 percent. It estimated that this year's revenues would pass 400m euros, leaving the player cut still below 15 percent.

The letter also complained that Roland Garros was ignoring the other issues raised by players. "The announcement does nothing to address the structural issues that players have consistently and reason-

ably raised over the past year," it said. "There has been no engagement on player welfare and no progress towards establishing a formal mechanism for player consultation within Grand Slam decision making."

While the tours did not release the names of the players who had signed the letters last year, copies of the first, in March, showed that 10 of the 11 top-ranked women had signed. Sinner, Novak Djokovic, Alexander Zverev and Carlos Alcaraz were among the men who signed - although Djokovic reportedly did not sign the second letter in the summer.

The Serbian has not signed the latest letter either, a spokesperson for the players said. "For sure it would be great if the Grand Slams wanted to talk to us, because that's how it's supposed to be and I don't really get why there's no more open conversation," Iga Swiatek said at the WTA Finals in November.

Meanwhile, also last March, the breakaway Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA) which Djokovic founded in 2021 and then quit in January of this year, launched a barrage of lawsuits against almost every other tennis organisation.

In its suit against the US Open organisers, the PTPA pointed out that "in 2024, the US Open made \$12.8m from selling a single speciality drink, which was more than it paid to both singles champions combined". The novelty drink, the Honey Deuce, sold for \$23 during last year's tournament.

Ferrari's Leclerc admits he threw away Miami podium finish

Miami: Charles Leclerc admitted he threw away a podium finish for Ferrari with a wild penultimate lap as he dropped from third to finish sixth in Sunday's Miami Grand Prix.

On a day of mixed emotions for Italian motorsport - with teenage prodigy Kimi Antonelli winning a third consecutive race from pole as the country mourned the death of racing legend Alessandro Zanardi - Ferrari failed to live up to their hopes. The team arrived in Florida with an extensive upgrades package that buoyed their ambitions. But after a strong showing in Friday practice they struggled to keep pace with rivals including Antonelli's Mercedes team and McLaren.

"I was third and I pushed very hard in the second-to-last lap. I thought it was a good idea to kind of let Oscar (Piastrri) go for me to get the over-

take (of him)," said Leclerc. "I knew it was going to be very difficult to stay in front of him otherwise, and it was a very poor decision. In the space of four corners, I put a very strong race in the bin - so I am very frustrated about that."

Leclerc survived a big spin and smacked the barriers in his efforts as he dropped places and battled to the finish. He was reported to the stewards for leaving the track too many times and for driving his car in an unsafe condition on the final lap. "I don't know what will be the decision of the stewards," he said. "I did my best to try and make the corners first of all... But it was probably a lot more difficult for me than it looked to be from the outside."

His Ferrari team-mate, seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, was also disappointed as he came home seventh.

French prodigy Seixas to ride Tour de France in July

Paris: French teenage prodigy Paul Seixas announced that he will ride the Tour de France in July for the first time, raising hopes of a first home winner in more than four decades.

No Frenchman has won the Tour since Bernard Hinault did so for a record-equalling fifth time in 1985. "It is my childhood dream, something I've often dreamed about and now it's so close," Seixas said in a statement published by his Decathlon CMA CGM team.

The 19-year-old has been in stunning form this season, winning seven races and pushing all-time great Tadej Pogacar close in the Liege-Bastogne-Liege Monument one-day classic a week ago. Seixas has ridden two week-long stage races and four one-day classics this season, and has not finished below second.

He insisted that he is not planning to ride the Tour just to gain experience. "My results since the start of the season have given me a lot of confidence - I feel ready and I will have ambitious objectives," he added.

He will be the youngest rider to start a Tour in 89 years when the Grand Boucle begins in Barcelona on July 4. In a video posted to social media by Decathlon, he is shown visiting his grandparents in the eastern Haut-Savoie region near his home in Lyon. "I've come here to announce to you something special, I have a race in July," he tells his grandparents, before they guess that he is talking about the Tour.

BADMINTON

An brings 'fire' as South Korea win Uber Cup



South Korea won the Uber Cup for a third time with a 3-1 victory over title-holders China in the Danish city of Horsens on Sunday.

AFP
Copenhagen

World number one and Olympic champion An Se-young "started the fire" as South Korea toppled China to win badminton's prestigious Uber Cup women's world team title in the Danish city of Horsens. South Korea won the Uber Cup for a third time with a 3-1 victory over title-holders China late on Sunday. Top-ranked An put the Koreans on their way, dismantling world number two Wang Zhiyi 21-10, 21-13.

China levelled in the first doubles rubber through Tan Ning and Liu Shengshu, before Kim Ga-eun stunned Chen Yufei 21-19, 21-15 to put South Korea within sight of glory. Baek Ha-na and Kim Hye-jeong fought back to defeat Jia Yi-

fan and Zhang Shuxian 16-21, 21-10, 21-13 to seal the triumph.

"An started the fire going," said team captain Lee So-hee, who reserved special praise for Kim Ga-eun following her surprise victory over Tokyo Olympic champion Chen. "Ga-eun was in a tough match, but she did it, I'm very proud of her."

Kim, the world number 17, was delighted to have played her part after being dropped from the semi-finals. "I wasn't in the lineup for the tie against Indonesia in the semi-finals as I hadn't played well earlier," she said. "But that helped me save energy and it was also good motivation for the game."

China, badminton's superpower, retained their Thomas Cup men's crown with a 3-1 win over France. It was France's first Thomas Cup final, underlining the country's rise in the sport.

ATHLETICS

Australia elated after breaking 42-year record at world relays

Reuters
Melbourne

While Jamaica stole the show with world records, Australia underlined its status as an emerging power on the track with a bronze medal and a long-awaited national record at the World Athletics Relays despite missing headline names.

The Australian quartet of Luke van Ratingen, Reece Holder, Thomas Reynolds and Aidan Murphy clocked 2:55.20 in the men's 4x400 metres on Sunday to finish third behind hosts Botswana and South Africa at the Gaborone stadium, lifting Australia to fourth on the all-time list.

With Reynolds subbed in for Matthew Hunt, the team improved on their 2:57.30 in the qualification round which blitzed the nation's 42-year-old record of 2:59.70 at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. "It was so surreal and such a vibe out there," Holder said of the atmosphere. "To come out and win a medal and do a time like that is pretty incredible."

The men's 4x100 team of Lachlan Kennedy, Joshua Azzopardi, Christopher Ius and Rohan Browning finished fourth in 38 seconds flat, just outside the medals behind the U.S., South Africa and Germany. However, it came without two of

the country's fastest men as emerging talent Gout Gout and California-based Eddie Nketia sat out the event.

"We wanted to make the final and came wanting a medal, so to get so close is disappointing," Ius said. "But to show the rest of the world what we can do is such a good thing, and I think we are improving every year which is exciting."

Established track power Jamaica earlier stamped their dominance in the mixed relay, clocking a blistering 39.62 seconds to win the 4x100m in a world record, having become the first nation to break the 40-second barrier in the qualifying round.

However, Australia's athletics chiefs were thrilled with their contingent's less splashy gains, which included qualifying six relay teams to next year's world championships in Beijing.

Australia will use the July 23-August 2 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow as another way-point on the road to Beijing. While 18-year-old Gout will skip the Games to focus on the under-20 world championships, Australian Athletics are hoping Nketia can commit to a run in Glasgow.

The Commonwealth nations' top runners have often skipped the multi-sport event but Australia takes it very seriously, and topped the athletics medal table at the last two Games at Birmingham 2022 and the Gold Coast in 2018.



FROM LEFT: Australia's Luke Van Ratingen, Matthew Hunt, Aidan Murphy and Reece Holder celebrate after qualifying for the World Athletics Championships, in Gaborone, Botswana, on Sunday. (AFP)

PREMIER LEAGUE

Advantage Arsenal as Man City held in six-goal Everton thriller

AFP
Liverpool

Jeremy Doku's stoppage-time strike salvaged Manchester City a 3-3 draw at Everton, but a second half collapse handed the destiny of the Premier League title back to Arsenal last night. The Gunners now just need to win their final three games to end a 22-year wait to become the champions of England. City remain five points adrift of Mikel Arteta's team, with a game in hand, and will struggle to recover from the manner of their implosion at the Hill Dickinson Stadium.

Pep Guardiola's side appeared to be cruising to victory when Doku opened the scoring at the end of a dominant first half. However, an error-strewn second period was punished as Thierno Barry scored twice for the Toffees, either side of Jake O'Brien's header. Erling Haaland and then a sensational effort from Doku in the 96th minute did however rescue a point which

could ultimately keep City in the race. Arsenal visit relegation-threatened West Ham on Sunday before hosting Burnley and visiting Crystal Palace on the final day of the campaign.

Two Arsenal victories since City last played in the league had ramped up the pressure on Guardiola's side. City's first team had gone the best part of two weeks without a proper outing after Guardiola heavily rotated for last weekend's FA Cup semi-final win over Southampton.

The visitors looked fresh rather than rusty as Everton were penned back inside their own box for practically the entire first half. City's pressure finally found its reward two minutes before half-time when Rayan Cherki found Doku, who curled a shot into Jordan Pickford's top right-hand corner.

Things could have been even worse for the Toffees before the break as Michael Keane escaped with just a yellow card for a wild lunge on Doku. That decision proved to be vital as City paid a heavy price for a series of basic defensive errors.



Everton's Jake O'Brien (centre) heads the ball to score his team's second goal against Manchester City at Hill Dickinson Stadium in Liverpool. (AFP)

Twice Guardiola's men did not heed a warning that an Everton equaliser was coming. Gianluigi Donnarumma parried

Iliman Ndiaye's effort back into the danger area but Merlin Rohl was not alive to the rebound. Ndiaye then had a glorious

chance after an error from Matheus Nunes but again could not beat the giant Italian in the City goal.

When the equaliser finally arrived, City were again architects of their own downfall. Marc Guehi's underhit passback handed Barry the simple task of slotting past the stranded Donnarumma. Another casual City mistake moments later led to Everton's second.

This time Abdulkodir Khusanov was caught in possession by Ndiaye and bailed out by a last-ditch challenge from Guehi. But from the resulting corner, O'Brien rose highest to power home a header. Barry prodded home a third for Everton from Rohl's deflected cross with City all at sea from a rapid counter-attack.

Within seconds they had a lifeline, though, as straight from kick-off Mateo Kovacic played in Haaland to halve the arrears. Doku delivered a dagger to Everton's hopes of European football next season right at the death. But it may have come too little, too late to rescue City's chances of a seventh title in nine years.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Arteta warns Atletico will face Arsenal 'beasts'

'I can't wait. I feel the energy among the team and our supporters'



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta (centre right) monitors a team training session in London yesterday, on the eve of the Champions League semi-final second-leg match against Atletico Madrid. (AFP)

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta expects Arsenal to play like "beasts" against Atletico Madrid as they aim to reach the Champions League final for the first time since 2006.

Arteta's side earned a 1-1 draw in the semi-final first leg in Madrid last week, putting them in position to finish the job at the Emirates Stadium today.

The Gunners have never won the Champions League, with their only final appearance ending in defeat against Barcelona 20 years ago.

After losing to Paris Saint-Germain in the semi-finals in 2025, Arteta said Arsenal are determined to go one step further this time.

"We will take to the pitch as beasts tomorrow and enjoy the moment and go for it," he told reporters yesterday.

"I can't wait. I feel the energy among the team and our supporters. This is the moment that we want to live together.

"We have worked hard as a club and as a team after 20 years to be in this position again. And we are so hungry to get through to that final.

"It is a feeling of huge excitement. So let's push hard, because something amazing is going to happen."

Arteta is boosted by the avail-

ability of captain Martin Odegaard after he missed Saturday's win over Fulham in the Premier League.

German forward Kai Havertz is also in contention as he returns from two games out with a knee injury. Premier League leaders Arsenal are searching for their first silverware since the 2020 FA Cup.

Asked if he could visualise Odegaard lifting the Champions League trophy later this month, Arteta said: "I did that many years ago and it was the thing that I had in mind for this club.

"You can never promise to win major trophies, but you can promise to work every single day by implementing the vision and being determined with the ideas and the

decisions to make this club one of the best in Europe.

"Here we are. Now we have to make the next step."

Unlike this stage last season, Arteta resisted the urge to call on Arsenal supporters to "bring their boots and kick every ball" in order to carry their side to the final against PSG or Bayern Munich in Budapest on May 30.

"I don't think a message is needed. It's what is at stake that says it all," he said.

"But I can't wait to live this moment with our supporters, our people and generate something really, really special to get into that final.

"Let's live this together, go grab it and let's make it happen."

Nominees for QFA Awards 2025-26 announced

Doha: The Qatar Football Association (QFA) Awards Board of Trustees announced the final nominees for 2025-26 season awards, following the completion of voting, screening and approval process. The winners will be announced at QFA Awards ceremony to be held on May 11. The nominees for the Best Player award include Roger Guedes (Al Rayyan), Akram Afif (Al Sadd), and Baghdad Bounedjah (Al Shamal), while the nominees for the Best Coach award included David Prats (Al Shamal), Vicente Moreno (Al Rayyan), and Roberto Mancini (Al Sadd). The nominees for the Best Goalkeeper award include Jassim al-Hail (Al Arabi Club), Mahmoud Aboundi (Al Rayyan), and Meshaal Barsham (Al Sadd). The nominees for the Best

Under-23 Player award are Mubarak Shanan (Al Duhail), Ayoub al-Alawi (Al Gharafa), and Mohammed Manaie (Al Shamal). The Mansour Mufthah Award (for top scorer) was won by Al Rayyan striker Roger Guedes, who scored 21 goals in the Doha Bank Stars League. Regarding the awards that are not subject to the voting process, namely the Football for All Award, the Best Refereeing Team Award, and the Best Stand Award, the winners will be announced during the QFA Awards ceremony.



FOCUS

Liverpool's troubled season unacceptable, says Van Dijk

AFP
London

Virgil van Dijk admitted Liverpool's troubled season has been "unacceptable" after a 3-2 defeat at Manchester United dented their push to qualify for the Champions League.

The Reds' loss against their bitter rivals on Sunday left them in fourth place in the Premier League.

Arne Slot's side, crowned champions 12 months ago, have mounted a dismal title defence, forcing them to settle for fighting to reach next season's Champions League.

After their 18th defeat in all competitions this term, Liverpool still need four points from their remaining three games to seal a place in Europe's elite club competition via a top five finish.

Slot was without star forwards Mohamed Salah, Hugo Ekitike and Alexander Isak, as well as two goalkeepers, through injury against United.

But Liverpool captain Van Dijk conceded fitness issues could not be used as an excuse for such a turbulent campaign.

"I'm not here to make excuses. It's been a very disappointing season, an unacceptable season for us, and it's tough," he said.

"We shouldn't feel sorry for ourselves whatsoever. We have to work, we have to turn this around and make sure that next season these things don't happen because it's not Liverpool."

Van Dijk hit back at criticism of Liverpool players' use of their

free time after several were pictured abroad before the United game. "I'm not sure it's a holiday. It's a city trip," the Dutch defender said.

"But I think if you have one day off, and you don't have many days off, they decide what they want to do with their families. We are not kids. Everyone is an adult."

Put to him that some critics believe the team has too much time off, Van Dijk said: "Really? I wish we had a couple more days off at times because I think it works both ways.

"You see Pep Guardiola giving (Manchester City) three days off, for example, the last weeks in a row and they are doing pretty well. It is finding the right balance."

Slot is under fire for failing to keep Liverpool in the title race in a season that will end without silverware.

And Van Dijk, who has won the Premier League and Champions League during his time at Anfield, is determined to ensure Liverpool don't endure a repeat of their frustrating form next season.

"Like anyone else, obviously, personally I want this to be solved. I want us to be what I've experienced over my time here. I want to be successful," he said.

"Consistency is the most difficult thing in any job, in anything you do, but it is the best way to get results and also be successful. That's what we have to try and find.

"We have to realise that next season we can't repeat (this). It's unacceptable."

Simeone laughs off 'cheaper' Atletico hotel switch before Arsenal clash

Diego Simeone laughed off claims that Atletico Madrid's decision to switch hotels before their Champions League semi-final against Arsenal was motivated by superstition. The Spanish club stayed in the Marriott Hotel near London's Regents Park before a 4-0 defeat at Arsenal in the group stage in October. With their last-four clash poised at 1-1 heading into Tuesday's second leg at the Emirates Stadium, Simeone and his squad snubbed the Marriott this time as they moved across the capital to the Courthouse Hotel in Shoreditch. It had been reported that Simeone ordered the move on the belief that using the same base as their previous visit could bring his players bad luck. But asked about the decision on Monday, Simeone told reporters: "The hotel was cheaper. That's why we changed."

Atletico forward Julian Alvarez, who scored from the penalty spot in the first leg, is set to overcome an injury to face Arsenal. Alvarez, who has scored 20 times this season, did not feature in Atletico's win at Valencia last Saturday but has travelled to London with the rest of the squad. "Julian Alvarez is important in this game because he knows the English league very well," Simeone said of the former Manchester City player. "He played really well last week, and I hope he can bring what he needs in the game tomorrow. "As coaches, we have to think about what could happen but it is down to the players. We have to manage our emotions and play as well as possible." Antoine Griezmann has scored 212 goals in 494

appearances for Atletico, but has agreed to join Major League Soccer side Orlando City at the end of the season. Tuesday's match will be the 35-year-old's last in Europe's elite club competition if they do not progress to the final. "It is not something I am thinking about. I am looking forward to the game tomorrow," he said. "I hope we can have the right attitude and play with the right pressure and build on our second-half performance from the first leg. "Every time we start a Champions League campaign you can see yourself lifting the trophy, and any child in their bedroom would do the same. "We are just two games away now and we have to get it right, tactically defensively and going forward, and of course we need more goals."

