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**CRICKET | Page 2**

**Sunrisers**  
Hyderabad beat  
Punjab Kings to  
go top of table



**TENNIS | Page 3**

**Villa's future is**  
bright even if  
Europa dream  
ends: Emery

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Thursday, May 7, 2026  
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# GULF TIMES SPORT



**FOOTBALL**

**Al Shahania and**  
Al Kharaitiyat set  
for high-stakes  
QSL playoff

Page 4

**BASKETBALL**

## Al Arabi beat Al Sadd to claim Amir Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**A**l Arabi delivered a commanding performance to defeat Al Sadd 84-63 in the final of the HH the Amir Basketball Cup, securing the prestigious title in front of a large and energetic crowd at Al Gharafa Indoor Hall yesterday.

Al Arabi set the tone early, dominating the first three quarters with scores of 22-16, 27-25, and an emphatic 32-9 surge in the third period. Although Al Sadd responded by taking the fourth quarter 13-3, the deficit proved too large to overcome.

Bahraini standout Mustafa Hussain, known as "Mosti," led Al Arabi with an impressive 31-point performance. On the opposing side, Dejan Janic and Steven Bernard Linard Green each contributed 17 points for Al Sadd.

The championship ceremony was held in a festive atmosphere, with HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), presenting the trophy to the winners. Mohammed bin Saad al-Mughaiseeb, President of the Qatar Basketball Federation, also attended the ceremony.

For their triumph, Al Arabi received gold medals and a cash prize of QR1.5mn, while runners-up Al Sadd took home silver medals and QR900,000.

Al Arabi's path to the title included victories over Al Ahli (89-70) in the semi-finals and Qatar Club (104-73) in the quarter-fi-



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, hands over the winning trophy to players of Al Arabi, who beat Al Sadd in the final of the Amir Cup basketball tournament at Al Gharafa Indoor Hall yesterday. Mohammed bin Saad al-Mughaiseeb, President of the Qatar Basketball Federation, also participated in the ceremony.

nals. Al Sadd reached the final after defeating Al Rayyan 87-72 in the semi-finals, following a 107-96 win over Al Shamal in the quarterfinals.

In recognition of an exceptional season, the Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) awarded Al Arabi the Sports Excellence Shield for 2025-2026. The honor was received by Sheikh Tamim bin Fahd al-Thani,

President of Al Arabi Sports Club, celebrating the team's historic treble - winning the Qatar Basketball League, the Qatar Cup, and the HH the Amir Cup, along with multiple youth titles.

Meanwhile, Al Rayyan secured the inaugural Qatar Basketball Super Cup, highlighting the continued rivalry among the nation's top teams. The HH the Amir Bas-

ketball Cup, first introduced in the 1999-2000 season, remains one of the country's most prestigious competitions. Al Rayyan holds the record with 10 titles from 14 final appearances, followed by Al Gharafa with five titles. Prior to this edition, both Al Arabi and Al Sadd had four titles each. Last season, Al Rayyan defeated Al Arabi 77-70 to lift the trophy.

Speaking after the final, al-Mughaiseeb praised the tournament's success, noting that the match reflected the growing strength and professionalism of Qatari basketball.

Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, Secretary General of the Federation, emphasized the importance of such high-level competition in preparing players for inter-

national challenges. Assistant Secretary General Ahmed Yousef al-Darwish described the season as a turning point for the sport, citing strong fan attendance and professional organization. Board Member Nasser Ajlan al-Kaabi added that intense competition among clubs continues to elevate the standard of play and provide valuable experience for athletes.

**CHAMPION LEAGUE**

## Holdings PSG edge Bayern to set final date with Arsenal

THE FRENCH GIANTS GO THROUGH 6-4 ON AGGREGATE AFTER 1-1 DRAW WITH BAYERN MUNICH

AFP  
Munich

**H**olders Paris Saint-Germain set up a Champions League final against Arsenal after a 1-1 second-leg draw at Bayern Munich secured a 6-5 aggregate victory yesterday.

PSG exploded on the counter less than three minutes in and Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele put Luis Enrique's visitors ahead on the night and two goals up in the tie. PSG largely succeeded in subduing Bayern's attacking threat, despite Harry Kane's stoppage-time goal.

On their return to Munich's Allianz Arena, the scene of their greatest triumph against Inter Milan in last year's final, PSG once again emphasised their excellence in a competition they coveted without success for so long.

The French giants will be favourites to lift the trophy for a second successive season when they face Premier League leaders Arsenal on May 30 in Budapest.

The French giants are hoping to become only the second back-to-back winners since 1990, after Real Madrid. Bayern were angered by some first-half refereeing decisions but were largely toothless in attack. The six-time European champions have still not reached the final since beating PSG in the 2020 showpiece in Lisbon.

Both sides were playing their 52nd match of the season in all competitions - not even counting



Paris Saint-Germain's head coach Luis Enrique and forward Ousmane Dembele (left) and midfielder Fabian Ruiz celebrate after the Champions League second-leg semi-final match against Bayern Munich in Munich yesterday. (AFP)

last summer's Club World Cup - but only the hosts looked weary.

So dangerous in the first leg, Bayern were surprisingly stodgy in attack, with Michael Olise in particular having an off night. In the midst of a record-breaking sea-

son, Bayern's fourth defeat in all competitions will sting for a club set to wonder what might have been. With Bayern already Bundesliga champions and PSG also on track for the Ligue 1 title, both sides heavily rotated their line-

ups in the weekend's league fixtures. But both teams only made one change to their starting XIs compared to last week's spectacle in Paris. Only PSG's was forced, with Fabian Ruiz in for the injured Achraf Hakimi.

The high-octane first leg, won 5-4 by PSG, was widely lauded as among the best matches in the competition's history and yesterday's game offered more of the same early. Ruiz, starting his first European match since January,

set Khvicha Kvaratskhelia down the left flank with an excellent through ball.

The Georgian latched onto the pass, blazed past his marker before cutting back for the perfectly placed Dembele to slam home.

Bayern conceded after just 36 seconds against Real Madrid in the quarter-finals and fought back to win but seemed stunned by the early goal this time around. Olise, Kane and Joshua Kimmich all mislaid passes in the opening half-hour, ending promising attacks.

Bayern surrounded referee Joao Pinheiro claiming a penalty on the half-hour mark when Vitinha's clearance hit Joao Neves's outstretched arm in the box, but their appeals were waved away.

PSG went inches from scoring a second but Manuel Neuer tipped a close-range Neves header just wide of the post. The home team rediscovered their rhythm just before the break, with Jamal Musiala forcing an excellent low save from PSG goalkeeper Matvey Safonov and blasting over the bar. PSG showed a more measured side to their game in the second half, sitting back to absorb Bayern pressure while never losing their own threat on the counter.

Neuer made fine saves from Kvaratskhelia and Desire Doue to keep Bayern in the tie. The Bavarians dominated possession and territory but could not break through until Kane scored for a seventh straight Champions League match in stoppage time. There was time for the restart, but it was too little, too late for the hosts.

## CRICKET

# Big-hitting SRH outbat Punjab, go top of points table

Cummins is Man of the Match as Connolly century goes in vain

AFP  
Hyderabad, India

South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen smacked 69 to help Sunrisers Hyderabad climb to the top of the IPL table with a convincing 33-run win over Punjab Kings yesterday.

Klaasen put on key stands including a 88-run partnership with Ishan Kishan, who made 55, to guide Hyderabad to 235-4 at their home Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

Klaasen and Kishan built on the blazing start by openers Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head, the pair putting on 54 runs from 21 balls.

Abhishek struck 35 off 13 deliveries and Head hammered a quick 38 to lay the foundation for the commanding total.

Hyderabad's bowlers restricted Punjab to 202-7 despite a valiant unbeaten 107 by Australia's Cooper Connolly, who struck his maiden T20 century in his debut IPL season.

Connolly, 22, surpassed Quinton de Kock's record as the youngest overseas player to score an IPL hundred. South African De Kock was 23 when he made a century for Delhi a decade ago.

Hyderabad skipper Pat Cummins was full of praise for his compatriot.

"Good to see the Aussies doing well. He's been a star this season with the bat for them. Yeah, not bowling at the moment, but still showing his worth as a batter.



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Pat Cummins (third from right) celebrates after taking the wicket of Punjab Kings' Priyansh Arya during their IPL match in Hyderabad yesterday. (Reuters)

So good time for Oz," said Cummins, who took 2-34 and a pair of catches.

Hyderabad knocked Punjab from top spot and took over first place in the table with 14 points from 11 matches.

Punjab, who are eyeing their first title, slipped to second with their third straight defeat but have played one match fewer than 2016 champions Hyderabad.

"We weren't that comprehensive enough on the field, nor in bowling, nor in batting," said Punjab skipper Shreyas Iyer.

#### BRIEF SCORES

**Sunrisers Hyderabad 235 for 4** (Klaasen 69, Kishan 55, Head 38, Chahal 1-32) **beat Punjab Kings 202 for 7** (Connolly 107\*, Cummins 2-34, Shivang 2-45) **by 33 runs**



Punjab Kings' Cooper Connolly plays a shot. (AFP)

## India opens door to Pakistani athletes for multilateral events but no bilateral series

**NEW DELHI:** Pakistani players and teams will be able to participate in multilateral events hosted by India but bilateral events remain off the table, India's sports ministry has said.

India also said the visa process for sportspersons and officials will be simplified while office bearers of international sports governing bodies will be granted multi-entry visas.

"With regard to international and multilateral events, in India or abroad, we are guided by the practices of international sports bodies and the interest of our own sportspersons," the ministry said in a memorandum.

"It is also relevant to take into account India's emergence as a credible venue to host international sports events."

India is set to host the Commonwealth Games in 2030 while

they have also bid for the 2036 Olympics and the 2038 Asian Games in Ahmedabad.

The two countries engaged in a military conflict that nearly snowballed into a full-fledged war last year.

There has been a long freeze in bilateral cricket between the nuclear-armed neighbours, who have not played a full series since 2012-13 and now meet largely at neutral venues.

Although India were co-hosts of the Twenty20 World Cup earlier this year, Pakistan played all their matches in Sri Lanka - including a group game against India.

"In so far as bilateral sports events in each other's country are concerned, Indian teams will not be participating in competitions in Pakistan. Nor will we permit Pakistani teams to play in India," the ministry added.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

# Williamson, Jamieson in New Zealand squad for England Test tour



Kane Williamson (left) and fast bowler Kyle Jamieson.

Reuters  
Auckland

**K**ane Williamson and fast bowler Kyle Jamieson were included in a strong New Zealand Test squad yesterday for the tour of Ireland and England in May and June.

Williamson, New Zealand's most prolific batter, has not represented his country since last December's Test series against West Indies, while Jamieson last bowled in five-day cricket more than two years ago.

Jamieson suffered a back stress fracture in February 2024 and the tall quick will be keen to add to his 80 wickets from 19 Tests when the Black Caps play Ireland in a four-day Test and the three-match series against England.

The 31-year-old joins Will O'Rourke, Matt Henry, Ben Sears, Zak Foulkes and Blair Tickner as seam options with Jacob Duffy skipping the tour because his wife is expecting a child.

"It's a great privilege to start this next period of sustained red-ball cricket with all our pace bowlers ready to go," coach Rob Walter said in a statement.

"Kyle's been on a journey of getting his body ready for Test cricket. He's really fit and strong at the moment and will bring a unique edge to our bowling line-up.

"Will brings a quality set of skills and physical attributes

which make him a hugely exciting addition to any Test team. Ben brings height and good pace, and I love his aggression and whole-hearted approach to his bowling."

All-rounder Michael Bracewell has decided to step back from Test cricket for family reasons and will not tour, which might offer an opportunity for the uncapped Dean Foxcroft.

Foxcroft offers strong batting as well as some off-spin to a squad without New Zealand's white-ball captain Mitchell Santner, who has been sidelined by a shoulder injury but might join the tour for the second and third England Tests.

Michael Rae and the uncapped Kristian Clarke have been included as further seam options in the 19-strong squad but only for the Ireland Test in Belfast from May 27. Sears will continue to England as a travelling reserve.

New Zealand, who are second in the 2025-2027 World Test Championship standings, will then play England at Lord's from June 4 before further Tests at The Oval and Trent Bridge.

**Squad:** Tom Latham (captain), Tom Blundell (wicketkeeper), Kristian Clarke, Devon Conway, Zak Foulkes, Dean Foxcroft, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Daryl Mitchell, Henry Nicholls, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Michael Rae, Rachin Ravindra, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith, Blair Tickner, Kane Williamson, Will Young.

## GOLF

# Johnson and Homa make PGA field; no Tiger, Phil

Reuters  
Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

**T**iger Woods and Phil Mickelson will not play the PGA Championship, the second straight major in 2026 that two of the greatest golfers of all time won't be present.

The PGA of America released its field list yesterday for the major championship slated for May 14-17 at Aronimink Golf Club outside Philadelphia.

As expected, Woods' name was not on the list, as he's believed to be in a private treatment program in Switzerland following his March arrest on suspicion of DUI.

USGA CEO Mike Whan also told *Sports Illustrated* this week that he would be "super surprised" if Woods were ready to play the US Open in June.

Mickelson is sidelined for a different reason. He is still attending to what he has called a personal health matter with his family. Mickelson has missed the Masters and all but one



A view of the putting greens at the Aronimink Golf Club outside Philadelphia.

LIV Golf event so far this year for the same reason.

Mickelson formally withdrew from the field yesterday afternoon, and Max Homa was added to the field as the first alternate.

After a poor 2025 that saw him tie for 60th at the PGA and miss the US Open and Open Championship, Homa was not otherwise qualified for the 2026 PGA Championship before Tuesday. He is playing better this year,

highlighted with a tie for ninth at the Masters.

Dustin Johnson appeared in the PGA Championship field yesterday after receiving a special invitation from the PGA of America. The two-time major champion has struggled while playing with LIV Golf, but he will appear in his 69th consecutive major for which he's eligible.

"I'm definitely very excited to play," Johnson said.

"The PGA of America, we've got a great relationship. I've supported them for a long time. I'm very, very thankful that they gave me an invite. And very honored."

There are 15 past PGA champions in the field, as well as the traditional group of 20 PGA of America teaching professionals. As of yesterday, the field is at 154 players, with two final spots reserved for the winners of this week's Trust Championship and Myrtle Beach Classic if they're not already qualified.

After Homa moved in, Canada's Sudarshan Yellamaraju is the first alternate and Tom Hoge is the second. Six-time PGA Tour winner Tony Finau needs some help to make the field as the fifth alternate.

## COMMENT

# Two-time major champ Rahm doesn't see 'ways out' of multi-year LIV deal

AFP  
Washington

**T**wo-time major champion Jon Rahm revealed he has several years remaining on his LIV Golf contract and doesn't "see many ways out" after agreeing to a new deal that allows him to play on the DP World Tour.

The 31-year-old Spaniard, a former world number one, spoke yesterday ahead of this week's LIV Golf Virginia event at Trump National Washington.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), which had promised long-term support for the series, said last week it will pull funding after the 2026 campaign concludes, plunging the upstart circuit into uncertainty over his future beyond this year.

But while the vexed question of how LIV players may return to the PGA Tour has dominated golf in recent weeks, Rahm said yesterday

he remained locked into his lucrative contract.

"I have several years on my contract left and I'm pretty sure they did a pretty good job when they drafted that, so I don't see many ways out," Rahm said.

"As of right now, I'm not really thinking about it since we still have a season to play and majors to compete for. So it's not something I want to think about just yet."

Rahm did however settle one long-running issue yesterday as the DP World Tour announced they reached a deal with the Spaniard that allows him to play on the European circuit this year while paying all outstanding fines since his 2024 jump to LIV.

"There's no longer a standoff. We were able to reach an agreement," Rahm said. "There was some concessions on both sides. I offered some, they extended an olive branch. That will not be a stress anymore."

Rahm will no longer have to



Jon Rahm holds a trophy after winning the 2021 US Open.

worry about his place on the Europe side for the 2027 Ryder Cup at Adare Manor in Ireland or future stops.

"The Ryder Cup is still really far away, but I'm happy that hopefully I won't have to think about any worries or any predicaments (ahead of) Adare Manor then or hopefully ever," Rahm said.

"I want to support the DP World Tour. There's a lot of events I want to play."

Rahm meanwhile admitted to shock at PIF's decision to pull the plug on LIV Golf, saying players had been assured financing from Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund was in place for years to come.

While LIV Golf chief executive officer Scott O'Neil seeks new backers, two-time defending LIV season champion Rahm says players will likely face compromises if the series is to continue.

Several big names jumped to LIV Golf from the PGA Tour, which banned those players from its events. Some players have made the move back, such as five-time major winner Brooks Koepka, but a return path for others remains uncertain. Rahm, for his part, said he likes where he is at with LIV.

"We want to be here. It has been a lot of fun. I want to keep competing. I want to keep sharing some time with them," Rahm said. "But only time will tell. Scott and his team have a lot of hard work to do, but obviously they're experienced

in the area, and that's why they've been chosen to take this role."

Rahm, the 2021 US Open and 2023 Masters champion, jumped in 2024 and won the past two season crowns. This year, in his final tune-up for next week's PGA Championship, Rahm has won LIV titles at Hong Kong in March and Mexico City in April.

#### Smith confident LIV will go on after Saudi pull-out

Former world number two Cameron Smith has shrugged off concerns the LIV Golf tour's days are numbered, saying he had been given every assurance it will continue beyond this year despite the loss of Saudi Arabian backing.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) has spent more than \$5bn on LIV since its 2022 launch.

Smith, who captains the all-Australian Ripper GC outfit, signed up early for a reported \$100mn and has earned about \$50mn in prize

money from the team-based tour.

"I promise you will hear it first from someone else, rather than me," he said. "I know the team are working hard behind the scenes and they're doing everything they can for us. So I am excited, I know (LIV Golf chief executive) Scott O'Neil is really excited for the progress and challenge in the coming months."

"I had about a dozen inbound calls this weekend from potential investors," O'Neil said yesterday.

"It was a split between private equity, family office and then your traditional high net worth guys who invest in sports and sports teams. So that has been really positive."

O'Neil stopped short of confirming whether PIF would honour player contracts past 2026.

"I mean, they own the majority of the business now, and they've agreed to fund through the season, as they said. Nothing there has changed," he said.

FOOTBALL

# Villa's future bright even if Europa dream ends: Emery

Villa trail 0-1 against Forest after first leg of the all-English clash

AFP  
London

Unai Emery said his Aston Villa side can still challenge for silverware in future even if they fall short in their Europa League semi-final against Nottingham Forest.

Villa, pre-season favourites to win Europe's second-tier competition, trail 1-0 after last week's first leg of the all-English clash. The Birmingham club reached the UEFA Conference League semi-finals in the 2023/24 campaign and the last eight of the Champions League last season.

Villa are on course to qualify for next season's Champions League but have stumbled in recent weeks, losing their past three games in all competitions. Emery, who has won the Europa League four times in his managerial career, with Sevilla and Villarreal, said the result of Thursday's second leg at Villa Park would not define the club's season.

"We are improving, myself as well, improving here," the Spaniard said.

"And we will have, after tomorrow, our way to set more challenges for the present or future. I don't think tomorrow is the last opportunity for us or for anyone. And the players, of course, they are enjoying the process we are doing, and they are aware about how difficult is football, but how the greatest moment we are having here in Aston Villa the last three years, and we can smile and we can be proud of everything."

Emery said reaching the semi-finals was a "huge achievement" as he seeks to end Villa's 30-year wait for a major trophy. "Winning a trophy is very difficult," he added. "Very, very difficult. It's not a defeat if we are not achieving a trophy."

"The only way forwards is to keep going, improving, having opportunities in the present and the future. We have now the opportunity but only one team wins. When I spoke before the first leg, we had 25 percent of the possibility to win a trophy. Now it's maybe less because we started losing."

The match pits two clubs rich in European history against each other - Forest were continental champions in 1979 and 1980 while Villa claimed the crown in 1982. Emery said Forest, unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions, were favourites but he was relishing a "fantastic" end to the season after a poor start.

"I am excited, 100 percent. So, so motivated. When I arrived here three and a half years



Unai Emery said reaching the semi-finals was a "huge achievement" as he seeks to end Aston Villa's 30-year wait for a major trophy. (Reuters)

ago, (it) was a dream to be playing a semi-final in the Europa League. And at the beginning of the season, when we were after five matches playing in Premier League, before we started playing Europa League, I was worried how we were finishing the season this year. And finishing the season this year like we are now, in the league and in semi-final, playing the second leg at home here, against Nottingham, is really something fantastic."

#### FOREST TO MAKE LATE DECISION ON GIBBS-WHITE FITNESS

Nottingham Forest will make a late call on Morgan Gibbs-White's fitness as they prepare for match at Aston Villa. In-form Forest, leading 1-0 after the first leg against their Premier League rivals, are seeking to reach their first European final since 1980.

Gibbs-White suffered a sickening cut to his forehead during Monday's impressive 3-1 win at Chelsea, which forced him off in the second half.

The England international posted a photo on social media thanking people for their mes-

sages and showing the stitches across his forehead and nose.

There are no concussion protocols regarding the midfielder's injury but there is doubt over whether the wound will heal quickly enough.

Forest boss Vitor Pereira said headwear has been made for Gibbs-White in the event that he plays at Villa Park. Asked how the 26-year-old is feeling, Pereira said: "With pain for sure. We will see until tomorrow if he is able or not, we will see. It's a big question. This is not a question for me, it's a decision between the player, the medical department and myself, but we haven't had the last meeting to decide."

Gibbs-White has scored 16 goals this season, including a hat-trick in Forest's recent 4-1 win against Burnley.

Forest, unbeaten in their past 10 games in all competitions, have injury concerns regarding several players, with Ibrahim Sangare, Ola Aina, Murillo and Dan Ndoye all missing recent matches.

Forest are 90 minutes away from reaching their first major continental final since Brian Clough led the club to successive European Cup triumphs in 1979 and 1980.

SWIMMING

# McEvoy, Australia's 50m freestyle star, eyes butterfly challenge

Reuters  
Melbourne

Olympic champion Cameron McEvoy thinks he can take even more time off the 50 metres freestyle world record he set in March, even as he takes on the new challenge of adding 50m butterfly titles to his resume.

With 50m gold medals in all four strokes on offer at an Olympics for the first time at the 2028 Los Angeles Games, the Australian will look to earn selection in the butterfly sprint at national trials before bidding for medals at the July 23 to August 2 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

His teammates' hopes that he might add 100m freestyle to his repertoire and help Australia win relay titles have been dashed, though, with the 31-year-old adamant it would be too difficult to juggle. McEvoy, whose innovative training methods have been copied by rivals, says the same stripped-back regime that has brought him Olympic and world titles is equally applicable for the butterfly splash-and-dash.

"It's one to one. The only difference is technique but everything else really comes under the same banner," he said. "So I wouldn't have to change my training at all. It would just be exposing myself to trying to unlock the right butterfly technique."

McEvoy swam the 50m butterfly virtually on a whim at the 2024 Doha world championships and took a surprise bronze in the event. He shelved the stroke to focus on winning 50m freestyle gold at the Paris Olympics and says he is still very early in the journey to optimise his performance.

He swam a personal best of 23.05 seconds in the 50m butterfly at the China Open meet in March, two days after his 50m freestyle world record (20.88). "So there is crossover there, and I think a little bit of scope to -- if I trained it properly -- move the needle a little bit more," he said.

McEvoy is wary of putting too much time into butterfly as he focuses on raising the bar in the freestyle. He noted the last five metres of his world-record swim in China were slower than his world championship swim at Fukuoka in 2023.

"So right off the bat, there's 0.12 (seconds) in the last five metres alone," he said. "There's a little bit of low-hanging fruit left to take,



and maybe cut a 10th (of a second) here and there."

If McEvoy sounds confident it is only because he has the data to back it up, and a love for the maths and physics that underpin his pursuit of perfection. He is an open book about his training regime which involves fewer laps, more weights and coaching the nervous system to transfer gym-built strength into power in the water.

People have called him an "idiot" for being so open-source about his formula for success, he said, but he regards it as his contribution to improving the sport through innovation. "You see time and time again, people burning out, leaving the sport, hating it," he added. "And so it was an opportunity to not only allow people to have another path to get to where they wanted to go, but they can still continue with the sport and not hate it."

Leaving that legacy sounds just as important to McEvoy as his four Olympic and 10 world championships medals, a haul that would be the envy of most swimmers but one that has generated little commercial reward.

Even after his world record McEvoy is not signed with any major sponsor, and he said the corporate apathy had taken him a bit by surprise. Ironically, doped-up swimmers at the upcoming Enhanced Games in Las Vegas will have the chance to earn prize money that clean athletes like McEvoy can only dream of.

Focused on winning Olympic and world titles, McEvoy said he had never seriously considered signing up for Enhanced but cast no judgement on those who had. "The access to that form of finance is literally one message away. And knowing that has been really tough to deal with (but) wasn't something I'd ever act on," he said.

CYCLING

# Seixas targets victory in Tour warm-up race

AFP  
La Motte-Servolex, France

Budding French star Paul Seixas said he is aiming to win the main preparation race ahead of July's Tour de France. With Tour favourites Tadej Pogacar, who will go to the Tour de Suisse instead, and Jonas Vingegaard, who is tackling the Giro d'Italia this month, skipping the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes, teenage prodigy Seixas will likely start as the favourite.

But he will face stiff competition from the likes of Mexican Isaac del Toro, who won the UAE Tour and Tirreno-Adriatico earlier this year, and Spaniard Juan Ayuso, who beat the Frenchman into second place at the Tour of the Algarve in February.

"Depending on my form and the competition, I will be aiming to go for the victory," Seixas said at a press conference for selective media at his Decathlon CMA CGM team's performance centre near the Alpine town of Chambéry



in southeastern France. "I certainly won't be in Tour de France form because that's not the aim, but I imagine that will also be the case for the other riders there," added Seixas of the June 7-14 stage race.

The 19-year-old has been in sensational form this season, finishing either first or second in all six of his races. He won the Tour of the Basque Country last month, having also tasted success in one-day races the Ardeche Classic and

Fleche Wallonne. Other than finishing narrowly behind Ayuso in his opening race of the season, he was beaten only by world champion Pogacar at Strade Bianche in March and Liege-Bastogne-Liege 10 days ago.

Before taking part in his first Grand Tour in July - where the expectation around him will reach fever pitch as France pins its hopes on his young shoulders to end the 41-year wait for a home winner at the Grand Boucle - he will use his time to ride the route of Tour stages and take part in altitude training.

The Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes, in which he finished an impressive eighth last year when it was still known as the Criterium du Dauphine, will be his only race before the Tour. Today he is due to ride the route of the Tour's 16th stage time-trial between Thonon-les-Bains and Evian-les-Bains, "not far from my grandparents", he said.

He had announced on Monday his participation at the July 4-26 Tour with a social media video of him breaking the news first to his grandparents.

## Diallo says Manchester United squad happy if Carrick stays

London: Amad Diallo has no doubt "everyone" at Manchester United would be pleased to see Michael Carrick carry on as head coach next season. The 44-year-old former United midfielder returned to Old Trafford as interim boss until the end of the campaign shortly after the end of Ruben Amorim's ill-fated reign in January.

Carrick has overseen a huge upturn in the Red Devils' fortunes and United have qualified for the Champions League with three games to spare. Kobbie Mainoo said the players "want to die for" Carrick following a 3-2 victory over Liverpool on Sunday that left third-placed United six points clear of their arch-rivals in the Premier League table.

Carrick's long-term future at

Old Trafford remains in doubt, however. "Honestly, it's not the player who decides who is going to stay here next season, but what I can say (is) everyone is happy to have him as manager," Diallo said.

"Everyone is with him. He's that manager who has a good relationship with every player, so we are really happy to have him as manager and, yeah, we will be happy if we have him next season as manager."

Diallo has not scored or provided an assist since Carrick's appointment, but the manager has still lauded the 23-year-old for his work-rate and overall impact.

"Even when you are in tough moments, he's there to talk to you, he's there to help you," Diallo explained.

## Talal Al Waab wins Senior Stallions gold at Qatar National Peninsula Arabian Horse Show



Talal Al Waab, owned by Abdulla Mohamed al-Kuwari and bred by Sheikh Abdulla Khalid al-Thani, claimed gold in the Senior Stallions Championship of the 11th Qatar National Peninsula Arabian Horse Show (for Individual Owners) which concluded at the Qatar Equestrian Federation on Tuesday. Noor Al Jassasiya of Al Dana Stud won gold in the Senior Mares Championship. Qassam Al Doha, owned by Al Mashrab Stud and bred by Doha Stud, topped the Junior Colts Championship; Farida Al Jaham of Al Jaham Stud was best in Junior Fillies Championship; Marwan Al Shaheen of Al Shaheen Stud won gold in Yearling Colts Championship while Sarah Al Jazeel of Al Jazeel Stud stood out winning gold in the Junior Fillies Championship. The three-day show was organized and conducted by the Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club. PICTURES: Juhaim

## PREVIEW

## Shahania, Kharaitiyat set for high-stakes QSL play-off

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Shahania and Al Kharaitiyat face off in a decisive relegation play-off tomorrow, with a place in next season's Qatar Stars League at stake at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Kick-off is scheduled for 7pm, as a top-flight side battles to retain its status against an ambitious Second Division challenger seeking promotion.

Al Shahania enter under pressure after finishing 11th in the QSL with 21 points, a result that forced them into the play-off. They approach the contest knowing defeat would confirm relegation.

Al Kharaitiyat, meanwhile, arrive in confident mood following a strong Second Division campaign. They finished runners-up with 25 points behind champions Lusail, who secured automatic promotion. Unbeaten throughout the season and

with the best defensive record in the league, Al Kharaitiyat will be aiming to carry that momentum into what promises to be a tense and decisive encounter.

Speaking ahead of the clash, Al Shahania assistant coach Pejman Montazeri acknowledged the challenge awaiting his team. "The entire season hinges on this match. We have watched them, they are a good team with a strong structure, and it will be a very difficult game for us," he said.

Montazeri, however, expressed confidence in his side's recent progress, highlighting improvements in mentality and performances in the closing stages of the season.

"The players are aware of this and we are well-prepared. The team is improving significantly in terms of mentality and form, as seen in the last few matches. But we are up against a side that has not lost and has the best defence, so it will be a tough match," he added.

Echoing his coach's sentiments, Al Sha-

hania player Lotfi Madjer described the encounter as a 'final'. "Everyone knows this match is very important and the entire season depends on it. It is about either staying in the First Division or being relegated," he said.

Al Kharaitiyat coach Rachid Tiberkane has warned his side face a tough test against Al Shahania in the promotion play-off, describing it as the most important stage of their season. "The team has worked hard since the start of the season to achieve direct promotion, but we did not succeed," he said. "However, hope remains to crown a full season's effort with victory and promotion. Preparations are going well. We have focused on the mental side as much as the tactical one, because matches like these are decided by small details, composure and avoiding mistakes."

The match will go to extra time and, if needed, penalties in case of a draw, ensuring a decisive outcome in this high-stakes battle.



Al Shahania players at a training session yesterday.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## Arteta hails 'incredible night' for Arsenal

'I cannot be happier, prouder for everybody that is involved in this football club'

Reuters  
London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was overjoyed as his side reached the Champions League final for the second time in their history on Tuesday, saying there had been a huge positive shift in energy and belief following crucial results over the last week. A tap-in from captain Bukayo Saka just before half-time and a ninth clean sheet in this season's competition gave Arsenal a 2-1 aggregate semi-final victory over Atletico Madrid.

They now face either holders Paris St Germain, who knocked them out in last season's semi-finals, or Bayern Munich in the Puskas Arena in Budapest on May 30 - a week after they hope to have sealed a first Premier League title for 22 years.

Arteta, who had sprinted onto the pitch at the final whistle to hug his players and then ran to the home fans for a series of odes, said it had been an "incredible night". "I cannot be happier, prouder for everybody that is involved in this football club," Arteta told reporters. "We have all been so aligned on the desire and ambition that we had."

The victory means Arsenal have also equalled their club record for most wins in a single season, according to Opta. They have now won 41 games across all competitions, matching the 55-year-old record set in the 1970-71 campaign.

Arteta said he had never experienced such a raucous build-up and atmosphere both inside and outside the stadium during his time at the Emirates, and that his side



FROM LEFT: Arsenal's Noni Madueke, manager Mikel Arteta, Declan Rice and Eberechi Eze celebrate after reaching the Champions League final at the Emirates Stadium in London on Tuesday night. (Reuters)

now had the bit between their teeth again.

Arsenal's season appeared to be faltering a few weeks ago but having overcome Atletico and seen Premier League title rivals Manchester City stumble the previous night, the North London side are within touching distance of a first English title since 2004 and potential European glory.

"It's great. Everybody can feel a shift in energy and belief in everything," Arteta said. "Let's use it in the right way and un-

derstand that the margins and the difficulty of what we are trying to achieve is huge, but we have the ability and conviction today, that is for sure."

Arsenal's midfield engine, Declan Rice, also said the side had regained their momentum. "We have kind of turned a corner again. We went through a stage where we weren't performing at our best. We were a bit sloppy in our play, but we have found a new way to play again," Rice said. "When

you have got confidence in football it is everything. I know everyone is focused."

Rice also underscored the longer-term progression Arsenal have made and the importance of their league game against his former side West Ham United at the weekend. "We have kept building - we have kept pushing each other. This competition and the Premier League. We have gone full throttle," Rice said. "Sunday now is a massive one."

## Infantino defends World Cup ticket prices

**Beverly Hills, United States:** FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Tuesday defended World Cup ticket prices, insisting that football's global governing body was obliged to take advantage of US laws that allow tickets to be resold for thousands of dollars above face value.

FIFA has faced searing criticism over the cost of World Cup tickets, with fan organisation Football Supporters Europe (FSE) branding the pricing structure "extortionate" and a "monumental betrayal".

FSE filed a lawsuit with the European Commission in March targeting FIFA over "excessive ticket prices" for the tournament. FIFA's own World Cup resale website, FIFA Marketplace, last week advertised four tickets to the July 19 final in New York at a cost of more than \$2mn each.

Speaking at the Milken Institute Global Conference in Beverly Hills, Infantino said the eye-watering prices reflected demand to watch the World Cup. "If some people put on the resale market, some tickets for the final at \$2mn, number one it doesn't mean that the tickets cost \$2mn," Infantino said.

"And number two it doesn't mean that somebody will buy these tickets," Infantino said. "And if somebody buys a ticket for the final for \$2mn I will personally bring him a hot dog and a Coke to make sure that he has a great experience." Fan groups have contrasted the difference in price of tickets for this summer with the Qatar World Cup in 2022. The most expensive ticket for the final in 2022 was around \$1,600 at face value, while in 2026 the most expensive ticket for the final is about \$11,000 at its original price.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Calm after the storm for Simeone as Atletico bow out

Reuters  
London

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone spent almost the entire second leg of his side's Champions League semi-final defeat by Arsenal prowling his technical area, gesticulating at his players and seemingly kicking everything.

As his hopes of taking the club to the final for the third time in his 15-year reign faded late on in their 1-0 loss at The Emirates his emotions got the better of him and, not for the first time while wearing a suit, he was booked.

But the 56-year-old Argentine was a model of composure later as he reflected on a 2-1 aggregate defeat for his team who found resilient Arsenal too tough a nut to crack. "I feel calm, I feel peace, I think the team gave absolutely everything," he told reporters. "(Arsenal) took their big chance in the first half and they deserved it."

Simeone's side struggled to open up an Arsenal defence that kept a ninth clean sheet in this season's Champions League and the Spaniards were left to rue the opportunities they spurned in the second half of the 1-1 draw in Madrid last week. "In the first leg we could have won it but we were not clinical enough," he said.



"We gave it all and now we have to accept the place that we are in. I'm proud of where we are."

Simeone was generous in his praise of Arsenal - a team who boast many of the attributes - defensive discipline and an ability to win ugly - once associated with his sides. "I think (manager) Mikel Arteta has done an incredible job at Arsenal ... I'm really pleased for them, they deserve it," Simeone said.

It proved to be a night of heart-break for Atletico's French forward Antoine Griezmann whose dream of bowing out in a Champions League final before his move to Orlando City in the MLS was shattered. "He has been an amazing player. We are sad not just for him but for all the fans of Atleti too," goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. "Everyone was looking for this final but we didn't reach it so it's a difficult moment."

## FOCUS

## Asia fans sweat on World Cup broadcast rights

AFP  
Hong Kong

Swathes of football-mad Asia from China to India and Thailand are yet to confirm broadcast rights for the biggest-ever World Cup with kick-off barely one month away. Unsociable match times in the region is one reason why hundreds of millions of fans have been left sweating about whether they can watch from their sofas.

Football's showpiece is being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico and begins on June 11 when the Mexicans face South Africa. For fans in Beijing and Shanghai the opening match will start at 3am, as will the final. In New Delhi that is 12:30am, although some games will be better timing in Asia.

Sandeep Goyal, chairman at advertising agency Rediffusion, said that he was "privy to some discussions" between football's governing body FIFA and Indian broadcasters. "The first problem is of match timings," said Goyal. "The bigger, better matches are at 12:30am or 3:30am. A few at 6:30 am. Except die-hard fans, match viewership is likely to be low in India. "Therefore monetisation opportunities for the channels come down massively."

Goyal said that JioStar, India's largest media conglomerate, had offered \$20 million for the rights. Sony did not make an offer, he said. FIFA originally wanted \$100mn for the 2026 and 2030 World Cup rights, Indian media has said. "The



Unsociable match times in Asia means monetisation opportunities for broadcasters come down massively. (AFP)

final deal is likely to close at much lower than what FIFA is looking for," Goyal added.

Like India, China has also not announced a deal for a tournament that has a most-ever 48 teams and 104 matches. Neither country - which combined have a population of nearly three billion - is playing at the World Cup but interest is intense, particularly in China.

The country accounted for 49.8 percent of all hours of viewing on digital and social platforms globally during the Qatar 2022 World Cup, according to FIFA.

State media weighed in this week, with the Global Times citing a 2015 regulatory notice saying that national broadcasting behemoth CCTV has the exclusive right to negotiate and buy World Cup broadcasting rights in China.

"Historically, CCTV has secured World Cup rights well in advance," the Global Times said. "For previous editions, agreements were typically concluded early enough

to allow for extensive promotion and advertising campaigns."

Thailand have never reached the World Cup but football is wildly popular there - and there is no confirmed deal. Thailand's National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) removed the World Cup from a "must-have" list last June, meaning the tournament no longer has to be shown on free-to-air television.

Thailand's prime minister was moved to assure fans on Tuesday that they would not miss out. "Previous governments ensured free access to the World Cup, and my administration should not be an exception," Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters.

Thailand struggled to secure live rights for the previous tournament in 2022, before the Sports Authority of Thailand finalised a last-minute reported \$33mn deal with FIFA, funded by the NBTC and private partners including telecom

giant True Corp. Malaysia's communications ministry announced Wednesday that the national broadcaster Radio Televisyen Malaysia and Unifi TV will show the tournament there, after reports in local media said there was haggling behind the scenes.

James Walton, sports business leader at Deloitte Asia Pacific, said that headlines screaming of millions of fans missing out in Asia were wide of the mark. "This happens every cycle in some countries," he said. "The country broadcasters want the best deal as they have to balance this cost against potential revenues from advertising (for commercial broadcasters) or social benefit (for public/government-owned broadcasters)."

"Meanwhile, the rights holders know that this is a one-off opportunity to sell a time-sensitive rights package. The reality is that it's almost unthinkable for most countries to not show the World Cup," he said. "So one way or another, a deal will be reached."

"Realistically, fans in all these countries will definitely get to watch as their governments will realise the potential for unrest," Walton added.

"And FIFA will want to ensure their flagship event gets maximum coverage to fulfil sponsor commitments, raise the profile of the sport and to avoid encouraging piracy." Asked by AFP if it was worried about the rights issue with the World Cup coming up fast, FIFA said that it had sealed agreements with broadcasters in more than 175 countries.