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FOOTBALL

Sadd chase double as Gharafa target Amir Cup title defence

Sadd are appearing in their 30th final and hold a record 19 titles, Gharafa are seeking a ninth title

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd will take on holders Al Gharafa in the final of the 54th Amir Cup today at Khalifa International Stadium, with Qatar's most prestigious football title at stake.

Having already secured qualification for next season's AFC Champions League Elite by winning the league title, Al Sadd are aiming to complete a domestic double, while Al Gharafa hope to retain the trophy and secure a direct place in Asia's premier club competition.

Al Sadd are appearing in their 30th Amir Cup final and hold a record 19 titles, 10 more than nearest rivals Al Arabi. However, Al Gharafa have won both previous Amir Cup finals between the two sides - a 4-1 victory in 2002 and a 4-3 penalty shootout win after a goalless draw in 2012.

Al Sadd have enjoyed an impressive run to the final. They defeated second division side Al Markhiya 2-1 in the Round of 16, overcame league runners-up Al Shamal 6-4 in the quarter-finals and then cruised past Al Duhail 4-1 in the semi-finals.

Al Gharafa, seeking a ninth Amir Cup title, began with a 2-0 victory over Al Kharaitiyat before edging Umm Salal 2-1 in the quarter-finals. They booked their place in the final after beating Al Wakrah 3-2 on penalties following a goalless semi-final draw.

Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins expressed confidence in his side's ability to defend the title they won last season with a 2-1 victory over Al Rayyan.

"There is no doubt the match will be difficult against a strong side like Al Sadd, the league champions. But we also have a strong team with quality players, and I expect a closely contested game like our previous meetings," Martins said. "We will enter the final with one objective - to win."

The Portuguese coach, targeting his fourth title with the club, said his players have developed a strong mentality in knockout competitions and highlighted their unbeaten Amir Cup run since he took charge at the start of the 2024 season.

Martins also pointed to the absence of key attacking players including Joselu, Mohammed Muntari and Alaa El-Din Hassan in recent weeks, but backed his squad to rise to the occasion.

Al Gharafa star Yacine Brahimi said reaching a second successive Amir Cup final was a source of pride. "It is a great honour for me and my teammates to play in the Amir Cup final for the second year in a row," Brahimi said. "We are determined to retain the title and will fight with everything we have to achieve our goal."

The former Algeria international acknowledged the challenge posed by Al



Forward Akram Afif holds the key to Al Sadd's aim of winning a record-extending 20th Amir Cup title as they face holders at Khalifa International Stadium today.



Al Gharafa star Yacine Brahimi said reaching a second successive Amir Cup final was a source of pride for his team.



Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins expressed confidence in his side's ability to defend the title they won last season with a 2-1 victory over Al Rayyan.



Al Sadd Italian manager Roberto Mancini said the club's history and status meant it must always compete for titles.

Sadd but insisted the team was fully focused on lifting the trophy once again.

Al Sadd coach Roberto Mancini said the club's history and status meant it must always compete for titles. "All players are ready for the match and determined to win the trophy," Mancini said.

The Italian coach described Al Gharafa

as a strong side with experienced players and staff, noting that they spent much of the season at the top of the league standings before Al Sadd claimed the title. "That reflects the quality of our opponents," he said, adding that finals are often decided by small details and full concentration would be required throughout the match.

Mancini also confirmed Brazilian forward Roberto Firmino would return after missing the semi-final victory over Al Duhail through injury. "Firmino is an important player for us because of his experience and technical quality," he said.

Al Sadd captain Hassan al-Haydos said the team was determined to complete the

domestic double after securing the league title. "Our ambition is to win the title and complete the domestic double," al-Haydos said.

He added that the squad had prepared well despite a demanding schedule and called on supporters to help inspire the team to another trophy.

SPOTLIGHT

Shahania beat Kharaitiyat to retain Qatar Stars League status

By a Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shahania retained their place in the Qatar Stars League for next season as they quelled Al Kharaitiyat's challenge 3-0 in their Play-Off match at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

Al Kharaitiyat were aiming to make a return to Qatar's top flight league but their hopes were dashed as Abdoulaye Traore (30th minute), Moaz Tawhed Elwadia (53rd minute), and Andreas Van Beek (62nd minute) struck for Al Shahania.

Both sides were tight-fisted in defence at the start until Al Shahania's Ivorian winger Traore broke the deadlock as he picked on a long ball from Francesco Antonucci to

dash in and beat two defenders and the rival goalkeeper.

Al Kharaitiyat tried to hit back as action resumed in the second half but Al Shahania's goalkeeper Shehab Mamdouh Ellethy made a well-timed leap to push out a long free kick.

Seven minutes later, Elwadia doubled Al Shahania's lead as he intercepted a Pelle van Amersfoort header assist before shooting it in.

More joy awaited Al Shahania as their Dutch star Andreas Van Beek deflected in a Marc Martinez free kick - taken from about 20 yards on the right - to make the scoreline 3-0.

Al Shahania had ended their Qatar Stars League campaign in 11th place with 21 points to be pushed into the relegation contest while Al Kharaitiyat had finished as runners-up in the Second Division.



Al Shahania players celebrate with support staff and their families after winning the Qatar Stars League Play-Off match against Al Kharaitiyat.

CRICKET

Captain Shanto's ton puts Bangladesh on top in Pakistan Test

'Shanto's innings is one of the best I have seen from him'

AFP
Dhaka

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto hit an attacking century as Bangladesh recovered from a shaky start to post 301-4 on the opening day of the first Test against Pakistan yesterday.

Shanto struck his ninth Test hundred off just 129 balls with the help of 12 fours and two sixes to delight the home fans at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

The in-form batsman steadied the innings after Bangladesh were reduced to 31-2 inside 11 overs, before falling lbw to seamer Mohammad Abbas.

The left-handed pair of Shanto (101) and Mominul Haque put on 170 runs off 257 balls for the third wicket, the highest partnership for that wicket against Pakistan and the third highest overall for Bangladesh.

Mominul praised Shanto, saying it was among his best knocks.

"Shanto's innings is one of the best I have seen from him. He is in outstanding form," Mominul said.

"Even under a lot of pressure, he manages to score hundreds. Today as well, he made a century in very difficult conditions. He is in the best form of his life."

Mominul was denied a well-deserved century, trapped leg before by spinner Noman Ali on 91.

Mushfiqur Rahim and Litton Das then took over, surviving the second new ball without trouble.

Mushfiqur ended unbeaten on 48 off 104 balls, with Litton Das unbeaten on eight.

Bangladesh lost both openers inside the first hour after they were sent in to bat.

Mahmudul Hasan Joy edged Shaheen Shah Afridi behind for eight after surviving a dropped catch on four, before Shadman Islam was caught at slip off Hasan Ali for 13.

Pakistan's bowlers toiled in hot and humid conditions, finding little assistance from the pitch. They also conceded 32 extras.



Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto celebrates after scoring a century during the first Test against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (AFP)

Abbas said Pakistan were up-beat despite the day not going their way.

"I don't think it was a frustrat-

ing day," Abbas said. "We did really hard work. The new ball is in our hand, so we will come tomorrow and take early wickets."

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 301 for 4 (Shanto 101, Mominul 91, Abbas 1-51) **vs Pakistan.**

IPL

Allen century powers Kolkata Knight Riders to fourth win in a row

AFP
New Delhi

Finn Allen unleashed a blistering maiden IPL century to power a resurgent Kolkata Knight Riders to a fourth win on the bounce with an eight-wicket rout of Delhi Capitals yesterday.

The New Zealander brought up his ton with his tenth six which sealed a victory which had been set up by a superb exhibition of spin bowling masterminded by Sunil Narine.

West Indian off-spinner Narine took one for 17 from his four overs as the Kolkata spinners established a middle-overs stranglehold, restricting Delhi to 142-8 at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi.

Narine was well supported by left-armers Anukul Roy and mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy.

Between them, the trio snared three for 76 from 12 exceptional overs, derailing a Delhi innings that had begun with great promise after Sri Lankan opener Pathum Nissanka made a polished half-century.

Nissanka and KL Rahul put on 49 for the first wicket on being put in by Ajinkya Rahane, but once the spinners came on, the scoreboard came to a virtual standstill.

Delhi were strangled by the brilliance of the Kolkata tweekers and failed to score a boundary for 38 deliveries at a stretch in the second half of the innings before Ashutosh Sharma provided the late impetus with 39 off 28 deliveries.

Allen, who came on as the impact substitute for a hobbling

Chakravarthy, hadn't survived the Powerplay in his previous six innings but he bided his time after losing Rahane, run out at the non-striker's end backing up, and Angkrish Raghuvanshi, bowled off his shoulder trying to sweep Axar Patel, in quick succession.

Allen found an able ally in Cameron Green, the powerful Australian all-rounder who was content to play second fiddle during a match-sealing unbroken third-wicket alliance that yielded 116 runs in 64 deliveries.

Dropped on 42 at long-on by Tristan Stubbs, Allen brought up his fifty off 32 deliveries before switching gears effortlessly.

He took down wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Vipraj Nigam with consummate ease, needing a mere 15 deliveries for his second fifty.

Allen breached the three-figure mark with the last of his 10 sixes, off paceman Mukesh Kumar, the boundary also muscling three-time former champions Kolkata home with 34 deliveries to spare.

Kolkata swapped places with Delhi on the points table, climbing to seventh and keeping their playoff hopes alive, while Delhi slumped to their ninth defeat at home in 11 outings since the start of the 2025 season.

"Happy for Allen, he was struggling and worked hard. Want to praise our bowlers, they've done well so consistently, spinners and death bowlers," KKR captain Rahane said.

BRIEF SCORES: Kolkata Knight Riders 147 for 2 (Allen 100*) **beat Delhi Capitals 142 for 8** (Nissanka 50, Tyagi 2-25, Roy 2-31) **by eight wickets**



Kolkata Knight Riders' Finn Allen plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi. (AFP)

CYCLING

France's Magnier sprints to victory in crash-hit Giro d'Italia opener



Soudal Quick-Step French rider Paul Magnier (centre) sprints to the finish line to win the 1st stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026 race between Nessebar and Burgas, Bulgaria, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Burgas, Bulgaria

Paul Magnier won the opening stage of the 2026 Giro d'Italia in Bulgaria yesterday in a bunch sprint, after a late crash left most of the peloton out of contention.

France's Magnier pipped Tobias Lund Andresen in a frantic finish following 147 kilometres of largely flat racing from Nessebar to Burgas, in the first of the three early stages which are being held in Bulgaria.

The Soudal-Quick-Step rider was one of a handful of riders who were ahead of a crash 600 metres from the line which left the rest of the field to roll home in the knowl-

edge that they would not lose any time due to the proximity of the accident to the finish. Magnier, 22, claimed his first ever Grand Tour win and also became the first Frenchman to wear the pink jersey for the overall lead since Bruno Armirail three years ago.

"I'm so proud of the team and I'm so happy to be starting the Giro in such good form," said Magnier.

"The finale was chaotic after an easy day for everyone, on a narrow road. Beating such good sprinters here makes me very happy."

Magnier, who was born in Texas and moved to France as a toddler, is one of his country's young guns alongside Paul Seixas and last year clocked up 19 wins, the second-highest behind Tadej Pogacar.

His win on Friday is a return to form following disappointing spring classics season, after beginning the year with two stages at the Volta ao Algarve.

Jonathan Milan, who won the sprinters jersey at last year's Giro, could only finish fourth after escaping a crash which kept other sprinters like Dylan Groenewegen and Kaden Groves from contesting the stage finale.

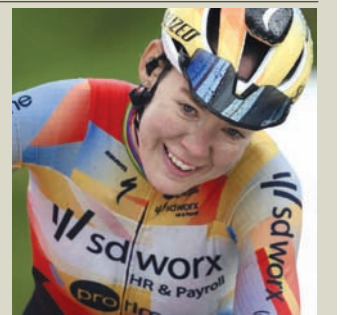
Jonas Vingegaard, who rode with one fingernail painted red in support of a children's welfare charity, was one of those in the main pack held up by the crash.

Dane Vingegaard is the favourite for overall victory and on Saturday will be in the peloton for a hilly 221km ride from Burgas to Veliko Tarnovo.

Van der Breggen soars into Vuelta lead with stage six win

Dutch veteran Anna van der Breggen pulled on the overall leader's red jersey after winning stage six of the women's Vuelta yesterday, taking a solo victory atop a steep final climb in driving rain. The 35-year-old SDX Works rider Van der Breggen dethroned overnight leader Lotte Kopecky of Belgium, who retained the sprint points jersey. The stage was contested under the rain in the remote and green Asturias region of northwest Spain. "It was a hard day and a hard climb, but I was confident and

the girls looked after me so I'm really happy with the final result," said van der Breggen. Spain's Paula Blasi came second, eight seconds off the pace. Frenchwoman Marion Bunel is third at 29sec and is the top young rider on the race. Bunel's Visma teammate, the fancied Pauline Ferrand-Prevot, lost ground crossing the line over two minutes behind. Van der Breggen pulled ahead of her rivals on the final Les Praeres climb that featured sections with over 20 percent incline to take control of the race heading in Saturday's final stage.



Team SD Worx - Protime's Dutch rider Anna van der Breggen celebrates winning the 6th stage of the La Vuelta Femenina yesterday. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

Formula One engines to change again in 2027, announces FIA

AFP
Paris

Formula One bosses have responded to the criticism of this season's power unit modifications by agreeing to "further evolutionary changes" before a revamp for the 2027 season, the FIA announced yesterday.

Motorsport's governing body said that an agreement had been reached "in principle" between the 11 team bosses and five power unit manufacturers to restore the primacy of combustion power over electric power as early as 2027.

"The measures agreed in principle today for 2027 would see a nominal increase in internal combustion engine power by 50 kilowatts with a fuel-flow increase and a nominal reduction

of the energy recovery system deployment power by 50 kilowatts," the FIA said in a statement.

This decision, which still has to be discussed in detail let alone approved, would in effect put an end to the 50/50 parity in hybrid engines - half electric, half combustion - introduced this season by the FIA.

The new regulations have created exciting racing for viewers but have met with a varied reception from the drivers with four-time Max Verstappen describing it as "Formula E on steroids" and hinting he might step away from Formula One if it did not change.

The 50/50 system involves a complex management of the battery during overtakes and then during the necessary recharging of electrical energy when slowing down and braking.

This has triggered safety concerns, notably when Oliver Bearman had a dramatic crash at the Japan GP as he closed on Alpine's Franco Colapinto.

The significant difference in speed between the two cars as a result of their contrasting states of energy deployment led to Bearman taking evasive action and hitting the wall.

Last month, the FIA announced a new "adjusted" version of the regulation which came into play at last weekend's Miami GP.

Friday's meeting gave the thumbs up to the modifications, saying they had improved competition and were a "step in the right direction".

The FIA said they would look at "further adjustments at future events", possibly as soon as the next grand prix in Canada on May 24.

TENNIS

Djokovic makes early Rome exit ahead of Roland Garros

ZVEREV AND THREE-TIME CHAMPION SWIATEK MOVE INTO ITALIAN OPEN THIRD ROUND

AFP
Rome

Novak Djokovic slumped to an early elimination from the Italian Open yesterday, crumbling to a second-round defeat at the hands of qualifier Dino Prizmic which leaves question marks about his physical condition ahead of Roland Garros.

Tennis icon Djokovic was sent packing by big-hitting Croatian Prizmic, who claimed the biggest scalp of his young career with a stunning 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 win on centre court in Rome.

Djokovic, a 24-time Grand Slam winner, was making his comeback from a shoulder injury in the last big tournament before the French Open, which starts later this month.

And the world number four was unsure as to whether he would be back to his best for the clay-court Grand Slam, simply saying "I hope so" when asked by reporters whether Paris would see the all-conquering "Nole" of old.

"Let's see what happens," said Djokovic, who lamented persistent physical problems in the twilight of his stellar career.

"I don't recall the last time in the last couple of years of preparation where I didn't have any physical issues coming into a tournament," said Djokovic.

"It's always something, it's kind of a new reality that I have to deal with."

Djokovic wore shoulder strapings in his first tournament since losing in the last 16 at Indian Wells



Croatia's Dino Prizmic (right) with Serbia's Novak Djokovic after winning the second round match of the Italian Open at the Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

in March, after pulling out of tournaments in Miami, Monte Carlo and Madrid.

He hadn't previously been knocked out this early in a tournament since the Madrid Open last year, and he looked a long way from the player who has won six titles at the Foro Italico.

He breezed into a one-set lead but then buckled under the weight of Prizmic's powerful hitting which has led to the 20-year-old rising to a career-high world ranking of 79.

Prizmic has beaten two top 10 players in a matter of weeks with sixth-ranked Ben Shelton succumbing in the second round in Madrid last month.

Djokovic is Prizmic's idol, and a landmark win gives the young talent a match with either Ugo Humbert or Vit Kopriwa and a chance to make the fourth round of a Masters 1000 event for the first time.

"He's a great competitor, a great fighter, a great kid" said Djokovic of Prizmic.

"I always wish him all the best and today he has definitely performed high-level tennis."

Earlier, Alexander Zverev eased into the third round after comfortably dealing with fellow German Daniel Altmaier in straight sets, 7-5, 6-3.

The second seed is in good form having reached the final in Madrid last weekend and he is again on the other side of the draw to red-hot favourite Jannik Sinner.

The 29-year-old has been beaten by Sinner in four Masters 1000



Poland's Iga Swiatek in action during her second round match against Caty McNally of the US yesterday. (Reuters)

events this year and will have his work cut out if he is to add to his 2017 and 2024 titles in Rome.

Three-time champion Iga Swiatek battled into the third round of the women's tournament with a 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3 win over Caty McNally.

Swiatek will play US 28th seed Emma Navarro or Italy's Elisabetta Cocciaretto this weekend for a place in the last 16, after a match which initially looked like being a routine win but dragged on for the best part of three hours.

"It was a tough match, Caty re-

ally played great," said Swiatek.

"I had to be patient. For sure, some mistakes happened. It was not an easy match. I'm really happy I was solid at the end and in the important moments. I kept it together."

Swiatek, a six-time Grand Slam champion, has not won a clay tournament since capturing the last of her four French Open titles in 2024.

The Pole suffered her earliest exit in five appearances in Madrid last month when she retired in the third round due to a viral illness.

GOLF

Hot-putting McCarty seizes PGA lead at Quail Hollow

AFP
Washington

Matt McCarty birdied five of his first eight holes, three on spectacular putts from beyond 50 feet, and grabbed the lead in Thursday's storm-halted opening round of the PGA Tourist Championship.

On a day when Masters winner Rory McIlroy made 17 pars before a closing birdie, McCarty stole the show with long-distance putting accuracy he called surreal.

The 28-year-old American also birdied four of his last five holes to fire an eight-under par 63 and sit atop the leaderboard at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina. Bad weather delayed the start by 90 minutes after more than two inches of overnight rain, and play was halted by storms with 20 of 72 players needing to finish the first round on Friday morning.

South Korean back-nine starter Im Sung-jae birdied six of his first eight holes and sank a 12-foot eagle putt at the par-five seventh to stand second on seven-under with one hole to play. McCarty, who sank just over 220 feet in putts, was the first player since distance measuring was introduced by the PGA Tour to make three putts from beyond 50 feet in one round.

"You never really expect to make one of them, let alone three in the span of like five or six holes," McCarty said. "I've been focused on doing a lot of lag putting the last couple of days out here, just hitting a lot of shots and knowing



Matt McCarty hits a tee shot on the third hole during the first round of the Truist Championship 2026 at Quail Hollow Country Club in Charlotte, North Carolina. (AFP)

how long in and I guess that paid off a little bit."

McCarty, who won his first PGA title at the 2024 Black Desert Championship in only his third tour start, was a runner-up to world number one Scottie Scheffler in January in the California desert and ninth last week at Doral. "Being in the mix all week was really good for me," McCarty said. "Game feels solid. Feel like I'm moving in the right direction."

McCarty started on the back nine and opened with a birdie putt from just inside five feet. He added a birdie putt from just beyond 52

feet at the par-three 13th hole then birdied the 14th from just inside five feet. At 16, McCarty rolled in another birdie putt stunner from just inside 60 feet and followed at the par-three 17th with a 52-foot birdie putt. McCarty sank a birdie putt from just inside four feet at the fifth, missed the green and made bogey at the par-three sixth and answered with a tap-in birdie at the par-three seventh after reaching the green in two.

He birdied the eighth from 12 feet and closed with a third consecutive birdie after landing an incredible approach from 245 yards

with a 7-wood just inches from the hole - but before the group ahead had finished the hole. "I had no idea they were on the green," McCarty said.

Four-time Quail Hollow winner Rory McIlroy, the world number two from Northern Ireland, shot 70 in his first competitive round since winning his sixth major crown at last month's Masters. McIlroy opened on the back nine and made 17 pars in a row before sinking a 15-foot birdie putt at nine, raising his hands into the air and looking to the heavens after making the putt.

Felix targeting US mixed relay spot

Seven-time Olympic gold medalist Allyson Felix said she is aiming for a spot on the U.S. mixed 4x400m relay team at the 2028 Los Angeles Games after the 40-year-old announced her plans to come out of retirement in April. The Los Angeles native said she felt compelled to try for a spot at a sixth Olympics with the sporting showpiece taking place in her hometown.

"My ideal situation would be to try to make the relay pool for maybe the mixed 4x400m relay," Felix, the most decorated female track and field athlete of all time, said during an appearance on the *TO-DAY* show on Thursday. "It's a tall task to get back to that level, but I'm excited to really push for it."

Felix, who retired in 2022 with 11 Olympic medals, is the oldest American to compete in an Olympic relay having won gold in the women's 4x400m at the Tokyo Games at the age of 35. "If it wasn't LA, I wouldn't be as curious," she said. "I just can't imagine not going for it with it being in my hometown," she added. "I'm so excited for everyone to experience the Olympics, but it would be really special to be walking in the Opening Ceremonies ... It's a bit scary. But also, there's a bit of peace there, because there's nothing to prove. It's just about testing the limits, kind of an experiment of what's still left there. So I do feel this calmness going into it."

FOCUS

ITF upholds Belarus suspension from Davis Cup, BJK Cup

AFP
Paris

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) said yesterday that the IOC's move to lift restrictions on Belarusian athletes does not affect Belarus's continued ban from the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup.

In a statement sent to AFP, world tennis's governing body said its stance remained unchanged despite the International Olympic Committee's decision to lift its ban on Belarus.

"The International Tennis Federation confirms that the IOC's announcement does not change its existing position regarding the Belarus and Russian Tennis Federations' suspensions, which remain in place," the ITF wrote.

Athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus had been banned from international competition following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, although some were permitted to compete as neutrals.

Restrictions on Russian athletes remain in place under IOC rules.

The ITF said its position on

Belarus would be reviewed later in the year.

"The membership status of the Belarus Tennis Federation will be considered at the ITF Annual General Meeting in October by the ITF's voting member nations in accordance with ITF constitutional process," the organisation said.

The ITF oversees major international team competitions such as the Davis Cup and the BJK Cup. It also organises Olympic tennis events in conjunction with the IOC.

The participation of Russian and Belarusian players on the professional tour depends on decisions taken separately by the ATP, the WTA and the organisers of the four Grand Slam tournaments.

World number one Aryna Sabalenka on Thursday said she hoped she would be able to play tennis again under the Belarusian flag.

"For me representing such a small country, and the hard work that I had to do to get to the top, it's just like, guys, it's incredible, it's a small country, and to make it all the way here, it means a lot to me," said Sabalenka.

"I would be super proud to represent Belarus."

LEE LEADS KO, THITIKUL AT MIZUHO OPEN

Andrea Lee birdied four of her last five holes to take the first-round lead at the Mizuho Americas Open by a single shot on Thursday in West Caldwell, N.J. Lee posted a 6-under 66, enough for a slight edge over two of the top players on the LPGA Tour, New Zealand's Lydia Ko and Thailand's Jeeno Thitikul. Another shot back in a tie for fourth were Brooke Matthews and South Korea's Hye-Jin Choi. Lee, a 27-year-old from California, started her day on the back nine at

Mountain Ridge Country Club and shook off an early bogey at No. 11 with birdies at the next two holes. She stood at just 2 under after 13 holes before her closing surge. Lee finished the round having hit all 14 fairways and 16 of 18 greens in regulation. "I really didn't see 6-under today to be honest, so I'm quite pleased (with) that," Lee said. "The game plan going into today was just staying really patient, trying to hit as many greens and fairways as possible, and just

know that pars is good score and trying to minimize bogeys. I did pretty well with that today, and hopefully can keep it going the rest of the week." It marked Lee's lowest round of the season as she searches for her second win on tour and her first since September 2022. "I think this is a great golf course for us, great test of golf. Honestly feels like a major championship just with how firm and fast the greens are and how tough the conditions are," Lee

said. "The game plan is just to stay really patient." Ko, the LPGA Hall of Famer, would love to land her first win in 14 months after her 5-under 67 put her in good position. That included an eagle at the par-5 13th. "I actually putted really well, which was a nice change," Ko said. "I haven't putted well since I shot 60 (at the Ford Championship in March), and that day I had a new putter and this week I have a new putter."

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arteta calls for Arsenal to focus against West Ham

Gunners are five points clear but have played once more than City

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta said Arsenal must refocus for tomorrow's "huge" Premier League clash at West Ham after the emotional high of reaching the Champions League final.

The Gunners will be crowned English champions for the first time in 22 years if they can win their final three league games. A trip to relegation-threatened West Ham appears to be their toughest task remaining.

Arteta's men then host relegated Burnley before facing Crystal Palace just days before the Eagles play in the Conference League final. Arsenal reached the Champions League final for just the second time in their history with victory over Atletico Madrid on Tuesday, but Arteta stressed there was little time to look ahead to facing Paris Saint-Germain in Budapest.

"Stay present, live in the moment, prepare and show the same level of energy, hunger and desire we have shown all season, or more," said the Arsenal boss, referring to his message to his players. "We are closer and closer and everything we do is going to matter."

The Gunners are five points clear of Manchester City at the top of the table but have played one game more than Pep Guardiola's men. The result at the London Stadium could also have huge ramifications for Arsenal's north London rivals Tottenham.

Spurs are just one point above 18-place West Ham in the battle to avoid the drop. "Understanding the conditions of the game for both clubs, it's huge, obviously," said Arteta. "We know the importance of it, we know what we want and what we have to do to win the game."

The Spaniard said Mikel Merino and Jurrien Timber remain out and are facing a race against time to feature in the Champions League final on May 30. "There's a fair bit to do," he said. "Everything has to be so smooth and quick if they want the chance to play any minutes."

West Ham manager Nuno Espirito Santo said his own future was not on his mind as he battles to save the club from relegation. The West Ham board are understood to want Nuno, who signed a three-year deal when he was appointed in September, to stay on even if they go down to the Championship.

The Hammers are in 18th spot, one point behind Tottenham, with Wolves and Burnley already relegated. Tomorrow, they have the daunting task of hosting leaders Arsenal -



Mikel Arteta's Arsenal will be crowned English champions for the first time in 22 years if they can win their final three league games.

survival is out of their hands with three games remaining. "I'm going to be honest with you - I don't have one second to think about next season," Portuguese coach Nuno said.

"It's so demanding what we have, the challenge, especially the game on Sunday, that's what we have to focus on. I don't have enough energy to think about what's ahead. It's tomorrow, then tomorrow, day-by-day."

On Arsenal, Nuno said: "It's difficult because they are very good," said Nuno.

"They are a very talented team that is fighting for huge things and achieving huge moments. They have reached the final of the Champions League and are fighting for the Premier League title. They are a tough opponent, but we are at London Stadium and that

always gives us a plus of energy and especially for us, we have to give our all."

He added: "It's always nervy in these final games of the season. There's always anxiety in the games so it is up to us to control our nerves and deliver what we want."

FIXTURES (ALL TIMES GMT)

Today (1400 unless stated): Liverpool v Chelsea (1130), Brighton v Wolves, Fulham v Bournemouth, Sunderland v Manchester United, Manchester City v Brentford (1630)

Tomorrow (1300 unless stated): Burnley v Aston Villa, Crystal Palace v Everton, Nottingham Forest v Newcastle, West Ham v Arsenal (1530)

Monday: Tottenham v Leeds (1900)

FOCUS

Watkins salutes Emery after Villa reach Europa final



AFP
Birmingham, United Kingdom

Aston Villa striker Ollie Watkins saluted **Unai Emery** for masterminding his side's run to the Europa League final after they thrashed Nottingham Forest 4-0 on Thursday. Emery's side produced a memorable performance in the semi-final second leg at Villa Park as goals from Watkins and Emiliano Buendia put them in control before John McGinn's brace completed the rout.

Chasing their first major trophy since 1996 and the first European prize in 44 years, Villa will face Bundesliga club Freiburg in the final in Istanbul on May 20. Villa will be firm favourites, in part

because of the presence of Europa League specialist Emery, who has won the competition four times - three with Sevilla and one at Villarreal - and is in the final for a sixth time.

"There is no better manager to get us prepared for this game and obviously take us into the final as well. His track record speaks for itself," Watkins said. "We are in a great position, but we need to go there and win now."

Villa captain McGinn added: "He's experienced a lot more European semi-finals than us. He's been amazing."

Villa were beaten in their previous three matches in all competitions, including a 1-0 first leg defeat at Forest and a 2-1 loss to lowly Tottenham on Sunday. Emery's team, largely comprised of reserves, were booed off after the Tottenham defeat, but

Watkins said they were already focused on beating Forest.

"After the performance against Tottenham, everyone's mind was on this game," the England forward said. "Everyone worked so hard. It is hard to pick a man of the match. We were all amazing."

Villa famously stunned Bayern Munich in the 1982 European Cup final, but they will be favourites rather than underdogs in the second continental final in their history. "I felt the nerves this morning, but now it's about embracing it. You see the guys in 1982, the cup winners in the 90s," McGinn said. "Tonight was one of the best performances from Villa I've seen in a long time. The club's been through some massive lows, but such a massive group deserves success. Hopefully we'll be the ones to bring it."

EQUESTRIAN

Saudi's al-Hadi tops Gold Tour in round 13 of Hathab

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Saudi rider Khaled al-Hadi claimed victory in the Gold Tour class during the 13th leg of the Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab at the Qatar Equestrian Federation main arena yesterday.

Al-Hadi topped the Table A, one round against the clock competition over 140cm with a flawless ride aboard Capoen, clocking 64.17 seconds. Qatar's Sultan Salem al-Naemi finished second on Gannan de La Luce in 64.30secs, while Saad Ahmed al-Saad took third place on Craquante de Mazin in 67.01secs.

In the Gold Tour Teams event, Al Shaqab Academy secured first place with a total of four penalties and a combined time of 131.29secs. Lekhwiyah finished second with 12 penalties in 130.10secs, while Al Shaqab placed third with 12 penalties in 133.53secs.



Hissa Ali al-Jaber took top honours aboard Violet Van Het Koetshuis in the Future Riders Optimum Time 70cm class.

In the Open Tour Table A two-phase class over 110cm, Bahrain's Mayoof Ab-

dulaziz al-Romaihi emerged victorious on Cash du Talus with a clear round in 24.89secs. Fellow Bahraini Hussain Mohamed Dadalla claimed second on Golden Eyes du Bavrou in 25.97secs, while Qatar's Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi finished third aboard Feline des Roys in 26.45secs.

In the junior category, Abdulaziz bin Jassim al-Thani secured first place riding Jabana, ahead of Sharida Nasser al-Kaabi on Gravity in second and Haifa Hamad al-Thani on Take Me Home in third.

The Future Riders Optimum Time class over 70cm saw Hissa Ali al-Jaber take top honours aboard Violet Van Het Koetshuis with a score of 0/-0.06. Mohammed Talal finished second on Ready To Rock And Role with 0/-0.08, while Nasser Hamad al-Thani placed third riding Sita with 0/-0.09.

The 13th round concludes today with the Diamond Round competitions over 150cm, the Bronze Round for individual and team categories over 120cm, and the Future Riders class over 90cm.



The winners of the Gold Tour pose with Ali bin Yousef al-Rumaihi, Assistant Secretary of the Qatar Equestrian Federation.

SPOTLIGHT

Real fine Tchouameni, Valverde 500,000 euros over bust-up

AFP
Madrid

Real Madrid announced they had fined Aurelien Tchouameni and Federico Valverde 500,000 euros (\$588,000) each after a training ground clash that left the latter needing hospital treatment.

The club did not impose any sporting sanctions on the two players, saying in a statement that the fine "thereby concludes the internal procedures" launched against them.

Valverde will miss tomorrow's Clasico against Barcelona as a result of the head injury he suffered during the altercation. The club said he would be out for up to two weeks. Tchouameni took part in training on Friday and could feature at Camp Nou this weekend.

Madrid said both players "expressed their complete remorse for what happened and apologised to each other" while taking part in a club investigation. "They extended their apologies to the club, their teammates, the coaching staff, and the fans, and both have made themselves available to Real Madrid to accept whatever sanction the club deems appropriate," read a club statement.

Uruguay international Valverde was accompanied to the hospital facility near the club's Valdebebas training complex by Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa, according to Spanish reports, which said the player needed stitches to treat a facial wound.

Uruguay midfielder Valverde sought to downplay the severity

of the altercation with the France midfielder. "The strain of the competition and frustration caused the situation to escalate," Valverde wrote on social media, expressing regret at the media coverage of the incident.

"I accidentally hit a table during the argument, causing a small cut on my forehead that required a routine visit to the hospital," he said. "At no point did my teammate hit me, and I didn't hit him either."

Tchouameni admitted that what had happened was far from acceptable. "Regardless of who is right and who is wrong we should always look for a peaceful resolution to any dispute," said the Frenchman. "There's no point going on about who did what or who said what and I accept the fine," he said. "Now we have to move forward and play this Clasico and make sure the club does as well as is still possible."

According to reports the two players rowed on Wednesday in training and their argument continued on Thursday during and after the session. Spanish media reported Valverde refused to shake Tchouameni's hand and later fouled him in Thursday's training session, with the pair scrapping afterwards in the dressing room when the injury occurred.

Tensions are running high at Real Madrid with the club on the verge of a second consecutive season without a major trophy. Los Blancos trail Barca by 11 points at the top of La Liga, with Hansi Flick's side able to clinch back-to-back league titles if they do not lose.



Real Madrid teammates Federico Valverde (left) and Aurelien Tchouameni were involved in a training ground clash that left the latter needing hospital treatment for head injury. (AFP)

Man City must put pressure on Arsenal, says Guardiola

Manchester: Pep Guardiola said Manchester City must bounce back against Brentford today to put pressure back on Arsenal in the Premier League title race. City's dramatic 3-3 draw at Everton on Monday handed the destiny of the title to the Gunners.

Arsenal are five points clear with three games to play, while City have four matches remaining. Victory for Guardiola's men at the Etihad against Champions League hopefuls Brentford would cut the gap at the top for at least 24 hours before Arsenal visit West Ham. "Put pressure on Arsenal winning our games," said Guardiola. "That's all we have to do. All we can do."

City were on course for defeat at Everton until Jeremy Doku's sensational strike with virtually the last kick of the game salvaged a point. The Belgian scored twice at the Hill Dickinson Stadium to take his tally to four goals in his last five games and register his best goalscoring season in a City shirt with seven. "I'm so glad," Guardiola added on Doku's development. "Not just the goals, the assists, also contributing defensively. Jeremy has been amazing this season."

A seventh league title in nine seasons may prove beyond City's men, but the club did celebrate a first Women's Super League success for 10 years this week. Andree Jeglert's side ended Chelsea's run of six consecutive league titles.

"Today is a reality in the world of football the impact of the women's team on society and the girls, how they enjoy to play football," added Guardiola. "I think it's the biggest step world football has made in the last decade. Before it started I think you never could imagine the impact on the girls, the teenagers, that now say 'I want to play football'."

"As much as you play a sport, it's fantastic. And of course, a big compliment (to the City women's team)."

Guardiola is hopeful Rodri could return from injury against Brentford, while centre-backs Ruben Dias and Josko Gvardiol are also nearing full fitness.