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Arsenal on brink of title, Villa slip up in Champions League chase

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Monday, May 11, 2026  
Dhul-Qi'dah 24, 1447 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



**MOTORSPORT**

Martin wins French MotoGP and Ogura ends Japan's drought

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**FOCUS**

# Doha ready to stage 4th GCC Games as curtain rises today

Opening ceremony at Al Shaqab arena will feature a range of artistic and cultural performances



Preparation underway at Al Shaqab Arena, which will host the opening ceremony of the 4th GCC Games today.



Secretary-General of the Qatar Olympic Committee Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain met Abdullah Baamakhlaf, Secretary-General of the Oman Olympic Committee, and head of the Oman delegation Dr. Marwan al-Juma on the eve of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026, which officially opens today at Al Shaqab Arena. Qatar will host one of the region's largest and most prestigious multi-sport events from tomorrow until May 22.

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

The 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 will officially open today at Al Shaqab Arena, marking the start of one of the region's biggest multi-sport events, which will run until May 22. The opening ceremony is expected to bring together presidents of National Olympic Committees, secretaries-general, senior sports officials and participating delegations from across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. The ceremony will feature a range of artistic and cultural performances, highlighted by a special operetta titled *One Gulf, One Heart*, celebrating the unity, solidarity and shared identity of GCC countries.

Hosting this edition reflects the commitment of HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Fourth GCC Games - Doha 2026, to delivering a tournament that embodies the deep-rooted bonds among GCC nations and contributes to strengthening the presence of Gulf sport, while presenting an exceptional edition that matches Qatar's established position as a leading host of major regional and international sporting events.

More than 1,000 male and female athletes from the six GCC nations will compete in 17 sports, including athletics, handball, volleyball, swimming, shooting, boxing, taekwondo, karate, fencing, padel, bowling and equestrian. Women athletes will also have a strong presence in several events, including athletics, 3x3 basketball, padel, fencing, taekwondo, shooting and archery.

Host nation Qatar will field a 300-member delegation competing across all sports on the programme.

Competitions will begin tomorrow with swimming events at the Hamad Aquatic Centre and 3x3 basketball matches at Al Gharafa Club Hall.

Taekwondo and table tennis events will be held at Aspire Dome, while billiards and bowling competitions will take place at the Qatar Billiards and Snooker Federation Hall and Qatar Bowling Center respectively.

Equestrian competitions are scheduled to start on Wednesday at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, alongside fencing, boxing and shooting events. Athletics ac-



More than 1,000 male and female athletes from the six GCC nations will compete across 17 sports.



tion will commence on Thursday at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium, while handball competitions will be staged at Duhail Sports Hall.

Snooker events will begin on Friday, followed by volleyball and padel competitions next Satur-

day. Archery competitions are set to start next Sunday, while karate events will conclude the sporting programme on May 21 at Aspire Dome. Historically, Kuwait claimed top spot at the inaugural GCC Games in Bahrain in 2011 be-



Aziz Ismail of Qatar swimming team during a training session ahead of the start of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026. The swimming competitions will take place from tomorrow until May 15 at the Hamad Aquatic Centre.



Athletes from Kuwait participating in the 4th GCC Games arrived in Doha yesterday.

fore Saudi Arabia finished first in the 2015 edition in Dammam. Kuwait also topped the standings at the third edition, which it hosted in 2022.

Qatar will aim to improve on its fifth-place finish from the previous edition as the hosts look to capitalize on home advantage in this year's Games. The Doha edition is expected to further enhance Gulf sporting cooperation and showcase Qatar's world-class infrastructure and proven exper-

tise in organizing major international sporting events.

Meanwhile, Qatar's swimming team has finalized its preparations for the Games, with the squad entering the competition in high spirits and determined to deliver strong performances that underline the continued progress of Qatari swimming on the Gulf stage.

The host nation will be represented by a talented lineup featuring Ali Tamer, Mohammed Mahmoud, Saad El-Din, Emil Fawzi,

Hamza Shaalan, Abdullah al-Ghamri, Aziz Ismail and Tamim al-Humaida, as the team targets podium finishes and top honours in the pool.

The swimmers expressed confidence in their preparations and reaffirmed their determination to produce impressive results while proudly representing Qatar at the Games. They also called on fans to turn out in support and create a strong atmosphere throughout the competition.

## CRICKET

# Awais, Mehidy shine as first Test evenly poised

Awais becomes 14th Pakistan player to hit a century on Test debut



Pakistan's Azan Awais celebrates after scoring a century during the third day of the first Test against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. **Right:** Bangladesh's bowler Mehidy Hasan Miraz celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi during the third day. (AFP)

AFP  
Dhaka

Mehidy Hasan Miraz claimed five wickets to give Bangladesh a slender lead after Pakistan debutant Azan Awais hit 103 on a rain-hit third day of the first Test yesterday.

Pakistan made 386 all out in response to Bangladesh's first innings total of 413 in Dhaka.

Bangladesh closed the day on 7-0 in their second innings to increase their lead to 34 runs, after bad light ended play with Mahmudul Hasan Joy unbeaten on two

and Shadman Islam yet to score.

The left-handed Azan, who resumed on 85, completed his hundred off 153 balls to become the 14th Pakistani and sixth player overall to score a century on debut against Bangladesh.

He became pace bowler Taskin Ahmed's 50th Test wicket after captain Najmul Hossain Shanto caught the opener at slip.

"It's a very blessed feeling for me because I know it's my debut match and I performed really well for my country," a visibly moved Awais said. "When I was going in to bat I was a little nervous, but I performed very well for my team." Pakistan lost wickets at regular

intervals but kept coming back as Abdullah Fazal, another debutant, scored 60, Salman Agha made 58 and Mohammad Rizwan chipped in with 59.

Rizwan and Agha put together 119 for the sixth wicket, one of three century partnerships for the visitors, before rain wiped out a large portion of the afternoon session.

The pitch offered more assistance to the spinners when play resumed and Mehidy exploited the conditions to perfection, with Pakistan bowled out in 100.3 overs.

Mehidy, who bowled 38 overs of his off-spin, was rewarded for his patience.

"On a true wicket like this, as a spinner my mindset is that I will not get help from the pitch in the first three days," Miraz said.

"If I bowl in good areas and the batter makes a mistake, then I have a chance of taking wickets. My job was to make sure I did not concede runs from one end," Miraz added.

"In the second innings I will come as an attacking bowler when the ball is turning," he said.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Bangladesh 413 and 7 for 0** (Mahmudul 2\*) **lead Pakistan 386** (Awais 103, Fazal 60, Mehidy 5-102, Taijul 2-46) **by 34 runs**

## FOCUS

## Record-equalling Patel sets up Chennai victory over Lucknow in IPL

AFP  
New Delhi

Urvil Patel smashed a record-equalling half-century but it was impact player Prashant Veer who steered Chennai Super Kings over the line to a five-wicket win over Lucknow SuperGiants in the IPL yesterday.

Veer was dropped twice in the 19th over, bowled by Avesh Khan, but struck 18 not out from 12 balls, hitting two successive sixes off Aiden Markram to see Chennai to 208-5 and victory with four balls to spare at the MA Chidambaram Stadium.

However, Patel was the star turn in the Chennai innings as he equalled Yashasvi Jaiswal's record for the fastest half-century in the IPL.

Patel needed just 13 balls to reach his first 50 in the competition, going on to top-score with 65 from 23 balls with eight sixes.

He added 81 for the second wicket with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad who made 42 from 28 balls.

"I just wanted to bat according to the situation and hit the ball," said Patel.

"Ruturaj said the wicket was slow and to be ready for it. I tried to maintain a stable base and then hit."

It was Chennai's third win in a row - sixth in 11 matches overall - as they climbed to fifth in the table, still in contention for a top-four playoff spot.

For Lucknow, it was an eighth loss in 11 games and they remain bottom of the log.

Put into bat, Lucknow relied made a terrific start, clubbing 91 in the powerplay thanks to opener Josh Inglis.

The Australian hammered a superb 85 off 33 balls to post his first IPL half-century for the SuperGiants.

His fifty, which included four sixes and six fours, came off just 17 balls making it his fastest T20 half-century.

When he fell to Jamie Overton in the tenth over, having taken his boundary count to 10 fours and six sixes, Lucknow were 112-3 and looking at an imposing total.

But Overton then removed Rishabh Pant and Akshat Raghuvanshi either side of Markram being run out to leave Lucknow on 147-6 in the fifteenth over.

Overton finished with 3-36 and was named player of the match.

"It was nice to get a couple of wickets and obviously getting Josh out at that point was crucial," said the England pacer.

Shahbaz Ahmed made sure the tail wagged with an impressive 43 not out off 25 balls but it wasn't enough to prevent Chennai veering to victory.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Chennai Super Kings 208 for 5** (Urvil 65, Gaikwad 42, Shahbaz 2-30, Rathi 2-245) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 203 for 8** (Inglis 85, Shahbaz 43, Overton 3-36, Kamboj 2-47) **by five wickets**



Chennai Super Kings' Urvil Patel plays a shot during the IPL match against Lucknow Super Giants in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

## CYCLING

## French rider Magnier claims Giro stage three on sprinters day in Sofia



Soudal Quick-Step French rider Paul Magnier (centre) wearing the points classification mauve jersey (Maglia Ciclamino) sprint to win next to Lidl - Trek Italian rider Jonathan Milan in the 3rd stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026 between Plovdiv and Sofia, Bulgaria, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Paul Magnier (Soudal Quick-Step) won his second stage of this year's Giro d'Italia, with the Frenchman catching Italy's Jonathan Milan (Lidl-Trek) on the line to take stage three in Sofia yesterday.

Milan hit the front on the final bend with 150 metres to race, but was unable to hold off Magnier, with Dutchman Dylan Groenewegen (Unibet Rose Rockets) finishing third.

Magnier briefly raised his hand in celebration after the line, but had to wait for the official photo-finish result before finding out he had indeed won two out of three in Bulgaria. "I was not really sure that I won the stage to be honest," Magnier said. "I celebrated and then I say, 'oh, I'm not sure.'"

The Giro's final day in Bulgaria took the riders 175-km from Plovdiv to the capital, with a mostly

flat ride punctuated by the Borovets climb and ending with a downhill run into Sofia, perfect terrain for the sprinters to come to the fore.

After two crash-marred stages, yesterday was a more relaxed affair, with Spain's Diego Pablo Sevilla once again part of an early breakaway, but just as in the opening two stages, the Spaniard's efforts came to nothing.

The peloton left it late to reel in the trio out in front, with the leaders holding out until inside the final kilometre. Milan went for broke, looking to outfox his rivals, but 22-year-old Magnier proved that his opening day win was no one-off.

"I dreamed about it, and it was a goal to go for the stage again," Magnier said. "The team did an amazing job again and we had to really be in a good position at one kilometre to go and this is what we did."

There was no change in the general classification, with stage two winner Guillermo Thomas Silva of Uruguay holding onto the leader's jersey, four seconds ahead of Florian Stark and Egan Bernal.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Points leaders Bengaluru edge to thrilling last-ball win over Mumbai



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli celebrates after taking a catch to dismiss Mumbai Indians' Suryakumar Yadav off the bowling of Bhuvneshwar Kumar during their IPL match in New Raipur. (Reuters)

AFP  
Raipur, India

Rasikh Salam scrambled two runs off the final delivery from Raj Bawa as Royal Challengers Bengaluru returned to winning ways on Sunday with a nervy two-wicket defeat of Mumbai Indians.

Naman Dhir top-scored with 47 as Mumbai clawed their way to 166-7 but a blazing half-century by Krunal Pandya set Bengaluru on their way at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in Raipur, their second 'home' this season.

Victory for the defending champions and current leaders Bengaluru eliminated Mumbai from the race for the playoffs as well as Lucknow Super Giants who were beaten by Chennai Super Kings earlier in the day.

"It's a crucial two points for us. If we'd lost that one, we would have been under pressure," said swing bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar whose 4-23 earned him the player of the match award.

The 36-year-old rocked Mumbai at the start of their innings with three wickets in his first 12 deliveries.

After removing Ryan Rickelton in the first over, he then had Rohit Sharma caught behind for a beligerent 22 and, next ball, stand-in skipper Suryakumar Yadav caught smartly at wide slip by Virat Kohli for a golden duck.

Tilak Varma staved off the hat-trick and orchestrated a rescue act in the company of Dhir on an up-and-down surface of unpredictable bounce. They added 82 for the fourth wicket but once Dhir fell, the innings petered out with only 35 runs coming in the last five overs.

Bengaluru lost Kohli for a sec-

ond successive duck, caught at mid-off off Deepak Chahar.

South African Corbin Bosch then ripped through the middle order with four wickets, as the holders made heavy weather of a challenging chase.

But the left-handed Pandya, promoted to No. 5, took it upon himself to punish his former franchise, unleashing a breathtaking array of strokes that had a capacity crowd eating out of his hands.

Pandya steadied the ship alongside England's Jacob Bethell (27) during a fourth-wicket stand of 55 and then went on the attack with Jitesh Sharma.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Royal Challengers Bengaluru 167 for 8** (Krunal 73, Bethell 27, Bosch 4-26, Chahar 2-33) **beat Mumbai Indians 166 for 7** (Tilak 57, Dhir 47, Bhuvneshwar 4-23) **by two wickets**

MOTOGP

# Martin claims first win in 588 days at French GP

Spaniard overtakes Bezzecchi late, moves within one point in championship standings

Reuters  
Le Mans, France

**J**orge Martin charged from seventh on the grid to win the French Grand Prix, claiming his first MotoGP victory in 588 days while moving within striking distance of his Aprilia teammate Marco Bezzecchi in the championship battle.

The Spaniard, who endured a forgettable 2025 season plagued by crashes and injuries, overtook race leader Bezzecchi with three laps remaining to secure his first win since capturing the 2024 title.

"It's unbelievable. I still can't say it enough times, because I'm so, so, grateful to all the fans," an emotional Martin said. "But for sure I have to remember my family, my team, my girlfriend, my dog - all the people that were with me all this time. I don't have words!"

The victory moved Martin to within one point of championship leader Bezzecchi.

AI Ogura completed the podium in third for Aprilia's satellite team Trackhouse, giving the Italian manufacturer its first-ever podium sweep while he became the first Japanese rider on the podium in 14 years. "What can I say, it just feels amazing... It was not an easy race, but good race pace and I'm super happy," Ogura said.

Ducati had another Sunday to forget with reigning champion Marc Marquez missing the race after fracturing his foot in Saturday's sprint crashwhile teammate and polesitter Francesco Bagnaia crashed in second place. Bagnaia had a poor start, allowing Bezzecchi to take the lead while home favourite Fabio Quartararo moved up to second.

Martin, unlike his lightning start in Saturday's sprint where he jumped from eighth to first in two turns, could not make up places initially amid heavy traffic. But the dynamics shifted dramatically when Bagnaia, who had worked his way up to challenge for the lead, crashed at turn three on lap 16 while under pressure - his third retirement in five rounds this season.

Martin seized the opportunity, moving past KTM's Pedro Acosta to second and then methodically hunting down Bezzecchi. Despite trailing by nearly three seconds at one point, Martin chipped away at the gap as the sun emerged from the clouds at an overcast Le Mans.



Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin (centre) celebrates with his team after winning the Moto GP Grand Prix of France. (AFP)

Acosta's hopes of a third podium finish disappeared with four laps remaining when the late-race specialist Ogura slipped past the KTM rider, setting up Aprilia's historic sweep. Aprilia boss Massimo Rivola could barely watch as the two factory riders battled for the lead.

With the duo separated by a point after five rounds, he was not worried about any tension between them in the garage, saying: "They are smart people, they are fighters. As long as they respect each other, I'm fine."

As Martin took the chequered flag, he celebrated his breakthrough victory with his trademark windscreen smash before mimicking France forward Kylian Mbappe's goal celebration, crossing his arms across his chest. "I'm still thinking about last year in Le Mans here, when Jorge wanted

to leave (Aprilia) and I said, 'I think you can win with us.' So winning in Le Mans is quite special for me," Rivola added.

In a final twist, Acosta was denied fourth place at the death when VR46 Racing's Fabio Di Giannantonio made a late lunge to steal the position with two corners remaining.

RESULTS

1. Jorge Martin (ESP) Aprilia Racing 41min 18.001sec;
2. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA) Aprilia Racing at 0.477sec;
3. AI Ogura (JPN) Trackhouse Racing MotoGP 0.874;
4. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA) Pertamina Enduro VR46 Racing Team 2.851;
5. Pedro Acosta (ESP) Red Bull KTM Factory Racing 2.991;
6. Fabio Quartararo (FRA) Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP 7.756;
7. Enea Bastianini (ITA) Red Bull GASGAS Tech3 8.615;
- 8.

- Raul Fernandez (ESP) Trackhouse Racing MotoGP 12.497;
9. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP) Gresini Racing MotoGP 14.903;
10. Luca Marini (ITA) Repsol Honda Team 15.016;
11. Johann Zarco (FRA) LCR Honda CASTROL 16.549;
12. Alex Rins (ESP) Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP 32.343;
13. Toprak Razgatlioglu (TUR) Prima Pramac Racing 32.476;
14. Franco Morbidelli (ITA) Pertamina Enduro VR46 Racing Team 32.774;
15. Jack Miller (AUS) Prima Pramac Racing 36.059;
16. Jonas Folger (GER) Red Bull GASGAS Tech3 1:13.229

**Abandoned:** Brad Binder (RSA) Red Bull KTM Factory Racing; Joan Mir (ESP) Honda HRC Castrol; Francesco Bagnaia (ITA) Ducati Lenovo Team; Diogo Moreira (BRA) Pro Honda LCR; Alex Marquez (ESP) BK8 Gresini Racing

Marquez undergoes successful double surgery

**Le Mans:** Reigning MotoGP champion **Marc Marquez** underwent successful double surgery yesterday in Madrid following his crash in Saturday's French Grand Prix sprint, Ducati announced.

Marquez suffered a nasty highside crash at Le Mans where the Spaniard fractured his foot and was thrown off his bike, which cartwheeled through the air before landing beside him. The 33-year-old had also planned to undergo shoulder surgery after the Catalan Grand Prix next weekend before the crash changed the timeline and he opted to get both surgeries done together.

"The medical team... successfully stabilised the fracture in the fifth metatarsal of the rider's right foot," Ducati said in a statement. "Simultaneously, Marquez underwent a second, pre-planned surgical procedure to fix a past injury in his right shoulder. This previous trauma had become painful again following the violent crash at last year's Indonesian Grand Prix. The doctors removed two screws and a bone fragment from a previous Latarjet surgery (in December 2019) that had shifted, compressing the radial nerve."

Ducati said Marquez would remain in the hospital overnight and his progress over the upcoming weeks would determine his return to racing. He was set to miss next weekend's Catalan Grand Prix and will now target a return at the Italian Grand Prix scheduled for May 29-31 at Mugello, Ducati's home turf.

Marquez, who has yet to secure a podium finish this season, has now dropped to seventh in the standings - 71 points behind Aprilia's championship leader Marco Bezzecchi.



TENNIS

# Prizmic follows up on Djokovic exploit by reaching Italian Open last 16

AFP  
Rome

**D**ino Prizmic followed up knocking out Novak Djokovic from the Italian Open by beating France's Ugo Humbert 6-1, 7-5 to reach the last 16 in Rome. Prizmic had to qualify for the main draw but the Croatian player looks like he could be a contender after another brilliant display of power and precision on clay.

The 20-year-old raced into a 5-0 lead in the first set, which he closed out in just 28 minutes against a shellshocked Humbert, who was seeded 31st. Such was Prizmic's dominance in the first set that he could even afford to try a trick shot between his legs and give up a point in game six.

Humbert battled back in the second set but after he gave up his serve for the third time in game 11 Prizmic closed out on his second match point. After his superb performance on the Pietrangeli court Prizmic will face 13th seed Karen Khachanov in the next round.

"I just want to play my game and to be myself on the court and we will see," Prizmic later told reporters. "Maybe for me the goal is to be top 30 at the end of the year but I just want to stay healthy and to play as much as I can."

As it stands Prizmic will already be up 11 places to 68th come Monday week, just before the start of the French Open, after his best ever performance in a Master 1000 tournament.

Alexander Zverev kept up his bid for a third title at the Foro Italico with a straight-sets win over Alexander Blockx, 6-1, 6-4 on centre court where the threat of rain looms large. Second seed Zverev, who was heavily beaten by Jannik Sinner in the Madrid final last weekend, will face one of Tommy Paul or Italy's Luciano Darderi in the fourth round.



Croatia's Dino Prizmic plays a forehand shot during his round of 32 match against France's Ugo Humbert at the Italian Open in Rome yesterday. (Reuters)

He barely had to get out of second gear against Blockx, who was beaten in the Madrid semis by Zverev. The German, who won the men's singles title in the Italian capital in 2017 and 2024, is on the same side of the draw as Prizmic.

"There's a lot of young guys who are playing great tennis. He's definitely one of them," he said. "But I'm going to go match by match, I think that's the most important thing, not to look too far ahead and focus on the things that you can control."

Home hope Lorenzo Musetti will face clay court specialist Casper Ruud in the last 16 after winning a tough match with Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo 7-6 (9/7), 6-4. Musetti was in tears at the end of a clash which

featured 81 unforced errors, and told Sky Sport that wasn't right physically without specifying what was wrong.

Naomi Osaka could face three-time Rome champion Iga Swiatek in the last 16 of the women's tournament after easily seeing off Diana Schnaider 6-1, 6-2. The four-time Grand Slam winner beat her Russian opponent in just 54 minutes to equal her best result of a difficult season in which she was knocked out of Indian Wells and Madrid at the same stage by Aryna Sabalenka.

But with Sabalenka suffering a shock early elimination on Saturday, 15th seed Osaka could yet be a contender.

She awaits the result of Swiatek's third-round match

against Italian Elisabetta Cocciaretto in front of what will be a partisan crowd on centre court. "For me those matches are the most fun. I'm excited at the thought," said Osaka of a clash with Swiatek.

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

She was knocked out at the same stage in Rome last year as defending champion and took nearly three hours to win her opening match against Cathy McNally. 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.

EQUESTRIAN

# Garcia wins Diamond Tour at Hathab



Juan Carlos Garcia onboard Oliver Twist Vd Berghoeve in action at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's Outdoor Arena on Saturday night.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**J**uan Carlos Garcia clinched the Diamond Tour title during the 13th round of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's Outdoor Arena on Saturday night.

Partnering with Oliver Twist Vd Berghoeve, Garcia produced the fastest round, clocking 67.80 seconds to secure victory in the feature event. Khalid al-Eid finished second aboard Q Hayen in 68.39 seconds, while Fares Saad al-Qahtani claimed third place with a time of 70.07 seconds on Com du Rouet Z.

The Bronze Tour, contested at a height of 120cm, witnessed close competition with rider Hazza Mubarak al-Hajri taking top honours



In the Future Riders Class, held at a height of 90cm, Khalifa bin Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani emerged victorious on Zion II Vdk.

aboard Elio 4 after clocking 48.17 seconds. Suhaim Hamad al-Yafai secured second place on Flash du Puits in 48.54 seconds, while Ibrahim Khalid al-Kuwari finished third on Khaled Bel Z with a time of 48.87 seconds.

In the Future Riders Class, held at a height of 90cm, Khalifa bin Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani emerged victorious on Zion II Vdk after completing the course in 22.01 seconds. Noura Abdulaziz al-Rumaihi finished second on Goliat in 22.43 seconds, while Ali Khalid al-Obaidli placed third aboard Roxette van de Achterhoek in 22.62 seconds. In the team competition, Team Marwan Al Shaqab claimed first place with a combined time of 107.67 seconds.

Team Al Shaqab secured second spot in 108.69 seconds, while Team Ajwad completed the podium with a time of 109.29 seconds.

## 2027 AFC ASIAN CUP

## We have a lot of work to do, says Qatar coach Lopetegui

By Sports Reporter  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

**Q**atar coach Julen Lopetegui is expecting a tough time next January when the two-time champions arrive in Saudi Arabia to defend their AFC Asian Cup crown they won in 2019 and 2024.

On Sunday, Qatar were drawn with four-time winners Japan, Thailand and Indonesia in Group F of the 24-team tournament set to be held in Saudi Arabia from Jan 7-Feb 5 next year.

Qatar beat Japan in the final of the 2019 edition staged in the UAE

for their maiden AFC Asian Cup title triumph. Five years later on home soil, Qatar beat Jordan in the title clash of Asia's showpiece football tournament to win two back-to-back trophies under the captaincy of Hasan al-Haydos.

After the draw ceremony staged in Riyadh Saturday, Lopetegui said: "We are optimistic but understand the qualities of our opponents and we will play in a very tough group. Japan are the main favourites, Indonesia have improved a lot, and so have Thailand. It's going to be a tough and balanced group, now we have a lot of work to do."

Born in Asteasu, Spain, Lopetegui has enjoyed a remarkable career both on the pitch and on the sidelines. Appointed as the head coach of the Spanish national team on July 21, 2016, he managed 16 matches, securing 12 victories and 4 draws. He was named Qatar coach last year in May.

Lopetegui's next big assignment is the 2026 FIFA World Cup to be held in the US, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19.

Thailand's coach Anthony Hudson said: "It's an exciting group. It's a good group. Obviously some big teams in there. For us, it's a great opportunity to play against some really good oppo-

nents and anything can happen. If you want to play in the Asian Cup, it's great to meet a team like Japan. Our opening game against Qatar is a great game. Then you look at Indonesia who are improving, there's a huge rivalry there."

John Herdman, coach of Indonesia, said: "The expectation for Indonesia is to represent the country as the fans want to see us. They are the most passionate of fans and every time the players put on the jersey, we owe them everything we got. This tournament gives us a chance to do something special for them. Thailand are a strong team but every game in this group is huge."



Qatar head coach Julen Lopetegui supervises his players during a recent training session.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Arsenal on brink of title as Villa held by Burnley

Everton's European hopes fade after late Crystal Palace equaliser

AFP  
London

**A**rsenal are on the brink of a first Premier League title in 22 years after surviving a hugely contentious finale to beat West Ham 1-0, while Aston Villa were held 2-2 at Burnley yesterday.

Leandro Trossard's 83rd minute goal reestablished the Gunners' five-point lead over Manchester City. But West Ham had an equaliser deep into stoppage time ruled out after a VAR review for a foul on goalkeeper David Raya before Callum Wilson fired home.

Arsenal also did north London rivals Tottenham a favour in the battle to beat the drop as they can move four points clear of West Ham with victory over Leeds today. Victories over already-relegated Burnley and Crystal Palace, just days before they play in the Conference League final, will end Arsenal's long wait to be champions of England.

Fresh from sealing their place in the Champions League final with victory over Atletico Madrid in midweek, Mikel Arteta's men burst out of the blocks. Mads Hermansen made a brilliant save to deny Trossard from a corner before the Belgian's follow-up header came back off the crossbar.

But the nerves that have accompanied Arsenal's quest to finally get over the line, after finishing second for the past three years, took hold after half-time.

Raya had to make a huge save to deny Mateus Fernandes giving West Ham the lead with little over 10 minutes to play.

Moments later the deadlock was broken at the other end.

Trossard had not scored since December, but ended a 25-game drought with a powerful low drive after patient play by Martin Ode-



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard celebrates after scoring against West Ham during the Premier League match at the London Stadium. (AFP)

gaard teed him up. Arteta wheeled away in delight, while Odegaard sank to his knees in celebration.

But there was another huge moment to come as Raya flapped at a corner under pressure from Pablo and Wilson drilled in the rebound.

After a lengthy VAR review, the referee deemed the Portuguese forward had impeded the Arsenal goalkeeper.

If City fail to beat Palace at home on Wednesday, Arsenal could seal the title on home soil

against Burnley on May 18.

Villa left the battle for a place in the top five open after failing to beat Burnley. Unai Emery's men booked their place in the Europa League final on Thursday with a 4-0 demolition of Nottingham Forest, but suffered a European hangover at Turf Moor.

Villa extend their lead over sixth-placed Bournemouth to four points and move six ahead of Brighton in the battle for Champions League qualification.

However, they face a tough end to the campaign with matches against Liverpool and Manchester City either side of the final against Freiburg in Istanbul.

Jaidon Anthony punished a slow Villa start to put Burnley in front after Emi Martinez spilled Lesley Ugochukwu's shot.

Ross Barkley headed the visitors level from a corner before half-time. Ollie Watkins then pounced on a long punt forward by Martinez to put Villa in front and headed up to fourth in the table. Burnley, though, hit back to avoid a sixth consecutive defeat. Zian Flemming fired home from Hannibal Mejbri's inventive flick to keep the fight for the top five alive.

Everton's bid for a place in Europe next season suffered from again failing to hold onto a lead in a 2-2 draw at Crystal Palace.

The Toffees twice led at Selhurst Park through James Tarkowski and Beto's brilliant individual goal.

Ismaila Sarr's 20th goal of the season in all competitions and Jean-Philippe Mateta levelled for the Eagles, who are now mathematically safe.

Elliott Anderson struck late against his former club Newcastle to secure a 1-1 draw and also guarantee survival for Nottingham Forest. Harvey Barnes had put the visitors in front, but England international Anderson salvaged a point.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Barca claim La Liga title with Clasico win over Real Madrid

AFP  
Barcelona

**B**arcelona secured their 29th Spanish league title after beating Real Madrid 2-0 in the Clasico. Marcus Rashford and Ferran Torres struck in the first half to help Hansi Flick's side clinch La Liga in consecutive years, while consigning Madrid to a trophyless season.

Barca moved an unassailable 14 points clear of second-place Los Blancos with three matches remaining. This was only the second time the outcome of La Liga has been decided directly by the result of a Clasico, with record 36-time champions Real Madrid winning their first title in 1932 after a draw with Barca.

Madrid arrived at the match embroiled in chaos, after midfielder Fede Valverde was ruled out with a head injury following a training ground scuffle with team-mate Aurelien Tchouameni, who started. Barca coach Flick received bad news before the game, with his father passing away, but took his place on the touchline regardless, to oversee his side's comfortable triumph.

The German opted for the energetic Rashford, on loan from Manchester United, on the right wing in place of injured teenage star Lamine Yamal. The Catalans, who only needed to avoid defeat, came out with their eyes firmly locked on the prize, racing into a two-goal lead inside 18 minutes.

Rashford opened the scoring with a superb free-kick, whipping the ball into the top left corner from a position 20 yards out, right of centre. Torres doubled the hosts' advantage at a jubilant Camp Nou, the 62,000-strong crowd enjoying the first Clasico back there since the stadium was reopened.

Dani Olmo produced a clever backheel to allow Torres to burst into the box and ram past Thibaut Courtois. Gonzalo Garcia, playing in place of injured Madrid superstar Kylian Mbappe, prodded narrowly wide after racing in behind Barca's high defensive line.

Urged on by coach Alvaro Arbeloa on the touchline, unlikely to be at the helm next season, Madrid battled to stem the bleeding. Rashford could have added a third before the break but fired wide, with Fermin Lopez unmarked and well placed to finish.

Torres should have struck early in the second half but Courtois saved from the Spain international as he ran through. Jude Bellingham put the ball in Barcelona's net but the goal was ruled out for offside, while Joan Garcia thwarted Vinicius Junior as Madrid threatened. Barca fans batted inflatable beach balls around to taunt the Brazilian over his unfulfilled Ballon d'Or ambitions, and lapped up the party atmosphere. Courtois saved from substitutes Raphinha, back after injury, and Robert Lewandowski as Madrid saw out the remainder of the match without taking further damage.

Flick's side remain on course to match the record of 100 points in a league season and can win all their home matches if they defeat Real Betis in the one remaining. Meanwhile Madrid finish a second consecutive season without a major trophy, starting down the barrel of a summer reshuffle, including former coach Jose Mourinho being linked with a potential return.

What is clear is that for now president Florentino Perez cannot seem to find the solution to end Flick's Barca's domestic domination.



Barcelona players celebrate after winning the La Liga. (Reuters)

## THE PRESIDENT OF THE UAE CUP

## Lacaro Du Croate triumphs at ParisLongchamp

**L**acaro Du Croate, the talented five-year-old mare, claimed a major victory by winning the Gr.1 (PA) The President of the UAE Cup - Coupe d'Europe des Chevaux Arabes over 2000m at ParisLongchamp yesterday. The race was for four-year-old and older Purebred Arabians.

Trained by Xavier Thomas-Demeaulte, ridden by Guillaume Guedj-Gay, and owned by Mansoor Khalil M. al-Shahwani, Lacaro Du Croate showed a very willing attitude to win at the highest level.

The mare jumped well from the stalls and quickly took a good position in midfield, but still close to the leaders, sitting fourth behind Al Theeb. The race was led by the pacemaker Mureb, while the well-fancied Lippo De Carrere was held up at the back of the field.

Entering the final straight, Lacaro Du Croate was still travelling strongly on the bridle. Guillaume Guedj-Gay switched her to the outside, where she looked to be going best of all.

Soon after, Lacaro Du Croate took the lead and was asked for her effort inside the final 300m. Moneer, Lippo De Carrere, and Al Theeb all tried to challenge her, while RB Kingmaker also began to finish strongly from the back on the outside.



But Lacaro Du Croate found more under pressure and responded very well to her jockey's urgings. She kept on strongly to win by one and a quarter length, with Lippo De Carrere finishing second and Moneer taking third.

Bred by Jacques-Francis Boudet, Lacaro Du

Croate is out of Beanie Du Croate, a winner over 1850m at three. She is a half-sister to Image Du Croate, a four-time winner from 1300m to 2000m, who won a Gr.1 (PA) over 2000m at three and a Gr.3 (PA) over 1600m at the same age.

## PSG move to the cusp of fifth successive Ligue 1 title

**Paris:** Paris St Germain left it late to earn a 1-0 home win over Stade Brestois to all but guarantee a fifth successive Ligue 1 title as Desire Doue came off the bench to score an 82nd-minute winner.

Victory advanced PSG to 73 points with two games left in their league schedule, six ahead of second-placed Lens, who also have two games remaining, and with a far superior goal difference.

PSG require a single point from their next match at Lens on Wednesday to be mathematically certain of the title. Brest were solid in defence through the first half against a

much-changed PSG line-up but in the second half they were breached several times before Doue's effort from the edge of the box secured a 23rd win of the Ligue 1 campaign.

Lille profited from a Denis Zakaria own goal as they won 1-0 at Monaco to move third in the standings, putting them on course for a Champions League berth next season.

On Friday, Mezian Mesloub scored with his first touch to earn Lens a 1-0 home win over Nantes, a result which keeps their slim Ligue 1 title hopes alive and relegated Nantes to Ligue 2 after 13 successive seasons in the top flight.