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Sinner, Djokovic kept apart in French Open Open draw



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GCC GAMES

# Qatar archers hit gold as hosts extend medal tally

Qatar's archers claim three gold and three bronze; Ashraf claims karate gold in the under-67kg category



Archers Ahmed al-Sada and Reem al-Saei of Qatar celebrate on the podium after winning gold in the recurve mixed team event at the GCC Games at Lusail Shooting Range yesterday.



Gold medallists archers Hamad al-Yafei and Aisha al-Saei of Qatar celebrate on the podium of the compound mixed team event yesterday.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar's archers delivered an outstanding performance on the penultimate day of the 4th GCC Games - Doha 2026, claiming three gold medals while the karatekas added another gold as the hosts picked up a further 11 medals yesterday strengthening the host nation's dominance at the regional event.

With the latest victories, Qatar overall medals tally swelled to 133 - 48 gold, 49 silver, and 36 bronze, maintaining a comfortable lead at the top of the standings.

Saudi Arabia are in second place with a total of 79 medals, comprising 30 gold, 27 silver, and 22 bronze medals. Bahrain occupied third position with 62 medals - 24 gold, 22 silver, and 16 bronze medals.

The archery competitions at the Lusail Shooting Range concluded yesterday with a spectacular finish as Qatar athletes continued their dominance of the podium securing six additional medals - three gold and three bronze - to raise their historic overall tally in shooting and archery to 26 medals.

The thrilling final rounds witnessed Qatar securing their first gold medal in archery in the compound mixed team event with Hamad al-Yafei and Aisha al-Saei delivering a highly accurate and composed show to finish ahead of UAE pair of Jumana al-Najjar and Shehab al-Saadi, who claimed silver, while Kuwait's Hanan al-Mayas and Abdullah Mal Allah secured bronze.

Qatar also imposed their dominance in the recurve mixed team event, where Ahmed al-Sada and Reem al-Saei won gold after a dramatic final against Saudi Arabia's Hessa al-Saree and Mansour al-Alawi, who claimed silver.

The UAE duo of Hessa al-Awadhi and Omar al-Ali secured bronze.

In the women's recurve individual event, hosts' Reem al-Saei



Qatar's Reem al-Saei claimed gold medal in the women's recurve individual event.

claimed gold after another dominant performance, ahead of Saudi Arabia's Safana al-Ahmadi, who won silver, while Hessa al-Saree secured bronze.

In the men's recurve event, UAE's Omar al-Ali won gold, Saudi Arabia's Mansour al-Alawi claimed silver, and Abdulrahman al-Mousa secured bronze.

The women's compound individual event saw UAE's Amna al-Awadhi claim gold ahead of compatriot Jumana al-Najjar, while Qatar's Aisha al-Saei won bronze.

In the men's Compound individual event, Saudi Arabia's Bilal al-Awadhi won gold, Kuwait's Abdullah Mal Allah secured silver, and the UAE's Shehab al-Saadi claimed bronze.

Qatar's success also extended to the team events, as the men's compound team trio of Abdulaziz Al Abbadi, Hamad al-Yafei, and Omar Laram secured bronze behind Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Meanwhile, Qatar women's

recurve trio of Maha Abdulhai, Reem al-Saei, and Haya al-Hajri also claimed bronze, while Saudi Arabia won gold and the UAE secured silver.

Dr. Mishaal Ibrahim al-Nasr, President of the Qatar Shooting and Archery Association (QSAA), and Jassim Shaheen al-Sulaiti, Secretary-General of the federation, alongside GCC sports officials and delegation representatives, crowned the winners.

Qatar also enjoyed success in karate competitions, securing five medals - one gold, three silver, and one bronze. Yaman Ashraf claimed gold for Qatar in the under-67kg category defeating Saudi Arabia's Saad al-Saif 10-9 in the final, while the Saudi athlete claimed silver. The bronze medals went to the UAE's Rashid al-Suraidi and Kuwait's Mohammed al-Otaibi.

In the under-60kg category, Qatar's Mustafa Abdulrahman won the silver medal, while Kuwait's Ali al-Ajmi claimed gold.

The bronze medals were awarded to Saudi Arabia's Ali Al Aryani and the UAE's Ibrahim Bakhit.

In the under-84kg category, Qatar's Abdullah Rashid secured silver, while Saudi Arabia's Ahmed al-Malki won gold. The bronze medals went to the UAE's Ali al-Ali and Kuwait's Mohammed Hassan.

In the over-84kg category, Qatar's Khalid Samir won silver, while Saudi Arabia's Anas al-Zahrani secured gold. The bronze medals were claimed by the UAE's Saif al-Qaidi and Kuwait's Mohammed al-Majadi.

In the under-75kg category, Youssef Riyadh of Qatar secured bronze, alongside the UAE's Ali Youssef, while Kuwait's Omar al-Janai won gold and Saudi Arabia's Ali Mejari claimed silver.

The medal ceremony was attended by Eid Ali al-Marikhi, President of the Qatar Taekwondo, Judo and Karate Federation, Rashid al-Hajri, Assistant Secretary-General of the federa-



Qatar's Yaman Ashraf poses after winning karate gold in under-67kg category at the GCC Games yesterday.

tion, Abdullah Shaaban, Head of the Kuwaiti delegation, Abdullah al-Shaya, Secretary-General of the Saudi Karate Federation, and Turki al-Bukhari, Board Member of the Saudi Federation.

With this exceptional achievement, Team Qatar shooting and archery extended its lead at the top of the overall standings with 26 medals - including 12 gold, 6 silver, and 8 bronze medals - ahead of Saudi Arabia in second place with 16 medals, followed by the UAE with 18 medals.

Kuwait finished fourth with 10 medals, Bahrain fifth with 12 medals, and Oman sixth with six medals.

Qatar's handball team will face Saudi Arabia today at the Duhail Sports Hall in a decisive encounter, with the silver medal at stake.

The Qatari side currently sits second in the standings with four points, collected from victories over the UAE (28-20) and Kuwait

(34-19), alongside a defeat to Bahrain (24-19).

Saudi Arabia occupies third place, level with Qatar on four points but trailing on goal difference. The Saudi team recorded wins against the UAE (34-21) and Kuwait (25-23), while suffering a loss to Bahrain (36-25). Meanwhile, Bahrain has already clinched the gold medal after defeating the UAE 31-20 to move to eight points at the top of the standings.

The UAE remains fourth with two points, while Kuwait is fifth without a point. The awards ceremony for the handball competition will be held today, following the conclusion of the Qatar-Saudi Arabia match, which will also mark the end of the Games.

Qatar will be aiming to finish strongly and add another medal to its campaign, having won the gold medal in handball in the 2022 edition of the Games.

CRICKET

# Clinical Gujarat end Chennai's IPL hopes with 89-run win

AFP  
Ahmedabad

Gujarat Titans beat Chennai Super Kings by 89 runs with a clinical all round performance in Ahmedabad yesterday.

The top three piled on the runs to lead Gujarat to 229 for the loss of four wickets. Then pacer Mohammed Siraj took three wickets in the first three overs of the Chennai chase, ensuring the visitors never had the momentum as they were bowled out for 140 in the 14th over.

Gujarat's easy win took them to the second in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and eliminated Chennai from playoff contention.

Chennai skipper Rituraj Gaikwad won the toss and decided to field, but Gujarat openers skipper Shubman Gill and Sai Sudharsan looked comfortable.

Gill, who hit 37-ball 64 with seven fours and three sixes, and Sai, who made a 53-ball 84 with four sixes and seven fours, shared a 125-run opening partnership.

The duo raced to 100 in the tenth over, with Gill taking the early initiative.

After Gill fell to Australia's Spencer Johnson, England's Jos Buttler took charge with an aggressive and unbeaten 27-ball 57.

Buttler and Sai put on 82 before Sai fell in the 19th over to Indian rookie Anshul Kamboj.

Most Chennai bowlers looked ordinary and leaked runs as Gujarat finished at 229-4.

Chennai's batters never got going, with player-of-the-match Siraj removing India teammate, Sanju Samson, for a first-ball zero.

Siraj removed Gaikwad in the third over after promising season-ball 16, and dismissed Urvil Patel for another duck in the same over.

That reduced Chennai to 29-3. Siraj's pace bowling partner, South Africa's Kagiso Rabada, was equally impressive and removed Australian opener Matthew Short after 14-ball 24.

Rabada finished with figures of 3-32 in 3.4 overs. In-form Siraj took 3-26 in his four overs.

"Ball is coming out nicely," Siraj said after the game.

"I'm happy to be driven through covers (and) that's what came off with Samson" wicket, Siraj added.

"While bowling in the powerplay, my priority is to build pressure. With that, even Rabada can get wickets."

Shivam Dube was the only Chennai batter who put up some resistance. He hit a 17-ball 47 before he fell to Afghanistan's Rashid Khan.

Khan finished with 3-18 in his two overs.

Gill said it was an "important win".

"Happy to go in with the momentum we have," the winning skipper said looking ahead to the playoffs.

"Happy with my batting, every time you're out you think you could've done better," Gill added.

**BRIEF SCORES: Gujarat Titans 229 for 4** (Sai Sudharsan 84, Gill 64, Buttler 57\*, Choudhary 1-36) **beat Chennai Super Kings 140** (Dube 47, Rashid 3-18, Siraj 3-26, Rabada 3-32) **by 89 runs.**



Gujarat Titans' Mohammed Siraj (left) celebrates after taking the wicket of Chennai Super Kings Urvil Patel during the IPL match in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

FORMULA 1

# Antonelli seeks to extend sensational start with 4th win

Mercedes team-mate Russell aims to regain momentum in Montreal

AFP  
Montreal

Italian teenager Kimi Antonelli seeks a sensational fourth consecutive victory to boost his F1 drivers' title bid this weekend, but expects a robust response from Mercedes team-mate George Russell at the Canadian Grand Prix.

The 19-year-old rising star of Italian sport leads the Briton, nine years his senior and the pre-season favourite for the title, by 20 points after four rounds of the 22-race championship as Mercedes unveil a major upgrade package.

For Russell, it is important to re-establish his authority in the team after two fourth-place finishes allowed his team-mate to revel in being the sole Silver Arrows man, astride the top of the podium.

"I am expecting George, for sure, to be super-strong again in Canada," said Antonelli, whose precocious talent, wide smile and curly hair have become an image Italian sporting optimism following their football team's failure to qualifying for the World Cup.

"He's always been strong in Montreal and he won last year so I have to be ready and be fully focused. I will do my best."

In addition to his hat-trick of pole, victory and fastest lap last year, Russell took pole at the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in 2024 and will fancy his chances of winning both Saturday's sprint race and Sunday's Grand Prix. Last year, Antonelli was fourth on the grid and finished third, his first podium finish. This time, he hopes to be the first Italian since Alberto Ascari in 1952 to claim four straight wins, when he reeled off six.

Mercedes' team chief Toto Wolff has side-stepped frenzied talk of Antonelli's prospects to concentrate on keeping balanced and cool.

"Performance is only perform-



Italian driver Kimi Antonelli leads the championship by 20 points after four races as Mercedes unveil a major upgrade package at the Canadian Grand Prix this weekend.

ance when it is delivered on track," he stressed. "We are just four races into the season and there is a long year ahead. It is an important race for us, but it does not decide anything. So, we stay balanced, keep learning and execute as well as we can."

The championship-leading Silver Arrows men are likely to be challenged by Ferrari, McLaren and Red Bull, with four-time champion Max Verstappen, who took part at the Nurburgring 24-Hours race last weekend, aiming to add to his three previous wins for Red Bull.

World champion Lando Norris won the sprint last year ahead of McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri, but the pair collided in the Grand Prix which ended up finishing behind a safety car.

Lewis Hamilton and his Ferrari

team-mate Charles Leclerc will also be strong contenders despite team boss Fred Vasseur grumbling about rule changes, notably the starting procedures, that have negated an advantage they enjoyed.

"It was a bit harsh for us," he said of the introduction of a blue light five-second warning to ensure teams spooled up their turbos. I understand what they did, for safety grounds, but the other option would have been to ask the others to start from the pit-lane if they think it's not safe."

Lance Stroll will be the only Canadian in the race, but like team-mate Fernando Alonso has little optimism as Aston Martin have struggled for performance with an uncompetitive Honda engine.

Alonso has hinted he is likely to retire from F1 and will decide his future during the summer months

of the European leg of the season.

**STANDINGS:**

**Drivers**

1. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 100 pts,
2. George Russell (GBR) 80,
3. Charles Leclerc (MON) 59,
4. Lando Norris (GBR) 51,
5. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 51,
6. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 43,
7. Max Verstappen (NED) 26,
8. Oliver Bearman (GBR) 17,
9. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 16,
10. Liam Lawson (NZL) 10,
11. Franco Colapinto (ARG) 7,
12. Arvid Lindblad (GBR) 4,
13. Isack Hadjar (FRA) 4,
14. Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP) 4,
15. Gabriel Bortoletto (BRA) 2,
16. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 1,
17. Alexander Albon (THA) 1

**Constructors**

1. Mercedes 180 pts,
2. Ferrari 110,
3. McLaren 94,
4. Red Bull 30,
5. Alpine 23,
6. Haas 18,
7. Racing Bulls 14,
8. Williams 5,
9. Audi 2

FOOTBALL

# Ronaldo strikes twice to end long wait for Saudi Pro League title

AFP  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Al Nassr clinched the Saudi Pro League title with a 4-1 win over Damac yesterday, ending his long wait for domestic silverware.

A trademark free-kick and a close-range finish, both in the final half-hour, sealed the win Al Nassr needed on the last night of the season, with Al Hilal finishing just two points behind.

Ronaldo, 41, who was without a major club trophy since winning Serie A with Juventus in 2020, arrived in the oil-rich desert kingdom to great acclaim in 2023, wept as he watched the final minutes from the bench. He adds the Saudi championship to his English, Spanish and Italian titles and five Champions League medals.

Al Nassr took a 2-0 lead but were back to 2-1 before Ronaldo's free-kick on 63 minutes evaded the goalkeeper and a forest of legs to find the far corner. He struck again nine minutes from time, receiving a cut-back on the edge of the six-yard box and smashing high into the net.

Next up for the all-time leading men's international goalscorer, with 143 goals, is a sixth crack at the World Cup after he was named in Portugal's squad this week.

Ronaldo opened the door to a series of big-money Saudi signings when he joined Al Nassr in January 2023 following an unhappy second spell at Manchester United.

Neymar and Karim Benzema were among those to follow after Ronaldo inked a two-and-a-half-year deal estimated at 200 million euros, extended for two years in June 2025.

The stated aim was to turn the Pro League into one of the world's top five football competitions measured by the quality of players, stadium attendances and commercial success. Inter-

national interest has been muted, however. In December 2024, Saudi Arabia was confirmed as host of the 2034 World Cup, a coup as it pushes to decouple its economy from oil and attract business and tourists, partly via the buzz of sports.

With a record 664 million Instagram followers, Ronaldo has been a highly-visible ambassador as Saudi Arabia tries to turn the page on the ultra-conservative image that has defined it for decades. The world's biggest oil exporter and home of Islam has been accused of "sportswashing" - using sport to deflect human rights criticism - as it has invested in Formula 1, golf, boxing and tennis alongside football.

Some of the more outlandish spending on economic diversification, including sprawling tourist developments and NEOM, a futuristic city in the desert, is being reined in.

This month, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund said it was exiting the breakaway LIV Golf tour, after reportedly ploughing more than \$5 billion into a venture that split the sport. Expensive football signings have also waned with the stream of big-money transfers slowing to a trickle.

Ronaldo was the Pro League's top scorer in his first two seasons, with his career tally now at 973 -- tantalisingly close to the 1,000-goals milestone. His Saudi stint has not always been smooth. In 2024, he was left in floods of tears when Al Nassr lost the King's Cup final to Al Hilal on penalties, denying him his first Saudi title.

This season, he disappeared from Al Nassr's line-up for three games in an apparent protest at Benzema's transfer to rival team Al Hilal.

Before yesterday, Ronaldo's only silverware with Al Nassr was the 2023 Arab Club Champions Cup. He was also disappointed on Saturday, when Al Nassr lost to Gamba Osaka in the AFC Champions League Two final.



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates scoring their third goal during the Saudi Pro League match against Damac in Riyadh yesterday. (Reuters)

CYCLING

# Segaert snatches Giro 12th stage, Eulalio stays in pink

AFP  
Novi Ligure, Italy

Alec Segaert won the 12th stage of the Giro d'Italia yesterday after a surprise late attack denied the sprinters their chance of a bunch finish, as his teammate Afonso Eulalio again stayed in the overall lead.

Belgian Segaert won his first ever stage on a Grand Tour after making a charge for the line with just over three kilometres remaining in an eventful stage.

The 23-year-old Bahrain Victorious rider prevailed in Novi Ligure in an eventful 175km stage from Imperia which saw key sprint rivals Jonathan Milan and Paul

Magnier dropped on the final Bric Berton climb. Portuguese Eulalio extended his lead over pre-race favourite Jonas Vingegaard to 33 seconds after claiming intermediate sprint points.

In the early part of the stage several attacks pulled away before being clawed back by the peloton, until a six-man group, none contending any of the jerseys on offer, created a gap of two minutes before the Colle Giovo climb.

That sweeping climb, which ended with the break caught, came around 80km from a finish which looked perfect for the sprinters.

Two of those sprint contenders, France's Paul Magnier and home hope Jonathan Milan, drifted off the back of the peloton near the crest of the subsequent Bric Ber-

ton climb where the steep gradient put the non-climbers to the test.

Milan and Magnier could not close the gap on a rapid peloton and ended up finishing several minutes off the pace. But it was not to be a sprinter's finish thanks to Segaert's bold burst which made it perfect day for his team. Today the peloton will take on a largely flat run between Alessandria and Verbania which features two punchy climbs towards the end of the 189km stage.

Alec Segaert celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 12th stage of the Giro d'Italia race between Imperia and Novi Ligure, Italy yesterday. (AFP)



**Sri Lanka appoints new cricket selectors**

Sri Lanka's newly appointed cricket administrators yesterday named a five-member selection panel headed by former player Kapila Wijegunawardena. The Sports Ministry said it had approved the new selectors and expected them to ensure "greater transparency and efficiency" in the team selection process. The government appointed an interim committee to run Sri Lanka Cricket late last month after elected office-bearers resigned en masse following political pressure. Other members of the selection panel are Amal Silva, Brendon Kuruppu, Varuna Waragoda and Vanessa de Silva. Meanwhile, financial irregularities surrounding Sri Lankan cricket were far worse than feared, government-appointed administrators said yesterday, promising a full accounting and sweeping reforms. "We have already ordered a forensic audit of the accounts," Eran Wickramaratne, interim president of Sri Lanka Cricket, said.

### Al Sadd clinch Amir Cup Table Tennis Championship



Al Sadd SC were crowned champions of the HH the Amir Cup Table Tennis Championship after defeating Al Arabi SC 3-2 in a thrilling final yesterday. Following the closely fought title clash, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain presented the trophies and medals to champions.

### Top-10 players plan French Open prize-money protest

Paris: The bulk of the top-ranked women's and men's players will limit their participation in today's French Open media day in a protest against what they see as their unfairly small share of Grand Slam revenue.

Seven of both the women's and men's top ten players - including number ones Aryna Sabalenka and Jannik Sinner - will take part in the protest. They are demanding more than 22 percent of the revenue from the four flagship tournaments of world tennis, compared to the current figure of 15 percent or less. For symbolism, the players plan to limit the time they spend with media to 15 minutes, a source close to the players told AFP. Among the leading men, those protesting, in addition to Sinner, include third-ranked Alexander Zverev, Felix Auger-Aliassime (5), Ben Shelton (6), Daniil Medvedev (7), Taylor Fritz (8), Alex De Minaur (9), Andrey Rublev (13), Casper Ruud (17)

and Jakob Mensik (28th). Missing from the list were two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz (2), who is injured and absent, Novak Djokovic (4) and Alexander Bublik (10).

On the women's side, Elena Rybakina (2), Iga Swiatek (3), defending champion in Paris Coco Gauff (4), Jessica Pegula (5), Elina Svitolina (7), Mirra Andreeva (8), Belinda Bencic (11), Jasmine Paolini (13) and Madison Keys (19) will join Sabalenka. Women's top 10 players expected to stay out of the protest are Amanda Anisimova (6), Victoria Mboko (9) and Karolina Muchova (10).

The traditional pre-tournament press conferences often last less than 15 minutes, but if they go over, the players will cut them short or cancel the interviews they usually grant immediately afterwards to broadcasters.

The players hope this will put pressure on the Roland-Garros

organisers ahead of a meeting between player representatives and officials from the French Tennis Federation (FFT), who organise the tournament.

**French Open 'will not budge' in prize money row: Mauresmo**  
Meanwhile, French Open organisers "will not budge" and increase prize money for the 2026 event despite a dispute with players, tournament director Amelie Mauresmo said.

"We are not going to budge," Mauresmo told reporters at the tournament draw in Paris, adding she was a "little saddened" by the situation. "We have prize money that has (...) doubled in 10 years and has also increased significantly recently."

A meeting between the French Open organisers and "some of the players' representatives" is to be held. "We don't usually take what comes from the players lightly," Mauresmo added.

### TENNIS

# Sinner, Djokovic kept apart in draw for French Open

Djokovic is bidding for a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title

AFP  
Paris

Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic will not be able to meet until the French Open final after the pair were placed in opposite halves of the men's draw on Thursday, while Coco Gauff could face Aryna Sabalenka in the women's semis.

Sinner, the red-hot men's title favourite in the absence of injured rival Carlos Alcaraz, will start his bid for a maiden Roland Garros crown against French wildcard Clement Tabur, the world number 165.

Women's world number one Sabalenka faces a tough potential road to the final, with Naomi Osaka, Victoria Mboko and reigning champion Gauff all potential hurdles for the Belarusian.

The build-up to the event, which gets under way on Sunday, has been overshadowed by threats from players to boycott some of their media duties over a pay dispute with Grand Slam tournament organisers.

World number one Sinner is slated to meet big-hitting American fifth seed Ben Shelton in the quarter-finals. Daniil Medvedev is a possible semi-final opponent for the Italian. The Russian gave Sinner a rare scare in the Italian Open semis earlier this month before eventually succumbing in three sets.

Sinner won his sixth consecutive Masters 1000 trophy by beating Casper Ruud in the Rome final. That made the four-time Grand Slam champion only the second man to complete the set of all nine Masters 1000 titles, after Novak Djokovic.

Third seed Djokovic will kick off his latest tilt at a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title against home player Giovanni Petrangola. Second seed Alexander Zverev is a potential semi-final opponent for Djokovic, who turns 39 on Friday.

The German has played Djokovic twice before at Roland Garros, suffering quarter-final defeats against the Serb in 2019 and last year. Djokovic is hoping to finally break out of his tie with Margaret Court on 24 Slam titles with a first major triumph since the 2023 US Open.

Zverev, still without a Grand Slam trophy after several near misses, plays Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi in round one. The stand-out first-round tie sees in-form French number one Arthur Fils take on 41-year-old former champion Stan Wawrinka, featuring at the tournament for the last time before retire-



Jannik Sinner, the red-hot title favourite in the absence of injured Carlos Alcaraz, will start his bid for a maiden Roland Garros crown against French World No. 165 Clement Tabur. (Reuters)



Aryna Sabalenka, who has never won French Open, was handed a difficult draw.

ment. Home favourite Gael Monfils, a semi-finalist in 2008, starts his farewell French Open against fellow countryman Hugo Gaston.

#### SABALENKA VS OSAKA POSSIBLE LAST-16 TIE

American fourth seed Gauff, who beat world number one Sabalenka in a tense final 12 months ago, will start her title defence against compatriot Taylor Townsend.

Sabalenka, who has never won the Roland

Garros tournament, was handed a difficult draw. Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka is a potential last-16 opponent for Sabalenka, although the Japanese star has never previously reached the second week in Paris.

Rising Canadian prospect Mboko or fifth seed Jessica Pegula could await the Belarusian in the quarters. Sabalenka will take on Jessica Bouzas Maneiro of Spain in the first round.

Gauff may need to get past fellow American Amanda Anisimova, who lost the Wimbledon and US Open finals last year, in the last eight. Four-time French Open champion Iga Swiatek, seeded third, could meet Italian Open winner Elina Svitolina in the quarters.

Second seed Elena Rybakina, who won the year's opening Grand Slam event at the Australian Open, is slated to face Swiatek in the semi-finals. Poland's Swiatek will start her campaign against 17-year-old Australian wildcard Emerson Jones, while Rybakina plays Slovenia's Veronika Erjavec.

There is a possible all-Southeast Asian clash in the second round between Indonesia's Janice Tjen and the Philippines' Alexandra Eala.

If that tie materialises, it may be for a last-32 meeting with Osaka.

### FOOTBALL

## Emery urges Villa to use Europa triumph to fuel bold new era

AFP  
Istanbul

Unai Emery urged Aston Villa to use their historic Europa League final triumph against Freiburg as the foundation for an "ambitious" new era.

Emery's side ended the club's 30-year trophy drought with a stylish 3-0 win in Istanbul on Wednesday. Spectacular first-half goals from Youri Tielemans and Emiliano Buendia put Villa in control before Morgan Rogers netted after the interval to kill off out-of-control Freiburg.

Villa's first trophy since the 1996 League Cup was also their first major European prize in 44 years. After long spells in the doldrums prior to Emery's arrival to replace the sacked Steven Gerrard in 2022, Villa are back among the elite both in the Premier League and Europe.

They have qualified for next season's Champions League and Emery called on his players and the club's hierarchy to match his desire to keep Villa in contention for silverware.

"I am myself ambitious and of course I need support. The owners, everyone that works in the club. Development is everything," he said. "The players are following us. We are doing it together. But we must try to set this ambition, being clear and realistic. As a team, ambitious and improving. This is our next step."

"We are getting stronger but we are trying to be demanding. Next year we will play in Champions League and the Premier League is the most difficult in the world. This is the challenge."

Emery has now won the Europa League five times after leading Sevilla to the trophy three times and clinching it once with Villarreal. "It's fantastic. Europe gave us a lot. For myself as well. I'm always very grateful for Europe. For every competition but especially the Europa League," the Spaniard said.

"The support I had with Valencia, with Sevilla, with Villarreal and here at Villa. We played it in a very serious way this year, so focused. Getting this trophy adds experience for us. And those experiences for the players are important. Because we can play next year trying as well to be in contention for trophies."

Villa last won a major continental trophy when they stunned



Bayern Munich to win the 1982 European Cup. For Emery, following in the footsteps of Tony Barton as Villa's second manager to land a major European trophy, emphasised how far they have come since he arrived in 2022 with the club languishing near the Premier League relegation zone.

"This final is confirmation of how we are progressing. It is very important," he said. "Of course my dream was to play in Europe and play to win trophies. We played the Conference League semi-final and Champions League quarter-finals. We were very close. This club won the European title in 1982. And again competing for a title in Europe is something which makes sense of everything we are doing."

On an unforgettable evening on the banks of the Bosphorus, Emery and his team ensured they will be ranked alongside the 1982 heroes as Villa legends forever. But Emery has no intention of resting on his laurels.

"We are improving. We are playing finals. We are winning trophies. I think the brand is increasing," he said. "Achieving this makes us so happy and proud. But we are not going to stop."

Freiburg's first European final proved to be an anti-climax, leaving the German club still waiting to win their maiden major trophy. "At this moment, there is no room for satisfaction. We lost the final," Freiburg boss Julian Schuster said.

"It is, of course, very painful. We believed we could win. In the first half, for the first 40 minutes, everything was fine."

"However, we lost control of the game, specifically due to set pieces. That is very tough to take."

### HATHAB

## Hussain shines in Silver Tour as Alqaqaa triumphs in Amateur class



Alqaqaa bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani rode Bon Suela to victory after producing two clear rounds at the Hathab.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Bahrain's Hussain Mohamed Dadalla delivered an impressive performance to top Silver Tour, while Alqaqaa bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani won Amateur class during the 14th and final round of the Longines Hathab - Qatar Equestrian Tour at the indoor arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF).

The series is organised by the QEF in partnership with Al Shaqab, a member of Qatar Foundation.

In the Silver Tour competition, held under Table A rules with

one round against the clock over 130cm fences, Hussain guided Elite to victory with a flawless round in 54.56 seconds. Saudi rider Khaled al-Hadi finished second aboard Doremi du Flot Z in 55.50secs, while Qatar's Faris Saad al-Qahtani secured third place on Gaya des Cours in 57.06secs.

In the Amateur class, contested over two phases at 100cm, Alqaqaa rode Bon Suela to victory after producing two clear rounds in 27.24secs. Sultan Abdulaziz al-Sada claimed second place aboard Argelith Squid in 28.34secs, while Iraq's Mariam Abdulkarim Abed and Qatar's Moza Hamza al-Kuwari shared third position after both clocked 28.39secs aboard Jumbo and Haneen respectively.



Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Thani, Director of Facilities Management at the Qatar Equestrian Federation, presented the medals to Silver Tour winners.

## FOOTBALL

# Groups set for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar

Qatar will host the event for second consecutive year from Nov 19 to Dec 13

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The draw for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 was held in Zurich, Switzerland yesterday, ahead of the tournament's return to Doha from November 19 to December 13.

Continuing the expanded 48-team format successfully introduced in 2025, qualified nations were drawn into 12 groups of four, producing a number of compelling matchups for the second of five consecutive editions of the youth tournament that Qatar will host through 2029.

Speaking virtually at the draw, Jassim al-Jassim, CEO, FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar Local Organising Committee, highlighted Qatar's commitment towards delivering another exceptional edition of the prestigious youth tournament.

"Last year, Qatar made history by hosting the first-ever 48-team FIFA tournament, welcoming 1,008 young players. More than 197,000 fans attended 104 matches across eight pitches of the Aspire Zone complex, creating a unique festival atmosphere. A total of 130 scouts from leading clubs also gathered to witness football's next generation up close. We are proud of the platform the 2025 edition provided for rising stars such as Hamza Abdelkarim, Mateus Mide, Anísio Cabral and Samuele Inacio," said al-Jassim.

"This year, we build on everything we learned in 2025 to deliver an even greater experience for players, fans, and the global football community. Congratulations to all qualified teams, we look forward to welcoming you to Doha," he added.

Hosts Qatar was drawn into Group A, alongside Panama, Egypt and Greece. Notable teams returning to Doha include Italy, Brazil, Morocco, Japan and Saudi Arabia, among others. The 2026 edition also features debutant nations Montene-



Former Portuguese footballer Nuno Gomes draws Qatar during the FIFA U-17 World Cup 2026 draw in Zurich, Switzerland.

gro, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Vietnam, who are making their first appearance in the tournament.

With 46 of the 48 participating teams already confirmed, the tournament's final line-up will be decided on May 23, when the CAF play-off matches conclude at the U-17 Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco. The two remaining berths will be awarded to the winners of the play-offs between Ethiopia v Mozambique and Uganda v Ghana.

Matches will be held at the state-of-the-art Competition Complex in Aspire Zone, welcoming fans to enjoy a vibrant football festival-like atmosphere. The tournament's centralised hosting model proved to be a defining feature of the 2025 edition, allowing fans and talent scouts to attend multiple matches a day.

The final will take place on December 13 at Khalifa International Stadium. The iconic venue, which this year marks 50 years since its inauguration in 1976, has hosted a number of premier sporting events, including matches during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.



## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Arteta on BBQ duty when Arsenal clinched title

AFP  
London

Mikel Arteta said he was barbecuing alone in his garden when Arsenal ended their 22-year wait to win the Premier League this week.

Manchester City's 1-1 draw at Bournemouth on Tuesday confirmed the Gunners as English league champions for the first time since 2004. Arsenal boss Arteta said winning the trophy after six-and-a-half years at the helm was "one of the best feelings that I have ever had".

But the Spaniard, speaking at his first press conference since the title win, admitted he did not see any of the match involving closest challengers City at the Vitality Stadium after leaving his players at the club's training ground to return home.

Pep Guardiola's team had to win to take the race into a final day this weekend but fell short. "I was supposed to be here at Colney (the training ground), watching the game with the boys and certain staff because that's what they wanted - but I couldn't," Arteta said on Thursday.

"I think 20 minutes later, before the game, I had to leave. I couldn't bring the



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said winning the Premier League trophy after six-and-a-half years at the helm was "one of the best feelings that I have ever had". (Reuters)

energy that I wanted, and ultimately it was their moment as well to watch it together, to be themselves and just see what the outcome would be. I went home, I went outside to the garden and I started to build some fire and started to do some barbecue. I didn't watch any of it. I was just hearing some noises in the background, in the living

room and suddenly the magic happened. My oldest son opened the garden door, he started to run towards me, he started to cry, he gave me a hug and said: 'We are champions, daddy'.

The Spaniard added: "It was magical." Arsenal players returned earlier Thursday for their first training session since

their triumph was confirmed. The Gunners complete their domestic campaign at Crystal Palace on Sunday and face Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final in Budapest on May 30, seeking a remarkable double.

"We're going to prepare for that game with the intention to win and write a new story in the club's history," said Arteta.

He said winning the Premier League had lifted a weight off the team's shoulders as Arsenal seek to become European champions for the first time in their storied history.

"I think it's a lot of emotion, joy, happiness, being proud," said the 44-year-old. "And as well, it's a relief. Because when you see so many people for so long just waiting for something to happen, and actually you achieve it, it's like everything that we've done, it was worth it. And now we need to sustain that energy, that positivity."

Arteta was asked whether Arsenal could now dominate and stack up more trophies. "We've done another step there and now we have to show that we have the ambition, the quality and the consistency to do that," he said. "And that's going to be the next step for us as a football club in every decision that we make to continue with those levels, with those standards and with that ambition for sure."

### Neuer recalled to aid Germany World Cup bid

**Frankfurt, Germany:** Veteran goalkeeper Manuel Neuer was handed a surprise recall to Germany's 26-man World Cup squad on Thursday, coming out of international retirement to play in the tournament for a fifth time. The 40-year-old retired from international duty in 2024 but coach Julian Nagelsmann confirmed the World Cup winner will play ahead of Oliver Baumann at this summer's tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Joshua Kimmich will retain the captaincy despite the long-time skipper's return. Former Manchester City and Bayern winger Leroy Sane, now at Galatasaray, has retained his spot.

Bayern Munich's Neuer is the only remaining member of the squad that won the World Cup in 2014. Matthias Ginter, another 2014 World Cup winner who was instrumental in Freiburg's run to the Europa League final, failed to make the cut, with Newcastle's Malick Thiaw preferred in central defence.

Bayern goalkeeper Jonas Urbig was dropped from the squad after being called up for the March friendlies, but will travel with the side to help in training during the tournament.

As expected, Bayern forward Serge Gnabry misses out with a thigh injury, as does Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen. Neuer was the standout player as Germany won their fourth World Cup in 2014, but since then the team's form has plummeted. Germany crashed out at the World Cup group stage in 2018 for the first time since 1938 and repeated the feat four years later in Qatar.

The Germans have not fared much better in other international tournaments. Since making the semi-finals of Euro 2016, Germany have won just one knockout game in the tournament - a 2-0 success against Denmark on home soil at Euro 2024.

The Germans will have one final match on home soil, against Finland on May 31, before facing World Cup co-hosts the United States in Chicago on June 6. Germany will be based in North Carolina during the tournament. They are in Group C alongside debutants Curacao, the Ivory Coast and Ecuador.

**Squad:**  
**Goalkeepers:** Oliver Baumann (Hoffenheim), Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich), Alexander Nuebel (Stuttgart)  
**Defenders:** Waldemar Anton (Borussia Dortmund), Nathaniel Brown (Eintracht Frankfurt), Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich), David Raum (RB Leipzig), Antonio Rudiger (Real Madrid), Nico Schlotterbeck (Borussia Dortmund), Jonathan Tah (Bayern Munich), Malick Thiaw (Newcastle/ENG)  
**Midfielders:** Nadiem Amiri (Mainz), Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich), Pascal Gross (Brighton and Hove Albion/ENG), Jamie Lewelling (Stuttgart), Jamal Musiala (Bayern Munich), Felix Nmecha (Borussia Dortmund), Aleksandar Pavlovic (Bayern Munich), Angelo Stiller (Stuttgart), Florian Wirtz (Liverpool/ENG)  
**Forwards:** Maximilian Beier (Borussia Dortmund), Kai Havertz (Arsenal/ENG), Lennart Karl (Bayern Munich), Leroy Sane (Galatasaray/TUR), Deniz Undav (Stuttgart), Nick Woltemade (Newcastle/ENG)

### FA launches Southampton probe over 'spygate' scandal

**London:** The Football Association is investigating Southampton over the "spygate" scandal that resulted in the club's expulsion from tomorrow's Championship play-off final.

Saints admitted observing a training session held by semi-final opponents Middlesbrough earlier this month, as well as two other similar incidents during the season.

The FA is looking at whether charges should be brought, following the decision by an English Football League independent disciplinary commission to kick Southampton out of the play-offs and dock the club four points for next season.

An FA spokesperson said: "We will now investigate and won't comment further until we have assessed the evidence."

The club's appeal against their punishment was dismissed on Wednesday, with Middlesbrough replacing them in the Wembley final against

Hull. Southampton beat Middlesbrough 2-1 over two legs in the play-off semi-finals.

Saints chief executive Phil Parsons said the sanctions imposed were "manifestly disproportionate". Kicking the club out of the play-offs denies them a shot at a Premier League place and with it an estimated £200 million (\$269 million) in additional revenue as a minimum.

Southampton player of the year Leo Scienza described the punishment as "heartbreaking" and said the club's fans "definitely deserved better".

Tonda Eckert's future as Southampton boss is now in major doubt, while reports suggest players are considering legal action against the club. Saints, relegated from the Premier League last year, said in a statement that "trust now needs to be rebuilt".

The winners of play-off final will join already promoted Coventry and Ipswich in the Premier League next season.

## SPOTLIGHT

## QOC organises Paralympic Challenge Day

The Qatar Olympic Committee organised the Paralympic Challenge Day for people with disabilities on Wednesday in cooperation with Awsaj Academy, part of Qatar Foundation's Pre University Education, at the academy's sports hall, in a sporting and educational atmosphere aimed at promoting the values of challenge and social inclusion.

The program featured a number of recognized Paralympic sports and competitions, including wheelchair basketball, boccia, goalball, and sitting volleyball, in addition to handcycling simulations and blindfold races. These activities provided students with an opportunity to learn about Paralympic sports while fostering teamwork and positive interaction among participants.

Saeeda al-Abdullah, Event Director from the Qatar Olympic Committee, expressed her sincere appreciation to all participants in the program, emphasizing that the event's great success was the result of fruitful cooperation with Awsaj Academy and the dedicated efforts made by everyone involved to achieve its sporting and humanitarian objectives.

She said: "At the Qatar Olympic Committee, we look forward to continuing this strategic and constructive cooperation in the future and to launching innovative initiatives that contribute to strengthening social responsibility and community participation, while support-



The program featured a number of Paralympic events, including wheelchair basketball, boccia, goalball, and sitting volleyball, in addition to handcycling simulations and blindfold races.

ing meaningful activities that serve and inspire younger generations and reinforce the values of determination, challenge, and respect among students."

Mohammed al-Janahi, Elementary School Principal at Awsaj Academy, stressed that organising such purposeful sporting events reflects the importance of promoting the values of inclusion and cooperation, while empowering all students to participate actively within the school community.

He praised the important role played by the Qatar Olympic Committee in supporting sporting and humanitarian initiatives that contribute to raising awareness of Paralympic sports and promoting a culture of respect and appreciation for the abilities of individuals with different needs. He added that such community partnerships leave a deep educational and humanitarian impact on students and contribute to building a more aware and socially engaged generation.