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# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Anderson to retire from Tests after Lord's Test against West Indies

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## QOC participates in the OCA General Assembly meeting in Bangkok



The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) participated in the 43rd General Assembly meeting of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) held in Bangkok, Thailand. Mohamed bin Yusuf al-Manea, the First Vice-President of the QOC, headed the delegation at the meeting. He was joined by Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, the Second Vice-President of the QOC and Vice-President of the OCA for West Asia, and Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, the Secretary-General of the QOC and Vice-President of the OCA for the Doha 2030 Asian Games. The meeting reviewed progress reports on the following four upcoming events: The 6th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Bangkok and Chonburi, Thailand in November 2024; The 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin, China in February 2025; The 2025 Asian Youth Games in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; The 20th Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan in 2026. The meeting also discussed the report of the OCA's Constitutional Reform Committee.

PREMIER LEAGUE

# City thrash Fulham to close in on title, Burnley relegated

City two points clear of Arsenal, who visit Man United today

AFP  
Manchester

Manchester City closed in on a fourth consecutive Premier League title by thrashing Fulham 4-0 yesterday, while Burnley were relegated from the top flight after a 2-1 defeat at Tottenham. Luton are also virtually down. A 3-1 defeat at West Ham left them three points adrift of safety and with a goal difference 12 worse than Nottingham Forest with just one game remaining.

There was no twist in the title race at Craven Cottage as defender Josko Gvardiol continued his hot streak in front of goal. The Croatian settled any City nerves by firing in on his weaker right foot after just 13 minutes. Pep Guardiola's men were dominant but had to wait until the hour to make the points safe when Phil Foden swept in his 25th goal of the season.

Gvardiol then turned in Bernardo Silva's cross at the back post for his fifth City goal, all of which have come in his past seven games. A £77mn (\$96mn) signing from RB Leipzig last summer, Gvardiol could have become the first defender in Premier League history to score a hat-trick when City were awarded a penalty in stoppage time.

However, he turned down the chance to take it, allowing Julian Alvarez to round off the scoring. Victory takes City two points clear at the top of the table and ramps up the pressure on second-placed Arsenal, ahead of their visit to Manchester United today. Should the Gunners fail to win, City can wrap up the title when they travel to Tottenham on Tuesday. "My players like to play with pressure, they are used to it. The players enjoy this feeling," Guardiola said. "The destiny (of the title) is in our hands."

Spurs kept their chance of Champions League football next season alive by coming from behind to send Burnley to the Championship. Jacob Bruun Larsen had fired the Clarets into a shock lead after Sander Berge's pass cut the Tottenham defence wide open.

Spurs had lost their last four matches, but they turned the game around to move within four points of fourth-placed Aston Villa. Pedro Porro blasted an equaliser high past Arjanet Muric. Micky Van de Ven then curled in the winner to at least guarantee Spurs will be in Europe next season.

"Today the Premier League is over but tomorrow we start day one of doing everything we can to get back to the Premier League," said Burnley boss Vincent Kompany.

Luton will also be back in the Championship next season after blowing a 1-0 lead and los-



Manchester City's Josko Gvardiol (right) celebrates with Bernardo Silva after scoring against Fulham during the Premier League in London yesterday. (Reuters)

ing to West Ham in David Moyes' final home game in charge of the Hammers. Albert Sambi Lokonga's early header gave the visitors hope of a great escape. But second-half strikes from James Ward-Prowse, Tomas Soucek and George Eardly all but ended Luton's Premier League stay after a remarkable rise back through the leagues to get back to the top flight for the first time in 32 years.

"These players and supporters have given me the best 18 months of my life," said Luton manager Rob Edwards, who broke down in tears after full-time. "It's a huge sorry, but a huge thank you."

With Luton set to join Burnley and Sheffield United in going down, all three promoted clubs will be relegated to expose to growing gulf between the top two divisions. Forest missed the chance to mathematically confirm Luton's relegation by blowing a late lead to lose 3-2 to Chelsea.

Mykhailo Mudryk's opener for Chelsea was quickly cancelled out by Willy Boly's header. Callum Hudson-Odoi then seemed to have sealed Forest's survival against his former club when his fierce curling finish found the far corner 16 minutes from time.

But two goals in two minutes from Raheem Sterling and Nicolas Jackson boosted in-form Chelsea's charge towards Europe next season. Mauricio Pochettino's men move level on points with sixth-placed Newcastle, who were held 1-1 at home by Brighton.

Crystal Palace's stunning form since the arrival of Oliver Glasner as manager continued with a 3-1 win at Wolves. Michael Olise, Jean-Philippe Mateta and Eberechi Eze were on target for the Eagles, who climb up to 12th. Abdoulaye Doucoure scored the only goal as Everton beat Sheffield United 1-0. Yoane Wissa scored a 95th-minute winner for Brentford to snatch a 2-1 victory at Bournemouth.

SPOTLIGHT

## Qatar to host FIBA West Asia Super League - Final 8

By Sports Reporter  
Beirut, Lebanon

The FIBA West Asia Super League - Final 8 is set to be hosted in Doha, Qatar, the FIBA Regional Office Asia announced on Thursday. The pinnacle event of the second season of FIBA West Asia Super League is scheduled from May 25-June 1, 2024.

This will be the first time that Doha, Qatar, will serve as the host of the much-anticipated event, with the inaugural edition having been hosted in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

"Witnessing Qatar host the WASL Final 8 fills me with immense pride and excitement," said Hagop Khajirian, FIBA Regional Office - Asia Executive Director. "This event not only highlights the exceptional growth and development of basketball in the region but also underscores Doha's commitment to excellence as a host city."

"Qatar's dedication to fostering the growth of basketball is evident. It sets a precedent as we collectively strive to elevate the sport to new heights across Asia, especially in club competitions, which is one of FIBA's strategic priorities for cycle 2023-2027."

Qatar will be hosting the FIBA Basketball World Cup in 2027. "Hosting the FIBA West Asia Super League - Final 8 in Doha this year marks a significant milestone for Qatar's basketball journey. It's not just about showcasing our regional prowess but also about laying the groundwork for the grand stage ahead," said Mohamed Saad al-Meghaiseeb, president of the Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF).

"This event serves as a testa-

ment to our commitment and readiness as we strive towards hosting the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027."

In recent years, Qatar has also hosted consecutive FIBA U16 Asia Cups in 2022 and 2023. The Gulf nation also hosted the FIBA Asia Cup, the region's flagship competition, in 2005.

"With the Final 8 set to tip off in Doha, we proudly continue to build a tradition of being a hotbed for basketball in the region from hosting recent U16 Asia Cups to the Asia Cup in the early 2000s," said Saadoun al-Kuwari, QBF secretary-general. "This year's Final 8 heralds another chapter in Doha's storied journey, as we continue to set the stage for unforgettable moments in basketball history."

Six teams from the FIBA WASL Sub-Zone Leagues make up the Final 8. Champions Kuwait Club spearhead the Gulf delegation that also has Manama as well as third-placed club, Kazma. The West Asia ensemble, meanwhile, features Al Riyadi, Shahrdary Gorgan, and Sagesse Sports Club. All six will be joined by BC Astana (Central Asia) and Tamil Nadu (South Asia).

The Final 8 teams will be divided into two groups, each comprising four teams. Following the group stage, the two highest-ranking teams from each group will progress to the semi-finals, while the third and fourth-placed teams will be eliminated from further contention. Subsequently, the winners of the Semi-Finals will advance to compete in the Final.

The two finalist clubs will earn a spot in the inaugural Basketball Champions League Asia (BCL Asia) which will be played from June 9-15, 2024 in Dubai.



The pinnacle event of the second season of FIBA West Asia Super League is scheduled from May 25-June 1 in Doha.

CRICKET

# Anderson to retire from Tests after Lord's match against WI



'It's been an incredible 20 years representing my country, playing the game I've loved since I was a kid'

AFP  
London

England star **James Anderson** believes the "time is right" to end his Test career after revealing July's clash against the West Indies at Lord's will be his final appearance in the five-day format.

The 41-year-old became the first seamer and just the third bowler in history to reach 700 Test wickets, after spinners Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan, in his most recent outing against India in March.

But Anderson has decided to call time on his Test career after talks with England head coach Brendon McCullum, who wants to modify his side's seam attack and build towards the future with one eye on the 2025-26 Ashes.

Setting the first Test against the West Indies as his farewell date, Anderson wrote on Instagram: "Hi everyone. Just a note to say that the first Test of the summer at Lord's will be my last Test. "It's been an incredible 20 years

representing my country, playing the game I've loved since I was a kid.

"I'm going to miss walking out for England so much. But I know the time is right to step aside and let others realise their dreams just like I got to, because there is no greater feeling."

Richard Thompson, the chair of the England and Wales Cricket Board, saluted Anderson and said English cricket must give him a "send-off like no other".

"I don't think we'll ever see a bowler to match Jimmy again. It has been an honour as an England fan to watch him, and to marvel at his skill with the ball," Thompson said.

"To still be bowling at the top of his game at 41 is remarkable, and he is a true inspiration and role model for peers and younger generations alike."

Anderson thanked his wife Daniella, their children Lola and Ruby and his parents for their support, adding: "I'm excited for the new challenges that lie ahead, as well as filling my days with even more golf."

"Thank you to everyone who has

supported me over the years, it always meant a lot, even if my face often doesn't show it."

**'UTTERLY REMARKABLE'**

It is understood McCullum made a visit to the UK recently from his native New Zealand and spoke with Anderson about his future during a round of golf.

Anderson's former England captain Michael Vaughan said the time was right for the pace bowler to walk away, with the focus moving towards the next Ashes series.

"For England to go down under in 18 months and try to win those Ashes back then they will need some pace, so it is the right time to move Jimmy Anderson aside," Vaughan said.

Anderson, who made his Test debut in 2003, is second only on the all-time list of Test appearances behind batting great Sachin Tendulkar, who played 200 times in the longest format for India.

Swing specialist Anderson also featured in 194 one-day internationals and 19 Twenty20s before his interna-

tional white-ball career ended in 2015 - the same year he overtook Ian Botham's 383 dismissals to become England's record Test wicket-taker.

Three and a half years later, Anderson overhauled Australia seamer Glenn McGrath's tally of 563 wickets to become Test cricket's most successful fast bowler.

Anderson struggled during the drawn 2023 Ashes in England, taking only five wickets in four matches. His long-time new-ball partner Stuart Broad, England's second most successful bowler, retired after the dramatic finale to that Ashes, when Ben Stokes's side won at The Oval to end the series all square at 2-2. Anderson has taken just 15 wickets in his last eight Tests at an average of 50.8 in the last 12 months. But that decline could not diminish the respect earned by Anderson throughout his astonishing career.

"For Jimmy to do it day in day out and to put his body and mind through everything he's done over the past 20 years is utterly remarkable. He's England's greatest," Vaughan said.

CYCLING

## Pogacar wins again on Giro mountain

AFP  
Rome

Tadej Pogacar tightened his grip on the Giro d'Italia yesterday winning the 152km mountainous stage eight over rolling terrain for his third success of this year's race.

A day after claiming the lengthy individual time-trial in Perugia, the 25-year-old Team UAE leader paced himself up the 14km final climb along with an elite clique before producing his trademark late kick to the 1,425m altitude finish line in the Abruzzo region.

Pogacar also won the second stage, a summit finish at the Sanctuary of Oropa in Piedmont.

In his bid to win the Giro and Tour de France in the same season he now leads title rivals Dani Martinez by 2min 40sec and Geraint Thomas in third

by 2min 58sec with the pair close on his heels on the second mountain stage in the 21-day race.

Australia's AG2R man Ben O'Connor at 3min 39sec and Belgian Visma rider Cian Uijtendbroeks at 4min 02sec round out the top five in the overall standings.

The Slovenian two-time Tour de France champion is taking part in the Giro for the first time and hopes to emulate Italy's Marco Pantani who won the double in 1998.

"My team won this one in a way," said Pogacar, who was paced all the way by team-mate Rafal Majka.

The race continues Sunday with a largely flat 214km stage nine to the southern port city of Naples on a route open to attacks from the same kind of one-day specialists that lit up stage six on the Tuscan gravel.

"Sunday will be easier for us and we could do with some

breathing space now," said Pogacar, known for his all-in style and desire to rack up stage wins.

Ineos leader Thomas had a more poised approach to the art of negotiating the 21-day long-haul and said he was more than happy after the climb.

"I felt much better today, it's like night and day," said the veteran, hoping to find his peak in the ultra-mountainous third week.

Thomas was just 2sec adrift on the day after being paced by young team-mate Thymen Arensman.

Dutch outfit Visma lost another of their chief riders to injury when Christophe Laporte failed to show up for the start. He fell hard when hitting a gutter on stage five.

The Visma team are reeling from injuries to double Tour de France champion Jonas Vingegaard and one day expert Wout van Aert.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

## Kolkata Knight Riders down Mumbai Indians to confirm play-off berth

AFP  
Kolkata

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy returned bowling figures of 2-17 as Kolkata Knight Riders booked their play-off spot with an 18-run win over Mumbai Indians in a rain-reduced IPL match.

Two-time champions Kolkata posted 157-7 as Venkatesh Iyer top-scored with 42 off 21 balls after being invited to bat first at their home Eden Gardens in a 16-overs-a-side match.

Bowlers combined to defend the total after Mumbai raced to 65-0 and Chakravarthy, a mystery spinner, got the big wickets of Rohit Sharma, who made 19 after coming in as impact substitute, and skipper Hardik Pandya, who was caught out for two.

Five-time winners Mumbai, who



Venkatesh Iyer plays a shot during the IPL match against Mumbai Indians at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

are already out of the play-off race, finished on 139-8 as Tilak Varma hit a 17-ball 32 before he fell to fast bowler Harshit Rana, who took two wickets in the last over.

Pace bowler Andre Russell also took two wickets, including that of Suryakumar Yadav, as table-toppers Kolkata got their ninth win in 12 matches to become the first team to book a play-off berth.

The top four teams will make the play-offs with the final on May 26 in

Chennai. Kolkata lost openers Phil Salt, out for six, and Sunil Narine, bowled for a duck off Jasprit Bumrah, in the first two overs and skipper Shreyas Iyer soon fell for seven.

But Venkatesh, a left-hand batsman, made Kolkata hit back with six fours and two sixes and he set the pace that was picked up by Nitish Rana and Russell in a key stand of 39. Rana, a left-hand batter, hit 33 and Russell smashed 24 off 14 before Rinku Singh, who hit 20, and Ramandeep Singh, unbeaten 17, helped Kolkata finish on a high.

Bumrah and veteran leg-spinner Piyush Chawla took two wickets each.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Kolkata Knight Riders 157 for 7** (Venkatesh 42, Rana 33, Chawla 2-28, Bumrah 2-39) **beat Mumbai Indians 139 for 8** (Kishan 40, Tilak 32, Chakravarthy 2-17, Russell 2-34, Harshit 2-34) **by 18 runs.**

# Rawabi Sports League (RSL) Kicks Off with a Bang!

Rawabi Management proudly announced the inauguration of the Rawabi Sports League (RSL), a groundbreaking initiative aimed at fostering staff empowerment through the spirit of sportsmanship and companionship. The momentous event commenced with great fervor and enthusiasm at Sherbone School, Mall of Qatar.



Under the astute leadership of the Rawabi Sports League Team Management, comprising Mr. Muhammed Abdulla - Managing Director, Mr. Ajmal Abdulla - Executive Director, Mr. Haris Thayyil - Group Director, Mr. Muhamed Sadik - Group Director,



Mr. Kannu Baker - Group General Manager, and Mr. Muhammed Jaseel, the league promises to set new benchmarks in sporting excellence and organizational prowess.

The Rawabi Sports League witnessed the participation of four formidable teams, each poised to showcase their prowess in a variety of sporting disciplines. The teams competing in the league are the Rawabi Sparks, Rawabi Royals, Rawabi Kings, and Rawabi Stars, representing the vibrant spirit and diversity within Rawabi Management.

The league features an exciting array of sports including football,

cricket, volleyball, badminton, and tug of war, promising thrilling matches and intense competition. Matches will be held across prestigious venues, including The Hamilton International School Doha, culminating in the grand finale scheduled for May 16th at Dynamic Sports (Old Ideal School).

In a pioneering move, Rawabi Management has joined forces with prominent brands to support and elevate the Rawabi Sports League. The league is proud to announce its title sponsors: Nelon, Rainbow, and Kinza, whose unwavering commitment underscores their belief in the power of sports to unite communities.

Furthermore, each team has garnered the support of esteemed brands, with Lipton, Coca Cola, Widam, Cocos, and Penta Trading Group stepping up as team sponsors. Additionally, associate sponsors including Awebia, Cafe Lovella, Hot Chicken, Snowfog, Anchor, Qatar Foods, Society Tea, and English Oven have lent their generous support to ensure the success of the league.

The Rawabi Sports League is grateful for the invaluable contribution of its media partners, comprising Gulf Times, Radio Olive, Radio Suno, Rawabi Media, Prestige, and Dorado Advertising, whose extensive reach and coverage will bring the excitement of the league to audiences far and wide.

The inauguration of the Rawabi Sports League marks a significant milestone in the sporting landscape of Qatar, as Rawabi Management spearheads a pioneering initiative to promote wellness, teamwork, and employee engagement. Through the power of sports, the Rawabi Sports League aims to inspire, unite, and create lasting memories for all participants and spectators alike.

For more information and updates on the Rawabi Sports League, please visit Rawabi social media.



MOTORSPORT

# Martin wins sprint to pad championship lead

AFP  
Le Mans, France

Jorge Martin cruised to his third MotoGP sprint victory of the season as he won in Le Mans yesterday to increase his championship lead.

Marc Marquez, who started 13th on the grid on his Gresini Ducati, finished second with a third Spaniard, Maverick Vinales, on an Aprilia, rounding out the podium.

Italian Enea Bastianini was fourth on a factory Ducati to climb to second in the championship standings. He trails Martin by 28 points. In morning qualifying, Martin, on a Pramac Ducati, became the first MotoGP rider to go around the Bugatti Circuit in under 1min 30secs.

He then crashed but suffered no after-effects in the race, pulling smoothly away from the field as rivals suffered problems. The closest challenger in the standings, Francesco Bagnaia, who also crashed his factory Ducati late in the morning, had problems with the backup bike in the race.

He started second on the grid but fell to 15th on the first lap. The reigning double world champion had slipped to last by the time he veered off the course on lap four.

Alex Espargaro started fast from the second row on his Aprilia. Too fast, the stewards ruled, penalising the Spaniard with two long laps. He still managed to take fifth. Vinales, said his rear tyre had overheated and he had decided to "defend not attack."

Italian Marco Bezzecchi crashed out on lap 10 while running comfortably second on a Ducati VR46.

"The objective was to pull away," said Martin at the finish.

"Marco was putting out some great laps, then when I saw he crashed I just tried to keep my constant pace right to the end, quite relaxed."

Martin took his 12th career sprint victory when he crossed the line 2.28 seconds ahead of Marquez, who had surged through the field from the fifth. Marquez said it was his best MotoGP start ever because with modern technology getting an edge off the line was harder. "It was a good start - a combination of concentration, luck, risk, instinct," he said.

"With all the holeshot devices and all these things it's super difficult to make the difference on the start because every rider, every manufacturer starts in a good way," he said. "For me the most important thing was the pace after that."

The sprint was raced under



Prima Pramac Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin (also inset) celebrates after winning the French MotoGP Grand Prix sprint at the Bugatti circuit in Le Mans, France, yesterday. (AFP)

sunny skies in 26C heat. Rain, and even thunderstorms, are forecast for the main race today from the same grid positions.

"Tomorrow will be a long race,"

said Martin.

RESULT

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 19min 49.694sec, 2.

Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) at 2.280sec, 3. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 4.174, 4. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 4.798, 5. Alex Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia)

7.698, 6. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 9.185, 7. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 11.190, 8. Jack Miller (AUS/KTM) 11.516, 9. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 12.257, 10. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 12.699, 11. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 13.492, 12. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) 15.578, 13. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 16.439, 14. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 16.816, 15. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 16.969, 16. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR) 19.123, 17. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 23.618, 18. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 27.854

DNF: Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46), Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha), Joan Mir (ESP/Honda), Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati).

World championship standings

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 104 pts, 2. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 76, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 75, 4. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 73, 5. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 70, 6. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 69, 7. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 59, 8. Alex Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 44, 9. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 37, 10. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 36.

TENNIS

# Nadal eyes French Open bid despite early Rome exit

'NO-ONE WILL EVER HAVE A RECORD LIKE HIM ON THIS SURFACE'

AFP  
Rome

Rafael Nadal said yesterday that he is leaning towards playing at the French Open despite his second-round elimination in Rome.

Clay-court icon Nadal had previously said that he would only play at the French Open, where he has won a record 14 titles, if he feels competitive after a raft of injury problems over the last two years which have left him languishing 305th in the world rankings.

And the manner of his elimination in his first ever encounter with Hubert Hurkacz - winner in straight sets 6-1, 6-3 - seemed a step backwards after reaching the last 16 in Madrid, leaving a question mark hanging over his plans.

"The decision, as you can imagine, is not clear in my mind today. But if I have to say what's my feeling and if my mind is closer one way or the other way, I am going to say to be in Roland Garros and try my best," Nadal told reporters.

"Physically I have some issues, but not probably yet enough to say I'm not playing in the most important event of my tennis career. Let's see what's going on, how I feel myself mentally tomorrow, after tomorrow, and in one week."

Nadal held his own in the first two games in the first set, which took 26 minutes to complete, but then quickly fell away, Hurkacz winning without dropping a service game and seemingly without breaking a sweat.

That level of dominance over Nadal on clay, much less a court where he has won a record 10 titles, would have been unimaginable a few short years ago.

Hurkacz will face Tomas Etcheverry in the third round after likely ending Nadal's love affair with Rome as the 22-time Grand Slam winner said that he was "98 percent" sure that he would never again grace the Roman clay.

"No-one will ever have a record like him on this surface. He's just bigger than the sport at the end of the day," said Hurkacz.

Second seed Daniil Medvedev kicked off his title defence by beating Briton Jack Draper in straight sets 7-5, 6-4 to set up a third-round clash with qualifier Hamad Medjedovic.

"It was not easy," said Medvedev, who committed 18 unforced errors to Draper's 30.

"I feel like the conditions are completely different from last year



Spain's Rafael Nadal (left) looks dejected after being eliminated by Poland's Hubert Hurkacz during the Rome Open in Rome yesterday. (AFP)



Poland's Iga Swiatek after winning her match against Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva during the Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

and also from Monte-Carlo and Madrid.

"Really slow and heavy here so I feel like honestly it's tough to make a winner and that's what I saw in all the other matches. You

need to work the opponent left-right-left-right and you get tired and your opponent gets tired. I knew that before the match so I'm happy that I managed to stay stronger."

SWIATEK, OSAKA, GAUFF THROUGH

Iga Swiatek, Naomi Osaka and Coco Gauff all reached the last 16 as the women's tournament begins to heat up. Osaka is ranked at 173 in the world after taking a break from the tour to have her first child but is in good form, yet to drop a set after beating 10th-seeded Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 6-3.

"I'm very grateful to be healthy because I know how much hard work it took for me to be here," said four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka, who will next play seventh-seed Zheng Qinwen.

"I feel like I'm just clawing my way back to hopefully where I think I belong."

World number one Swiatek will next face Angelique Kerber after seeing off Yulia Putintseva 6-3, 6-4 as she bids to become the first woman since Serena Williams to claim a third Rome title. The 22-year-old came into the event having won the Madrid Open last weekend and will also be gunning for a fourth French Open crown later this month.

"I just wanted to stick to my 'solid game' and balance the risk," she said. "And also know that there's no point sometimes to play too hard, because she's going to use your power anyway. I think I can do that well. I've done that before when I played against her. Today, as well." Gauff meanwhile has Spain's Paula Badosa in the last 16 after the US Open champion battled to a 6-1, 0-6, 6-3 victory over Jaqueline Cristian.

SPOTLIGHT

## 'Fine' Djokovic dons cycling crash helmet after Rome bottle drama

AFP  
Rome

Novak Djokovic lightheartedly donned a cycling crash helmet yesterday after being hit on the head by a water bottle at the Rome Open but insisted he was feeling "fine".

World number one Djokovic was left crouched on the ground in agony when a bottle struck him as he greeted fans on centre court at the Foro Italico following his second-round win over France's Corentin Moutet on Friday. "Thank you for the messages of concern," Djokovic wrote yesterday on X.

"This was an accident and I am fine resting at the hotel with an ice pack. See you all on Sunday."

The 36-year-old later posted a video of himself wearing a bicycle helmet as he came to training, with the jokey message "Today I came prepared".

He will next face Chile's Alejandro Tabilo today as the Serb warms up for the French Open with a great chance to add to his six titles in Rome, where only

Rafael Nadal has won more with 10.

There had been fears that Djokovic might join the list of players to withdraw from the tournament after the 24-time Grand Slam winner was covered by security staff as he was led from the arena on foot.

However tournament organisers later released a short statement saying Djokovic's "condition is not a cause for concern", and shared a video showing that the bottle had accidentally slipped from a spectator's grasp.

Djokovic's absence would have been a blow for the last major tournament before the French Open which is already without Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz.

Home fans have also been deprived of cheering on former Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini and Lorenzo Musetti who both pulled out, Musetti while losing to France's Terence Atmane on Friday morning.

And Djokovic's great clay-court rival Nadal, a big crowd favourite, was dumped out in the second round on Saturday by seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic takes part in a training session during the Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

## India on course for maiden Olympic medal in archery: Kim

India have never won an Olympic medal in archery, but celebrated coach Kim Hyung Tak will not be surprised if they break the duck in Paris. Between 2004 and 2020, India's men's, women's and mixed teams made the quarter-finals six times but could not secure a podium finish. Only Dhiraj Bommadevara has won a quota place for India in archery for the Paris Games, while the recurve archers are chasing a team quota in a qualification tournament in Turkey next month. They are particularly upbeat after Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav stunned reigning Olympic champions South Korea to win a World Cup team gold last month. "The average level of the team has got a notch higher," Kim, who conducted a two-day camp for the archers, told the Sports Authority of India media yesterday. "The frequent coaching camps... too are contributing to the cause, and constant collaboration is only helping the team get that elusive medal at the Olympics." Kim had a special session with three-time Olympian Deepika Kumari, who won a silver in the World Cup in Shanghai, her second successive medal since returning from a 14-month maternity break. Kim, who guided South Korean women's recurve team to their first Olympic gold at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, was pleased with the mix of experience and youth in the Indian camp. "There are many young archers and this is only good for the future of Indian archery," said Kim, who has trained more than 500 archers from 30 nations.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Al-Sowaidi wins Ladies' class at Al Shaqab Showjumping League

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Ghada Thani al-Sowaidi astride Sandro Girl won the Ladies' class 90cm event at the Al Shaqab Showjumping League yesterday. At the Longines Indoor Arena, the pair narrowly beat Aseel Ali al-Ibrahim and Godette. Noora Abdulaziz al-Rumaihi on Fanta Sparta claimed the third spot.

The winners received their awards from Qatar Equestrian Federation & Modern Pentathlon President Bader Mohamed al-Darwish.

In the Intro 60cm class, Fatima Bader al-Darwish emerged winner with Whistler. Fahad Nasser al-Thani was second on Coco Chanel SB, while Mohamed Fahad al-Attiya took third place with Fornite. Al Shaqab Breeding and Show Manager Khalid al-Jehani presented the awards to the winners.

Meanwhile, Shaikha Mohamed al-Thani took the top honours in the Intro 40cm class astride Bay Barney. Ali Omar al-Ansari also rode Bay Barney to finish second, ahead of Khalifa Joana Hamad al-Thani on Ardfry Apollo. Al Shaqab Legacy and Heritage Specialist Ahmed Khaled al-Hemaidi presented the awards to winners.

On Friday, Khalitham Thani al-Swadi (80cm), Amer Hamad Jaber al-Mansori (100cm), Abdulla Khalid Aljulandani (110cm) and Ghanim Mohamed AlBinali (90cm) bagged victories.



Ghada Thani al-Sowaidi astride Sandro Girl celebrates after winning the Ladies' class 90cm event at the Al Shaqab Showjumping League.



Qatar Equestrian Federation &amp; Modern Pentathlon President Bader Mohamed al-Darwish awarded the trophies to winners of the Ladies' class 90cm event at Al Shaqab's indoor arena.



Shaikha Mohamed al-Thani won the Intro 40cm class, ahead of Ali Omar al-Ansari and Khalifa Joana Hamad al-Thani at the Al Shaqab Showjumping League yesterday.



Fatima Bader al-Darwish emerged winner in the Intro 60cm class.

## LA LIGA

## Real Madrid rout relegated Granada

Diaz strikes twice with Garcia and Guler also on target for Madrid

AFP  
Barcelona

Spanish champions Real Madrid romped to a 4-0 victory over relegated Granada to get their title celebrations started yesterday. Carlo Ancelotti's side will parade the league trophy today in the Spanish capital and a side filled with reserves made light work of the downtrodden Andalusians.

Brahim Diaz struck twice with Fran Garcia and Arda Guler also on target for Madrid, who defeated Bayern Munich in midweek to reach the Champions League final. Los Blancos secured their 36th Spanish title last weekend with four games to spare, but chose not to celebrate to focus on the Bayern clash.

A late Joselu brace settled that match in dramatic fashion and the Spaniard started up front against Granada, with only Antonio Rudiger selected from the side that beat the German giants. "The objective is to arrive with the squad all at their best for the day of the final, and we will do it," said Ancelotti.

After Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappe confirmed Friday he was leaving the French side, many Madrid fans are also thinking about his closely rumoured arrival. However, Madrid coach Ancelotti only has the Champions League final in London in mind.

Granada, 19th, were relegated before kick-off after Mallorca beat Las Palmas to ensure the Andalusians could not escape the drop zone. Their players gave Real Madrid a guard of honour and Los Blancos went on to demonstrate the focus that drove them on to the title, even with nothing on the line now. Victory sent them 15 points clear of second-placed Girona.

Madrid took the lead after 38 minutes when Diaz cut the ball across the six-yard box and Garcia arrived to stroke home. The left-back turned creator for Madrid's second goal in stop-



Real Madrid's Brahim Diaz (left) scores against Granada in the La Liga yesterday. (AFP)

page time before the break, feeding Turkish teenager Guler, who took a touch to control and a second to fire into the bottom corner.

Madrid maintained their dominance in the second half and extended their lead after 49 minutes. Tricky playmaker Diaz received the ball on the halfway line and drove forward deep into Granada territory.

With the defence standing off he worked his way into the area and fired home.

The Morocco international added the fourth after a neat team move, finishing comfortably after veteran midfielder Luka Modric teed

him up. The likes of Jude Bellingham, Vinicius Junior and Fede Valverde stayed on the bench for Madrid, while goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois completed his second game back after nine months out injured.

The three remaining league fixtures will allow Ancelotti to rest and rotate to get his first-choice side in optimal condition to face Borussia Dortmund at Wembley in the Champions League final. They may also provide fans a last chance to see Modric in action, with the 38-year-old Croatian's contract expiring in the summer.

## Bologna on brink of Champions League with Napoli win

Rome: Bologna took a huge step towards Champions League qualification yesterday by winning 2-0 at dejected Napoli, whose miserable season as Serie A titleholders nears its end. Early headers from Dan Ndoye and Stefan Posch were enough for Thiago Motta's Bologna to move third, above Juventus, and go seven points ahead of sixth-placed Roma, with a top-five finish enough for a spot in Europe's top club competition.

Roma are at fifth-placed Atalanta - who have a game in hand - today with the pair level on 60 points, and anything but a win for the capital club will guarantee Bologna a place in the Champions League. Bologna played one match in the old European Cup in 1964, the same year they won the last of their seven league titles, but have never featured in the modern Champions League.

The only negative note on a great evening for Bologna was star forward Joshua Zirkzee limping off in tears with what looked like a thigh injury. Dutchman Zirkzee, who is yet to claim a senior cap for his country with Euro

2024 around the corner, was consoled by team-mates. Napoli were loudly booed off at half-time and at the final whistle by livid fans who have watched their team slump from Scudetto winners last season to eighth this term.

## MAINZ CRUSH DORTMUND TO EDGE TO SAFETY, COLOGNE STUN UNION BERLIN

Mainz hammered a second-string Borussia Dortmund 3-0 yesterday to haul themselves out of the Bundesliga's bottom three, as Cologne came back to beat Union Berlin in a day of much importance for the relegation battle. Sitting in the relegation playoff spot at kick-off, Mainz stunned the visitors by racing into a three-goal lead inside just 23 minutes.

Leandro Barreiro opened the scoring on 12 minutes, before Lee Jae-sung grabbed two goals in three minutes as the hosts tore into a much-changed Dortmund side. Mainz, who are now eight games unbeaten since losing 8-1 to Bayern Munich in March, realistically need just a point from their final game of the season at Wolfsburg to secure another season in the Ger-

man top flight. With Dortmund's Champions League qualification for next season now guaranteed, and a Champions League final against Real Madrid on the horizon, coach Edin Terzic rang the changes. Defender Nico Schlotterbeck was the only starter from the team that won in Paris on Tuesday and though Jadon Sancho, Ian Maatsen and Julian Brandt came off the bench at half-time, they could not turn the tide.

Dortmund now sit four points behind fourth-place RB Leipzig, who drew 1-1 with Werder Bremen. But one spot behind Dortmund in sixth, Eintracht Frankfurt are a distance adrift of Terzic's side, and drew 1-1 at Borussia Moenchengladbach in their penultimate match of the season. At the other end of the table, Mainz's victory leaves Union Berlin, who squandered a 2-0 lead at Cologne earlier in the day to lose 3-2, languishing in the thick of the relegation fight.

Bochum, who host champions Bayer Leverkusen today and travel to Werder Bremen on the final day, need a point from one of those games to ensure their Bundesliga survival.

## HORSE RACING

## QREC begins preparations for new season

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

With the conclusion of the horse racing season at the Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club (QREC) last month, the QREC management, led by Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohandadi, has begun preparations for the new racing season, expected to start next October following the completion of the overseas participations and major races sponsored by QREC in Europe.

To ensure the upcoming season's programme is optimised, the QREC management, through the Racing Department, is in continuous communication with owners and trainers for joint coordination and considering the key proposals that need to be implemented in the programme.

This collaboration aims to achieve the optimal format that will enhance Qatar's horse racing and standing on the global racing map, thereby fulfilling QREC's vision in this field.

Abdulla al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, stated: "We are all working towards delivering an exemplary season, similar to the recent seasons at QREC. At the end of each season, we consider the most important positive and negative aspects in coordination with owners and trainers, whose feedback is appreciated as we all work towards realising the same end. There are several proposals which are always adopted in the racing program and if not we explain to owners and trainers why a certain proposal is postponed or not incorporated because we have standards, which are applied to races run at both Al Rayyan and Al Uqda race courses."

"As part of the QREC Management's and Racing Departments' commitment to continuous improvement, the door is open for owners and trainers to present their proposals for the upcoming season," added al-Kubaisi.

"At this stage, we have noted that the remarks presented in relation to the negatives of the

last season are a few compared to those raised in relation to the previous seasons, which positively indicates the level the races have reached and QREC's efforts to provide an ideal environment for all to actively participate and achieve the best results. In addition to the staging of race meetings at Al Uqda racecourse (22 meetings last season) had a positive impact by providing opportunities for a broader base and more diverse categories of participants, as well as easing the pressure on Al Rayyan racecourse, where 45 race meetings were held from October to the end of the last season in April. There has been a clear improvement in the maintenance of the racetracks at both Al Rayyan and Al Uqda."

Sami al-Boenain, Adviser to the QREC chairman and one of the region's most professional horse racing specialists, said: "We are considering remarks from owners and trainers and are still welcoming any proposals from them. However, QREC intends to maintain the general structure of the program. If there is a change, it would be by addition rather than replacement, as maintaining the programme unchanged helps owners and trainers develop their plans and identify their purchases on the long term."

In regard to the proposal of increasing the number of races for Qatari jockeys, al-Boenain pointed out: "This request is certainly welcome, but we currently do not have enough Qatari jockeys for this. On the other hand, some connections are not willing to engage non-Qatari apprentices in races reserved for Qatari jockeys, but it is necessary for Qatari jockeys to compete with more experienced jockeys to enhance their skills and QREC strongly supports this opinion. A successful example in this respect is jockey Faleh Bughenaim, who, since the beginning of his career, has competed against foreign professional jockeys, which has significantly contributed to his current high level of performance. After all, riding in easy races would not help Qatari jockeys."



FROM LEFT: QREC Racing Manager Abdulla al-Kubaisi, Adviser to the QREC Chairman Sami al-Boenain and Chief Steward Phillip Dingwall during a meeting to discuss preparation for next horse racing season.