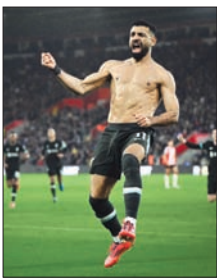


To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2

Jaiswal and Kohli
slam centuries
as Australia
stare at defeat



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Salah sends
Liverpool eight
points clear after
Southampton scare

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Monday, November 25, 2024
Jumada I 23, 1446 AH

GULF TIMES

SPORT

MOTORSPORT

Verstappen lights
up Las Vegas with
fourth Formula 1 title

Page 3

SPOTLIGHT

Sheikh Joaan honours athletes, officials at QOC Sports Excellence Awards

Barshim named Male Athlete of the Season, while Amal awarded Female Athlete of the Season

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) hosted the 2024 Sports Excellence Awards yesterday under the patronage of its President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani. The event took place at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

Also in attendance were HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, the Minister of Sports and Youth, Mohammed bin Yousef al-Mana, the First Vice-President of the QOC, Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, the Second Vice-President of the QOC, Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, the Secretary-General of the QOC as well as the presidents of Qatar's sports federations and several prominent sports figures.

The ceremony honoured outstanding athletes, administrators, sports personalities and institutions that have supported sports in Qatar.

"It is truly an honour to gather once again at this annual celebration, which has become a valued tradition for honouring Qatari champions and athletes with outstanding achievements, as well as our partners and sponsors from government and private sectors who play a vital role in supporting sports and the Olympic movement in our country," said al-Buenain.

"We take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani for his unwavering and profound support of Qatari sports, which has been instrumental in driving achievements across all levels. We also offer our sincere thanks to HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, for his boundless support and guidance, which have significantly advanced the development of sports in Qatar," he added.

Reflecting on the accomplishments of the past season, al-Buenain noted: "This season has been extraordinary for Qatari sports. Our participation in the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games saw our athletes continuing their successes on the international stage. Notably, our world champion Mutaz Barshim earned a bronze medal in the high jump, becoming the first athlete to win four Olympic medals in this event."

Looking ahead, al-Buenain concluded: "The challenges of the next phase are substantial, requiring everyone in the sports sector to intensify their efforts to realise even greater accomplishments for Qatari sports."

Sheikh Joaan presented the awards to the honorees of the 2024 Sports Excellence Awards. Qatar Foundation received the award for Distinguished Organisation in Supporting the Olympic Movement, while the Ministry of Education and Higher Education was honoured with the award for Distinguished Organisation in Supporting Sports Community Events. Alkass Sports Channels was recognised with the award for Media Partner.

Sheikh Saud bin Ali al-Thani re-



ceived the Recognition Award for Personalities That Served Sports in Qatar. Masraf Al Rayan, Aamal QPSC and Ibn Ajayan Projects were honoured with the Team Qatar Official Supporter Award.

The Qatar Handball Association was honoured with the Golden Federation Award for Team Sports, while the Qatar Athletics Federation won the Golden Federation Award for Individual Sports. The Men's Team of the Season Award went to Team Qatar's beach volleyball team.

Mutaz Barshim was named Male Athlete of the Season, while Amal Mohammed Mahmoud was awarded Female Athlete of the Season. Ismail Dawood Abakar received the Promising Male Athlete of the Season Award, and Noor Nizar Abdulqader Mohammed was recognised as the Promising Female Athlete of the Season.

Hendrik Jacobus Kotze was named Coach of the Season. Ali Radi Arshid won the Male Para-Athlete of the Season Award, and Sara Hamdi Masoud received the Female Para-Athlete of the Season Award. Khalifa Yousuf Abdulmalik was awarded Male Administrator of the Season, while Amal

Mohammed Awad was recognised as Female Administrator of the Season. The Male Referee of the Season Award was presented to Abdulrahman Ibrahim al-Jasim, Talib Salim al-Marri, Saoud Ahmed al-Maqaleh, Abdullah Ali al-Marri, and Abdullah Ali al-Hammadi for their contributions to officiating in men's sports.

In camel racing, Jaber Salim Jaber Ali Faran received the award for Camel Trainer of the Season (Open Races), while Abdulhadi Khalil al-Shahwani al-Hajri was named Camel Owner of the Season (Public Races).

In equestrian sports, Khalifa Sheail al-Kuwari was awarded Horse Owner of the Season, Faleh Nasser Saleh Salem Bougneim received the Best Jockey Award, and Mohammed Hamad Khalifa al-Attiyah was recognised as the Best Qatari Horse Trainer. The Best Personal Sports Achievement Award was jointly awarded to Ali al-Obaidli. The ceremony recognised the Local Organising Committees for their success in hosting major events: The World Aquatics Championships – Doha 2024 and The World Judo Championships – Doha 2023.



IPL AUCTION

India's Pant and Iyer break \$3mn mark



Rishabh Pant

AFP
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Indian wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant became the most expensive player in Indian Premier League history yesterday when he sold for a record \$3.2mn, as teams splashed out on world-class cricketers for the lucrative Twenty20 tournament.

A total of 577 players are up for grabs at the two-day auction in Jeddah, with Pant, England veteran James Anderson and New Zealand all-rounder Rachin Ravindra among the top names.

The 2023 record of 247.5mn rupees Kolkata paid to Australian Mitchell Starc was first breached by Punjab Kings, who the IPL said snapped up Shreyas Iyer for a "handsome" 267.5mn rupees (\$3.17mn).

Iyer, 29, captained Kolkata Knight Riders to their third IPL crown this year.

New Punjab coach Ricky Ponting, who left Delhi Capitals after this season, said they will make Shreyas captain if he agrees.

"I have worked with him three or four years at Delhi and obviously he is a championship winning captain from last season," Ponting said.

"We have got someone there that can do the job if that's the way we decide to go, so I am delighted to have him back."

Shreyas' record rapidly tumbled yesterday.

The IPL reported Lucknow Super Giants paid a "gigantic" 270mn rupees for 27-year-old star keeper Pant.

"Rishabh's history in the IPL and in the sport of cricket is unparalleled in terms of his skill, what he brings to the table," Lucknow owner Shashwat Goenka, said of the record buy.

"I think he came at what we had anticipated for him. We are very excited to have him as part of the squad."

Pant made an impressive return to competitive cricket in this year's IPL after a serious car crash in December 2022.

He came in as captain of Delhi Capitals but he and the team parted ways.

Later on day one Indian all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer hit the jackpot when he went to Kolkata for a whopping \$2.81mn after a fierce bidding war with Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Venkatesh, a left-hand batter and right-arm medium pace bowler who was released by Kolkata only to be bought back, became the third-highest buy of the day.

Sizzling start

The auction started on a sizzling note when Indian quick Arshdeep Singh began a bidding war, which ended with Punjab getting the left-arm pace bowler for \$2.13mn.

This year, Australian left-arm quick Starc was not retained by Kolkata - and went to Delhi for

\$1.39mn. Fellow quick Josh Hazlewood went for \$1.48mn to Bengaluru, while England fast bowler Jofra Archer cost the same amount for the Rajasthan Royals.

New Zealand quick Trent Boult returned to five-time winners Mumbai Indians for \$1.48mn.

Afghanistan spinner Noor Ahmad had a big pay day as he went to five-time champions Chennai Super Kings for \$1.18mn.

Buttler goes to Titans

Gujarat Titans paid \$1.87mn for England white-ball skipper Jos Buttler, while India pace bowler Mohammed Shami went to Sunrisers Hyderabad for \$1.18mn.

Australian David Warner and England's Jonny Bairstow went unsold, but could be brought back later in the auction.

The IPL has generated billions in revenue since its inception in 2008, turning the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) into one of the richest governing bod-

ies in sport. In June 2022 it sold the broadcast rights for five IPL seasons to global media giants for \$6.2bn.

The BCCI has sought to broaden the tournament's profile by staging the auction abroad.

Last year it was held in Dubai, a regular host for international cricket tournaments.

Like Saudi Arabia, it has a large base of prospective fans among its migrant worker population.

Putting the auction on in Jeddah is seen as a win-win for a tournament expanding its global reach and a kingdom using sports to improve its image.

The IPL is a huge earner for Indian cricket and the tournament makes more than \$11bn for the economy each year.

The pioneering IPL helped make Twenty20 cricket hugely popular, spawning copycat events worldwide. Dates for next year's IPL have not been released but seasons usually run from March to May.

FIRST TEST

Century heroes Jaiswal, Kohli give India edge

CAPTAIN BUMRAH TAKES TWO QUICK WICKETS LATE ON DAY 3

Reuters
Perth

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Virat Kohli hardly put a foot wrong on their way to magnificent centuries in Perth yesterday, as India declared on 487-6 and had Australia reeling at 12-3 at stumps and trailing by 521 runs on day three of the first test.

The visitors scored 150 in their first innings before bowling out Australia for 104 while conditions still favoured seam.

Jaiswal scored a consequential 161 to earn the title of heir-apparent to Kohli as India's batting figurehead, but the former captain showed he is not ready to relinquish the reins just yet with a fine unbeaten 100.

"Be fearless," Jaiswal described his mindset to reporters.

"It's always special to score a hundred against one of the best in the world, so I really enjoyed it."

With a declaration looming and increasing urgency, Kohli broke his 16-month century drought in the final hour, sweeping Marnus Labuschagne for four to the rapturous approval of the crowd's many Indian supporters.

During a tricky 4.2 overs before stumps, paceman Jasprit Bumrah dismissed debutant Nathan McSweeney (zero) and Labuschagne (three), both lbw, while night-watchman Cummins (two) edged Mohammed Siraj to the slips, leaving Usman Khawaja unbeaten on three with an almighty mountain to climb.

"If a couple of guys find some form and score 80, 90, even a hundred, that's the positive we can take out of it," said pacer Josh Hazlewood.

Resuming on 90 overnight,



India's Virat Kohli celebrates reaching his century during day three of the first Test against Australia at Optus Stadium in Perth yesterday. (AFP)

aided by a flattening pitch, Jaiswal brought up his fourth test hundred within the first hour audaciously upper-cutting Hazlewood (1-28) to deep fine leg.

The emerging sensation

The emerging sensation had a moment to contemplate his celebration as umpires checked for a four or six, and upon confirmation that it flushed the boundary rope he raised his arms and embraced his opening partner KL Rahul.

Rahul soon departed for 77, feathering paceman Mitchell Starc (1-111) to 'keeper Alex Carey, bringing India's highest opening stand Down Under of 201 to an end.

Jaiswal, whose innings started

conservatively, became increasingly aggressive as the ball aged and the fielders tired, bashing and slashing to force unorthodox field placements including a fly slip 15 metres in from the boundary.

His only false shot came when Cummins, around the wicket, cramped the batsman for room and a late cut flew just above the outstretched hand of Steven Smith at second slip.

Jaiswal pushed his luck too far against all-rounder Mitchell Marsh (1-65), however, with a full-blooded cut gobbled up by Smith after lunch.

A brief resurgence was in store for the world champions, who eked out three wickets in the space of 18 balls, but Kohli combined with allrounder Washing-

ton Sundar (29) to heap misery back on the beleaguered bowlers, who conceded 55 extras.

Nathan Lyon (2-96) spun through Sundar's defences, bringing debutant Nitish Kumar Reddy (38 not out) to the crease, who attacked the spread field with Kohli as skipper Bumrah eyed a declaration.

Kohli dissected the field with ease, picking up eight fours and two sixes before blowing kisses to wife and Bollywood star Anushka Sharma upon reaching his 30th Test century.

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 104 and 12 for 3 need 522 more runs to beat **India 150 and 487 for 6 dec** (Jaiswal 161, Kohli 100*, Rahul 77)

SPOTLIGHT

'Star is born': From homeless to Test hero for India's Jaiswal



India's Yashasvi Jaiswal celebrates as he reaches 150 runs on day three of the first Test against Australia in Perth yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
New Delhi

India's Perth Test hero Yashasvi Jaiswal, who hit a stunning century yesterday, rose to stardom from being homeless and selling snacks on the streets to finance his cricketing ambitions.

The 22-year-old opening batsman turned an overnight 90 into 161 on day three in the opening match of the five-Test series against Australia.

It was his fourth ton in his 15th Test.

He hit 171 last year on his debut against the West Indies, off a gruelling 387 deliveries over more than eight hours at the crease in Dominica.

He smacked two double centuries against visiting England earlier this year.

The attacking left-handed batsman burst into the consciousness of cricket-mad India with a stellar showing in the Indian Premier League last year.

He was snapped up by Rajasthan Royals in the 2019 IPL auction and last season made one half of a fearsome opening pair with England's white-ball captain Jos Buttler, amassing 625 runs with a strike rate of more than 163.

After his latest heroics, former India captain Sunil Gavaskar said it was all the more special be-

cause he had "come the hard way". The batting great called Jaiswal a "wonderful role model for those who come from the villages to the cities", showing how if "you work hard, you're dedicated, you have a dream, you can fulfil it".

"This boy is a man," Gavaskar said in his commentary show.

English commentator Mark Nicholas said: "This innings will announce him as a star is really born."

Jaiswal dreamed of playing for India and moved to the financial capital Mumbai at just 11 years old, leaving his parents back home in their village.

"I used to sleep in a dairy and then stayed at my uncle's place, but it wasn't big enough and he asked me to find a different place," Jaiswal told AFP in an interview in 2020.

"I then started to stay in a tent near Azad Maidan" - a field considered the birthplace of cricket in India - "and would play cricket there during the day".

In between he sold popular street snacks to make enough money to pay for his own meals, supplementing a side hustle in cricket scoring and ball fetching in club games.

Jaiswal eventually won a place in the Mumbai state team in 2019 and became the youngest batsman, at 17 years and 292 days, to score a domestic one-day double century.

WEST INDIES BOWLERS STRIKE ON DAY 3



West Indies' Shamar Joseph celebrates a wicket on day three of the first Test against Bangladesh in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, yesterday. Bangladesh were 203 for 6 wickets an hour after lunch. Earlier West Indies declared at 450 for 9 wickets. Justin Greaves hit a maiden Test century as West Indies piled on the runs against Bangladesh to take command of proceedings.

FOCUS

Zimbabwe beat Pakistan in rain-shortened ODI



Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza (left) plays a sweep during the first ODI against Pakistan at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe beat Pakistan by 80 runs in a rain-shortened one-day international at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday.

The home team scored 205 all out after 40.2 overs thanks mainly to a 62-run eighth-wicket stand between Richard Ngarava (48) and Sikandar Raza (39).

Pakistan, reeling from a 3-0 ODI series loss to Australia this week, were struggling at 60-6 after 21 overs when torrential rain, thunder and lightning halted play in the southern city.

After a delay of several hours, the match was called off and the Duck-

worth Lewis Stern method applied, giving Zimbabwe a convincing victory on home soil.

The teams meet again tomorrow and Thursday before playing a three Twenty20 internationals. Pakistan then travel to South Africa for an all-format tour.

BRIEF SCORES

Zimbabwe 205 in 40.2 overs (R. Ngarava 48, S. Raza 39, T. Marumani 29; F. Akram 3-24, S. Ali Agha 3-42) **v Pakistan 60-6 in 21 overs** (M. Rizwan 19 not out; B. Muzarabani 2-9, S. Williams 2-12) **Result:** Zimbabwe won by 80 runs (DLS method) **Series:** Zimbabwe lead 1-0 in three match series **Toss:** Pakistan

MOTORSPORT

Verstappen lights up Las Vegas with fourth F1 title

‘WHAT A SEASON. FOUR TIMES. THANK YOU GUYS. THANK YOU TO EVERYONE’

Reuters
Las Vegas

Red Bull’s Max Verstappen lit up the Las Vegas night after securing his fourth Formula One title in a row on Saturday in a race won by George Russell in a Mercedes one-two with Lewis Hamilton.

Verstappen finished where he started in fifth but that was all the Dutch driver needed to put the championship, already effectively over, out of reach of McLaren rival Lando Norris with two rounds to spare.

Norris took the chequered flag in sixth, also where he started, making a late pitstop for fresh tyres to secure a bonus point for fastest lap that still left him an insurmountable 63 points adrift.

“What a season. Four times. Thank you guys. Thank you to everyone,” Verstappen said over the radio after being congratulated by team boss Christian Horner.

“It was a little bit more difficult than last year but we pulled through and we gave it all.”

Norris was quick to recognise his rival’s achievement: “As much as it hurts a little bit, saying congrats doesn’t hurt,” he said.

“He drove an incredible season and when you have the quickest car he dominated and when he didn’t he was still there and always on my heels. He made my life tough, we made his tough at times I’m sure, but he drove a better season.”

Russell led away cleanly from pole position, fending off Leclerc who surged from fourth to second at the start, and was never troubled as Hamilton charged back from 10th on the grid on a cold desert night.

“I was planning on flying in a couple of hours but I’m definitely



Red Bull’s Max Verstappen is seen in the pits during the race at Las Vegas Grand Prix in Las Vegas yesterday. (Reuters)

not getting on that flight,” said the race winner. “I will enjoy this evening with all my team.

“It’s been a dream of a weekend. I don’t know how I’ve been so quick but I’m just enjoying this ride right now.”

Ferrari’s Carlos Sainz was third with team mate Charles Leclerc unhappy in fourth, after suffering early tyre trouble, as the Italian team cut the gap in the constructors’ standings to McLaren to 24 points.

Oscar Piastri was seventh for McLaren, despite collecting a five second penalty for a false start, and Nico Hulkenberg was eighth for US-owned Haas.

Yuki Tsunoda took points for RB in ninth and Verstappen’s strugg-

ling team mate Sergio Perez got himself back on the scoreboard in 10th. The midfield battle grew even more intense, with Renault-owned Alpine drawing a blank after the excitement of Pierre Gasly starting third.

Gasly’s engine expired on lap 15 and Alpine dropped back from sixth to seventh in the standings, a point behind US-owned Haas.

As fireworks lit up the skyline and the Bellagio hotel fountains played, Verstappen prepared to celebrate long into the night.

“To stand here as a four-time world champion is of course something that I never thought was possible. So, at the moment I’m just feeling relieved, in a way, but also very proud,” he said.

Only six drivers have won four titles and Verstappen is one of just two, with Sebastian Vettel, to have taken his first four consecutively.

Only Britain’s Hamilton, Germany’s Michael Schumacher (seven each) and the late Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio (five) have won more. Frenchman Alain Prost also won four.

“He’s been in a class of his own this year. He’s been absolutely outstanding,” said Horner.

“He’s won eight Grands Prix, more than double anyone else on the grid.

“He kept overdelivering, kept getting the results and performances. He deserves this fourth world championship. It puts him among the elite of the sport.”

Verstappen hails impressive season, if not the best

Las Vegas: Max Verstappen

hailed 2024 as his most impressive Formula One season, if not the best, after winning his fourth successive title at the Las Vegas Grand Prix.

The Red Bull driver told reporters he had not had the fastest car for 70% of the season, unlike 2023 when he won 19 of 22 races in the most one-sided campaign in the history of the championship. So far this year Verstappen has triumphed ‘only’ eight times in 22 and reaching double figures looks a stretch with two rounds to go and Mercedes, Ferrari and leaders McLaren all fighting for the top step of the podium.

“Last year I had a dominant car but I always felt that not everyone appreciated what we achieved as a team, winning 10 in a row,” Verstappen said after finishing fifth in Saturday’s race to take an unbeatable lead in the standings.

“Of course our car was dominant (last year) but it wasn’t as dominant, I think, as people thought it was. That (2023) is for sure my best season. I will always look back at it, because even in places where maybe we didn’t have the perfect set-up, we were still capable... our car was always quite strong, to win races. But I’m also very proud of this season because...for 70% of the season we didn’t have the fastest car, but actually we still extended our lead. So that is definitely something that I’m very proud of.”

Verstappen started the campaign with seven pole positions in a row and won seven of the first 10 but then went on a streak of 10



winless races in a row.

The latter part of the season has been about defending the sizeable lead built up in the early months.

“Every championship has actually been very different in emotions,” said Verstappen. “It will never top the emotions of the first one because that is what you set out to do and that’s your ultimate dream and goal to win one. But then you know, the season has been very different to the second one and last year’s one. And that’s, I think, very beautiful because if they’re all fairly similar that’s not as exciting.

“Honestly, when I crossed the line, I was just very relieved. I was like, it’s over. It’s been a tough run of races, and I’m very happy that it rained in Brazil,” he added, referring to his standout win from 17th on the grid. To be honest with you, when I look back at this season, probably in 20 years’ time when I’m retired, Las Vegas ’24 as a race is not going to be in my top 10. But it’s still very special to win it here.”

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar golfers finish third at Pan Arab Golf Championship



The Qatar golf team delivered a remarkable performance by securing third place at the 43rd Pan Arab Golf Championship held at the Al Zorah Golf Club in Ajman, the UAE.

The tournament, which featured competitors from 12 nations, saw Team Qatar earn the bronze medal with a cumulative score of 643 strokes over three days of intense competition.

Morocco emerged victorious, capturing the gold medal with an outstanding total of 612 strokes, while the hosts UAE claimed the silver medal with a score of 638 strokes.

Fahad Nasser al-Nuaimi, Secretary-General of the Qatar Golf Association, underscored the importance of the Arab Golf Championship as one of the region’s most prestigious and competitive events.

TENNIS

In-form Sinner leads Italy to repeat Davis Cup glory

Reuters
Malaga

Italian Jannik Sinner completed a remarkable season by sealing his country a second successive Davis Cup title with a 2-0 victory over Netherlands in the final at the southern Spanish city of Malaga yesterday.

World number one Sinner produced a commanding display to outclass Tallon Griekspoor in a 7-6(2) 6-2 in the second singles rubber to wrap up the win after Matteo Berrettini comfortably beat Botić van de Zandschulp 6-4 6-2 in the first singles clash.

It was Italy’s third title in the elite men’s team competition following their triumphs in 1976 and last year.

A week after capturing the ATP Finals title, Sinner led Italy to another triumph to cap a season in which he also won two Grand Slam titles.

Paul Haarhuis’ Netherlands were looking to capture their first title in 104 years after reaching the final for the first time but favourites Italy simply overpowered them.

Van de Zandschulp, who ended Rafa Nadal’s glittering career earlier in the week, never got going against an inspired Berrettini. Sinner was kept on his toes during a closely fought first set but eventually overwhelmed Griekspoor in the second to maintain his perfect record during this week’s competition.



Italy’s Jannik Sinner raises the trophy with teammates after winning the Davis Cup Finals at the Palacio de Deportes Jose Maria Martin Carpena arena in Malaga, southern Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

Smylie wins Brisbane tournament

Brisbane: Elvis Smylie claimed a “life-changing” two-shot victory at the Australian PGA Championship yesterday after starting down major winner Cameron Smith to secure his maiden DP World Tour title.

The 22-year-old Australian began the third and final day of the Brisbane tournament, which was shortened to 54 holes due to torrential rain, level with Smith at 10-under-par. Left-hander Smylie held his nerve with a bogey-free 67 to finish at 14-under while playing in the final group with his idol, who carded 69 for outright second.

Smylie, the son of former tennis Grand Slam doubles champion Liz Smylie, was a recipient in 2019 of an annual scholarship run by

Smith, who flies two Australian juniors to the United States to spend a week learning and practising. He said Brisbane had been an unforgettable week.

“It’s life-changing for me and I can’t wait to get started,” he said after securing two years’ worth of status on the DP World Tour. “I won’t forget this day playing with Cam and Leish. They are guys I’ve grown up watching on TV and have idolised. It was just a dream come true.” Smith’s fellow LIV Golf star Marc Leishman tied for third at 11-under with Anthony Quayle, who equalled the tournament-low score of 63. It was the biggest win of Smylie’s career after securing his first professional victory at last month’s Western Australian Open.

FOCUS

Organisers hit back at critics of Nadal ceremony

AFP
Málaga, Spain

Davis Cup organisers said tennis superstar Rafael Nadal had the retirement ceremony that he wanted this week in Malaga, despite some criticism of the event from people close to the player.

The 22-time Grand Slam winner played his final match on Tuesday as Spain were eliminated in the quarter-finals by Netherlands.

Following that disappointing end to his stellar career Nadal gave a speech which ran over 10 minutes long. Various sports stars including Novak Djokovic left messages in a video which was played on screens at the venue.

Spain captain David Ferrer also gave a speech about Nadal but some have suggested

the ‘King of Clay’ deserved a bigger farewell. “It’s not the time to blame anyone, but the feeling is that we witnessed something shabby,” Nadal’s coach Carlos Moya told *Onda Cero* radio station. “It’s true that we’re talking about a Tuesday night, but we knew for months that if Spain had lost, Nadal would have retired that day...”

“It was a farewell that did not live up to what Rafa Nadal means to this sport.”

Spain’s surprise early elimination may have caught out some hoping to attend record 14-time French Open winner Nadal’s goodbye, including Djokovic. “I would have preferred something different, more in line with his incredible career,” said the 38-year-old’s uncle and key influence, Toni Nadal.

“It could have been a more dynamic ceremony.”

The International Tennis Federation (ITF)

said they had given Nadal the departure he wanted.

“We felt it was very important to listen to what Rafa wanted and how he wanted to be celebrated, that’s what we did, we took his lead and delivered on that,” ITF president David Haggerty told reporters yesterday.

“People can have whatever opinions they want, whether it was right or not - we delivered the ceremony that Rafa wanted.”

Davis Cup finals tournament director Feliciano Lopez had promised a “very special” farewell that lived up to his career.

“I think we should focus, all of us, on the fact that Rafa chose the Davis Cup to be the final tournament of his career, instead of keeping on talking about his farewell ceremony,” said Lopez yesterday. “Honestly, we did our best. We should focus more on that he chose Davis Cup as his final tournament.”

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Al Gharafa in strong test against Ronaldo's Al Nassr

Qatar's Al Rayyan to host Persepolis of Iran at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Gharafa will face one of their stiffest tests for a place in the knockout stage of the AFC Champions League Elite 2024-25 stage when they meet Ronaldo's Al Nassr Club of Saudi Arabia at the Al Bayt Stadium today at 7pm.

Al Gharafa head into the tie being sixth in the West Zone standings with Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr third.

Al Gharafa have blown hot and cold on the continental stage, something which they can't afford as the League Stage enters the second half but will be boosted by Friday's 3-1 win against Al Wakrah in their Qatar Stars League 2024-25 match.

A haul of four points means they can be overtaken even by bottom-placed Al Ain FC, with the UAE side three adrift, but the records are not in Al Gharafa's favour with the Qatari side winless in each of their last 10 matches against Saudi Arabian opposition in the competition.

Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins, however, said he expects his team to rise to the occasion and change the script.

"We need a win to stay on track for the knockout stage. I hope the players will perform up to their potential. We will play with our own style against Al Nassr, which is a strong side having a great striker in Cristiano Ronaldo, but we will apply individual marking on him. Our chances to advance are still there and we will continue to fight for it," said Martins.

Al Gharafa's Argentinian player Matias Nani, said, "We look forward to playing a good match and the while it's a strong challenge, we aim to get the three points."

Al Nassr coach Stefano Pioli said his team would be wary of Al Gharafa players Yacine Brahimi and Joselu. "Al Gharafa are strong opponents having good players. They are an organised team which tries to control the field. They have a good midfielder in (Yacine) Brahimi and good striker Joselu so we must be careful," said Pioli.

He added, "We get little time to recover during our games but we are used to it. We have professional players who



Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins attends a press conference yesterday.



Al Rayyan players in action during a training session yesterday.

AL RAYYAN VS PERSEPOLIS

Qatar's Al Rayyan and Persepolis FC of Iran will be aiming to revive their respective campaigns when they square off in the AFC Champions League Elite 2024-25 at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium today at 9pm.

Both sides are in desperate need of a win with Al Rayyan having accumulated three points from four matches while Persepolis are one behind.

Al Rayyan ended a run of three consecutive defeats with their 1-0 win over Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor on Matchday Four and will be hoping to carry that form into their tie against Persepolis.

Al Rayyan were edged 1-2 by Al Shamal in the Ooredoo Stars League on Friday but would be looking to show their form on a bigger stage.

Al Rayyan coach Younes Ali said his side is focused on improving their chances of qualifying for the knock-outs.

"We are looking to capitalise on our previous win against Pakhtakor and increase our chances of qualifying for the next stage.

"We have turned the page on the last Al Shamal match, in which I bear responsibility for the loss. I trust my players' ability to do their best in the continental championship," said Ali.

He added, "We aim to derive strength from our last win against Pakhtakor (of Uzbekistan) and do well to enhance our chances of qualifying for the next round having studied the opposition well."

Persepolis' assistant coach Seyed Jalal Hosseini said the contest is a difficult.

"Al Rayyan match will be difficult and strong, and we need to achieve victory and come out with the three points. So we will do our best to get the desired result," he said.

"Our preparations have been good for tomorrow's match and we look forward to winning and restoring our chances of qualifying for the round of 16. We will do our best to come out with a positive result," he stressed.

Persepolis have also found the going tough on the continental stage, managing just two draws but will count on their record against Al Rayyan to get on the winning trail - having won two and drawn one of their last three meetings with the Qatari side.

Their domestic form has been good, advancing to the Round of 16 of the Hazfi Cup with a 3-0 defeat of Soon-gun on Thursday and sitting just a point behind leaders Sepahan in the Iran Pro League 2024-25.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Salah sends Liverpool eight points clear, Man United held

Reuters
London

Premier League leaders Liverpool beat bottom side Southampton 3-2 yesterday to build a sizeable eight-point lead over reigning champions Manchester City after Mohamed Salah led a second-half comeback for the visitors.

Liverpool were trailing 2-1 when Salah scored twice in the second half to take his season's tally to 10 goals in the league. After City lost their third straight league game on Saturday, a humbling 4-0 loss to Tottenham Hotspur, Liverpool took full advantage and Arne Slot's side now have 31 points from 12 games to City's 23.

Southampton shot themselves in the foot when they tried playing out from the back and under Liverpool pressure, Flynn Downes's pass fell to Szoboszlai at the edge of the box and the unmarked midfielder fired home to make it 1-0.

However, Southampton received a lifeline minutes later when Andy Robertson tripped Tyler Dibling on the edge of the box and the referee pointed to the spot, with VAR upholding the decision even though the contact was made just outside the area.

Although Adam Armstrong had his spot kick saved by Caoimhin Kelleher, the forward pounced on the rebound to equalise with his third goal in four games for Southampton.

Saints turned things around 11 minutes into the second half from a sublime counter-attack when Dibling found Armstrong running



Liverpool's striker Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring his team's third goal during the English Premier League match against Southampton at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton yesterday. (AFP)

into space and the forward spotted Mateus Fernandes making a run and the Portuguese midfielder made it 2-1.

That spurred Liverpool into action and after Darwin Nunez failed to find Luis Diaz at the far post for a simple tap-in, Salah took matters into his own hands. Liverpool equalised through Salah when he ran through on goal on to a lob from Ryan Gravenberch and as he saw Alex McCarthy come off his line, the Egyptian winger took one

touch to let the ball roll past the onrushing goalkeeper.

It marked the eighth time Southampton had committed an error leading to an opposition goal - more than any other Premier League team this season - as the home side squandered their advantage. Southampton then conceded a penalty in the 83rd minute from a Yukinari Sugawara handball and Salah made no mistake from the spot as Liverpool sealed the three points.

are used to these situations. We had a good training session and the team is ready for the match. We will try to do our best after we lost our last match due to mistakes.

"The most important thing is that our mental focus is present tomorrow. It is true that in the last match we made mistakes, but we have a final training session today to prepare for the match with Al Gharafa."

About Ronaldo's presence, Pioli said, "Today we have the last training

session, and if he is ready, he will be present in tomorrow's match."

Al Nassr are unbeaten in their last seven matches against Qatari opposition on the continental stage, winning each of their last five.

They were in a rich vein of form prior to the international break but suffered a shock 2-1 defeat to Al Qadisiyah in the Saudi Pro League 2024-25 on Friday, with the result leaving them six points adrift of pacesetters Al Hilal SFC.

SERIE A

Reborn Kean helps Fiorentina past Como

AFP
Milan

Moise Kean continued his revival at Fiorentina by netting in yesterday's 2-0 win at Como and helping his team move level with Serie A leaders Atalanta. Italy forward Kean bundled in the second in the 68th minute to ensure red-hot Fiorentina would return to Florence with all three points from a hard-fought match.

The 24-year-old has been reborn in Tuscany after failing to score a single goal at Juve last season and has scored seven times in his last four Serie A matches for a Fiorentina team on a seven-match winning streak in the league.

Kean's strike came after Yacine Adli lashed in a 20th-minute opener and was his ninth in 12 league appearances under Raffaele Palladino, who has taken Fiorentina to 28 points in his first few months in charge.

That tally puts Fiorentina in third, below Atalanta on goal difference and champions Inter

Milan on goals scored, although Napoli can reclaim their one-point lead when they host Roma on Claudio Ranieri's return to management.

Fiorentina didn't have things all their own way, and had David De Gea to thank for a superb triple save on the hour mark when they still only led by a single goal. Como are one point and place above Lecce, who are just inside the relegation zone and take on bottom side Venezia on Monday, after a fifth defeat in a worrying seven-match winless run. Cesc Fabregas' side also finished the match with 10 men after Alberto Dossena slapped Adli in stoppage time.

Patrick Vieira was denied a winning start as Genoa manager after a late penalty gave fellow Serie A strugglers Cagliari a 2-2 away draw.

Roberto Piccoli lashed home his spot-kick two minutes from the end after being fouled by Aaron Martin, snatching a point for Cagliari with his team's second penalty of the game.

The draw leaves Genoa in 16th, level with Cagliari and two points above Lecce.

Leicester sack manager Cooper

Leicester sacked manager Steve Cooper yesterday with the Foxes just two points above the Premier League relegation zone. Cooper, 44, had been an unpopular appointment to succeed Enzo Maresca in June due to his past with local rivals Nottingham Forest. He won just two of his 12 Premier League games in charge to leave Leicester perilously

poised above the drop zone. The final straw came as Chelsea won 2-1 in Maresca's return to the King Power on Saturday. First team coach Ben Dawson will take temporary charge while the club conclude the search for a successor. Cooper began his coaching career in the youth set up of the England national teams before a two-year spell at Swansea.