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TENNIS

Medvedev, Rublev set to shine at 2025 Qatar ExxonMobil Open

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Tennis Federation has confirmed that world No.5 Daniil Medvedev and world No. 8 Andrey Rublev will participate in the highly anticipated 2025 Qatar ExxonMobil Open.

Scheduled from February 17 to 22 at the Khalifa International Tennis Complex, the tournament will bring together some of the brightest stars in the world of tennis.

Returning to Doha for the first edition of the event as an ATP 500 tournament, Medvedev and Rublev are expected to elevate the level of competition, bringing added excitement to this year's event.

Daniil Medvedev, 28, is no stranger to success in Doha, having claimed the 2023 Qatar ExxonMobil Open title in the ATP

250 category with a commanding straight-sets victory (6-4, 6-4) over Britain's Andy Murray.

With 20 career titles, including the 2021 US Open, Medvedev has established himself as one of the sport's finest.

Hard courts have been his forte, with 18 of his singles titles earned on the surface, including two ATP Masters 1000 victories in Cincinnati and Shanghai in 2019.

Despite not adding to his title count this season, Medvedev's track record in Doha and his dominance on hard courts position him as a strong contender for the 2025 crown.

Andrey Rublev, 27, also returns to the tournament with high expectations.

A former champion, Rublev won the 2020 Qatar ExxonMobil Open in the ATP 250 category by defeating France's Corentin Moutet in straight sets.

In the current season, Rublev

has added two titles to his impressive tally of 16 career victories, including a remarkable win at the 2024 Madrid Open, where he defeated two-time champion and world No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz.

Rublev's presence in Doha promises another thrilling campaign as he aims to leave his mark in the upgraded ATP 500 tournament.

Speaking on this occasion, Karim Alami, Tournament Director said in a statement: "We are excited to welcome Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev back to the Qatar ExxonMobil Open in 2025. Both players are exceptional talents who consistently compete at the highest level. With the tournament's elevation to the ATP 500 category, we look forward to witnessing their top performances on Doha's courts. Their participation adds significant prestige and excitement to this year's event, and we are confident fans will enjoy a spectacular week of tennis."

For his part, Rashid al-Hajri, Vice-President and Public and Government Affairs Manager for ExxonMobil Qatar, said: "We are delighted to see both Andrey Rublev and Daniil Medvedev returning for the 2025 Qatar ExxonMobil Open. As previous champions, their return to the newly upgraded ATP 500 tournament is a testament to the event's stature. Their incredible skill and competitive spirit will surely make this year's edition one to remember."

Headlining the stellar roster for the 2025 Qatar ExxonMobil Open will be world No. 1, Jannik Sinner of Italy, further solidifying the tournament's status as a marquee event in the tennis calendar.

This year's tournament marks a historic moment as it transitions from an ATP 250 to an ATP 500 event, a significant milestone in its 32-year history.



QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Gharafa beat Shahania to remain in top four

UMM SALAL BEAT AL ARABI 3-0, AL SHAMAL PREVAIL OVER 10-MAN AL WAKRAH 3-0

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Gharafa scored a thrilling 4-2 win over Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League (QSL) match at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

Umm Salal defeated Al Arabi 3-0 at the Al Thumama Stadium. In another match of the day at the Al Janoub Stadium, Al Shamal prevailed over a 10-man Al Wakrah 3-0.

The win saw The Cheetahs remain in the top four of the standings with 21 points while Al Shahania slid to eighth with 11 points. Their fourth win of the league saw Umm Salal climb up to 6th place in the standings with a tally of 14 points while Al Arabi remained in 10th place with 10 points at the half way mark of the championship. Al Shamal with a fifth win of the season moved to 5th spot with 16 points while Al Wakrah are 7th with 14 points.

Both Al Shahania and Al Gharafa teams dished out a super battle with The Cheetahs going up the lead early in the first half. A tense fight ensued in the second half with five goals being scored including an Own Goal for Al Shahania. The stoppage time play also saw a goal each for both sides.

The goals for Al Gharafa came from Florinel Coman (19th minute), Marc Muniesa (66th minute Own Goal), Ferjani Sassi (70th minute + 90+4 minute), Al Shahania scored through Pelle van Amersfoort (76th minute) and Lotfi Majder (90+2 minute).

Al Gharafa looked for an early breakthrough and in the 11th minute came close when a Rabeh Yahia Boussafi cross was headed by Joselu but Al Shahania's goalkeeper Shehab Ellethy dived to his left to make a fine save.

Al Gharafa however succeeded soon with an unmarked Coman on the left deflected in a corner kick. Gharafa's lead would have been doubled in the 34th minute when a telling Yacine Brahimi strike was cut off by a diving Ellethy, this time to his right.

Al Shahania also had a fair share of attack and just before half time Amersfoort struck hard at the goal but Al Gharafa's tall goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar stood like a rock to collect it.

In added time, Al Shahania made more forays and again Ababacar made a good save by diving long to his left. After the break, in the 55th minute a Brahimi attempt was foiled by Al Shahania's goalkeeper.

Eleven minutes later Al Shahania suffered a blow as a frantic attempt from Muniesa saw him head a corner kick from the left into his own goal. Brahimi soon returned to big action as he lobbed a cross to Joselu, who headed it to a waiting Sassi to make another header and score (3-0). Al Shahania's



Al Gharafa captain Ferjani Sassi (left) vying for the ball with Al Shahania players during the Qatar Stars League match at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.



Umm Salal's Antonio Mance celebrates after scoring against Al Arabi yesterday.

repeated attack attempts soon reaped dividends for them as an Amersfoort header off a corner kick found its way into the net (1-3).

Adding to Al Shahania's excitement was a wonderful goal from Majder in stoppage time from the top of the box that went straight into the far corner (2-3).

Al Shahania now hoped for an equaliser in the remaining time but their hopes were dashed as Brahimi and Sassi combined again as the former made a lob from the left and

the latter made a successful header (4-2).

In the dying moments, Joselu again came close to scoring but failed to go past a lone goalkeeper but Al Gharafa rejoiced all the same with the victory. Kenji Gorre (5th minute), Antonio Mance (27th minute), and Oussama Tannane (38th minute) struck for Umm Salal as they beat a hapless Al Arabi.

Umm Salal shocked their fancied rivals right at the start firing the opening salvo with a well co-ordinated effort. Captain

Victor Lekhal moved the ball down the right to Mance who provided a fine cross which was caught by Gorre just out of the outstretched hand of Al Arabi goalkeeper Mohamed Saeed Ibrahim to score.

The goal left Al Arabi shocked and they tried to launch an offensive but were held back by the strong Umm Salal defence. While Al Arabi's defence too appeared strong, it was smartly broken through by Umm Salal.

With Al Arabi trying to mark Umm Salal attack line, Lekhal chose to lob the ball to his left as Mance volleyed a left-footer to find the second goal for the Orange Fortress.

Six minutes later, Al Arabi managed to break past the rival defence as Rodrigo unleashed a shot which was deflected by a diving Ibrahim but there was Abdullah Essa al-Sulaiti at hand to put the ball into the net. The joy for Al Arabi was however short-lived as the referee ruled the player off-side.

Five minutes later, Umm Salal delivered another blow with Mance this time making a lob again to the left of the danger area from where an unmarked Tannane struck the third goal for his team.

The second session was more subdued comparatively as Al Arabi tried hard to challenge the opposition but with no success.

In the 66th minute, Rodrigo again fired from top of the box but his kick was cut off by the rival goalkeeper. In the 72nd minute, Umm Salal threatened to score again but this time a Tannane kick hits the bottom of the left post before being parried to safety.

Al Shamal upstaged a 10-man Al Wakrah 3-0 with hotshot Baghdad Bounedjah opening the scoring for Shamal in the 25th minute before Mohammed Omar (45th minute) and Suhaib Gannan (90+7 minute) added to the tally. Bounedjah, beat an offside trap, following an overhead cross by Mohammed Musa, before hitting home a right-footed shot from the centre of the box. The goal, though initially contested, was eventually made to stand after a lengthy VAR review.

Al Shamal doubled the lead at the dot of half time with Bounedjah muscling his way past Al Wakrah defence before freeing the ball for the Algerian Omar to simply slot home. Things turned from bad to worse for Al Wakrah in the 71st minute when Abdeaziz Mitwali's initial yellow card for a dangerous foul on Al Shamal's Younes Belhanda was upgraded to a red after a lengthy VAR review.

With their one-man advantage, things could not have gone better for Al Shamal as they relentlessly attempted to troll Al Wakrah. Al Shamal found the back of the net again in seven minutes of added time through Gannan, whose right-footed shot from the centre of the box into the bottom left corner following another superb assist by Bounedjah.

Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024
LOC announces trophy tour

With only a few days to go until the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 kicks off, the tournament's Local Organising Committee (LOC) has invited the public to view the tournament's trophies in Doha this week. Fans wishing to view the trophies of the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 can visit Place Vendome Mall from 6-10pm on December 12, where they will be on display on the ground floor near Gate 1.

The tournament taking place in Qatar on December 11, 14 and 18 2024, will see Botafogo compete against CF Pachuca for the FIFA Derby of the Americas Cup Qatar 2024.

The winner will then face off against Al Ahly FC for the FIFA Challengers Cup Qatar 2024, which will determine the club that will contend with Real Madrid CF for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 Final.

The Intercontinental Cup is just one of seven trophies Real Madrid is pursuing this season. The team has already secured the UEFA Super Cup but still aims for the Spanish Super Cup, the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup, La Liga, the Copa del Rey, and the revamped Champions League.

Tickets for the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2024 are available online at FIC24.qa. Fans can purchase up to six tickets per person, with a variety of accessible options provided for disabled fans.

Disabled fans interested in acquiring accessible seats are asked to e-mail accessibility-fic@sc.qa. Fans are reminded to purchase tickets only from the official ticketing platform.

In addition, fans are encouraged to regularly check the official website and Resale Platform for additional tickets. Extra tickets are occasionally released up until match day, providing an opportunity to secure tickets for matches with limited availability.



BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY

Australia thump India at Adelaide to level series

VICTORY CAPPED A FIGHTING TURNAROUND FOR AUSTRALIA

AFP
Adelaide, Australia

A resurgent Australia thumped India by 10 wickets to win the second Test yesterday and level their blockbuster five-match series 1-1 after a batting and bowling masterclass at fortress Adelaide Oval.

Chasing just 19 for victory, openers Usman Khawaja and Nathan McSweeney steered the hosts to the meagre target without loss on day three of the pink-ball clash.

The visitors resumed at 128-5 after their hopes were left in tatters during a final fiery session on Saturday at the hands of an Australian pace onslaught.

They only boosted the total to 175 before meekly surrendering.

Danger man Rishabh Pant failed to negotiate the opening over from Mitchell Starc and was out without adding to his overnight 28 while Pat Cummins accounted for Ravichandran Ashwin (7) then Harshit Rana (0).

Allrounder Nitish Kumar Reddy made a plucky 42 before he fell to Scott Boland, who then removed Mohammed Siraj (7) to end the innings.

Skipper Cummins ended with 5-57 while Boland grabbed 3-51. Starc took eight wickets for the match.

“That’s a great week. We were far from the team we want to be in Perth but this was good,” said Cummins, whose side was well beaten in the series opener.

The captain reserved special praise for Travis Head after his match-winning century.

“He loves batting here, again one of those momentum-shifts, it could have gone either way when he walked out to bat,” Cummins said.

“The ball does a bit more under lights, but the big thing was getting a big lead.”

Defeat was another painful memory of Adelaide for India, who also crashed within three days in 2020 when they were bundled out for 36 – their lowest-ever Test score.



India's Mohammed Siraj (right) evades a short ball from Australia's captain Pat Cummins on the third day of the second Test at the Adelaide Oval yesterday. (AFP)



Australia's Travis Head holds his Man of the Match medal yesterday. (AFP)

Victory capped a fighting turnaround for Australia after being crushed by 295 runs in the first Test, which sparked fierce criticism over whether the top-ranked but ageing team could still produce the goods.

While Khawaja and Steve Smith were again notable flops with the bat, the hosts largely silenced the critics – at least until the next Test at the Gabba in Brisbane from Saturday.

Australia were always odds-on favourites in Adelaide despite the Perth calamity, boasting far more experience of day-night Test cricket. They have now won 12 of their 13 games played under lights, including a perfect 8-0 record in Adelaide.

In contrast, India have a 3-2 win-loss record in the format, with both defeats to Australia in the South Australian capital.

“Disappointing week for us. We didn’t play well enough to win the game,” said India skipper Rohit Sharma.

“There were times when we could have grabbed the opportunity but failed, which cost us the game.

“What we did in Perth was great but every game throws a new challenge. Looking forward to the next Test and we will see what we did well in Perth.”

India’s problems began on the first ball of the match, when a menacing Starc trapped hot-shot young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal – a century-maker in Perth – lbw.

They never recovered, all out for 180, with Reddy top-scoring on 42 and Starc ending with a

career-best 6-48. India’s pace attack were then unable to make the best use of the new pink ball when Australia battled through a difficult phase till stumps for the loss of just Khawaja on day one.

The visitors’ bowling coach Morne Morkel pinpointed a failure by their young attack to find the right lines and lengths.

The next day Head made them pay with a rollicking game-changing 140 while Marnus Labuschagne hit 64 to propel Australia to 337 and an ominous 157-run lead. In contrast to India, Australia then drew on their experience to decimate India’s top order when they took the new ball at dusk on Saturday. It left them with just five wickets to mop up Sunday, which they did with minimum fuss.

BRIEF SCORES (Adelaide Test, Day 3)

Australia 337 (Head 140, Labuschagne 64, Bumrah 4-61, Siraj 4-98) **and 19 for 0 beat India 180** (Reddy 42, Starc 6-48, Cummins 2-41) and 175 (Reddy 42, Cummins 5-57, Boland 3-51) **by 10 wickets**

AUSTRALIA PRIVILEGED TO HAVE A BOWLER LIKE STARC, SAYS CAPTAIN CUMMINS

Adelaide: Australia captain Pat Cummins said it was a “privilege” to have a bowler of Mitchell Starc’s calibre at his disposal and felt Travis Head’s blistering hundred set up their series-levelling victory against India in the day-night second Test yesterday. Smarting from their comprehensive defeat in the opening test in Perth, Australia bounced back in style at Adelaide Oval, where they now have a perfect 8-0 record in pink ball tests following the 10-wicket win over India. Starc’s 6-48 in the first innings routed India, who were bundled out for 180, and his victims included Perth centurions Yashasvi Jaiswal and Virat Kohli. In the second innings, Starc, the most successful pink-ball bowler, removed Shubman Gill and dashed India’s slim hopes of saving the test by removing the dangerous Rishabh Pant. “We know what a good unit we are, and having someone like Starc is amazing,” said Cummins, who claimed five wickets in the second innings. “He just does it time and time again. He’s done it for over a decade now. So feel very lucky and privileged.” However, it was local man Head who was adjudged player of the match thanks to his match-defining 140. Head, who struck match-winning hundreds against India in the finals of the World Test Championship and the 50-overs World

Cup last year, helped Australia to a decisive lead which eventually translated into a series-levelling victory. “He loves batting here,” Cummins said of the lefthander. “Again, one of those momentum shifts. The game could have gone either way when he walked out to bat and he just took it straight out of their hands.” The defeat in a little over two days brought India down to earth after the euphoria of their Perth victory. “What we did in Perth was very, very special, and we wanted to come out here and do that again,” touring captain Rohit Sharma said. “But every Test match has its own challenge. We knew it was going to be challenging with the pink ball. Australia was better than us.” Rohit, sacrificing the opening slot for KL Rahul and playing in the middle order, managed three and six in Adelaide. The team would immediately shift their focus to the third Test in Brisbane, beginning on Dec 14, as they seek to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, he said. “We just want to go out there and think about what we did right in Perth, and also what we did last time when we were here. “There are some really good memories. We understand the challenges of every Test matches are fresh. We want to start well and play well.”



Australia's captain Pat Cummins (right) celebrates his dismissal of India's Nitish Kumar Reddy with teammate Mitchell Starc (left) on the third day of the second Test at the Adelaide Oval yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Sri Lanka battle hard to stay in second Test against South Africa

AFP
Gqeberha, South Africa

Dhananjaya de Silva and Kusal Mendis kept Sri Lanka’s hopes alive on the fourth day of the second Test against South Africa at St George’s Park yesterday.

Captain De Silva and Mendis, Sri Lanka’s last recognised batsmen, shared an unbeaten partnership of 83 as Sri Lanka, set 348 to win, reached 205 for five at the close.

South Africa seemed on target for an early win to complete a 2-0 series clean sweep when Sri Lanka slumped to 122 for five, with fast bowler Dane Paterson and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj taking two wickets each. But De Silva and Mendis, who both finished on 39 not out, not only blunted the South African bowling attack but kept the score moving at better than four runs an over.

“It takes a lot of patience as the ball gets older and the pitch gets more placid,” said Maharaj.

He said the bowlers had deviated from the basics as they tried to break the De Silva-Mendis stand.

It has been a pitch on which the new ball has been a key factor for bowlers. The second new ball is 27 overs away and Maharaj said the focus today would be “old-fashioned” Test cricket.

“We need to zone in on a length, make it difficult for batters to score with the softer ball and hopefully pick up one or two early wickets and get into the lower order.”



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis plays a shot against South Africa during the fourth day of the second Test at St Georges Park in Gqeberha yesterday. (AFP)

Earlier, left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took five for 129 – his 10th five-wicket in Tests but his first outside Sri Lanka, as South Africa were bowled out for 317 in their second innings after resuming on 191 for three.

BRIEF SCORES (Second Test, Day 4)

South Africa 358 and 317 (A. Markram 55, T. Stubbs 47, T. Bavuma 66, V. Fernando 2-47, P. Jayasuriya 5-129) **Sri Lanka 328 and 205-5** (A. Mathews 32, Kamindu Mendis 35, D. de Silva 39 not out, Kusal Mendis 39 not out; K. Maharaj 2-62, D. Paterson 2-33) **Match situation:** Sri Lanka need 143 runs to win with five wickets remaining **Toss:** South Africa

SPOTLIGHT

Reuters
Wellington

England romped to a second comfortable victory over New Zealand in two weeks to secure a Test series triumph yesterday with skipper Ben Stokes apparently enjoying a Midas touch with his every decision turning to gold.

Stokes delivered the coup de grace at Wellington’s Basin Reserve himself, coming on to take the last three wickets at a cost of five runs to dismiss New Zealand for 259 and wrap up the 323-run victory with more than two days to spare.

Seamers Chris Woakes, Brydon Carse and Gus Atkinson all played crucial roles in the victory, the latter with a rare hat-trick on Saturday to help scuttle New Zealand’s first innings for 125.

Shoaib Bashir stepped up to remove Tom Blundell after the New Zealand wicketkeeper had marshalled the home rearguard with a defiant 115 on a surface that rarely offers anything for spinners this early in the season.

With the bat, the controversial selection of Jacob Bethell at number three paid dividends in only his second test with an innings of 96, while Ollie Pope thrived with a key knock of 66 despite being dropped down the order as stand-in wicketkeeper.

Most of all, it was the brilliant



England's captain Ben Stokes (right) and Joe Root (centre) lead their team from the field after their match and series win during day three of the second Test against hosts New Zealand at Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

innings of 123 from Player of the Match Harry Brook on a tricky surface that laid the foundation for England’s biggest win by runs over the Black Caps, and a first series triumph in New Zealand since 2008.

“You look down that scorecard, there’s one guy that took it away from us,” said New Zealand captain Tom Latham. “Harry played a fantastic innings there. Credit where credit’s due, I thought that was a fantastic innings.”

Stokes agreed the fifth-wicket partnership between Brooks and Pope that took England from 43-4 to 280 in the first innings had been crucial.

England beat New Zealand again to secure Test series

runs and is perhaps the least natural player of the “Bazball” style of aggressive batting England have played under coach Brendon McCullum.

Class is permanent, however, and the prolific 33-year-old even showed a real flash of creativity to secure his 36th Test century with a glorious reverse-ramp for four off seamer Will O’Rourke.

“He thought it was a good idea to scoop a six-foot-nine giant bowling rockets but it came off, it was just awesome,” chuckled Stokes. “He’s desperate to do well for this team. He knows how important it is. When he does well, we generally do well.”

After Root edged behind for 106, Stokes, who was unbeaten on 49, immediately declared for 427-6 to present the Blacks Caps with a mammoth target of 583.

“Brydon Carse and Gus Atkinson have been so good for us in the time that they’ve been out there playing for England,” Stokes said of the two seamers, who both made their debuts this year.

The third Test in Hamilton starts on Saturday.

BRIEF SCORES (Wellington Test, Day 3)

England 280 (Brook 123, Pope 66, Smith 4-86) **and 427 for 6 dec** (Root 106, Bethell 96, Duckett 92, Brook 55) **beat New Zealand 125** (Atkinson 4-31, Carse 4-46) **and 259** (Blundell 115, Stokes 3-5) **by 323 runs**

FORMULA ONE

Norris wins as McLaren finally end F1 title wait

LEWIS HAMILTON FOURTH IN FINAL RACE FOR MERCEDES

Reuters
Abu Dhabi

Lando Norris led the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix from start to finish yesterday to end McLaren's 26-year wait for a Formula One constructors' title.

The Briton delivered in style after Australian teammate Oscar Piastri tangled with Red Bull's quadruple world champion Max Verstappen at the first corner and dropped to the back of the field.

Piastri finished 10th, with Carlos Sainz and Charles Leclerc second and third for Ferrari, McLaren's historic rivals over the decades and the only team that could have beaten them to the championship.

"You all deserve this. Thank you so much. It's been a special year," said Norris over the team radio after taking the chequered flag for his fourth win of the season. "Next year is going to be my year too."

The 25 points, and Piastri's one, left McLaren 14 clear of Ferrari and champions for the first time since 1998.

Norris finished the season as overall runner-up.

Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished fourth in his last race for Mercedes, starting 16th and overtaking teammate George Russell on the 58th and final lap.

He joins Leclerc, who made stunning progress through the field after starting 19th, at Ferrari next season.

"Lewis, that was the drive of a world champion," said Mercedes boss Toto Wolff, who could at least take some consolation in McLaren winning with the German manufacturer's engines.

Hamilton was 14 seconds behind Russell, but on medium tyres compared to his teammate's hards, with 15 laps to go but was told he could catch him.

He did it six corners from the end, Russell putting up little re-



McLaren's Lando Norris celebrates with team members after winning the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix at Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi, UAE, yesterday. (Reuters)

sistance and clapping Hamilton at the finish.

The 39-year-old then saluted the crowd with some tyre-smoking spins to mark the end of the most successful driver and team pairing in Formula One history.

"What started as a leap of faith turned into a journey into the history books," Hamilton said over the team radio.

Verstappen, who took his fourth successive drivers' title in Las Vegas last month, was sixth after collecting a 10-second penalty for the collision with Piastri.

Pierre Gasly was seventh for Alpine, who won their midfield battle to finish sixth overall in the standings, with Nico Hulkenberg eighth for Haas and Fernando Alonso ninth for Aston Martin.

McLaren were the first team of the current engine era that started in 2014 to win the title as a customer rather than a factory team.

There was drama from the start as Verstappen and Piastri clashed, after McLaren had locked out the front row in qualifying but with

Verstappen right behind in fourth slot.

Both cars spun while Norris made a clean getaway from pole position and sped away.

Verstappen said he had been "super unlucky", and claimed to have been all the way up the inside of the McLaren into the first corner but the evidence suggested he was at fault.

"Move of a world champion, that one," commented Piastri sarcastically, before he was also given a 10-second penalty for running into the back of Franco Colapinto's Williams.

Verstappen served his penalty on lap 30, dropping from third to 11th and seemingly taking a pop at the stewards over the radio.

"Could we ask for 20 seconds, stupid idiots," said the Dutch driver, who was given two 10-second penalties in Mexico in October. Leclerc was 12th by the end of the first lap and fourth by the time he pitted on lap 20 with team mate Sainz settled in second and Russell a distant third.

The race then became a waiting game, with Ferrari hoping for a miracle that might slow Norris while McLaren boss Zak Brown watched nervously.

"Unfortunately, we were starting too far back to do anything better than what we did. I think we did the maximum. It hurts when a season is so close until the end," said Leclerc before the podium celebrations.

"That was the worst two hours of my life, by far," said Brown.

"That race, he (Norris) carried us. To not make any mistakes, and we were worried about safety cars, I was worried about everything, and he drove flawlessly."

Norris made his pitstop for hard tyres at the end of lap 26, retaining the lead with a smooth stop quicker than either of the Ferraris.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez wrapped up his miserable season with yet another retirement after a first-lap clash with Sauber's Valtteri Bottas sent him spinning out.

Team bosses will decide the Mexican's future next week.

SPOTLIGHT

Hamilton bows out of Mercedes era with cheers, tears and a rousing drive

AFP
Abu Dhabi

Lewis Hamilton ended his glorious 12-year spell at Mercedes with cheers and tears yesterday after finishing a rousing fourth from starting 16th in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The seven-time world champion, who will turn 40 before he races with Ferrari next season, stirred emotions with his driving and his words after a classic recovery drive that saw him pass teammate George Russell on the final lap.

"When he (race engineer Pete Bonnington) said 'hammer time' I did notice, in the moment, that it was the last time I'm going to hear that," said an emotional Hamilton afterwards. "It really clicked for me in that moment."

"It was a really, really hard race naturally where I was, I didn't get as great a start as this one here, my teammate next season (pointing to nearby Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc) and the first stint was really, really difficult."

"I wasn't losing hope, but it just wasn't going as well as I thought it would. I didn't give up, I kept pushing and thinking 'come on, we can get there' and switched on to the different tyres and the car came alive. I wanted to finish on as much as a high and give every ounce of me to the team as they have given to me all these years."

Before spinning 'donuts' in his car to the cheers of a chanting crowd and posing for photographs with individual team members, Hamilton had spoken eloquently of his feelings and his love for the 'silver arrows' team in radio exchanges.

"That was the drive of a world champion," said Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff.

The drive of a world champion. Amazing!"



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton greets the fans after the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. (Reuters)

Bonnington said: "Stellar drive today bud, it's been a pleasure all the way."

Hamilton replied: "The pleasure's been mine. We dreamed alone, but together we believed and as a team we achieved things, thank you for all the courage, the determination and the passion for seeing me and supporting me."

"What started out as a leap of faith turned into a journey into the history books. We did everything together and I'm so grateful to everyone back at the factory from the bottom of my heart. All the best."

Bonnington added: "It's been an amazing journey and I'm so grateful to have been a part of this chapter of your life and best of luck for the next one."

In a final comment, team boss Toto Wolff said: "We love you too and you're always going to be part of the family. And if we can't win, you should win."

In 12 seasons, Hamilton started 246 races with Mercedes, a record for a driver with a single team. He won 84, secured 13 other podium finishes and claimed 78 pole positions and six of his seven drivers' world championships.

In a final social media post, he wrote: "It's been real. I love you all."



British driver Lewis Hamilton performs a burn out after the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Ooredoo Qatar proud sponsor of 2024 Ooredoo Padel Challenge



By Sports Reporter
Doha

In line with its dedication to promoting local sports in Qatar, Ooredoo Qatar successfully concludes its role as the Title Sponsor of this year's Ooredoo Padel Challenge, a prestigious tournament that took place from December 1-5 2024 at the Maidan Sports Center, bringing together players from Qatar and the Gulf region.

The Ooredoo Padel Challenge featured four categories of participants, ranging from levels A to D, with level A showcasing top players from Qatar and the Gulf countries. Other categories highlighted the community spirit by welcoming Qatari amateur players and residents alike.

With the participation of over 300 Qatari players, the tournament has become one of Qatar's largest padel events, fostering both competition and community engagement.

Sabah Rabiah al-Kuwari, Director of PR, Sponsorships and CSR at Ooredoo Qatar commented yesterday: "We are proud to be the title sponsor of the Ooredoo Padel Challenge as it aligns perfectly with our commitment to supporting the local community and encouraging a healthy, active lifestyle. This tourna-



ment not only promoted the growth of padel in Qatar but also reinforces our connection with the community by creating opportunities for engagement and collaboration."

As part of Ooredoo's broader Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, this sponsorship underscored the company's commitment to promoting health, wellness, and community engagement, while also reinforcing Qatar's position as a leading sports destination.

MASTER RAMI ELECTED CHAIRMAN



Master Rami Albanna, founder of Doha Sports and Arts Academy in Qatar, has been elected as the chairman of the Arab Professional Committee (APC) for Jeet Kune Do. This remarkable achievement took place during a championship held in Cairo, Egypt, from November 19-24 at Cairo Stadium, with the participation of 12 Arab countries. The elections resulted in a well-deserved victory for Master Rami. He has promised to organise a major professional championship in Qatar in April next year featuring 24 fighters representing Arab and other countries. Details and the exact date of the championship will be announced soon.

BOTTOMLINE

Veerman storms from five back to win Nedbank Golf Challenge

Reuters
Sun City, South Africa

American Johannes Veerman carded a final round 69 to claim the DP World Tour's Nedbank Golf Challenge at the Gary Player Country Club yesterday with a score of five under par after starting the final round five shots back.

Veerman claimed his second title on the tour and first in three years since he won the Czech

Masters in 2021. Veerman saved his best for the final round at Sun City, with six birdies and three bogies on a course that was challenging for the players all week.

"I did not have the best of seasons in the last two years, but my team and I have put in countless hours (of practice)," an emotional Veerman said.

"To start this season with a win is indescribable. I thought I had a chance (at the start of the day), but then I thought I might have lost it when I three-putted on 16," he said.

"Now it doesn't matter! We worked really hard for this," he added.

South African Aldrich Potgieter, 20, started the final round with a three-shot advantage but a double bogey on the par-four third and a triple-bogey on the par-three 13th proved disastrous as he carded a 75 and finished a shot back in tied second place with England's Matthew Jordan (72) and Frenchman Romain Langasque (71). Veerman won the €969,273.82 winner's share of the \$6,000,000 purse.

QMMF honours QORC and QNSC winners



The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) recognized the top-performing competitors across various categories in the 2024 Qatar Off Road Championship (QORC) and the 2024 Qatar National Sprint Championship (QNSC) at its annual awards ceremony. In the QORC, Mansour al-Suwaidi proved his dominance, securing first place across all quad categories, while UAE's Mohammed al-Balooshi retained his title in the motorcycle category, securing both Baja and QORC trophies. The standout performances in the QNSC came from Lebanese driver Mansour Chebli, who claimed the top spot in both O1and P1 categories, and Qatar's Nadim Ziade, who dominated P2 class. Francesco Fornaciari shone in the P3 category, while Paige De Jager took home the Women's title in the Championship.



PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea beat Spurs to go second, Arsenal held

Second-placed Chelsea now have 31 points after 15 games, two ahead of Arsenal

AFP
London

Chelsea roared back from two goals down to beat Tottenham 4-3 yesterday, moving just four points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool after Arsenal were held by Fulham.

The Gunners and Chelsea both started the day seven points behind Arne Slot's Liverpool, whose game this weekend was postponed due to stormy conditions.

Arsenal were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw but Enzo Maresca's Chelsea, kicking off later Sunday, mounted a stunning comeback at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Dominic Solanke and Dejan Kulusevski put Tottenham two goals up inside 11 minutes but Jadon Sancho quickly pulled one back with a fine strike and the second half belonged to the visitors. Cole Palmer equalised from the penalty spot in the 61st minute, Enzo Fernandez put Chelsea ahead 12 minutes later and Palmer chipped in another spot-kick before Son Heung-min added a late third for Spurs.

Second-placed Chelsea now have 31 points after 15 games, two points ahead of London rivals Arsenal. Liverpool, with a game in hand, are on 35 points. But it is a disastrous result for Spurs, who hammered champions Manchester City 4-0 late last month.

Ange Postecoglou's men have now lost seven of their 15 Premier League games and are languishing in 11th place in the table.

Earlier, Bukayo Saka had a late winner ruled out for offside by a VAR review as the Gunners' four-match winning streak was halted



Chelsea's English midfielder Cole Palmer celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur in London yesterday. (AFP)

in west London. Raul Jimenez fired Fulham into an early lead before William Saliba levelled after yet another Arsenal goal from a corner.

"We are very disappointed not to win the game, overall we absolutely dominated the game from start to end," Arteta told the BBC.

"We did all the things that we wanted to do during the game and unfortunately we concede one goal in one shot. The way the team played, the way the team wanted to win, it was unbelievable."

Arsenal were still without in-

fluent defensive pair Gabriel Magalhaes and Riccardo Calafiori through injury and Fulham exposed a makeshift left side of the Gunners' backline to take the lead. Kenny Tete's ball in behind was pounced on by Jimenez, who drove forward and fired brilliantly across David Raya into the far corner on 11 minutes.

Arsenal underlined their threat from set-pieces when they scored twice from corners to beat Manchester United 2-0 in midweek.

Yet for all their preparations, Fulham were still powerless to prevent the corner kings from



Arsenal's French defender William Saliba celebrates after scoring their first goal against Fulham in London yesterday. (AFP)

striking again. Saliba stabbed home Kai Havertz's header from close range for Arsenal's 23rd goal from corners since the beginning of last season. Another corner should have led to the winner but Thomas Partey nodded wide when unmarked from another pinpoint Declan Rice delivery.

Saka did head in at the back post as stoppage time approached, but Gabriel Martinelli had strayed offside before supplying the cross. Ruud van Nistelrooy's Leicester struck twice late on to deny Brighton in a 2-2 draw at the King Power.

Tariq Lamptey opened the scoring in spectacular fashion with a looping effort into the top corner from outside the box and Yankuba Minteh looked to have sealed the three points for the Seagulls 11 minutes from

time. But Jamie Vardy started the comeback on 86 minutes before teeing up Bobby De Cordova-Reid to snatch a point in stoppage time. Van Nistelrooy, appointed at the King Power late last month, praised 37-year-old striker Vardy. "If you are on the scoresheet and make an assist, then you have to say this result would not be possible without him," said the Dutchman. Bournemouth also scored twice in the dying minutes to deny Ipswich a first home win in the top flight for 22 years in a 2-1 win at Portman Road.

Conor Chaplin put Ipswich in front, but the Cherries move up to eighth after substitutes Enes Unal and Dango Ouattara turned the game around in the dying minutes. Ipswich remain four points adrift of safety in the bottom three.

Indian teen challenger takes 6-5 lead in world chess championship

Singapore: Indian teenage challenger Gukesh Dommaraju beat China's Ding Liren in the eleventh game of their world championship match yesterday, taking a crucial lead as the tournament entered the final stretch. Gukesh, whose win gave him a 6-5 lead with just three games to play, forced a resignation from Ding after the defending champion made a blunder under time pressure.

The victory ended seven consecutive draws and gave the 18-year-old Gukesh a big psychological advantage into the homestretch of the 14-match series. "Obviously, this is a very, very important win," said Gukesh, who played with the white pieces.

But he also remained cautious, adding that "there's still three more very, very important games to go".

Ding, 32, admitted that it was "a very difficult game" for him, but added he would try to bounce back on Monday when he will make the first move with white. Both players were cautious from the start, making only five moves in the first hour of play. The Indian prodigy spent an hour of pondering before making the 11th move.

The players went into a pulsating time pressure game after almost four hours, especially Ding, who had just under 10 minutes on his allotted time. When the Chinese resigned, Gukesh's supporters gathered in the public area at Singapore's Resorts World Sentosa hotel erupted into applause, chanting his name. "Indian fans are the best. I'm really grateful for all the support. All these things give me the extra energy I need."

Ding won the opening game on November 25. Gukesh came back to claim game three after Ding lost on timing after he was unable to play his first 40 moves in 120 minutes. If both players are tied in 14 games, the match will move to a tie-breaker, which will be played on December 13.

QATAR DRIFT CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Sarraf emerges as third round winner

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The third round of the Qatar Drift Championship concluded after two days of intense competition last weekend. The championship saw the participation of top drift champions from the Gulf countries and the region.

The round was held under the sponsorship of HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, President of Qatar Racing Club (QRC), and in the presence of HE Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, Director of the club. The qualifying sessions saw a record-breaking participation of 27 drivers, each given two attempts on the track, with the best result for each driver being considered.

The session ended with last round's champion, Salem al-Sarraf, topping the leaderboard with a slight lead over competitor Misyer Abu Sheba. Last round's runner-up, Ihab Falah, finished in third, while last year's champion in the local category, Ali Jabsha, placed fourth and first in the local category ahead of his brother Yazan, Yasser Mustafa, and Abdullah al-Muhtaseb.

According to the results of the



QRC Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khaled al-Thani and members of the Basel Salem al-Sabah Club pose with the winners of the third round of the Qatar Drift Championship.

qualifying sessions, the drivers were placed into the bracket for the tandem battles, which took place on Friday. The first round of these battles saw seven matchups instead of eight, due to the absence of competitor Saud al-Attayah, allowing al-Sarraf to advance directly to the second round. Additionally, Mohamed Khourshid made it past the first round at the

expense of competitor Abdullah al-Muhtaseb, and Yazan Jabsha overcame Mohammed al-Jaber. His brother Ali, however, was eliminated in the first round after facing Fahd al-Jad'i. On the other side of the bracket, Misyer Abu Sheba won his battle against Hamza al-Na'amneh, moving on to the second round, alongside Yasser Mustafa, who triumphed

over Mazen Nasser in the same round.

Ihab Falah and Louay Abu Ayash also secured their spots in the second round after defeating Ahmed Abu Arshid and Khaled al-Shafi'i.

While the local category participants' journey ended in the second round, Yazan Jabsha was crowned the local category champion for the third consecutive round and



Action from the third round of the Qatar Drift Championship.

is now close to securing the season's championship title. Yasser Mustafa repeated his performance from the previous round, finishing in second place, while last season's champion, Ali Jabsha, took third place on the podium.

The second round witnessed a major matchup, described as an early final, between the winner of the previous round, Salem al-Sarraf, and the third-place finisher in that round, Mohamed Khourshid.

Al-Sarraf won the battle and continued on his path to the semi-finals. Following in his footsteps, Fahd al-Jad'i triumphed over local category leader Yazan Jabsha. Also, Misyer Abu Sheba and Ihab Falah made it to the first semi-final after defeating Yasser Mustafa, and the second semi-final after a heavyweight battle against Louay

Abu Ayash. Moving on to the semi-final battles, al-Sarraf defeated his opponent Fahd al-Jad'i, who could not complete the battle due to a car issue. The match between Ihab Falah and Misyer Abu Sheba ended with Falah winning after a collision between the two, which affected Abu Sheba's car and prevented him from continuing the third-place battle. This allowed al-Jad'i to claim third place for this round.

The final match, which saw Salem al-Sarraf face off against Ihab Falah for the second consecutive round, ended in a victory for al-Sarraf, marking his second win of the season. Falah secured his second podium finish in the championship.

The fourth round will be held from December 19-20.