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ARABIAN GULF CUP

# Supersub sends Saudi into semis as Yemen make history

The semi-finals line-up is complete with Bahrain set to face Kuwait while Saudi Arabia take on Oman

By Sports Reporter  
Kuwait City

Substitute Abdullah al-Hamddan scored twice to send Saudi Arabia through to the semi-finals of the Khaleeji Zain 26 in Kuwait with a 3-1 victory over Iraq, while Yemen bagged their first ever win in the competition against Group B winners, Bahrain.

After an edgy 53 minutes at the Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium, the match burst into life when VAR instructed the referee to go to his monitor and he awarded a penalty to Saudi Arabia for handball.

Captain Salem al-Dawsari made no mistake from the spot to put his side 1-0 up.

But just when Saudi appeared to be turning the screw, Iraq levelled through Mohanad Ali in the 63rd minute to silence the large Saudi contingent.

Saudi Arabia, who will host the next edition of the Cup in 2026, only needed a draw to secure their last four place, and when substitute al-Hamddan cut in from the right in the 81st minute to fire a sublime left foot shot into the top corner to put them 2-1 ahead, Iraq's hopes of retaining their title faded. And as they pushed forward in search of an equaliser, al-Dawsari broke into the Iraq half and delivered on a plate for supersub al-Hamddan to make it 3-1 with just five minutes left.

Saudi Arabian striker al-Hamdan expressed delight following their 3-1 victory.

Al-Hamdan emphasised Saudi Arabia's dominance throughout the game, translating their efforts



Saudi Arabia's Abdullah al-Hamdan celebrates scoring their second goal against Iraq in their Group B Gulf Cup clash at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium, Kuwait City, Kuwait, yesterday. (Reuters)

into a significant victory. He highlighted the creation of numerous scoring opportunities.

"This match presented a significant challenge for us as players," al-Hamdan said after the match.

"We successfully achieved the desired outcome, fulfilling the aspirations and ambitions of our fans, which is paramount to us in this round," he added.

He concluded by stating that the 3-1 victory will serve as motivation for the upcoming semi-final, where they aim to continue their journey and win the Gulf Cup

title. Across the city at the Jaber Al Mubarak International Stadium, Yemen yesterday stunned group leaders Bahrain by taking the lead in the 41st minute. A low cross into the box from Nasser al-Gahwashi was sliced into his own net by Bahraini midfielder Ibrahim al-Khatal. But their hopes of finishing in Kuwait with a first victory in the tournament seemed to be hit when Mohamed al-Romaihi equalised after 62 minutes.

Bahrain were reduced to 10-men when Sayed Baqer was sent off with 17 minutes remaining, and

Yemen took advantage with a dramatic winner through Harwan al-Zubaidi late on. The results mean that Bahrain won Group B, and will face hosts Kuwait in the semi-finals after they finished second in Group A to winners Oman, who will take on Saudi Arabia. Both matches are scheduled to take place on Tuesday night.

Action from the Bahrain-Yemen match at Jaber Al-Mubarak International Stadium yesterday. Yemen won 2-1.



Saudi Arabia's Salem al-Dawsari celebrates scoring their first goal against Iraq. (Reuters)



HORSE RACING

# Hazaa Al Shahania crosses the finish line with a late surge for End Of Year Cup win

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Ghazali Stud's Hazaa Al Shahania finished strongly to register a 1/4 of a length victory to clinch the End Of Year Cup yesterday.

At the Al Uqda Racecourse, the four-year-old gelding confirmed his promising debut with a hard-fought win in the 1,300m Graduation for Local Purebred Arabians. Trained by Mohammed Ghazali and expertly ridden by Marco Casamento, the son of Aziz ASF delivered a perfectly timed late surge to claim his second victory in just three career starts.

The win also completed a treble by the Italian jockey, concluding the day and the year's racing in style.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani-owned Galeb Al Shahania came second, while HE Sheikha Yasmeen bint Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Mastoorah finished third. Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, crowned the winners.

Casamento started the day as he guided Heater, in the silks of Mohammed Abdulhadi al-Hajri, to victory in the 1,300m race for the



Team of Hazaa Al Shahania celebrates after the gelding won the End Of Year Cup at the Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. **Right:** Jockey Marco Casamento guided Hazaa Al Shahania to victory yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaim

Thoroughbred Handicap (50-70) (Div. 1) for three-year-old+.

The Gassim Ghazali trained colt finished half-a-length ahead of the Al Majd Stud's Insignia. Casamento was again in the winners' enclosure with Gassim Ghazali-trained Elliptical in the colours of Mansoor Ebrahim SI al-Mahmoud, in the 1,300m contests for the Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80), three-year-old+.

In the card opener - Purebred Arabian Handicap (45-65) for three-year-olds - Injaaz Stud's Ghayat Al Matlouh emerged winners. Jockey Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri rode Zuhair Mohsen-trained grey colt to three lengths victory over - Khalid Ali al-Obaidli's Kanz Al Adeed.

**RESULTS**  
End Of Year Cup Day

**WINNERS (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)**  
**1 - End Of Year Cup, Local Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate**  
Hazaa Al Shahania, Mohammed Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**2 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-85)**  
Al Nati Up, Mohd Ahmed Mohd Hasan al-Sulaiti, Fayos Martin Borja  
**3 - Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80)**

Elliptical, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**4 - Thoroughbred Handicap (50-70) (Div. 2)**  
Tomorrownevercomes, Rashid Mohammed al-Athba, Maikon De Souza  
**5 - Thoroughbred Handicap (50-70) (Div. 1)**  
Heater, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**6 - Purebred Arabian Maiden**

**Plate**  
Azraq, Alban de Mieulle, Youssef Lachhab  
**7 - Local Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate**  
Za'eer Al Shahania, Osama Omer E al-Dafea, Jefferson Smith  
**8 - Purebred Arabian Handicap (45-65)**  
Ghayat Al Matlouh, Zuhair Mohsen and Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri





FOCUS

# Reddy's defiant first century lifts India gloom at the MCG

The crowd of 83,073 was a record for the 3rd day of a Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground

AFP  
Melbourne

British Kumar Reddy scored a defiant maiden century yesterday as India fought back to reach 358-9 on a rain-hit third day of the fourth Test against Australia.

Rising all-rounder Reddy was applauded off the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 105 not out after rain ended play for the day midway through the final session.

Having provided much-needed stability to another shaky Indian batting effort, the 21-year-old will resume today alongside Mohammed Siraj, on two, with the first-innings deficit reduced to 116 runs.

Australia's push for a much bigger advantage after scoring 474 was stymied by Reddy and spin-bowling all-rounder Washington Sundar, who scored 50 as the pair put on 127 for the eighth wicket.

To the roar of a large contingent of Indian supporters among a record 83,073 third-day crowd at the MCG, Reddy lofted Scott Boland over mid-on to reach three figures just before play was halted.

It was an innings memorable for resolute defence, mixed with classical strokeplay.

Reddy faced 176 balls, hitting 10 fours and one six, continuing the fine batting form at number eight in the order that has marked his debut series.

In his first six Test innings, he has scored 284 runs - the most in the series by any Indian player - at an average of 71.

Sundar described Reddy's innings as "unbelievable" and said he always knew a century was



India's Nitish Kumar Reddy celebrates his century as Mohammed Siraj looks on during the fourth Test against Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday. **Right:** Australia's Steve Smith (left) takes a catch to dismiss India's Washington Sundar from the bowling of Nathan Lyon. (AFP)

well within his teammate's ability. "Mentally he's very, very strong," Sundar said. "I've known him for quite a few years. The way he went about his business today was amazing. He gives a hundred percent, that's his approach to life.

"I'm sure this hundred will be talked about and remembered for a very, very long time."

Seamers Boland, who took 3-57, and Pat Cummins with 3-86 were the most productive Australian bowlers in conditions that offered little assistance despite overcast skies.

Boland said Reddy was a "nice player" whose range of shots

proved hard to contain. "It looks like he's got pretty much every shot in the book," Boland said. "Obviously he's playing really nicely. Coming in down in the lower order, he's trying to put the pressure back on us."

#### Record crowd

Boland believed Australia were still well placed to push for victory, with the pitch still containing a "bit of nip" for the seamers.

He said teammate Mitchell Starc was bowling with a "niggle in his back or rib" but expected the pace-man would continue to play a full part in the Test. "He's someone

who can still bowl at the same pace even when he is really sore, which is a great trait to have."

The recalled Sundar's dogged knock off 162 balls ended when he was caught at first slip by Steve Smith from off-spinner Nathan Lyon.

It ended a partnership that traversed the entire second session after India had advanced from 164-5 overnight to 244-7 at lunch.

Sundar survived the most freakish moment of the day when on 18.

Attempting to flick a leg-sided delivery from Starc, the ball flew from the back of the bat into the slip cordon where a diving Smith



spilled a one-handed opportunity.

India lost Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja in the opening session.

Pant's innings of 28 ended when he over-balanced while attempting a ramp shot for six off Boland, top-edging the ball to third man where Lyon held the catch.

Jadeja was trapped lbw when on 17, playing back to a Lyon delivery that skidded on.

The crowd of 83,073 was a record for the third day of a Boxing Day Test, according to Cricket Australia, and the largest day three crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1937.

The record total attendance for a Boxing Day Test is 271,865, which looks certain to be smashed to-day after 255,462 spectators came through the gates on the first three days. Rain threatened throughout the day and about 40 minutes of play was lost in a period either side of tea.

The series is locked at 1-1 with the fifth and final Test to be played in Sydney next week.

**BRIEF SCORES (Fourth Test, Day 3)**  
**India 358 for 9** (Reddy 105\*, Washington 50, Boland 3-57, Cummins 3-86) **trail Australia 474** by 116 runs

SPOTLIGHT

## SA lose wickets chasing modest winning target

Reuters  
Centurion

Anervy South Africa slumped to 27-3 when bad light brought play to an early close on a rain-delayed third day, still 121 runs shy of victory in the first Test against Pakistan at Centurion and a place in next June's World Test Championship.

The home side are chasing a modest target of 148 after bowling out Pakistan for 237 and if they win will be assured a place in the WTC final at Lord's.

But Pakistan kept alive their own hopes of victory as they took three wickets in the opening nine overs of South Africa's second innings with Mohammad Abbas taking two wickets and Khurram Shahzad the other as Tony de Zorzi (2), Ryan Rickleton (0) and Tristan Stubbs (1) were all trapped leg before wicket.

Aiden Markram, who top scored for the hosts in the first innings, will resume on 22 not out, alongside skipper Temba Bavuma, when play resumes today.

South Africa had a 90-run



South Africa's Marco Jansen (second left) celebrates after the dismissal of Pakistan's Salman Agha during the third day of the first Test at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday. (AFP)

lead over the tourists after the opening innings and although the contest ebbed and flowed through the day, will have felt they had worked their way into a winning position before they came out to bat.

Marco Jansen finished with 6-52 to put the brakes on Pakistan's hopes of a bigger second innings tally after Saud Shakeel and Babar Azam made a bright start to the day's play, which

was delayed until after lunch because of a passing rainstorm.

#### Shakeel top scores with 84

Shakeel top scored with 84, before being undone by a full toss from Jansen, but his dismissal was unlucky in contrast to a raft of injudicious shots that saw his teammates get out.

Babar moved briskly from 16 not out overnight to 50 - his first in his last 20 test innings

- but was then tempted into swinging at a short and wide delivery in Jansen's first over and caught by Corbin Bosch on the boundary.

Mohammad Rizwan then gave away his wicket cheaply while Salman Ali Agha drove at only the third ball he faced and edged behind.

Aamer Jamal was dismissed for 18 as he could not resist attempting to pull a short delivery from Dane Paterson and was caught by Rickelton.

Successive test wins over the West Indies, Bangladesh (2) and Sri Lanka (2) have left South Africa needing to win one of their two Test series against Pakistan for a first-ever appearance in a WTC final.

The second Test against Pakistan will be at Newlands in Cape Town, starting next Friday.

**BRIEF SCORES (First Test, Day 3)**  
**Pakistan 211 and 237** (Saud Shakeel 84, Babar Azam 50; M. Jansen 6-52, K. Rabada 2-68) **v South Africa 301 and 27-3** (Mohammad Abbas 2-3)

**Match situation:** South Africa need 121 runs to win with seven wickets remaining  
**Toss:** South Africa

BULAWAYO TEST

## Double centurion Shah inspires Afghanistan fightback in Zimbabwe

AFP  
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Rahmat Shah struck an Afghanistan Test record 231 not out while partnering Hashmatullah Shahidi in an unbeaten 361-run stand on the third day of the first Test against Zimbabwe yesterday.

Captain Shahidi finished a punishing, wicket-less day for the six-man Zimbabwe attack on 141 for his second Test century.

Starting the day on 95 for two, the tourists were 425 for two by the close of play at Queens Sports Club in southern city Bulawayo.

Zimbabwe, who scored a record 586 after winning the toss and batting, hold a 161-run lead going into the fourth day of the match.

Shah bettered the previous best Afghan individual score of 200 not out by Shahidi against Zimbabwe in Abu Dhabi three years ago.

He has faced 416 balls after coming in when Afghanistan lost opener Sediquallah Atal in the second over, and struck three sixes and 23 fours in his record knock.

His previous highest score was 102 against Bangladesh in 2019 - the first Test century by an Afghan.

Inexperienced spinner Brian Bennett was the bowler when Shah became a centurion, then a double centurion.

Shah, part of the Afghanistan team that made their Test debut in 2018 against India, struck a single to reach 100, and a four to get to 200.

Shahidi proved a superb partner. He has faced 276 deliveries and hit 16 fours.

The skipper reached his century with a pull shot to fine leg off Newman Nyamhuri, one of two Test debutants in the Zimbabwe attack.

Zimbabwe, seeking a first Test win since beating Afghanistan three years ago, were guilty of some wayward bowling and sloppy fielding.

Medium pacer Trevor Gwandu was a wicket-taker, but also the joint most expensive Zimbabwe bowler, conceding 86 runs.

Afghanistan won Twenty20 and one-day international series ahead of the Test - the first of two with the second set to start on January 2.

**BRIEF SCORES (First Test, Day 3)**  
**Zimbabwe 586 in 135.2 overs** (Sean Williams 154, Brian Bennett 110 not out, Craig Ervine 104, Ben Curran 68; Allah Ghazanfar 3-127) **v Afghanistan 425-2 in 125 overs** (Rahmat Shah 231 not out, Hashmatullah Shahidi 141 not out)  
**Toss:** Zimbabwe



Rahmat Shah of Afghanistan celebrates reaching his double century against Zimbabwe during the first day of the first Test at Bulawayo yesterday. (@ACBofficials)

## Duffy bowls New Zealand to T20 victory over SL

**Mount Maunganui, New Zealand:** A late bowling fightback sparked by Jacob Duffy produced a remarkable eight-run victory for New Zealand against Sri Lanka at Mount Maunganui yesterday. Sri Lanka, with openers Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis in sparkling form, were cruising towards the 173-run target when they reached 95 without loss at the halfway stage. But in the 14th over, with Sri Lanka 121-0, Duffy changed the game with three wickets in four balls, all caught behind by Mitchell Hay, beginning with the dismissal of Mendis for 46 off 36 deliveries. Nissanka went on to make 90 off 60, which included seven fours and three sixes for his highest Twenty20 score, while no other Sri Lankan reached double figures.

"We should have done better," was the succinct summary from Sri Lankan captain Charith Asalanka who was out for three and also dropped a catch. "Pathum and Kusal batted well, the rest including me should take responsibility for this loss." New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said Duffy changed the game with his 3-21 after the home side reached 172-8 in their 20 overs with the innings propped up by a century stand by Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell. The pair came together in the 10th over with New Zealand struggling at 65-5 and put on 105 before both were dismissed in the final over. Mitchell was stumped for 62 off 42 deliveries while Bracewell was caught behind for 59 off 33. "It was a massive partnership for us, the way they went about it,

they soaked it up for a bit then put the pressure back on to put up a pretty good score," Santner said. Binura Fernando, who removed both New Zealand openers in his second over, finished with 2-22. Tim Robinson was caught and bowled for 11 when he drove a short-pitched delivery straight back to the bowler. Three balls later Rachin Ravindra, on eight, nicked an outswinger and was caught behind.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**New Zealand 172-8 off 20 overs:** (Daryl Mitchell 62, Michael Bracewell 59; Binura Fernando 2-22, Maheesh Theekshana 2-29, Wanindu Hasaranga 2-33).  
**Sri Lanka 164-8** (Pathum Nissanka 90, Kusal Mendis 46; Jacob Duffy 3-21, Matt Henry 2-28, Zak Foulkes 2-41)  
**Result:** NZ won by 8 runs **Toss:** Sri Lanka



AL SHAQAB INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE

# Qatar's al-Amri, al-Saad and Abdullah excel

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatari riders delivered outstanding performances as the first round of the Al Shaqab International League concluded yesterday, wrapping up two days of thrilling action at the Longines Indoor Arena at Al Shaqab.

The event, a qualifier for the FEI Group Seven Championship Final, featured competitions across Junior, Young Rider and Youth categories.

In yesterday's marquee event, Jaber Rashid al-Amri claimed the biggest prize of the night as he topped the CSI\* Al Shaqab Champions (Open Class) 1.35m with a flawless performance on Apollon du Banney. The Qatari rider clocked an impressive 34.85 seconds in the jump-off to secure victory.

Nasser al-Ghazali, riding Etna du Chateau, finished second with

a time of 38.00 seconds, while another Qatari rider Mohammed Saeed Haidan took third place after recording a time of 35.78 seconds with Mediena, penalised by eight faults in the jump-off.

Manager of the Equine Education Department at Al Shaqab Mohammed Jaber al-Khayarin presented trophies to the podium winners.

Saad Ahmed al-Saad delivered a flawless performance with 12-year-old Craquante de Mazin to claim victory, clocking 38.70 seconds in the jump-off and securing qualification for the FEI Group 7 Final 2025. Sultan Salem al-Naemi (Cethys de Vernay) finished second with a time of 53.69 seconds after four penalties while Ibrahim Yousuf al-Mahmoud (Qataro van het Texelhof) settled for third in 52.09 seconds with eight penalties.

Qatari riders also impressed in CSIJ-B Junior Champions (1.20m) as Fahad Jassim H K al-Thani clinched the title with a perfect

31.11 seconds on Hazel de Luxe, earning a spot in the 2025 FEI Group Seven Championship Final. Haya Khalid A E al-Hitmi (Hustique) claimed second with 31.25 seconds while Mohammed Jassim A J al-Thani (Cattleya Plassay) was third with 34.10 seconds.

Abdullah bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani swept the top two spots, winning with Goteborg Handyman (31.96 seconds) and finishing second with Cassandra 352 (32.04 seconds).

He advanced to the FEI Group 7 Final after an outstanding show. Saudi Arabia's Mohammed al-Mutairi (Baccarat d'Azur) came third with 33.45 seconds.

CEO of Old Doha Port, engineer Muhammad Abdullah al-Mulla, crowned the winners of the 1.20m and 1.10m events.

In Small Tour (1.10m), Saudi Arabia's Fahad al-Juaid triumphed on Dushi with a time of 25.90 seconds, followed by compatriot Nasser al-Bagami (Vahine de Curaine, 27.34 seconds) and

Morocco's Achraf Oualla (Just In Time, 27.46 seconds). FEI-certified judge Nasser Mubarak al-Hajri presented the trophies.

Also yesterday, Belgium's Jana Bart Sas (Dilandra) cleared the second phase in 25.23 seconds to win the Amateur Class (90cm). Saudi Arabia's al-Mutairi (Diane, 25.25 seconds) and Qatar's Hamad Nasser S al-Marri (Dilandra, 25.53 seconds) completed the podium. Director of Commercial and Marketing Manager at Al Shaqab Abdulrahman al-Kaabi presented the awards.

Qatar's youngsters, meanwhile, were also impressive in the Optimum Time (60cm) title as Ghanim Thamer K al-Maadadi (Bay Barney) emerged victorious, followed by Mohammed Hamad N al-Maadheed (Bay Barney) and Salha Khalid A al-Obaidli (Lancome Paris).

Specialist in Inheritance and Heritage at Al Shaqab Ahmed Khaled al-Hamidi crowned the winners.



Manager of the Equine Education Department at Al Shaqab Mohammed Jaber al-Khayarin presented trophies to the CSI\* Al Shaqab Champions (Open Class) winners. Jaber Rashid al-Amri won the event.

TENNIS

# De Minaur wins but Australia crash to Argentina

‘I’VE BEEN PUTTING IN SOME GREAT WORK IN THE PRE-SEASON’

AFP  
Sydney

Alex de Minaur swept past Tomas Martin Etcheverry to win his first match of the season yesterday but it was not enough to prevent Argentina upsetting hosts Australia at the United Cup, while Switzerland beat France.

The world number nine crushed his opponent 6-1, 6-4 to level the tie after teammate Olivia Gadecki crashed to Nadia Podoroska 6-2, 6-4 in the women's singles rubber at Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney.

But the home side couldn't lift in the deciding mixed doubles with Etcheverry returning to partner Maria Carle and beat Matt Ebden and Ellen Perez 6-2, 6-4.

Despite losing the tie, De Minaur was happy with his early-season form.

"I've been putting in some great work in the pre-season," he said.

"I felt comfortable with the way I was playing before the tournament, so I just told myself to back myself and play the type of tennis I wanted to play."

Former Olympic gold medalist Belinda Bencic won her first tour-level match since the 2023 US Open to help Switzerland beat France. The 27-year-old, a one-time world number four who is now ranked 487, took down Chloe Paquet 6-3, 6-1, winning 10 of the last 11 games.

While she tentatively returned to the court at low-key events in November after having a baby in April, it was her first win at tour-level since her third-round victory at the 2023 US Open.

Her teammate Dominic Stricker slumped 6-3, 7-5 to Ugo Humbert in their singles clash to send the tie to the mixed doubles.

Bencic fronted up again alongside Stricker to down Edouard Roger-Vasselin and Elixane Lechemia 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) and earn Switzerland the win.

"I'm really excited to be back, of course," said Bencic, who won Olympic gold at the 2021 Tokyo



Australia's Alex de Minaur hits a return to Argentina's Tomas Martin Etcheverry during their men's singles match at the United Cup on Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

Games and has eight career WTA titles to her name. "I had a little bit of nerves at the start and a little bit of rust, so I'm happy I kind of accepted that and tried to fight through it."

"And after, I felt like it went smoother, I became a little bit more calm, and kind of was more able to focus on my tennis."

In Perth, Canada bounced back after Felix Auger-Aliassime lost his singles rubber to prevail 2-1 over Croatia. The Canadian win over Croatia came thanks to a 6-3, 6-4 mixed doubles victory from Auger-Aliassime and Leylah Fernandez against Lucija Ciric Bagaric and Ivan Dodig. "It was all about trusting each other and not trying

to go for too much," Auger-Aliassime said. "We stuck to the game plan and it worked out well."

After 2021 US Open finalist Fernandez easily dispatched Donna Vekic 6-4, 6-3 to start the tie, Auger-Aliassime got into trouble against Borna Coric, crashing 0-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Former top 10 players Maria Sakkari and Stefanos Tsitsipas relied on a mixed doubles win to complete the 2-1 Greek win over Spain, which knocked the Iberians out of the competition after they lost to Kazakhstan on Friday.

Sakkari, who once stood third in the WTA ranking, showed signs of rustiness after playing her first official match since quitting injured in the US Open first round.

She was beaten 6-2, 6-1 in singles by Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, who produced the statement win of her career a day after losing to former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina.

The 11th-ranked Tsitsipas leveled the evening one match apiece with a defeat of Pablo Carreno Busta 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, coming from a break down in the final set.

The deciding mixed doubles rubber was tight, with the Greek pair taking victory over Yvonne Cavalle-Reimers and Sergio Martos Gornes 4-6, 6-3, 10-6 as Sakkari set up victory with three match points. "There's no Greek night without some drama," Tsitsipas said. "I'm glad to have her as my partner in crime, I like to have a fighter alongside me."

"She delivered at the very end," Sakkari added. "We came through when we had to, the tie-break set was very good from our side. There were some quite good moments."

The 18-nation mixed-team United Cup is being played in Perth and Sydney.

Each team features three men and three women, with ties comprising one men's and one women's singles and an often decisive mixed-doubles clash. The tournament began on Friday with Spain crashing 2-1 to Kazakhstan, while China swept past Brazil 3-0.

FOCUS

# Carlsen quits chess championship after jeans row

AFP  
Paris

Chess number one **Magnus Carlsen** has quit a world championship event in New York after being fined and threatened with exclusion for breaching the dress code by wearing jeans.

Carlsen was asked to change his clothes on Friday at the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships after falling foul of the governing body's regulations. The chess federation (FIDE) said Carlsen rejected the opportunity to switch out of his jeans, and he was issued a fine of \$200 (192 euros).

In a statement, FIDE said its rules "are designed to ensure professionalism and fairness for all participants".

It cited the case of another competitor who was fined for wearing sports shoes but allowed to continue after changing into appropriate footwear.

Carlsen, 34, is a five-time world chess champion. The Norwegian is also the reigning champion in both the rapid and blitz chess competitions.

"I put on a shirt, jacket and honestly like I didn't even think about jeans, even changed my shoes," Carlsen told the chess channel Take Take Take.

"First of all, I got a fine which is fine, and then I got a warning that I would not be paired if I didn't go change my clothes. They said that I could do it after the third round today."

"I said 'I'll change tomorrow if that's OK, I didn't even realise it today,' but they said, 'Well you have to change now.' At that point it became a bit of a matter of principle for me."

Carlsen said he would not appeal the decision.

"Honestly, I am too old at this point to care too much," he said.

"Nobody wants to back down... I'll probably head off to somewhere where the weather is a bit nicer than here."



## Scheffler to miss tournament after injuring hand making Christmas dinner

Scottie Scheffler will miss The Sentry tournament next month after the world number one suffered an accidental puncture wound to his right hand preparing Christmas dinner and had to have surgery, the PGA Tour said on Friday.

Scheffler is expected to miss several weeks due to the injury, as the 2025 season opens at the Plantation Course at Kapalua in Maui, Hawaii. "On Christmas Day while preparing dinner, Scottie sustained a puncture wound to the palm of his right hand from a broken glass," Scheffler's manager, Blake Smith, said in a statement provided by the PGA Tour.

"Small glass fragments remained in the palm which required surgery. He has been told that he should be back to 100% in three to four weeks."

It marks a disappointing start to the New Year after a blockbuster 2024 for Scheffler, who maintained his world number one ranking for the whole season and was voted PGA Tour Player of the Year for a third consecutive time. Scheffler picked up the Olympic gold medal, retained his Players Championship and won the Masters for a second time, capping it all off with the season-long FedExCup title.

## KYRGIOS SAYS TENNIS INTEGRITY 'AWFUL' AFTER DOPING SCANDALS

Nick Kyrgios lashed out yesterday at what he believes is the lenient treatment of world tennis number one Italian Jannik Sinner for a failed drug test and said integrity in the sport was "awful".

Sinner twice tested positive for the banned steroid clostebol in March. However, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accepted his argument that the steroid entered his system due to contamination from his physiotherapist and opted not to suspend him.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) subsequently appealed the decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, with a verdict pending. Kyrgios has been scathing about the ITIA decision in the past and didn't hold back in a press conference ahead of his return to the game at the Brisbane International after an 18-month injury lay-off. "Tennis integrity right now, and everyone knows it, but no one wants to speak about it - it's awful," said the Australian. "It's

actually awful and it's not okay. I know that people don't like it when I just speak out about things, be honest about things. For a kid that grew up playing tennis, I enjoyed the competition, I enjoyed playing. "I can get emotional, I can throw a racquet, but that's nothing compared to cheating and taking performance-enhancing drugs." Asked whether he was accusing Sinner of cheating, Kyrgios told journalists to look at the facts. "He did fail two doping tests at

separate times, as well," Kyrgios said. "It wasn't one after the other - they were a different time frame, so I mean, if you think that that's the way that it got in his system, if that's how you think it happened, then. But, I mean, if he didn't do anything wrong, then why did they take his prize money and points away? Obviously they found something wrong with it." With former women's world number one Iga Swiatek also having been suspended for a doping

violation in 2024, Kyrgios said the sport's image was being tarnished. "I just think that it's been handled horrifically in our sport," he said. The ITIA accepted that Swiatek's violation was not intentional and she received only a one-month ban. "Two world number ones both getting done for doping is disgusting for our sport. It's a horrible look," said Kyrgios, who has been out of the sport since suffering knee and wrist injuries at the 2022 US Open. Kyrgios has had wrist

reconstruction and said while it was a success, he was unsure how the wrist would cope with tournament play. "I'm just not going to take anything for granted," he said. "I'm going to go out there and play. It's literally going to be a day-by-day symptomatic injury moving forward." "If I play a long match, jam it the right way, who knows how it's going to pull up the next day. That's the type of injury it is." Kyrgios's comeback begins against Frenchman Giovanni Perricard.



## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Guardiola won't quit troubled Manchester City

'I WILL NOT GIVE UP. I WANT TO BE HERE. I WANT TO DO IT'

AFP  
London

**P**ep Guardiola insists he will not walk out on troubled Manchester City as he strives to stop the champions' stunning decline.

Guardiola only recently signed a two-year contract extension but City's dismal form has raised questions about his future at the Etihad Stadium.

A nightmare run of nine defeats in 13 games, with just one win in that woeful spell, triggered suggestions the City boss could decide to quit if he cannot find an answer to his team's problems.

But, having led City to six Premier League titles in the past seven seasons, Guardiola is adamant he still has the hunger to turn the situation around.

"I will try, I will keep going. Sometimes you think the bad run will be ended earlier or it would be easier to fix it, but it takes more time," he said. "I will not give up. I want to be here. I want to do it and, with the situation that we have, we have to do it.

"Of course I want it, everyone wants it. I don't want to disappoint my people in terms of the club, the fans, the people who love this club.

"I think all of us in our job want to do it well and please the people. That is undeniable, not a question mark. The biggest test is to come back again, but we have done that before."

Injuries have been a major factor in City's demise, leaving them languishing in seventh place in the Premier League.

Ballon d'Or winner Rodri is recovering from a long-term knee injury, while Ruben Dias, John Stones, Ederson, Kyle Walker, Jack Grealish and Matheus Nunes all missed the 1-1 draw with Everton on Boxing Day.

The usually prolific Erling Haaland missed a penalty that could have sealed a City win against Everton, extending his erratic form in an inconsistent season.

Haaland has scored just once in his last seven games, but Guardiola refused to blame the Norway striker or any of his team-mates.

"I don't have it in my education to start complaining, to point at people. It's happened, it's life, it's football, so let's try it again," he said.

"That's why we have had success, because always it is never enough, we will try it again and again and again. That's why we won a lot of titles.

"Every three days it was a game and win, win, win for many, many months and years. Now we have to do the same when results are not good."

City still have doubts over the fitness of a number of players as they bid to get back to winning ways at struggling Leicester on Sunday.

"Sometimes you have injuries," Guardiola said. "For how many years we were incredibly consistent but now, yes, we're a little bit down and the main reason is having so many important players injured. But I saw the team spirit, how we trained this week, how focused they are, how they try to practise."



## PREVIEW

## Alisson tells Liverpool to create own history

AFP  
London

**L**iverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker has challenged his team to "create their own history" amid comparisons with the club's last Premier League winning side.

Arne Slot's charges sit six points clear of second-placed Arsenal with a game in hand ahead of Sunday's trip to West Ham.

Chasing a first English title since 2020, the Reds are firm favourites to be crowned champions after winning 13 times and losing just once in their first 17 league games.

Liverpool fans are already debating if the current crop are as

good as Jurgen Klopp's team, who lifted the trophy four years ago to end the club's 30-year title drought.

But Alisson, one of a handful of players remaining from Klopp's squad, said Slot's men deserve to be ranked on their own terms rather than compared to a side that reached three Champions League finals as well as winning the Premier League under the German.

"I don't think it's too similar, two different teams. A few players still play in the team but we have a little bit different style now, more ball possession, before it was really straightforward: a lot of transition, a lot of intensity," the Brazilian said.

"That team was really special, we achieved great things, it

was the first Premier League title for this club in a long time. We achieved the Champions League together as well, the season before. I believe we don't have to compare ourselves with the teams in the past, we have to create our own history.

"We're not going to erase the things we did in the past that were really special and be always in the history of this club."

Of the 20-man squad named for Liverpool's 3-1 win against Leicester on Boxing Day, eight have experience of winning the title four years ago.

Only Mohamed Salah remains from the famous front three that also featured Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino four years ago. But Cody Gakpo, Luis Diaz and

Darwin Nunez have joined with Salah to create an effective forward line for Slot.

Alisson is impressed with their impact, as well as the hunger displayed by the players yet to experience title glory with the Reds.

"We have a few players that are playing here long enough, that experienced the highest peak of maybe the Jurgen Klopp era and the lowest as well," he said.

"We have the quality to do something special and the most important thing is the commitment that is needed to win something is there, and the passion, the desire.

"We are hungry and we want to win every game in front of us and that's all we are focused on at the moment."

## COMMENT

## Diallo wants to make 'history' with struggling Man Utd

AFP  
London

**A**mad Diallo has vowed to "make history" with Manchester United despite his struggling club's dismal slide down the Premier League.

United have lost five of new manager Ruben Amorim's 10 games in all competitions since he arrived from Sporting Lisbon to replace the sacked Erik ten Hag.

Dismal defeats to Wolves, Bournemouth and Tottenham in their last three matches have increased the pressure on Amorim ahead of Newcastle's visit to Old Trafford on Monday.

United are languishing in 14th place in the Premier League, just eight points above the relegation zone.

But Diallo has been one of United's few bright spots, highlighted by his late winner in the derby against Manchester City recently.

The 22-year-old Ivory Coast forward has scored two goals and added six assists in the league this season.

Alongside United's other young players, Diallo has his sights set on taking United back to the top.

"We are part of the project, we have so many young players for this club, especially Garna

(Alejandro Garnacho), Kob-bie (Mainoo), Joshua (Zirkzee), Rasmus (Hojlund), me, we are young players who want to make history for this club," Diallo told MUTV.

"We want to do our best every game. Sometimes it can not work, but you can see in the pitch we are very focused to do our best for this club, because we want to bring back this club to the level it was before.

"So, for the young lads, we just have to keep going, work hard and the most important thing is to listen to the old men, the old players, learn every day.

"We have now a new manager, he likes to work with young players, and he brings a new system, so we just have to follow it and try to do our best every game."

Diallo has proved his versatility in the early days of Amorim's reign, featuring both at right wing-back and in more attacking roles.

"In football this can happen," he added. "Don't be focused in only one position. Sometimes you can play as a defender, sometimes as a striker. Whenever the manager puts me I'm ready to fight for the team.

"I just want to play, right wing, number 10, anywhere. I say to the manager if you need me as a 'keeper I'm ready to do my best, I will fight for the team and for my teammates. I want to make history for this club."



Manchester United's midfielder Amad Diallo (left) battles for the ball with Wolverhampton Wanderers' defender Tote Gomes during the English Premier League match in Wolverhampton on Thursday. (AFP)

### Ronaldo slams 'unfair' Ballon d'Or result after Vinicius snub

Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo said on Friday it was "unfair" that Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior missed out on this year's award. Manchester City midfielder Rodri took the prestigious prize in October with favourite Vinicius in second place.

Rodri helped City to a fourth straight Premier League title and Spain to Euro 2024 while attacker Vinicius guided Madrid to a record-extending 15th Champions League.

This year's ceremony in Paris was clouded by controversy after Vinicius' Madrid boycotted the event.

"In my opinion he deserved to win the golden ball. It was unfair, I say it here in front of everybody," former Madrid attacker Ronaldo said at the ceremony of the Global Soccer Awards.

"They gave it to Rodri, he deserved it too but I think they should have given it to Vinicius because he won a Champions League," the Portugal captain added.

Only Argentina superstar Lionel Messi with his six successes has won the Ballon d'Or more than Ronaldo.

The winner of the Ballon d'Or is chosen from the shortlist by an international jury of 100 specialist journalists.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Rice seeks trophies as Arsenal chase down Liverpool

AFP  
London

**D**ecan Rice is hoping 2025 brings silverware for Arsenal but knows they need some help to deny a rampant Liverpool the Premier League title.

The Gunners moved second in the table with a 1-0 win over Ipswich on Friday but remain six points behind Liverpool, who also have a game in hand.

Arsenal finished second to Manchester City in each of the previous two seasons and Rice wants to end their status as nearly men in the new year.

"Hopefully the new year brings trophies - we've been pushing for that. To make the next step to be amongst the elite, you have to win stuff," the England midfielder told Amazon Prime.

"We can keep winning games but it means nothing if you don't win nothing.

"Liverpool are full throttle, they were under (Jurgen) Klopp and now under (Arne) Slot. They

don't let anyone breathe. We need someone to help us out so they can drop points as we can only focus on ourselves and hopefully something can happen."

Arsenal's chances of chasing down a Liverpool side that have lost just once in 17 Premier League games under Slot has not been helped by a serious hamstring injury suffered by Bukayo Saka.

The England winger will be sidelined for at least several weeks with fears he may not return before March.

Rice said others now have to take extra responsibility in his absence and believes his own performances are improving after recovering from the physical and mental exertion of England's run to the Euro 2024 final.

"Tonight was different without him - he's been our main man," added Rice. "We're going to have to adapt. It's a great chance for players to step up over the coming months and make their mark.

"I had a slow start after the Euros but the last couple of weeks I've found my feet again and I'm feeling back to myself."



Arsenal's Declan Rice vying for the ball with Ipswich Town's Omari Hutchinson during their Premier League match. (Reuters)

### Saka out for more than two months after hamstring surgery

Arsenal forward Bukayo Saka is set to be sidelined for more than two months after an operation on a hamstring injury, manager Mikel Arteta said on Friday.

"He had a procedure, everything went well but unfortunately he will be out for many, many weeks," the Spaniard told reporters after Arsenal beat Ipswich 1-0 to go second in the Premier League table.

Pressed on a more precise timeline, Arteta added: "I think it will be more than two months. It will depend on how the scar tissue starts to heal, the first week or so of mobility...let's see, it's very difficult to say."

Saka has scored five goals and had 10 assists in the league this season as one of Arsenal's creators-in-chief. The 23-year-old was forced off in their match against Crystal Palace earlier this month and left the stadium on crutches.

In October and November, the England international missed three Nations League games as well as Arsenal's league defeat at Bournemouth and their Champions League win over Shakhtar Donetsk due to an injury to the same leg.