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TENNIS | Page 3

Machac beats Davidovich Fokina to win maiden ATP title



FOOTBALL | Page 4

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India beat New Zealand to set up Champions Trophy semi-final with Australia

Page 2

PREVIEW

# Confident Al Sadd ready to take on UAE's Al Wasl

'Playing a two-leg Round of 16 will be tough, but we are ready for the challenge'



Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez addressing the media yesterday ahead of the AFC Champions League Elite Round of 16 tie against Al Wasl in Dubai. (Right) Al Sadd players during a practice session. The match today starts at 9pm.

Agencies  
Dubai

Former champions Al Sadd are set to face Al Wasl of the UAE today in the first leg of the Elite 2024-25 Round of 16 tie of the AFC Champions League at Zabeel Stadium in Dubai.

Felix Sanchez's Al Sadd are confident ahead of the crucial away leg as they finished just above the UAE club in the Elite group stage standings, having secured three wins and three draws from their eight matches.

Speaking to the media ahead of the match Sanchez said, "We are excited to be here again and are fully focused on delivering a strong performance to secure a positive result. We've faced Al Wasl twice this season, and both

matches posed significant challenges, so we know what to expect. Playing a two-leg Round of 16 will be tough, but we are ready for the challenge."

Sanchez added: "We have recently faced tough matches in the QSL and managed to secure victories, but this match against Al Wasl will be different, with the added complexity of two legs. I have great confidence in our players to put forward their best performances."

It will be the fourth meeting between the two sides with Al Saad having won twice with their most recent encounter – in the league stage – ending in a 1-1 draw. The first eight teams out of 12 teams from the West Zone qualify for the round of 16. While Al Wasl comfortably booked their Round of 16 spot, their recent form has been inconsistent with their last two league stage matches ending in

defeat. Their domestic form has also been patchy, with a 2-1 defeat to Khor Fakkan on Thursday leaving them on 27 points and their title defence as good as over.

Al Sadd, on the other hand, are firing on all cylinders after qualifying for the knockout stage of the continental tournament for the first time since 2020.

Felix Sanchez's side are well in place to defend their Qatar Stars League (QSL) title, a 4-0 win over Al Gharafa SC on Thursday moving them to 37 points – one behind Al Duhail SC. The mercurial Akram Afif is also in fine form on the continent, his four goals from seven matches already matching his total tally over 17 matches from the previous three seasons.

"The Round of 16 marks a new chapter in the AFC Champions League Elite, and we are fully prepared for it. The confronta-

tion with Al Wasl will be tough and intense, and we are aiming to achieve the most important result in tomorrow's match ahead of the return leg in Doha," Al Sadd player Mustafa Meshaal said.

Al Sadd will play a return leg match against the UAE club on March 10 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. The first leg matches of the round of 16 of the competition, which will be held over the course of today and tomorrow, also bring together Esteghlal Tehran with Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia, Pakhtakor of Uzbekistan with Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia, and Al Rayyan of Qatar with Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia, for the western region.

**Esteghlal vs Al Nassr**

Esteghlal have to end a poor run if they are to beat Al Nassr Club in the first leg of the Round of 16 tie today. Iran's Esteghlal are winless in their

last five matches against Saudi Arabian clubs while Al Nassr are undefeated in 11 games against teams from the Central Asian nation.

Esteghlal will head into the tie not in their best form, having lost to 2-1 to Persepolis in an Iran Pro League tie on Thursday, with the defeat leaving them on 26 points and well off the pace in the title race.

Qualification to the elite round of 16 was also only sealed on the final league matchday, thanks to a 2-0 defeat of Qatar's Al Rayyan SC. The victory against Al Rayyan ended a six-match winless streak on the continent and Esteghlal will hope to maintain their momentum, especially with their fans backing them. Al Nassr will also head into the tie on the back of a defeat, a 2-1 loss to Al Orobah on Friday leaving their Saudi Pro League title hopes in tatters.

## Man United knocked out of FA Cup by Fulham

Manchester United's dismal season hit a new low as the FA Cup holders crashed out after a 4-3 penalty shoot-out defeat against Fulham in the fifth round yesterday.

Ruben Amorim's side trailed to Calvin Bassey's first-half opener at Old Trafford before Bruno Fernandes equalised to force a 1-1 draw after extra time.

Fulham keeper Bernd Leno was the hero in the shoot-out as he saved from Victor Lindelof and Joshua Zirkzee, with the visitors converting all four of their kicks. Booned off at half-time, it was another wretched result for United in a season that sees them languishing in 14th place in the Premier League.

The 13-time FA Cup winners had reached the final for the last two seasons and beat Manchester City to lift the trophy last year.

But there will be no trip to Wembley this season for United, who have only the Europa League left as a silverware chance.

It has been another testing week at Old Trafford, with 200 job cuts announced and United struggling to draw with Everton and barely beat lowly Ipswich.

Amorim admitted that life is "hard" just now for United and this was the latest hammer blow to the under-fire Portuguese coach, who only arrived in November to replace the sacked Erik ten Hag.

United head to Real Sociedad for the Europa League last 16 first leg on Thursday before hosting Arsenal in the Premier League. It didn't take long for Amorim to realise United were in for another dispiriting afternoon.

Rasmus Hojlund fired over from an acute angle after Christian Eriksen's cross found the much-maligned United striker, whose goalless drought has now reached 18 games.

Eriksen's curler was fisted away by Leno, but that did little to satisfy fans frustrated by years of underachievement.

Earlier, Danny Welbeck sent Brighton into the quarter-finals as his extra-time strike clinched a dramatic 2-1 win against Newcastle in a stormy clash scarred by red cards for both teams.

(AFP)

MOTORSPORT

# Marc outduels brother Alex for 'dream' Thai MotoGP win

AFP  
Buriram, Thailand

Six-time world champion Marc Marquez used all his experience to fight back from a mid-race wobble to outduel his brother Alex Marquez for a "dream" win in yesterday's season-opening Thai MotoGP.

It completed a dominant debut for his new factory Ducati team, with pole-sitter Marquez having romped to victory in Saturday's sprint at the Buriram Circuit for a maximum 37 championship points.

The Spanish great took his 63rd MotoGP victory by 1.732sec from younger sibling Alex, who is still seeking a first chequered flag, with Italian two-time world champion Francesco Bagnaia third.

Marc Marquez had opened a 1.5 second gap at the front in searing heat, when on lap seven he suddenly slowed on turn three with a tyre pressure problem to relinquish the lead to his brother.

Marc tucked into second spot, lurking ominously on Alex's back wheel for another 15 laps as he managed his tyres expertly and kept the pressure issue under control. His strategy paid off as he made a decisive move with less

than laps of the 26 to dive under Alex on turn 12 before stretching away to complete a second family one-two, after Saturday's sprint.

"Yesterday I was happy, today I am super happy," said Marc Marquez. "I mean it's a dream. I cannot ask for more. We started this new journey in the perfect way, with pole position and a double victory, sprint and main race. I want to say thanks to the team."

"And to share this weekend with my brother is something unreal for our family."

"There are no words to describe how you feel when you are on the podium with your brother."

Another Italian, Franco Morbidelli, was fourth on a VR46 Ducati and Japanese rookie Ai Ogura fifth on his MotoGP debut for Trackhouse Aprilia.

"For one moment I thought I might hold on to win," said Alex Marquez. "Leading was not easy. I just tried to ride, not to override and not make mistakes."

"But he was able to not use a lot of rear tyre and I was using up everything."

Marc Marquez enjoyed a strong pre-season with the factory Ducati, having joined from Honda, and is strongly fancied to win a first world crown since 2019.



Ducati Lenovo Team's Marc Marquez celebrates with a trophy after winning the Thailand Grand Prix in Buriram yesterday. (Reuters)

"The last time I felt like this on a bike was at Jerez in 2020," he warned.

Marquez and two-time world champion Bagnaia have been hailed as a factory Ducati dream team but some observers have cautioned that the high-octane mix of two fast high-profile racers could prove too combustible. "I gave my all," said Bagnaia. "But Marc, he was playing with us all

day. So maximum ambition was to finish in P2 but we finished in P3.

"Honestly I tried, but I was like I was in the cinema watching," he added of the battling brothers in front of him. "I am not here to finish third. It was the maximum I could but I will never settle for third place. Next time I will try to be second and then first. "But I need to start work on my setup, on my bike, and close the gap to them."

Ogura, who came fourth in Saturday's sprint, put on a stunning performance on his main race debut to finish fifth for Trackhouse Aprilia, beating the factory Aprilia of Marco Bezzecchi, who was sixth.

Somkiat Chantra finished 18th as he made history by becoming the first Thai rider to take part in a MotoGP race. The start of the new MotoGP season was overshadowed by the absence of world champion Jorge Martin.

The Spaniard suffered broken bones in his right hand and left foot in a horror crash during pre-season testing in Malaysia and more fractures in training a week ago, needing further surgery. Aprilia said Martin would definitely miss the next race, in Argentina in mid-March, with no time frame put on his return to the grid.

**RESULTS**

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 26 laps in 39min 37.244sec, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Gresini Ducati) at 1.732sec, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 2.398, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/VR46 Ducati) 5.176, 5. Ai Ogura (JPN/Trackhouse Aprilia) 7.450, 6. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 14.967, 7. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda) 15.225, 8. Brad

Binder (RSA/Red Bull KTM) 19.929, 9. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Red Bull GASGAS KTM) 20.053, 10. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/VR46 Ducati) 21.546, 11. Jack Miller (AUS/Pramac Ducati) 22.315, 12. Luca Marini (ITA/Repsol Honda) 23.940, 13. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Gresini Ducati) 24.760, 14. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Pramac Ducati) 26.097, 15. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 26.456, 16. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Red Bull GASGAS KTM) 28.770, 17. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 31.095, 18. Somkiat Chantra (THA/Honda) 31.480, 19. Pedro Acosta (ESP/Red Bull KTM) 42.115, 20. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia) 46.827. The other competitors were not classified.

**Championships standings:**

1. Marc Marquez (ESP) 37 pts, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP) 29, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA) 23, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA) 18, 5. Ai Ogura (JPN) 17, 6. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA) 10, 7. Brad Binder (RSA) 10, 8. Johann Zarco (FRA) 9, 9. Enea Bastianini (ITA) 7, 10. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA) 6, 11. Jack Miller (AUS) 5, 12. Luca Marini (ITA) 4, 13. Fabio Quartararo (FRA) 4, 14. Pedro Acosta (ESP) 4, 15. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP) 3, 16. Miguel Oliveira (POR) 2, 17. Joan Mir (ESP) 1



MATCH REPORT

# Chakravarthy stars as India set up semi with Australia

‘It will be a great contest, looking forward to that. Hopefully we can stitch one towards us’

AFP  
Dubai

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy returned figures of 5-42 as India beat New Zealand by 44 runs yesterday to set up a semi-final clash with Australia in the Champions Trophy.

India won all three of their group matches to top Group A and will play the first semi-final of the 50-over tournament in Dubai tomorrow.

“Important to finish on a high,” India skipper Rohit Sharma said after the win.

“New Zealand are a good team who are playing some good cricket. Very important to get a good result, we played a perfect game,” Rohit added.

New Zealand will take on Group B winners South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday in the second semi-final.

India are playing all their matches at the Dubai International Stadium after they refused to tour hosts Pakistan, citing security concerns.

Rohit’s team lost the 2023 ODI World Cup final to Australia in Ahmedabad.

“Australia has a rich history of playing ICC tournaments well, but it is about us and what we want to do well on that particular day,” said Rohit.

“It will be a great contest, looking forward to that.

“Hopefully we can stitch one towards us.”

Australia and South Africa had to travel to Dubai from Pakistan despite not knowing if they would be playing there, as India were told ahead of the tournament they



India's Varun Chakravarthy (second right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Will Young during the ICC Champions Trophy match against New Zealand at the Dubai International Stadium in Dubai yesterday. **Right:** India's Shreyas Iyer plays a shot during his knock against New Zealand in Dubai yesterday. (AFP)

would play the first semi-final if they qualified no matter where they finished in the group. South Africa will now have to fly back to Pakistan ahead of their meeting with New Zealand.

Shreyas Iyer's 79 and a late 45 by Hardik Pandya steered India to 249-9 after being invited to bat first.

New Zealand pace bowler Matt Henry stood out with figures of 5-42 from his eight overs.

“The key for us was getting wickets in the powerplay, and that was good to see,” New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said. “Our next game is in Lahore where Henry will be massive.”

Player of the match Chakravar-



thy took his first ODI five-wicket haul in just his second match as India bowled out New Zealand for 205 in 45.3 overs despite a valiant 81 by Kane Williamson.

Williamson survived two dropped catches on 17 and 68 in his 120-ball knock before he finally fell, stumped off Axar Patel.

New Zealand lost Rachin Ravin-

dra early as Patel took a superb catch to dismiss the opener for six. Chakravarthy cut short Will Young's innings on 22 when he bowled him with a googly.

Williamson stood firm but could not find a long-term partner as Daryl Mitchell and Tom Latham were dismissed for 17 and 14 respectively.

India's spinners dominated in helpful conditions, as Kuldeep Yadav sent back Mitchell and Ravindra Jadeja trapped Latham lbw.

In between the two wickets, Williamson hit Jadeja for a boundary to raise his 47th ODI half-century but India kept taking wickets.

Earlier, India were in trouble at 30-3 when Virat Kohli, playing in his 300th one-day international, fell victim to a stunning one-handed catch from Glenn Phillips.

An airborne Phillips clung on to a fast-travelling ball at backward point to dismiss Kohli for 11 off Henry.

Kohli was left standing in disbelief before trudging off the ground to stunned silence.

Iyer and Patel, who made 42, put on 98 for the fourth wicket to rebuild the innings against a disciplined New Zealand attack.

Another stunning catch, this time by Williamson, who flung himself to his left at backward point to make a one-handed grab close to the ground, dismissed Jadeja for 16 off Henry.

Pandya struck four fours and two sixes in his run-a-ball innings to give India a total which proved to be enough.

## BRIEF SCORES

**India 249-9 in 50 overs** (S. Iyer 79, A. Patel 42, H. Pandya 45; M. Henry 5-42) **v New Zealand 205 all out in 45.3 overs** (K. Williamson 81, M. Santner 28; V. Chakravarthy 5-42) Result: India beat New Zealand by 44 runs

**Toss:** New Zealand

**1st semi-final:** India v Australia in Dubai tomorrow

**2nd semi-final:** New Zealand v South Africa in Lahore on Wednesday

## MYSTERY SPINNER CHAKRAVARTHY GIVES INDIA A 'GOOD HEADACHE'



India's Varun Chakravarthy celebrates with Virat Kohli after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Will Young in Dubai yesterday.

**Dubai:** Spinner Varun Chakravarthy emerged from the dugout to produce a match-winning display against New Zealand in his Champions Trophy debut yesterday while also leaving India with a “happy headache” ahead of the tournament’s knockout stage. Chakravarthy is considered a ‘mystery spinner’ for his bag of tricks that include off-break, leg-break, googly and the ‘carrom ball’ that he pushes with his knuckle. He was the player-of-the-series when India beat England 4-1 in a T20 series last month but has been warming the bench during the Champions Trophy being behind Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja in India’s spin pecking order.

Having already secured their semi-final place, India replaced seamer Harshit Rana and picked Chakravarthy, whose 5-42 in only his second ODI secured their 44-run win. “He has got something different about him, there’s no doubt about it,” India captain Rohit Sharma said. “So we just wanted to try and see what he can offer, and we saw he has a lot to offer.” India, who topped Group A with their third consecutive win, will face Australia in the first semi-final tomorrow and Rohit sounded unsure about the makeup of his spin attack for the match. “We got to think about what we want to do in the next game, but obviously (it’s) a good headache to have.

“Varun was class today. If he gets it right, it’s very difficult to read him.” New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said his side had not anticipated the wicket in Dubai to be so slow. However, he expected pacers from both sides to have more say in Wednesday’s second semi-final in Lahore against South Africa. “Our next game is in Lahore where (Matt) Henry will be massive,” Santner said of his pace spearhead, who claimed 5-42 against India. “On those wickets with some pace and bounce, they (South Africa) have four good pacers so we will have to see how we play them. “We have to wait and see if it is a used surface or a fresh one.”

## SPOTLIGHT

# South Africa’s Klaasen aims to be the best batsman in the world

Agencies  
Lahore

South Africa’s **Heinrich Klaasen** has been in top form lately, scoring fifties in his last five matches. But the wicketkeeper-batter has set his sights on a bigger goal during the Champions Trophy: to become the best in the world.

Klaasen, fourth in the ICC’s world rankings for batsmen in One-Day Internationals, scored 64 off 56 balls on Saturday to help South Africa qualify for the Champions Trophy semi-finals with a seven-wicket win over England.

“I gave myself a challenge with (South Africa head coach) Rob Walter this trip. I want to be the best in the world,” Klaasen told *Sky Sports* after the match in Karachi.

“I know I can play situations well and for me, just to keep hitting it on the ground for as long as possible, like I did tonight” is important.

“I’m quite pleased with my innings tonight... standing still and just trusting my technique. I know my swing is good, so as long as it clicks, then I’m quite happy.”



South Africa will play New Zealand in the semi-finals on Wednesday.

Meanwhile Anil Kumble feels that the variety offered by South Africa’s pace trio of Marco Jansen, Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi makes them the most complete attack for the not-always-bowler-friendly conditions seen in the Champions Trophy 2025.

“I think one good thing about South Africa is that all three of their fast bowlers that played today – of course Mulder is the one who bowls the middle periods – but if you look at the three tall fast bowlers, all of them are really tall. And all of them are different,”

Kumble said on *ESPNcricinfo’s* Match Day show.

“Their angles are very different. Rabada is very classical whereas Ngidi is pretty awkward to face with his action and Marco Jansen comes at such height. So all three are very different. So that’s the nature you want in a one-day. That’s the variation.

“Even on a flat track, it’s not easy for the batters to line up because all three are very different. And that’s something that South Africa can certainly feel [confident] they have this kind of a quality and also the variety going into the business end of the tournament,” Kumble said.

## FOCUS

# England coach McCullum backs Buttler for ‘huge role’ after captaincy exit

AFP  
Karachi

Coach Brendon McCullum backed Jos Buttler to play a big role for England after standing down as the team’s white-ball captain following a dismal Champions Trophy campaign.

England suffered a third straight defeat on Saturday, losing to South Africa by seven wickets after a limp display in Karachi to finish bottom of Group B and without a single point.

With their exit already confirmed, England slumped to 179 all out in 38.2 overs, with Joe Root making a top score of 37.

South Africa chased down the target in 29.1 overs for the loss of

three wickets as Rassie van der Dussen made an unbeaten 72 and Heinrich Klaasen added 64.

England went down by five wickets against Australia before losing to Afghanistan by eight runs.

Buttler made starts in each three of his innings – scoring a combined 82 runs – but couldn’t replicate the explosive form that has made him one of the most feared batters in white-ball cricket.

England have lost their last seven one-day internationals, winning only 18 of 45 with Buttler as captain, but McCullum said the 34-year-old remained a key member of a team in need of a rebuild.

“We still see Jos as obviously a big player within that and he’s got a huge role to play,” said McCullum, who took over as England’s

white-ball coach this year, combining the role with his existing Test duties.

“It will be an exciting time for a new captain to try and put their stamp on it.”

Harry Brook is the favourite to take over the captaincy, which Buttler had held since replacing Eoin Morgan in June 2022.

“I thought it was a brave decision to make and it gives us now an opportunity to be able to start to plot and plan our way forward,” said McCullum.

“He (Buttler) cared so much about it and he admittedly said that he wasn’t able to get the best out of the guys and was sad.”

McCullum, who is credited with overseeing England’s transition to an ultra-aggressive style in Test cricket, said it was time to look

ahead. “We weren’t good enough, obviously very disappointed so now we will put our thinking caps on and start to try and navigate our way through what an improvement looks like,” he said.

“We need to work out a way that we can get ourselves back to where we should be.”

McCullum praised fast bowler Jofra Archer, who took six wickets across three matches in the tournament, as he showed glimpses of his best following a gruelling road back to international cricket.

“I think if we look at Jof, he’s been out of competitive cricket for a couple of years (with injury), and I think it’s taken probably just a little bit of time to get that rhythm of gameplay back. I think he’s been really good. He’s bowled high pace, he’s played a lot of cricket



England's Jamie Overton with Jos Buttler (left) during their ICC Champions Trophy match against South Africa at National Stadium, Karachi, Pakistan, on Saturday. (Reuters)

and we’ve seen moments of how great Jofra is.” England next host

the West Indies for three ODIs and three T20Is from May 29.



TENNIS

# Machac secures maiden career ATP trophy in Mexico

Machac, ranked 25 in the world, beat Alejandro Davidovich Fokina

Reuters  
Acapulco, Mexico

Czech Republic's Tomas Machac won his first title on the ATP tour on Saturday, beating Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-6(6) 6-2 in the final of the Mexican Open.

Eighth seed Machac, who won gold in mixed doubles at the Paris Olympics, became the third player from his country to win an ATP 500 title, following Tomas Berdych and Radek Stepanek.

"It feels amazing," Machac said after lifting the silver gourd-shaped trophy.

Machac, ranked 25th in the world, was the superior player on the serve, landing seven aces through a tightly contested first set where neither player could get a break.

Spain's Davidovich Fokina was on the verge of winning the set when he led 6-5 in the tiebreaker, but Machac held his nerve to win the next three points and claim the set.

The 24-year-old stepped up in the second set, getting the first break of the match to go up 3-2. Davidovich Fokina struggled to keep up as Machac won every subsequent game to seal the victory.

Machac, who beat Novak Djokovic in last year's Geneva Open to reach his first tour final, where



Czech Republic's Tomas Machac celebrates with the trophy after winning his final match against Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina at the Mexican Open. (AFP)

he lost to Casper Ruud, fell to his back after securing the championship point in Acapulco as Davidovich Fokina's return got stuck in the net.

"Congratulations for your first title," Davidovich Fokina told Machac at the presentation ceremony.

"I don't know how you feel right now. I never won a title. But for sure it feels amazing."

The Spaniard has now lost three finals on the tour, including at the Delray Beach Open earlier this month. Machac thanked his coach Daniel Vacek for helping him stay calm through the tense

contest. "I was sometimes very tough on him, I speak very loudly (to) him during the matches," Machac said. "But I told him two weeks ago that I sometimes struggle with big matches and I don't know how to manage these situations but then I won... I will try to speak more often."

SPOTLIGHT

## Two silver medals for Qatar golfers at GCC meet

The Qatar golf players won two silver medals in the team and individual categories of the 27th edition of the GCC Men's Golf Championship held at the Royal Greens Golf Club in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The Qatar team finished second in the team competition, won by UAE while Bahrain finished third. In the men's individual competition, Qatar's Daniel Sokolov claimed the second place on the podium.

UAE's Ahmed Skaik won the gold while his compatriot Jonathan Selvaraj took the bronze.

Mohammed Ibrahim al-Mohannadi, Assistant Secretary-General of Qatar Golf Association and Head of the National Team's Mission in Saudi Arabia, praised the results achieved by the Qatar players in the championship, noting that the event is one of the strongest competitions in the region and witnesses the participation of elite players from all Gulf countries.



BOXING

## Davis retains the WBA title after a majority draw

AFP  
New York

Unbeaten American Gervonta Davis retained his World Boxing Association (WBA) lightweight world title with a majority draw against battling challenger Lamont Roach in Brooklyn on Saturday.

Davis, who had won 28 of his prior 30 fights by knockout, was taken to the limit by WBA super-featherweight world champ Roach in an action-packed all-

American bout at the Barclays Center. Two judges scored it 114-114 while a third gave it to Davis 115-113 - but controversy erupted over the referee's failure to call it a knockdown when the champion took a knee in the ninth round. Davis, who then stuck his head through the ropes to have his face towelled off, said he stopped because oil from his hair got in his eye. He chided fans for booing when he offered that explanation in the ring after the bout. "They love you and then they hate you," he said.

Roach, one of the few fighters

who has tested Davis, took the fight to the champion, weathering a stream of punishing blows and responding in kind.

"I'm one of the best fighters in the world, man, and it showed tonight," Roach said in the ring. "He probably wasn't wailing when he said grease got in his eye, but if you voluntarily take a knee and the ref's not counting that's a knockdown. If that's a knockdown, I win the fight," he added, calling for a rematch.

"I want to run it back," said Roach, who fell to 25-1 with 2 drawn and 10 knockouts.

On the undercard, Dominican Alberto Puello beat Spain's Sandor Martin by split decision to retain his World Boxing Council super lightweight world title.

After 12 rounds of relentless action, two judges gave it to Puello by scores of 115-113 and 116-112 while the third saw it 113-115 for Martin. Puello remained unbeaten with 24 victories, 10 by knockout.

Martin fell to 42-3 with 15 knockouts, but he gave Puello all he could handle in the early rounds, landing damaging punches to the body.

ANNOUNCEMENT

## QSL, ICSS join hands to organise sports integrity workshop via video

The Qatar Stars League (QSL), in association with International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS), organised a two-day sports integrity workshop via video communication technology with the participation of players and officials of Ooredoo Stars League and Second Division clubs.

ences and exchanged their expertise on the topic during the seminar that shed more light on various aspects of match-fixing awareness as well as the importance of integrity and fair play in the game. The workshop came in line with QSL's efforts to help clubs meet Asian Football Confederation's requirements and prerequisites.



The Football Integrity unit of QSL, headed by its CEO Hani Taleb Ballan, and his ICSS counterpart Massimiliano Montanari oversaw the workshop, which mainly focused on raising awareness of match fixing for First and Second Division clubs.

Former football players from outside Qatar shared their experi-

It may be recalled that QSL, in its keenness to maintain the highest standards of integrity in football, had joined hands with ICSS last year too by organising a similar workshop on the dangers and harms of tampering with results of matches, which would have serious repercussions on competition in football.

FOCUS

## Takele wins Tokyo Marathon as Cheptegei finishes in ninth spot



Ethiopia's Tadesse Takele finishes in first place to win the men's category of the Tokyo Marathon in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Tokyo

Ethiopia's Tadesse Takele won the Tokyo Marathon in a time of 2hr 3min 23sec yesterday as Uganda's double Olympic track champion Joshua Cheptegei finished ninth.

Takele broke clear of the pack with around 4km to go in warm conditions to claim his first major marathon title, shaving a second off his previous personal best.

Ethiopia's Deressa Geleta was second in 2:03:51, with Kenya's Vincent Kipkemoi Ngetich third in 2:04:00.

"The weather wasn't a problem, it wasn't too hot and for me it was comfortable," said Takele.

"The course was good and this was a great day for me. In the future, I hope to run even better than I did today."

Ethiopia's Sutume Asefa Kebede defended her title in the women's race, finishing in 2:16:31.

Kenya's Winfridah Moraa Moseti was second in 2:16:56, with Ethiopia's Hawi Feysa third in 2:17:00.

Cheptegei, who won gold in

both the Tokyo Olympics 5,000m in 2021 and the 10,000m in Paris last year, was running his second marathon after making his debut at the distance in Valencia two years ago.

The 28-year-old finished in a time of 2:05:59.

"I'm so grateful today that I came to Tokyo," said Cheptegei.

"There are some good positives to take home and prepare for another step forward."

Cheptegei said he struggled with the unseasonably warm Tokyo weather, with temperatures reaching 20C (68F) by the end of the race.

"Regardless, I'm not complaining," said Cheptegei.

"I'm really satisfied with the result and it can be a build-up for next season."

Paris Olympics marathon bronze medallist Benson Kipruto of Kenya, last year's Tokyo champion, was sixth in 2:05:46.

Former women's world record-holder Paula Radcliffe, who was running her first marathon in 10 years at the age of 51, finished in a time of 2:57:26. Britain's Radcliffe also plans to run the Boston Marathon next month.



The medal winners in the women's marathon in Tokyo yesterday - Sutume Asefa Kebede (gold) of Ethiopia, Winfridah Moraa Moseti (silver) of Kenya and Hawi Feysa (bronze) of Ethiopia - pose for a group photograph. (@TokyoMarathon\_E)

## Lydia Ko cards a 69, wins first HSBC Women's World Championship

**Singapore:** Lydia Ko shot a final-round 69 to win her first HSBC Women's World Championship in 11 appearances yesterday in Singapore. For Ko, who had five birdies and three bogeys on the Tanjong course at Sentosa Golf Club, it's her 23rd career LPGA Tour victory. She finished the tournament with a 13-under 275. Ayake Furue of Japan (68) and Jeeno Thitikul of Thailand (70) tied for second place, four shots back of Ko. Furue started the day tied for seventh, and for Thitikul, this was her 10th consecutive top-10 finish. Charley Hull of England entered the round one shot back of Ko but finished with a 74, leaving her six strokes off the pace and in a

three-way tie with Gaby Lopez (70) of Mexico and Jin Hee Im (67) of South Korea for fourth place. With the win and the \$360,000 payday, Ko, of New Zealand, passed Karrie Webb to move into second place on the career official money list at \$20.6mn, leaving her about \$2mn behind leader Annika Sorenstam. At 27, Ko already is a member of the LPGA Hall of Fame but had been left disappointed by the results of this tournament in the past. "I dreamt last night that I won but then I woke up, and I was like, dang, it's not real yet," she said after the match. "But I just wanted to focus on my game, and it was a pretty tight leaderboard." Ko's confidence grew after playing the first five holes at par, then recording birdies on

Nos 6 through 8 to move to 13 under. "I started off really steady, and you know, didn't really put myself in trouble that much," she said. "I think that was going to be the key for today. I felt a lot better coming into this event than a few weeks ago but I don't know that I would win. But to win here in Singapore and get all the love, not only this year but for the years that I've come, it means a lot." Equally pleased with the result was Furue, whose best start this season had been a T13. "I'm very happy with this outcome because this year, I'm not playing well until this tournament," she said. "So I'm very happy with that." A Lim Kim of South Korea, who led after the first two rounds, followed Saturday's round of 73 with a 72 yesterday to finish in a four-way tie for seventh place at 6 under.



HORSE RACING

# Chrome bounces back to win Ras Mlaiji Cup

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Chrome returned to winning ways with a strong performance in the Ras Mlaiji Cup at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC)'s Al Rayyan Racecourse on Saturday.

The eight-year-old gelding, owned by Abdulla Abdulmonem Mohammed al-Ibrahim and trained by Hadi al-Ramzani, showed his resilience under jockey Jefferson Smith, delivering a well-timed run to secure a well-earned half a length victory over Engineer Osama Omer F al-Dafea-owned and trained Za'eer Al Shahania in the Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-85) for four-year-old+ and completed a double in the evening for the trainer.

Chrome last won the race on April 24, 2024, when the geld-

ing claimed the Purebred Arabian Handicap 60-80 (Class 4) during the Al Jumayliyah Cup meeting.

Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, crowned the winners.

Earlier, trainer al-Ramzani was in the winners' circle when jockey Soufiane Saadi guided Mohammed Nasser R A al-Naimi-owned Akmar to a two and a half lengths victory in the Purebred Arabian Handicap (60-80) for four-year-old+. Basheer Al Shahania in the colours of Sheikhha Reem bint Mohammed bin Khalifa al-Thani won the 1,900m contest for the Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate for the five-year-old+.

Jockey Lukas Delozier guided the Rudy Nerbonne-trained horse to a comfortable two-length victory in the penultimate race of the day.

In the card opener, Rumailah Stud's Necessitate registered a



Connections of Chrome celebrate after the gelding won the Ras Mlaiji Cup. PICTURE: Juhaïm

convincing three and a quarter lengths win in the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate for the 4-6-year-olds in the 1,900m contest.

**RESULTS**  
**18th Al Uqda Race Meeting - Ras Mlaiji Cup**  
**WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer,**

**Jockey)**  
**1 - Ras Mlaiji Cup - Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 65-85 (Class 4)**  
Chrome, Hadi al-Ramzani,

Jefferson Smith  
**2 - Purebred Arabian Graduation Plate (Class 4)**  
Basheer Al Shahania, Rudy Andre Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier  
**3 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 60-80 (Class 4)**  
Akmar, Hadi al-Ramzani, Soufiane Saadi  
**4 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 40-60 (Class 4)**  
Nadira, Julian Colin Smart, Alberto Sanna  
**5 - Thoroughbred Handicap 55-75 (Class 5)**  
Morning Vietnam, Gassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**6 - Thoroughbred Handicap 45-65 (Class 6)**  
Beat The Clock, Mohammed Ghazali, Maxim Bozzio  
**7 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6)**  
Necessitate, Rashid al-Jehani, Tomas Lukasek.

LA LIGA

# Barcelona thrash Real Sociedad to reclaim top spot

'I'M HAPPY FOR THE GOOD WORK WE DID AND GOING FIRST AGAIN'

AFP  
Barcelona

Barcelona secured a comfortable 4-0 win over Real Sociedad yesterday to move back top of La Liga.

Aritz Elustondo's early red card gave Hansi Flick's side a comfortable afternoon with Gerard Martin, Marc Casado, Ronald Araujo and Robert Lewandowski on the scoresheet.

Athletico Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao on Saturday to temporarily knock the Catalans from their perch, while Real Madrid, third, lost at Real Betis.

Flick was able to rotate his side a little ahead of the Champions League last 16 visit to face Benfica on Wednesday and still move one point above Atletico.

"There were a lot of things that helped us a lot today, the red card but also how we played, we were dominant after the red card," Flick told reporters.

The German coach said before the game Barca would fight hard to win all of the three major competitions they are in, and reiterated it afterwards.

"Today we are happy with the three points and there's a long way to go in La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the Champions League," he continued.

"We will fight for every title and when we started the season no-one (expected) this.

"We're in this situation, that we can fight (for the trophies), and



Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski celebrates with teammate Ronald Federico Araujo da Silva after scoring a goal during the La Liga match against Real Sociedad in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

that's what we want until the end of the season."

Real Sociedad, ninth, threatened in the opening stages but fell foul of Barcelona's offside trap, with Sergio Gomez's strike ruled out. At the other end Barcelona playmaker Pedri Gonzalez came close when he pressed La Real goalkeeper Alex Remiro and deflected his attempted clearance just over and onto the roof of the net.

The game swung Barcelona's way when Elustondo was sent off in the 17th minute for pulling

down Dani Olmo, who was running through on goal.

The hosts took the lead after 25 minutes when Olmo chipped the ball across for Martin to fire home the first goal of his career.

Four minutes later, Barca had their second, with Olmo involved again, this time his wayward shot deflected home by team-mate Casado. The enterprising Lamine Yamal teed up Pedri but Remiro saved his shot from the edge of the box as Barca dominated.

Pedri came close again after the break with an effort from range

which bounced back off the crossbar, shortly before Araujo nabbed the third.

Remiro pushed out Lewandowski's header from corner but Araujo nodded home the rebound.

Lewandowski cleverly converted Barcelona's fourth, prod-ding home Araujo's low drive from distance. The 36-year-old leads the league with 21 goals in 25 appearances. "I'm very happy for our performance and it was important to win and go back to being leaders," Araujo told Movistar.

"I'm happy for the good work we did and going first again."

Since recovering from a bad knee injury, Araujo has been unable to reclaim a regular starting spot in defence.

"I came back from a long-term injury, I'm calm and going step by step, I believe in myself and my characteristics, and I am happy to help," said Araujo.

"I think it is important to have a competitive team to win titles, not just 11 players but a good bench too."

Barcelona played out the final half an hour without incident, occasionally threatening, with substitute Ferran Torres twice coming close to a fifth. "The red card, after that the game changed completely, we came here to try and dominate the ball," said Real Sociedad defender Javi Lopez.

"A sending off changes everything... they also had luck on their goals and that makes it very difficult against one of the best teams in the world."

SERIE A

# Ranieri's Roma revival continues with narrow Como win

AFP  
Milan

Roma continued their revival under Claudio Ranieri yesterday with a 2-1 win over 10-man Como which kept the capital club in touch with Serie A's European places.

Goals in the second half from substitutes Alexis Saelemaekers and Artem Dovbyk turned an entertaining match in Roma's favour and put them in eighth place.

Roma are four points behind Bologna who sit sixth - in the division's Conference League spot - after beating Cagliari 2-1 earlier on Sunday.

An eighth win in 11 league matches put Ranieri's team one place and two points above troubled AC Milan ahead of the seven-time European champions' match with Lazio at the San Siro.

Roma looked in danger of relegation when Ranieri took charge in November but they haven't lost in Serie A since falling at Como in mid-December and their form has been such that the 73-year-old was named the division's manager of the month for February.

Como, who took the lead just before half-time at the Stadio Olimpico through Lucas Da Cunha, will feel hard done by after performing well all evening, even after Marc Kempf was sent off for two bookable offences in the 63rd minute.

Cesc Fabregas' side somehow managed to not level two minutes before the end when Mergim Vojvoda hit the post and Patrick Cutrone shot straight at Mile Svilar on the rebound. However ambitious Como have been excellent since the turn of the year and should stay up as they sit six points above the relegation zone in 13th place.

## KIEL BEAT UNION BERLIN IN BUNDESLIGA BASEMENT CLASH

Berlin: Holstein Kiel boosted their slim chances of avoiding the drop with a 1-0 win away at fellow strugglers Union Berlin yesterday.

Kiel's Armin Gigovic scored the only goal, finding the net after 43 minutes.

Gigovic collected a pass from Shuto Machino on the turn and slotted home from close range to give the Storks the lead in the German capital.

Phil Harres had the ball in the net for Kiel with 61 minutes gone, but the strike was ruled out for offside.

The loss was the latest setback in a bad week for Union.

On Friday, Union lost an appeal against a DFB decision to strip them of a point - and award Bochum all three - from a 1-1 draw at home in December.

Bochum, who like Union are battling to avoid the drop, were awarded a nominal 2-0 victory after their goalkeeper was hit in the head by a lighter thrown by a member of the Berlin crowd.

Kiel's victory, just their fourth of the season, lifted the promoted side off the bottom of the table, one point behind Bochum who occupy the relegation playoff spot.

The Berliners sit two spots and seven points ahead of Kiel, with 10 games remaining. Playing in the Champions League against Real Madrid and Napoli just last season, Union have now won just two of their past 17 games.

(AFP)

MOTORSPORT

# QDRC second round concludes with 16 new winners

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Amidst strong competition and a high level of excitement and challenge on the drag strip at Qatar Racing Club (QRC), the second round of the Qatar Drag Race Championship (QDRC) concluded with great success.

The event was held under the generous sponsorship of QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani. The round saw the participation of over 150 competitors, who competed in 8 categories, six for cars and two for bikes. Only the Kuwaiti Mohammed Bo Rashid managed to retain the title he won in the opening round. The round saw 16 new winners across all categories.

The Index categories, which compete over a quarter-mile distance and include 4 categories, saw entirely new champions crowned in the second round. In the (INDEX 10.00) category, despite



All the winners of the second round of the QDRC celebrate on the podium.

last round's champion Hisham al-Awadi reaching the final race, which he competed against Hussein al-Balushi, al-Awadi settled for second place in this round while al-Balushi won his first title. A similar scenario occurred with Hamdan al-Kaabi in the (INDEX 8.5) category. He was the champi-

on in the opening round, but after reaching the final race, he had to settle for second place after losing the final to Mustafa Atat, who claimed his maiden championship title. The final race in the INDEX 9.00 saw a highly competitive and exciting showdown between competitors Rumaih Jassim and Badr

al-Fodari, with Jassim coming out on top to win his first title, while al-Fodari finished in second place.

The motorcycle category, competing over a quarter-mile in the (INDEX 8.50) category, also featured an entirely new podium. Abdullah al-Ansari took first place after defeating Mohammed Ali in

the final, who had to settle for second place. The youngest competitor in the championship, Yusuf al-Darwish, secured third place on the podium.

Only Mohammed Bo Rashid was able to retain his title from the opening round, increasing his title count to two. The second round featured a final race between him and Mohammed al-Salem, repeating the final from the previous round, which had also featured the same competitors.

While al-Salem aimed to settle the score with Bou Rashid in this round, the latter reaffirmed his dominance, leaving al-Salem with second place on the podium.

The INDEX 4.50 category saw an entirely new podium, with Mohammed al-Awad being crowned champion after reaching the final race, where he defeated his competitor Abdulaziz al-Saleh, who had to settle for second place.

The third spot went to Saeed al-Balushi. In the (INDEX 4.80) category, the final race was between competitors Yusuf Adel

al-Khamiri and Nawaf Mesier al-Khalidi. Neither of them had previously made it to the podium in the past round. In this round, al-Khamiri claimed his first-ever victory, leaving al-Khalidi in second place.

As for the most powerful category in the championship, the Super Street category, the third-place prize was withheld, as only two competitors reached the semifinals and advanced to the final: Badr al-Sharshani and Turki al-Dhufairi. Al-Dhufairi emerged victorious, securing his first win in the championship and his second podium finish after taking third place in the previous round. Meanwhile, al-Sharshani recorded his first podium finish of the season by securing second place.

QRC Head of Operations Jassim al-Emadi crowned the top three finishers in each category. The third round will begin on Thursday with the first and second qualifying sessions, followed by the third session on Friday before the elimination rounds begin.