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**QATAR ARC TRIALS**

# Ch'ezza claims Gr1 PA Qatar Cup at ParisLongchamp

Bluestocking was also victorious after the four-year-old filly clinches the Gr1 Qatar Prix Vermeille



Sheikh Ali bin Jassim al-Thani, ambassador of Qatar to France, presented the trophies to connections of Ch'ezza, which won the Qatar Cup - Prix Dragon and Bluestocking, which claimed the Qatar Prix Vermeille yesterday.

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

**A**bdulla bin Fahad al-Attiah-owned Ch'ezza won the Qatar Cup - Prix Dragon (Group 1 PA) title at the Qatar-sponsored Qatar Arc Trials Day at ParisLongchamp in France yesterday.

Juddmonte's Bluestocking was also victorious winning the Gr1 Qatar Prix Vermeille with connections of both the races being crowned by ambassador of Qatar to France Sheikh Ali bin Jassim al-Thani.

Both races are the final rehearsals for the Qatar Arabian World Cup (Gr1 PA) and the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe (Gr1) to be run at the same course in a few weeks.

Sheikh Ali also honoured the winners of the Gr2 Qatar Prix Foy, which was taken by the Bertrand Milliere-owned Iresine, the Gr2 Qatar Prix Niel, which was won by Wertheimer & Frere's Sosie, the Gr 3 Qatar Prix du Pin, which was won by the Hisaaki Saito-owned Topgear and the Gr 3 Qatar-Prix Du Petit Couvert which was won by the Stal Vie En Rose-owned Pradaro. The day had nine races on the card and six of them were group contests. All nine contests were marked by the name of Qatar.

Yesterday, the six-year-old Ch'ezza continued to show his top class level by landing the Gr.1 (PA) Qatar Cup - Prix Dragon. With Maxime Guyon in the saddle, the François Rohaut trained was making his return to the track for the first time

this year. He was last seen in December when finished third of the Gr.1 (PA) Jewel Crown at Abu Dhabi.

With the favourite Al Wakrah (TM Fred Texas) making a good pace early on, Ch'ezza was patiently ridden in second last. Going well in the turn for home, the top class colt did not have to force his talent to win and beat Nabucco Al Maury (Assy) by one and a quarter lengths.

The Gr.1 Qatar Prix Vermeille went the way of the four-year-old filly Bluestocking (Camelot) who landed the 2400m contest Arc Trial.

After a good effort against the colts in the Gr.1 Juddmonte International Stakes at York on last outing, the Juddmonte-owned & bred filly improved again by landing a second Gr.1 success to her profile. Trained by Ralph Beckett, the homebred filly was ridden by Rossa Ryan and has now her ticket for the Arc.

Bluestocking tracked the pacemaker Halfday (Lope De Vega) who led at an even pace. Grabbing the lead entering the final straight, the British-trained filly was momentarily headed by Aventure (Sea The Stars) but rallied inside the final 150m to win by three quarter of a length.

Aventure was an excellent second while Emily Upjohn (Sea The Stars) ran a super race in third.

**TOPGEAR BACK TO WINNING WAYS**

Runner-up of the Gr.3 Barriere Prix Quincey at Deauville on return, the five-year-old Topgear (Wootton Bassett) land-



Maxime Guyon rides Ch'ezza to Qatar Cup - Prix Dragon victory at ParisLongchamp.

ed the day's opening race, the Gr.3 Qatar Prix du Pin. Owned by Hisaaki Saito and trained by Christopher Head, Topgear is now a dual Gr.3 winner.

With loyal partner Stephane Pasquier in the saddle, the French-trained colt was on the girth of the early leader Mount Athos (Dark Angel). Travelling well into the home straight, the experienced colt quickened nicely to win and beat Ten Bob Tony (Night Of Thunder) by two lengths. Darl Trooper ran a big race to finish third from last.

Sporting the colours of Bertrand Mil-

liere, the seven-year-old, Iresine (Manduro) landed the Gr.2 Qatar Prix Foy. Trained by Jean-Pierre Gauvin and ridden with by Marie Velon, the high class gelding won this race for the second time.

With the ballydoyle short price favourite Continuous (Heart's Cry) in the lead, Iresine was surprisingly racing more prominent than usual in second.

Once the pace lifted, the son of Manduro easily passed the early leader but had to maintain his effort to hold on the late challenge of Zarir (Frankel) who was only

beaten by a short head in second. Continuous was a clear third.

**SOSIE WINS QATAR PRIX NIEL**  
After winning the Gr.1 Grand Prix de Paris when last seen, the superb colt Sosie (Sea The Stars) took the Gr.2 Qatar Prix Niel.

Owned and bred by Wertheimer & Frere, the three-year-old is trained by Andre Fabre and is now joint-favourite, with Look De Vega, to win the Arc.

Ridden by Maxime Guyon who makes it a double on the card, Sosie travelled in second in a race led by the well fancied Look De Vega (Lope De Vega). With Look De Vega increasing the pace from the false straight, Sosie was gently closing and soon headed the leader at the beginning of the home straight. The homebred colt won by one and half lengths. Delius (Frankel) went second while Look De Vega took third.

Meanwhile, after showing a model of consistency, the nine-year-old Pradaro (Penny's Picnic) landed the Gr.3 Prix du Petit Couvert.

Owned by Stal Vie En Rose and trained by Sofie Lanslots, Pradaro, who was the veteran of the race, showed his best foot to land a second Group success.

In front with three other contenders, the consistent gelding got a bit outpaced over 400m out but rallied gamely to lead close home and win by a short head with Aurelien Lemaitre in the saddle. Electric Storm (Night Of Thunder) was a brave second while Rogue Lightning (Kodiac) was a very close third.

**FOOTBALL**

## Sadd, Gharafa open AFC Champions League Elite campaign today

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

**A**l Sadd will face a formidable challenge when they take on Al Ain in their AFC Champions League Elite opener today at 7pm the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain.

Al Ain will be seeking to create more history. Winners of the inaugural edition of the AFC Champions League in 2003, the Emirati side brought the curtains down on the prestigious tournament by lifting the trophy again in its final season and will leave no stone unturned in their bid to be the first victors of the AFC Champions League Elite.

Hernan Crespo's side will be determined to hit the ground running despite the domestic season still in its infancy stage. While the Emirati club started their season with four points from two matches, history is against them as they are winless against sides from Qatar in their last six games on the continental stage.

Al Sadd, however, will go into the tie having lost 3-1 to Umm Salal on Friday in the Qatar Stars League, their second defeat in four matches. The reigning Qatar champions have also not won their last five opening matches on the continental stage, with four of them ending in draws.

But coach Felix Sanchez was confident his side will get off to a good start this time. "We are looking forward to a positive start in the prestigious competition. Our preparations were short but all the players are excited and determined to give a good show," Sanchez said yesterday.

"Al Ain are a very strong side having a good coach and players. It is going to be a big challenge in front of their home fans. But we also have a good side and we are confident of giving our best," the Spaniard added.

Meanwhile, Al Gharafa will open their campaign in Iran against Esteghlal at 9pm today. Both teams will be desperate to shake off their inconsistent form as they have struggled to get going domestically and will have to find their best form if they

are to hit the ground running at the Shahr-e Qods Stadium. Esteghlal will hope to make home ground advantage count, with the two meeting for the first time since they clashed in the group stage of the AFC Champions League in 2010.

Esteghlal won the home tie then 3-0 but the Iran side have only triumphed once in their last seven opening matches on the continental stage. Al Gharafa were held 1-1 by Al Shamal in their Qatar Stars League tie on Friday, the result taking them to five points from four matches.

They will, however, draw on the high of having defeated UAE side Shabab Al Ahli in the preliminary stage to get a result against their Iranian opponents.

The Champions League Elite is a new format that splits 24 teams evenly into two groups of East and West. Each team will play eight different opponents in the group stage. The top eight teams from each zone will play in the last 16 over two legs in March, before the action moves to the final stages in Saudi Arabia from April 25 to May 4.



Coach Felix Sanchez was confident Al Sadd will get off to a good start against Al Ain.

FORMULA ONE

# Piastri victorious in Baku as McLaren grab points lead

Piastri wins Azerbaijan GP from second on the grid as McLaren go 20 points clear of Red Bull



McLaren's Australian driver Oscar Piastri (also inset) steers his car during the Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku yesterday. **Right:** Oscar Piastri celebrates after winning the race. (AFP/Reuters)

Reuters  
Baku

Oscar Piastri won the Azerbaijan Grand Prix as McLaren went top of the constructors' standings in a race that finished with a virtual safety car after a penultimate lap collision between Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and Red Bull's Sergio Perez.

Max Verstappen finished fifth, just behind his closest title rival Lando Norris, who started 15th for McLaren and ended up fourth with a bonus point for fastest lap.

"That was probably the most stressful afternoon in my life," said Piastri, after soaking up relentless pressure from Leclerc to take his second career win.

"It definitely goes down as one of the better races of my career." Triple champion Verstappen's lead over Norris, who went long on his first stint with hard tyres and then reeled in a 15 second gap to pass the Dutch driver on lap 49 thanks to his fresher mediums, was cut from 62 points to 59.

McLaren are now 20 points clear of Red Bull in the standings with

seven Grands Prix and three sprint races remaining.

Leclerc led away from the start, and was six seconds clear before the first pitstops, but his fourth successive pole in Baku was destined to end in defeat like the previous three.

Piastri was first of the two to change tyres, on lap 16 with Norris crucially preventing Perez from getting an advantage from an earlier stop, and Leclerc followed him down the pit lane a lap later.

The Australian then made a great passing move on Leclerc at turn one but the battle was just heating up.

The top two duelled for lap after lap, with the Ferrari driver trying in vain to use the DRS drag reduc-

tion to get past Piastri who had the benefit of clean air as he defended tenaciously but fairly.

Time and again Leclerc tried but just fell short on a circuit with long and fast straights along the shores of the Caspian Sea but tight and twisty turns through the old town.

**Couldn't get close**

"I couldn't get as close as I wanted and eventually we lost the race when I didn't defend as well as I could have at the end of the straight," said Leclerc.

"Sometimes you make mistakes and I'll learn from it," Leclerc told reporters.

Piastri eventually pulled clear to win by 10.910 seconds while Leclerc fell into the clutches of

Perez and Sainz, with a dramatic sting in the tail. Perez tried and failed to pass Leclerc on the penultimate lap, opening the door for Sainz to breeze past the Mexican and into third at turn one.

As the Red Bull driver tried to get the place back at turn two, the cars collided and went into the wall in a shunt that effectively ended the race with the virtual safety car deployed to the finish.

"What happened there?," exclaimed Sainz, with Perez asking the same thing in more colourful language. Both were summoned to the stewards, who decided to take no further action.

Fernando Alonso was sixth for Aston Martin with Williams benefiting from the late crash to see

Alex Albon finish seventh with Argentine rookie Franco Colapinto following him home in eighth.

The points windfall catapulted Williams above Renault-owned Alpine and into eighth place overall.

Seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton was ninth for Mercedes, after starting in the pit lane due to a power unit change, and British rookie Oliver Bearman collected the final point for Haas as a stand-in for suspended Kevin Magnussen.

Bearman has now scored points for two different teams in his two races after making his race debut with Ferrari as a stand-in for appendicitis-stricken Sainz in March.

CRICKET

# Brook to replace injured Buttler as England skipper

AFP  
London

Harry Brook is set to captain England for the first time in the upcoming one-day international (ODI) series against Australia after Jos Buttler's persistent calf injury ruled him out, team management announced yesterday.

Buttler has not played a competitive match since defending champions England lost a T20 World Cup semi-final against India in Guyana in June. He has been now forced to miss both a three-match T20 series with Australia, which concludes Sunday, and the subsequent five-game ODI contest with England's arch-rivals.

Brook has only 15 caps in ODI cricket, but England already regard him as a future long-term leader, with the 25-year-old Yorkshire batsman having captained their youth side at the 2018 Under-19 World Cup.

He deputised as Yorkshire captain for four matches in the T20 Blast in 2022 and led Northern Superchargers in the Hundred this year, winning five out of six completed matches at the helm as they narrowly missed out on the knockout stages. Brook also served as Ollie Pope's vice-captain during England's recent 2-1 Test series win over Sri Lanka.

His appointment as ODI captain means England will have deployed a new skipper in all three international formats this season.

Pope took over as Test captain from Ben Stokes when the all-rounder's hamstring in-



jury meant he missed the whole of the Sri Lanka series, with Phil Salt leading the T20 side after Buttler was sidelined.

"It's going to be a great opportunity for Brooky to be the captain," Buttler told Sky Sports. "He is a pretty laid-back character, but I think he has everything in line. He is a really good thinker about it... I'm sure he'll do that his own way, and he'll get a feel for those moments (in games)." Buttler, aiming for an England return during their November tour of the Caribbean, said of his recovery from injury: "It's a bit slower than hoped. I'm going to be missing the ODI series as well, so that's a shame. But at my age, I've just got to make sure I get it right... There's lots to look forward to in the future."

After England's woeful defences of both their 50-over and T20 world titles, questions were asked over whether Buttler should continue to carry the triple burden of captaining, keeping wicket and opening the batting in white-ball internationals.

He confirmed yesterday he would not have been behind the stumps had he been fit for the T20s, following discussions with incoming limited-overs coach Brendon McCullum - already in charge of England's Test side and himself a former New Zealand wicketkeeper-batsman.

"Having spoken to Baz (McCullum) about it, he stumbled across it with injury preventing him from keeping wicket, but then he really enjoyed being next to the bowler at mid-off," Buttler said.

He added: "I just want what's best for the team: what's best for the team is going to be me being the best captain I can be, and if I have to move from behind the wickets to do that then so be it."

Josh Hull, the 20-year-old left-arm fast bowler who made his Test debut in the Sri Lanka series finale at the Oval earlier this month, had been due to be a member of the 50-over squad but has suffered a quad injury and will rest ahead of next month's trip to Pakistan.

Liam Livingstone, initially dropped from the ODI squad, has been recalled after two notable performances in a T20 campaign against Australia currently level at 1-1 ahead of Sunday's decider in Manchester.

RUGBY

# DRFC begins West Asia Premiership journey with Bahrain friendly



The Doha Rugby Football Centre (DRFC) kicked off their West Asia Premiership (WAP) campaign this weekend with a pre-season friendly game against Bahrain Rugby Football Club (RFC).

A squad of 18 players, led by head rugby coach Elliot Johnston, travelled to Bahrain for the season opener, ready to make their mark in the WAP competition.

Commenting on the game, which saw Bahrain RFC win 36-0, Johnston said: "It was a very worthwhile trip to assess where we stand after our four-week pre-season block. It also serves as a good segue into our local league competition, which starts on Thursday.

"The boys really stepped up. The game could've gotten away from us, but we managed to restrict Bahrain. We have a few areas to focus on in the coming weeks - particularly our set pieces - but we're very much looking forward to a competitive season."

Martin de Torres, captain of the first XV, added: "Games against Bahrain are never easy, but I think the boys really rose to the challenge - and it was great to see a few players make their debut. The game was physical, and we did well to stay in it.

"It was a good test for us, and playing against a team like Bahrain shows us the standard we need

to be at to compete in the WAP league. We have a lot to work on in training, but with a few more players still to come back, I'm confident the season will be a success."

The WAP is a top-tier rugby competition in the Gulf that features clubs from across the region. This year's teams include DRFC, Abu Dhabi Quins, JA Dragons RFC, Dubai Hurricanes, Bahrain RFC, Dubai Sharks, and Dubai Exiles RFC.

Games will be played both home and away.

Additionally, this season, DRFC's various sections - men's, women's, vets, and minis & youth's teams - will compete in a range of domestic games across three formats: 7s, 10s, and 15s.

The DRFC is a cornerstone of the rugby community in Qatar, offering opportunities for players of all ages and skill levels.

The club currently fields four main sections: men's, ladies, vets, and minis & youths. These sections provide a platform for competitive and social rugby.

DRFC is actively involved in both domestic and regional competitions, with a history of participation in the West Asia Premiership and various local leagues. Beyond the pitch, DRFC is committed to promoting rugby culture in Qatar, supporting fitness, teamwork, and sportsmanship within the community.

## Rain washes out England v Australia T20 with series drawn

**Manchester:** The decisive Twenty20 clash of the three-match series between England and Australia was abandoned without a ball being bowled due to persistent rain at Old Trafford yesterday. Play was due to start at 1330 GMT in Manchester, but after multiple pitch inspections, umpires decided there was no chance of play, with the match being called off at around 1520 GMT. No result meant the three-match series was tied at 1-1 after the touring side won the first T20 by 28 runs, with England bouncing back to win the second by three wickets. Both the teams will now shift their focus to the five-match One-Day International series, starting Thursday at Trent Bridge.



Australia's Mitchell Marsh (left) and England's Phil Salt pose after the 3rd T20I was abandoned because of the rain at Old Trafford in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

**Schedule of five-match ODI series between England and Australia:**

- 1st ODI: Thursday 19 September, Trent Bridge, (12.30pm start)**
- 2nd ODI: Saturday 21 September, Headingly, (11am start)**
- 3rd ODI: Tuesday 24 September, Seat Unique Riverside (12.30pm start)**
- 4th ODI: Friday 27 September, Lord's (12.30pm start)**
- 5th ODI: Sunday 29 September, Seat Unique Stadium (11am start)**

GOLF

# United States beat Europe to win 'dream' Solheim Cup

'THIS IS A DREAM OF MINE AND SO HAPPY THAT I WAS ABLE TO DO THAT. IT MEANT THE WORLD'

AFP  
Gainesville, United States

Second-ranked Lilia Vu captured the deciding half-point and the United States defeated Europe 15.5-12.5 yesterday to win the Solheim Cup for the first time since 2017.

The 26-year-old American was two down to Swiss rookie Albane Valenzuela with two holes remaining but birdied to win 17 then dropped her approach inches from the hole at 18 and tapped in for birdie to win the hole and finished tied.

That gave the Americans 14.5 points to clinch an overall victory at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club after two losses and a draw against Europe in the past three show-downs.

"This is a dream of mine and so happy that I was able to do that," said Vu, a daughter of Vietnamese immigrants. "It meant the world."

The Americans, who lead the all-time rivalry 11-7 with one draw, began yesterday's 12 concluding singles matches with a 10-6 advantage, needing only four wins and a draw to reclaim the Cup. Despite three early US wins, it became a fight into the late matches.

"This is so cool. So stressful to watch. But just so proud of the players," US captain Stacy Lewis said. "It really could have gone either way."

"Just proud of the team and Lilia's finish there was unbelievable. That's what you expect from one of the best players in the world."

Europe failed to match the greatest last-day Solheim comeback, needing to capture eight singles matches on US soil for the first time, and missed the chance to take the trophy for an unprecedented fourth consecutive time.

"We gave them a run for their money," Europe captain Suzann Pettersen said. "There were possibilities out there and several times we thought we could get it done. It came down to a couple of matches. Happy for Stacy on home turf but we'll come back very hungry."

World number one Nelly Korda, a six-time LPGA winner this year, was on her first Solheim Cup winner.

"It has been a dream come true," Korda said. "It has been such an amazing week. We all bonded really well."

The US women stretched their lead to 13-8 early but Europe made an intense last stand.

American Andrea Lee tied Ger-



United States captain Stacy Lewis celebrates after winning the Solheim Cup in Gainesville, Virginia. (AFP)



Lilia Vu of Team United States celebrates winning the Solheim Cup yesterday. (AFP)

many's Esther Henseleit by making a clutch five-foot par putt at 18 to add a half-point for each side.

Lee pulled level on a 20-foot birdie putt to win the 16th. Paris Olympic runner-up Henseleit answered with a 12-foot par putt at 17 to stay level.

Then France's Celine Boutier kept European hopes alive by sinking a six-foot birdie putt at 18 to edge Lexi Thompson 1-up. Boutier, 3-down with seven holes to play, birdied 12 and 13 and squared the match with a 10-foot birdie putt at 15 before her clutch finish.

"It feels amazing," Boutier said. "It was a great match. She played awesome. Very needed point."

Ireland's Leona Maguire next dispatched Ally Ewing 4&3 as the pressure built.

Sweden's Maja Stark sank a tension-packed 10-foot par putt at 18

to tie Lauren Coughlin to deny a US victory, a half-point putting the Americans on the brink at 14-11.

"It was huge," she said. "Having the putt to not lose Solheim, it's so much pressure."

That set the stage for Vu's heroics, with Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom and American Jennifer Kupcho adding wins after the trophy was decided.

England's 12th-ranked Charley Hull never trailed in routing top-ranked Korda 6&4 in the first match.

"I played my heart out," Hull said. "It was a pretty cool moment."

American Megan Khang never lost a hole in crushing Dane Emily Pedersen 6&5 to finish 3-0.

TENNIS

# Canada beat Britain to reach Davis Cup quarters

Reuters  
London

Canada powered into the quarter-finals of the Davis Cup for the third straight year with a victory over Britain yesterday while defending champions Italy outclassed the Netherlands to finish as winners of their group.

Needing only one match win in Manchester to eliminate the hosts and top Group D, Canada got the job done in double quick time as Denis Shapovalov dismissed Dan Evans 6-0 7-5 before celebrating by eating ice cream on court.

"It definitely wasn't easy to play against so many Britons," said Shapovalov, who kept his cool in front of a partisan crowd of around 15,000 fans.

"I've experienced it in the past as well... I just tried to stay focused, tried to stay in my bubble and tried to stay ahead as much as I could because I could feel Dan getting pumped up and the crowd getting pumped up."

"It was definitely starting to turn, so I'm very happy I was able to get it done in straight sets."

Felix Auger-Aliassime gave the 2022 winners an unassailable 2-0 lead by outlasting British number one Jack Draper 7-6(8) 7-5 in a high-quality clash.

Britain then ensured the crowd had something to cheer about as Henry Patten and Neal Skupski cruised past Gabriel Diallo and Alexis Galarneau 7-5 6-4.



Canada's Denis Shapovalov celebrates winning his Davis Cup Group D match against Britain's Daniel Evans at AO Arena in Manchester, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

The Final 8 knockout stage will be held in Malaga from Nov. 19-24, with a draw taking place this week to determine ties.

Italy, Spain, Australia, the United States, Germany, Canada and Argentina have all qualified.

With world number one Jannik Sinner watching on in Bologna, Italy surged to a 2-0 lead against the Netherlands after Matteo Berrettini beat Botić van de Zand-

schulp 3-6 6-4 6-4 and Flavio Cobolli saw off Tallon Griekspoor 7-6(4) 4-6 6-3. The Dutch can still advance as group runners-up by winning the doubles match that will follow.

Spain rested world number three Carlos Alcaraz for their tie with Australia but earned a hard-fought 2-1 victory to top Group B in Valencia as Marcel Granollers and Pedro Martinez rallied to beat

Matthew Ebdon and Max Purcell 5-7 6-4 6-4. Pablo Carreno Busta had given Spain the lead with a 2-6 6-2 7-6(3) win over Jordan Thompson but Alexei Popyrin beat Martinez 6-4 6-4 to draw last year's runners-up level. Earlier, Chile finished their campaign on a positive note in Zhuhai with a 2-1 win over Slovakia to finish third in Group C, although both teams were out of contention.

## Alvarez pummels Berlanga

Los Angeles, US: Mexican superstar Saul "Canelo" Alvarez retained his unified super middleweight world title with a punishing unanimous decision over Edgar Berlanga on Saturday in Las Vegas.

Alvarez knocked down the previously unbeaten Berlanga in the third and was relentless throughout the 12 rounds.

The champion rocked Berlanga with a big right in the waning seconds of the ninth round and Berlanga's cornerman could be heard asking his fighter: "Are you awake?", as he sat on his stool before the 10th.

Berlanga, who was warned for an intentional head butt, remained defiant, taunting Alvarez as they came out for the 12th. But the Puerto Rican-American,



who launched his pro career with 16 straight first-round knockouts, couldn't find the stoppage he'd brashly predicted. The vastly experienced Alvarez put him under pressure early, Berlanga looking tentative in the opening two rounds as he was backed repeatedly into the corner. Berlanga, 27, fell to 22-1.

FOCUS

## Qatar in Pool B at 2025 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship

Qatar was drawn in the Pool B alongside Poland, Netherlands, and Romania at the 2025 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship which will take place in the Philippines from September 12 to 28, 2025.

The pools for the 2025 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship were drawn in Manila.

The 32 qualified teams were distributed into eight single round-robin pools of four.

Pool A includes the Philippines, Iran, Egypt and Tunisia, while Pool C is made up of France, Argentina, Finland and Korea.

Pool D includes USA, Cuba,



Portugal and Colombia, and Pool E has Slovenia, Germany, Bulgaria and Chile.

Pool F consists of Italy, Ukraine, Belgium and Algeria, and Pool G includes Japan, Canada, Turkiye and Libya, while Pool H is Brazil, Serbia, Czechia and China.

BOTTOMLINE

## A doubles victory for Djokovic rescues Serbia

AFP  
Belgrade

Former world number one Novak Djokovic teamed up with doubles partner Hamad Medjedovic yesterday to seal a 3-0 play-off win over Greece which keeps Serbia in World Group I of the Davis Cup.

The 37-year-old, playing his first competitive tennis since losing in the third round of the US Open, and his 21-year-old teammate won 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 against Aristotelis Thanos and Petros Tsitsipas, the younger brother of Stefanos, who had to withdraw.

On Saturday, Miomir Kecmanovic had given Serbia their first point by beating Thanos 6-3, 6-3 before Djokovic blew away Ioannis Xilas, ranked 770 in the world, 6-0, 6-1 in just 45 minutes.

Djokovic said on Saturday that it "may be the last time" he plays in front of a Belgrade Davis Cup audience because of a change in format.

"Some young tennis players who will defend the colours of the national team need to take over the helm," he said.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic (left) and Hamad Medjedovic celebrate after winning against Greece's Petros Tsitsipas and Aristotelis Thanos during the group stage Davis Cup doubles match at the Aleksandar Nikolic Hall in Belgrade yesterday. (AFP)

## Brady meets Tyson in Texas



Dallas Cowboys owner and general manager Jerry Jones (left) welcomes NFL star Tom Brady and retired boxer Mike Tyson at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. Future Hall of Fame quarterback Brady shook hands and embraced legendary boxer Tyson. The two chatted amongst a group that also included Cowboys owner Jones and Saints owner Gayle Benson. (@dallascowboys)

## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arteta salutes depleted Arsenal as Gabriel strike sinks wasteful Spurs

Gunners have now won on their last three visits to arch rivals Tottenham

AFP  
London

Mikel Arteta saluted Arsenal's hunger as the gritty Gunners ignored the absence of Declan Rice and Martin Odegaard to clinch an "ugly" 1-0 win at bitter rivals Tottenham yesterday.

Arteta's side were without skipper Odegaard due to an ankle injury suffered on Norway duty, while fellow midfielder Rice served a suspension for his red card against Brighton. But the Premier League title contenders dug deep with a combative display, benefitting from Tottenham's latest display of wasteful finishing before Gabriel Magalhães bagged the winner in the second half.

The Brazilian defender's first goal since February made it three wins from four league games for unbeaten Arsenal as they chase a first title since 2004 after two successive runners-up finishes. "Super happy obviously. We know what it means for our club and our people to win a north London derby," Arteta said.

"We had moments in the game where we had to suffer. We had to adapt a little bit because of some of the players we lost. I prepared for Tottenham for five days, then in one moment I lost one player and in another I lost another. I didn't sleep much! There were no excuses, no crying. The players have thick skin. They love the game. Sometimes to win you have to do the ugly things and they love to do that. I loved it, because day after day the players are hungrier and hungrier."

Arsenal have now won on their last three visits to Tottenham, losing just once, in May 2022, in their last eight meetings with their hated neighbours. The second placed Gunners are two points behind Manchester City as they turn their attention to their Champions League opener at Atalanta on Thursday before travelling to face Pep Guardiola's champions next weekend.

Arteta believes Arsenal's latest success behind enemy lines with stand them in good stead for a daunting week.

"We won three years in a row here. That is a big thing in the history of the club," he said. "It is a tough week coming up. The players believe already. We have a won a lot of big games, but this will give us a lot of energy and belief."

Since the start of last season, Arsenal have scored more goals (23) from dead-ball



Arsenal's Gabriel Magalhães scores against Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League in London yesterday. (Reuters)

positions than any other team in the Premier League. No wonder Arteta turned to embrace Nicolas Jover, the German assistant coach poached from Manchester City as Arsenal's set-piece guru, immediately after Gabriel's goal.

"I made the decision to bring him to City when I was there and to Arsenal," he said. "Together with the rest of the staff, they have injected the belief that there are many ways to win games and this is one of them, so big credit to them."

It was another dispiriting north London derby for Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou. The Australian has come under fire for Tottenham's sloppy start to the season, which now includes successive defeats and only one win. Having conceded more dead-ball goals than any top-flight team except Nottingham Forest over the last two seasons, Tottenham's weak defending at set-pieces was ruthlessly exposed by Arsenal.

But Postecoglou insisted that wasn't

the reason for the loss, instead pointing at Tottenham's lack of cutting edge and composure in the final third. Son Heung-min was unusually quiet, while former Bournemouth striker Dominic Solanke struggled on his home debut after returning from injury. "We had some good opportunities but we could have had so many more. We wasted our good play, similar to other games when we haven't had the conviction in the front third. You keep opponents in the game when you do that," Postecoglou said.

## NEWCASTLE STRIKE BACK TO WIN AT WOLVES

Meanwhile, Harvey Barnes' stunning strike sent Newcastle third after coming from behind to win 2-1 at Wolves. Mario Lemina had swept the home side into a first-half lead at the end of a swift counter-attack.

However, Wolves remain without a win in the Premier League this season as Newcastle's greater quality proved decisive after

the break. The Magpies' performances have been far from convincing so far this season. Yet, Eddie Howe's men have still picked up 10 points from a possible 12.

Howe responded to another lacklustre opening 45 minutes with a triple half-time change with Alexander Isak among those to come off at the break. Newcastle could have found themselves 2-0 down before the fightback started when Jorgen Strand Larsen smashed off the post.

Instead, fortune favoured the visitors when Schar's speculative shot flicked off the head of Craig Dawson and flew beyond Sam Johnstone. Barnes needed no such luck as he arched a rocket into the top corner 10 minutes from time to snatch all three points. Newcastle still required a brilliant save from Nick Pope to deny Matheus Cunha in stoppage time and leave Wolves in the bottom three. However, they survived to move level with second-placed Arsenal, just two points behind Manchester City.

## Napoli top Serie A after stormy Cagliari win

Milan: Napoli moved top of Serie A yesterday after comfortably winning 4-0 at Cagliari in a match which was stopped for seven minutes in the first half for fan disorder.

Goals from Giovanni Di Lorenzo, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Romelu Lukaku and Alessandro Buongiorno gave Napoli their third straight win and a one-point lead over Juventus, who they face in Turin next weekend.

Inter Milan have the chance to reclaim their league lead from Napoli in Sunday's late match at Monza ahead of their Champions League opener at Manchester City on Wednesday. Napoli's win was marred by ugly scenes midway through the opening period when the away fans unveiled a banner which mimicked sheep bleating and sparked the throwing of objects between the two sets of supporters.

That banner came after Napoli's fans were pictured with another one on their ferry trip to largely rural Sardinia which read "sheep hunting". Napoli supporters threw flares at home fans while at the other end of the ground Cagliari's hardcore ultras, who had only just come into the Unipol Domus after staying outside for the first 20 minutes in protest at stadium bans dished out to some of their members, pelted the pitch with firecrackers.

Antonio Conte's side were already leading at that point through Di Lorenzo's wildly deflected 18th-minute opener, and goalkeeper Alex Meret kept it that way early in the second half with two sensational stops from Sebastiano Luperto and Razvan Marin.

Kvaratskhelia then doubled Napoli's lead in the 66th minute with a neat low finish after being set through by Lukaku, and the Georgian repaid the favour to his new strike partner moments later. The 23-year-old pounced on a loose pass from Cagliari goalkeeper Simone Scuffet and rolled across for Lukaku to stroke home his second goal as many Napoli matches, sealing the three points before Buongiorno nodded home the fourth in stoppage time.

Ademola Lookman made sure that Atalanta warmed up for their return to the Champions League with the winner in a 3-2 victory over Fiorentina.

They are eighth on six points, three ahead of 14th-placed Fiorentina who twice went ahead in the first half through Lucas Martinez Quarta and Moise Kean but are yet to win under new coach Raffaele Palladino.

## LA LIGA

# Yamal bags brace as Barca beat Girona

AFP  
Girona, Spain

Teenage star Lamine Yamal struck twice as La Liga leaders Barcelona thrashed Girona 4-1 yesterday.

Hansi Flick's side have now won all five of their opening matches and avenged two humiliating Catalan derby defeats by Girona last season with an emphatic victory at Montilivi. Yamal's first-half double sent Barcelona on their way with Dani Olmo and Pedri Gonzalez adding further goals after the break.

Cristhian Stuani pulled one back for the hosts, last season's surprise package who finished third in only their fourth season in the top flight. Girona lost several key players in the summer with coach Michel Sanchez forced to rebuild.

Barcelona have new momentum under former Bayern Munich and Germany coach Flick and produced their best performance of his reign to date. "I think you can see the confidence we have, and when we have the ball, we have the quality to play and to create chances," Flick told reporters. "I think today we had a lot of chances to score one or two goals more, but in the end I'm very happy with the performance of the team."

Yamal and striker Robert Lewandowski came close in the opening exchanges before the teenage star, who led Spain to Euro 2024 victory in the summer, broke the deadlock. The winger picked the pocket of David Lopez as he tried to bring the ball out of defence, before finishing with aplomb past Paulo Gazzaniga after 30 minutes.

"We started very concentrated, very focused, we pressed them - we know when we give them the space they need for combinations we get in trouble," said Flick. "You saw the first goal, it was unbelievably good (pressing) from Lamine."

Yamal grabbed his second before the break with a fine guided finish from the edge of the box after a free-kick was cleared into his path. Bryan Gil fired straight at Marc-Andre ter Stegen from close range at the other end, before Girona were awarded a penalty when Imigo Martinez handled the ball.

However after a VAR referral the referee annulled his decision, seeing that it had bounced



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal (left) celebrates with Jules Kounde after scoring against Girona. (Reuters)

on to Martinez's arm off team-mate Alejandro Balde. Olmo expanded Barcelona's lead early in the second half with a sublime finish from a tight angle, leaving the new arrival from RB Leipzig on three goals from three La Liga matches.

Gazzaniga denied Lewandowski as he ran through on goal and tried to finish with a dink, as Barcelona maintained control. Their fourth came through Pedri when midfielder Marc Casado cleverly played him through and the Canary Islander took his time to sidestep Gazzaniga and finish.

"We had to start (the season) well, other years we didn't start it as we would have liked, above all the coach told us that," Pedri said. "(He told us) that from the first game we should push,

that the league is won above all in these first games if you keep building the distance up, let's continue in the same way."

Former Espanyol striker Stuani finished from close range with 10 minutes remaining to give Girona a consolation, before Barcelona substitute Ferran Torres was sent off for a high tackle on Yaser Asprilla. They were the only blots on Barcelona's otherwise pristine copybook as they maintained their 100 percent record at the start of the campaign.

On Saturday champions Real Madrid earned a 2-0 win at Real Sociedad to move second, four points behind Flick's side. Girona are seventh after the defeat, with their next match a Champions League debut away at Paris Saint-Germain.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Saudi's al-Muwallad in intensive care after fall

AFP  
Riyadh

Saudi international striker Fahad al-Muwallad has been placed in intensive care after plummeting off the balcony of his residence in Dubai, Saudi and Emirati authorities said yesterday.

The 30-year-old, who played in the 2018 World Cup but was withdrawn from the 2022 squad due to a doping ban, fell from his second-storey flat while on holiday in the emirate according to the Dubai government media office. It added Muwallad as a result was "in intensive care at a hospital in Dubai".

The Saudi consulate in Dubai confirmed in a statement on X it was informed of an "accident at (Muwallad's) private residence... on Thursday". The consulate "is following the investigations conducted with the police" in Dubai, it said in a statement.

Muwallad plays for Saudi side Al Shabab, whose captain travelled to Dubai to check on Muwallad's condition, the club said. Saudi newspaper Al Madina meanwhile pointed to "criminal suspicions", citing "informed sources".

Before joining Shabab, the striker played for Jeddah's Ittihad and enjoyed a successful international career, scoring 17 goals in 74 international matches. He has, though, also had a chequered career in terms of doping, serving two bans. The first in May 2019 and the latest between March 2022 and September 2023, after testing positive for furosemide, a diuretic that masks the presence of ana-



bolic steroids and is banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

## TEN-MAN WERDER BREMEN WIN AT MAINZ

Derrick Koehn's 69th minute goal lifted Werder Bremen to a 2-1 win at Mainz in Bundesliga, despite having to play the final half an hour with 10 men.

Marvin Ducksch gave Bremen the lead from the spot after Justin Njinmah was fouled in the box, with the injured player taken from the field as a result of the collision. The hosts hit back through Jae-sung Lee, who tapped in after goalkeeper Michael Zetterer spilled the ball at his feet.

Bremen's chances of taking all three points looked dim when Marco Friedl saw straight red for a last-man foul with 60 minutes remaining, but Koehn's goal on debut just nine minutes later put them in the driver's seat. Zetterer redeemed himself for his error with a string of late saves to keep Bremen on track for their first win of the season.

Earlier, goals from Marius Wolf, Phillip Tietz and Yusuf Kabadayi took Augsburg to a 3-1 Bundesliga home win over promoted St Pauli.