

To subscribe  
**GULF TIMES**  
Newspaper  
Please call  
**444 666 35**



**QATAR CLASSIC | Page 3**

**Defending champs Farag, El Hammamy march on**



**FOOTBALL | Page 4**

**Aston Villa can compete against Bayern, says coach Emery**

To advertise here,  
PLEASE CALL  
**444 666 21**

Wednesday, October 2, 2024  
Rabia | 29, 1446 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



**CRICKET**

**India conjure own 'Bazball' to squeeze win from rain-hit Bangladesh Test**

Page 2

**AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE**

## Joselu scores a double as Gharafa stun Al Ain in a topsy-turvy clash

By Sports Reporter  
Al Khor

**Q**atar's Al Gharafa claimed a famous win after they downed Al Ain FC of UAE 4-2 in a thrilling AFC Champions League Elite match at Al Bayt Stadium yesterday. The topsy-turvy match saw Al Gharafa taking a 2-0 lead before being pegged back by AFC Champions League 2023/24 winners Al Ain but recovered to score twice as Pedro Martins' side went on to secure the first win of their campaign.

Al Gharafa started brightly, forcing a series of corner kicks albeit without causing Al Ain too much trouble before a Florinel Coman shot required goalkeeper Khalid Eisa to swing into action after six minutes of play. The visitors were largely contained inside their own half but in a rare break in the 23rd minute, Mateo Sanabria's forceful run caused concerns for Al Gharafa but the young Argentine was eventually closed down by Seydou Sano.

Having seen their team keep AFC Champions League 2023/24 Most Valuable Player Soufiane Rahimi quiet in the opening half, the home fans had more reason to cheer in time added on at the end of the first half.

Yacine Brahimi's corner kick hit Sano and then bounced off Joselu's hip into the net with Eisa caught out by the deflections as Al Gharafa headed into the break in front.

The Qatari side doubled their lead in the 48th minute when teenage defender Sano held off Park Yong-woo on the right flank before firing in a cross that was headed in by Joselu. Al Ain were presented with an opportunity to pull one back in the 56th minute after referee Hiroyuki Kimura pointed to a spot following a VAR review following Sano's foul on Rahimi with Kaku chipping in the spot-kick.



Al Gharafa's Joselu celebrates after scoring against Al Ain during the AFC Champions League Elite at Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor yesterday. **PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil**

Boosted by the goal, Al Ain made it 2-2 in the 67th minute when Kaku fed Rahimi who side-stepped Sano before blasting a low shot past Sergio Rico. The pendulum swung back in favour of Al Gharafa six minutes later, a free-kick routine set up Coman for the cross with Sano arriving at the far post to sweep home with the

hosts increasing their lead with another Coman assist in the 76th minute, this time Brahimi sliding in for the fourth.

Al Gharafa next meet another UAE side in Al Wasl Club on October 21, with Al Ain taking to continental action a day earlier against early pacesetters Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia.

**SPOTLIGHT**

## Qatar's Afif heads Asian Player of the Year award shortlist

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar's Asian Cup winning forward **Akram Afif** has been nominated for a second Asian Player of the Year award, joining Jordan's Yazan al-Naimat and Seol Young-woo of South Korea on the Asian Football Confederation's three-man shortlist.

Australia's Cortnee Vine as well as Kiko Seike from Japan and South Korea's Kim Hye-ri have been nominated for the women's title, with the winners of both awards to be announced in Seoul on Oct 29.

Afif previously won in 2019 and is favourite to reclaim the trophy after leading his nation to a second consecutive continental title in February, when hosts Qatar defeated Jordan in the Asian Cup final. The mercurial forward became the first player to ever score a hat-trick in a final, finishing with eight goals and three assists to win the Most Valuable Player and Top Scorer accolades. Unstoppable at the club level as well, Afif spearheaded Al Sadd SC's successful charge to a record 17th Qatar Stars League title with 26 goals and 11 assists from 22 matches, and will aim to win this award for the second time after 2019.

Recently departed Australia coach Graham Arnold has been nominated for the men's coach of the year award alongside Go Oiwa, who led Japan to the quarter-finals of the Olympic Games, and South Korea's Asian Games gold medal winner Hwang Sun-hong. Arnold quit the Socceroos role last month after a disappointing start to the third phase of Asia's World Cup qualifiers and has since been replaced by Tony Popovic. Japan's Tomoki Miyamoto, Park Yeon-jeong of South Korea and Australia's Leah Blayney have been nominated for the women's coaching award.



**CHAMPIONS LEAGUE**

# Havertz and Saka star as Arsenal sink PSG

Gunners are now unbeaten in nine games in all competitions this term

AFP  
London

**K**ai Havertz and Bukayo Saka inspired Arsenal's 2-0 success against Paris Saint-Germain yesterday as the Gunners secured their first win in the Champions League this season. Havertz headed Arsenal into the lead and Saka netted before the interval to underline their superiority at the Emirates Stadium. After drawing their opening league phase tie at Atalanta, Mikel Arteta's side moved onto four points in their bid to reach the knockout stage of the revamped tournament.

Eliminated by Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-finals last season and pipped to the English title by Manchester City, the Gunners are now unbeaten in nine games in all competitions this term as they chase silverware on both fronts. There was further good news for Arsenal as Spain midfielder Mikel Merino made his long-awaited debut for the last 30 minutes.

Merino's recovery from a shoulder injury suffered in his first training session following his close-season move from Real Sociedad was a welcome boost for Arteta with Martin Odegaard currently sidelined. Gianluigi Donnarumma was back in goal for PSG after missing the last three games with a thigh injury and the Italian had an early test of his fitness as he sprinted off his line to save at Gabriel Martinelli's feet.

Saka, captaining Arsenal for the night, quickly switched the momentum in the hosts' favour when he cut in from the right flank to curl just over from the edge of the area. Havertz rewarded Arsenal's relentless pressure with the opener in the 20th minute. Leandro Trossard curled a pin-point cross into the six-yard box and Havertz made a perfectly-timed run behind the visitors' flat-footed defence to bravely head past the advancing Donnarumma. The



Arsenal's Kai Havertz heads the ball to score during the UEFA Champions League match against Paris Saint-Germain in London yesterday. **(AFP)**

Germany forward, who scored Chelsea's Champions League final winner in 2021, endured a difficult start with Arsenal after moving across London for £65m last year.

But since the start of February, only three Premier League players have more combined goals and assists in all competitions than Havertz's tally of 21 as he banishes the 'waste of money' jibes. PSG's cause wasn't helped by the absence of France winger Ousmane Dembele, who was left out after the 2018 World Cup winner's reported clash with boss Luis Enrique when he was substituted in their win over Rennes on Friday.

Dembele is PSG's most potent attacking force following Kylian Mbappe's move to Real Madrid. Nuno Mendes tried to provide an attacking spark for the spluttering visitors as the defender's blast from 18 yards smashed off the post and bounced to safety. But Arsenal were always in control and Saka doubled their advantage in the 35th minute.

Under the guidance of their set-piece guru Nicolas Jover, Arsenal have become lethal from free-kicks and corners, while PSG are notoriously deficient in that area.

So it was little surprise that Arteta's team were able to capitalise on their dead-ball expertise yet again.

Whipping an in swinging free-kick towards Donnarumma's goal, the England forward expected a team-mate to get a touch on his delivery. Instead, there was enough swerve on the ball that it eluded a gaggle of players and caught the slow-to-react Donnarumma unsuspected as it flashed into the net.

Only Bayern Munich's Harry Kane and Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior have been involved in more Champions League goals than Saka since the start of last season. Trossard shot just wide before half-time as PSG's creaky defence looked more League One than Ligue 1.

Donnarumma made a fine save to keep out Martinelli's volley soon after the interval, but PSG were inches away from grabbing a lifeline when Joao Neves' effort smacked off the bar. On a rainy evening in north London, Arsenal batted down the hatches in the closing stages as they eased to a significant victory.

**RESULTS**

RB Salzburg (AUT) 0 Brest (FRA) 4 (Sima 24, 70, Camara 66, Pereira Lage 75); Stuttgart (GER) 1 (Millot 7) Sparta Prague (CZE) 1 (Kairinen 32); Inter Milan (ITA) 4 (Calhanoglu 11, Arnautovic 59, Martinez 71, Taremi 81-pen) Red Star Belgrade (SRB) 0; Borussia Dortmund (GER) 7 (Can 7-pen, Adeyemi 11, 29, 42 Guirassy 40-pen, 66, Nmecha 79) Celtic (SCO) 1 (Maeda 9); Barcelona (ESP) 5 (Lewandowski 8, 51, Raphinha 34, Martinez 37, Camara 81-og) Young Boys (SUI) 0; Bayer Leverkusen (GER) 1 (Boniface 51) AC Milan (ITA) 0; Arsenal (ENG) 2 (Havertz 20, Saka 35) Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 0; PSV Eindhoven (NED) 1 (Schouten 15) Sporting Lisbon (POR) 1 (Braganca 84); Slovan Bratislava (SVK) 0 Manchester City (ENG) 4 (Gundogan 8, Foden 15, Haaland 58, McAtee 74)

## Dortmund hand Celtic brutal reality check

**Dortmund, Germany:** Karim Adeyemi scored three goals in the first half as Borussia Dortmund handed Celtic a brutal Champions League reality check, winning 7-1 at home yesterday. Celtic came into the match having won eight from eight in Scotland and Europe this season, but were blown off the park in Germany, Dortmund leading 5-1 at half-time.

By then, Emre Can had opened the scoring from the penalty spot while Adeyemi had already scored three goals and had won another spot kick, converted by Serhou Guirassy. Adeyemi was a constant threat for the home side, popping up all over the pitch to bamboozle the Celtic defence.

The Germany forward was subbed off three minutes into the second half but the visitors were spared any respite. Guirassy scoring an excellent solo goal and Felix Nmecha netting a late strike. The victory equalled Dortmund's biggest ever Champions League win while leaving Celtic's ambitions of impressing on the European stage in tatters.

Domestic league champions in 12 of the past 13 seasons, the European stage has long been the true test of Celtic's quality -- and it has often sent them crashing back to earth. The supporters united to sing 'You'll Never Walk Alone' before kickoff, a staple of the pre-match ceremony at both Dortmund and Celtic, who share a long-lasting fan friendship.

When the game started however, the smoke from the Celtic fans' pre-match pyrotechnics had barely cleared before Dortmund took the lead.

The lightning-fast Jamie Gittens was felled in the box by Kasper Schmeichel, bringing Can to the spot, the captain converting for his first goal in the competition since his Liverpool days in 2017.

MATCH REPORT

# India conjure own 'Bazball' to squeeze win from rain-hit Bangladesh Test

**Kanpur:** India produced their own version of 'Bazball' to squeeze out a remarkable seven-wicket victory over Bangladesh from a seemingly dead test match en route to a 2-0 series sweep yesterday. India's record-extending 18th consecutive Test series victory on home soil was never in doubt after their 280-run romp in the series opener in Chennai. But after two and half days were lost to bad weather in Kanpur, a draw seemed the likely outcome as only 35 overs were played in the first three days with Bangladesh stuck on 107-3.

Once the visitors folded for 233 in their first innings on Monday, India unleashed the kind of batting blitz unseen in test cricket. England's ultra-aggressive batting under coach Brendon 'Baz' McCullum has rejuvenated test cricket and India conjured up something similar with their take-no-prisoners batting at the Green Park Stadium. Skipper Rohit Sharma set the tone by hitting the first two balls he faced for sixes and India eclipsed Bangladesh's total in just 28 overs reaching the 50, 100 and 200 marks in record speed. It was batting T20 style before

India eventually declared on 285-9 giving themselves enough time to remove both the rival openers by stumps on day four. They returned yesterday to claim the remaining eight Bangladesh wickets in an extended morning session to bundle out the tourists for 146. Opener Yashviji Jaiswal smashed his second fifty of the test, which earned him the player of the match award, as India chased down the 95-run victory target with a session to spare.

**SENSATIONAL BATTING**  
"It was a risk we were willing

to take because when you're trying to bat like that, it is very easy that you can get bundled out for a low score as well," Rohit said of their sensational batting to force a result. "But we were ready with that factor as well, that even if we get all out for 100 to 150, we wanted to give ourselves a chance to be in the game and try and get a result." Ravichandran Ashwin, who smashed a hundred in the opening test and claimed 11 wickets in two matches, was Player of the Series. "When we bowled them out yesterday a little after lunch,

Rohit was very keen (to get a result)," Ashwin said after equalling Sri Lankan Muttiah Muralitharan's record of 11 Player-of-the-Series awards. "He said we at least need 80 overs to bowl at them and the moment he came inside and gave that talk ... we set the cat among the pigeons. "It's not only him saying it but he went out there and hit his first (two balls) for a six. You set the tone that way, and obviously everybody follows on from there." India, who consolidated their lead in the World Test Championship

standings with the victory, will play a three-Test home series against New Zealand beginning on Oct. 16. Bangladesh, on the other hand, were brought down to earth after their memorable 2-0 series win in Pakistan last month.

**BRIEF SCORES (Day 5)**  
**India 285 for 9 dec** (Jaiswal 72, Rahul 68, Mehidy 4-41, Shakib 4-78) **and 98 for 3** (Jaiswal 51, Kohli 29\*, Mehidy 2-44) **beat Bangladesh 233** (Mominul 107\*, Bumrah 3-50) **and 146** (Shadman 50, Bumrah 3-17, Jadeja 3-34, Ashwin 3-50) **by seven wickets**



India's players celebrate with their trophy at the end of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Green Park Cricket Stadium in Kanpur yesterday. (AFP)

COMMENT

## India captain Rohit says batting risk paid off against Bangladesh

Reuters  
Kanpur

India captain Rohit Sharma conceded they took a risk trying to force a result in the rain-truncated second Test against Bangladesh and was pleased it paid off resulting in a memorable victory in Kanpur.

A draw loomed large over the match after two-and-a-half days were lost to bad weather in Kanpur with only 35 overs played in the first three days at the Green Park Stadium.

Even after India bowled out Bangladesh for 233 on day four, few expected a result until India came out to bat for the first time.

Opener Rohit himself led from front, whacking the first two balls he faced for sixes and India went on to eclipse Bangladesh's total in 28 overs scoring at a rate unprecedented in test cricket.

By the end of day four, India declared their innings on 285-9 and even removed both the Bangladesh openers.

Yesterday, they claimed the remaining eight Bangladesh wickets in an extended morning session bundling out the tourists for 146.

Needing 95 to win, India lost three wickets before overwhelming the target with more than a session to go.

"We had to think a lot how the game can keep moving forward," Rohit said of their race against time to win the match.

"When we came on day four, we



India's captain Rohit Sharma (right) talks to Rishabh Pant during the fifth and final day of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Green Park Cricket Stadium in Kanpur yesterday. (AFP)

wanted to get them out as early as possible and see what we can do with the bat.

"The pitch didn't have much for bowlers but to get a game out of that pitch was a great effort from the bowlers, and the batters bought into that thought of ... scoring as quickly as possible.

"It was a risk that we were willing to take... when you are trying to bat like that, it's very easy to get bundled out for a low score as well. Even if we got all out for 150, we wanted to give ourselves a chance to get a result."

It was breathtaking batting on Monday as India reached 50 in three overs, 100 in 10.1 overs, and 200 in 24.2 overs – the fastest ever by a Test team. Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said his batters needed to do better.

"We didn't bat well," said Shanto, who had arrived in India on a high his team's 2-0 series sweep in Pakistan last month.

"If you look at our batters, they played 30-40 balls and then got out.

"It's important for one batsman to get big runs."

## BROAD BACKS ENGLAND'S AGGRESSIVE TEST STYLE FOR PAKISTAN TOUR

**London:** England's aggressive approach will help when they face spin-friendly conditions in Pakistan during their Test series in October, the country's former bowler Stuart Broad has said. England will return to Pakistan for a red-ball series after defeating the hosts 3-0 in Tests in 2022 when Harry Brook scored three centuries and spinners thrived.

Brendon McCullum's side, however, failed in similar spin-friendly conditions in India, where they lost a series 4-1 earlier this year.

Broad said England have got the players to deal with spin in Pakistan but will have to play with their ultra-aggressive style to get positive results.

"I think the style will work in Pakistan, for sure," Broad said ahead of the launch of Inside Lord's, Marylebone Cricket Club's (MCC) new digital platform.

"I think they're really positive and aggressive, they can find the boundary and don't get tied down by spin. "England will have to play fast-paced cricket to force results over there because you generally do need five days to make something happen."

England's fast-bowling unit, led by Chris Woakes and including Matthew Potts, Olly Stone, Gus Atkinson and Brydon Carse, will be without experienced Mark Wood, who has an elbow injury, and skipper Ben Stokes, who is not yet fit to bowl.

### Struggling Pakistan

Broad said Pakistan, who were defeated 2-0 at home by Bangladesh last month, would be looking to take advantage of England's inexperienced fast bowling lineup, but the visitors must capitalise on the hosts' underwhelming form.

"Pakistan have not been playing the best cricket. They've been struggling, so England should see that as a positive and go there trying to apply pressure to that team as soon as they possibly can," Broad said.

"But we always know Pakistan, they've got world-class talent and players that can win a game on their own. It won't be an easy challenge.

"The surfaces (in Pakistan) were a bit slower and turned, but in their recent series they've had a bit of green grass on and carried through a bit more. "I don't know which way Pakistan will lean on their pitches - they might leave a bit of grass on, seeing an inexperienced bowling group from England." Broad said there had been an inconsistency in results with England's test style, but players must focus on the positives.

The youngsters might take time to adapt to it, but players like Jamie Smith were improving under McCullum and Stokes. "It's been an amazing style

for young players to learn their game and have amazing freedom. The key to it is the consistency in selection," Broad added.

The three-match series between Pakistan and England will run from October 7 to 28 and is part of the ICC World Test Championship 2023-25. It's worth noting that the second Test, which was originally planned at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi from 15-19 October, will now be played at the Multan Cricket Stadium. The match has been shifted as the National Stadium is undergoing a major facelift for next year's ICC Champions Trophy 2025. The remaining two Tests will be played as originally planned, i.e. 7-11 October in Multan and 24-28 October in Rawalpindi.

**Babar resigns as Pakistan's white-ball skipper**  
Babar Azam resigned as Pakistan's white-ball skipper yesterday, saying he wanted to focus on his playing role in the future matches, batter said on social media site X.

"I have decided to resign as captain of the Pakistan men's cricket team. It's been an honour to lead this team, but it's time for me to step down and focus on my playing role," Azam, re-appointed skipper in May this year, tweeted late yesterday. Azam's resignation came a week before Pakistan's three-match Test series against England, starting in Multan on October 7, in which he was named in the 15-man squad. Shan Masood will lead the Test side.



BOTTOMLINE

## Retired Malan backs coach McCullum to revive England's white-ball fortunes

Reuters  
London

England coach Brendon McCullum must find the right balance between youth and experience if he is to revive the country's white-ball fortunes, former player Dawid Malan has said.

England won the Cricket World Cup in 2019 and the world T20 title in 2022, but things have not gone smoothly in either limited-overs format since.

They failed to get past the pool stage at the 2023 ODI World Cup and white-ball coach Matthew Mott stepped down after their T20 World Cup semi-final exit in June, paving the way for the cricket board (ECB) to put McCullum in charge across formats.

The New Zealander, who already coaches the test team, will take additional charge of the limited-overs sides when England tour India in January, but a rebuild has already begun under interim head coach Marcus Trescothick.



England head coach Brendon McCullum

Harry Brook was named ODI captain in the absence of the injured Jos Buttler and became the youngest England captain to score an ODI century in last month's series against Australia, in which Jordan Cox, Jacob Bethell and Jamie Overton made T20 debuts.

"England have got the players to re-

build and become one of the best white-ball teams in the world again," Malan told Reuters. "It's just finding that balance between which players to back and which senior players to stick with. I think you still have to earn the right to play for England. I don't think it's just giving caps out."

Malan, 37, pointed to the dramatic loss



Retired England batsman Dawid Malan

of form suffered simultaneously by several England stalwarts during the 2023 World Cup as evidence of England's white-ball sides were in need of fresh blood. "If you look at the 2023 World Cup ... the guys you bank on - (Joe) Root, (Jonny) Bairstow, (Jos) Buttler - all sort of struggled at the same time, which is unheard of with those guys," he

said. "As soon as they started scoring runs again, England started winning games of cricket again."

McCullum's record with the Test side, whose fortunes saw a dramatic uptick after his introduction of an ultra-aggressive style of play that came to be known as "Bazball", showed he could do the same in white-ball cricket, Malan added.

"McCullum is fantastic at rebuilding teams and building a legacy and a formula for players to grow and to succeed. He's been fantastic with that as a coach in the test team," Malan said.

"Hopefully he can work his magic in white ball and get some of the big boys to go on runs again. You can talk about the youngsters all you want... (but) if your senior players aren't performing, that's when you don't win games of cricket."

England tour Pakistan for a three-match Test series in October, followed by white-ball series against West Indies and then three Tests in New Zealand starting from Nov. 28. Their tour of India begins on Jan. 22 with a five-match T20 series followed by three ODIs.

SQUASH / QTERMINALS QATAR CLASSIC

# Defending champs Farag, El Hammamy march on

'I'm more experienced and I know how to deal with the pressure of being the defending champion'

**D**efending men's champion from Egypt Ali Farag yesterday rallied in fine fashion to beat Youssef Soliman on day two of the QTerminals Qatar Classic yesterday.

World No 1 Farag had a strong record against Soliman, with only one previous defeat in eight matches. However, Soliman yesterday played exceptionally well and won the first game but Farag rallied quickly.

Farag won 6-11, 11-4, 11-8, 11-4. "It takes so many things (to beat Soliman)," said Farag after his win yesterday. "It was a really tactical battle. He's really smart and when I watched him yesterday in the fifth game he was out of breath but still found a way to win. I watched him against Diego (Elias) in Paris and I think this is the best he is playing in his career so far.

"He's been challenging the top guys for a very long time, but I feel he is getting closer in every match and it was getting a bit nerve-racking. Thankfully, I had (Karim) Darwish in my corner and he told me to tweak a few things, but it's credit to Youssef because he didn't give me the opportunity to play my own game plan."

Reigning women's champion Hania El Hammamy also advanced in the tournament with a decisive 11-7, 11-5, 11-9 victory over wildcard Salma Eltayeb.

The World No 3 dominated the match, consistently applying pressure on her opponent. Eltayeb struggled to keep up with El Ham-



Defending champion Ali Farag of Egypt retrieves a low shot during his QTerminals Qatar Classic match against World No11 Youssef Soliman at the Khalifa Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha yesterday. **Right:** Nour El Sherbini in action against fellow Egyptian Sana Ibrahim.



mamy's relentless pace, and the second game quickly followed the same pattern.

"I'm not that familiar with her game, we've played a couple of times in training, but it's different in a match and real tournaments," said El Hammamy yesterday.

"It was a bit tricky not knowing what to expect. She's very attacking and very powerful, so I had to be alert and ready for her shots. I'm glad I got through in three.

"I played better today (compared to the first round against Satomi Watanabe). I got more used to the court and started to find my

length a bit better. There is only one way forward, I guess.

"Every time I've been the defending champion I've not done well and I haven't won the title. Now, I'm more experienced and I know how to deal with the pressure of being the defending champion. I need to improve my performance each round, and if it's meant to be, it will happen."

**World No 1 Nour El Sherbini wins**  
World No 1 Nour El Sherbini stayed on course to win a third PSA Squash Tour title on the bounce after she completed a dominant 3-0 win

over fellow Egyptian Sana Ibrahim. El Sherbini won 11-5, 11-5, 11-8 in 29 minutes.

Despite two previous final appearances in Doha, the Qatar Classic trophy is the only major title that currently eludes El Sherbini.

**Veteran Momen advances**  
Egyptian veteran Tarek Momen yesterday booked his place in the quarter-finals of this year's QTerminals Qatar Classic after halting dangerous Frenchman Sebastien Bonmalais in straight games.

The 36-year-old from Cairo - making his 16th appearance at the

Qatar Classic - made the most of his racket skills in the opening game and won 11-7, 11-9, 11-9 (50 minutes).

"Some of his retrievals were insane," Momen said. "I think I did a pretty good job with the attacking side of things, but he was onto it. I couldn't believe some of the shots he got back, he put a lot of pressure on me and I'm happy I managed to close it out.

"I don't think about the numbers (his longevity) I just try to take care of my body the best way I can. I don't know how many chances I have left, so any opportunity I

get to play on this court I have to take it. I am blessed that I am still playing at this level, and I'm very proud.

"I want to keep going and fighting for every match I play for as long as I can.

"I've added a few layers to my game, I've slowed things down, I still play at a fast pace, but I'm better at slowing the pace down when I need to. I spend more time off court doing mobility and recovery work too.

"It's all part of the process, you grow older and you need to do a few things differently."

TENNIS

# Sinner, Alcaraz to clash in Beijing final

AFP  
Beijing

**J**annik Sinner ignored the bubbling controversy over his steroid case and a roaring home crowd to set up a China Open final against Carlos Alcaraz yesterday.

The world number one and defending champion defeated the 96th-ranked Chinese wildcard Bu Yunchaokete 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) to avoid a major upset.

The Italian faces Spanish second seed Alcaraz, who was in fine form in a 7-5, 6-3 victory over Russian third seed Daniil Medvedev in the other semi-final.

"It's a very delicate moment, very difficult, very different," Sinner said after racking up a 15th win in a row even as he makes headlines off the court.

"So every victory for me is a great sign."

In front of a packed house on China's national day, US Open champion Sinner was facing a player he had never met before and who was competing in the biggest match of his life.

China's 22-year-old Bu was also in the form of his life, having reached the semi-finals last week in Hangzhou.

Bu had Sinner under pressure on the Italian's serve early in the first set, but Sinner staved off the threat and the storm gradually blew itself out as the set wore on.

They went to the tiebreak in the second set, with Sinner sending down his 11th ace of the contest to convert his third match point after just over two hours.

Nobody has won more matches on tour this season than Sinner, 23, who failed two doping tests in March but was cleared of wrongdoing and allowed to keep playing.

Tennis authorities accepted Sinner's explanation that trace amounts of a banned steroid unintentionally entered his system from a physiotherapist who used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) reignited the case on Saturday, saying it had appealed the decision and is seeking a ban of up to two years. Sinner has admitted to having sleepless nights over the issue.

Four-time Grand Slam champi-



Italy's Jannik Sinner returns against China's Bu Yunchaokete during their semi-final at the China Open in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return to Russia's Daniil Medvedev during their semi-final at the China Open in Beijing yesterday. (AFP)

on Alcaraz reached his first Beijing final and is in ominous form, yet to drop a set.

"I think I played really well. Obviously if I want to beat Daniil, I have to play really good tennis, high-quality tennis," said Alcaraz, who is chasing a 16th ATP Tour title - which would equal Sinner. "I felt great on the court once again, so I'm really happy about it. I think I couldn't ask for a better semi-final."

Sinner and Alcaraz have met nine times previously on the tour, with the Spaniard holding a 5-4 edge in wins.

**Shades of Mbappe**

In the women's draw, 595th-ranked home hope Zhang Shuai - one of the storylines of the tournament - rolled into the quarter-finals to make more history.

Her 6-4, 6-2 victory over Magdalena Frech was her fourth win in Beijing and all in straight sets - having come into the event after losing 24 singles matches in

a row. The barren run lasting more than 600 days was the second-longest on the WTA Tour in the Open Era, which began in 1968.

The 35-year-old Zhang, a former two-time Grand Slam quarter-finalist who has been plagued by injury, said she had come close to quitting singles tennis before coming to Beijing.

"I had no idea how to win and I didn't want to lose another, especially with all the Chinese fans," she said. "Walking back to the locker room, I didn't know if I should continue or not before this tournament."

The former top-25 player will face Spain's 19th-ranked Paula Badosa in the last eight.

Zhang is the lowest-ranked player to reach this stage of the China Open and struck a defiant pose - a tribute to Kylian Mbappe - after beating 31st-ranked Frech.

Former world number two Badosa dumped out US Open finalist Jessica Pegula 6-4, 6-0.

SPOTLIGHT

# Qatar Cup basketball draw held, 9 clubs to feature in Oct 19-31 event



Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, General Secretary of Qatar Basketball Federation, Nasser Ajjan al-Kaabi, Assistant-Secretary, Essam Lotfi, Technical Expert, and Dr Khaled al-Qahtani, Chairman of the Media Committee, at a press conference in Doha yesterday.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**T**he Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) held the draw ceremony for the Qatar Cup Championship for season 2024-2025 yesterday evening at the association's headquarters.

Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, General Secretary, QBF; Nasser Ajjan al-Kaabi, Assistant Secretary, Essam Lotfi, Technical Expert and Dr Khaled al-Qahtani, Chairman of the Media Committee, in addition to representatives of the nine clubs participating in the tournament attended the draw ceremony yesterday.

The tournament will be played

on a knockout system from October 19-31, where the preliminary round will witness matches between Al Khor and Al Ahli, and Al Gharafa and Qatar SC on October 19 at the Al Gharafa Hall, while Al Rayyan will meet Al Arabi, and Al Sadd will meet Al Wakrah on October 20 at the Al Rayyan Club Hall.

The draw resulted in Al Shamal Club getting a bye in the preliminary round and will meet the winner of the Al Khor and Al Ahli match on October 23 at the Al Rayyan Club Hall to determine the qualifiers for the quarter-finals.

The semi-finals are scheduled to be held on October 26 at the Al Gharafa Hall, with the two winners advancing to the final, which

will be held on October 31 at 6:30pm at the same venue. Following the draw, Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari said: "All participating teams enter the tournament with a great desire to compete for the title as the Qatar Cup is considered one of the most important tournaments at the beginning of the new season. This year, we have compressed the matches schedule and on a knockout system to align the tournament with the commitments of the national team, which is preparing for the Asian qualifiers for the 2025 FIBA Asia Cup."

"We expect the tournament to witness a high level of competition and excitement, and we wish all teams the best of luck," he added.

## Qatar's Daniil Sokolov claims bronze medal



Qatar's Daniil Sokolov claimed bronze medal in the Juniors event at the 2024 Arab Junior Golf Championship which has concluded in Gammarth, Tunisia. Sokolov took the third place behind Egypt's Alaedin Salama and Jordan's Mohammed al-Rawashda. As many as 121 golfers representing 11 Arab countries took part in the championship, including Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, UAE, Iraq and hosts Tunisia.

## SPOTLIGHT

## QREC delegation participates at Salon du Cheval in Morocco

Under the patronage of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, Prince Moulay Rashid officially inaugurated the 15th edition of the Salon du Cheval at the Mohammed VI Exhibition Centre in El Jadida, Morocco on Monday.

The Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) and delegations representing 40 Arab and European countries are participating in the Salon. QREC's participation in the Salon this year comes at the invitation of the Morocco side and QREC accepted the invitation and included it under the framework of the Qatar-Morocco 2024 Year of Culture.

The official opening ceremony was held in presence of the heads of the participating delegations. Prince Moulay Rashid visited the booths of the Salon, including the QREC's booth, which has become one of the distinctive features of the Salon every year. During the visit, Issa bin Mohammed al-Mohammadi, QREC Chairman, presented QREC Shield to the Prince, in presence of Abdulrahman bin Saleh al-Attayah, Charge d' Affaires a.i. of Qatar Embassy in Morocco, and the members of the Qatari delegation to the Salon and members of both Morocco's Royal Society of Horse Encouragement (SOREC) and the Organising Committee.

## QATARI PARTICIPATION

QREC's booth has been receiving visitors, the day following the official inauguration day, which is always limited to VIPs and the participating delegations.

Through the QREC pavilion, the events organised by QREC, including Arabian horse shows and race meetings at Al Rayyan and Al Uqda racecourses, as well as the major international racing events sponsored by QREC such as the Qatar Goodwood Festival in the UK and the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in France, are promoted.

This year, the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in France coincides with the Salon and the QREC management coordinated the participation in the two events to ensure a successful and good representation of Qatar's equestrian sport in both events.

The visitors of the Salon learn about the remarkable development of Qatar's equestrian sport and the tremendous successes in enhancing Arabian racing worldwide.

The booth also highlights Qatar's leading role in the Arabian horse show discipline in terms of both winning the world's biggest titles and excellence in organising shows for many years in the Arab region.

## CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF EQUESTRIAN SPORT

Held at the Mohammed VI Exhibition Centre in El Jadida city, the Salon will continue until October 6 and will include a large variety of equestrian events and championships throughout the week.

The Salon celebrates the equestrian heritage in its cultural, historical and scientific dimensions through the display of paintings, artworks and manuscripts, as well as through cultural and scientific lectures, which are conducted in presence of senior equestrian experts.

The Salon du Cheval has gained a distinguished international status, becoming one of the most famous horse and equestrian salons in the world and one of the strongest events in the international equestrian programme. This year's edition is held under the theme "Horse Farming in Morocco: Innovation and Challenge". During the Salon's activities, all professions related to horses will be represented, including modern and traditional saddle making, modern farriery and "Tbourida" rifle making. "Tbourida" is one of the most famous and popular equestrian activities in Morocco. In addition, the programme of the Salon includes an Arabian Horse show and a show jumping competition.



QREC Chairman Issa bin Mohammed al-Mohammadi presented a shield to Prince Moulay Rashid in presence of Charge d' Affaires a.i. of Qatar Embassy in Morocco Abdulrahman bin Saleh al-Attayah.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Villa can compete against Bayern, says coach Emery

'We are motivated and so excited to play in front of our fans'

AFP  
Birmingham, United Kingdom

Unai Emery is hoping Aston Villa can summon the spirit of the club's 1982 European Cup final win over Bayern Munich when the German giants visit Birmingham in the Champions League today.

Villa's return to the top level of European football after a 41-year wait began successfully with a 3-0 win at Swiss side Young Boys two weeks ago. But Villa Park's first taste of the competition since it was re-branded as the Champions League brings back memories of the club's greatest-ever night.

Villa upset the odds to beat a mighty Bayern side, featuring club legends Paul Breitner and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, 1-0 in Rotterdam. "It is a special, special match for everyone," said Emery at his pre-match press conference. "We are motivated and so excited to play tomorrow with our supporters in Villa Park. Remembering as well the final that Villa played against them 42 years ago."

Emery, who has won the Europa League four times in his managerial career, has inspired a phenomenal turnaround in Villa's fortunes since taking charge less than two years ago. They were battling relegation from the Premier League when the Spaniard replaced Steven Gerrard, but rose to finish seventh in Emery's first season to qualify for the Europa Conference League.

Villa reached the semi-finals in their first experience of European football for 13 years and secured a top-four finish in the Premier League, above Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham, to qualify for the Champions League. Bayern, six-time European champions, are unbeaten in seven matches since Vincent Kompany took charge and Emery believes they are among the favourites to win the Champions League.

But he is hoping his side can compete as they have done with the Premier League's elite sides in recent seasons. "I want to play matches like this and I want to play consistently matches like this," added Emery. "In the



Aston Villa's Emiliano Buendia (left) and Ollie Watkins train in Bodmoor Heath, Britain, on the eve of their Champions League match against Bayern Munich. (Reuters)

Premier League we are facing teams like them - Manchester City, Liverpool, Arsenal - that can win this competition this year. They are favourites with other teams like Bayern Munich. Playing in Europe, we are very, very happy to face Bayern at home and hopefully we can enjoy tomorrow. Hopefully we can compete and show our best against them."

Kompany was a surprise choice by Bayern to succeed Thomas Tuchel after he oversaw Burnley's relegation from the Premier League last season. However, Emery is not surprised at the fast start the former Manchester City captain has made to life in Germany.

"I think he's a coach that has a very good future and he started being successful with Burnley when he got promoted.

"Last year was difficult with Burnley at the beginning, favourites to get relegated. He didn't achieve to keep them in the Premier League, but I always respect him a lot as a coach because the two matches we played were very difficult. With Bayern Munich and the players they have, I think it's easier to get the level they will want to have in their league and in the Champions League. They have started winning matches with very good results, playing very well."

## FOCUS

## Kompany confident Kane fit to face Villa

AFP  
Birmingham, United Kingdom

Bayern Munich boss Vincent Kompany is hopeful Harry Kane will be able to shrug off an ankle injury to face Aston Villa on his return to England in the Champions League today.

Kane, who has a history of ankle problems, was replaced in the closing minutes of Saturday's home 1-1 draw with reigning Bundesliga champions Bayer Leverkusen. However, the England captain was able to return to training yesterday.

"Harry trained today, and things went well. But we need to wait and see till tomorrow and be sure things stay like that," said Kompany at his pre-match press conference. "Then we can calmly make the right decision. Hopefully everything stays fine."

Bayern are unbeaten in Kompany's open-



ing seven games in charge with the Leverkusen stalemate the only match the former Manchester City captain failed to win. The German giants have been in scintillating form, including a 9-2 thrashing of Dinamo Zagreb on matchday one of the Champions League.

Kompany was a surprise choice to land one of European football's top jobs after overseeing

Burnley's relegation from the Premier League last season. The former Belgian international said he had nothing to prove on his return to England. "I don't have to prove anything as a coach. I think it's important to keep things separate," he added.

"Every challenge you take on has a different context. The most important thing for a coach is to say: 'Have I really done everything I can to get the best out of the team?' When you come home every night, you might say I'm tired, but if I've done everything I can to make the team better, I'm happy. I have a new club, a new team, a new task. You have to leave the past behind you. It's not about me now, it's about the players and the club."

Villa also got off to a winning start in their first taste of Champions League football for 41 years in a 3-0 win at Young Boys. But it is the visit of Bayern in a repeat of the 1982 European Cup final won by Villa that has been eagerly awaited by fans of the Premier League side.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Mbappe has recovered, but Madrid will take no risks for clash vs Lille

Reuters  
Madrid

Real Madrid will make a late call on whether Frenchman Kylian Mbappe is ready to return to the side for their Champions League clash at Lille after the forward recovered from a muscle injury, manager Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday.

The 25-year-old France captain, who joined the Spanish side from Ligue 1 champions Paris St Germain on a free transfer in June, picked up the problem during Madrid's 3-2 home win over Deportivo Alaves in La Liga last week. He has since missed one game - a 1-1 La Liga draw at Madrid's bitter rivals Atletico Madrid on Sunday.

"Mbappe has recovered very well, very quickly," Ancelotti told reporters ahead of today's game at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy. "He trained yesterday, and today, he will do the full training session with us. Then we'll make the decision together because the last thing we want to do is take risks. Mbappe has had an overload... and in less than a week he has recovered well. He wanted to travel to play. We'll see what training he does today. If he's at full strength, he can play. If there is no risk, he will play from the first minute."

Madrid are second in La Liga, three points behind rivals Barcelona after eight matches. But Ancelotti said there was room for improvement, especially when they face Lille, who sit fifth in Ligue 1. "We have to get points, taking into account the value of the opponent. They are a team that plays very well. They like to play with the ball, they have young players with quality," the Italian said. "Every match has to be fought. That's why we're here. We are doing well. We are convinced we can improve. We are ready. There are a lot of games, but we are pretty good."

Ancelotti was also asked about the heated Madrid derby. On Monday, Atletico permanently banned a fan for throwing an object onto the pitch during the game at the Metropolitan Stadium. The derby was suspended for just over 20 minutes after home fans hurled objects onto the pitch as the visitors celebrated the opening goal.

"The point is that violent people are not allowed in football. Not at Atletico, but on any pitch. Football doesn't need them," Ancelotti said. "Let them stay somewhere else, somewhere that is not dangerous. I'm talking in general. Whether it's a violent person from Madrid, Barca, Atleti, Villarreal, it doesn't matter. Let the violent ones leave us in peace."



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe heads the ball as he takes part in a training session in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, northern France. (AFP)

## Man United captain Fernandes has red card rescinded

Manchester: Manchester United captain Bruno Fernandes has escaped a three-match suspension after his red card in a 3-0 defeat to Tottenham was overturned.

The Portugal midfielder was sent off by referee Chris Kavanagh for a high tackle on James Maddison during Sunday's clash at Old Trafford. Fernandes clearly slipped before catching Maddison, who agreed the challenge did not justify a red card.

United appealed against the decision and the English Football Association (FA) has upheld a claim of wrongful dismissal. In a statement yesterday the FA said: "Bruno Fernandes will be available for Manchester United's next three games following a successful claim of wrongful dismissal."

The 30-year-old will now be free to face Aston Villa, Brentford and West Ham in United's next three Premier League games. Fernandes' availability is a boost to beleaguered United boss Erik ten Hag, who is battling to save his job. The Red Devils are 13th in

the Premier League table having won just two of their opening six matches.

**HAALAND CAPTAINS NORWAY WITH ODEGAARD STILL 'A LONG WAY' FROM PLAYING**  
Manchester City striker Erling Haaland will take over the captain's armband for this month's Nations League fixtures, the Norwegian FA said, with regular skipper Martin Odegaard still "far from ready" to return to action.

Odegaard, who twisted his left ankle on September 9 in Oslo during a match against Austria in the Nations League, was unsurprisingly absent from the squad who will host Slovenia in Oslo on October 10 before travelling to Linz to face Austria three days later. The 25-year-old's injury will also affect Arsenal, who played Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League yesterday. "He (Odegaard) is a long way from being able to play," the Norwegian FA said. "But he may turn up during the preparations to be with the team."