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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Need to keep winning to stay in title race, says Sadd coach

Defending champs Sadd face Shahania, who stunned league leaders Duhail in the previous round

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Defending champions Al Sadd will aim to extend their winning run when they take on newly-promoted Al Shahania in the Qatar Stars League at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today. Al Sadd, currently sitting in fifth place, have won three of their six matches so far, collecting nine points. Their most recent victory was an impressive 4-2 triumph over Al Gharafa before the international break.

However, consistency remains a priority for head coach Felix Sanchez. "We need to keep winning to stay in the title race," Sanchez said. "It's always challenging after the break, as players return from national duties. But we are confident in our ability to deliver a good performance."

The Wolves will be without defender Pedro Miguel, who underwent surgery on a hamstring injury and is expected to be sidelined for three months. However, key players like Akram Afif, Rafa Mujica, and Boualem Khoukhi are available and will be essential to Al Sadd's hopes of picking up three points. Sanchez also hinted at the importance of squad rotation, with matches coming thick and fast. "After this game, we have a crucial AFC Champions League match, so we need to manage things carefully while maintaining momentum," he added.

On the other hand, Al Shahania enter the game with renewed confidence following their surprise 2-1 win over Al Duhail in the previous round. That victory was their first of the season, bringing their points tally to five, placing them 10th in the standings. Head coach Alvaro Mejia emphasized that his side is improving with every game. "Al Sadd are one of the best teams in Qatar, but we are ready. The team is improving in level from one match to another, and is ready for the Al Sadd match," Mejia said.

They will look to Dutch striker Pelle van Amersfoort, who was instrumental in their win against Al Duhail, scoring twice. Other key players for Al Shahania include goalkeeper Shehab Ellethy, Lotfi Majder, and Alhassan Koroma. Mejia noted the importance of monitoring Koroma's fitness after his international duty with Sierra Leone.



Al Sadd players at a training session yesterday.

"We'll assess his physical condition before the match, but we are prepared to field the best lineup," Mejia said.

With both teams in need of points – Sadd aiming to close the gap on the league leaders and Shahania fighting to move up the table – the tactical battle between Sanchez and Mejia promises to be intriguing. Al Shahania player Francesco Antonucci said, "Al Sadd are a strong team and our team is ready for this difficult match in the Ooredoo Stars League. We played against Al Duhail in the previous round of

the league and were very strong opponents and succeeded in achieving victory. The players took advantage of the break to prepare themselves for this important match. We will be up to the responsibility against Al Sadd and we are a team coming from the second division and everyone is working hard, and we in Al Shahania are one family and will be ready for Al Sadd."

At the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, hosts Al Gharafa will take on. Umm Salal currently occupy fourth place in the standings with a tally of 10 points, having won three



Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez at a press conference yesterday.



Al Shahania's coach Alvaro Mejia (right) midfielder Francesco Antonucci.

matches and drawn one while losing two.

The Orange Fortress are only five points away from leaders Al Duhail and are looking forward to continuing their brilliance this season. Al Gharafa are in search of a third victory in the league this season as they aim to move into the top four.

The Cheetahs are currently in sixth place with eight points gained from two wins and as many draws. They have also suffered two losses.

Umm Salal coach Patrice Carteron said: "There is continuous improvement in the league, which makes the match against Al Gharafa difficult, but our players are determined to achieve the best result in this encounter. "I am very happy with the team's performance, because we are refreshed and ready to compete again, and we hope to continue in this manner."

Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said: "We spent about three weeks in the break, it was important for some players to play competitive matches. It was good to recover some injured players such as Aron and Muntari, and there are some players who will arrive a day before the match."

Meanwhile, Al Khor and Al Rayyan will at the Al Khor Stadium today in an early 5:30pm kick off. Al Khor are currently bottom-placed with three points from three draws and as many losses, being the only team in the league which has not won a game so far. Al Rayyan are ninth in the rankings with six points – gained from two wins. They have also suffered four losses.

Both Al Khor and Al Rayyan are also coming losses in their previous fixtures. Al Khor had lost 1-3 to Al Wakrah, while Al Rayyan went down 1-2 to Al Arabi.

QFA to institute Best Goalkeeper and Stand awards

Doha: The Board of Trustees of Qatar Football Association Awards held a regular meeting on preparations for the 2024-2025 season and discussed a number of proposals submitted by the Board members with the aim of developing and contributing towards enhancing the competition and raising the level of technical performance.

A number of decisions were taken, the most important of which are: Instituting an award for the best goalkeeper, as a support and encouragement for goalkeepers to excel and provide the best in addition to creating a spirit of competition between them. It may be noted that this award will be subject to voting by participants in the voting process and according to the approved

official mechanism.

It was also decided to add a special award for fans under the name 'Best Stand' considering the importance of fan factor and with the aim of encouraging clubs to work to communicate and motivate their fans to be present and support their teams during matches.

It may be noted that this award is not subject to voting process and nominations will be made for it according to the following criteria: The average fan attendance during the season according to official statistics approved by relevant authorities; Creativity and innovation, including methods of encouragement and means of motivation; Social responsibility programmes and various community initiatives.



Cherif, Tijan start with a win at Joao Pessoa Elite16



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan secured an easy 21-17, 21-12 win over local favourites Felipe Alves and Henrique Barros in their opening Group D match of the Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour Joao Pessoa Elite16 in Brazil yesterday. In the other matches, Cherif and Tijan will play Argentina's Nicolas Capogrosso/Tomas Capogrosso and Brazil's another pair Gustavo Carvalhaes and Vitor Felipe.

SECOND TEST

England stutter after Salman and Sajid lift Pakistan

England, set a target of 297, have been reduced to 36 for two

Reuters
Multan

Pakistan set England a tricky victory target of 297 and then reduced the touring side to 36 for two on an eventful third day of the second Test to stay on course for a series-levelling victory yesterday.

Salman Agha, dropped twice early in his knock, smashed a belligerent 63 as Pakistan posted 221 all out in their second innings in the spin-dominated contest.

It left England substantial total to win the match and take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-test series but their batters struggled against the turning ball on a track where spinners from both sides have done well.

England, still 261 runs behind their target, will expect vice-captain Ollie Pope (21) and batting mainstay Joe Root (12) to put their chase back on track when play resumes today.

Earlier, Sajid Khan claimed seven wickets as Pakistan bowled England out for 291 to grab a handy lead of 75 at the Multan Cricket Stadium.

England, resuming on 239-6, lost their remaining four wickets in the first hour.

Off-spinner Sajid dismissed Brydon Carse, Matthew Potts and Shoaib Bashir to finish with impressive figures of 7-111.

Left-arm spinner Noman Ali claimed the remaining three as England lost all 10 wickets to Pakistan's spin-heavy attack, which has Aamer Jamal as the lone seamer.

Recognising the nature of the track, England captain Ben Stokes



Pakistan's Salman Agha (right) and Sajid Khan bump their fists during the third day of the second Test against England at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan yesterday. (AFP)

began with spin from both ends, putting in off-spinner Bashir with left-arm spinner Jack Leach.

Stokes stayed with spin even when Leach had to be rested, pressing part-time off-spinner Root into service.

Bashir drew first blood when he had Pakistan opener Abdullah Shafique caught behind for four. England successfully reviewed the original not-out decision and replays confirmed the faintest of edges.

Bashir (4-66) then dismissed Shan Masood for 11 after the Pakistan captain tried to flick a ball only to offer an edge to Ollie Pope at second slip.

Opener Saim Ayub (22) looked

comfortable before falling to the same Pope-Bashir combination in the final delivery before the lunch break.

Kamran Ghulam, who smashed a hundred in the first innings of his debut test, made a fluent 26 before Leach trapped him lbw.

Carse dismissed Mohammad Rizwan for 23 but could only watch in horror as wicketkeeper Jamie Smith and slip fielder Root spilled regulation catches after the seamer produced two edges in three deliveries from Salman.

Salman went on to add 65 runs with Sajid (22) for the ninth wicket before he was bounced out by Carse. England stuttered early in their victory pursuit.

Opener Ben Duckett, who smashed a rapid hundred in the first innings, fell for a two-ball duck fluffing his sweep shot against Sajid.

Zak Crawley (three) did not last long either and was stumped after left-arm spinner Noman Ali deceived him with a flighted delivery. Root reverse-swept the final delivery of the day for a four to signal his intention of not letting the Pakistan spinners dictate terms.

BRIEF SCORES (Day 3)
England 291 (Duckett 114, Sajid 7-111) and 36 for 2 need a further 261 to beat Pakistan 366 and 221 (Salman 63, Bashir 4-66)

South Africa stun Australia to reach T20 World Cup final

Dubai: A superb 74 not out from Anneke Bosch fired South Africa into the Women's T20 World Cup final as they demolished defending champions Australia by eight wickets in Dubai yesterday. Set 135 to win, South Africa reached their target with 16 balls to spare, with Bosch, who struck eight fours and a six in her 48-ball innings, sharing a match-winning partnership of 96 with skipper Laura Wolvaardt (42).

In Sunday's final, which will be the first not to feature one of Australia or England, the South Africans will face either West Indies or New Zealand who meet in the second semi-final today. Australia, who have won six of the previous eight editions, had been the odds-on favourites to win a seventh title in the United Arab Emirates.

However, they had no answer to South Africa for whom this marked a measure of revenge for defeat by Australia in last year's final in Cape Town.

"I think this is one of the best wins of my cricketing career for sure. A couple of other girls have said it as well," Wolvaardt said yesterday.

"I think that was such an amazing chase. The bowlers are excellent. It's been a good year for us. I think it's been a real collective group effort." Put into bat, Australia, who were again without their injured captain Alyssa Healy, struggled from the start with the normally fluent Beth Mooney top-scoring with a grafting 44 that included just two fours.

Healy's stand-in Tahlia McGrath made 27 and Ellyse Perry 31 but the run rate only got moving once Phoebe Litchfield came in to club a rapid 15 from nine balls. The South Africans made a brisk start with Tazmin Brits hitting a six and a four before being bowled by Annabel Sutherland for 15.

That brought in Bosch who had had a mediocre tournament until Thursday with a highest score of 25 against Bangladesh. She was quickly into her stride, using the slog sweep to great effect as she knocked all of the Australian bowlers apart from Sutherland off their rhythm.

She duly posted her third fifty in T20I cricket, going on to make her highest total in the format and the top score in this tournament.



Anneke Bosch of South Africa bats against Australia during their Women's T20 World Cup semi-final in Dubai yesterday. Bosch scored an unbeaten 74 as South Africa beat Australia by 8 wickets. (@ProteasWomenCSA)

ment. "It was quite tough out there but I'm really glad we could get over the line and that I could finally contribute with some runs," Bosch who was named Player of the Match, said after the game.

"I can't really describe it but we knew we were capable of it and we had a pretty good tournament so far coming into this game and we were quite confident."

Wolvaardt, who is now the tournament's highest run-scorer with 190, fell just short of the finish with Bosch sealing South Africa's stunning win by smashing Megan Schutt through midwicket.

"It's going to be pretty hard to take," said McGrath.

"We just didn't really show up tonight. You can't afford to do that in tournaments like this. Full credit to South Africa. They outplayed us tonight."

BRIEF SCORES
Australia 134-5 in 20 overs (Beth Mooney 44, Ellyse Perry 31, Tahlia McGrath 27, Ayabonga Khaka 2-24) v South Africa 135-2 in 17.2 overs (Anneke Bosch 74 not out, Laura Wolvaardt 42; Annabel Sutherland 2-26)
Result: South Africa win by eight wickets
Player of the Match: Anneke Bosch
Toss: South Africa

MATCH REPORT

India dismissed for 46 as Henry runs riot

Reuters
Bengaluru

India were bundled out for a dismal 46, their worst total on home soil, as New Zealand's fast bowlers ran amok in overcast conditions before the tourists got to 180-3 at stumps on the second day of the rain-hit opening Test yesterday.

New Zealand swelled their lead to 134 runs under glorious sunshine and will eye a big total to improve their chances of a first victory over India in the country since 1988.

Devon Conway took the attack to the jolted hosts with a bold approach during his 91, while Rachin Ravindra was unbeaten on 22 and Daryl Mitchell on 14 not out at stumps.

Earlier, in conditions more reminiscent of Christchurch than Karnataka, Matt Henry bagged 5-15 while fellow speedster William O'Rourke sparked in his first match in India with 4-22 to skittle the hosts shortly after lunch.

The 46 runs were India's third-lowest test total and the fewest in an innings by



New Zealand's fast bowler Matt Henry gestures during the second day of the first Test against India at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

any team playing in the country, short of the 62 the Black Caps managed against the hosts at Mumbai three years ago.

India's previous lowest total at home was the 75 they made against West Indies

in New Delhi in 1987. After the opening day was washed out, Rohit Sharma raised eyebrows by opting to bat first in a seamer-friendly environment under lights at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium and was fortunate to survive a loud appeal for lbw from Henry in the morning.

"You see (the pitch) and try and make a judgement. Sometimes you make the right call and sometimes, you don't," Rohit said.

"I'm hurting a little bit because I made that call," Rohit said.

"The challenges that were thrown at us, we didn't respond to well and found ourselves in a situation where we got bowled out for 46. As a captain, it definitely hurts to see that number."

The skipper did not last long at the crease as Tim Southee castled him with a delivery that nipped back in and the tourists then landed two more heavy blows by dismissing Virat Kohli and Sarfaraz Khan for ducks in successive overs.

Kohli, in at number three after Shubman Gill was ruled out with injury, was caught at leg gully by a diving Glenn Phillips after O'Rourke delivered a ball that moved back in towards the veteran batsman's ribcage.

India's 5 lowest totals in Tests

Total	Rival team	Venue	Match date
36	v Australia	Adelaide	17 Dec 2020
42	v England	Lord's	20 Jun 1974
46	v NZ	Bengaluru	16 Oct 2024
58	v Australia	Brisbane	28 Nov 1947
58	v England	Manchester	17 Jul 1952

Khan fell to Henry thanks to a stunning catch by Conway at mid-off, leaving the hosts teetering at 10-3.

New Zealand could have had a fourth wicket shortly after a brief rain interruption but for some sloppy wicketkeeping by Tom Blundell, who dropped a simple chance and handed Rishabh Pant a lifeline when the left-hander was on seven.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal was not as fortunate when a well-timed cut off O'Rourke went straight to Ajaz Patel, before the towering paceman sent back KL Rahul for a duck.

Henry compounded India's woes by removing Ravindra Jadeja for another duck, the fourth of the innings before lunch, and then added Ravichandran Ashwin to that list with the first ball after the break.

He then dismissed Pant for 20 before claiming his fifth victim of the innings and 100th of his Test career by having Kuldeep Yadav caught at gully.

O'Rourke earlier accounted for Jasprit Bumrah, with Henry taking a brilliant catch in the deep.

"It was a good toss to lose," said Henry. "It was quite nice when those clouds started coming in. I think we were expecting it to be a flatter wicket, but there was plenty of assistance this morning so it was great that we could make the most of it."

India lost their last seven wickets for only 15 runs as fans in the stadium cheered every time the lower-order batsmen played defensive shots under pressure.

The crowd had little to celebrate until New Zealand's Tom Latham (15) and Will Young (33) departed, with the loudest roar reserved for the wicket of Conway when he was bowled by Ashwin after hitting the India attack for 11 fours and three sixes.

BRIEF SCORES (Day 2)
New Zealand 180 for 3 (Conway 91) lead India 46 (Henry 5-15, O'Rourke 4-22) by 134 runs

FOCUS

Sri Lanka complete series win over West Indies

AFP
Dambulla, Sri Lanka

Kusal Mendis hit an unbeaten 68 to help clinch Sri Lanka's first T20 international series win over the West Indies with a thumping nine-wicket victory in the third and final game yesterday.

Sri Lanka chased down their 163-run target with 12 balls to spare as a sell-out home crowd in Dambulla erupted.

"Happy to get the team over the line," said Mendis who hit five fours and three sixes. "Not the easiest pitch to bat on, but these are conditions that we are used to playing." The tourists had a chance to dismiss Mendis when he was on 44, but Roston Chase could not hold on to a tough return catch. Mendis and fellow



Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis (right) and Kusal Perera during the third and final T20I against West Indies in Dambulla. (AFP)

opener Pathum Nissanka put on 60 runs in just 5.2 overs.

Nissanka, in sublime form, contributed 39 from 22 deliveries, including seven fours and a six, before a low delivery from

Gudakesh Motie ended his stay. Mendis continued his composed knock, driving the spinners effortlessly through the covers and pulling the seamers with authority. He was joined by Kusal Perera, whose unbeaten 55 off 36 balls showcased his resilience as he battled cramps to reach his 15th T20I half-century.

Together, Mendis and Perera stitched an unbroken 106-run partnership, steering Sri Lanka to a landmark victory over the higher-ranked tourists.

The West Indies opted to bat and rallied from a shaky start that left them 68-5 with a 54-run stand off 26 balls between skipper Rowman Powell and Motie.

Motie blasting Dunith Wellalage for three consecutive sixes and a four in the 15th over, later departing when Mendis stumped him off Wanindu Hasaranga.

Sri Lanka leaned heavily on their spin arsenal with Maheesh Theekshana and Wanindu Hasaranga claiming two wickets each. "I thought we had enough runs on the board," Powell said. "Sri Lankan spinners completely outplayed us. We knew spin was going to play a key role and Sri Lanka were far better."

The West Indies won the series opener by five wickets and Sri Lanka bounced back with a commanding 73-run victory in the second game. This series win crowns a strong three months for Sri Lanka under new head coach Sanath Jayasuriya.

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 166 for 1 (Kusal Mendis 68, Kusal Perera 55) beat West Indies 162 for 8 (Powell 37, Motie 32, Theekshana 2-19) by nine wickets

Shakib not returning to Bangladesh over 'security issue': Media

Dhaka: Retiring ex-skipper Shakib Al Hasan told local media yesterday he was not returning to Bangladesh because of "a security issue", potentially missing what he says will be his final match for his country.

Asif Mahmud, who heads the sports ministry, said he had advised the cricket board to discourage Shakib from returning because of public anger. As well as a cricket star, Shakib is an ex-lawmaker in the government ousted by a revolution in August.

The 37-year-old announced his retirement from international cricket last month but said that he wanted to play one last Test series at home.

He was named in the Bangladesh squad to face South Africa, with the first of two Tests starting October 21, and had been expected to fly back to Dhaka yesterday.

Shakib is a former lawmaker from the party of autocratic ex-leader Sheikh Hasina, who fled by helicopter to India in August. He is among dozens from Hasina's party facing murder investigations on protesters during the uprising. "I was to return home... but now I don't think I can," Shakib told broadcaster *bnews24.com*. "It is over a security issue, a matter of my own security." Shakib apologised in a Facebook post earlier this month for remaining silent during the revolution.

But Mahmud, from the interim government's cabinet, said that "recent protests suggest it wasn't enough" and that to avoid "unwanted incidents" he had advised Shakib not to return. Bangladesh media said Shakib was in Dubai but would be heading to the United States.

FORMULA 1

Verstappen eyes ending winless streak in Texas

'It's going to be incredibly busy, but also exciting, in the next two months'

AFP
Austin

Max Verstappen will seek to reboot his title defence and end an eight-race winless streak this weekend when he locks horns with title rival Lando Norris at the United States Grand Prix.

Four weeks on from finishing second behind him in Singapore, Red Bull's three-time world champion and series leader hopes recent upgrades to his car will be enough for him to reel in the McLaren driver and repeat his 2023 triumph at the Circuit of the Americas. "The car felt better in Singapore," said Verstappen. "It was already a good step for us in Baku and I think we are going in the right direction now, but it takes time. You can't change something like this in one or two weeks."

The Dutchman admitted that Red Bull struggled to match the speed of their main competitors, McLaren, Ferrari and Red Bull, during much of the mid-part of the 24-race season, but with six races remaining, three including additional sprints, he hopes his 52-point lead will be enough for him to hang on. Verstappen has not won since the Spanish Grand Prix and Norris, despite some inconsistency, has beaten him in the last five races, igniting a late bid for the drivers' title to add to McLaren's takeover of the constructors' championship.

An extra eight points are on offer



Second placed Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium after the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix night race at the Marina Bay Street Circuit in Singapore on September 22, 2024. (AFP)

This weekend thanks to Saturday's sprint as the F1 circus begins a triple-header with races in Austin, Mexico and Brazil on successive weekends before the final events in Las Vegas, Qatar and Abu Dhabi. In all, a total of 180 points are still available to be won and the various permutations all end up suggesting that Norris needs to stay on top and hope Verstappen has a few low or non-scoring races.

"It's going to be incredibly busy, but also exciting, in the next two

months," said Norris. "I'm ready to get back in the car, so let's show Texas what we can do."

Verstappen has won all three sprints this season so far and will hope he can continue that vein of form to make the difference as the season moves to a rousing finale.

His Austrian sprint win was his last success and he said he hopes further updates for Austin will "suit this circuit and see if we are more competitive when we head out on track." Both leading teams

will turn to their second drivers Sergio Perez of Red Bull and Oscar Piastri for McLaren for critical support as their battle for the titles.

McLaren lead Red Bull by 41 points in the teams' title race with Perez in acute need of a change of form and fortunes before his home event in Mexico. Mercedes' seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, who is the most successful driver at the US Grand Prix with six wins, could also be a factor at one of his favourite circuits.

MOTORSPORT

Leader Martin targets mistake-free Australia MotoGP as Bagnaia lurks

AFP
Phillip Island, Australia

Championship leader Jorge Martin said yesterday a mistake-free weekend at the Australian MotoGP was his priority as he looks to fend off rival Francesco Bagnaia.

The Spanish Pramac star Martin, who is chasing his first world title, went into the race in Japan a fortnight ago with a 21-point cushion over the Italian.

But defending world champion Bagnaia won the sprint and the grand prix on his Ducati to narrow the gap to just 10 points and keep the championship on a knife-edge with four race weekends left.

"It will be a really challenging weekend," said Martin, who came second in the Japan MotoGP after starting from 11th, and finished fourth in the sprint.

"The most important thing for me is to arrive at Valencia (season-ending race) with options. There are three races before that... if you make a mistake it will be a disaster. So I am going to try to be focused and be competitive."

Anything can happen at the waterfront Phillip Island circuit, where riders are at the whim of often unpredictable weather on a demanding track.

A new surface this year could further complicate matters, making tyre choice crucial.

Last year the grand prix was held a day early due to forecast gale-force winds with the 13-lap sprint race pushed back to the Sunday. The sprint was ultimately called off an hour before it was due to start with the track soaked and wind gusts of up to 80 kilometres (50 miles) per hour. Bleak conditions are again forecast.

"Tomorrow looks like rain, Saturday looks windy and Sunday looks okay, but cold," said Bagnaia, who was pipped on the final lap last year by France's Johann Zarco.

"Like always, Phillip Island is complicated to understand."

Neither Bagnaia nor Martin have won before in Australia.

The Italian said he was focused on the championship rather than a breakthrough win at this stage of the season.

"We have to be thinking about the championship and try to do the maximum without taking too much risk," he said. "And here at Phillip Island if you take the risk, it can be costly."

While the championship is virtually a two-way battle for the title, Ducati's Enea Bastianini and four-time Phillip Island winner Marc Marquez remain in the hunt.

Bastianini is 69 points adrift, two points clear of Gresini's Marquez, with both riders needing podium finishes to stay in touch this weekend.

"If we do everything right and we are perfect we can stay with the guys at the front," said six-time world champion Marquez.

"But we don't have the capacity to catch them when they get away from us. Let's see if we can get back to qualifying well. We haven't done it since Aragon (in September) and when you get out on the front row it changes the whole picture."

The championship moves to Thailand after Australia, then visits Malaysia before the season finale in Valencia.

Di Giannantonio to miss final two MotoGP for surgery

Italian Fabio Di Giannantonio will miss the final two MotoGP races of the year to undergo shoulder surgery, his Ducati-VR46 team said yesterday.

Di Giannantonio, currently 10th in the championship, dislocated his left shoulder in a high-speed collision at the Austrian GP in August, but has continued to ride. He is set to compete in Australia this weekend then at Thailand before returning home for an operation that will rule him out of the season-ending races in Malaysia and Valencia.

FORMULA ONE TO SCRAP BONUS POINT FOR FASTEST LAP

Formula One will scrap from next season the bonus point awarded to the driver who sets the fastest lap in a grand prix, the governing FIA said yesterday.

Since 2019 the regulations have allocated an extra point provided the driver finishes in the top 10 - a potentially significant consideration in a 24-race season like 2024. The FIA said ahead of the U.S. Grand Prix in Austin that changes to the 2024 and 2025 sporting and technical regulations were approved by its World Motor Sport

Council at a meeting in Paris and by video conference. As well as removing the point for fastest lap, the requirement for fielding a young driver during free practice will increase from once per car per season to twice per car per season. The fastest lap point can be crucial when the championship is on a knife-edge but it has also become a part of strategy, sometimes controversially when used by teams with common ownership.

At last month's Singapore Grand Prix, RB's Australian driver Daniel

Ricciardo pitted at the end for fresh tyres to set the fastest lap in what was likely the last race of his F1 career.

The move did not bring him a point, because he was outside the top 10, but benefitted Red Bull's Max Verstappen by taking the point away from McLaren rival Lando Norris, who had previously been fastest. Norris, 52 points behind Verstappen with six rounds remaining, has taken four points from fastest laps so far this season - including three of the last four -

to the triple champion's two. "I would say probably it's the right thing to get rid of it because it's not really relative to the speed, like who's the fastest out there," said Sauber driver Valtteri Bottas at the Circuit of the Americas. "It's always depending on strategy, who stops the last basically will get it, so it doesn't tell much. I think even with our car, we could sometimes maybe get it if we stop before the last lap and go all out." Sauber are the only team yet to score a point this season.



Prima Pramac Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin attends a press conference ahead of the Australian MotoGP on Phillip Island. (AFP)

GOLF

Olympic champ Ko three behind leaders at LPGA in South Korea

AFP
Seoul

Olympic gold medallist Lydia Ko shot a five-under-par 67 yesterday to finish three shots off the lead after the first round of the LPGA BMW Ladies Championship in South Korea.

The New Zealander triumphed at the Paris Olympics and ended an eight-year major drought at the Women's British Open at St Andrews two weeks later. The 27-year-old shot five birdies and no bogeys at Seowon Valley Country Club to stay within striking distance of leading trio Jenny Shin, Hannah Green and Ashleigh Buhai.

Ko, the 2022 champion, said she was satisfied after a "solid" start.

"I didn't really put myself in that many difficult positions," said Ko, who also won the LPGA Queen City Championship in Los Angeles last month.

"This is kind of a golf course where if you hit the ball well, you can set up and give yourself a lot of birdie opportunities."

Ko, who was born in South Korea before moving to New Zealand when she was four, said she also "left a lot of putts out there."

"But I think it's because I hit like 16 or 17 greens," she added.

"So it's always a good place to be at, and just overall a good start to this event."

Defending champion Minjee



Lee matched Ko with a five-under round. The leading trio all posted rounds that featured eight birdies and no bogeys.

Australia's Green, the world number eight, said it was "nice to play some simple golf."

"Last week in China I just had a very mixed scorecard, made some bigger numbers, and just to go bogey-free was really nice but it also helps when you hit 18 greens," she said. "I think I only missed one fairway."

South Korea's Ryu Hae-ran was one shot behind the leading pack after a 65. American Lilia Vu, ranked number two in the world, finished the day one-under par. Two-time major winner Yuka Saso was at three-under.

LEADING FIRST-ROUND SCORES (PAR 72):

64 - Hannah Green (AUS), Ashleigh Buhai (RSA), Jenny Shin

(KOR)
65 - Ryu Hae-ran (KOR)
66 - Ji Eun-hee (KOR), Choi Hye-jin (KOR), Sung Yu-jin (KOR), Gemma Dryburgh (SCO), Mao Saigo (JPN), Céline Boutier (FRA)
67 - Lydia Ko (NZL), Minjee Lee (AUS), Grace Kim (AUS), Nanna Koerstz Madsen (DEN), Megan Khang (USA), Rose Zhang (USA), Angel Yin (USA), Bailey Tardy (USA), Amy Yang (KOR), Kim Hyo-joo (KOR), Lee Jeong-eun6 (KOR), Kim A-lim (KOR)
68 - Kim Sei-young (KOR), Chanettee Wannasaen (THA), Albane Valenzuela (SUI), Lucy Li (USA), Minami Katsu (JPN)
69 - Yuka Saso (JPN), Yuna Nishimura (JPN), Esther Henseleit (GER), Danielle Kang (USA), Ryann O'Toole (USA), Ariya Jutanugarn (THA), Moriya Jutanugarn (THA), Im Jin-hee (KOR), Park Kum-kang (KOR), Linnea Strom (SWE), Oh Soo-min (KOR)

TENNIS

Swiatek hires stars' coach Fissette

Reuters
London

World number one Iga Swiatek has added Belgian Wim Fissette, a former coach to top-ranked players like Naomi Osaka, Kim Clijsters and Victoria Azarenka to her team, the 23-year-old Pole said yesterday.

Earlier this month, the five-times Grand Slam champion had parted ways with her coach Tomasz Wiktorowski after three years.

Wiktorowski had joined Swiatek's team before the 2022 season and had been with her during four of her five Grand Slam wins, including three French Open victories.

"I'm happy to announce that Wim Fissette is joining our team," Swiatek said on social media platform X.

"As you know, I'm preparing for the WTA Finals but my perspective is, as always, long-term, not short-term. I said many times that my career is a marathon for me, not a sprint and I'm working, operating and making decisions with this approach."

"I want to say that I'm very excited and looking forward to working with Wim. He seems to have a great attitude, vision and huge experience at a very top level of tennis. It's always crucial to try and get to know each other better but we're off to a good start and I can't wait to compete soon."



Serena has grapefruit-sized cyst removed from neck

Serena Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, revealed on Wednesday she had a grapefruit-sized cyst removed from her neck and is doing well as she recovers.

The 43-year-old former women's tennis world number one said in a Tik Tok video that she found a lump in May on the right side of her neck and an MRI showed she had a brachial cyst.

"I am still recovering, but getting better. Health always comes first," Williams posted on X.

Williams did not have the cyst removed immediately but after it grew in size and she had multiple tests and a biopsy, she underwent surgery to remove it.

"I found this big mass on my neck. I was mortified by it," she said in the video. "I got tests done. Everything you could imagine. Everything was negative. Turns out I had what they call a cyst, a brachial cyst to be exact."

"So I ended up having to get it

removed. It was so big. It was the size of a grapefruit and it kind of hurt coming out."

"They had to put a drain in it because it was so much but everything worked out and I feel really happy to have worked with some great doctors."

"A little scared here but excited to move on to the next steps of healing and getting well."

The end of her video showed Williams with daughter Olympia on a promised shopping trip after the operation. "I'm feeling so grateful and fortunate everything worked out and most of all I'm healthy," Williams wrote in a caption to the video. "I still made it to American doll with Olympia as promised."

"And yes all is ok."

Williams won her first Grand Slam title at the 1999 US Open and her last at the 2017 Australian Open. She captured seven Australian Opens, seven Wimbledon, six US Opens and three French Open titles before retiring after the 2022 US Open.

FOOTBALL

Monaco aiming to last in Ligue 1 title fight with PSG

The principality club are top of the table, two points clear of PSG

AFP
Paris

Monaco have had a fine start to the season at home and in Europe, and are hoping to last the pace in the Ligue 1 title race ahead of a stiff test of their credentials against Lille this weekend.

The principality club were thrilling champions in 2017 with a teenage Kylian Mbappe in their ranks but have not managed to repeat those heroics despite four podium finishes in the seven seasons since. However, they were runners-up to Paris Saint-Germain in Ligue 1 last season and went into the recent international break top of the table, two points clear of the reigning champions.

Under Austrian coach Adi Huetter, Monaco have won six of their seven Ligue 1 matches so far, the sole exception being a 1-1 draw at home to Lens, when they were denied victory by a stoppage-time penalty. They have also got off to a good start in their first Champions League campaign in six seasons, beating Barcelona 2-1 at the Stade Louis II before coming from two goals down to draw at Dinamo Zagreb.

Monaco have been helped by some sound close-season recruitment, in particular the arrival of young Senegal star Lamine Camara in midfield to make up for the sale of French international Youssouf Fofana to AC Milan. The emergence of exciting young talents Eliesse Ben Seghir and Maghnes Aklouches is significant too, while the departure of prolific captain Wissam Ben Yedder may ultimately be beneficial.

Ben Yedder, who scored 98 Ligue 1 goals in five seasons, is currently on trial for sexual assault and is battling alcoholism. The next week will say much about Monaco's long-term prospects however, with Lille's visit on Friday followed by a Champions League meeting with Red Star Belgrade and then a derby against Nice. "It is a fact that we have started the season very well but it was the same situation at this point last year," Huetter pointed out. Monaco were top after seven games last season. "We have some big opponents coming up and for me Lille are one of the best teams in the league."

Eight-time champions Monaco have also been dealt a blow with the news that United States striker Folarin Balogun will be out for two months after suffering a dislocated shoulder in the team's last game, a 2-1 win at Rennes.



Monaco have won six of their seven Ligue 1 matches so far.

This weekend's opponents Lille, champions in 2021, are fifth and recently beat Real Madrid in the Champions League.

The trip to the Mediterranean for them will be followed by a journey to Spain to play Atletico Madrid in the Champions League.

This weekend the player to watch out is Pierre Lees-Melou. The midfielder, 31, was so impressive on Brest's run to a surprise third-place finish last season that he was named in Ligue 1's team of the year. An untimely injury – a stress fracture of the fibula – prevented him from leaving the Brittany club during the close season when a lucrative move to a more glamorous name seemed on the cards.

He then played no part in Brest's first eight games of this campaign but returned as a substitute in their last match, against Le Havre two weeks ago.

Now he is in line to feature in Saturday's Brittany derby against Rennes – a club he might have joined last season – and will hope to start in Wednesday's Champions League clash against German champions Bayer Leverkusen.

FIXTURES (TIMES GMT)

Today: Monaco v Lille (1845)

Tomorrow: Brest v Rennes (1500), Saint-Etienne v Lens (1700), Paris Saint-Germain v Strasbourg (1900)

Sunday: Le Havre v Lyon (1300), Auxerre v Reims, Nantes v Nice, Toulouse v Angers (all 1500), Montpellier v Marseille (1845)

U-14 QATAR ASIAN TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIP

Qatar's Dana Khalifa clinches singles and doubles titles

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Dana Khalifa starred at the fourth edition of the Qatar Asian Tennis Championship (under 14 years), securing titles in both the girls' singles and doubles categories. The tournament, held at the Qatar Tennis Federation's courts, featured around 100 male and female competitors.

Khalifa claimed the singles title by defeating Kazakhstan's Sofia Churkina in straight sets 6-2, 6-3. In the girls' doubles final, she teamed up with Lithuanian partner Ona Kildesit to triumph over the Kazakh duo of Vlada Chakushina and Sofia Churkina, dominating the match with a decisive 6-1, 6-0 victory.

In the boys' singles, India's Hirish Patel emerged victorious, winning against Romania's David Raducan with a flawless score of 6-0, 6-0.

Tariq Zainal, Secretary-General of the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel, and Badminton Federation, expressed pride in Dana Khalifa's achievements. "We are immensely proud of Dana Khalifa for winning both the singles and doubles titles in this tournament, which gathered the top junior players from Asia. We look forward to seeing more of our players on regional and international podiums," he stated during the award ceremony.



Zainal emphasised that these results signify a notable success for Qatari tennis and serve as motivation to continue enhancing the skills of both male and female players. He assured that the federation will spare no effort in providing robust support to its national teams.

Bahrain wants World Cup qualifier moved from Indonesia after 'death threats'

Manama: Bahrain's football association said it would request that a World Cup qualifying match scheduled for March be moved outside of Indonesia after the national team allegedly received death threats from Indonesian fans. "The association will submit a request to remove the match from Indonesia to preserve the safety of the team," it said in a statement posted to X. "The association refuses to expose the lives of team members to any potential danger, especially since the actions of the Indonesian fans are completely unacceptable and incorrect."

The move comes after an October 10 match in Bahrain ended in a 2-2 draw, with Bahrain equalising in the ninth minute of injury time. Indonesian officials and supporters afterwards com-

plained the injury time had gone on for too long.

Wednesday's statement from Bahrain's football association said its players had since been "subjected to a torrent of insults, slander, threats and hacking operations" online. It also expressed "extreme surprise at the multiple death threats received by the team members on their personal social media accounts – a move that reflects the Indonesian public's disregard for human lives".

In a statement, Indonesia football association executive committee member Arya Mahendra Sinulingga said there was "no need to worry" about player safety. "We will guarantee the safety and comfort for our guest, like Bahrain, because the Indonesian nation is a nation that is friendly to guests," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

Beckham says Ratcliffe needs time to revive Man United

AFP
London

David Beckham is hopeful that minority owner Jim Ratcliffe will turn Manchester United's fortunes around but says it will take time to return to the "good old days".

British billionaire Ratcliffe's INEOS took charge of the club's football operations earlier this year but United have had an underwhelming start to the new campaign as they look to build on last year's FA Cup success. Pressure has mounted on manager Erik ten Hag, with United sitting 14th in the Premier League after seven games and winless in two Europa League fixtures.

Beckham, who won six Premier League titles, two FA Cups and the Champions League during his playing career with



United, believes fans will need to be patient with Ratcliffe and his team. Ratcliffe bought a minority stake in United from owners the Glazers in February.

The Americans have been deeply un-

popular with supporters ever since a leveraged takeover of the club in 2005 saddled the club with huge debts. Beckham said on the Rio Ferdinand Presents podcast that the club had needed change and a "fresh perspective".

"I really like Jim," he said. "I've met him a few times over the years with a few mutual friends and I think that he's a fan and obviously he's a great businessman as well, one of the best and one of the biggest. But I think more importantly the fans see that he cares, and I think that's a big part of it. I think obviously the fans had lost faith with the leadership over the years and obviously he really cares about what he wants to do and what he wants to create. So, hopefully, things will change but these things take time. I think we have been quite patient as United fans over the years but we want those good old days back. We want those

days back and the sooner the better."

Beckham has been president of MLS side Inter Miami since it was founded in 2018. Inter Miami, who signed Lionel Messi last year, have won this season's MLS Supporters' Shield – awarded to the team with the best regular season record – and will be targeting their first championship when the play-offs start later this month.

Beckham said he looked to his old Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson for guidance when founding the club. "I went to him once and said to him, 'I'm starting this team, how would you run it?'" he said. "And he sat me down for a couple of hours and he told me what I should do and what players I should be looking for and how I should run the academy. And that's really what I've tried to do. And then I also learnt from people like (Real Madrid president) Florentino Perez. You know, with

Florentino, he has this crazy vision of always bringing the greatest players to the club and building this unbelievable stadium."

United host mid-table Brentford tomorrow, seeking their first win in the Premier League since mid-September. Brentford manager Thomas Frank insisted ten Hag has endured "too much" criticism as he prepares to pile more pressure on the Manchester United boss this weekend.

Ten Hag is fighting to avoid the sack after United's worst start to a top-flight season since 1989-90. Frank's side travel to Old Trafford sitting three spots above United. A loss to Brentford would push Ten Hag closer to the axe, but Frank is convinced the Dutchman does not deserve such intense scrutiny.

"It's incredible how much scrutiny he's had to face," Frank said.

Al-Qadi clinches Small and Medium Tour victories at third round of Hathab



Talented Qatari rider Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi bagged Small and Medium Tour wins as the third round of Longines Hathab kicked off at indoor arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation yesterday. Al-Qadi astride Chanel opened his fine day with a victory in the Small Tour clocking a perfect 26.67 seconds. Riding Vamos, Hamad Tuwaim al-Marri was second while Saif Mohammed al-Nuaimi, who rode Sydney, settled for third place.

Al-Qadi then rode Morocco to a flawless round in 54.8 seconds to seize the Medium Tour title, with Saeed Hamad Juma (Amber) and Hussein Saeed Haidan (Fayahibi) claiming second and third positions respectively. Meanwhile, the team event in the same class saw Wathnan claiming the triumph followed by Al Fardan and Al Shaqab outfits respectively. Also yesterday, Fahad bin Jassim al-Thani, who rode Chiara Lou, emerged on top in the junior category of Small Tour followed by Ibrahim Khaled al-Kuwari (Felix) and Abdullah al-Jalandani (Armageddon) on second and third positions respectively.